

Charlotte Streetcar No. 85



This report was written on October 9, 1989

NOTE: There have been significant developments in the status of the Charlotte Trolley since this report was written. For more recent information, see the end of this report for links to other streetcar-related areas of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission site.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charlotte Trolley is temporarily located at the rear of Discovery Place in Uptown Charlotte.

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

Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
1225 South Caldwell St. Box D
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: Because the trolley is a piece of moving equipment, it is not appropriate that this report should contain a map depicting its location.

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: There is no deed recorded on this property.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by John W. Hancock.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill

8. Documentation of how 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 historical, prehistorical, architectural, or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Charlotte Trolley does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Charlotte Trolley is the only restorable, known remnant of Charlotte's trolley fleet, which played a decisive role in the physical evolution of this community; and 2) the Charlotte Trolley, when fully restored and placed in service, will enhance the historic image of Uptown Charlotte.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill which is included in this report demonstrates that the essential form of the Charlotte Trolley 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 a "historic landmark." The Charlotte Trolley has no current Ad Valorem Tax value placed upon it.

Date of Preparation of this Report: October 9, 1989

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

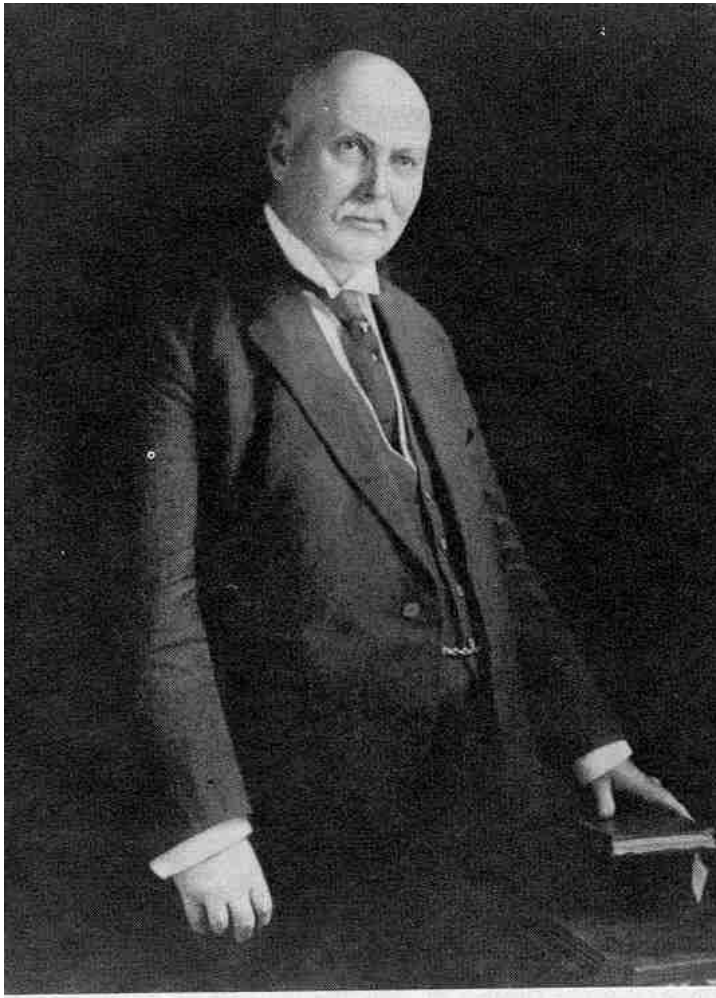
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Historical Overview

John W. Hancock

The history of the electric streetcar currently being restored behind Charlotte's Discovery Place begins with the foresight of a well-known former Charlottean - Edward Dilworth Latta. It was E.D. Latta's Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (created by Latta and five associates and known locally as the Four Cs) which purchased the existing horse-drawn cars from the city of Charlotte in late 1890 and contracted with the Edison Electric Company in February 1891 to install new electric trolley lines. ¹



Edward Dilworth Latta

A subsidiary, the Charlotte Railway Company, was formed by these progressive late nineteenth-century developers to manage the new streetcar system. At 3:00 p.m. on May 18, 1891 the first electric streetcar departed from Charlotte's Square at the intersection of Trade and Tryon and headed toward the recently-created suburb of [Dilworth](#).² A new era of transportation had dawned in a New South city.

On January 1, 1910 the Southern Power Company (predecessor of the Duke Power Company) entered into contract with E.D. Latta, president of the Four Cs, to purchase the Charlotte Railway Company at cost plus 6%.³ A writer in the *Southern Public Utilities Magazine* metaphorically hailed the electric streetcar as providing the essential "blood" of the expanding suburbs.⁴ The Southern Power Company, and its successor, Duke Power Company, successfully operated and managed Charlotte's streetcar system until its eventual demise.

Advances in technology would eventually render Charlotte's electric streetcar system inefficient and obsolete. On November 15, 1937 Duke Power Company and the City of Charlotte applied to the North Carolina Utilities Commission for authority to substitute motor buses in place of electric streetcars in and around the city of Charlotte.⁵ City Council member J. S. Nance argued that such a substitution would be "one of the most progressive moves that Charlotte has made in quite a long time."⁶ City attorney Basil M. Boyd called it "one of the biggest and the finest things that has perhaps ever happened to the City of Charlotte" and said he did not know of "a single individual in the City of Charlotte who has voiced any objection to the proposed change."⁷ The new motor buses were more flexible, safer and quieter than the outmoded streetcars. On March 14, 1938 streetcar number 85 traveled what was now a nostalgic trip from Presbyterian Hospital through downtown, stopping at the Square for a special ceremony, and continuing to its last stop at the South Boulevard car barn.⁸ The era of the electric streetcar in Charlotte was officially over.

Most streetcars were simply scrapped. An internal Duke Power Company memo dated November 28, 1938 documents five streetcars (total value \$5000), along with thirty six streetcar bodies (total value \$2940), to be salvaged.⁹ This would account for most of the Charlotte fleet, which varied between forty and forty-five cars. Some streetcars, however, were to continue serving, but in different capacities. Some of the older model cars were sold to enterprising cafe owners who converted them into dining cars and others were to continue life as cottages.¹⁰ The known history of the streetcar currently being restored in Charlotte lends itself to both of these historical alternatives.

During the week of November 2, 1987 Mecklenburg county planners Carl Flick and Sandra Albrecht were mapping land use on David Street on the southern edge of Huntersville, N.C. Flick, a native of Philadelphia, Pa., which has the largest trolley system in the United States, spotted something at the end of the street. "It appeared to be some kind of diner," he recalled.¹¹ Flick called Dan Morrill, consulting director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, with news of his discovery.

Flick's on-the-spot historical analysis proved to be accurate. The streetcar found on David Street had, indeed, been used as a diner/concession stand near Huntersville at Caldwell

Station, N.C., which is located on Highway 115 approximately one-half mile north of the intersection of Highway 73 and 115. Many area residents recollected the streetcar concession stand. Edith Brown and Mrs. W. R. Hager of Huntersville remember seeing the streetcar at Caldwell Station during the 1940s.¹² Interestingly, none of those interviewed remembered actually eating at the streetcar concession stand. A possible explanation for this was provided by another long-time Huntersville resident, Mrs. Leggett Blythe. Mrs. Blythe recalled that gypsies often inhabited the land where the streetcar sat, and her parents, undoubtedly like many others, forbade her to stop or patronize the concession stand.¹¹

The name of the first resourceful owner of the streetcar concession stand has not been established. Duke Power Company archival records do not indicate individual streetcar sales when the fleet was disbanded in 1938. There are no remaining McLeod Trucking Company business records for the period prior to 1950. Mr. Jay Mumpower of Charlotte, a retired rigger for the McLeod Trucking and Rigging Company, recalls hauling several streetcars from the Duke Power car barn on South Boulevard to local sites, but does not specifically recall moving a streetcar to Caldwell Station. A land deed search revealed that the land at Caldwell citation where the streetcar sat was respectively owned during the 1940s by a Mary Wilson, G. D. Moody and a J. N. Barker, but the 1969 telephone book holds no listings for these names and none of the area residents interviewed recognized these names when mentioned.¹⁴

The history of the streetcar after its use as a concession stand is clearer. Daisy Mae Trapp Moore of Huntersville estimates buying the streetcar from its Caldwell Station owners twenty-five to thirty years ago and paying approximately \$125 - \$150 for it.¹⁵ While she does not recall the exact date of her purchase, an October 28, 1951 *Charlotte Observer* newspaper, found stuffed behind the paneling as insulation when the streetcar was found in 1987, may provide some evidence as to the date Mrs. Moore bought the streetcar and moved it to David Street in Huntersville. Mrs. Moore originally used the streetcar as housing for some relatives who were down on their luck and Mrs. Moore's brothers, who were carpenters, renovated the inside of the streetcar to make it habitable. The newspaper's 1951 date roughly coincides with Mrs. Moore's recollection of buying the streetcar approximately thirty years ago.

When the streetcar was found in November 1987, it was being used by Mrs. Moore as a rental property. Clay Thompson, a backhoe operator for McCall Brothers, had lived in the streetcar house since the early 1970's.¹⁶ Shortly before the streetcar was found by Flick, the county had condemned the streetcar house because it had no indoor plumbing.

On April 12, 1988 in Contract of Sale was made between Daisy Mae Trapp Moore and the Emergency Properties Fund of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission to sell the streetcar to the Commission for \$1000.¹⁷ McLeod Trucking and Rigging Company of Charlotte donated its services and transported the streetcar on a flatbed truck to Charlotte on Friday May 6, 1988.

The streetcar currently resides behind Discovery Place in downtown Charlotte and in the capable hands of professional restorer David Lathrop. While Lathrop has not found any

direct evidence of the streetcar being one from the Charlotte fleet, he has found important physical evidence which closely correlates the car to those used in Charlotte during the 1920s. Surviving pictures of Charlotte streetcars of this era closely match the car being restored. Undercarriage components manufactured by the J. G. Brill Company of Philadelphia are the same style as those used by the Perley Thomas Car Company of High Point, North Carolina, the builder of many Charlotte streetcars. Also, the close proximity of the streetcar when found, less than fifteen miles from downtown Charlotte, lends credence to the car as being an original Charlotte streetcar.

Dan Morrill and Bill Huffman of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission estimate it will cost \$250,000 to make the streetcar operable once again.¹⁸ A fundraising drive is currently underway to raise the necessary money. Charlotte Trolley Inc., a private non-profit organization, wants to operate the streetcar on the abandoned Norfolk and Southern rail line between the ninety-three year old Seaboard station on 12th Street to Dilworth, a distance of about 1.3 miles.

It would be a fitting tribute to the early visionaries of Charlotte, such as E.D. Latta and others, to have a streetcar clambering once again along Charlotte's streets, headed toward Dilworth almost a full century after the first streetcar left the Square. Perhaps the crowds would turn out amid much hoopla, as they did in May 1891, to usher in the restoration of an important part of Charlotte's history.

Notes

¹ Morrill, Dan. "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (1890-1925): Builders of a New South City. " *North Carolina Historical Review*. Volume LXIII, Number 3, July 1985, p.297.

² *Charlotte News* May 23, 1891.

³ Letter from H. W. Anderson, President of Archival Consultant, Inc. Winston-Salem, N.C. to Marilyn Usher, Charlotte, N.C. January 10, 1987.

⁴ "Parable of Transportation." *Southern Public Utilities Magazine*. April 18, 1918, p. 1.

⁵ Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p. 1.

⁶ Nance, J. S. Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p. 9.

⁷ Boyd, Basil M. Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p. 5.

⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, March 14, 1938.

⁹ Folder A-842. Duke Power Company Archives. Charlotte, N.C.

¹⁰ *Charlotte News*, January 7, 1938.

¹¹ *Charlotte Observer*. November 10, 1987.

¹² Interview conducted with Edith Brown at White Hall Retirement Homes, Huntersville, N.C. September 14, 1989.

¹³ Telephone interview conducted with Mrs. W. R. Hager of Huntersville, N.C. September 22, 1989.

¹⁴ Land Deed search conducted at Mecklenburg County Tax Office, 720 East Trade St., Charlotte, N.C. September 22, 1989.

¹⁵ Interview of Daisy Mae Trapp Moore conducted by Bill Huffman of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. April 10, 1988.

¹⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, November 10, 1987.

¹⁷ Contract of Sale. Mecklenburg County, N.C. Pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. 160A-399.3

¹⁸ *Charlotte Observer*. May 7, 1988.

Physical Description

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

Professor of History, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

October 9, 1989

When located in 1987 at the end of David St. in Huntersville, the Charlotte trolley or electric streetcar was in a deteriorated condition. Customarily, when an electric company such as Duke Power placed its streetcars up for sale, it would remove the trucks, motors, control systems, and all interior features, including the seats, so that the car could be more easily transported. Such was the case with the Charlotte Trolley. Also, because the trolley

had served as a residence for many years, a panel had been removed from the center of one side, providing a opening for the front door, and a small wooden addition, containing a kitchen, had been placed at one end of the car, and a door of the trolley itself had been removed to provide easy access into this space.

Documentary evidence demonstrates that the Charlotte trolley was constructed by the Perley Thomas Car Company of High Point, N.C., most likely in the late 1910's. The J. G. Brill Company of Philadelphia, Pa., manufactured the mechanical systems. It is a double-truck, double-ended car, originally with flip-over wooden seats. Unfortunately, the original wooden ceiling and floor were not salvageable, nor were the bumpers, the car ends or the knee braces. Happily, the great majority of the main body was restorable, and a major portion of the time spent to date has been devoted to refurbishing the body, including sandblasting and putting the prime layers of paint on the car. Also, new bumpers, knee braces, and car ends, replicating the originals, have been fashioned and are in process of being placed on the car. A new, beaded board ceiling has been constructed on the car, as has a magnificent, red oak floor. When completed, the Charlotte trolley will have reproduction flip-over wooden seats, vintage mechanical gear, and will be carry its original "South Public Utilities Company" insignia.