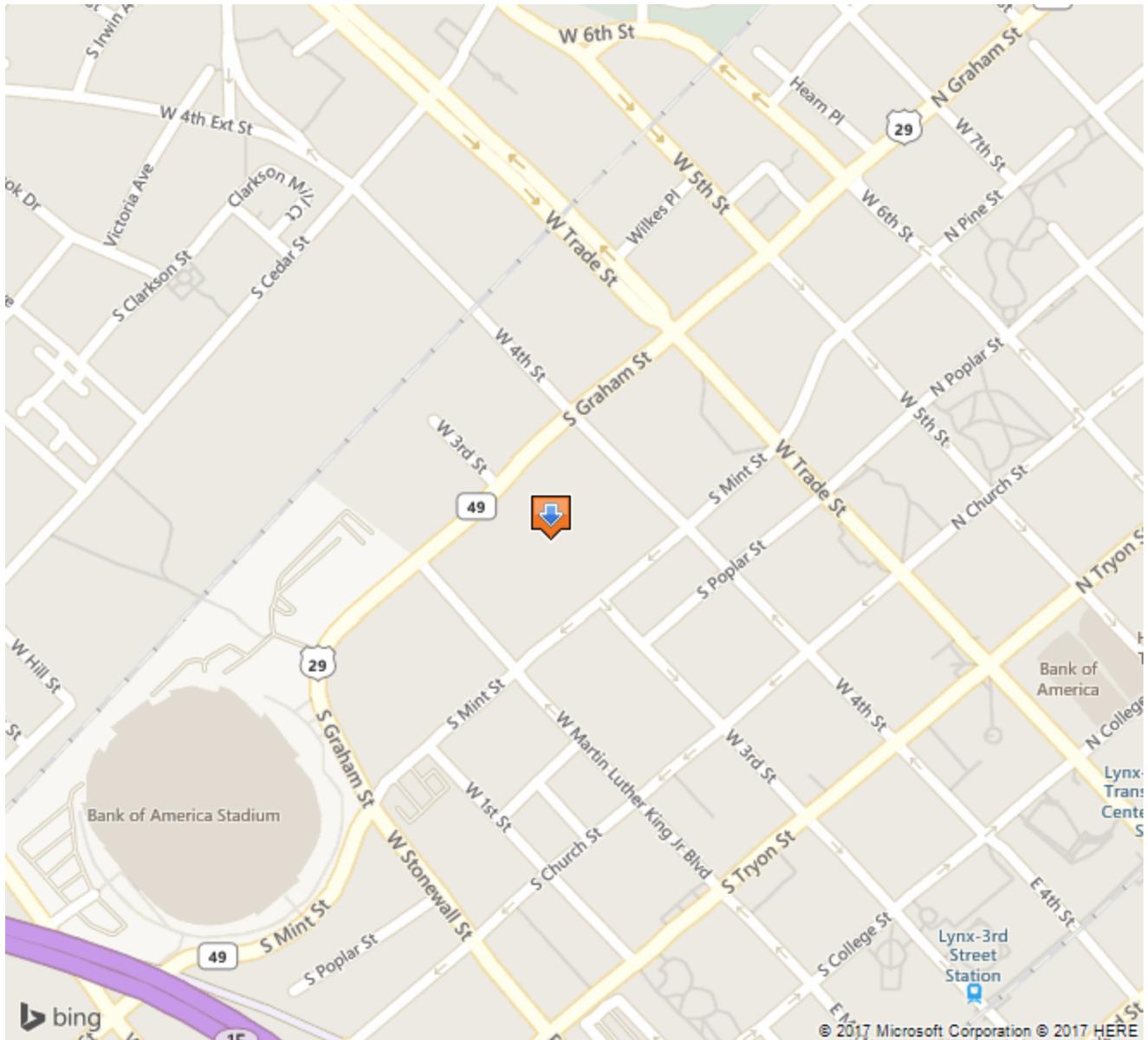


**Survey and Research Report on  
The Virginia Paper Company Building**



**416 West Third Street, Charlotte, NC**

- 1. Name and location of the property:** The Virginia Paper Company Building, 416 West Third Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.
- 2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:** Mecklenburg County
- 3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.



**4. Maps depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.

**5. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property:** 07311205

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-400.5:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Virginia Paper Company Building does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) The Virginia Paper Company Building is significant as one of the last large industrial building to be constructed close to the center of the city of Charlotte, relying on freight rail service.
- 2) Designed by New York architect Walter Dabney Blair, the Virginia Paper Company Building is significant as an extremely well preserved and largely unaltered example industrial architecture from the 1930s.
- 3) The Virginia Paper Company Building is an important reminder of the evolution of parts of Third Ward, from a mixed-race residential neighborhood at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a largely industrial and commercial neighborhood by the middle of the century.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description which is included in this report demonstrates that the Virginia Paper Company meets this criterion.

**10. 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 designated "historic landmark." The current total appraised value of the building is \$981,100.

**11. Portion of property recommended for designation:** The exterior and interior of the building and a sufficient amount of the property associated with

the tax parcel to ensure integrity of the building are recommended for historic designation.

**Date of preparation of this report:** January, 2006

**Prepared by:** Stewart Gray

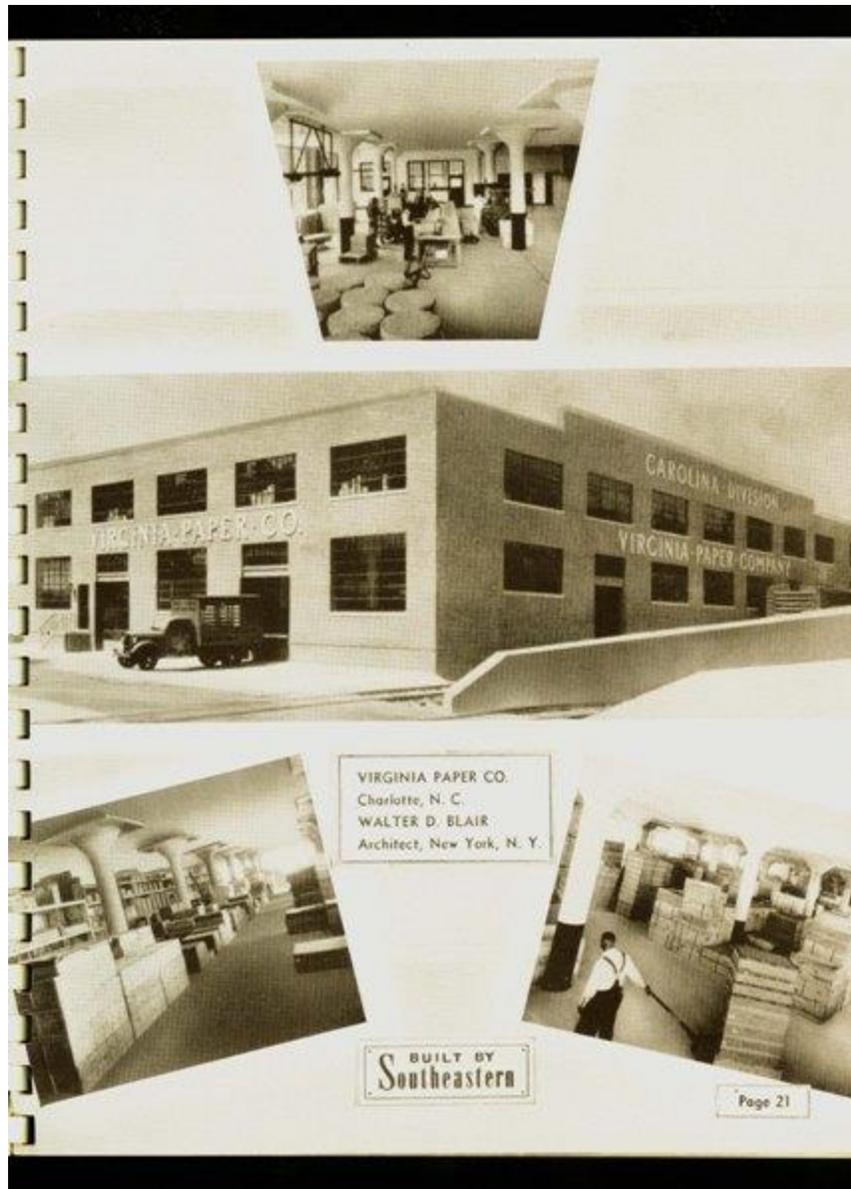
## **Brief Historical Sketch**

The 1937 Virginia Paper Company Building was among the last of the large industrial buildings the built in the center city.<sup>1</sup> The historic industrial buildings located in Charlotte's Uptown are largely the remnants of a period of unprecedented industrial growth that occurred throughout the city beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing until World War Two. In 1900, Charlotte was home to only fifty-seven industrial plants. By 1910, that number was up to 108. As of 1930, there were 157 industrial facilities in the city. These building are generally limited to this time period because the nature of the city shifted dramatically after the war. Following a trend that began early in the twentieth century, heavy industry and warehouses moved away from the center city. The emergence of trucking encouraged this move away from the once critical rail lines that bisect each of the city's four wards. Many existing uptown factories and warehouses continued to operate late into the twentieth century. However, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new construction in the Uptown concentrated on the building of office and government buildings.

The Virginia Paper Company Building functioned as a distribution center for wholesale paper. Adjacent to a spur of a P&N Railroad freight line, material could arrive by rail, and be distributed by rail or by trucks. With a growing industrial economy that relied heavily on the movement of products in and out of the city, warehousing became an industry unto itself in the early twentieth century. Charlotte warehouses in the center city demonstrate various forms of construction. The Phillip Carey Building which was built around 1907 used the heavy-wooden-framed "slow-burn" design promoted by industrialist D.A. Tompkins. Advances in building technology are seen in the very large, four-story 1928 Great A&P Tea Company warehouse, featuring a poured concrete frame with brick infill. Similar construction techniques were employed in the Virginia Paper Company Building, which features large mushroom columns, so named for their wide, disc-like capitals. The slabs, girders and columns of these buildings were designed to work together to allow for wide open storage spaces without numerous posts. When combined

with metal frame windows and metal stairs, the construction method also made for a virtually fire-proof building. The popularity of this technology is indicated in the 1951 Sanborn maps which shows that fourteen buildings in Charlotte (including warehouses, schools, automobile showrooms, and even apartment buildings) were built in this manner. Like the Virginia Paper Company Building, all of the surviving historical warehouses in the Uptown were built oriented towards the railroad lines. By the time that warehouses relying solely on truck transportation were being built, industry and warehouse had begun to move away from the center city.

The Virginia Paper Company appears to have opened its Carolina Division in Charlotte in 1934. It is first listed in the Charlotte directories at 601 South Cedar Street, a building that functioned as the B.F Avery & Sons Plow Company until 1929.<sup>2</sup> The present Virginia Paper Company building was constructed by the Southeastern Construction Company.<sup>3</sup> The city block containing the building is bordered West 4<sup>th</sup> and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets and by the P&N Spur to the east, and Graham Street to the west. This area was transformed from a residential neighborhood at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to a largely industrial and commercial block by the middle of the century.<sup>4</sup> During the 1920s and the early 1930s, this section of West Third Street contained the homes of African American residents. On the same block, the houses that faced West 4<sup>th</sup> Street were occupied by white residents. The nature of the block began to change in 1924 with the construction of the sprawling Hoppe Motors building on the corner of Graham and West 4<sup>th</sup>. By 1953, the Virginia Paper Company building, the I.E. DuPont Office and Laboratory building, as well as a steel-framed knitwear warehouse had displace all but three of the houses on the block. Today, the Virginia Paper Company building is the only surviving structure on the block.



### **Undated Post-WWII Promotional Brochure from the Southeastern Construction Co.**

Perhaps because of his connection with Virginia, New York architect and University of Virginia graduate Walter Dabney Blair was chosen to design the building. Dabney studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, and spent three years at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In addition to the Virginia Paper Company Building, he designed several buildings for the University of Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

The services of a Beaux-Arts trained architect for such an austere, utilitarian building may be somewhat surprising. However the architecture of Charlotte's

industrial buildings was evolving in such a way that the stark plainness of the Virginia Paper Company building may have been seen at the time as a significant architectural statement. Most of Charlotte's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century industrial buildings utilized classically inspired architectural elements. Early examples such as the Ada Cotton Mill have clear Italianate references. But building technology developed rapidly after 1900, and that began to be reflected in the appearance of the buildings as the century progressed.



**Cole Manufacturing**

The 1909-11 Cole Manufacturing complex demonstrates the tenacity of the classical architectural styles, but these Romanesque Revival brick buildings incorporated an advanced structural design, utilizing a poured concrete frame, floor and roof system. By the mid-1920s, buildings in Charlotte were using a concrete support structure similar to that used in Cole Manufacturing, however, instead of hiding the poured posts, and floors with decorative brickwork, buildings such as the 1926 Carolina Transfer and Storage boldly exhibited the concrete framework of the building in the exterior walls.



**Carolina Transfer and Storage**

Built utilizing neither classical architectural elements, or exposing its structure in its exterior walls, the Virginia Paper Company Building appears to have been another step in this process. All three of these buildings feature similar poured concrete construction. But all appear very different. The Virginia Paper Company Building neither exhibits or attempts to disguise its structural design, instead it can be seen as precursor to the Modern designs that came to define post-WWII industrial architecture.

### **Architectural Description**

The Virginia Paper Company Building is a two-story warehouse located along Third Street, just a few blocks from the Square. Completed in 1937, the building was among the last of large industrial structures built near the center of the city. While a good collection of industrial buildings still exist in Third Ward to the west of the Southern Railroad, Virginia Paper and the neighboring I.E. DuPont Building are the only substantial surviving examples of industrial buildings in the section of Third Ward bounded by the Southern Railroad and Mint Street. Until much of it was destroyed during Urban Renewal, this section of the city was home to factories and warehouses dependent on railroad transportation, with workers'



houses scattered among the industrial buildings.

Fire insurance company maps indicate that in the 1950's a brick textile warehouse occupied a site to the east of the Virginia Paper Building, with the buildings separated by a narrow alley. Directly across West Third Street sat a large brick grocery warehouse. Both of these warehouse buildings have been demolished.



The Virginia Paper Building employed fire-proof construction. The solid brick exterior walls surround reinforced concrete slab floors and roof, which are supported by poured concrete mushroom columns. These noncombustible materials combined with metal frame doors and windows, resulted in a virtually fire-proof building shell. These elements of a fire-proof design became popular in the 1920's and were the culmination of over one hundred years of technical advances.



The Virginia Paper Building is not "square," instead the south elevation was constructed at an angle that conforms to the border of the building lot. And the building's facade does not face Third Street. Instead, the eight-bay wide east elevation, which at one time overlooked eight rail spurs of the P&N and Southern railroads, is the principal and was historically the most prominent elevation. A raised center parapet features tall letters, many of which are missing, that once spelled out the company's name.

The brick are laid in Flemish Bond. The walls are unadorned except for a simple corbelled water table, and cast stones that cap the parapets walls. The concrete ground floor is raised to the level of a railcar to accommodate materials being loaded and unloaded from an adjacent rail spur through two large door overhead doors, each topped by large 16-light transoms. The facade is also pierced by twelve large window openings, each filled by triple 16-light metal-framed windows, flooding the warehouse floors with light.

The facade is symmetrical except for a single narrow recessed bay at the north end of the facade, containing a narrow 12-light window and a doorway that gives access to a stairwell.

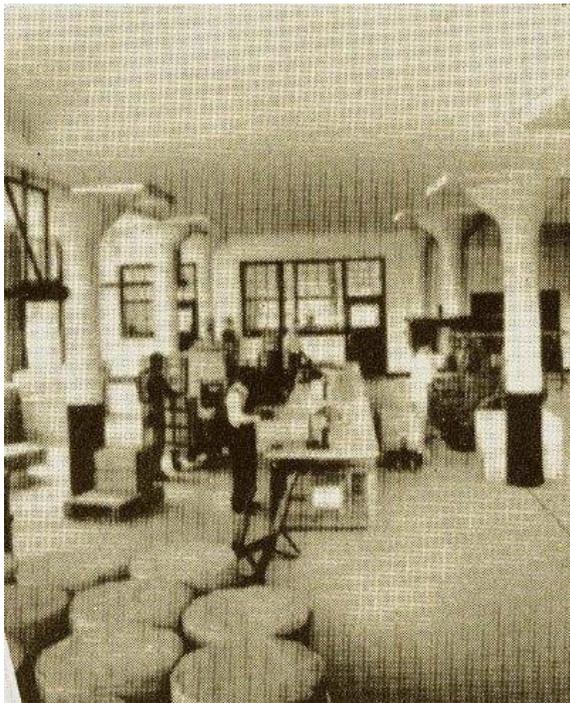




The five-bay wide south elevation is relatively symmetrical. The three large first-story window openings are filled with 72-light metal-frame windows. Between the windows, two large door openings topped with 16-light transoms, have been infilled with brick. The five second-story windows are the same triple 16-light windows found on the facade. A single doorway with a brick stoop and steps has been cut into wall between the westernmost window and original industrial door.



The west elevation, which was originally largely obscured by a neighboring warehouse, is the most altered section of the generally intact and unaltered building. The second story is pieced by some of the same triple windows found on the east and south elevations, but the location of offices on the first floor illuminated by tall 24-light windows, a stairwell in one of the bays, and an access door to a small basement, required a jumbled fenestration. The practical but asymmetrical fenestration of the west elevation is typical for the least public side of a building. It is very likely that the most prominent openings in the west elevation, two large overhead doors, and the narrow concrete loading dock were added only after the neighboring warehouse was torn down sometime after 1953<sup>1</sup>. With the removal of the neighboring warehouse, the Virginia Paper Building could be transformed from a warehouse dependent on rail freight, to one able to load and unload truck freight. The orientation of the building switched from the symmetrical east elevation, overlooking the rail lines, to the jumbled west elevation, adjacent to a large parking lot. The north elevation is blank and is partially obscured by the high grade of the adjacent lot.



The interior of the building features ordered rows of concrete mushroom columns supporting massive reinforced concrete floors. The first floor contains a small series of offices in the southwest corner of the building. The building has a partial basement, that may have held a mechanical ro

---

1. Building dated by the Mecklenburg County tax records and the Sanborn Map Co. Charlotte, NC Maps 1953 ed.

2. Dates were derived from Charlotte City Directories from 1929, 1934, and 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Beaumert Whitton Papers in the Sepcial Collection, Atkins Library, UNCC.

<sup>4</sup> See Sanborn map 322, Sanborn Map Co. Charlotte, NC Maps 1953 ed.

<sup>5</sup> Denis R. McNamara “Training in Tradition: The University of Virginia and the Architecture of Athletics”<http://www.virginia.edu/history/courses/spring97/hius330/mcnamara.html>

6. Building was shown in 1953 Sanborn Map