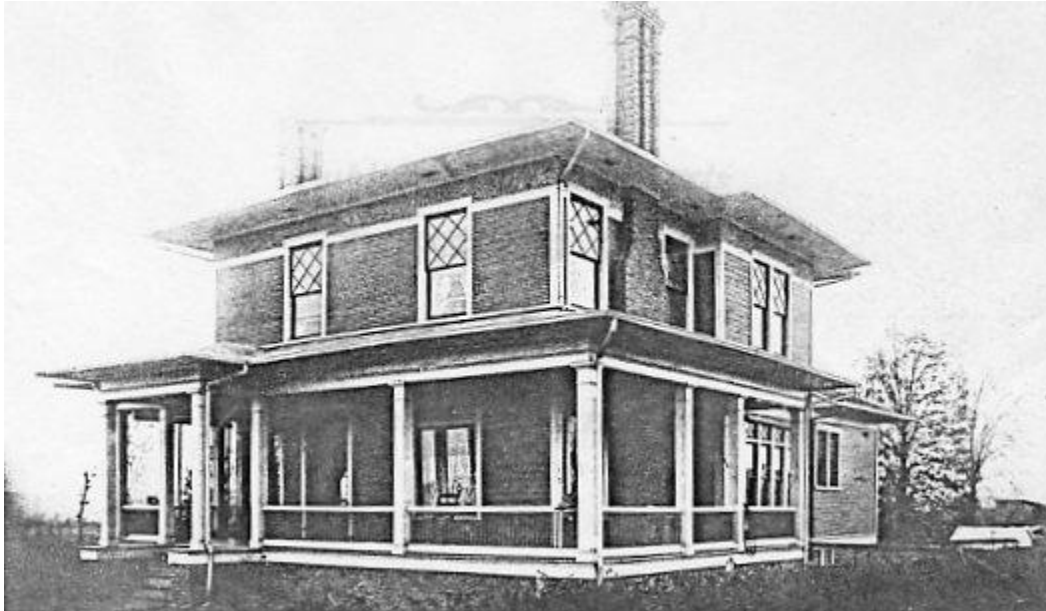


CHARLES W. PARKER HOUSE



This report was written on May 5, 1982

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charles W. Parker House is located at 901 Central Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

The present owner of the property is:
Michael W. and Mediana Normile
834 Central Avenue
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

Telephone: (704) 372-8824

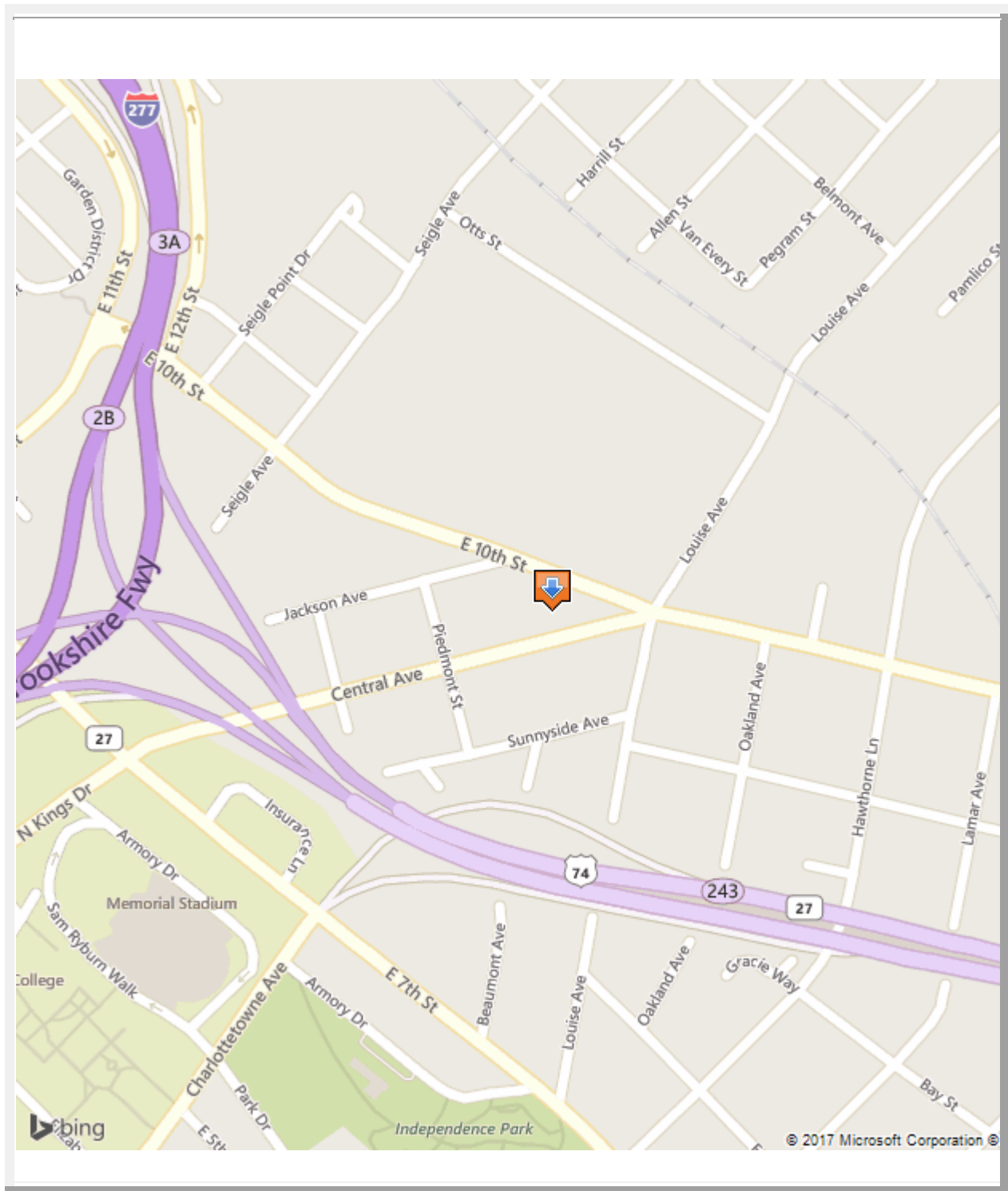
The present occupant of the property is:

Charlotte Rehabilitation Homes
901 Central Avenue
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

Telephone: not available

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 4331 at page 658. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 080-211-07.

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 an architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian.

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 Historic Properties Commission judges that the property known as the Charles W. Porter House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: (1) the Charles W. Parker House was built in 1903-04 and is, therefore, one of the earliest houses in Piedmont Park, a streetcar suburb which opened in March, 1902, and which was developed by F. C. Abbott and George Stephens, the latter being the developer of Myers Park a decade later; (2) the house is one of the finest local examples of the Four Square style; (3) Charles W. Parker (1886-1950) was a prominent and resourceful businessman of local and regional importance.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The attached architectural description by Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett demonstrates that the Charles W. Parker House 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 appraisal of the Charles W. Parker House is \$360.00. The current appraisal of the .330 acres of land is \$28,710.00. The property is zoned B-2

Date of Preparation of this Report: May 5, 1982

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
3500 Shamrock Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28213

Telephone: (704) 332-2726



Architectural Description

Thomas W. Hanchett

The C.W. Parker residence at 901 Central Avenue is a good early example of the Four Square house type. Built in 1904 for a leading Charlotte merchant, its exterior is today in excellent original condition. The Four Square house type developed as part of a general movement around the beginning of the twentieth century toward more simple and sensible, non-eclectic, rectangular houses --- a reaction against the gaudy, chaotic Victorian era. When the first Four Squares appeared in architectural magazines around 1890, their clean surfaces were a sharp contrast to the heavy detail of the Queen Anne and Colonial designs on surrounding pages. In the early 1890's several major architects experimented with the type. These included America's most famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, whose later Prairie School houses may have borrowed their geometric massing, wide eaves, and non-historic decoration in part from the Four Square. By the end of the 1890's variations on the Four Square were a regular feature of every magazine dealing with house planning, from *Carpentry and Building* to *Ladies Home Journal*. Thousands of the homes were built all over the country, until the type's popularity began to wane in the 1920's.

The 1904 construction of the C.W. Parker residence dates it among the first examples of this new house type in Charlotte. In other parts of the country the well-to-do were the first to break from the Victorian styles and build Four Squares, and the Parker house fits this pattern. Charles Parker was one of the city's leading furniture dealers,

and his large new residence was considered among Charlotte's finest homes when it was photographed in 1905 by the Gravure Illustration Company of Chicago for their handsome volume *Art Work of Charlotte, North Carolina*. The primary exterior characteristics of the Four Square are two-story cube-shaped massing, a pyramid-shaped "hip" roof, and an off-center front door that indicates a side-stair interior plan. The hip roof of the Parker house is covered with rectangular slate shingles and topped by a metal cresting. The roof flairs out over wide, unornamented eaves. Below, the mass of the building is basically cubic. On the west side a shed-roofed one-and-one-half story staircase bay projects slightly, balanced on the east side by a two story bay marking the dining room. Originally a one story kitchen wing extended from the rear of the home, a common variation on the Four Square. Some time after 1905 a second story was added to this wing, projecting out beyond the wing at the back to form a second story enclosed porch carried on four columns. With the exception of the clapboard rear addition, exterior walls are covered with horizontally double-grooved "novelty" siding. Additional horizontal emphasis is given by a wide band of stucco below the eaves, a very uncommon detail in Charlotte.

Simple flat molding surrounds the windows and extends horizontally at the tops and bottoms of the second story windows, dividing the wall surfaces into rectangular panels. The 1905 photograph shows that the building was originally painted a dark color with the molding highlighted in a light color, further emphasizing the home's rectilinear geometry. The windows continue the geometric theme. Most are large [double-hung sash](#), with a single pane of glass in the lower sash, and smaller squares of glass set diamond-fashion in the upper sash. Exceptions are the dining room windows, which have narrower one-over-one pane double-hung sash topped by diamond paned [transoms](#), a large fixed-pane front parlor window, and two big oval windows in the stair bay believed to have once held stained glass. The front door has simple rectangular sidelights. A wide one story front porch extends across the front of the structure and wraps around the east side. Its [hip roof](#), wide eaves, and horizontal molding echo the main block of the house. One bay of the porch projects forward to shelter the front steps. Porch columns are square with simple vertical fluting. Unlike most homes surviving from this era, the Parker residence still retains its original porch balustrade. The square balusters, set at a forty-five degree angle, contribute to the home's sense of carefully uncluttered detailing. The house is flanked by a pair of massive brick chimneys. Their elaborate paneling and corbelled caps are among Charlotte's most exuberant, an unexpectedly Victorian feature on this otherwise post-Victorian house. The building rests on a brick foundation which extends to support the porch. At the rear of the west side of the home the foundation is recessed about three feet.



Glass doors cover the resulting niche between the ground and the first floor, creating a small enclosure that was probably used as a greenhouse. The interior of the Parker house has been altered over the years, and vandals stripped some of its detailing when it stood vacant in the late 1970s, but its distinctive Four Square room arrangement and some details survive. The basic Four Square had four rooms downstairs: entry hall, parlor, dining room, and kitchen, four upstairs bedrooms and a bath linked by a stairway at the side of the house. In the Parker residence the hall and parlor are combined as one long room across the front. This may represent an early alteration or

may be original; the combination hall and parlor, forerunner of today's living room, was introduced around 1900 and became increasingly popular in succeeding decades. The main features of this room are the hall mantel to the left of the front door, covered by recent tile veneer except for the dentilled mantel shelf, and a pair of French doors opening onto the porch at the opposite end of the room.

From the front door one moves counter clockwise through the hall and parlor space, then slides open a large pocket-door and moves back into the dining room. In the corner of this room is an elaborate mirrored spindly mantel recalling earlier Victorian designs. Behind the dining room is the kitchen, extending all the way across the back of the house except for a small bathroom. This area, which probably once included a butler's pantry, has been gutted and fitted out a modern institutional kitchen. Because the Parker's kitchen was in this rear wing, there was space in the main block of the house for another downstairs room next to the dining room, behind the entry hall. This large chamber may have been used as a library or guest bedroom.

Having completed a circuit of downstairs rooms one returns to the entry hall. The [stairs](#) to the second floor rise from the rear of the hall. The original balustrades are gone and the [newel posts](#) are probably not original, but a small section of the original heavily panelled [wainscoting](#) survives. At the top of the two runs of stairs is a small circulation hall off which three bedrooms and a newly remodeled bath open. All three bedrooms retain their wooden mantels, each flanked by graceful turned columns which, like the exterior of the house, carefully avoid mimicking any historical style. When the rear kitchen wing received its second story, three more upstairs rooms were created. These are a bathroom and bedroom flanking a small hall, and a large enclosed porch across the back of the house which is now the housekeeper's apartment. The new circulation hall between the new bedroom and bath unexpectedly opens off the old back bedroom, rather than from the original upstairs circulation hall. The Parker house is sited on the east side of its large Central Avenue lot. The west third of the property is now given over to lawn and trees, and probably once included gardens. An old narrow concrete drive leads down the west lot line to the site of a now-demolished double garage.



Historical Overview

William H. Huffman

Charles Walter Parker, who was the son of Montfort Stokes and Mary Shankle Parker, was born in New London in Stanley County, NC. As a young man of twenty in 1886, he came to Charlotte and found employment with the E. M. Andrews Furniture and Music Company located at 16 West Trade Street.¹ Through his industry and good working relationship with owner Edgar Andrews, Mr. Parker gradually rose to the position of manager and secretary of the firm.² In 1892, his brother William Eli (Will) Parker also came to Charlotte and went to work at the Andrews Co., which left the remaining brother Fred to tend the 300-acre, eighteenth-century family farm in New London.³ By 1902, the Parker brothers and a partner, James O. Gardner, had bought out Mr. Andrews, who opened a smaller furniture business at 10 N. College St. The following year, the name of the company was changed to the Parker-Gardner Company, with Charles Parker serving as president, Will Parker as vice-president, and James Gardner as secretary and treasurer.⁵

The firm carried fine furniture, carpets, curtains, pianos, organs, and pianos, which were, according to a 1903 advertisement in the Charlotte City Directory, "The very best obtainable in all departments at the lowest possible prices." The prosperity of the business was shown by the same ad which said they were "The Largest Dealer in the State,"⁶ and in a *Charlotte Observer* ad later that year, where the claim was raised to "Largest Dealers in the South."⁷ Indeed, Charles W. Parker's efforts had been rewarded with a measure of personal prosperity for himself and his wife, the former Louise Anthony, who was a Virginia native and the daughter of John and Abigail Everett

Anthony of that state.⁸ Thus in 1902, when Mr. Parker became president of the E. M. Andrews Co., he purchased a building lot from Piedmont Realty Co. for a fine new home in one of Charlotte's new streetcar suburbs, Piedmont Park.⁹ At the time, Piedmont Park was envisioned as an exclusive neighborhood of fine homes, similar to [Dilworth](#), located to the southeast of downtown along Central Avenue and adjacent streets. Among several deed restrictions was the requirement that purchasers must spend a minimum of \$1500.00 for a "dwelling house" on the lot, which was twice the cost of the property itself, and certainly sufficient for a medium-sized multi-story frame house at the time. On November 13 of the year 1903, when he was then president of the newly-named Parker-Gardner Company, C.W. Parker took out a building loan from the Mechanics Perpetual Building and Loan Association in the amount of \$2100.00, and shortly thereafter began construction of his new house.¹⁰

Thus it was in 1904 when the spacious dwelling on [Central Avenue](#) was completed and the Parker family moved in. Just next door to the east, with a vacant lot in between (now the site of an apartment building), Mr. Parker's partner, James Gardner, also built a house in the same block. The entire neighborhood carried the air of Victorian orderliness with its neat and tidy blocks of charming houses of the prosperous middle-class merchant and professional inhabitants. It was served, by those who did not ride their own horse and carriage, by the streetcar running down Central Avenue to 7th, McDowell and Trade Streets to the Square. The expansive house on Central Avenue provided the place where the three lovely Parker daughters, Miriam (Hrs. H. P. Conway), Helen (Mrs. Whedon), and Dorothy Gardner (Mrs. E. Blackburn Moore) were raised and became active in Charlotte society. Charles Parker was a devoted family man, and was known for his congeniality and gentleness. He retained his roots in the country by occasionally visiting the old family farm in New London, and remained a man of strong and simple principle. His grandson recalls every letter ending with the dictum, "Do not borrow and do not lend." Louise Parker left her mark as an avid gardener who, in addition to her roles as wife and mother, measurably added to the comfort and beauty of the family home.

One by one the daughters married and left home, with the house providing the setting for one of them, that of Helen Parker Whedon in the mid-twenties. During that same time, the business had continued to do well. About 1909, Mr. Gardner left the firm and eventually became president of the Citizens Savings and Loan Corp.¹³ The Parker-Gardner Co. supplied fine furniture for many of Charlotte's best homes, including that of Gov. Cameron Morrison. The high point of its furniture sales was reached when the company received a contract to furnish the state house in Columbia, SC. In the 'teens, C. W. Parker was elected president of the Merchant's Association, and he helped establish a local chapter of the Knights of Pythias. Unfortunately, the general economic dislocations of the Great Depression of the Thirties also took its toll

on the business, and the furniture lines had to be dropped in favor of concentrating on musical instruments, sheet music, and records. Will Parker watched over the store on Trade Street while Charles was out on the road on his frequent selling trips.

During the Depression, Mrs. Parker took in boarders to make ends meet, which included R. M. (Tex) Hunter, a Charlotte CPA, and John Akers, a founder of Akers Motor Lines, and their wives. Helen Whedon and her son, Parker Whedon, also returned to live at the house about 1929. On November 30, 1942, the Central Avenue home was the scene of the celebration of Charles and Louise Parker's fiftieth wedding anniversary. The following year, Will Parker moved into the home. Will, whose niece Helen Whedon had died the year before, had been a widower since the 1920's.¹⁴ By the time of Charles Parker's death in 1950, until which time he had remained active in civic and business affairs, he had been in business on Trade Street for over a half century.¹⁵ When his brother Will died two years later, the business passed to two nephews, Fred G. and William J. Parker, the present owners, who had joined the company in 1946.¹⁶ Louise Parker lived on in the Central Avenue house, tending her gardens and receiving family and friends until a year or two before her death in January, 1976, at the age of 105.¹⁷ The house, which then descended to Dorothy Parker Moore and Parker Whedon, a Charlotte attorney, was closed in March, 1975, and subsequently suffered damage from vandalism.¹⁸ Its fortunes revived in 1980, however, when it was sold to the present owner, Michael Normile and his wife, who undertook an extensive renovation and restored the house to much of its original status as one of Charlotte's fine turn-of-the-century, houses.¹⁹ It is currently being resold as a halfway house, called the Central House, for mentally ill adults by the Charlotte Rehabilitation Homes, Inc., a non-profit organization which seeks to help their clients rejoin the mainstream of society.²⁰

NOTES

¹ *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 13, 1950, p. 1; Meck. Co. Certificate of Death, 1950-95.

² *Charlotte City Directory*, 1899/1900, p. 275.

³ Interview with Parker Whedon, 10 March 1982.

⁴ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1902, pp. 196 and 393.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1903, pp. 275 and 387.

⁶ Ibid., p. 387.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 15, 1903, p. 3.

⁸ Meck. Co. Certificate of Death, 1976-93.

⁹ Deed Book 168, p. 192, 1 May 1902.

¹⁰ Interview with Parker Whedon.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. Daughter Dorothy married the son of the operator of the Selwyn Hotel just town the street from the furniture store. He became the Speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses and an important figure in that state's politics.

¹³ Charlotte City Directories, 1909, p. 94; 1916, p. 216.

¹⁴ Interview with Parker Whedon.

¹⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 13, 1950, p. 1; *Charlotte News*, same date, p. IB.

¹⁶ Interview with Parker Whedon.

¹⁷ Ibid.; Meck. Co. Certificate of Death, 1976-93.

¹⁸ Interview with Parker Whedon.

¹⁹ Deed Book 4331, p. 658, 9 June 1980.

²⁰ *Charlotte News*, March 16, 1982, p. 6A.