



**Survey and Research Report
On The
Red Front Department Store Building**



1. **Name And Location Of The Property.** The Red Front Department Store Building is located at 1125 Belmont Avenue in the Belmont Park Neighborhood of Charlotte, N.C.
2. **Name And Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.**

Camp Greene Properties, LLC
1219 East 35th Street
Charlotte, N.C. 28205

3. **Representative Photographs Of The Property.** The report contains representative photographs of the property.

2



5. **Current Deed Book Reference To The Property.** The current deed to the property is recorded in Deed Book 30533 at Page 548. The tax parcel number of the property is 08112705.

6. **A Brief Historic Sketch Of The Property.** The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. **A Brief Physical Description Of The Property.** The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

8. **Documentation Of Why 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 History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance .** The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Red Front Department Store possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Red Front Department Store is the oldest store building in the Belmont neighborhood, a significant and well preserved early-20th-century suburb of Charlotte that helps to demonstrate the industrial growth of the city. The Red Front Department Store has retained a good degree of integrity and is the oldest and is one of the most prominent commercial building in the Belmont neighborhood. The only surviving two-story, pre-world-war-II commercial/retail building in Belmont, the Red Front Store is the neighborhood's most prominent early twentieth-century building of any type aside from the nearby textile mills.

b. **Integrity Of Design, Setting, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association.** The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the physical description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Red Front Department Store 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 that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the Red Front Department Store is \$69,700.

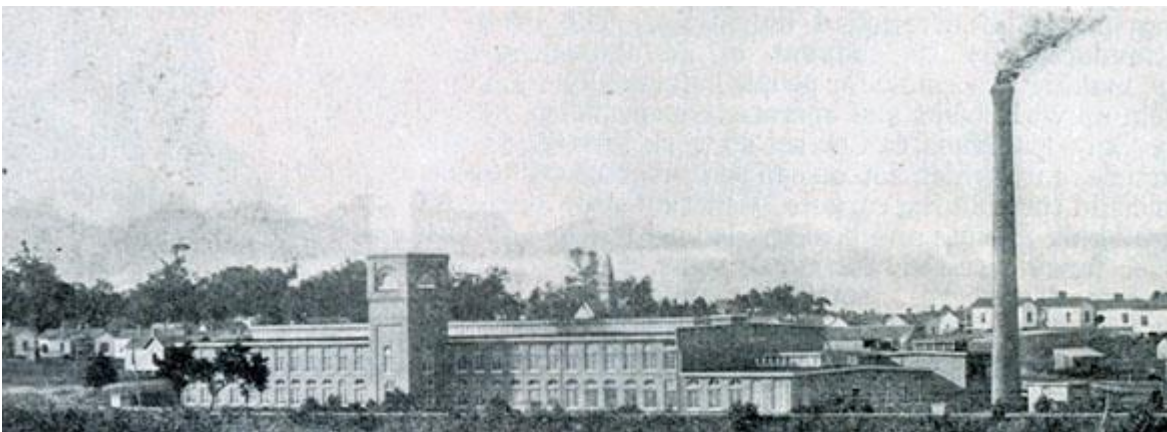
Date Of The Preparation Of This Report: April 17, 2017

Prepared By: Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Stewart Gray

A History Of The Red Front Department Store Building



The significance of the Red Front Department Store Building is best understood within the context of the neighborhood in which it is located. The history of the Belmont Park neighborhood, commonly known simply as Belmont, on the northern outskirts of Charlotte, North Carolina, began in the late 1890s. That decade witnessed a major increase in Charlotte's population, from 11,557 to 18,091.¹ This dramatic growth resulted mostly from an expansion of Charlotte's industrial base, mainly the appearance of new textile mills along the city's railroad lines. Especially impactful for Belmont Park was the completion of the Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant No. 1 on the Southern Railroad corridor in 1892 and, even more so, the opening of the Louise Cotton Mill on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad at the southern edge of the neighborhood on May 31, 1897.² Not surprisingly, Belmont Park emerged predominantly as a blue-collar community.



Louise Cotton Mill

On April 7, 1902, *The Charlotte News* commented at length upon the dramatic expansion Belmont Park had experienced since the first neighborhood streets were laid out in 1896.³ “Belmont Park is one of Charlotte’s largest suburbs,” the article began. “About four years ago Belmont was almost a wilderness. There was only one house.”⁴ “In 1897, there were only three houses in Belmont, and the Louise Mill was unfinished,” declared the newspaper in February 1903. “The census of 1901 gave it a population of 1,742. The police census of January, 1903, gave it a population of 2,314.”⁵

Belmont Park had an impressive collection of industrial plants. *The Charlotte News* called Belmont a “manufacturing town.”⁶ In addition to the Highland Mill No. 1 and the Louise Cotton Mill, the neighborhood in 1902 had a batting factory, a show case factory, a casket factory, a plow and farm implement factory, and a large dairy farm. In the period before World War II the neighborhood also had a variety of retail outlets, including grocery stores, at least one beauty shop, at least one barber, dry cleaners, service stations, and eateries.⁷ The oldest surviving retail building in Belmont is the 1902 Red Front Store, located on Belmont Avenue at the intersection with Pegram Street. Thomas Hill Haughton, Sr., (1841-1915) an insurance agent, owned the building and leased it out. None of the neighborhood’s other retail buildings from before World War II survive with a good degree of integrity with the exception of the one-story ca. 1935 Farrar Store at 1135 Harrill Street, and the one-story ca. 1925 Northside Corner Store at 1201 Kennon Street. The Red Front Store and the Farrar Store are in the neighborhood’s center along Belmont Avenue, while the Northside Corner Store is isolated in what was historically a residential section of the neighborhood. The two-story Red Front Department Store, is significant as the oldest and among the most prominent historic retail buildings in the Belmont Neighborhood.⁸

From the perspective of today, when thousands of automobiles zoom down Charlotte’s streets, when jetliners soar overhead, when cell telephones connect us to websites from all over the world, it is difficult to imagine what life was like in Belmont Park when the Red Front Department Store opened for business in 1902. Smoke billowed from steam locomotives that hauled goods to and from the Louise Mill and the Highland Park Manufacturing Plant No. 1. Steam whistles sounded regularly throughout the day, announcing the change of work shifts at the Belmont industrial plants, such as the Barnhardt Manufacturing Company and the Cole Manufacturing Company. Automobiles were rare in Charlotte, and all were beyond the reach of everybody but the wealthy. Commercial radio was still two decades away. Television would not appear for almost fifty years. Air conditioning was non-existent, and motion pictures were in their infancy. Eating at home for most families was a necessity, not a choice. Farmers set up food stalls on the streets of Belmont Park on weekends. “Belmont presented quite a busy scene this morning,” reported *The Charlotte News* on April 5, 1902. “Several farmers were on the streets early, with country produce, which was readily disposed of to the residents of the village.”⁹

The Red Front Department Store attempted to take advantage of Belmont Park's relative separation from Charlotte's central business district. It made home deliveries by horse-drawn wagon or buggy.¹⁰ A streetcar line from the center city was completed along Central Avenue in the adjoining suburb of Piedmont Park in March 1902, but one had to walk some distance south on Louise Avenue to reach it.¹¹ The Red Front Department Store sold a wide variety of items, including "fine shad and speckled trout," "Highland Brand Sausage," Irish potatoes for "20c. a peck." and bars of laundry soap.¹² "IT IS (sic.) a known fact that we are saving our customers money," said an advertisement for the Red Front Department Store on April 23, 1902. "You should be one of the lucky ones who trade at the RED FRONT."¹³ Management claimed that the store sold "Everything from a Postage Stamp to a House and Lot."¹⁴ One could buy drugs and medicines at the Red Front Department Store.¹⁵ *The Charlotte News* rented space in the building for its "Belmont Bureau," where one could place advertisements or acquire subscriptions.¹⁶ The Red Front Department Store sold hats, shirts, pants, chinaware, crockery, and glassware.¹⁷ Management offered special inducements to customers. "Every lady purchasing goods to the amount of \$1.50 at the Red Front Store between Wednesday and ten o'clock Saturday night will be given a nice piece of Glassware free of charge," stated Red Front officials on October 8, 1902.¹⁸



The Red Front Department Store was more than a retail outlet. It served as a community center of sorts. "The Belmont Glee Club met last night at the parlor of the Red Front grocery store and rendered some fine selections of music," reported *The Charlotte News* on March 28, 1902.¹⁹ The store served as a recruitment center for civic organizations, such as the "International Sunshine Society" for young girls.²⁰ But the presence of the Red Front Department Store in Belmont Park was short lived. Jesse B. Rudisill, the first manager, was dismissed in December 1902 and was replaced by Alex Phifer, who had moved to Charlotte from Union County.²¹ In 1905, the Red Front Department Store closed, and Phifer became the proprietor of a grocery store that occupied the eastern half of the first floor of the building.²² His name can still be seen on the front façade.



**Milas Alex Phifer & Wife, Mary
Catherine Caudle Phifer**



**The name “Alex Phifer”
Is readable on the upper façade.**

Milas Alex Phifer (1864-1929) moved from Union County to Charlotte and established a residence with his wife, Mary Catherine Caudle Phifer (1865-1934), on Central Avenue in the Piedmont Park section of Charlotte, N.C. Phifer operated the Alex Phifer Grocery at the corner of Belmont Avenue and Pegram Street until 1920.²³ But Phifer was more than a retailer. *The Charlotte News* stated that Phifer was “widely known as a public spirited citizen.”²⁴ He joined with other citizens of Belmont Park in 1911 to organize a “mass meeting” to submit a petition that asked the School Board to “do justice to our section.”²⁵ In 1912, he served on a fundraising committee to secure the money to erect a memorial to former North Carolina Governor Charles B. Aycock (1859-1912).²⁶ Alex Phifer won election to the Charlotte Board of Aldermen in 1915 as the representative of Ward 6.²⁷ In January 1917, he was named to a committee that traveled to Raleigh to lobby for an amendment to charters for cities.²⁸

A series of grocery stores occupied the Red Front Department Store Building as the twentieth century unfolded. In 1926 the H & M Grocery Store was the tenant. In the 1930s it was the N. J. Covington Grocery, as well as the Louise Pharmacy. The Cut Rate Variety Grocery was there in 1960. Walker & Son Grocery Store occupied the building from the 1960s until at least 1989. In the 1990s, the Red Front Department Store Building became vacant and fell into disrepair as the roof began to fail.²⁹ The decline of the once-proud building reflected the deterioration of the neighborhood as a whole.

A turning point in the evolution of Belmont Park occurred on June 3, 1957. R. M. Cushman, executive vice president for manufacturing for the Amerotron Corporation, announced that the Louise Cotton Mill was closing.³⁰ The residents of the Louise Cotton Mill village had always been a significant component of the walk-in customers who frequented the grocery stores and other retail establishments in the

neighborhood. Further undermining the sustainability of Belmont Park was the appearance of suburban developments with moderate priced homes, such as Shannon Park and Hampshire Hills, in northeast Charlotte. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an escalation of the number of renters in Belmont Park. The neighborhood also became increasingly homogenous in terms of race and income. As early as the 1930s, realtors started steering African Americans from the Center City to Belmont Park. Moreover, the Federal Housing Administration discouraged lenders from making home loans there. In July 2015, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that Belmont was in the bottom 10 percent of neighborhoods in the United States in terms of socioeconomic status. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department stated that Belmont Park was “among the most downtrodden and violent in Charlotte.”³¹ On January 28, 2016, law enforcement officials conducted a pre-dawn raid and arrested almost twenty residents of Belmont Park on drug charges. The local press quoted officials who said that the neighborhood had become an “open-air drug market” for the entire city.³²

The Red Front Store Building stood on the verge of demolition. In 2010, the Charlotte City Council adopted an ordinance requiring owners to repair abandoned commercial buildings or the City would destroy the buildings for them. “Century-old vacant store targeted for demolition” read the heading of an article in the *Charlotte Observer* on June 20, 2010. Code enforcement officials said that they would ask the City to grant permission to tear the Red Front Department Store Building down later that year.³³ Happily, the owner did install a new roof and brought the building up to code. The prospects for the Red Front Store Building are now on the upswing. Belmont Park, its social ills to the contrary notwithstanding, is experiencing a revitalization. Urban pioneers are moving into the neighborhood, attracted by its proximity to the center city, its walkability, and the reasonable prices for historic homes. The Louise Cotton Mill, the centerpiece of Belmont Park, has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is being converted into apartments. No greater manifestation of the rebirth of Belmont Park comes readily to mind. Perhaps the Red Front Department Store Building will soon experience its own resurgence.



Louise Mill From East Dec. 2016



Louise Mill From West Dec. 2016

Architectural Description of the Red Front Department Store Building



The Red Front Department Store is located in the Belmont neighborhood in Charlotte. The neighborhood developed to the west of the Louise Cotton Mill and includes company housing, privately developed housing, and a small collection of commercial buildings concentrated along Belmont Avenue that served the neighborhood. Much of the building stock in Belmont Park appears to date from the first quarter of the twentieth century. Aside from the surrounding mills, the Red Front Department Store is the most prominent early-twentieth-century non-residential building in the neighborhood.

The Red Front Department Store faces southwest on Belmont Avenue at the intersection of Belmont Avenue and Pegram Street, and abuts the sidewalks of both streets. The two-story, brick building features a flat, parapet roof.



The facade consists of two large, equal sized bays. The east bay contains the primary entrance to the building, a clipped-bay recessed behind a substantial brick post that supports the south corner of the building. The bay contains paired original panel doors. Each door features a single large panel originally topped by a single plate-glass light. The glass is now missing. Most of the original storefront around the doors is intact, but much of the glass is missing and much of the original millwork is covered with plywood panels. The door opening is topped with a large, single-light, direct-glaze transom. The doors are bordered by tall, four-over-four double-hung windows that sit on brick knee-walls. The knee-walls feature their original sills, and are now faced with tile. The recessed entrance's soffit features a tongue-and-groove ceiling, with the boards running perpendicular to the doors.



The remainder of the east bay contains a masonry knee wall. Resting on the knee wall is a single large storefront window opening, now infilled with masonry block. Above the storefront window and extending over the recessed bay is a clearstory composed of a row of fixed multi-light sash, now covered with panels.

According to Sanborn Maps, during the middle years of the 20th century the west bay of the façade contained an entrance. Currently the bay contains a continuous knee wall covered in tile. The grade in front of the building slopes up to the west, and the knee wall in the west bay is taller than the knee walls in the east bay. The original storefront framing is covered with plywood in the eastern part of the bay, and the remainder of the bay is infilled with masonry block. The bay features a clearstory composed of three multi-light fixed sash, now covered with panels.

The bays in the facade are separated by a large brick pier and are topped by a substantial metal cornice that spans nearly the full width of the façade.



The second story of façade is pierced by six windows which are evenly spaced over the first-story bays. The brick is laid in common bond. The windows feature segmental-arches composed of two rows of rowlock brick, and simple brick sills. Four of the window openings replacement windows have been set in the original window frames. Two original six-over-six windows have been covered with plywood panels. Above the windows are two corbelled panels that match the width of the first-story bays. “Alex Phifer,” the name of an early store owner, is painted in the east panel. The wall is topped with a simple corbelled cornice, capped with metal.



The Red Front Store's recessed entrance is the most prominent feature of the southeast elevation, which fronts Pegram Street. A clearstory composed of three fixed eight-light sash is set above the recessed entrance and extends over a large adjacent bay that once contained a storefront window. A large portion of the bay's knee wall has been cut away, and the bay now contains two large plywood doors. The remainder of the bay has been infilled with masonry block. An original steel post adjacent to the clipped entrance runs from the knee wall through the clearstory to the brick wall above. To the east of the storefront bay, the elevation is pierced by three small, evenly spaced segmental-arch windows. The rectangular window frames have been retained, but the original sash have been replaced with new single-light sash. The second story is pierced by five evenly spaced segmental-arch windows. Three six-over-six windows are covered with plywood. The remaining windows contain modern double-hung windows mounted in the original window frames. Going toward the rear of the building the roof parapet steps down twice. The parapets are topped with a simple corbelled cornice, partially covered with a metal cap.



The northwest elevation is blank. Portions of the common-bond brick wall have been repaired, including a large portion of the parapet. Like the Pegram Street elevation, the northwest elevation features a stepped parapet. A faded sign is painted on the bricks that references the Covington Grocery Store, a onetime tenant.



The rear elevation is pierced on the first story by four segmental-arch openings. Adjacent to the northwest elevation is a tall door opening containing a replacement door. To the east of the door is a wide door opening now infilled with brick, that likely functioned to allow goods to be loaded into the building. To the east of the wide door opening is a tall window opening containing a tall four-over-four window, now covered with a corrugated fiberglass panel. To the east of the window is another wide door opening with paired replacement doors. The second story is pierced by four windows like those found on the other elevations; three are original six-over-six windows now covered with plywood panels. One contains a double-hung replacement window set in the original window frame.



The interior of the Red Front Department Store contains a single large room on each story. The open spaces are accomplished using steel beams running front to rear on both stories. On the first story the beams hang below the ceiling and are encased in plaster. The beams rest on masonry piers integrated into the front and back walls, and a single steel post, also encased in plaster, set in the middle of the room. On the second floor the steel beams bear on timbers set directly above the first-story piers and steel post. The integrity of the interior of the Red Front Store has been compromised with the loss of much of the original plaster ceiling, which was

largely due to water damage. Also lost are the original staircase and the wood flooring on the second floor.

While some of the storefront millwork has been damaged, significant portions have survived including most of the clearstory sash and window trim, the storefront window frames, wide window stools, and beaded-boards covering the knee walls. The frame and trim around the original recessed entry doors are largely intact. All of the window and door trim on the east and rear walls are intact. The doors and windows feature wide moulded side jams and plain head jams topped with a moulded cap. The windows on the east wall also feature moulded aprons. Several original, simple hanging light fixtures have survived.



On the second floor much of the original wall plaster is intact, as is the tall baseboard topped with a moulded cap. Most of the windows have retained their original moulded jams, aprons, and caps, and portions of a simple chair rail that aligns with the window aprons have survived in-place.



¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte,_North_Carolina#frbanner3

² Dr. Dan L. Morrill, <http://www.cmhpf.org/essays/cottonmills.html> When it was complete the Louise Cotton Mill was the largest textile mill in Charlotte. The building, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is presently being transformed into housing. Louise Avenue, named for the Louise Mill, was one of two entrances into Belmont. It extended northward from East 7th Street. The second was Belmont Ave. which crossed Little Sugar Creek and bisected the neighborhood from the west.

³ Dr. Thomas Hanchett, <http://www.cmhpf.org/kids/neighborhoods/belmont-et-al.html>

⁴ *The Charlotte News*, April 7, 1902.

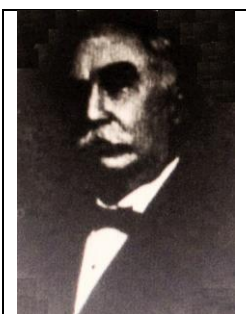
⁵ *The Charlotte News*, February 24, 1903.

⁶ *The Charlotte News*, April 7, 1902.

⁷ *Charlotte City Directory 1914* (Piedmont Directory Company), p590. *Hill's Charlotte City Directory 1939* (Hill Directory Co., Richmond, Va., 1939), p. 745.

⁸ *The Charlotte News*, February 18, 1902. The earliest mention of the Red Front Store in Belmont Park appeared in *The Charlotte News* on February 18, 1902. There were Red Front Stores in many North Carolina towns, including Asheville, Shelby, Mocksville, and Fayetteville. See *The Charlotte News*, December 22, 1912.; *The Davie Record*, March 1, 1916; *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 15, 1946; *The Fayetteville Index*, March 12, 1913;

⁹ *The Charlotte News*, April 5, 1902. Haughton moved to Charlotte in the early 1870s and entered the insurance business. At the time of his death, the *Charlotte Observer* called Haughton "one of the city's best known citizens." See *Charlotte Observer*, November 17, 1915.



Thomas Haughton

¹⁰ *The Charlotte News*, March 20, 1902.

¹¹ Dr. Dan L. Morrill, <http://www.cmhpf.org/essays/streetcars.html>

¹² *The Charlotte News*, March 28, April 3, September 19, 1902.

¹³ *The Charlotte News*, April 23, 1902.

¹⁴ *The Charlotte News*, February 19, 1902.

¹⁵ *The Charlotte News*, April 7, 1902.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *The Charlotte News*, February 28, March 4, April 5, 1902.

¹⁸ *The Charlotte News*, October 8, 1902.

¹⁹ *The Charlotte News*, March 28, 1902.

²⁰ *The Charlotte News*, February 28, 1902.

²¹ *The Charlotte News*, December 13, 1902; April 22, 1904.

²² *The Charlotte News*, January 5, 1905.

²³ *United States Census of 1920. The Charlotte News*, December 17, 1920. *The Charlotte Observer* of March 22, 1921, reported that Phifer "retired recently from the grocery business." One incident that occurred at the Alex Phifer Grocery is especially noteworthy. Foster Phifer was working in his father's grocery on March 24, 1917, when two friends invited him to go to a nearby eatery. While walking along Pegram Street, Foster encountered a drunkard named Shoemaker. Shoemaker bumped into Foster, who responded by leading Shoemaker across the street. When Foster turned around and began walking back toward his friends, Shoemaker lurched at him with a knife. Foster hit Shoemaker over the head with a Coca-Cola bottle and mortally wounded him. See *The Charlotte News*, May 17, 1917.

²⁴ *The Charlotte News*, March 21, 1921.

²⁵ *The Charlotte News*, September 13, 1911.

²⁶ *The Charlotte News*, May 7, 1912.

²⁷ *The Charlotte News*, May 5, 1915.

²⁸ *The Charlotte News*, January 28, 1917.

²⁹ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1926, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1937, 1960, 1969, 1975, 1982, 1989; *Charlotte Observer*, June 20, 2010.

³⁰ National Register Registration Form the Louise Cotton Mill. See <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/MK1857.pdf>

³¹ *Charlotte Observer*, July 24, 1915.

³² *Charlotte Observer*, January 28, 2016

³³ *Charlotte Observer*, June 20, 2010.