

## OLD HOLY COMFORTER EPISCOPAL CHURCH

[Click here to view photo gallery of the Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church.](#)



*This report was written on November 2, 1987*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church is located at 1510 South Boulevard in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

Duke Power Company  
c/o Mr. William Duren  
General Manager of Corporate Properties  
400 South Tryon St.  
Wachovia 2955  
Charlotte, NC 28242

Telephone: (704) 373-7555

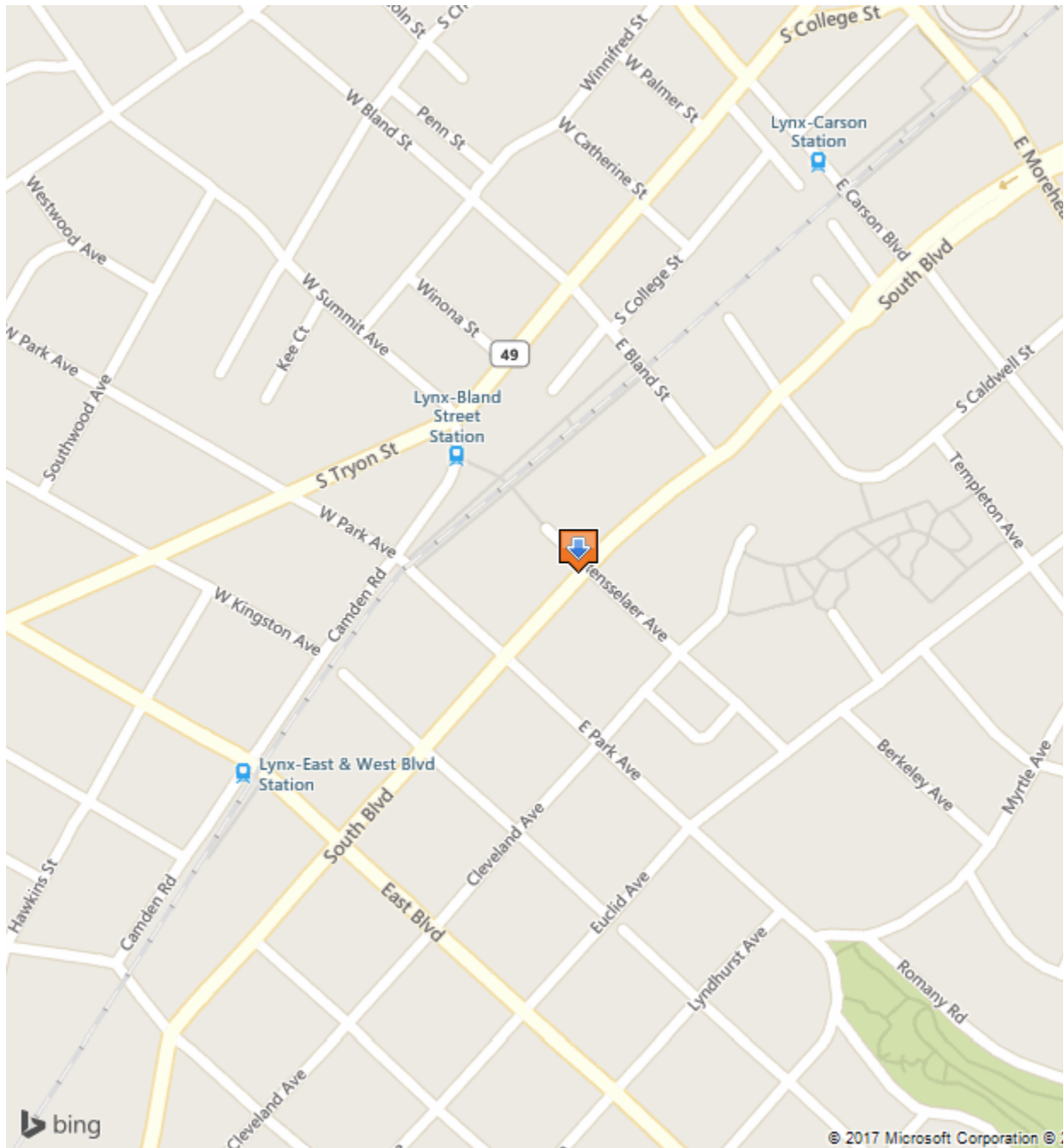
The occupant of the property is:

Brown-Shoemaker Tire Co.  
1510 South Boulevard  
Charlotte, NC, 28203

Telephone: (704) 334-3021

**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.



Click on the map to browse

**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent reference to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg Deed Book 3573, page 223. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 123-041-23.

**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 of the property prepared by Joseph Schuchman and Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation 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 Holy Comforter Episcopal Church does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church, erected between 1908 and 1912, is the only known local building designed by Charles Coolidge Haight (1841-1917), an influential and significant architect; 2) Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church is one of only two early twentieth-century church buildings that survive in the South Boulevard district of Dilworth, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb; and 3) Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church is the former home of a Christian congregation which continues to play an important role in the religious life of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Joseph Schuchman and Dr. Dan L. Morrill which is included in this report demonstrates that the Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church 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 improvement is \$89,860. The current appraised value of the 189 x 140 foot lot is \$72,770. The total appraised value of the property is \$162,460. The property is zoned B2.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** November 2, 1987

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

Telephone: (704) 376-9115



### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

The Old Holy Comforter Church Building on South Boulevard is distinguished by its architecture and the fact that it was the first suburban Episcopal church in the city. Designed by New York architect C. C. Haight, it was built in stages from 1908 to 1912, and eras for many years a landmark in the small commercial area of early [Dilworth](#), the city's first [streetcar](#) suburb.

At the turn of the century, St. Peter's on North Tryon Street was the only Episcopal parish church in the city. In 1901, the Reverend Joseph Blount Cheshire, the Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina (and the former Rector of St. Peter's) appointed the Reverend George Meredith Tolson as City Missionary in Charlotte, who ministered to the immediate outlying areas: St. Martin's at Tenth and Davidson Streets, St. Andrew's in Seaversville in the present Five Points area and in Dilworth.<sup>1</sup>

Dilworth was developed by Edward Dilworth Latta (1851-1925). Latta was a Princeton-educated native of South Carolina who, after achieving success in Charlotte with a clothing store (1876) and the Charlotte Trouser Company (1883), formed the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (often referred to as the 4 C's) to develop the city's first suburb in 1890. Originally laid out in grid fashion, the main boulevards and some side streets boasted grand homes, while the remainder were more modest middle-class houses, and, at the southern edge, mill houses for the [Atherton Mill](#) (1892-1893). Special inducements were devised to lure people to the new suburb: a new electric trolley line from the Square (opened 1891): a first-rate park, complete with a concert and dance hall, racetracks, a pavilion, greenhouses, a large boating lake, and installment buying for lots. With the Atherton Mill and seven other factories that were put up along the western side of South Boulevard in 1894 and 1895, Dilworth's success was assured.<sup>2</sup>

The Dilworth Episcopalians grew to the point that on February 6, 1903, Reverend Tolson forwarded an application to Bishop Cheshire for the formation of an independent congregation. It was accompanied by an objection by the Rector of St. Peter's, Rev. Clarence O. Leman, who thought that his own church would suffer if a new one was formed in the suburb. Nonetheless, as Bishop Cheshire later reported in an address:

"March 5, 1903, upon the petition of certain inhabitants of Dilworth, a suburb of Charlotte, I organized the petitioners into an independent mission under the name of The Church of the Holy Comforter, Dilworth, appointing as officers thereof Addison Arnold to be Warden, Frank B. Ferris to be Treasurer, and Bertram Swift Davis to be Clerk."<sup>4</sup>

In the report on the church to the annual convention in 1903, the following entry appears, which shows the number of people involved, and that it was the women who were responsible for the formation of the new church:

"Families 15. Baptized persons 50. Confirmed 4. Communicants: admitted 4; received 26; present number 30. Sunday-school teachers 5; scholars 27. Other Parish Agencies: A Women's Guild and Young Children's Guild, known as the Busy Bees. Public services: on Sundays, 16; other days 31. Holy Communion 4.... The minister in charge (Rev. George M. Tolson) held his first service in Dilworth February 8, 1903. An instrument of organization was issued to the Mission on March 5th. The Women's Guild, named St. Elizabeth's has done notable work in behalf of the new organization, and it was through their efforts the enterprise was started. It is bending its energies towards raising money for the purchase of a suitable lot on which to build a house of worship. They have abundant enthusiasm and ability, and will no doubt succeed in all their endeavors. A good, strong Church is much needed in Dilworth."<sup>5</sup>

Reverend Tolson resigned in January, 1904, and was replaced by Rev. Francis Moore Osborne, who took over Holy Comforter and other outlying missions the following September. That fall, a meeting of the congregation was held in a hall over a store where they held their church services (the Dilworth Drug Store building at the corner of Rensselaer and South Boulevard; B. S. Davis, the Holy Comforter Clerk, ran the drug store), and a building fund committee was formed.<sup>6</sup> In March, 1905, the church trustees acquired a 50' front by 150' deep lot next to the grocery store for \$1000, and the following January bought another 100' front by 150' parcel of adjacent property for \$2000.<sup>7</sup> The building fund progressed to the point that by 1908, work on the basement portion of the church had begun, and the cornerstone for the new church was laid on August 6, 1909, which was the Feast of the Transfiguration. At the ceremonies, Bishop Cheshire dedicated the new church as the "Bishop Atkinson Memorial." Bishop Thomas Atkinson of North Carolina had played a leading role in reuniting the Southern Episcopal churches with the Northern after the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> By 1910, the roof was completed over the chancel and transepts, and worship services there being held in the basement Sunday school rooms, which continued until early 1913.<sup>9</sup> In the official record of 1913, the church's completion was recorded:

"Since the last annual report, we have completed that portion of the Bishop Atkinson Memorial Church, the basement of which has been used as a place of worship for the past two years. This completed portion is now furnished, and a pipe organ has been placed. This work was accomplished towards the close of the fiscal year (1912). It is thought that the completion of the

building will immediately affect the growth of this congregation. The number of communicants is now 90. The debt is \$11,000."<sup>10</sup>

The building, which has the feel and look of an English country parish church, was designed by New York architect Charles Coolidge Haight ( 1841-1917). Haight's specialty was "an unpretentious variation of Victorian Gothic." Educated at Columbia and wounded in the Civil War, Haight studied architecture after the war in the office of a fellow officer before opening his own office in 1867. His early work was country churches and houses in Victorian Gothic and [English Tudor](#). Although he designed in a wide range of styles, his most important work was in Collegiate Gothic, which appeared in a number of buildings he did for Columbia College and Yale University. His connection with the Episcopal Church was through his father, believed to be Dr. Benjamin L. Haight ( 1809-1879), a prominent Episcopal theologian who became the Bishop of Massachusetts.<sup>11</sup> At a service on March 2, 1913, the church building was formally opened with the first service in the main auditorium. A contemporary newspaper article recorded the event:

"The present edifice is a portion of a larger plan of a cruciform church with a massive Gothic tower, and is built of Bedford stone and brick laid in cement mortar, with heart pine and selected maple flooring, only the best materials being used throughout the structure. A new Estey pipe organ, pronounced to be of the finest tone quality of any like instrument in the city, has been installed. The furniture is of solid walnut, the choir stalls being of the same material, with hand-carved finials. The chancel furnishings are not yet complete, and a temporary altar will be used for several months until the completion of a handsome marble altar and reredos. By Easter, a handsome brass memorial lectern will be placed, and the church is already in possession of a massive brass altar cross, processional cross, altar vases, and candlesticks."<sup>12</sup>

In the following year, 1914, at the diocese's annual convention, the Reverend Henry T. Coker placed the following resolution before the assembly, which they adopted: "Resolved, that the congregation of the Mission of the Holy Comforter in the city of Charlotte [Dilworth was annexed in 1907] be admitted as a parish into union with this Convention, to be known as the Parish of the Church of the Holy Comforter."<sup>13</sup> The last link bringing it into being as a fully independent church came when, on January 10, 1916, the Trustees of the Diocese conveyed a deed for the property on South Boulevard to the Vestry of Holy Comforter.<sup>14</sup> Later that year, Reverend Osborne, who had seen the church through from its beginnings to a successfully completed parish with a handsome building, was reassigned by the Bishop and was succeeded by Rev. Robert Bruce Owens.<sup>15</sup>

Three years after Rev. Owens took charge, Mary Lamb Smith, one of the original signers of the petition to start the church, died in the influenza epidemic of 1919. Her grief-stricken husband, Edward A. Smith, who built the Chadwick, Hoskins and other mills in the area, commissioned Tiffany's in New York, without regard to expense, to build a memorial stained glass window to be placed above the altar. The resulting five-panel set of windows depicting the Last Supper is a striking work of art, which was done by Tiffany's best artist, Frederick Wilson. The center panel shows Christ with raised, open arms, while a dove, the symbol of the Holy Comforter, spreads its

wings above his head. The windows were donated anonymously, and Reverend Owens was under pledge not to reveal their source until after Smith's death.<sup>16</sup>

In the nearly three decades of Reverend Owens rectorship, from 1916 to 1945, the parish grew from 154 communicants to 284, and the church was consolidated into a financially sound, important part of the Dilworth community.<sup>17</sup> But the character of Dilworth and that part of South Boulevard changed, and the changes accelerated in the post-war period. Dilworth lost its identity as a separate neighborhood, and suffered decay and indiscriminate development along South Boulevard. In 1948, property for a new church site, containing over five acres at the corner of Avondale and Park Roads, was donated by Mrs. Salem A. Van Every in memory of her mother, Mrs. Philip L. Lance, wife of the founder of Lance Packing Company. In 1949, a new building committee was formed, and by 1954, the South Boulevard property was sold and the church moved to the new location.<sup>18</sup>

The old Holy Comforter church building, along with its next-door neighbor where the first services were held (the Dilworth Drug Store building), constitute a small remaining historic core of early Dilworth's commercial, civic and religious activities. Their preservation and rehabilitation are crucial to the revitalization of that part of South Boulevard and a new Dilworth that is very much aware of its historic heritage.



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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Typescript copy of speech by the Right Reverend Edwin A. Penick, Bishop of North Carolina, at the 50th anniversary of the Church of the Holy Comforter, March 5, 1953, on file at the Historic District Commission Office.

<sup>2</sup> Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (1890-1925): Builders of a New South City," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 62 (1985), 293-316.



<sup>3</sup> Bishop Penick's address, cited above. The original petitioners were Ida Clarkson Jones, Caroline Davis Taliaferro, Lora Marie Stokes, Jennie L. Woodruff, Catherine Stokes, Frances McDonald, Mr. & Mrs. Frank B. Ferris, Mrs. Horace Baker, Philip L. Lance, Jr., Mrs. Amanda L. Ferris, Mrs. Addison Arnold, Ella Gardner, Mr. & Mrs. Philip Lance, Mrs. Hattie C. Dorr, Addison Arnold, Miss Mary Lance, H. L. Hunter, Mrs. L. B. Mann, Miss Ruth Lance, Mrs. H. L. Hunter, Mrs. E. A. Smith, B. S. Davis, Mrs. B. S. Davis, Miss Agnes McCarthy, Ida V. Lamb, Mrs. Laura R. Gardner, A. R. Gardner, Mrs. James F. York, and F. A. Gardner.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of the Eighty-Seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1903), p.62.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop Penick's speech, cited above; William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Dilworth Drug Store Building," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Communion, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Deed Book 195, p. 388, 23 March 1905; Deed Book 204, p.609, January 1906. An additional 2-1/2' strip was obtained on September 9, 1909: Deed Book 254, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Penick's speech, cited above, "A Bulletin of Information Concerning the Progress of the Bishop Atkinson Memorial Church," undated pamphlet on file at the Historic District Commission office.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Penick's speech, cited above.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Carolina Churchman* (1913), p. 13, A. F. Placzeck, ed., *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architect* (New York: The Free Press, 1982); Vol. 2, p.296; *The Church Almanac* (New York: The Protestant Episcopal Tract Society, 1880), p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in *Carolina Churchman*, cited above.

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Penick's speech, cited above.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Deed Book 358, p.179, January 10, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Bishop Penick's speech.

<sup>16</sup> Typescript copy of article by Fannie Lou Bingham in *Charlotte News*. May, 1934, entitled, "Church Window Given as Memorial to Wife," on file at Historic District Commission Office.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop Penick's speech, cited above.

<sup>18</sup> Deed Book 1718, p.581, October 27, 1954.

## *Architectural Description*

*Mr. Joseph Schuchman and Dr. Dan L. Morrill*

Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church, which faces south, was erected between 1908 and 1912 in Dilworth, Charlotte's initial streetcar suburb. Once part of a thriving residential, industrial and commercial district, Old Holy Comforter is one of only two surviving early twentieth century church buildings in the South Boulevard section of Dilworth, the other being Chalmers Memorial A.R.P. Church at 1800 South Boulevard, a [Neo-Classical](#) style structure.<sup>1</sup>

Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church has a one and one-half story rectangular Gothic Revival style nave with a covered, pedimented, single bay entry porch, an offset left chimney, a cross gable on each side, and a slate, steeply-pitched [gable roof](#). The building rests on a foundation of rusticated granite and is sheathed in man-made striated blocks. A rectangular shaped original wing runs off the rear elevation and projects eastward toward South Boulevard. Essentially an unpretentious brick building, this wing does have a front facade of rusticated granite and striated blocks (to match the main portion of the building) and a large, pedimented entrance. A stairway, originally outside but now enclosed by a one story brick building that houses Brown-Shoemaker Tire Co., is situated near the front of the eastern elevation of the church.

Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church remains fundamentally incomplete. The architect, Charles Coolidge Haight (1841-1917), submitted plans which called for an extension of the nave southward, the construction of a two and one-half story venerated belfry, and the placement of the main entrance at the southeastern corner of the extension, thereby creating a cruciform. The fact that these additions were never built gives the edifice a subdued, almost rustic feel. Even though the design motifs commonly associated with Gothic Revivalism are present, such as tracery, buttresses and, of course, the pointed arch, Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church is by no means a lavish structure.

The most impressive features of Old Holy Comforter Episcopal Church are inside the main block of the building. The first floor has four principal rooms, each of which remains undivided. A chapel on the west side, the nave or sanctuary in the middle, and a room off both front sides of the nave, both reached from the sanctuary by a large arched entryway. All have elegant vaulted coffered ceilings. Two modest rooms, most probably used as offices, one having a door which leads to the nave, radiate off an entrance hall in the right cross gable, and an "L" shaped stairway with square newels and pickets leads to a full basement.

That the Holy Comforter Episcopal congregation selected the Gothic Revival style for its suburban church is not surprising. Taking its inspiration from the romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which rejected rationalism and extolled the supposed virtues of Medieval Christendom, the Gothic Revival style, at least in the United States, gained greatest and most enduring favor in church architecture.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the two Episcopal congregations in Mecklenburg County that predate Holy Comforter, St. Mark's Episcopal and St. Peter's Episcopal, had selected the Gothic Revival style, the former in 1886 and the latter in 1893.<sup>3</sup>

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> The only other Dilworth church now on South Boulevard is Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church at 1117 South Boulevard. All of its buildings are of relatively recent origin. For a detailed analysis of the history of Dilworth, see Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company: Builders of a New South City," in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, July, 1985, pp. 293-316. For a detailed analysis of the architecture of North Carolina's early twentieth century suburbs, see Catherine W. Bishir and Lawrence S. Early, *Early, Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning* (Raleigh: Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969), pp.173-177. John Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers, and Nancy B. Schwartz, "What Style Is It? Part Two." *Historic Preservation* July-September, 1976), pp. 39-42.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, "St. Peter's Episcopal Church Architectural Description" (October, 1986), an unpublished manuscript prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Survey and Research Report On The St. Mark's Episcopal Church (March 1, 1983) an unpublished manuscript prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.