

# Route VII. Uptown Walking Tour Part 1

*The Uptown Walking Tour begins at the intersection of Trade Street and Tryon Street, locally known as the Square. Park in one of the many lots or parking decks in the Uptown area and walk along Trade Street or Tryon Street, whichever is nearer, until you reach the Square. The tour will take approximately two hours to complete. Allow extra time if you plan to visit any of the many attractions along the way. Prudence suggests that you not walk alone. Having somebody with you will make the tour more enjoyable and will provide greater personal security.*

## 1. THE SQUARE:



Charlotte is a crossroads town. You are standing at the crossroads. This intersection has existed for thousands of years, long before the first white settlers began to arrive in the mid-1700's. It is the reason that Charlotte exists. It was here that countless generations of Native Americans passed by on their way to the mountains to the west or the coastal plain to the east. It was here that Thomas Polk built his imposing house and had the log courthouse erected for the new county seat in 1768. The courthouse was right out in the middle of the intersection, and Polk's house stood nearby. It was here that the Mecklenburg Resolves and the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence were signed in May, 1775. It was here that William R. Davie and a small band of patriot militiamen stood on September 26, 1780, and fired upon the British army and its Tory allies as they marched up South Tryon Street and occupied the town. It was here that General Nathanael Greene assumed command of the patriot army from Horatio Gates on December 3, 1780.

"**The Square**" is Charlotte's historic heart. In the 1830's and 1840's, gold miners walked through the Square and headed for the U.S. Mint building that used to stand at the intersection of West Trade Street and Mint Street. Confederate president Jefferson Davis and his cabinet came to the Square on their flight southward after the fall of Richmond to the Yankees in April, 1865. Electric streetcars rumbled through the Square beginning in May, 1891, when Charlotte was

experiencing the so-called New South era of industrial growth. Thousands of folks gathered here in 1945 to rejoice over the news that World War II had ended. The story is not over. The Christmas parade still moves through the Square each year. Charlotte still has its New Year's Eve celebration at the Square.

Standing in the midst of Charlotte's gleaming skyscrapers it is sometimes difficult to appreciate how historic the Square is. By the way, many people wonder why Charlotte was not built on the banks of the Catawba River, which runs along the western border of Mecklenburg County. The reason is simple. The Catawba River was not continuously navigable in this region, so roads, not waterways, were the more efficient means of transportation. That's why Charlotte is a crossroads town, not a river town. That's why the Square is Charlotte's historic heart.

*Continue the Tour by walking along the northern side of West Trade Street. The arrows in the map will show you exactly where to go. Each stop on the tour has a corresponding number on the Walking Tour Map. To your right just after crossing Church Street is First Presbyterian Church. Walk into the church yard and gaze at this grand, majestic structure that looms before you.*

## **2 FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:**



Most of the early white settlers who migrated to Mecklenburg County in the eighteenth century were Scots-Irish Presbyterians. As Calvinists, they believed in a stern but merciful God who rewards good and punishes evil. They were also experienced pioneers. The Scots-Irish were Scotsmen who had been sent by King James I to Ireland. Later, many had migrated to the New World, mainly to Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. After 1730, when the Royal government began to market land aggressively in the Carolina "backcountry," the Scots-Irish started pouring into the Piedmont in search of cheap land. Some, like Thomas Polk, stopped when they came to the major crossroads formed by what is now Trade Street and Tryon Street.

The Scots-Irish were not alone. Even in Mecklenburg County there were Germans, English, Welshmen and others. Especially in county seats like Charlotte, where tavern keepers and lawyers tended to settle, several Christian denominations could be found. It is not surprising that the first church on this site, established in 1815, was a town church. The Presbyterians bought this lot and erected their own house of worship in 1845, and they have been using the land ever since. The oldest part of the building you see today is the very front section. It dates from 1857. Most of the ornate structure, including its crenelated parapets, towers, spires, and pinnacles, was built in the mid-1890's.

As you stand amid the trees and look up at the steeple pointing toward the heavens you cannot help but think about the thousands of worshipers who have come to this spot over the years. How many weddings? How many funerals? How much joy? How much sadness? Old and young have

come here to listen to the stories and perform the rituals that have sustained them in sickness and in health.

One member of First Presbyterian Church was [Daniel Harvey Hill](#). A graduate of West Point and Professor of Mathematics at Davidson College, Hill came to Charlotte in 1859 to become Superintendent of the North Carolina Military Academy. A devout Christian, he would serve as a Lieutenant General in the Confederate Army. He would lead young Southerners into battle at places like Malvern Hill, South Mountain, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. After the war, D. H. Hill returned to Charlotte and published a magazine and a newspaper that called upon the South to heal up its wounds and reconcile itself with the North.

Another member of First Presbyterian Church was Mary Anna Morrison Jackson, Hill's sister-in-law and the widow of General Stonewall Jackson.

***Exit from the First Presbyterian Church yard on the Poplar Street side. Turn right on Poplar Street and look at the brick house on the next corner across the street.***

### 3. [BAGLEY-MULLEN HOUSE](#):



You are now entering a part of Uptown Charlotte known as [Fourth Ward](#). Except for the dwellings on Trade and Tryon Streets, the finest homes in Charlotte in the late 1800's and early 1900's were built on the back streets of Fourth Ward. This fancy brick dwelling with its distinctive corner tower was constructed by E. M. Andrews, a local developer, in 1892-1893. The first owner was Andrew J. Bagley, a railroad ticket agent.

Most folks don't realize how important the railroad has been in Charlotte's history. Until 1852, when the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad linked Charlotte with Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina, this community did not have easy commercial contact with the outside world. By 1880, Charlotte had an impressive array of railroads, running east, west, north and south; and it was this rail transportation network that played a major role in making Charlotte the largest city in the two Carolinas by the early twentieth century. Think about it. Charlotte is the economic capital of the two states. Listen carefully. You may hear trains rumbling along the tracks at the edges of Fourth Ward several times daily.

The most colorful owner of the Bagley-Mullen House was Walter N. Mullen, a native of Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Mullen was a medicine man. He concocted a brew he called the "Hornet's Nest Liniment." He promised it would make the old look young and the fat look thin. He swore that his secret potion would put hair on a man's head and take it off a lady's face. A Charlotte newspaper explained that Mullen "made a lucrative living from the much advertised

and meritorious composition." The house is now a Bed and Breakfast. Go in and see if they have any liniment.

*Continue north on Poplar Street. Just after you cross Fifth Street, enter the Old Settlers' Cemetery that covers most of the next block.*

#### 4. OLD SETTLERS' CEMETERY:



This is Charlotte's first burial ground. Many people assume that the cemetery belongs to First Presbyterian Church. It doesn't. The City owned the cemetery in the 1700's, and it still does. Most of the folks buried here were Presbyterians, but not everybody.

The oldest known grave is that of Joel Baldwin, who died October 21, 1776. He was 26. One of the figures from the Revolutionary era there is **Colonel Thomas Polk**, founder of Charlotte, who died in 1793, and was the great-uncle of **President James K. Polk**. Among his accomplishments were reported to be his holding office as one of the county's first commissioners, being treasurer and trustee of Queens College and a member of the Colonial Assembly, and signing the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Next to him is his wife, Susannah Spratt Polk, whose father's house, that of Thomas Spratt, was the site of the first court held in Mecklenburg County.

A hero of the Revolutionary War, Major General George Graham (1758-1826) is also interred in the Old Settlers' Cemetery. Graham came to Charlotte in 1764 from Pennsylvania, and was at the

historic battle at McIntire's farm where a small group of patriots sent a detachment of 600 British soldiers back to Cornwallis with the complaint that there was a "rebel behind every bush."

Distinguished politicians are buried here, including **William Davidson**, a member of the U. S. House of Representatives from 1818 to 1821, and **Dr. Nathaniel Alexander**, a Revolutionary War surgeon and Governor of North Carolina. Even slaves are buried here. The northwest corner of the cemetery was reserved for them.

The City closed Old Settlers' Cemetery on August 1, 1867, but burials occurred here with special permission until 1884. You are only two blocks from the Square where the Uptown Charlotte Walking Tour began. The vast majority of people meandering about that bustling intersection give little thought to the Old Settlers' Cemetery. But one is reminded of an epitaph written on a gravestone somewhere in Virginia.

*As you are, so once was I.*

*As I am, you will soon be.*

*Prepare for Death!*

***Standing in the middle of Old Settler's Cemetery, walk toward the old, red brick building bordering the lower right-hand edge of the burial ground. This was the home of the North Carolina Medical College.***

## **5. NORTH CAROLINA MEDICAL COLLEGE:**





This section of Fourth Ward contained most of Charlotte's medical facilities in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The North Carolina Medical College, a private school founded by **Dr. Paul B. Barringer** in Davidson, North Carolina in 1887, moved to its new building in Charlotte on October 2, 1907. The driving force behind the expansion and relocation of the North Carolina Medical College was **Dr. John Peter Munroe**, like Dr. Barringer a teacher at Davidson College. At the official dedication of the building Dr. Munroe explained that he had moved the school to Charlotte because "the opportunities were broader, the scope of work broader." Put simply, there were lots of sick people here. The architect of the new building was **James McMichael**, and it cost \$27,000 to construct. You'll learn more about Mr. McMichael later on the tour. The North Carolina Medical College closed in Charlotte in 1914, because Dr. Munroe and his associates were not willing or able to spend the money to bring the school up to the standards required by the Carnegie Foundation.

The North Carolina Medical College was important in causing Charlotte to become a dominant medical center in this region. Seven hundred and thirty-two students attended the North Carolina Medical College. The school awarded 340 Doctor of Medicine Degrees. Among its graduates were Mary Martin Sloop and her husband, Eustace Sloop, who established a hospital at Crossnore, North Carolina. Portia McKnight, another female graduate, was a co-founder of a clinic in Sterling, Colorado. **Dr. B. C. Nalle**, founder of the Nalle Clinic in Charlotte, was a member of the faculty, as were many of the leading physicians in the community. Robert H. Lafferty, an official of the institution, contended that "the impetus it gave medicine in Charlotte and this section of the State was both great and lasting." The building, which now contains offices, is an excellent example of adaptive re-use.



*Walk to the intersection of Poplar and Sixth Streets. Look across Poplar Street at the large brick building. This is another example of adaptive re-use, one of the major historic preservation tools used to save historic buildings.*

#### 6. ST. PETER'S HOSPITAL:



Who remembers **Jane Smedberg Renwick Wilkes**? Almost nobody. That's sad, because she was a remarkable woman and a true Charlotte hero. A member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, which you'll see later on this tour, and wife of John Wilkes, owner of the Mecklenburg Iron Works, Jane Wilkes, a native of New York City, labored tirelessly to establish Charlotte's first civilian hospital. It was no easy task. Not the least of her accomplishments was heading the fundraising campaign, which raised enough cash to open the hospital, initially known as the "Charlotte Home and Hospital," at a temporary location on East Seventh Street on January 20, 1876.

Money was not the only issue. In those days people looked upon hospitals with disdain and distrust. One hospital supporter explained: "It is strange to recall the tremendous struggle which the pioneers were called upon to make against prejudice; first of the patient, who had to be almost kidnapped from his relatives, and brought against his own will as well, and secondly, against the opposition of those who lived in the neighborhood, who resented the diseases brought into their midst. The first few patients were brought in under resistance so fierce that one of the two or three policemen which the town boasted had always to walk beside the patient, and at times stand around the premises, to intimidate the rioters who threatened to shoot into the building." In the beginning, hospitals mainly served the poor and homeless. No respectable person would be caught "dead" in such a place.

St. Peter's Hospital, named for nearby St. Peter's Episcopal Church, opened at this location on May 30, 1878. The lot cost \$273.42. Gradually, the facility expanded as more and more people were willing to be admitted. The building assumed its present form in 1922, when architect **Louis Asbury, Sr.** designed a major addition to the front.

In April, 1938 Dr. William Henry Walsh, a hospital consultant from Chicago, presented a survey of medical facilities in Charlotte. His findings prompted the community to launch a drive to establish a new hospital. The St. Peter's Board of Trustees voted to contribute \$100,000 to this effort and to close St. Peter's if the drive was successful. It was. Charlotte Memorial Hospital, now Carolinas Medical Center, opened on October 8, 1940. It was quite a scene that day. Patients were carried on stretchers out the front door of St. Peter's to ambulances that hauled them to the new facility across town. By then no policemen were needed to control rioters. The operating rooms stood silent. The halls empty. But there are still lots of folks in Charlotte who drive by the old brick building, which has been converted into condominiums, and say, "I was born there."

*Across Sixth Street from St. Peter's Hospital is a fountain which marks the entrance to Fourth Ward Park. Enter the park at this point and follow the sidewalk as it leads you to the north end of the park at the intersection of Pine Street and Eight Street, where you will see a large Victorian house with a corner tower. Stop at the fountain across Eighth Street from the house.*

## 7. OVERCARSH HOUSE:



It's hard to believe that this section of Fourth Ward was on the outer fringes of Charlotte in the late 1800's. It was also one of the most fashionable residential districts in the entire community. Look at the one-story projection or wing on the far right side of the Overcarsh House. This is probably the oldest frame structure in Uptown Charlotte. That was the entire house when it was built, and it dates from before the Civil War.

The house was greatly expanded around 1880 when Elias Overcarsh, a Methodist minister, had the main block constructed in the then-fashionable Queen Anne style. Rev. Overcarsh must have inherited a lot of money, because he spared no expense in making his "new" Victorian home a showplace.

Irregularity of plan and massing and variety of color and texture characterize the Queen Anne style. Look at the different kinds of roofs, windows, and exterior siding on the Overcarsh House, and you will see examples of these distinguishing features.

The Queen Anne style began in England in the 1860's when architect **Richard Norman Shaw** invented the style. But it really caught on in the United States when the British government chose the Queen Anne style for two buildings it erected at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. Tourists flocked to Philadelphia from all over the country and were enchanted by the extravagant ornateness of what they saw. Whether Elias Overcarsh visited the Centennial Exposition is not known. But it's obvious that he liked the Queen Anne style. One wonders whether Methodist founder John Wesley would have approved of such ornate showiness. Probably not.

*Continue north on Pine Street until you reach Ninth Street. Notice the two-story frame store building on your immediate left that now houses Alexander Michael's Restaurant.*

8. CROWELL-BERRYHILL STORE:



Fourth Ward was a "walking-scale" neighborhood in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Horse-drawn streetcars did not arrive in Charlotte until January, 1887, and the first trolleys or electric streetcars did not enter service here until May, 1891. Even after that, or at least until the 1920's, most folks did not own automobiles. When they needed to go somewhere, they walked. That's why there were no driveways between the houses. That's why commercial, industrial, and residential structures often existed side by side.

Fourth Ward was filling up with homes in the 1890's, as Charlotte became the leading cotton mill town in the Carolinas. On July 25, 1898, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that 37 residences had been completed in Fourth Ward during the previous 12 months. These new residents needed some place close by where they could purchase groceries.

Wilson M. Crowell owned and operated Star Mills, a grist and feed mill and a grocery store on East Trade Street. He recognized the opportunity in Fourth Ward and bought a lot at Ninth and Pine Streets on December 17, 1896, for \$300. A neighborhood branch of the Star Mill Grocery opened in this building in 1897. Crowell specialized in selling ground corn meal -- the Star Mills brand, of course. To supplement his income, Crowell put an apartment on the second floor of his store building. It's still there. See the entrance on the left front?

In 1899, Crowell sold the property to a competitor, Andrew M. Beattie, who had a grocery in First Ward, on East Seventh Street. Beattie needed a manager for his Fourth Ward outlet, so he hired Ernest Berryhill, who knew nothing about the grocery business but who lived in the big house diagonally across the intersection.

Friendly, generous, and a devoted family man, Berryhill took to the grocery business like a duck takes to water. In October, 1907, he bought the property and changed the name to Berryhill Store. He ran the store until his death in February, 1931. Every morning Earnest and his wife, Gussie Newcomb Berryhill, and their black helper, Amzi Rosman, welcomed customers, asked about their children and relatives, and discussed politics -- all except Amzi, of course. That's the way things were in those days.

In 1960, John Berryhill, Earnest's son, converted the old store building into a Laundromat. It closed in 1973. In the late 1970's, the Crowell-Berryhill Store was restored, first as a grocery and now as a restaurant. Alexander Michael's doesn't sell Star Mills corn meal, but the food is worth a stop. Ask for the table in the nook by the front window.

***Standing in front of the Crowell-Berryhill Store, look diagonally to your right across the intersection of Ninth Street and Pine Street at the Newcomb-Berryhill House.***

## **9. NEWCOMB-BERRYHILL HOUSE:**





This is where Earnest Berryhill, the storekeeper, lived. Can't you see him getting up in the morning and walking across the intersection to work? But that's getting ahead of the story. The Newcomb-Berryhill House was built in 1884 by John H. Newcomb, Earnest's father-in-law. John Newcomb was a Yankee from White Plains, New York who had moved to Charlotte in 1879 with his brother George to establish a bellows factory. The two wives, Annie Augusta, nicknamed "Gussie," and Susie A. Newcomb, ran a fancy hat shop on West Trade Street. Gussie would travel to New York City to purchase the finest material and ribbons, and Susie would make the hats. Because Charlotte was a "New South" city, it welcomed enterprising folks from the North, even if they were Yankees.

The two brothers built houses side by side on West Ninth Street in Fourth Ward. George's house was torn down many years ago. It's not surprising that John constructed a fancy house, because by 1884 he and his brother had become building contractors. The Newcomb-Berryhill House and its elaborate trim and dramatic tent-roofed tower were advertisements of sorts. John Newcomb died on July 27, 1892, at the age of 47. Soon thereafter, Earnest Berryhill, the Newcomb's son-in-law, moved in. "Gussie" lived on in the house until September 13, 1933, which ironically was her 83rd birthday. The funerals for John and Gussie, who were members of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, were held in the house.

In 1940, the Newcomb-Berryhill House was turned into a four-unit apartment house. By the mid-1970's, it was in serious disrepair and seemingly forgotten. The Junior League of Charlotte came to the rescue. It purchased the house on October 28, 1975, refurbished it, and sold it with restrictive deed covenants. This assured that the Newcomb-Berryhill House would be saved. Don't you think John and Gussie would be pleased? Maybe Gussie would put on a fancy hat with pretty ribbons!

***Walk east on Ninth Street. The only original house on the left side of Ninth Street is the Newcomb-Berryhill House. All the others were moved from elsewhere in Fourth Ward in the 1970's. At the end of the block you will come to another fountain.***



*Continue around the fountain and look at the house on your immediate left that faces Poplar Street.*

10. **JOHN W. SHEPPARD HOUSE:**



This was the home of druggist John W. Sheppard, another Yankee who came to Charlotte in the late 1800's to seek his fortune. He and his partner, J. P. Woodall, opened Woodall and Sheppard Drug Store on the northwest corner of the Square in 1896. Woodall and Sheppard was the first drugstore in Charlotte to sell ice cream year around and the first to make deliveries by bicycle.

The John W. Sheppard House was completed in 1899 soon after John had returned to his hometown of Cedarville, New Jersey to marry his childhood sweetheart, Anna Stanton Mulford. John and Anna Sheppard had three sons and one daughter. Tragically, all the boys died as youngsters. Edith, the lone survivor, went on to excel as a student and graduated from Swathmore College in 1923.

Edith's best childhood friend was Mildred Morse, who lived next door. In later years, Mildred Morse, then Mildred Morse McEwen, told in her book, *Growing Up In Fourth Ward*, what it was like to be a young girl in Fourth Ward at the turn of the century. "There was a big rat in the Sheppard's woodhouse, later a garage. Anyway, smart-aleck Mildred wanted to show Edith

that *she* wasn't afraid of a rat so she stuck her finger in the rat's face and said, 'Boo.' I remember that Mrs. Sheppard brought a saucer for the blood to drip into so it wouldn't get on the floor of the back porch." Or again: "Every summer the Sheppards would go to New Jersey. There was one upstairs room in their house called 'the plunder room' containing the trunks they took with them on the train. I can't remember why I thought it sad when the Sheppards would go to New Jersey, but I remember crying as the surrey loaded with the Sheppards left for the railroad station." They're all gone now. So many memories!

***Continue east on Ninth Street one more block. Turn right on Church Street and look for the first house on your right.***

**11. LIDDELL-McNINCH HOUSE:**



On leaving the Sheppard House and continuing on Ninth Street you no doubt noticed that you were moving into a part of Fourth Ward where almost none of the old houses remain. In the 1950's and 1960's, the City of Charlotte began rigorously enforcing its building code. Mildred McEwen wrote movingly about her feelings when she was forced to tear her old Fourth Ward homeplace down. "I stood on the street on the verge of tears. One of the workmen must have felt sorry for me because he stopped his work and came to the sidewalk and handed me a piece of gingerbread."

Happily, the Liddell-McNinch House, another example of the Queen Anne style, was not demolished. This imposing Victorian dwelling was constructed in 1892 by Vinton Liddell, whose father, W. J. F. Liddell, had moved to Charlotte in 1875. Vinton's father, still another Yankee, was a brilliant machinist from Erie, Pennsylvania who recognized that Charlotte was fast becoming a major manufacturing center in the late nineteenth century. Therefore he decided to build a plant that made steam engines, saw mills, and cotton presses, as well as other equipment for the textile industry. The Liddell Foundry and Machine Shop were located at North

Church Street and the Seaboard Air Line Railroad tracks or about three blocks north from where you are now standing. Liddell Street still marks the site.

Vinton Liddell, like his parents a Baptist, was a vice president of the Charlotte Cotton Mills and also worked for his father, who died in November, 1888. Many years after Vinton Liddell had sold his house on North Church Street in 1903, his daughter, Vinton Liddell Pickens, visited the old homeplace with a reporter from the *Charlotte Observer*. She remembered a stable with horses in the backyard. She remembered the lot being much bigger. "I do remember hearing that when this house was built, my father insisted on having gas lines installed. It was wired for electricity, but it was quite new, and my father didn't trust it. He wanted the gas in case electricity didn't prove satisfactory."

**S. S. McNinch**, the Mayor of Charlotte, purchased the Liddell-McNinch House in 1907, and **President William Howard Taft** visited in the house when he came to Charlotte on May 20, 1909, for the annual celebration of the signing of the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The house today serves as the McNinch House Restaurant which serves elegant meals by reservation only. For information, call 332-6159.

***Continue south on Church Street until you reach Eighth Street. Turn left on Eighth Street and walk until you reach Tryon Street and go in front of the church to your immediate left.***

## **12. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:**



The remainder of the Walking Tour of Uptown Charlotte will mostly be along Tryon Street, named for **Governor William Tryon**, the Royal Governor of North Carolina when Charlotte was established in 1768. Until the early 1900's, Tryon Street was lined with elegant homes, except for one block immediately north and south of the Square. As the size of Charlotte exploded in the twentieth century, however, all of the old buildings were torn down aside from a few churches and early skyscrapers, plus one florist shop and a lavish arcade. You will visit them all!

First United Methodist Church is an extravagant example of the Late [Gothic Revival](#) style. Typically constructed of stone, structures of this type were especially popular as churches or college buildings, such as Princeton University in New Jersey, Yale University in Connecticut, and Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

**James Buchanan Duke**, whose money created Duke University, played a role in establishing First United Methodist Church in Charlotte. In the early 1920's, Duke met with Charlotte Methodist E. R. Bucher, an employee of what is now Duke Power Company, and said, "You know, I'm going to spend a great deal of time in Charlotte. I think I ought to do something for Charlotte Methodism." Later Duke promised to contribute \$100,000 if Trinity Methodist Church and Tryon Street Methodist Church, both in Uptown Charlotte, would merge and "build a representative stone church." On November 24, 1926, Trinity Methodist Church and Tryon Street Methodist Church did vote to unite. The first service was held here on October 30, 1927. Although J. B. Duke had died in 1925, his estate did contribute money to the building of First

United Methodist Church. The architect of the Charlotte church was Edwin Brewer Phillips of Memphis, Tennessee.

*Cross Tryon Street at the Eighth Street intersection and stop in front of the fancy, two-story brick building on the corner of Tryon Street and Eighth Street.*

13. OSCAR J. THIES AUTOMOBILE BUILDING:



Oscar J. Thies hired architect **Louis Asbury, Sr.** to design this building, which was completed in 1922 and which housed several automotive dealerships during the flamboyant twenties. The big front windows were show windows for the newest models of automobiles. Shut your eyes and maybe you can imagine a 1923 Chevrolet or a 1925 Oldsmobile glistening in the window. The storefront has an interesting rhythm set up by the progression from the larger first floor panes of glass, to the narrower second floor panes of glass, and finally to the bricks set in soldier course above the windows. That rhythm, combined with the vertical corner emphasis, gives the building a sense of greater height.

Oscar J. Thies was a shrewd businessman. Although he followed in his father's footsteps of being educated as a mining engineer, Oscar made his mark as a real estate developer. The Thies-Smith Realty Company, which he organized in 1912, constructed many homes in Charlotte's outlying suburbs, including Dilworth, Elizabeth, and Myers Park, as well as along Morehead Street, Selwyn Avenue, and Sharon Road. He also invested in commercial real estate projects like the Oscar J. Thies Automobile Building.

It's not difficult to imagine how Oscar felt about owning an automobile sales and service center. The automobile was becoming a status symbol for the middle class by the mid-1920's. No longer totally dependent upon public transportation, average folks could now aspire to follow the



affluent to the suburbs, where green grass, cool air, and song birds beckoned and where Oscar J. Thies had plenty of fine homes for sale.

The "walking scale" city that Fourth Ward residents Earnest Berryhill and John Sheppard had known was torn apart by the automobile. In the 1800's, poor folks lived on the edge of town, and the wealthy resided closer in. Now the situation was reversed. The rich and the comfortable headed for the suburbs, and the less privileged were left behind. That process is still going on. If you don't believe this, watch what happens to Uptown Charlotte in the late afternoon. It's a mass exodus of suburbanites. And if you want to see just how fundamental the automobile remains, go to the top of one of Charlotte's skyscrapers and see how much space is devoted to automobile parking lots. They're just about everywhere.

***Walk south along Tryon Street by crossing Eighth Street. When you come to Seventh Street, turn left and proceed one block to the intersection of North College Street and East Seventh Street. Look at the brick church on the northeast quadrant of the intersection.***

**14. FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:**



Since crossing Tryon Street you have been in **First Ward**. Unlike Fourth Ward, which was totally white in the nineteenth century, First Ward was racially mixed. College Street is named for the Presbyterian College for Women, which was located about two blocks north until it moved to Myers Park in 1914 and changed its name to Queens College.

First United Presbyterian Church, known as Seventh Street Presbyterian Church until it merged with Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in 1968, has a rich and illustrious history. The current church building was constructed in the 1890's, but there has been a black Presbyterian church on this site since the mid-1870's. **Stephen Mattoon**, a white missionary and president of Biddle Institute, now Johnson C. Smith University, was its minister in the 1880's.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, the black people of Charlotte struggled to establish a new identity for themselves. Encountering scorn and ridicule from the majority of whites, many of the former slaves lacked the training and education to compete with whites for power and status. Consequently, blacks began creating their own institutions where they could develop and practice the skills needed to survive. Especially important in this regard were black churches. blacks associated membership in the white man's church with the days of slavery and therefore had no desire to continue worshipping there. This was true of those blacks who belonged to First Presbyterian Church on West Trade Street, which you've already visited on this tour. Mrs. Kathleen Hayes summoned the black members to "come down out of the gallery and worship God on the main floor." Established in 1866, the congregation initially called itself the

Colored Presbyterian Church of Charlotte and was located in nearby Second Ward. Samuel C. Alexander, a white minister, bought the original lot for the church.

***Return to Tryon Street by retracing your route along East Seventh Street and take a left. Notice the dark brick church immediately across Tryon Street.***

**15. ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH:**



There has been an Episcopal Church on this corner since 1857, and the present sanctuary was completed in 1893. Confederate president Jefferson Davis worshipped at St. Peter's in April, 1865, when he and the other members of the Confederate Cabinet were fleeing from the Yankees. Jane Smedberg Wilkes, the founder of St. Peter's Hospital, was a member. There is a memorial window for her in the church. Every Sunday morning John and Gussie Newcomb would walk from their big home on West Ninth Street on their way to the eleven o'clock service. Gussie always wore fancy hats. Edwin and Elizabeth Clarkson, founders of Wing Haven, the locally famous bird sanctuary and garden in Myers Park, belonged to this congregation. St. Peter's Episcopal Church has consistently reached to the broader community, including feeding the homeless in recent years.

***Continue south on Tryon Street and stop in front of the tan-colored, brick church in the middle of the block.***

**16. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH (Spirit Square):**



The architect of this fancy structure was **J. M. McMichael**. A native of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania., McMichael moved to Charlotte soon after 1900. He joined First Baptist Church and convinced the minister, H. H. Hulten, that the congregation should take the revolutionary step for turn-of-the-century Charlotte and erect a church that had no steeple. McMichael took an enormous chance in selecting a Byzantine dome as the central element of his design. Stanford White, a world-famous architect, had used the same style in his Madison Square Presbyterian Church in New York City, and that building had failed acoustically. You could hardly hear anybody. Not the preacher. Not the choir. Folks wondered if the same fate would befall McMichael's First Baptist Church in Charlotte. For the dedication service on May 2, 1909, 1400 people packed the sanctuary. At the organ Mrs. Alexander Stephens led the throng in singing the hymn, "All Hail The Power Of Jesus Name." So special was the day that Dr. E. Y. Mullins, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, came to preach the sermon. He took his text from the Sixteenth Psalm: "I have a goodly heritage." The people marveled at the stained glass windows. The one on the south side of the sanctuary was given by Vinton Liddell in honor of his father, W. J. F. Liddell. The acoustics worked! The sound of the music was glorious. "J. M. McMichael has succeeded where the late Stanford White failed," a local newspaper boasted.

First Baptist Church is now the main performance space for Spirit Square, an Uptown center for the arts. As chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, Liz Hair led the effort to save the building from probable destruction in 1975. Let the good sounds continue!

***Walk south along Tryon Street to the next intersection, which is Sixth Street. Look diagonally across the intersection at the skinny, ten-story, high-rise building.***

## Uptown Walking Tour Part 2

*The Uptown Walking Tour begins at the intersection of Trade Street and Tryon Street, locally known as the Square. Park in one of the many lots or parking decks in the Uptown area and walk along Trade Street or Tryon Street, whichever is nearer, until you reach the Square. The tour will take approximately two hours to complete. Allow*

*extra time if you plan to visit any of the many attractions along the way. Prudence suggests that you not walk alone. Having somebody with you will make the tour more enjoyable and will provide greater personal security.*

17. **THE MAYFAIR HOTEL:**



The Mayfair Hotel, now Dunhill Hotel, was designed by **Louis Asbury, Sr.** and opened in November, 1929 at the former site of Tryon Street Methodist Church, where Mildred Morse McEwen worshipped as a child. In 1929, there were no fewer than 15 hotels in Charlotte. The largest were the Hotel Charlotte on West Trade Street and the Clayton Hotel at Fifth and Church Streets. Although not the largest, the Mayfair Hotel was noted for its elegance. Look at the top floor of the building, and you will see the porches for the fancy penthouse suite where Dr. J. P. Matheson, an owner of the Mayfair Hotel, lived. A newspaper reporter who toured the hotel when it opened was impressed by what he saw. The rooms were furnished in "living room style" with double or Murphy beds, "luxurious" carpets and "fashionable" wallpapers. The lobby had an inviting fireplace and was the only place in town where you could buy Martha Washington candy.

By the early 1980's, the building had become the James Lee Motor Inn, a flophouse hotel. None of the original interior of the Mayfair Hotel remains. The building was completely gutted when it



was renovated as the Dunhill Hotel in 1983. It is again an elegant place to stay. Does anybody even make Martha Washington candy anymore?

***Cross Tryon Street, stand in front of the Mayfair Hotel and look at the facade of the Carolina Theater across Tryon Street.***

**18. CAROLINA THEATER:**



The Carolina Theater opened on March 7, 1927, when Warren Ervin, who managed the Carolina welcomed the large audience that came to see "A Kiss In A Taxi" starring the "ever popular" Bebe Daniels. Lavish movie houses were built all over the United States in the 1920's, and the Carolina Theater in Charlotte was no exception. Architects for these cinema palaces were free to borrow from various historical styles and to employ ostentatious ornamentation, because their mandate was to provide opera houses for the masses. "No kings or emperors have ever wandered through more luxurious surroundings. In a sense, those theaters are a social safety valve in that the public can partake of the same luxuries as the rich, and use them to the same full extent," explained one designer.

Publix Theaters, the owners of the Carolina Theater in Charlotte, selected architectural styles which it deemed appropriate for different regions of the country. New Yorker R. E. Hall and C. C. Hook of Charlotte, the architects of the building, were told to emphasize Mediterranean motifs. "All the best in art and architecture from the various countries bordering on this sea of azure blue are combined in a harmonious assemblage," explained the *Charlotte Observer*.

The Carolina Theater underwent a major renovation in 1961, when it became the Carolinas home of Cinerama, a wide-screen technology of that day. The interior was transformed into a "modern, suburban" look. The final glory days for the Carolina occurred in the mid-1960's, when the "Sound of Music" played to 398,201 people during its run from March 1965 to October 1966. The Carolina Theater closed on November 27, 1978, after showing "The Fist," starring Bruce Lee. Since then, all but a small portion of the front facade of the grand movie palace has been demolished. But if you look carefully you can still see reminders of the Mediterranean.

***Continue south on Tryon Street until you reach the next cross street, which is Fifth Street. Directly ahead is the building that originally served as the home of the Ivey's Department Store.***

#### **19. IVEY'S DEPARTMENT STORE:**



**Joseph Benjamin Ivey**, the handsome son of a Methodist preacher, opened a small store room in rented space near the Square on February 18, 1900. He belonged to a distinguished list of storekeepers who came to Charlotte at the turn of the century to take advantage of the booming cotton mill economy. Ivey's first day's sales totaled \$33.18. "We had to study carefully and push the lines that the other merchants did not make a specialty," the enterprising merchant explained many years later. "For instance, at one time brass buttons were quite the rage. I was careful to

keep in a supply all of the time while the other merchants were not noticing and allowed their stock to get low." Among Mr. Ivey's early employees was **David Ovens**, a Canadian who joined J. B. Ivey & Company in 1904. "I would probably have been satisfied with a moderate business that would make something over a living," said Ivey, "but Mr. Ovens was ambitious to make J. B. Ivey & Company a big store and the business grew rapidly under our combined efforts." Ovens Auditorium on East Independence Boulevard is named for David Ovens.

A devout Methodist, Ivey insisted that the curtains be drawn in his store windows on Sundays, so that the pedestrians would not be tempted to consider matters of *this* world on the Lord's day. Can you imagine a merchant doing such a thing today? Hardly. Our cultural values have undergone radical change since Ivey's day.

J. B. Ivey had a wide range of interests. He was an avid traveler. He also devoted great amounts of time and energy to growing flowers, especially tulips, dahlias, and gladiolas. Many people remember that the restaurant in Ivey's Department Store was named the Tulip Terrace. Ivey's home in Myers Park was surrounded by gorgeous tulip beds. There was even a miniature Dutch windmill in the yard.

This elegant building at Fifth and North Tryon Streets was designed by architect **William H. Peeps** and opened as the new home of J. B. Ivey & Company in 1924. The store was renovated and enlarged in 1939. On May 4, 1990, Ivey's was purchased by Dillard's, another department store chain. The building has recently been converted into luxury condominiums.

***Continue south on Tryon Street. You have returned to the Square where the walking tour began. Continue straight across West Trade Street and stop at the skyscraper next to Polk Park on your right. Polk Park is named for Thomas Polk. Remember him?***

## **20. FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING:**



The First National Bank Building was the tallest skyscraper in the two Carolinas when it opened in 1926 on the Tryon Street edge of **Third Ward**. Skyscrapers with banks in them have dominated the Charlotte skyline ever since the early 1900's. The architect of this imposing Neo Classical style edifice was the seemingly ubiquitous **Louis Asbury, Sr.** Look up and you will see some wonderful examples of the classical ornamentation that Asbury employed. High up on the building are Buddhas, lions, and pharaohs. The magnificent archway over the front entrance is decorated with beehives, owls, and other symbols of thrift and industry. Go inside and look at the historical exhibit in the display window in the elevator lobby. It will tell you all about the First National Bank Building.

The president of First National Bank was **H. M. McAden**. Like so many of Charlotte's New South business leaders, McAden had made his money in the textile industry. That he went into banking is no surprise, because the rise of Charlotte as a banking center was tied directly to the emergence of Charlotte and its environs as a major cotton mill region at the turn of the century. Indicative of Charlotte's importance as a financial center was the establishment here of a branch of the Federal Reserve Bank. Its initial location was on the top floors of the First National Bank Building. Keep your eyes open for bankers on South Tryon Street. They're not hard to spot. Look for conservative business suits.

*Continue south on Tryon Street, cross Fourth Street, and stop at the skyscraper in the middle of the block.*

21. JOHNSTON BUILDING:





Skyscrapers are cultural totem poles. They dominate the landscape and convey a sense of power and pride. That's one of the reasons that Charlotte's business leaders like them so much. The Johnston Building is named for **Charles Worth Johnston**. It was designed in the Neo Classical style by New York City architect William Lee Stoddart and opened in 1924. The lavish elevator lobby is worth a visit. The Johnston Building is situated in the very heart of Charlotte's financial district. Elegant homes once occupied these lots, but they have long since given way to commercial development.

Charles Worth Johnston was born in 1861 in neighboring Cabarrus County and entered the textile business soon after graduating from Davidson College. He moved to Charlotte in 1892 to become Secretary of the Highland Park Manufacturing Company. He became president of the Highland Park mills in 1911 and went on to have a controlling interest in several other mills, including the Johnston Mill on North Davidson Street in Charlotte and the Anchor Mills in the North Mecklenburg County town of Huntersville. The *Charlotte Observer* described Johnston as a "Titan among textile industrialists" at the time of his death in 1941. "His career and achievements memorialize the old-fashioned virtues of thrift, frugality, self-reliance and industry, the honorableness of hard work, the virtue of business honor and integrity," the newspaper proclaimed. The Johnston Building now houses the Charlotte headquarters of United Carolina Bank.

***Continue south on Tryon Street and cross Third Street. In the middle of the next block, at 316 South Tryon Street, is the Latta Arcade. Enter the building and walk to the glass-roofed arcade in the rear.***

## 22. [LATTA ARCADE:](#)



This magnificent commercial arcade, designed by architect **William H. Peeps**, opened in January, 1915 as the home of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, locally known as the **Four C's**. The owner was **Edward Dilworth Latta**. Latta, a South Carolinian, had come to Charlotte in 1876 to open a men's clothing store with his brother. Later he went into the men's trouser manufacturing business. His greatest fame came in 1890, when he and several other local entrepreneurs established the Four C's.

The Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company bought the local horse-drawn streetcar system and electrified it. Trolley service began on May 20, 1891, and initially linked Charlotte with Dilworth, the streetcar suburb that the Four C's was constructing just to the south of the city. In 1910, Latta sold the streetcar system to James B. Duke's Southern Power Company and decided to concentrate his energies exclusively upon real estate development. Latta built the Latta Arcade on South Tryon Street in hopes that it would stimulate development in the area. Close your eyes and imagine the cigar-smoking Latta descending the stairs from his second floor office. He was a hard-nosed businessman. Listen to him speak. "I realize we have attained that juncture when we must decide whether we will adopt the sluggish inactivity of the provincial town or aspire with zealous hope to become one of the independent cities of the New South." Those words speak volumes about what Charlotte has been about for over a century. Watch Charlotte Grow!

The Latta Arcade ranks among the most significant early twentieth-century office buildings erected in Charlotte. Although the main facade has been substantially remodeled, the remarkable interior arcade survives largely intact, with parallel rows of shop fronts and office suites beneath the skylit roof. The design continues to reflect its original purpose, which was to accommodate a variety of small businesses as well as provide natural light for the grading of cotton, all within an architecturally sophisticated space.

***Return to the Tryon Street entrance to the Latta Arcade, turn right on Tryon Street and walk to the intersection of Tryon Street and Second Street. Cross Tryon Street and turn right again and proceed to the former Ratcliffe Flower Building, which is in the middle of the block, at 431 South Tryon Street.***

### **23. RATCLIFFE FLOWER BUILDING:**



You have now entered **Second Ward**, the last of Charlotte's original four wards. All were established as voting districts in 1869. Here along Tryon Street commercial buildings have again replaced what was once a fashionable residential neighborhood.

In 1917, Louis G. Ratcliffe, a native of Henrico County, Virginia, opened a florist shop next to the Latta Arcade. After military service during World War I, he returned to Charlotte and was a civic leader in this community for more than 50 years. He died in 1961. So successful was Ratcliffe at supplying flowers for weddings, funerals and other special occasions that he decided to erect his own building. In 1929, he hired architect **William H. Peeps** to design the new home for Ratcliffe Flowers. Of course, Ratcliffe was familiar with Mr. Peeps's talents, because the same architect had designed the Latta Arcade for Edward Dilworth Latta.

*"Ratcliffe's Flowers Brighten The Hours" - original slogan*

The Ratcliffe Flower Building is an almost whimsical expression of Mediterranean motifs. To capture the mood of the Mediterranean, Peeps used a variety of materials and forms in the design of the front facade. Four stylized columns separate the second-story openings from each other and the rest of the facade. The shafts of these columns have a spiral groove cut into them; a Mediterranean motif. No doubt the front bay window was used to display the wonderful flower

arrangements that Louis Ratcliffe could supply for seemingly every occasion. In those days store windows were essential, because folks used to walk along the sidewalks instead of meandering through air-conditioned overstreet walkways. Ratcliffe Florists moved elsewhere in 1983, but its sign remains because the building is a local historic landmark. A restaurant now occupies the space. Go in and ask to sit at the table in the window. You might even look like a flower.

*Continue south on Tryon Street, cross First Street, and stop in front of the church on the corner.*

#### 24. ST. PETER'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH:



St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church was established in 1851 mainly to serve the Irish who were laboring in gold mines in and around Charlotte. Two of the largest mines, the Rudisell and the St. Catherine's, were close by. That's probably why St. Peter's located on what was then the southern edge of town. The current church building, which was erected in 1878, is the only 19th century structure remaining on South Tryon Street, except for the fanciful Victorian Eastlake style rectory next door, which was completed in 1897. Notice the rectory's keyhole window.

The Roman Catholics of St. Peter's have contributed greatly to the quality of life in Charlotte over the years. Charlotte's **Mercy Hospital**, now located in the Elizabeth neighborhood, originated with the Sisters of Mercy in 1906 in a frame building that used to stand behind the church. More recently, in 1987, Father John Haughey secured the services of artist **Ben Long** to fashion a magnificent religious fresco on the front wall of the sanctuary. It's worth a trip inside to

see this wondrous work of art. The sanctuary is open 10 AM-12 PM and 1-4 PM Monday through Saturday.

*Continue south on Tryon Street and turn left at Stonewall Street. Proceed for two blocks on Stonewall Street (you will pass the Charlotte Convention Center) and turn left onto South Brevard Street. Continue north on Brevard Street for two blocks until you come to Third Street. Look at the brick office building diagonally across the intersection.*

25. [MECKLENBURG INVESTMENT COMPANY BUILDING:](#)



Until the early 1950's, Stonewall Street, Second Street, and Third Street stopped at College Street, and a big railroad freight yard separated the area along South Brevard St. from the fancy stores and shops, like the Latta Arcade, that stood along South Tryon Street. That meant that this neighborhood, which is part of Second Ward.

This block of South Brevard Street between Third Street and Fourth Street became a sort of main street for Charlotte's African American community at the turn of the century. The development of this block was largely due to the efforts of two remarkable people. One was **Thad L. Tate**(1865-1951), who operated an uptown barber shop. Tate helped establish the Brevard Street branch of the public library, which used to stand on the upper end of the block. The other was **Dr. J. T. Williams** (1859-1924). A prominent and respected educator, physician,



businessman and public servant, he built an elegant 3-story house in this block. Unfortunately, it was torn down in the 1970's.

Tate and Williams were among the leaders in overseeing the construction of the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building in 1922. The contractor was W. W. Smith, another enterprising black man. The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building was the first structure in Charlotte planned and executed by African Americans to accommodate black businesses, professional offices, and civic and fraternal organizations.

***Continue north on Brevard Street and look at the church immediately next to the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building.***

#### **26. GRACE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH:**



Among the people responsible for the establishment of Grace A.M.E. Zion Church in 1886 was W. C. Smith. A native of Fayetteville, N.C., Smith entered the printing trade and became the publisher of the *Charlotte Messenger*, a black newspaper that first appeared in June, 1882. A resolute abolitionist, Smith wanted to withdraw from Clinton Chapel, the city's oldest A.M.E. Zion congregation, and establish a new church. "The building of a new church is essential,"

Smith insisted, "to rid our youth of fogey ideas, sentiments, etc., and to bring them up to *proper moral sentiments* and religious beliefs."

Grace A. M. E. Zion Church became a prestigious institution in the African American community in the 1890's. A black visitor to Charlotte in 1893 wrote, "To say you belong to Grace,' signifies almost as much as it did at one time to say, I am a Roman citizen.'" The cornerstone of Grace says it all. "Deo Religion Et Temperantiae" -- "God, Religion, and Temperance."

***This is the end of the tour. To return to the Square, walk to the end of the block, turn left on Fourth Street, go to Tryon Street, and turn right. You now know how historic Uptown Charlotte is. Our tours will show you about the history of communities and neighborhoods throughout Mecklenburg County.***

***If you would like to read more about the history of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, go to the Spangler-Robinson Room on the third floor of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library at Sixth and North Tryon Streets. The staff will be happy to help you.***