



THE HOTEL CHARLOTTE

[Click here to view photo gallery of the Old Hotel Charlotte.](#)



This report was written on August 4, 1982

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Old Hotel Charlotte is located at 231 W. Trade St. in Charlotte, N.C.

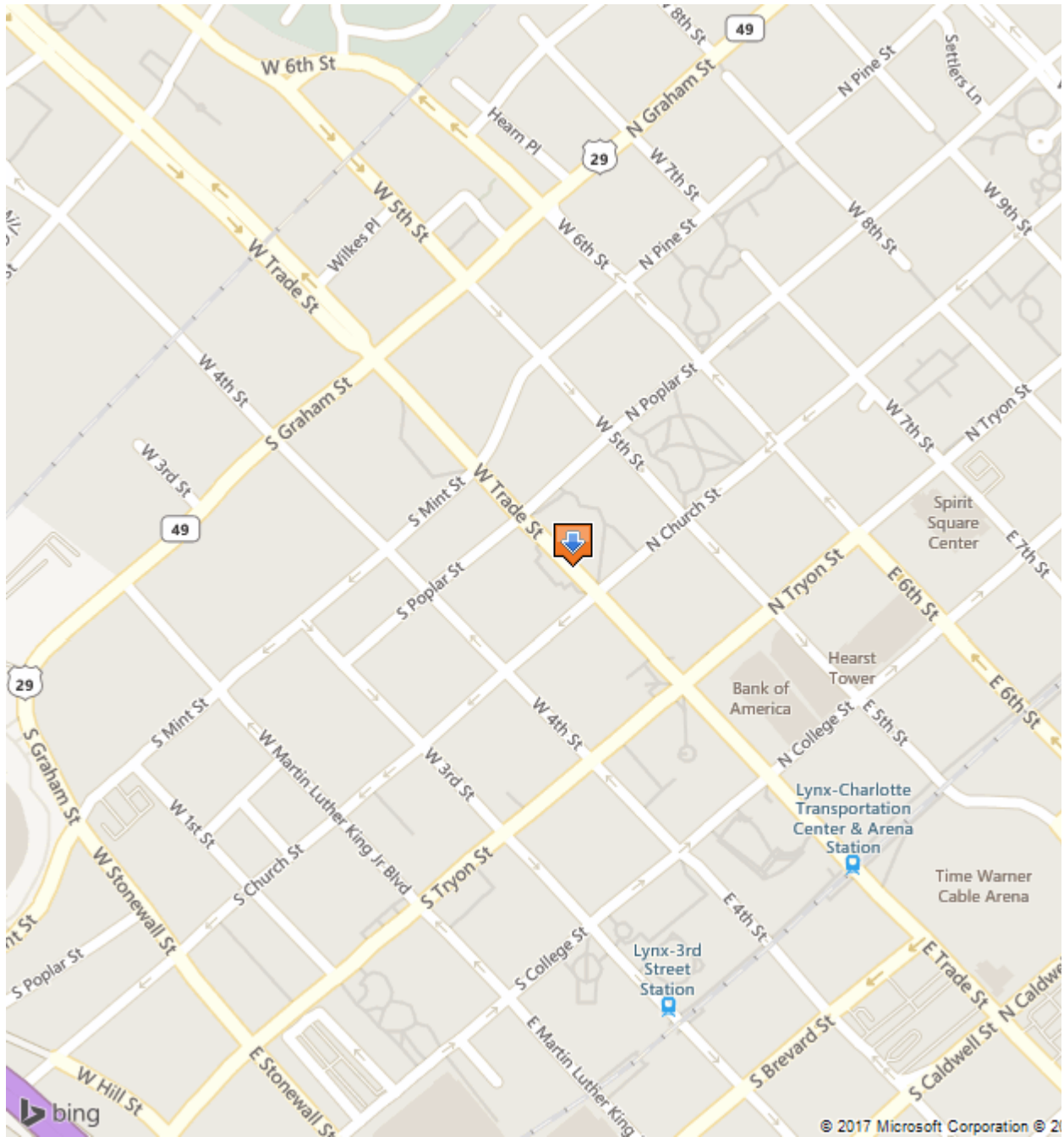
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The present owner of the property is:

Justice Investors of Charlotte, Inc.
122 E. Stonewall St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28202

Telephone: c/o Faison Associates 374-1711

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 4431 at page 997. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 073-012-01.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: The attached National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: The attached National Register of Historic Places Inventory --- Nomination Form contains a brief architectural description of the property.

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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission judges that the property known as the Old Hotel Charlotte does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: (1) the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, (2) such prominent Charlotteans as Robert Lassiter, Edward Dilworth Latta, Julian H. Little, and Word H. Wood, were instrumental in securing the construction of the property, (3) the property played a pivotal role in Charlotte's growth as a major twentieth century southern economic center, and (4) the property served as a symbol of Charlotte's growth as well as a show place for the city from 1924 until the late 1960's.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached letter from Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian, demonstrates that the exterior of the Old Hotel Charlotte 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 1.474 acres of land (entire tract) is \$533,740. The current appraised value of the Old Hotel Charlotte is \$202,610. The most recent Ad Valorem tax bill on the total tract and improvements was \$13,600.39. The property is zoned B3.

Date of preparation of this report: August 4, 1982

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Architectural Description

The Hotel Charlotte, 327 West Trade Street, rises thirteen stories at the intersection of Trade and Poplar Streets in downtown Charlotte. Designed by architect William Stoddart, contracted by J. A. Jones Construction Company, and built as a luxury hostelry by citizen subscription, it opened in March, 1924, with 250 rooms and quickly became one of the city's leading social centers. The hotel, which subsequently was named the Queen Charlotte Hotel and then the White House Inn,

today remains as one of the few hallmarks that attest to Charlotte's history and building growth in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The hotel is supported by a steel frame which is sheathed with sections of gray granite and a buff colored brick. Ornamentation is restricted to the lower and attic sections of the building. The Trade Street facade (north) bears the major entrance and is articulated by a restrained and elegant use of classical detailing. Concrete brick facing has been applied over the original masonry of the ground floor. The doorway, located on the right side of the facade, has likewise been altered from its original state.

The piano nobile, extending two floors, is articulated by rusticated stone masonry pierced by five arched windows which open onto a large ballroom. Each window, of wood frame set into the granite, is divided by a vertical, inner arched section and a wooden spandrel. These divide the window into a central four mullioned section flanked on either side by single lights; the upper section is partitioned into a double portioned fan light. The windows are further delineated by bold voussairs with scroll keystone. The rusticated granite between each window bay is decorated by rectangular plaques of fired terra-cotta. These ornamental polychrome plaques contain a tripod base (colored burnt gold) upon which rest a lion's head (lead colored), urns (burnt gold), festoons (green), and fruit (purple, green, and earthenware). Above the panels are granite shields bearing a tree containing a hornet's nest and the date "1775"--references to early Charlotte history--and framed by ribboned torches. The frieze contains running glyphs which are broken at intervals over the windows and shields by cow skulls and stylized floral swags respectively. The cornice, functioning as a belt course to divide the piano nobile from the first floor of guest rooms, is delineated by dainty acanthus leaves and above that by a dentil course.

The first story of bedrooms is characterized by a mixed use of building materials; thus, the shift from the use of stone to brick gives a more subtle transition. This floor contains singly grouped windows on each end; these frame three sets of paired windows. Each of these groups are bound by geometrically patterned brickwork set into the stone. Immediately above this story lies a second stone belt course, its lower section articulated by egg and dart design and the upper by a band of fine incised decoration.

This string course marks the transition of the facade from ornamentation to simple, unadorned surfaces and from the use of stone to a buff colored brick laid in Flemish bond. The sole decoration of this seven-story middle section are the large, highly ornamental cartouches, each of which also bears the tree with hornet's nest and the year "1775". The rest of the section is punctuated at regular intervals by single paneled, double hung windows with brick lintels; these are grouped into three bays of paired windows in the middle section. The outer-most section on either end of the facade is pierced by single windows. A rectilinear sign bearing the name "White House Inn" is attached to the north-east side of this facade.

The "penthouse" or upper-most section of the facade is marked by a blending of stone ornamentation and brick. A stone string-course divides this section from the lower one. This division contains two large windows on either end which are framed by projecting balustrades, decorative lintels, and segmental arches broken by cartouches and held by ornamental brackets. These windows frame three sets of paired windows which bear non-projecting balustrades and

decorative lintels; these divide the windows into a larger, rectangular section and an upper, smaller section. Paneled brick work characterizes the areas in-between the fenestration. Above a stone belt course lie stone rosettes. The cornice contains courses of dentils, egg and dart.

The west facade of the building (Poplar Street side) contains an auxiliary entrance which enters directly to the lobby by means of an outer set of four stone steps and an interior flight of eleven marble steps. Although this facade is characterized by ornamentation and design similar to that found on the north side, the sloping grade of the lot to the south required some modification of the design. A concrete brick veneer has again been applied to the ground and basement floors of the facade. The corner of the two facades is emphasized by an indentation of the brickwork; the cornices and belt courses continue from the West Trade Street side to the Poplar Street facade. The ballroom, which extends along the west side, has three tall, arched windows.

Over the entrance, five rectangular windows pierce the granite masonry: the central window is flanked on either side by two lions' heads whose mouths once held rods to support a canopy over the entry. These windows are capped by remnants of voussoirs with keystone. Decorative medallions and garland panels define the area between these windows and five sets of unadorned double windows positioned directly above. Three rectangular, double partitioned windows pierce the south-most section of the facade. A frieze, which bears glyphs punctuated at intervals with cow skulls and on each end with a decorative floral panel, helps to unify the design of this section

The upper sections of this facade closely resemble that of West Trade Street with the exception that the Poplar Street facade has been extended to accommodate nine sets of paired windows flanked by single windows. The facade again contains a section marked by the blending of materials and ornamentation of geometric design and bounded by two horizontal stone belt courses bearing acanthus and egg and dart molding. The next section, containing seven stories, is of brick punctuated with sets of windows, similar in arrangement to the fenestration of the West Trade Street facade. A sign bearing the words "White House Inn" is attached to the northwest corner. The final upper-most section of this facade is a repetition and extension of the design of the north facade.

The southern-most sections of the side above the second stone belt course is a later addition. The original plan appears to have consisted of a basic block on which an "L" shaped section containing the guest rooms was superimposed. The southwest section was added in the late 1930s over the pre-existing base and therefore altered the "L" into a "U" shape. The 1924 plan contained approximately twenty-seven guest rooms on each of the floors devoted to bedrooms; the addition increased the number of rooms to about 400.

The south facade of the Hotel Charlotte, not a major or "showy" side, bears no ornamentation; its brick wall is punctuated by series of uniformly spaced fenestrations. The stone cornices and string courses do extend partially from the Poplar Street facade onto the south side, providing some continuity and blending of the two facades. This side bears a fire escape; the convention center with garage, built in 1966, also abuts onto this side.

The east side contains the "U" shaped court and is entirely of red brick. This area is primarily devoted to services and maintenance.

Ornamentation and fine workmanship within the building are largely confined to the lobby. The lobby is entered on the west side by a flight of marble stairs. Sections of the walls are also sheathed in a black veined white marble. The lobby ceiling has large exposed beams which are supported by massive pink marble columns. The guest rooms have little noteworthy architectural ornamentation with the exception of marble thresholds and unadorned molding running the course of the rooms.

Historical Overview

The Hotel Charlotte played a significant role during Charlotte's growth as a major twentieth century southern economic center. The concept of the hotel was developed by leaders of the Chamber of Commerce--including such Charlotte business leaders as Robert Lassiter, Edward D. Latta, Julian H. Little, and Word H. Wood--who sought citizen support to erect the structure. The development of the hotel reflected and contributed to Charlotte's energetic efforts to become a major regional banking and retail center. The project was important enough to employ the services of a nationally known hotel architect, William Stoddart. Debates over the location of the building led to the disgruntled departure from the project--and the city--of one of Charlotte's leading citizens and developers, Edward Dilworth Latta. Despite the controversy the hotel was built and served as a symbol of Charlotte's growth as well as a show place for the city from 1924 until the late 1960s.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Associated closely and contributing to the development of Charlotte as a major regional trade center in the early twentieth century, making the community the largest city in the state; the early twentieth century was an era of major change in the state, when urbanization began to have a dramatic impact on the long-rural state. The rapid growth of Charlotte as the state's first big city, stimulated by energetic businessmen, was vital; the Hotel Charlotte was a key factor in this growth.

B. Associated with important Charlotte business leaders including E. D. Latta, Robert Lassiter, Julian H. Little, Word H. Wood, as well as the nationally prolific hotel architect William L. Stoddart. J. A. Jones, contractor, has been a major building firm.

C. Embodies characteristic features of urban hotel architecture of the period ca 1915-1930, reflecting the important national development of tall downtown hotels; Stoddart's work, unified but varied in detail, seems to have set the standard for hotel architecture in this important period of downtown growth in which hotels were a pivotal element.

D. The hotel is not the first nor the grandest ever built in Charlotte, but with the loss of its predecessors and many of its contemporaries, it survives as perhaps Charlotte's most important hotel landmark and a cornerstone of the history and townscape of the city's downtown.

On St. Patrick's Day in 1920 the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce announced a plan to raise one million dollars from the local business community. Robert Lassiter, president of the Chamber, noted that people were walking the streets at night or sleeping in lobbies because of the lack of hotel rooms. Other Charlotte businessmen indicated that they had to take visiting salesmen into their homes and that Charlotte's poor hotel facilities were becoming a by-word across the state.¹ It was obvious that Charlotte businessmen must address the problem if Charlotte was to prosper and grow as a business center.

The campaign to interest prominent businessmen limped along during the last weeks of March and into early April of 1920. Leaders who joined Robert Lassiter in the early campaign were Clarence O. Kuester, Edward Dilworth Latta, Julian H. Little (president of Independence Trust and builder of the Independence Building) and Word H. Wood (president of American Trust). In order to add stimulus to the campaign and widen their appeal, the leaders organized a banquet of seventy-five leading businessmen. These men resolved to plan and build a hotel costing not less than one million dollars. At this April 8th banquet, business leaders C. C. Coddington, A. J. Draper, and J. H. Cutter joined Latta and Lassiter subscribing \$25,000 each.²

During the week that followed the banquet, Charlotteans were continually reminded of the benefits to be derived from the completion of this hotel. Word H. Wood said:

"the hotel is the foremost public utility of any city. It is the organized host to the city's visitors. A city without an up-to-date hotel is like a private house without a spare or extra room for company. . . With an up-to-date hotel, a city can think of inviting outside capital. Until then its efforts are usually wasted."³

It was obvious that this hotel was, in the minds of Charlotte's economic leadership, the key to future growth and development. But the leadership realized the need for broad based support. T. T. Allison, vice-president and manager of the Chamber of Commerce, stated:

"It is now an established fact that the hotel will not be built by any special group or alignment of men or interests but that it will be a purely civic proposition with every loyal citizen doing his individual duty. The success of the proposition rests on the successful placing of the burden on the shoulders of a large number of people."⁴

Regular reports were issued informing the people of the amount subscribed--April 21, \$542,700; April 23, \$617,200; April 25, \$780,000. A front page headline in the *Charlotte Observer* on April 25, 1920, announced "Million Dollar Hotel Assured For Charlotte." While the final goal was one million dollars the backers had agreed they would go forward with plans if subscriptions reached \$750,000. Speakers at a Saturday night mass meeting on April 24th chided a certain element of the city on its lack of city pride and questioned "What is the matter with Charlotte?" All speakers declared Charlotte to be the center of a trading territory unequaled in the South.⁵

The campaign for the million dollar goal continued while organization and plans for the hotel moved forward. A charter creating the Citizens Hotel Company was issued on April 30, 1920. ⁶The charter listed E. D. Latta as the largest shareholder with 500 shares worth \$100 each.

The post-war depression finally caught up with Charlotte causing a lull in the drive to build Charlotte's new hotel. It was more than a year later when the directors of the Citizens Hotel Company announced that the yet to be built hotel would be leased by a group of Greensboro men. ⁷ Another six months passed before preliminary plans for the hotel were announced. The directors indicated that by delaying the start of construction, they had saved the subscribers money. They also indicated they were about to announce the appointment of an architect to draw plans for what promised to be the largest and tallest building in Charlotte. Subscribers were informed that a site had been purchased on the southeast corner of the intersection of West Trade and South Poplar. ⁸ There was no indication at this time that the site choice was to become the cause of a major split in the project's leadership.

William L. Stoddart was chosen to design the new hotel. His selection has been based on his reputation as a noted hotel architect of New York City who was "recognized as one of the leading hotel architects in America" ⁹ and by the fact he had designed several of the hotels run by the lessees. ¹⁰

Newspaper reports concerning the shape and size of the structure were constantly changing. Starting with a fourteen story structure, it was later announced as twelve stories with 278 rooms. The room count was revised down to 250. Estimates of completion varied as much as the descriptions. ¹¹

Construction finally began in the late summer of 1922. J. A. Jones was given the construction contract to build the hotel for \$713,480. The land had cost \$187,500. Another local company, Southern Engineering, was to handle the engineering. The building was described as a steel frame structure of twelve stories with twenty-seven rooms per floor. The base was to be of polished granite and the first two stories of terra cotta. The two street sides were to be faced with red tapestry brick. ¹²

As construction was well underway, a major legal controversy surfaced. The first hint of a problem was a news story in the *Charlotte Observer*, March 2, 1923, which indicated that Edward Dilworth Latta had placed his home on sale and invested money outside Charlotte for the first time. The March 4th issue of the *Observer* shed light on the controversy. Mr. Latta was being sued for \$50,000 by the Citizens Hotel Company for failure to meet his subscription obligation. Evidently attempts had been made to settle the issue without litigation but Latta refused. ¹³ The case occupied nine days of court time and was heard before a jury. Latta's testimony clearly outlined the problem. He had refused to pay his subscription for two reasons. One, he had offered to sell to the company a site on South Tryon Street which he owned and the directors chose not to purchase it. Secondly, most of his recommendations for membership on the Board of Directors had been ignored. While these appear to be the real reasons, Latta's legal arguments involved the timing of the lease and collection of the payment. He contended that the stock offer was not binding until the lease had been signed to run the hotel. He also contended that he had not seen the lease previous to the purchase of the Trade Street land and that he had

not refused to pay until he learned of the land transaction. Testimony against Latta indicated he was well aware of the lease prior to the purchase of the hotel site. The court ruled in favor of the Citizens Hotel Company and demanded Latta pay \$5,000 plus interest.¹⁴ While the Citizens Hotel Company won the battle, they lost the war. E. D. Latta sold his Charlotte property and left town--thus, Charlotte lost one of its most important backers and developers. Perhaps Charlotte's economy had reached a level at which the interests of one man could not dictate the direction any longer.

The hotel project was not slowed by Latta's withdrawal. Construction continued and the Hotel Charlotte was used as a symbol of Charlotte's growth in the 1920s. While the hotel was under construction there was a real boom in downtown construction. A new Ivey's store was announced, Efird's Department Store was constructing a large addition (now Belk's), plans for the [Johnston Building](#), designed by William Stoddart, were announced, and the [Charlotte Women's Club](#) presented plans for an impressive edifice to be built on the edge of downtown. The hotel project was already attracting "outside capital" as Word H. Wood had promised.¹⁵ Another indicator of Charlotte's economic growth and its relation to the hotel project was the offer which the original lessees received. They were offered a bonus of \$75,000 for the lease of the new hotel from an unidentified man who considered it a good investment because "of the great possibilities of expansion and growth which Charlotte possesses."¹⁶

The Robinson-Foor syndicate of Greensboro, who owned the lease, had started to unofficially use the name Hotel Charlotte on their stationery late in 1923. That became the name the hotel was identified by until December 23, 1961, when it became the Queen Charlotte Hotel and later on October 7, 1966, became the White House Inn.

The Hotel Charlotte originally was to open in May of 1923. The date was moved back to June, November, December, January of 1924, February and finally March 10, 1924. The opening was a gala occasion involving a banquet for the 600 stockholders followed by a dance and an open house. The *Charlotte Observer* summed it up. "Marking a new step of progress in Charlotte and giving the city the first shove across the threshold into the era of cooperative civic enterprises, the new Hotel Charlotte was formally Opened."¹⁷

The Citizens Hotel Company under the leadership of Julian H. Little, J. H. Cutter, and John C. Meyers continued to own the hotel until 1961. During the late 1930s 150 rooms were added making it a 400 room hotel, the largest in the Carolinas.¹⁸ Despite the addition of a much needed convention center adjoining the hotel, the 1960s brought a decline in business. Motels and a new civic center sealed the fate. On December 31, 1973, the Hotel Charlotte, known at the time as the White House Inn, closed its doors.

The hotel's guest list: ---Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard M. Nixon; sports figures, Jack Dempsey and Babe Ruth; politicians, Jim Parley, Huey Long, and John Nance Garner; musical stars, Guy Lombardo, Lily Pons, and Tommy Dorsey--support the claim that it was Charlotte's finest.

H. P. Patterson, president of the Charlotte Merchant's Association, summarized it best in April of 1920:

"The social, political and business life of any progressive community center around its finest hotel. In the ballroom are held the special functions; around the banquet table men meet and get to know each other better, smoothing out their differences; in the meeting rooms groups of all shades of opinions gather and crystallize their ideas into lagction--all for the city's improvement and advancement." ¹⁹

The Hotel Charlotte was, indeed, an important factor in the city's economic rise. It became a rallying point for businessmen of the 1920s, the same men who laid the foundation for Charlotte's phenomenal growth of the last half of the century. The 600 or so citizens put their money on the line as insurance for Charlotte's future in 1920. Their vision as well as their money paid good dividends. The city's growing pains are symbolized in the struggle with Mr. Latta and his withdrawal from Charlotte. The building is a visual historic reminder of Charlotte's emergence as a significant New South city, as well as a fine architectural example of the work of William Stoddart.

FOOTNOTES

¹ *The Charlotte Observer*, March 27, 1920, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, April 9, 1920, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1920, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, April 25, 1920, p.1.

⁶ Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office, Corporate Charters, Book 6, p. 151.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, June 8, 1921, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 6, 1922, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, February 1, 1922, p. 4; and Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, p. 575.

¹⁰ *The Charlotte Observer*, February 1, 1922, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1922, p. 1; April 27, 1922, p. 4; May 19, 1922, p. 4; and July 16, 1922, p. 1.

¹² Ibid., July 16, 1922, p. 1

¹³ Ibid., March 6, 1923, p. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., March 8, 1923, p. 5; March 9, p. 21; March 10, p. 1; March 13, pp.1,2; March 14, p. 1; March 17, pp. 1, 2; and March 18, p. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., August 12, 1923, Section 6, p. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., November 8, 1923, p. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., March 11, 1924, p. 4.

¹⁸ See Charlotte City Directories during the years 1935 to 1944.

¹⁹ *The Charlotte Observer*, April 16, 1920, p. 7.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The Charlotte News and Observer Clipping File (Microfilm).

The Charlotte Observer, various editions in the 1920s, see footnotes.

Legette Blythe and Charles R. Brockman, *Hornets' Nest. The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (McNally of Charlotte, 1961), p. 297.

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