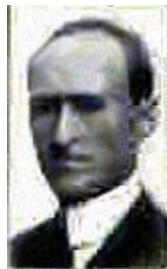


# Charles Christian Hook

by Lisa Bush Hankin



*C. C. Hook, in his twenties*



*C. C. Hook, in his forties.*

One of the most prolific architects in turn-of-the century Charlotte, North Carolina would have to be Charles Christian Hook, who designed not only many of the prominent residences of his day, but also a great number and variety of public buildings. That many of Hook's buildings have managed to escape the "demolition fever" that has raged in Charlotte is a testament to the lasting appeal of his classic designs in this conservative southern town.

Hook's resume would not suggest that he would be a leading figure (architectural or otherwise) in a place such as Charlotte. The son of German immigrants, Hook was born in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1870. He was educated at Washington University, probably not a place that would afford him access to the power elite of North Carolina. Upon his graduation in 1890, the man known as "the father of Charlotte

schools", Dr. Alexander Graham, brought Hook to Charlotte to teach mechanical drawing. This route from Washington University directly to Charlotte would not appear to have provided Hook with any formal architectural training or apprenticeship. After two years as a teacher, Hook began his career as Charlotte's first full-time professional architect in 1892. Initially, he practiced by himself, as suggested by a small (though hardly humble!) advertisement in the June 4, 1893 *Charlotte Daily Observer*: "CHAS. C. HOOK/ARCHITECT/OFFICE NO. 1 HARTY BUILDING/CHARLOTTE, NC/THE BEST IN TOWN."

Hook must have met some of the right people, or was in the right place at the right time, because early on he became involved designing residences for Edward Dilworth Latta's new suburb of [Dilworth](#). The June 4, 1893 *Observer* stated that Latta had:

arranged to introduce some new styles of architecture at Dilworth, and Mr. Hook will provide plans for five new-style residences. They will include the '[Queen Anne](#),' 'Colonial,' and 'Modern American' styles of architecture. All the buildings will be built in the best manner, with slate [roofs](#), fine interior finish, and ornamental [stairways](#).

In all, Hook is said to have designed 35 houses for Latta. A hint that Hook and Latta understood Charlotte's conservative nature is suggested by the use of the word "new" associated with the Queen Anne style, which had already passed from fashion in other areas of the country. Another insight is that when local architectural historians were preparing Dilworth's National Register nomination in 1978, they could find no concrete evidence of any houses that were planned or built in the aforementioned "Modern American" style. This evidence also suggests that Hook was willing to work in a variety of styles, perhaps to ensure a steady stream of clients to keep his fledgling practice afloat.

Despite his apparent willingness, Hook actually designed few Queen Anne style houses. Only two survive in Charlotte, and there is not evidence to confirm there were others. Hook's later writings (disparaging the use of the jig saw) suggest that he was not overly fond of the true Queen Anne style in the first place. Again, it would seem that, at least early in his career, Hook was willing to sacrifice his personal taste to build something that would appeal to his clients and the public.

That Hook was involved in designing suburban residences was probably not unusual for the time period around the turn of the century. The invention of electrified streetcars made it possible for people to move out of the center city, and suburbs such as Dilworth were cropping up all over the US (though this was to be the first in North Carolina). The growth of suburbs continued unabated well into the 20th century, and Hook continued to design grand suburban residences throughout his career. In 1898,

Hook formed a partnership with Frank McMurray Sawyer called Hook & Sawyer. Together they unveiled a savvy (for Charlotte) marketing campaign in 1902 -- they published a book-sized portfolio of their work, entitled *Some Designs by Hook and Sawyer*. This book contained full-page photographs of completed commissions and full-page sketches of plans not yet built. In all, there were 41 pages of designs, plus a section at the back that contained a number of advertisements for local businesses. From this book, we can see that Hook had already begun working further afield in North Carolina. The book included plans for projects in Durham, Greensboro, Concord, Greenville, Davidson, High Point, Spray, Red Springs, Spartanburg (SC) and Salisbury. The opening page suggested that this book was intended to be only one of a series, and that it was unabashedly a marketing piece. It read:

#### OUR BOOKLET FOR 1902

Hardly a day passes that we do not have inquiries for a catalogue showing some designs of our work. We do not issue a catalogue nor do we encourage the reproduction of buildings that have been built.

Originality and artistic design is the secret of our success, together with accuracy and completeness in the services we render. Why not, therefore, take advantage of experience.

Our work is not only confined to the designing, but also to specification work for Sanitary Plumbing, Heating, Ventilation, and everything entering into the construction of modern buildings.

Keep this little book; it will be a help to you when you least expect it. When you are ready to build, write us and we will call on you.

Respectfully yours, Hook & Sawyer.

Publication of a vanity volume or printed "souvenir" such as this followed in the earlier 19th century tradition of producing architectural pattern books. But that was not the totality of Hook & Sawyer's marketing efforts. In late 1903 and early 1904, they submitted to the *Charlotte Daily Observer* a series of house plan illustrations with accompanying floor plans and a 7-10 paragraph essay describing the design. Among the installments were: "Building Beautiful Homes;" "A Picturesque House;" "Residential Architecture;" and "No Space Wasted." The designs, which kept Hook & Sawyer visible to Charlotteans and enabled them to espouse some of their views on residential architecture (discussed more later), included: a large Georgian Revival house, a Spanish Mission stuccoed cottage (\$2,000), a medium Colonial Revival house, a large cottage, a Georgian Revival porticoed mansion (\$7,000) and a Georgian Revival duplex (\$3-4,000). These articles revealed some of Hook's true feelings about architectural styles, revealing that he was enamored of the [Neoclassical](#) design elements that gained renewed prominence at the [1893 Columbian Exposition](#) in

Chicago. He also came out as a proponent of the Colonial Revival style, the style for which he probably is best known, suggesting that "colonial architecture" was "the most appropriate form for domestic building in the state."

Others agreed. The Colonial Revival style was an oasis of stability in a culture of skyrocketing immigration and rapid industrialization. The Colonial Revival may have struck an especially responsive chord in a southern city like Charlotte where the shift from a small courthouse town in an agrarian region to a bustling "New South" city may have been particularly jarring. As architectural historian Catherine Bishir states, "Tying the newly stabilized present with the South's own past, the Colonial Revival expanded to encompass the architecture of an idealized antebellum civilization and the values it had come to represent." Hook's propaganda fed into this. He wrote: "The Civil War marked the change from good to bad architecture in the South." [After the war] "things being reversed in general we find a greater reversal in architectureŠ[because] the illiterate and unrefined, being new to wealth, desired display more than purity." And:

Out of all this chaos we again have a revival of the colonial. Its symmetry, restfulness, and good proportions generally caused it to be superior to all other schools of design. Beyond doubt the colonial style in its purity expresses more real refined sentiment and is more intimately associated with our history than any of the styles mentioned, it is not only an association of English history with our own, but expresses authentic memoirs of the American people themselves.

What could be more reassuring for the kings of industry than to build in the safe, always tasteful, Colonial Revival style?

Among Hook's commissions were residences for some of the leading captains of industry in their time, including James Buchanan Duke, tobacco magnate and Southern Utility Company entrepreneur; Southern Power Company executive Z.V. Taylor; textile magnate Abel Caleb Lineberger; C. Furber Jones, founder of the Piedmont Fire Insurance Company; William Henry Belk, founder of Belk Department Stores; cotton broker Ralph VanLandingham, and Whitney Company founder Egbert Barry Cornwall Hambley to name a few. How did Hook come to know these people and, arguably, to become their "architect of choice" when he had not grown up or been schooled in North Carolina? Very likely several things contributed to Hook's success with this affluent and rarified segment of the population. First, Hook's wife, the former Ida McDonald, was from the area (either Charlotte or Concord, according to newspaper articles) and was actively involved in charitable affairs.



*Hook's Duke Mansion*



*Hook's Belk Mansion*

A feature article about her in the *Observer* lauded her for her work in the "upbuilding of Charlotte's religious, cultural, and civic life." The same article said that she was educated at Presbyterian College in Charlotte (later Queens College) and was a member of numerous civic and social clubs, holding high office in many. Certainly, her connections couldn't have hurt Hook in obtaining commissions from Charlotte's movers and shakers. Secondly, Hook himself was very active in Charlotte's civic affairs, serving as President of the Chamber of Commerce for several years, as well as being involved in organizations such as Westminster Church, the Knights of Pythias, the American Red Cross, and others. Third, Hooks' partners, Sawyer and Rogers may have been well connected in Charlotte. There is certainly precedent for architectural partnerships where one partner was the designer and one is the businessperson (e.g., Burnham & Root). Finally, Hook's involvement in designing civic and commercial buildings must have afforded him introduction to some of Charlotte's civic and industrial leaders.

The partnership of Hook & Sawyer lasted eight years, until 1906. At that time, Hook went back into practice by himself until he joined up with Willard G. Rogers in 1910. After dissolving his partnership with Rogers (who continued to practice in Charlotte) in 1916, Hook again practiced on his own until 1924, when he established a

partnership with his son, Walter. Apparently, the split with Rogers was amicable, since Rogers served as a pallbearer at Hook's funeral.



*This photo was taken in January 1929 at a Barbecue held at the Ornamental Stone Company in Charlotte. It was part of the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. C. C. Hook is the third man from the left in the light coat holding one hand in the air. The photograph is from Architects and Builders in North Carolina by Catherine W. Bisher, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood III.*

Hook was by no means solely a residential architect. He designed [city halls](#), post offices, office buildings, banks, facilities for colleges and universities, fire stations, theatres, hospitals, and railroad terminals, among others. Neither was Hook's work confined to Charlotte.



*Charlotte City Hall*

One of his most visible (today) commissions was for the gymnasium and dormitory buildings at Trinity College in Durham (now Duke University), where he served as architect from 1895-1925. Letters between Hook and president William P. Few lend insight into the architect-client relationship at the turn of the century, covering topics such as the (time-consuming) nature of the design process for a large building scheme, site supervision in days when transportation between cities 160 miles apart could be difficult, realization of a long-term building plan one building at a time, and the inevitable billing issues.

Though Hook is best known for his work in the Colonial Revival style, he was a very versatile architect. In addition to his early forays into the Queen Anne style, his 1902 portfolio book shows residences (now destroyed) in the Shingle Style, as well as designs with Mediterranean motifs. In 1914, he built an [estate](#) for Ralph and Susie Harwood VanLandingham in a severe [Bungalow](#) style, with grounds extensively landscaped to remind them of their home in the mountains.



*The VanLandingham Estate*

Hook designed a castle-like mansion of stone for mining engineer and Whitney Company founder Egbert Barry Cornwall Hambley in 1902-3. Hook's design for the 1927 [Carolina Theatre](#) was in the Mediterranean style, consistent with the exotic architecture of many movie palaces built in that era. The now-destroyed Charlotte [Masonic Temple](#) was supposed to have been a masterpiece of the Egyptian Revival style. Even a humble [fire station](#) built in 1929 incorporated a rusticated first level with sturdy arches, reminiscent of the Richardson Romanesque style, with roof tiles in the Spanish Mission style. Hook used this type of roof tile extensively; it also appears on the original buildings of Queens College, and on a number of residences he designed in the Charlotte suburb of [Myers Park](#). Perhaps indicative of Hook's true preferences, his own residence (now demolished) was a comparatively modest gambrel-fronted Colonial Revival house sheathed in shingles.

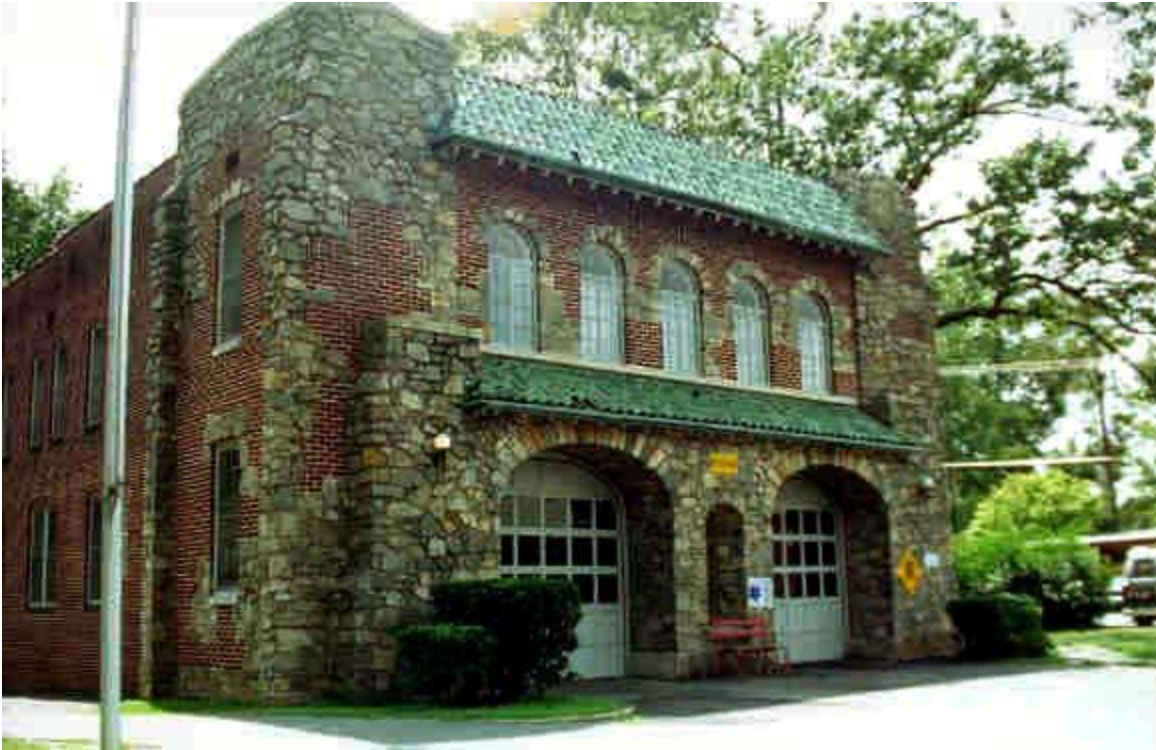




*Carolina Theatre*



*Masonic Temple*



*Fire Station Number 6*

C.C. Hook died in dramatic -- if not downright mysterious circumstances at the age of 68. After riding the elevator up to his office on the 12th floor of the Commercial National Bank Building in Charlotte, he either fell, was pushed, or jumped out of a window and was killed as he fell to the roof of the building below. The local coroner ruled the death accidental, but there has always been speculation as to how Hook really died. At the time of his death, his family said that Hook had suffered from vertigo. He is said to have fallen suddenly from a low washroom window, after slipping or having a sudden vertigo attack, which is certainly possible, but sounds somewhat implausible. A mailroom employee, who was the last person to have seen Hook alive, saw him holding his head in his hands, saying he felt "terrible." Again, this could be interpreted as the onset of a vertigo attack or could refer to other problems or despair. Whatever the circumstances, Hook's architectural influence didn't end with his death.

As mentioned before, Hook's son Walter was also an architect, and he became well-known in North Carolina, especially for his designs for hospitals and healthcare facilities. Interestingly, the Hook story does not end there. Hook's daughter, Rosalie, married an artist named Robert Gwathmey. Their son (born in Charlotte, according to Southern tradition) was named Charles, after his grandfather. Though his grandfather died soon after he was born, his legacy has lived on as Charles Gwathmey has followed his grandfather's path as an architect. While C.C. Hook was designing

commissions for the business elite of his day, so has his grandson, whose commissions include the addition to New York's Guggenheim Museum and the Long Island residence of Steven Spielberg, among others.

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