

Masonic Temple

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This report was written on April 2, 1980.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Masonic Temple is located at 329 S. Tryon St. in Charlotte, N.C.

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

The present owner and occupant of the property is:

Masonic Temple Association

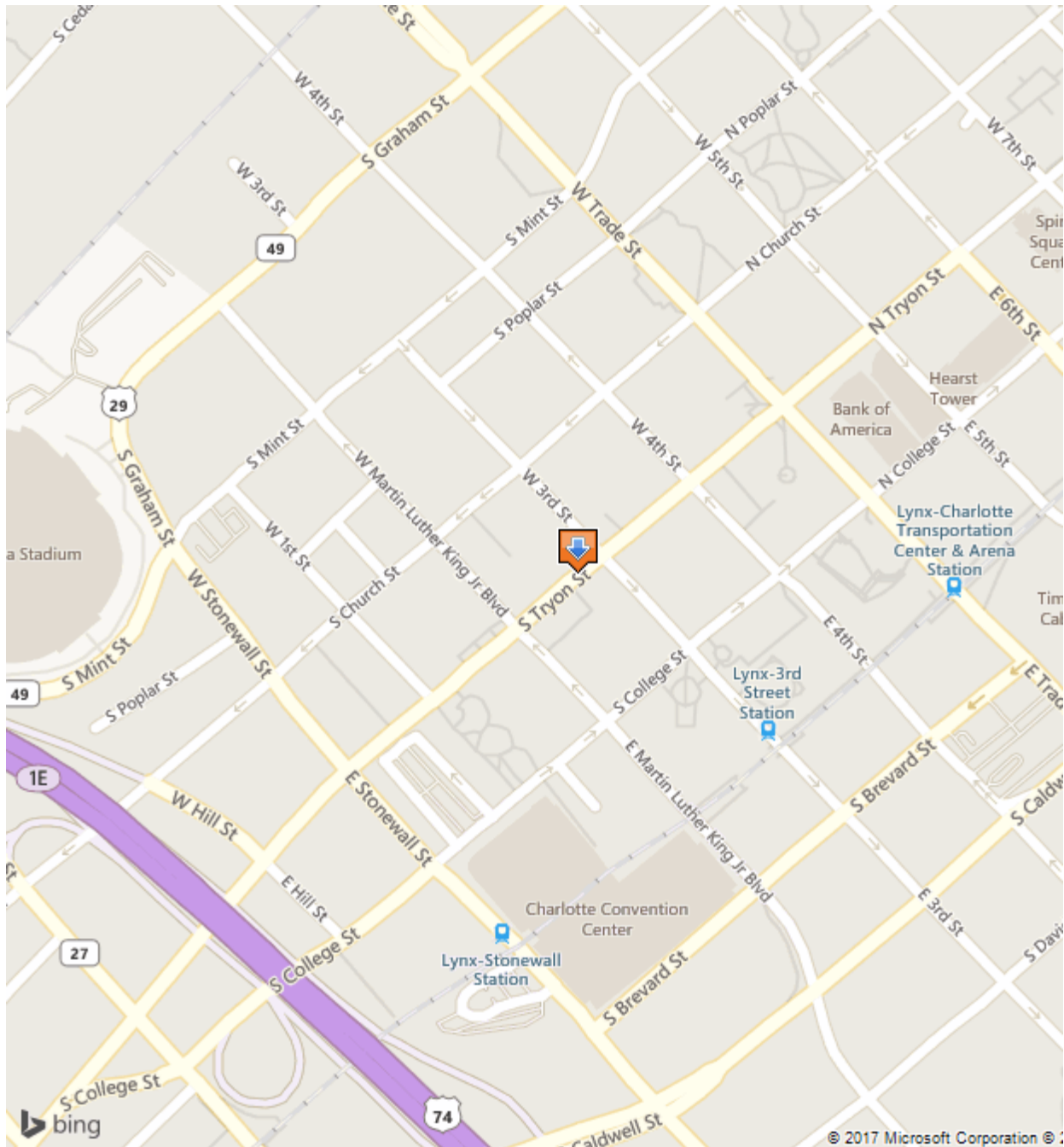
327 S. Tryon St.

Charlotte, N.C. 28202

Telephone: (704) 332-7862

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 deed on this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 290 at Page 326. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 125-051-01.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

The initial grand lodge of Freemasonry was established in London, England, in 1717. This fraternal organization, officially known as the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, was brought to the American colonies by English masons during the first three decades of the eighteenth century. The First Lodge of Boston, organized in 1733 by Henry Price, is the oldest Masonic grand lodge in the United States. The movement prospered in this country, counting among its participants such eminent citizens as Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. Freemasonry draws its inspiration from the rituals and ceremonies of the guilds of stone workers or masons in medieval Europe. Believing that God is the "Great Architect of the Universe," masons obligate themselves to advance the brotherhood of man and to live in accordance with the highest ethical standards. Men who accept any monotheistic faith may join. ¹

The origins of the Masonic Temple in Charlotte date from May 19, 1869, when the three lodges in this community created the Masonic Temple Association. ² Samuel Wittkowsky, a leading Jewish resident of Charlotte, headed the organization, the sole purpose of which was to secure funds for the construction of a temple. Its initial fund-raising event was a Masonic Fair and Festival, which occurred in July 1869 on the grounds of First Presbyterian Church. On December 28, 1874, the consecration of the initial temple transpired. Situated in leased quarters on the third floor of the Hutchinson Building in the first block of N. Tryon St., it served the Charlotte masons until January 1902, when they occupied the top floor of the Piedmont Building on S. Tryon St. In 1904, the Masonic lodges in this community purchased a lot at W. Trade and Church Sts. on which to build their temple. The Masonic Temple was not erected at this location, however. ³ On January 22, 1912, the Masonic Temple Association voted instead to sell its property on W. Trade St. and to build on a parcel at S. Tryon and Second Sts. which it had bought from Edward Dilworth Latta, president of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company. ⁴ The Charlotte masons had hoped to occupy their temple by early 1913, but plans were delayed for almost a year because of a disagreement with the City concerning the location of the southwestern corner of the lot. Finally, on January 2, 1913, the dispute having been settled, the Masonic Temple Association announced that it would move ahead with construction. ⁵ Charles Christian Hook and Willard G. Rogers, two local architects who had formed a partnership in 1907, were awarded the contract for the Masonic Temple on July 24, 1912. ⁶

[C. C. Hook](#) (1870-1938) was the first architect who resided in Charlotte. A native of Wheeling, W. Va., and graduate of Washington University, he moved to this community in 1891 to teach in the Charlotte Graded School, which was located at the corner of South Blvd. and E. Morehead St. ⁷ Most of his early commissions were for structures in [Dilworth](#), the streetcar suburb which the Charlotte Consolidated

Construction Company, locally known as the Four Cs, opened on May 20, 1891.⁸ Among the significant edifices which he designed were the [Charlotte City Hall](#), the [clubhouse of the Charlotte Woman's Club](#) and [White Oaks or the James B. Duke House](#) on Hermitage Rd.⁹ Indeed, C. C. Hook occupies a place of preeminent importance in the architectural history of Charlotte, N.C.

It was altogether fitting and proper that Hooks & Rogers selected the Egyptian Revival style for the Charlotte Masonic Temple. Tradition holds that stonemasonry originated in ancient Egypt among the builders of the great pyramids and that it was there that the Hebrews learned the skills which enabled them to erect the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.¹⁰ In the United States, the Egyptian Revival style attained its greatest popularity in the 1830's, manifesting itself in such notable edifices as the Philadelphia County Prison, the New York Halls of Justice and the County Courthouse at Newark, New Jersey.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the motif enjoyed an enduring popularity among Masonic organizations.

A gala ceremony occurred in Charlotte on March 4, 1914, when masons from across North Carolina joined with their local counterparts in witnessing the laying of the cornerstone of the Masonic Temple.¹² The new temple will become an edifice of adorning beauty to one of the city's principal streets and Charlotte will be proud of the moment it lifts its proud head toward the heavens," the *Evening Chronicle* declared.¹³ *The Charlotte News* predicted that the building would be "one of the crowning glories of the city."¹⁴ *The Charlotte Observer* called it the "Only exclusively Masonic temple of distinctive architecture in the South."¹⁵ The most compelling statements concerning the building were made by Francis D. Winston, past Grand Master of the masons of North Carolina. "Other great buildings, designed for commercial uses, may rise here from time to time in the years that are to come. The world can do without them," he intoned, "but the world today is demanding - more than it ever demanded - the idea that every man owes something to every other man as his brother. This building will stand through the ages for the eternal principle of the brotherhood of man."¹⁶ In the opinion of the *Evening Chronicle*, the Masonic Temple was "a mighty fortress."¹⁷

The J. A. Jones Construction Company erected the building. The cost was just over \$90,000.¹⁸ Tragedy struck the Masonic Temple in the early morning hours of March 4, 1937, on the twenty-third anniversary of the cornerstone ceremony. Flames engulfed the structure, completely destroying the interior. Every available piece of fire-fighting equipment was summoned," *The Charlotte Observer* reported.¹⁹ The Masonic Temple Association considered relocating its facilities in the suburbs, where adequate parking could be provided.²⁰ Happily, it decided instead to rebuild the temple within the extant walls. The architect was Willard G. Rogers, formerly of

Hook & Rogers. Construction began in February 1938, and the temple reopened on October 11, 1938.²¹

Notes:

¹ William James Hughan, "Freemasonry" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Eleventh Edition (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York, 1910) Vol. XI, pp. 78-85. Hereafter cited as *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

² The Masonic lodges in Charlotte in 1869 were Charlotte Chapter No. 39 Royal Arch Masons, Phalanx Lodge No. 31, and the Excelsior Lodge No. 261 F. & A. M.

³ *Historical Sketch of the Masonic Temple Association of the City of Charlotte* (Charlotte, 1950). Hereafter cited as *Historical Sketch*.

⁴ *The Charlotte News* (January 23, 1912), p. 2. *The Charlotte Observer* (January 24, 1912), p. 5. *The Evening Chronicle* (January 23, 1912), p. 1.

⁵ *The Charlotte News* (January 3, 1913), p. 7. *The Charlotte Observer* (January 3, 1913), p. 6.

⁶ *Historical Sketch. The Evening Chronicle* (March 4, 1914), p. 1.

⁷ *The Charlotte News* (September 17, 1938), p. 12.

⁸ *The Charlotte News* (May 20, 1891), p. 1.

⁹ Jack O. Boyte & Dan L. Morrill, "[Survey and Research Report on Lynnwood for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission](#)," (January 5, 1977); Jack O. Boyte & Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey and Research Report on the Mecklenburg County Courthouse for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission," (April 5, 1977); Ruth Little-Stokes and Dan L. Morrill, "[A Survey and Research Report on the Clubhouse of the Charlotte Woman's Club](#)," (April 1, 1978).

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

¹¹ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780 A Guide to the Styles* (The M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 48-51.

¹² *The Evening Chronicle* (March 3, 1914), p. 1. For a photograph of the ceremony, see the *Evening Chronicle* March 5, 1914, p. 6.

¹³ *The Evening Chronicle* (March 3, 1914), p. 4.

¹⁴ *The Charlotte News* (March 4, 1914), p. 4.

¹⁵ *The Charlotte Observer* (March 5, 1914), pp. 1,3 & 7.

¹⁶ *The Evening Chronicle* (March 5, 1914), pp. 1 & 6. For a text of Winston's speech, see *The Charlotte News* (March 14, 1914), p. 7.

¹⁷ *The Evening Chronicle* (March 4, 1914), pp. 1,5 & 8.

¹⁸ *Historical Sketch*

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Laura A. W. Phillips, 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 Commission judges that the property known as the Masonic Temple does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) it is the only building in Charlotte which was erected to serve as a Masonic temple; 2) it is the only example of the Egyptian Revival style in Charlotte-Mecklenburg; 3) it was designed by Hook & Rogers; C. C. Hook is an architect of local and regional importance; 4) it serves as the symbolic landmark of the Charlotte masons.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission judges that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Masonic Temple meets this criterion. It is true that the interior of the structure was destroyed by fire in March 1937. However, Willard G. Rogers, a co-designer with C. C. Hook of the initial interior, supervised the refurbishment of the building; and, while not restoring the

interior, he did remain sensitive to the initial design. The exterior dates from 1914. *The Evening Chronicle* stated on March 5, 1914, that the Masonic Temple in Charlotte, "for significance and conformity to the Masonic traditions," would be "unequaled south of Washington." (*The Evening Chronicle* (March 5, 1914), pp. 1 & 6.)

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually 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 Ad Valorem tax appraisal of the .234 acres of land is \$255,000. The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal of the building is \$465,000. The property is exempted from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes. The building contains 30,000 square feet of floor space. The land is zoned B3.

Bibliography

Jack O. Boyte & Dan L. Morrill, "[A Survey and Research Report on Lynnwood for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission](#) ," (January 5, 1977).

Jack O. Boyte & Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey and Research Report on the Mecklenburg County Courthouse for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission ", April 5, 1977).

The Charlotte News.

The Charlotte Observer.

The Evening Chronicle.

Historical Sketch of the Masonic Temple Association of the City of Charlotte (Charlotte, 1950).

The Charlotte Observer (March 4, 1937), p. 1. For photographs of the fire, see *The Charlotte News* (March 4, 1937), p. 1. and *The Charlotte Observer* (March 4, 1937), p. 1.

The Charlotte Observer (March 5, 1937), p. 1.

Historical Sketch.

William James Hughan, "Freemasonry" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Eleventh Edition (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York, 1910) Vol. XI, pp. 78-85.

Ruth Little-Stokes & Dan L. Morrill, "[A Survey and Research Report on the Clubhouse of the Charlotte Woman's Club for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission](#)", (April 1, 1978).

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this Report: April 2, 1980.

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Architectural Description

The Masonic Temple is a monumental Egyptian Revival building prominently located on the corner of South Tryon and Second Streets in downtown Charlotte. The architectural firm of Hook & Rogers designed the Masonic Temple, which was built in 1913-1914 by contractor J. A. Jones. A disastrous fire on March 4, 1937 gutted the building, leaving only the four exterior walls. Plans were immediately started for the rebuilding of the Temple under the supervision of Willard G. Rogers as architect and with J. J. McDevitt & Co. serving as general contractor. The rebuilding project began in February, 1938 and a dedication service for the completed project was held on October 11, 1938. Thus the Temple as it presently stands is the result of a 1913 exterior design with major rebuilding -- primarily on the interior -- in 1938.

In planning their Temple, the Masons were striving for a structure which would be reminiscent of King Solomon's Temple, as described in the Bible in 1 Kings, Chapter 6 and 2 Chronicles, Chapter 3. In doing so the temple would symbolically reflect the Masonic goal of constructing better men of its members, creating "human temples."

The simple but elegant massiveness of the Egyptian style seemed appropriate for fulfilling these requirements.

With its massive quality, smooth wall surfaces, battered walls with narrow windows, roll-and-gorge cornice and decorative details, the Masonic Temple is a typical representation of the Egyptian Revival style. This style was first popular in America between 1830-1850 and was again revived in the twentieth century, primarily in the 1920s. The Egyptian Revival was never an especially widespread and prolific style, but rather one which tended to be used in specialized cases where the symbolic nature of the style could be played to the fullest. With the occurrence of buildings in the Egyptian Revival style being therefore rather limited, the surprise of finding this building on South Tryon Street, coupled with the boldness of its design, makes the Masonic Temple one of most dramatic buildings in downtown Charlotte.

The primary exterior decoration of this four-story building is concentrated on the South Tryon Street facade, with secondary attention paid to the Second Street facade. The left side and rear of the building are devoid of decoration and are purely functional in design.

The South Tryon Street facade is sheathed in smooth [ashlar](#) blocks. Verticality is emphasized in the battered walls (creating perspective distortion), broad and narrow pilasters, narrow-paned windows, and heavy lotus bud columns which flank either side of the entrance and rise to half the height of the building. These typically Egyptian columns, with their lotus flower and basket weave bud capitals, are topped by spheres - a terrestrial sphere above the left column and a celestial sphere above the right. Between the columns is the main entrance, which seems a miniature version of the primary facade itself with its battered jambs and roll-and-gorge cornice, this time accented by a lotus blossom design. The narrow pilasters which extend upward from the entrance way lead the eye to the great vulture-and-sun-disk symbol -- Egyptian sign of protection -- found just beneath the roll-and-gorge cornice.

The Second Street facade carries out the Egyptian theme with elegant simplicity. It retains the roll-and gorge cornice and ashlar base of the Tryon Street facade as well as two entrances which are essentially identical to the main entrance. The remainder of the wall surface is a combination of tan brickwork, sash windows and a minimum of stone trim. This facade is eight bays in depth, divided by brick pilasters which terminate at their upper ends with banded caps. A strongly vertical feeling is created by these pilasters which dominate over the horizontality of the slightly recessed window spandrels. Interestingly enough, the resulting effect is similar to some of the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright as seen especially in his Larkin Building (Buffalo, N. Y.) of 1904.

Upon entering the Masonic Temple, one is immediately struck by the magnificently detailed Egyptian Revival vestibule. The richness of its Egyptian qualities are seen both in the details and in the colors used. The walls are deep red, the corner pilasters are bright yellow, the doorways are crisp white and the other decoration is polychromed. The corner pilasters are topped by Egyptian male heads. Encircling the top of the room is a lushly decorated coved cornice with geometric and lotus flower designs. The doorways of the vestibule have battered jambs and a roll-and-gorge cornice. The transom area of the doorway leading to a side waiting room features the vulture-and-sun-disk symbol, artistically polychromed. The waiting room to which this doorway leads is generally more classical in feeling, with its pilastered doors, garlanded panels and Adamesque medallions.

Most of the interior is divided into rather nondescript meeting rooms and offices, although in several of the more prominent rooms special attention has been given to details. The main lobby of the building on the first floor is of generally classical design with heavy Doric pilasters and full entablature with triglyph and metope frieze encircling the room. Behind this is a large dining room and kitchen. The lodge hall on the second floor has columns and/or pilasters with simple acanthus capitals at front and rear and a colonnade of the same type of columns along either side. On the third floor the former Scottish Rite room features an auditorium with seating for approximately 300 and a stage with decorative classical surround. On the fourth floor is a room for other affiliate organizations. It features a slightly arched ceiling and a pointed-arch arcade along either long side.

Although much of the space in the Masonic Temple is currently being under utilized, the building -- both interior and exterior -- has been well maintained.

For more information...

[Photo Gallery 6: Gone But Not Forgotten: Lost Buildings of Mecklenburg County](#)