

THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT AND DESIGN OF CHARLOTTE COLLEGE: 1957-1965

by

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ABSTRACT

MARY CAROLYN DOMINICK. The original concept and design of Charlotte College: 1957-1965 (Under the direction of DR. DAN L. MORRILL)

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the built environment of Charlotte College, an institution founded in 1946 as the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and moving to a suburban campus in 1961, contains iconic symbols of the aspirations of Charlotte's business and cultural elite to create a more modern and cosmopolitan city. Also, like many colleges and universities begun in the mid-twentieth century, the school sought to encourage greater imagination and creativity among its students by adopting a non-traditional architecture. Both impulses, plus the strictures imposed by State regulatory agencies, profoundly influenced the configuration of the Charlotte College Campus.

The Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, composed of prominent Charlotte leaders, understood the consequences of selecting A. G. Odell, Jr. as the architect for the campus in December 1958. Odell, who had established himself as Charlotte's leading Modernist, had at the time of his selection already designed such important local non-traditional edifices as the Second Ward High School Gymnasium (1948), Double Oaks Elementary School (1950) - for which he received two awards: the National American Institute of Architects (AIA) presented him with an Award of Merit in 1954 and the North Carolina American Institute of Architects (NCAIA) honored him with an Award of Merit in 1955, and, most notably, the Charlotte Coliseum and Ovens Auditorium Complex (1955). Odell collaborated with Englehardt, Engelhardt, Leggett and Cornell (EELC), a premier educational firm headquartered in New York City, in

laying out the campus, selecting the architectural style of the buildings, and anticipating the need for future expansion. Among EELC's employees was Frank G. Lopez, editor of the *Architectural Record* and an advocate for non-traditional design for educational buildings as an inducement to learning. It is reasonable to assume that Lopez influenced the overall design approach of EELC and, therefore, Odell.

The monograph concludes with a description of the array of tools available to document the historic significance of the most physically intact Charlotte College buildings and argues for their preservation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"The highest function of the teacher consists not so much in imparting knowledge as in stimulating the pupil in its love and pursuit. To know how to suggest is the art of teaching." –Henri-Frederic Amiel

As I have explored the history of Charlotte College and its Board of Trustees, I have developed a great respect for all the people involved in the development of the school, today known as the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I would especially like to acknowledge Madeleine Perez and Marilyn Schuster of University Archives and Special Collections for their supportive words, counsel, and assistance in the research process. Without their familiarity of the Charlotte College Records, I would have been at a great disadvantage. I am deeply beholden to Dr. Dan L. Morrill for his mentorship and heartfelt guidance over the course of this process and for the many opportunities he has given me – his mentorship means more than words can say. My interest in the original built environment of Charlotte College stems from his stories and personal recollections. This specific field of research could not have been accomplished without the architectural history expertise of Dr. Lee Gray in the realm of mid-twentieth century Modernism, Dr. Dan L. Morrill's first-hand experiences at Charlotte College, and Dr. John David Smith's knowledge in the field of public history. I would also like to extend my gratitude to everyone who kindly shared his or her time with me as interviewees: Ken Sanford, Jack Claiborne, Walter L. Bost, Chancellor Philip Dubois, and Dr. Loy Witherspoon.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my Daddy, Jon Barry Dominick, for he taught me what it means to be strong.

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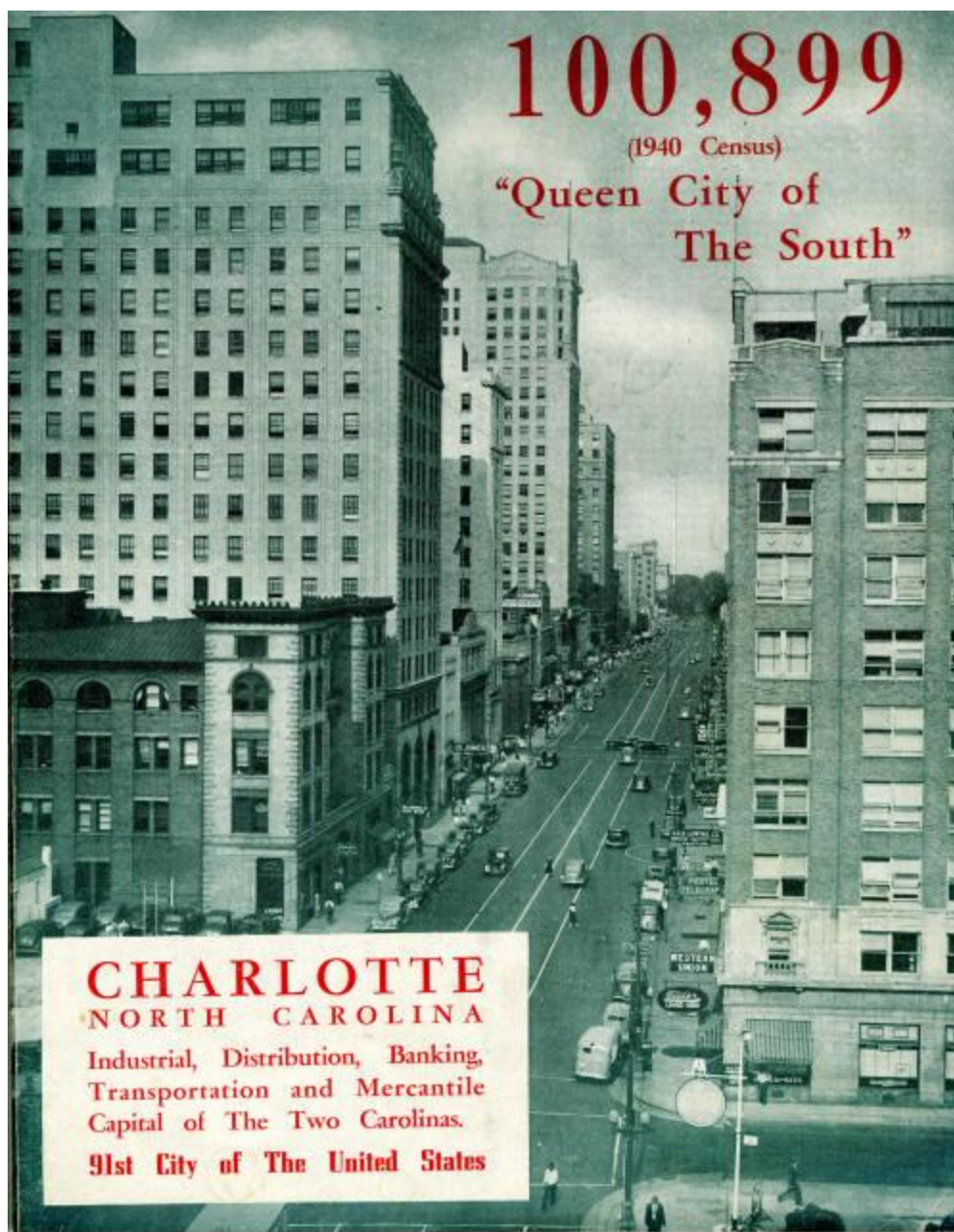
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INTRODUCTION

During the mid-twentieth century, Charlotte was undergoing a major transformation, re-branding itself as a city of the New South.¹ By 1960, Charlotte's population had exceeded 200,000 people.² Charlotte's civic leaders of that day, such as Clarence "Booster" Kuester, manager of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, led successful initiatives that the great majority of influential residents enthusiastically endorsed. At the center of this effort was the fashioning of a new image for the "face" of the city. Many leaders of the city believed that a non-traditional aesthetic would assist in marketing a new era for Charlotte. The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce was convinced that this updated image would encourage people to relocate to the area and bring greater economic expansion with them. Prominent Charlotteans thought that people moving into the community would be eager to become a part of something "new." Charlotte College, the Board of Trustees insisted, by adopting a Modernist design for its campus would contribute to the rebranding of Charlotte as a vibrant part of the New South. Charlotte College's built environment should be understood largely within that context.

¹ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 127.

² Blythe, LeGette. *Hornets' Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte, N. C.: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1961), 448.



Queen City of the South promotional booklet published in 1945 by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of Executive Vice-President and Business Manager, Mr. Clarence O. "Booster" Kuester.³

A. G. Odell, Jr. (1913-1988), who according to architectural historian Catherine Bishir, was Charlotte's premier Modernist architect, selected a design philosophy for Charlotte College that eschewed traditional architectural motifs and adopted instead the

³ "Charlotte North Carolina: Distribution Center in War and Peace," Fourth Edition of 75,000 copies. (Charlotte, N.C.: The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, Inc., 1945).

simple geometric shapes and minimal ornamentation associated with Modernism.⁴ In doing so he diverged sharply from the revivalist styles of most of the school buildings erected theretofore in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and adopted an architectural genre similar to that found on the campuses of other educational institutions that came into being during the 1950s and 1960s.



Bonnie E. Cone, circa 1964.

Bonnie Ethel Cone (1907-2003), President of Charlotte College, understood how best to secure support for Charlotte College.⁵ She convinced a select group of Charlotte leaders of commerce and industry that Charlotte needed a public institution of higher education. She earned their backing by convincing them that Charlotte College would not only aid the students but would also positively impact the local economy. The Board of Trustees for the Charlotte Community College System was comprised of many of Charlotte's most influential businessmen, bankers, and politicians. Among them were J. Murrey Atkins, prominent investment banker at R. S. Dickson & Company and City Council member; John Paul Lucas, vice-president and manager of merchandising and publicity at Duke Power; W. A. "Woody" Kennedy, textile machinery manufacturer and

⁴ Catherine W. Bishir and Charlotte V. Brown *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 419.

⁵ In 1946 Dr. Elmer H. Garinger made Bonnie Cone Director of the Charlotte Center; she was later Director of Charlotte College, becoming President of Charlotte College in 1963.

founder of Kennedy Investment Company; and Oliver R. Rowe, engineer and founder of the Rowe Corporation. Other early non-Board supporters included Henry Fowler, Charlotte's Pepsi-Cola bottler, whose granddaughter, Dale F. Halton, grew up to become a patron of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.⁶

Although there was never enough money to guarantee Charlotte College's success, Cone identified benefactors willing to come to the budding college's relief whenever a major crisis arose. She was grateful for the community's support and encouraged donors by making the smallest of contributions seem considerable. Ken Sanford, former director of public information and publications at Charlotte College, recalled Thomas M. Belk, department store executive and member of the Board of Trustees for the Charlotte Community College System, describing a telephone conversation he had had with Cone: "When Bonnie called, you might as well say yes to whatever it was she wanted right off the bat rather than argue with her, because you always end up saying yes anyhow. Then just sit back and enjoy the rest of the conversation."⁷

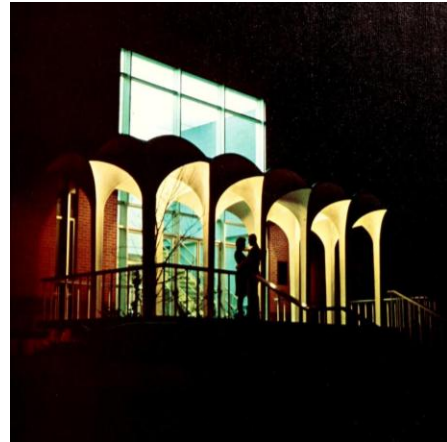
The man-made environment of Charlotte College unquestionably contributed to the making of Charlotte's modernized image. The persistence of the predilection for Modernism among Charlotte's civic leaders manifested itself in the 1965 seal of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the successor institution of Charlotte College. The signature architectural element of Charlotte College, the pillars supporting the portico of the W.A. Kennedy Building, is prominently featured.

⁶ <http://cone.uncc.edu/about-bonnie-e-cone> (accessed December 12, 2012).

⁷ Ken Sanford. Interview by Mary Carolyn Dominick. Video. Charlotte, N.C., April 12, 2011.



Left: UNCC Seal.



Right: Columns on Kennedy Building.

There are other factors that influenced the design rationale of the Charlotte College buildings. First, the suburban location of the 248-acre campus allowed for an abundance of land between buildings and diminished the need to conserve space. Second, the budgetary and construction strictures placed upon the Charlotte College Board of Trustees by the North Carolina State Board of Education played a large role in determining what could be erected. The design concepts of Modernism allowed for the use of new, cost effective building materials, thus “architecturally modern could mean the use of conveniences, new materials, and methods just as it meant new and better ways to finance, organize, and maintain the building process.”⁸

Modernist design has since fallen out of favor. With each passing day, more and more examples of it are falling into disrepair and facing demolition. The Charlotte College buildings stand as a reminder of Charlotte in the 1960s. The Charlotte College buildings provide a striking example of Modernism, retain their essential distinctive form, are the oldest edifices on campus, and are worthy of preservation because they are

⁸ Bishir and Brown *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*, 306.

cultural artifacts of the physical beginnings of what is now the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERNISM

“Less is more.” – Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Many individuals derive meaning in their lives by responding to the built environment around them. Spaces can cause us to feel or act a certain way, because the physical landscape that surrounds us is ever present and critical to our sense of self. Streets, structures, and spaces form the stage upon which we encounter the aggregate experiences of daily life. Unbeknownst to many, the man-made environment of any era explicitly or implicitly contains didactic elements that reflect its *zeitgeist* or “spirit of the age” in which it appeared. Twentieth Century Modernism illustrates this truth. Through such means as placing minimal ornamentation on flat-roofed, low-lying buildings or putting chrome and reflective metal trim atop edifices, Modernist architects were attempting to convey the notion that the hope of mankind lay in the reconsideration of traditional values and the incorporation of innovative concepts of thought and action.

In the early 1900s, European architects began to insist that Modern architecture and modern materials called for a new kind of architectural form. They joined others in rejecting historical ornamentation and preaching that revolutionary design that broke completely with the past could transform the world. As Chester Nagel, an Alumnus of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, recalls in an interview with Carter Wiseman, author of *Twentieth-Century American Architecture*, “We were going to change the world; architecture was no longer going to be merely decorative. We were

trying to separate ourselves from the bombast of the old. We were looking for the essence, and we found it.”⁹

No longer would buildings be symbols of status, wealth, and elitism. By using technologically advanced materials such as reinforced concrete, steel beams, flat roofs, and broad expanses of glass, Modernist architects would produce up-to-date buildings that would improve the human condition by signaling the advent of a more egalitarian society. In short, advocates of the Modernist movement were originally inspired by social aspirations and the dream of a better tomorrow. They rejected traditional architectural styles. While employing materials made possible by industrialization, Modernist architects were devoted primarily to social goals, not to the veneration of the machine age.

In the United States, several factors came together in the early 1930s to alter the predominant philosophy of architectural design that drew its inspiration from the past. The Great Depression had virtually halted new construction and had understandably dampened public enthusiasm for customary practices and beliefs. At the beginning of 1933, fully 85 percent of the practicing architects in New York City were out of work.¹⁰ Jobless, many turned to the study of Modernist architectural theory for consolation, where they could find a plethora of fresh theoretical concepts to consider. Not insignificantly, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe came to the United States in the late 1930s, the former to Harvard University and the latter to the Illinois Institute of Technology. Refugees from Nazi Germany, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe continued

⁹ Peter Blake, *No Place like Utopia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 5.

¹⁰ Carter Wiseman, *Twentieth-Century American Architecture: The Buildings and Their Makers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 149.

to espouse Modernist principles, both in their teaching and in the buildings they fashioned.



Above: Harvard University Graduate Center, Walter Gropius (1948).¹¹
Below: Crown Hall on the campus of IIT, Mies van der Rohe (1956).¹²



¹¹ CHS Image Collection (1975-1985), Harvard Buildings, Harvard University Library, Box 15 Folder 2.

¹² Mies van der Rohe Society, [www.http://miessociety.org/](http://miessociety.org/) (accessed September 5, 2012).

MODERNISM IN AMERICA

“Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space.” – Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

A cardinal event in popular acceptance in the United States of Modernist architecture occurred in 1932, when Philip Johnson, an ardent admirer of Modernism, and founder of the Department of Architecture at the Modern Museum of Art (MOMA) in New York City, joined with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, a leading American architectural historian, in co-authoring *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. This book was published in conjunction with the opening of a seminal exhibit “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition” held at MOMA that same year. Both the exhibit and the book presented the Modern Movement as a momentous incident in the “evolution of style.”¹³ The authors identified three primary elements that defined the International style: the expression of volume rather than mass, the emphasis on balance rather than preconceived symmetry, and the expulsion of applied ornament.¹⁴ They singled out industrial artifacts, such as dams, steel water towers, and electrical substations as examples of plain, simple, unadorned design. An ardent admirer of Mies van der Rohe, Johnson was greatly influenced by van der Rohe’s Modernist teachings and architectural philosophies. Johnson was among the premier Modernist architects in America for much of the 20th century.¹⁵

¹³ Alan Colquhoun, *Oxford History of Art: Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 231.

¹⁴ Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932), xxii.

¹⁵ William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects (Volume 5): The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City, N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1972), 233.

The impetus for innovation in architectural design surged during the years immediately following World War Two. Mass production of automobiles, returning GIs, mounting suburban development, technological advancements, and the need for additional schools were among the factors that led to the reshaping of the American built environment. Colleges and universities were experiencing steady increases in enrollment due to the wave of post-war GI students, and institutions of higher learning were especially prone to adopt Modernist architecture for buildings, often on entirely new suburban campuses.

The Boards of Trustees of many educational institutions came to believe that Modernist buildings better served the academic missions of colleges and universities than did structures bedecked with revivalist ornamentation. “Our colleges and universities are charged with a dual assignment – the dissemination of knowledge and the advancement of human thought,”¹⁶ said Harold D. Hauf, Editor-in-Chief of *Architectural Record* in June 1950. Frank G. Lopez, Senior Associate Writer and editor of the *Architectural Record*, spoke directly to this point. “If the student should be inquisitive, then should not the buildings which surround him, at least during the formal period of education, stimulate inquisitiveness as well as appreciation?”¹⁷ Lopez claimed that the aesthetic form of a modern building was intended to challenge the imagination of students. “Unless a college building expresses in its architecture the advancement of thought and dissemination of knowledge which are the college’s reasons for existence, that building has in some degree failed to achieve its purpose.” Lopez went on to state that only fear

¹⁶ Harold D. Hauf, “Toward Modern Architecture on the Campus,” *Architectural Record* Vol. 107 No. 6 (June 1950): 101.

¹⁷ Frank G. Lopez, “College Buildings: Whence Come These Modern Buildings?” *Architectural Record* Vol. 107 No. 6 (June 1950): 102-105.

of innovation and denial of curiosity would allow College Boards of Trustees to tolerate the recreation of a dead style, heavy in sameness and “architecturally inappropriate.”¹⁸ According to Lopez, “However well it [a building] may perform mechanically and physically,” it was inappropriate on a college campus if it failed to function philosophically or even spiritually.¹⁹

The Board of Trustees of Charlotte College resolved to adopt a non-traditional look for the campus. Toward this end it employed the nationally recognized educational consulting firm of Engelhardt, Engelhardt, Leggett and Cornell (EELC) to advise the architect on how best to fashion the campus and its buildings to create a stimulating learning environment within the budget constraints mandated by the State of North Carolina. Noteworthy is the fact that EELC secured the services of Frank G. Lopez to be one of the six educational consultants for the Charlotte College project.²⁰

Not a few educational pundits in the post-World War Two era believed that providing students with the most innovative and stimulating architecture would engender a lifelong appreciation for learning, which hopefully would lead to professional success. The Boards of Trustees at schools such as Florida Southern, the University of St. Thomas, the University of Mary, Oral Roberts University, Vassar College, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, were captivated by the promise of Modernist campuses. Academic institutions increasingly selected architects for their ability to design non-traditional places and spaces.

¹⁸ Lopez, “College Buildings,” 103.

¹⁹ Lopez, 102-105.

²⁰ Frank G. Lopez authored the following articles and books on the planning and development of academic campuses: “Thousands of Schoolmen, Handful of Architects,” *Architectural Record* (April 1956), “Schools for the New Needs: Educational, Social and Economic,” (1956), and “College Students Live Here: A Study of Student Housing” (1961).



Above Left: Fine Arts Center at the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville, AR, Architect Edward Durell Stone. (1951) Right: Dexter M. Ferry Cooperative House, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, Architect Marcel Breuer. (1951)



Above Left: St. Thomas University, Houston, TX, Architect Philip Johnson (1958) Right: Howard Auditorium, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK (1963)



Above Left: University of Mary Church Monastery, Bismarck, ND, Architect Marcel Breuer. (1963). Right: Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, Architect Eero Saarinen. (1966).

Sarah Gibson Blanding (1898-1985), President of Vassar College from 1946 to 1964, was among the group of prescient academic executives who grasped the benefits of Modernist architecture in the years following World War Two. Not to be dismissed is the

fact that her tenure coincided with that of Bonnie E. Cone, the President of Charlotte College. Blanding believed that a vital way of visibly expressing Vassar's commitment to education was to embrace the most contemporary architectural styles available. Thus, when the need arose for new campus buildings, Blanding reached out to Marcel Breuer, a prominent advocate of Modernism who designed many structures for colleges and universities.²¹ It is within this context that one can understand why Cone and the Charlotte College Board of Trustees selected A. G. Odell, Jr., Charlotte's major proponent of non-traditional architecture, to fashion the Charlotte College Campus.²²

²¹ Sarah Gibson Blanding Papers, 1946 - 1985, Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Correspondence to Marcel Breuer, Vassar College Special Collections, Box 5, Folder 5.

²² Stewart Gray, Survey and Research Report on the Robert and Elizabeth Lassiter House, <http://cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/surveys&rlassiter.htm> (accessed: August 20, 2012).

MODERNISM COMES TO NORTH CAROLINA (DEAN KAMPHOEFNER)

“North Carolina architecture is slowly being revitalized. Someday faddism and eclecticism will disappear and the devitalized and sterile forces will be defeated. That is the challenge for Tar Heel architecture today.” – Charlotte News Editorial²³

Bonnie Cone wrote letters to several universities concerning building plans and governmental construction requirements. In her letters she requested pertinent facts and figures regarding building practices, estimations of student body growth, and other information such as architectural plans that were most suited to construct a university campus. In April 1959, Louise Hall, Head of the Humanities Division of the Library at the University of North Carolina, responded to one of Bonnie Cone’s inquiries. Cone was specifically seeking data that would assist Charlotte College in drawing up a master plan for the campus. Hall urged Cone to contact the North Carolina State College Library in Raleigh, stating that it might have more “practical and technical sources to use with the project because of the architectural curriculum in the School of Design there.”²⁴

Odell was not alone in championing Modernist design in North Carolina. Modern architecture found its way into the Tar Heel State largely through the School of Design (SOD) at N.C. State College, now N. C. State University. The School of Design had a profound impact on architecture in North Carolina by rejecting traditional styles, (including the popular Colonial Revival). The SOD sought to establish and propagate an innovative, contemporary style for North Carolina and the South.

²³ “Goodbye to Gothic and Williamsburg,” *Charlotte News*, January 10, 1955.

²⁴ Charlotte College Records (1949-1960), University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 2, Folder 38.

Henry Leveke Kamphoefner (1907-1990) was the founding Dean of the SOD in 1948. Kamphoefner had a passion for Modernism and lost no time in placing his design philosophy at the core of the “State College” curriculum. His influence on the institution is evident in the 1948-49 SOD catalog, which highlighted the SOD program as one “that is devoted to the development of an organic and indigenous architecture; its accompanying landscape architecture and the related arts, to meet the needs and conditions of the southern region.”²⁵ Under Kamphoefner’s guidance, dozens of architectural students were steeped in the principles of Modernism. It is reasonable to assume that Odell benefited from the cultural milieu that Kamphoefner fashioned in the Tar Heel State. Kamphoefner admired Odell’s work, as he expressed in a letter to the pastor of Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church, Odell’s client, “I congratulate you and your committee again on bringing to one of the smaller North Carolina communities an outstanding example of first-rate contemporary architecture.”²⁶



Dean Henry Kamphoefner, circa 1965.²⁷

²⁵ Henry Leveke Kamphoefner Papers (1924 – 1990), North Carolina State University Library, Special Collections, Box 4, Folder 1.

²⁶ Bishir and Brown *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*, 422. Letter from Henry Kamphoefner to the Rev. R. F. Lineberger, dated January 18, 1957.

²⁷ Henry L. Kamphoefner Portraits (1957-1985), North Carolina State University Library, Special Collections, Box 19, Folder 1.

Kamphoefner worked tirelessly to recruit distinguished Modernists, because he believed “the faculty was the key to the school.”²⁸ He hired just over thirty new teachers, all of whom were top-ranked leaders in the architectural profession. Among the recruits were George Matsumoto, an associate of noted American architect Eero Saarinen, United Nations headquarters design team member Matthew Nowicki, a Modernist from the United Kingdom, and Eduardo Catalano of Buenos Aires.²⁹ Kamphoefner revamped the entire curriculum to incorporate Modernist design theory and instituted a distinguished visitors program, which hosted some of the most prominent Modernist architects of the day, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller. All worked directly with SOD students. Kamphoefner was indefatigable in his efforts to elevate the School of Design from relative obscurity to a level of national prominence.

²⁸ Bishir, Brown, Lounsbury, and Wood, 421.

²⁹ *Architects and Builders: Henry Leveke Kamphoefner Biography*
<http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000043> (accessed: June 14, 2012).

THE ARCHITECT, A.G. ODELL, JR.

“Architecture is 90 percent business and 10 percent art.” –Louis Kahn (Often quoted by Odell in interviews.)³⁰

Odell, a native of Concord, N.C., graduated from the School of Architecture at Cornell University in 1935. Cornell was among the Ivy League schools that were incorporating the teachings of Modernism into their courses of study. As early as 1928, the College of Architecture at Cornell structured its academic programs around the concepts of Modernism and was one of the first Colleges to have an educational curriculum shaped primarily by Modernist principles.

Associate Professor George Young, Jr. served as Dean of the College of Architecture at Cornell University from 1928 until 1937 and was, like Kamphoefner several years later, an ardent supporter of Modernist architecture.³¹ During his early years as an associate professor, Young designed several campus buildings and in 1934 established the City and Regional Planning program in collaboration with the Cornell’s College of Engineering.³² In 1921, Young authored the book *Descriptive Geometry* and in 1927 *Mechanics of Materials*. Both works championed the Modernist movement in architecture. Young encouraged independence and innovation and built a staff with diverse approaches to design.³³ While there is no record that Odell had a class with Young, Odell would certainly have been impacted by the design principles advanced in

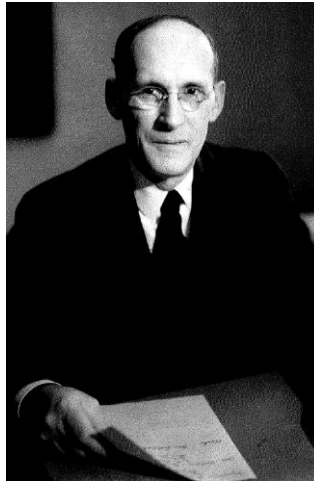
³⁰ Bishir and Brown *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*, 422.

³¹ Cornell University Faculty Memorial Statement, <http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/17813>, (accessed June 26, 2012).

³² The Art of Building, Cornell University Library <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/Aap-exhibit/AAP8.html> (accessed August 29, 2012).

³³ Ibid.

the curriculum Young devised at the College of Architecture at Cornell University from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s.



Dr. George Young, Jr., 1935.³⁴

After his graduation from Cornell and before his arrival in Charlotte, Odell spent one year (1935-36) at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, a leading art school in Paris that divided the fields of study into two curriculums: the "Academy of Painting and Sculpture" and the "Academy of Architecture." Both programs emphasized classical arts and architecture from Ancient Greek and Roman culture. One can only speculate about the reasons for his year in Paris.

Upon his return from Europe, Odell took an apprenticeship with Harrison & Foulhoux (formerly Hood & Foulhoux), the architectural firm that had designed the Rockefeller Center in New York.³⁵ In 1938, he went to work for Raymond Loewy, the French-born industrial designer who fashioned sleek, new looks for an array of products, from Studebaker automobiles, the General Motors Greyhound Scenicruiser and even

³⁴ Barrett Gallagher Photographs and Film Collection #3956, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Box 2, Folder 9.

³⁵ Benjamin T. Rook, AIA, *The Legacy of Architecture In Honor of Arthur Gould Odell, Jr.* Odell Associates Inc. Planners, Architects, Engineers (New York: Newcomen Society of the United States, 1987), 3.

Sears Roebuck refrigerators.³⁶ Loewy was described as a man with “a continental natty style,” a fashion of dress which Odell must have admired, because he adopted that form of business attire during his years in Charlotte.³⁷ It is reasonable to assume that Loewy had a profound and comprehensive impact upon Odell, especially in encouraging him to eschew traditional ornamentation.



Above: Loewy's designs: The Sears Roebuck 'Coldspot' refrigerator (1935) and the General Motors Greyhound Scenicruiser (1954).³⁸

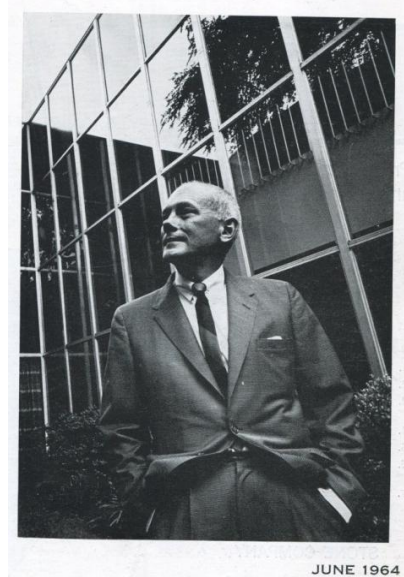
When Odell came to Charlotte as a trained architect in 1939 and established his firm, Odell & Associates, most of Charlotte's buildings were conservative and traditional. “There was nothing here,” Odell remembered, “that illustrated the honesty of stone as stone, steel as steel, glass as glass. Everybody was still wallowing in the Colonial heritage.”³⁹ Odell sought to transform Charlotte's architectural landscape by eliminating the city's predilection to erect structures that harkened to the past.

³⁶ Rook, *The Legacy of Architecture In Honor of Arthur Gould Odell, Jr.*, 3.

³⁷ Rook, *The Legacy of Architecture In Honor of Arthur Gould Odell, Jr.*, 3.

³⁸ Raymond Loewy's Designs, <http://www.timbouckley.com/news/?cat=14> (accessed December 4, 2012).

³⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, April 23, 1988.



A.G. Odell, Jr., June 1964.

A. G. Odell, Jr. returned to Charlotte after serving in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) during World War Two and resumed his practice.⁴⁰ He wasted no time in leaving his mark on the city and soon established himself as an innovative and well-respected architect. Clients who desired the “latest and best” increasingly went to Odell. During the 1950s, Odell & Associates was one of the largest and most influential architectural firms in North Carolina. In a book marketing his business, Odell described the overall character of the firm. “Our achievements in aesthetics are obtained through the creation of efficient and economical buildings as developed by the teamwork of the talented and skilled professionals of our staff,” he wrote. Odell insisted that he and his associates always considered the client’s needs. “. . . Regardless of how many design awards we may win . . . our primary consideration,” he stated, “always must be to create a design within the predetermined budget and to do this so expertly that each project we

⁴⁰ Biography on Arthur Gould (A.G.) Odell Jr., FAIA, PE,
<http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/odell.htm> (accessed August 30, 2012).

agree to undertake – whether larger or small – fulfills its operational requirements completely, has artistic merit, and above all, is a sound investment for our client.”⁴¹

Odell became known as a man who thought very highly of his work and of himself. Humility was not one of his principal traits.⁴² He wore custom dress suits and drove around Charlotte in his British green racing convertible. Odell was a well-groomed man with a determined spirit and competitive drive. He had little interest in other people’s feelings, except those of his clients, of course. Odell was somewhat of a sycophant. The son of a prominent textile manufacturer, he socialized frequently with Charlotte’s civic and business leaders.⁴³ Odell’s family had long been involved in the Carolina textile industry. His great-grandfather, John Milton Odell, a cotton manufacturer and founder of the J. M. Odell Company, bought a cotton spinning mill in Bynum, N. C., in 1886. The Bynum mill that J. M. Odell purchased sold much of its yarn to Odell weaving plants, spread across Concord, N. C.⁴⁴ “In a society where class connection still counted for much, young Odell had automatic entry to the offices of the area’s mill owners and businessmen,”⁴⁵ writes local historian Thomas Hanchett. Although not kindhearted, Odell had a genuine charisma that made him, and by extension his designs, alluring to prospective clients.

⁴¹ Biography on Arthur Gould (A.G.) Odell Jr., FAIA, PE, <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/odell.htm> (accessed August 30, 2012).

⁴² In 2000, J.N. Pease, Jr., chief designer for J. N. Pease Associates from 1950-1980, told Dr. Dan L. Morrill that he saw Odell slap his wife in the face at a social event.

⁴³ Lew Powell, “A Designing Man, Looking Back on the Career A.G. Odell Built,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 15, 1982.

⁴⁴ Marjorie W. Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South* (Anderson, South Carolina: James R. Young, 1963), pp. 156-161.

⁴⁵ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 202.

By 1957, Odell was strident in his support of Modernism.⁴⁶ Odell, for example, passionately defended a proposed Modernist chapel on the campus of the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado against critics who thought it was ugly. When Odell learned that the U.S. House of Representatives had voted to withhold funds to construct the Modernist style chapel, Odell virulently chastised the politicians. “Congress should do less meddling in esthetics, about which they apparently know nothing at all,” said Odell. “Congress is like the average ignoramus, who says he doesn’t know anything about art, but he does know what he likes.”⁴⁷



United States Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel, completed in 1962. The architect was Walter Netsch of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Odell is remembered as a hard taskmaster but one who spoke honestly and with unbending candor, if not always with proper propriety. According to Jack Claiborne, a reporter and later associate editor of the *Charlotte Observer*, “Odell could pack a

⁴⁶ In contrast with the modern design of Charlotte College and other institutional buildings in North Carolina and across the country, the leaders of Wake Forest University and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation selected the Georgian style, the same architecture that had been employed on its old campus, for its new campus design. This style choice was incomprehensible to Dean Kamphoefner, A.G. Odell, Jr. and many other North Carolina architects who participated in a 1948 questionnaire sent by the *Winston Salem Journal and Sentinel*. Distributed to 160 architects, of whom 20 responded, and only one of twenty favored the traditional design, this survey provides insight into the mind of an architect working in the South during the mid-twentieth century.

⁴⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, August 8, 1957.

sentence full of profanity like no one I'd ever seen before... and I grew up playing sports, where vulgarity was the very litany of the language."⁴⁸ By the time he was selected as the architect for the Charlotte College Campus in 1958, Odell had demonstrably established himself as the most outspoken supporter of Modernism in Charlotte.⁴⁹

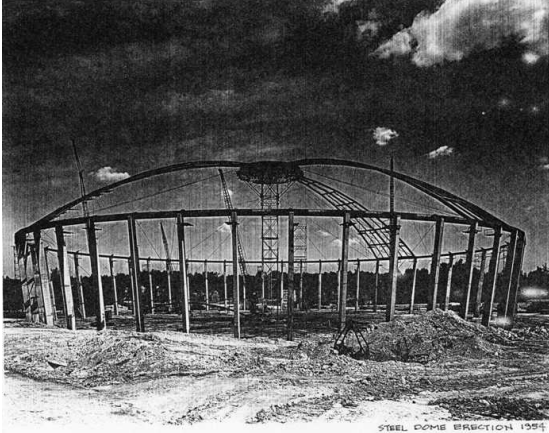
Many of Odell's early projects were schools and civic buildings. Odell's incorporation of geometric and Modernist design elements was evident in these structures: the Second Ward High School Gymnasium (1948), Double Oaks Elementary School (1950), the Charlotte Coliseum and Ovens Auditorium Complex (1955), and the Garinger High School campus buildings and plan (1960). The Charlotte Coliseum project solidified Odell's position as a leading modernist architect in North Carolina and the Southeast. At the time of its completion in 1956, the Coliseum's 334-foot diameter steel "dome" was one of the largest in the world.⁵⁰ This single feature garnered the most attention. *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture*, and even *Look* magazine highlighted the structure. The Charlotte Coliseum was the first building by a Charlotte architect to be featured in a foreign architectural publication.⁵¹ The August 1956 issue of *Architecturra*, an Italian journal, included a two-page article on the construction of the building's imposing dome.

⁴⁸ Jack Claiborne. Interview by Mary Carolyn Dominick. Video, Charlotte, N. C., June 30, 2012. Claiborne was a former *Charlotte Observer* reporter, assigned to cover stories of schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

⁴⁹ Bishir, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*, 361.

⁵⁰ *Look*, July 1956, p. 25.

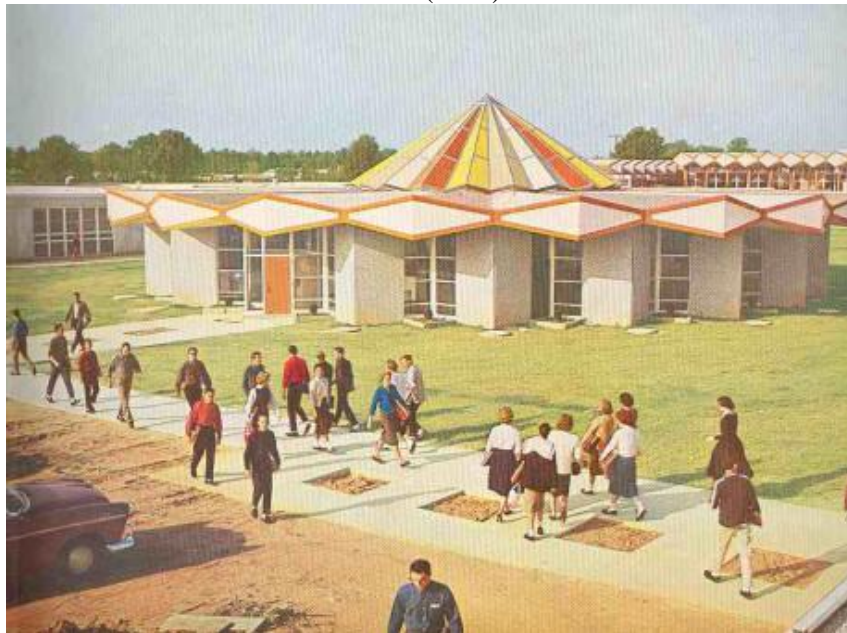
⁵¹ Gray, Lee. *The Charlotte Council of Architects: 1953-1959*, Chapter One, 9.



Above Left: Charlotte Coliseum Dome under construction, circa 1954. Above Right: Ovens Auditorium under construction, photograph taken on July 22, 1954.



Above Left: Second Ward High School Gymnasium (1948). Above Right: Double Oaks Elementary School (1950). Below: Above: Rendering of the proposed Library for Garinger High School (1960).



THE CHARLOTTE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM (1958-1963)

“The time is now: Never before in our history has the time been so right for the growth of community and area colleges.” – Governor Luther Hartwell Hodges

On September 23, 1946, the State of North Carolina opened the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina with an enrollment of 278 students.⁵² Classes were initially held in the evening at Charlotte Central High School on Elizabeth Avenue. The range of programs offered included three divisions: a college transfer curriculum leading to an associate of arts degree, a vocational training program, and an accelerated high school unit. In 1949, the state closed the center; and Charlotte College was established as a two-year institution under the direction of Charlotte’s City School Board. The college was originally funded by student tuition payments and subsequently by local property taxes.⁵³ As early as 1957, enrollment had increased to 492. It had become apparent that the school had a reasonable prospect for growing substantially and therefore needed to establish its own campus to accommodate an increasing number of students.⁵⁴

On March 25, 1957, a meeting between representatives of North Carolina Community Colleges and the North Carolina Board of Higher Education was held in Raleigh.⁵⁵ At this event details such as prospective methods for the financing of schools and the procedures for appointing trustees were discussed. This meeting resulted in the Advisory Budget Commission recommending that one and a half million dollars be

⁵² Ken Sanford, *Charlotte and UNC Charlotte: Growing Up Together* (Charlotte, N.C.: UNC Charlotte Press, 1996), 9.

⁵³ Sanford, *Charlotte and UNC Charlotte*, 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, March 25, 1957.

appropriated for state community colleges.⁵⁶ This proposal went before the Appropriations Committee of the state Legislature prior to becoming a local bond issue for the voters of Mecklenburg County.⁵⁷ On November 4, 1958, the people of Mecklenburg County approved a \$975,000 bond issue, making Charlotte College eligible to receive \$575,000 from the State of North Carolina, which eventually led to the purchase of a 248-acre tract of land for the new campus in 1958.⁵⁸ The passage of this bond issue made it possible for Charlotte College to grow, physically as well as academically.

In 1958, the average cost of attending Charlotte College was \$210 per annum. The tuition costs of other state colleges ranged from \$1,500 to \$2,000.⁵⁹ Funds for the Charlotte College buildings came from the \$975,000 in bonds approved by Mecklenburg County residents in November 1958.⁶⁰ This revenue enabled the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System to accept the \$575,000 in matching funds from the state.⁶¹ The North Carolina Board of Higher Education and the North Carolina Advisory Budget Commission stipulated that all architectural renderings had to be approved by the North Carolina Department of Administration, a branch of government that oversaw and regulated building construction and contracting for goods and services on all properties receiving state funding. Before the final selection of any design scheme could be adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, the Department of Administration had to endorse the plans. As part of this process, proposed drawings had

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, August 30, 1957.

⁵⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, December 15, 1958.

⁵⁹ "Charlotte Bond Issue Faces Voters," *Charlotte Observer*, October 31, 1958.

⁶⁰ "College Site Official Now," *Charlotte Observer*, February 5, 1959.

⁶¹ "Board Agrees To Buy," *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1958.

to be submitted to the educational consulting firm of Engelhardt, Engelhardt, Cornell and Leggett (EECL) for its evaluation and comment, and then to The North Carolina Department of Administration before final approval could be issued by the State Advisory Budget Commission. If revisions were needed, Odell and Associates would review recommendations of the educational consulting firm and the Department of Administration, draft changes to reflect these recommendations, and submit the revised plans to EECL and the Department of Administration. Then the review process would proceed until all appropriate agencies had approved the final plan.⁶²

⁶² The North Carolina Department of Administration initially rejected the portico columns on the Kennedy Building and the custom-designed windows on the exteriors of Macy and Kennedy because of their projected costs. The Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System was able to persuade the North Carolina Department of Administration to withdraw its rejection. The Board, with Odell's concurrence, argued that these features would make the first buildings on campus more architecturally distinctive.

CAMPUS SITE SELECTION PROCESS

Businessman and Charlotte College Board of Trustee Member Oliver Rowe recalled going to the site with Bonnie Cone when the only buildings on the land were a barn and a silo left from earlier farming days: *"She reached down and grasped a handful of earth, let it sift through her fingers and said, 'This is the place. This is the place.'"*⁶³

The Buildings and Grounds Committee of the Charlotte Community College System was directed to conduct a comprehensive study of the quadrants of Mecklenburg County to determine the most suitable location for the campus.⁶⁴ Thomas M. Belk, John Paul Lucas, Dr. Thomas Watkins, and Committee Chairman W.A. Kennedy were Committee members in 1957, the critical year of site selection. In order to determine the location that best fit the needs of a growing institution, the Building and Grounds Committee consulted data such as geographical distribution of presently enrolled students, transportation studies, accessibility to Charlotte and other population centers, modern highways and the secondary road network, the availability of land for future expansion, acquisition and development costs.⁶⁵

The Building and Grounds Committee, using the data enumerated above, established a list of criteria against which to measure the suitability of potential sites. Among the determining factors were such items as "possible expansion to about 600 acres, room for single or two-story buildings to spread out rather than be forced into more expensive multi-story construction, access to major well-established highways, good

⁶³ Dan Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, 2001), 86.

⁶⁴ The Building and Grounds Committee was later referred to in the minutes of the Board of Trustees of Charlotte College as the Site Selection Committee once Charlotte College had its own Board of Trustees.

⁶⁵ Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

drainage of the land, and land that lends itself to the planning of beautiful buildings.”⁶⁶

Realtor W. Cleve Davis of Davis and Davis Realty Company conducted an extensive survey of available land from March until August, 1957.⁶⁷ The Committee examined several locations in its investigation of the most practical and ideal site for the college. According to the minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, four prospective sites were seriously considered. They were: Morrocroft, the estate of former N.C. Governor Cameron Morrison, the previous Naval Ammunition Depot in southwestern Mecklenburg County, a tract of land cleared for urban renewal in Charlotte’s Second Ward or Brooklyn neighborhood, and a 248-acre tract of land wedged between Highway 29 and Highway 49.⁶⁸ Addison Reese, Chairman of the Board’s Buildings and Grounds Committee from 1958 until 1963, and Chairman W.A. Kennedy in 1957-58, were both heavily involved in this process, although Kennedy was more important. As the Chairs of the Committee, both men were responsible for presenting site options and the advantages and disadvantages of each to the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System.

As early as 1957, the Board of Trustees and Charlotte city planners anticipated that the school would increase substantially in the size of its student body. It is clear from the minutes that even in these early planning stages, the members of the Board of Trustees expected that the school would eventually become a four-year college. The North Carolina Board of Higher Education, involved in the site selection due to the passage in 1957 of the North Carolina Community College Act, stressed that community

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

colleges should be located on expandable sites and insisted that this attribute was essential for Charlotte College since demographic projections for 1958 estimated that more than 20% of all the high school graduates in North Carolina would live within a 50-mile radius of Charlotte.⁶⁹

The Board of Higher Education also wanted to ensure that the campus of Charlotte College would be readily accessible to the largest possible number of enrollees. Since Charlotte College was to be a commuter college, it obviously would also need a significant amount of space for parking. Dr. Stanton Leggett of the nationally known educational planning firm of Engelhardt, Engelhardt, Leggett and Cornell, affirmed this need when he advised J. Murrey Atkins, Chairman of the Advisory Board, and members of the Site Committee that the new location of the college campus should contain at least 600 acres.⁷⁰

Three of the four prospective sites for the campus, Morrocroft, Second Ward, and the location of the former Naval Ammunition Depot, were eliminated due to the incompatibility of land uses contiguous to each. The majority of the dairy and crop farmland in the immediate area of Highway 49, however, was still owned by local families, thereby increasing the likelihood of affordably acquiring additional land and allowing the Board of Trustees to accumulate substantial acreage.

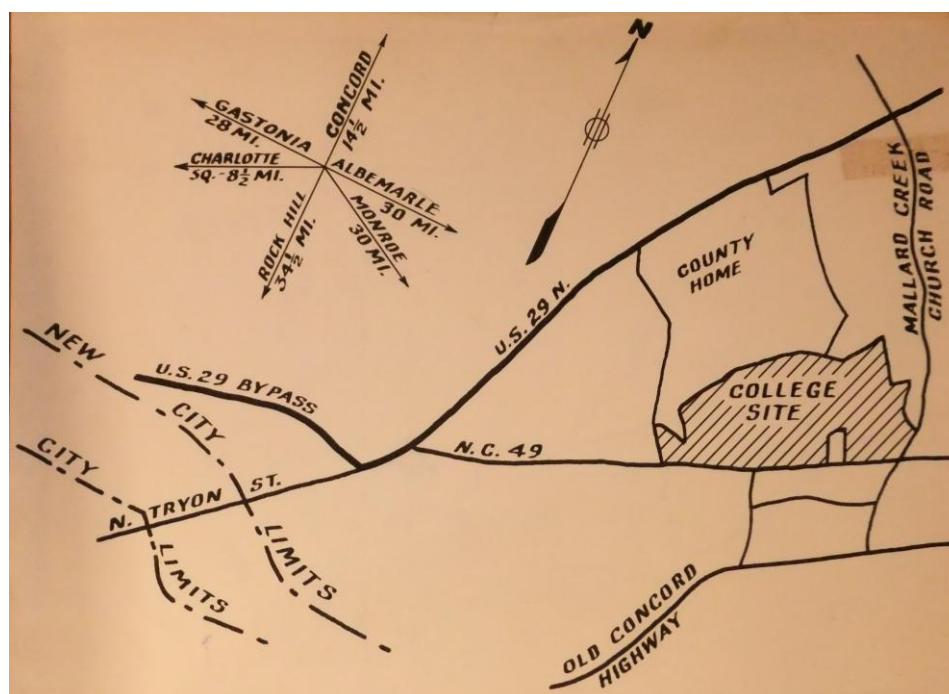
In September 1957, Mary Alexander, a champion of higher education and former teacher in the nearby Newell Community, donated roughly five acres of land to the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System even before the final deeds for

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 1, Book 1.

⁷⁰ Proposal for Charlotte College Site (dated September 23, 1957), Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

the site had been filed. “It’s important that the base of anything be strong,” she declared. “And I don’t ever want this land near the base of the college to ever be cluttered up with unsightly business places.”⁷¹ Mrs. Alexander’s gift provided for a 100-foot thoroughfare which led from Mallard Creek Church Road through her property, feeding directly into the 248-acre tract of land wedged between Highway 29 and Highway 49.

Mrs. Alexander was not the sole owner of adjoining land who donated property to the fledgling college. Other residents of the neighborhood generously gave what they could afford to aid the college, which they anticipated would enrich educational opportunities for residents of Charlotte and its environs. They included Ruth Boyte, John A. Kirk, Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Kimbrell and Tom Mattox. The total land donated was approximately ten acres, collectively valued at approximately \$20,000.⁷²



Map of future college site as shown in the Special Report #13 of the Buildings and Grounds Committee for the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, dated 1958.⁷³

⁷¹ *Charlotte Observer*, September 15, 1957.

⁷² *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1958.

⁷³ Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

The Highway 49 site did provide ample room for growth. In addition to the donated land, to the immediate west of the 248-acre parcel was land owned by Mecklenburg County, the site of the Mecklenburg County Home, a residential facility for the indigent elderly. One could reasonably assume that Charlotte College could acquire this land by purchase or donation at some point in the near future. Furthermore, there were no industrial or low cost housing developments in the vicinity of the Highway 49 property, and students could readily commute to the site from Concord, Salisbury, Kannapolis, Mooresville, Shelby, Gastonia, Monroe and other neighboring towns. These factors were among many that prompted Buildings and Grounds Committee Chairman W.A. Kennedy to be a strong advocate for the purchase of the Highway 49 site.

In his essay *The University of North Carolina in Charlotte, 1946-1965*, Elmer Garinger, superintendent of the Charlotte City Schools, commented on Kennedy's vigorous spirit and ever present determination, "Woodie had a drive that was unmatched . . ."⁷⁴ Kennedy believed that the selection of the Highway 49 site made the most sense geographically and economically. In a summation of the Site Committee's findings, Kennedy wrote:

"All proposed sites have been carefully and prayerfully considered. The writer along with groups of interested people—school officials, engineers, and laymen—have spent many hours and many Sundays traveling all over Mecklenburg in the quest of the best available site. We believe the proposed site on Highway 49 is the choice location in all of Mecklenburg."⁷⁵

Kennedy died on May 11, 1958, just before the appointment of the first Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System and prior to the closing on the 248 acres of

⁷⁴ Elmer Henry Garinger Papers, University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Manuscript Collection 70.

⁷⁵ Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

land that would serve as the new campus. Therefore he did not live to see the completion of the project for which he had so tirelessly labored. Clearly, W. A. “Woody” Kennedy was instrumental in the development of Charlotte College. In honor of “Woody” Kennedy, one of the campus’s first buildings and the most architecturally distinctive bears his name.



Aerial photograph of the Charlotte College site as it looked during the time of purchase in 1959.

The Site Committee was convinced that the tract located just off N.C. Highway 49 met all the desired criteria. The trustees therefore unanimously agreed on August 12, 1957, to purchase the 248-acre parcel of land for \$186,200 for the new site of Charlotte College.⁷⁶ The real estate closing on the plot of land was not made official until funding from the North Carolina Community College Act became available. On September 16,

⁷⁶ “Board Agrees To Buy,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1958.

1958, Addison Reese, Building and Grounds Committee Chair, presented the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System and journalists from the *Charlotte Observer* a detailed report of the committee's findings—that “the Highway 29/49 land was the finest available at the most affordable price and offered the best prospects for expansion as the college grows in the future.”⁷⁷

Now that Charlotte College had a site, it needed buildings. Planning for the first two structures was well underway in 1959. The Liberal Arts and Administration building (later Macy) and the Science and Engineering building (later Kennedy), were scheduled to be completed by 1961.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1958.

⁷⁸ Charlotte College Records, Building Plans, (1949-1965) Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 2, Folder 38.

ARCHITECT SELECTION (1958)

“An architect is the drawer of dreams.” – Grace McGarvie



Rendering of the Interior of the Special Collections Room in the Charlotte College Library, by Odell & Associates, 1963.

Minutes and correspondences show that three firms, all based in Charlotte, competed for the contract to plan and design the campus: A.G. Odell Jr. and Associates, Walter Hook, and J. N. Pease and Company. Walter Hook's firm, however, was only mentioned in the correspondence and was evidently not a serious contender. Odell & Associates and J.N. Pease and Company, firms that often competed with one another for commissions, were well respected designers of Modernist architecture. Both had designed schools for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and were familiar with the regulatory and budgetary constraints associated with publicly-funded projects. Walter

Bost, a former Odell architect from 1950 until 2000, stated: “After the War, everyone was having babies, the babies grew into little people who needed to be educated... schools were popping up everywhere, and they were our bread and butter.”⁷⁹

Odell’s firm, as noted earlier, had designed many of Charlotte’s civic structures and primary schools. But in an article in the *Charlotte Observer*, dated June 2, 1957, Odell declared: “What I’d really like to design is a university.”⁸⁰ The article described the center of downtown Charlotte as an area where “his [Odell’s] firm is building some of the biggest and, according to the awards he’s won, best buildings in Charlotte and the South.”⁸¹



Image from the article, “Odell’s Work Featured,” published in *Southern Architect*, July 1957.

In 1958-1959, Odell would have the opportunity to undertake the project for which he had been aspiring. On November 18, 1958, the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System voted to hire Odell as the architect for Charlotte College and J. N. Pease to design the campus of Carver College (originally Mecklenburg College), an institution also under the Board’s control and exclusively open to African

⁷⁹ Walter Bost. Interview by Mary Carolyn Dominick, Video. Hickory, N.C., May 16, 2011. Bost worked with A.G. Odell, Jr. on the Charlotte College project.

⁸⁰ “Meet Architect A.G. Odell, Jr. – He’s Changing our Skyline!” *Charlotte Observer*, June 2, 1957.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Americans. Archival documents reveal that there was no formal design competition for either project. One can assume that the selection of Odell and Pease resulted from informal processes that drew largely upon personal contacts within Charlotte's business and civic elite. According to the Board's minutes:

"Dr. Beaty moved that two architectural firms be employed – one for Charlotte College and one for Carver College. Mr. Rowe seconded the motion (sic.) and it was passed unanimously. It was moved by Mr. Prince, seconded by Mr. Lucas, that A.G. Odell, Jr., and Associates be employed for Charlotte College. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Garibaldi moved that the Board employ J.N. Pease for Carver. It was seconded by Mr. Rowe and unanimously approved."⁸²



Odell and Pease from *Southern Architect*, January 1962.

St. Andrews Presbyterian College (originally Consolidated Presbyterian College) in Laurinburg, N.C., also planned by Odell's firm in 1959, offers instructive insights into the design philosophy Odell was then advocating for institutions of higher education, including Charlotte College. There are many similarities between the two campuses. Intended to promote a sense of community, the St. Andrews campus features a causeway crossing over a 65-acre lake, connecting the student residence halls and student union on one side and the academic buildings on the other. In keeping with the Modernist tradition, buildings on both campuses have low-lying silhouettes, minimalist ornamentation, and geometric design. Both have sizeable acreage, thereby allowing

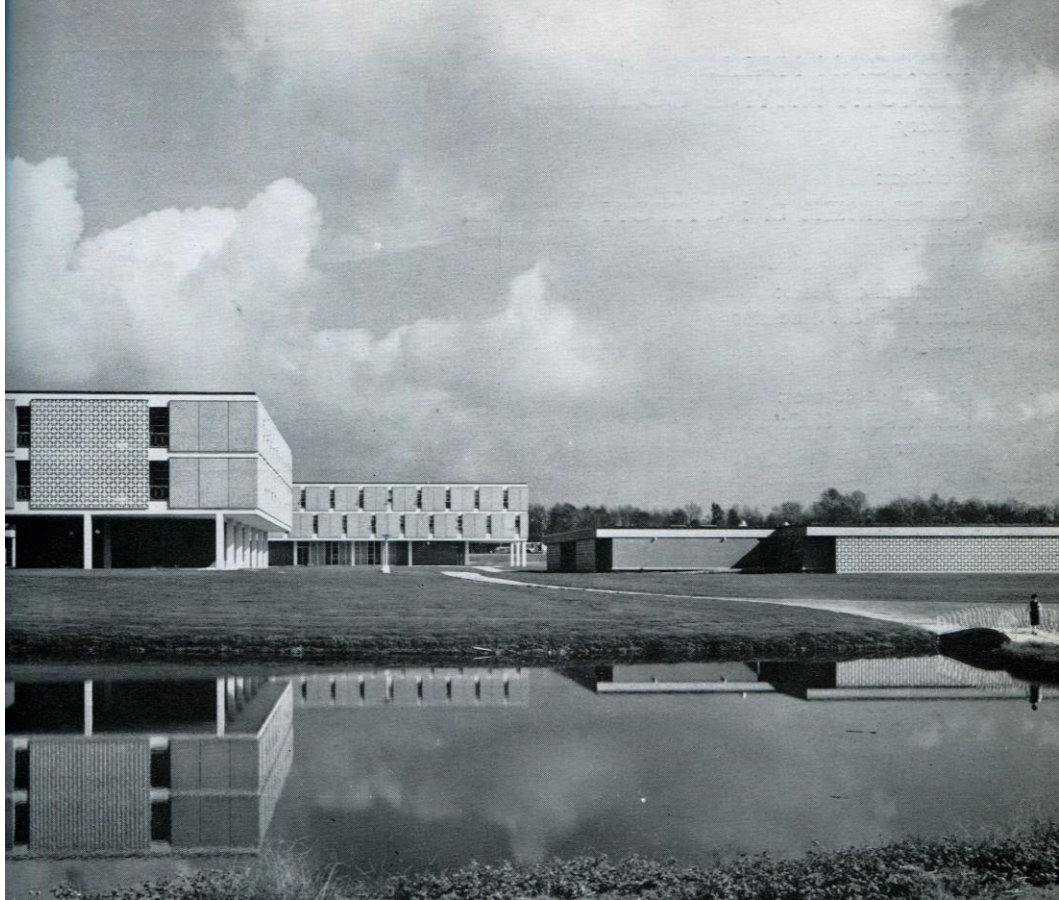
⁸² Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, (1958-1963) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 1, Book 2.

Odell to provide ample space between brick-faced structures of one or two floors on the two campuses. Parking at both schools is mostly on the perimeter.

Bonnie Cone expressed concern that Odell would not have sufficient time to devote to his responsibilities at Charlotte College because of his concurrent commitments at St. Andrews. Cone wrote to Odell on January 25, 1960, expressing her uneasiness. “Having recently seen several articles of publicity for Consolidated Presbyterian College, I am concerned that the firm’s focus is elsewhere.”⁸³ Odell responded on February 2, 1960, stating that “All of us here in the office are most enthusiastic about Charlotte College and we naturally have the utmost interest in its development since it is right here in our home town. We greatly appreciate the privilege of working with you on this project (sic.) and you may be sure that it will continue to receive our best efforts.”⁸⁴ This letter must have assuaged Cone, as the correspondence files show no additional letters of apprehension on this subject.

⁸³ Charlotte College Records, Building Plans, (1949-1960) Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 2, Folder 38.

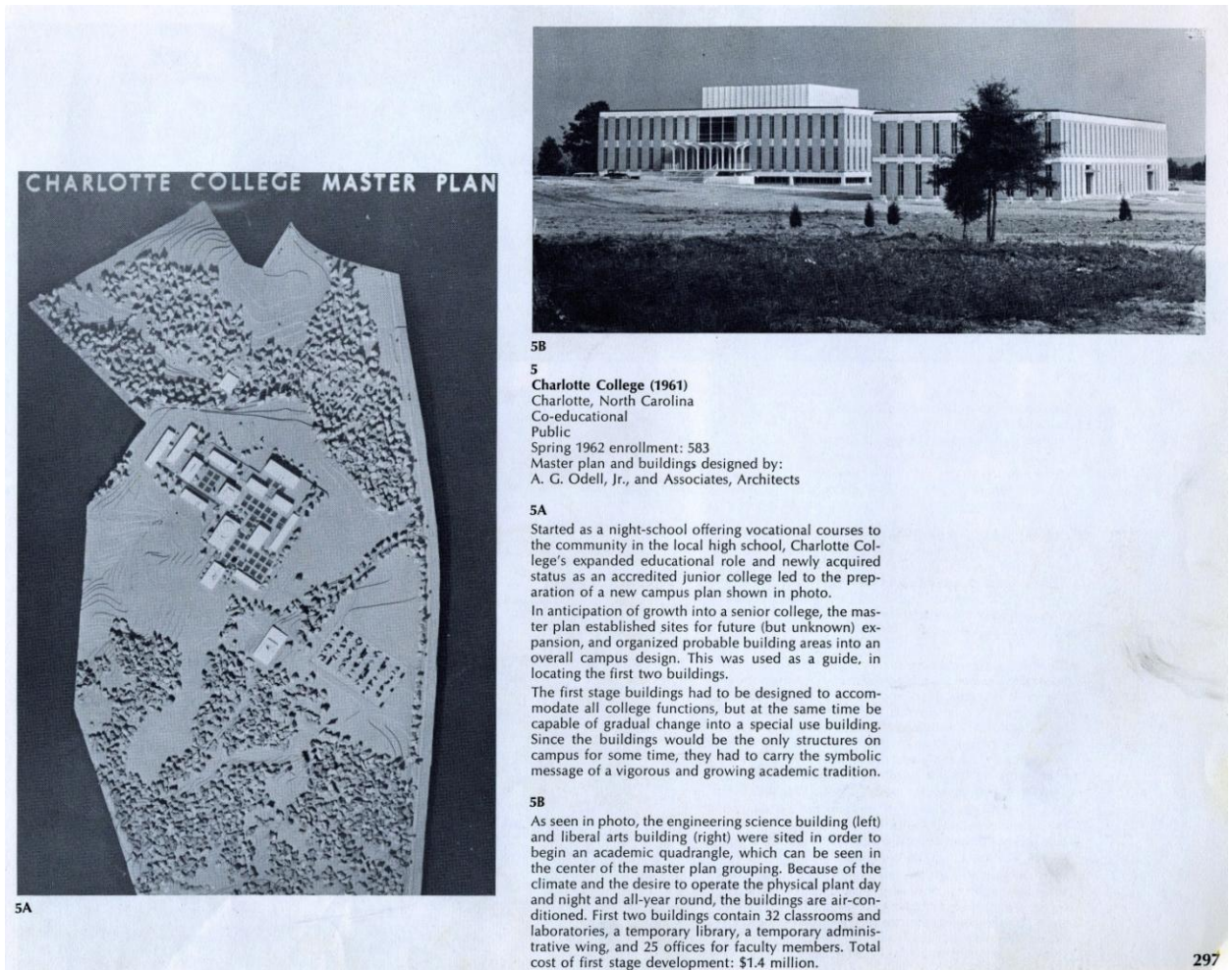
⁸⁴ Ibid.



St. Andrews Presbyterian College, Laurinburg, N.C. as featured in *Southern Architect*, July 1962.

Dr. Lee Gray, Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Architecture at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, described the Charlotte College project as an “architect’s dream.” Gray declared that “the slightly elevated and completely rural campus served as a blank canvas, with which the architect had the opportunity and freedom to design a fresh, new atmosphere.”⁸⁵ Within this context Odell incorporated contemporary methods of architectural design in fashioning the appearance of the Charlotte College buildings.

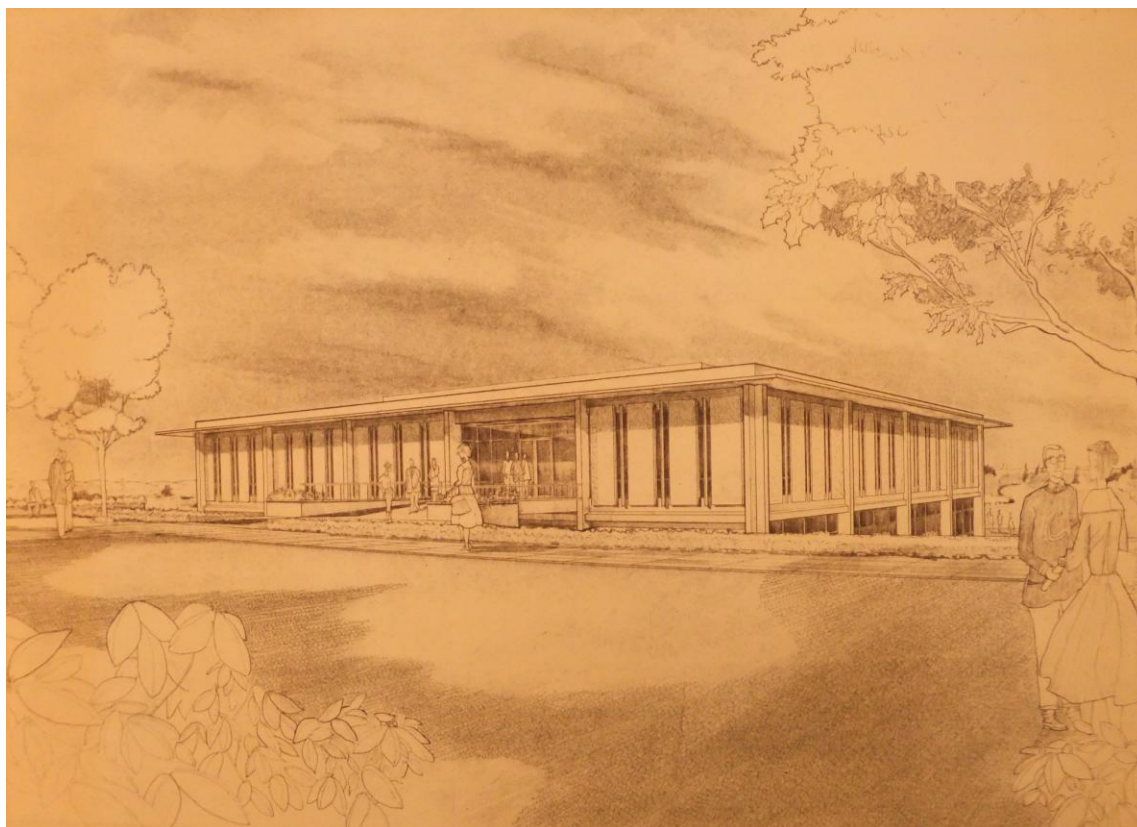
⁸⁵ Lee Gray. Interview by Mary Carolyn Dominick. Video. Charlotte, N. C., August 2, 2012.



The Charlotte College Master Plan as it was featured in Campus Planning, by Richard P. Dober, published in 1963.

CREATING A CAMPUS

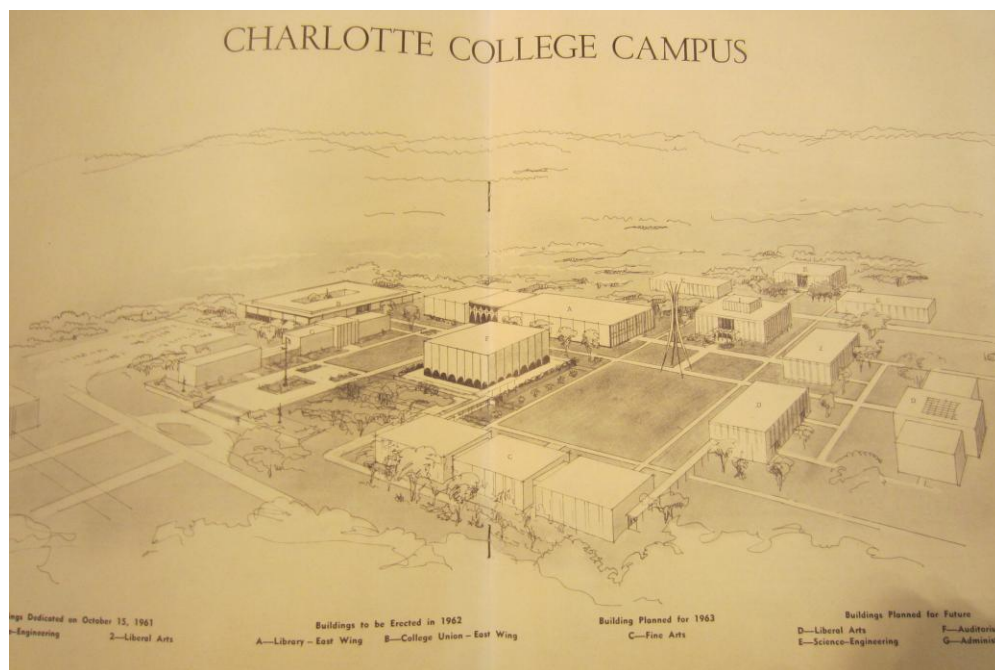
"Some people devote their lives to building monuments to themselves. She has devoted hers to building educational opportunities for others." – Governor James Holshouser on Bonnie Cone



Architectural rendering of the Student Union (Cone Center), Front Elevation (1963).

In the original contract, dated December 12, 1958, between the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System and A. G. Odell, Jr. & Associates, the firm was authorized to design the structures for the campus and to develop a master plan. The “Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect” stipulated that the master plan would serve as a guide to assist the Board in its management of the expanding college. The plan sought to accommodate the anticipated growth of the student body as well as the eventual expansion of the physical campus. Detailed within the original

master plan were the placement of proposed structures and the arrangement of roads and utilities. The contract between the Board and Odell & Associates required that the total cost for the development of the master plan was not to exceed \$10,000.⁸⁶ Much of Odell's master plan was executed in the 1960s, including the core of the campus containing the following buildings: Kennedy (1961), Macy (1961), Garinger (1965), Denny (1965), and Barnard (1969). The original plan also set forth the spatial arrangement of these buildings. The construction of these structures and the space created by their placement speaks to the spatial dynamic that was intended for the original Charlotte College Campus.



Original Master Plan for Charlotte College, 1959. This sketch of campus shows the predicted feel of the grounds.

A.G. Odell's designs for the Charlotte College buildings were in keeping with his beliefs regarding the methods of architectural design for the era in which he lived.

Accordingly, Odell adhered to the core principles of the International Style by creating

⁸⁶ Charlotte College Records, Site Selection (1949-1960) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 9, Folder 226.

buildings that would be attractive without the use of expensive trim or decorative ornamentation that would have no function and that would obscure the building's function. Odell selected this architectural philosophy partly because he was a Modernist and also because of the strict budgetary constraints imposed on the Charlotte College Board of Trustees by the Higher Board of Education for North Carolina.

The New Look: Modern But Dignified

BY DICK RIGBY
News Staff Writer

Charlotte College students in the fall of 1961 will walk into two sparkling buildings at its new campus north of Charlotte. Plans shown trustees this week call for a science and liberal arts building, which together will contain 60,000 square feet of space. The design will be modern but dignified.

The three-story science building will sit on a sloping site at the Highway 49 campus.

CONDITIONAL OKAY

Trustees gave the plans their conditional approval yesterday. A building committee headed by Addison Reese will go over the plans carefully before the final okay is given.

Architect A. G. Odell Jr. told the trustees windows in the two buildings are to be given an unusual treatment.

The windows are 10-inch strips of glass that rise unbroken from floor to ceiling. Between every two strips are fins that project 18 inches from the side of the building.

The usual purpose of windows in air-conditioned buildings is to "punch" holes in the building's side for glass. "The fins will shade one side of the glass strips from the sun all day, except when the sun hits straight-on," a member of the firm explained today.

The science and liberal arts buildings will be the only ones on the campus until the second-phase construction. Voters will have to approve a \$975,000 bond issue this fall before more building can take place.

The second phase will give the college an 18,000-square-foot student center, an 8,000-square-foot administration center and a 22,000-square-foot arts building.

Total cost of the two-phase program will be \$2,050,000.

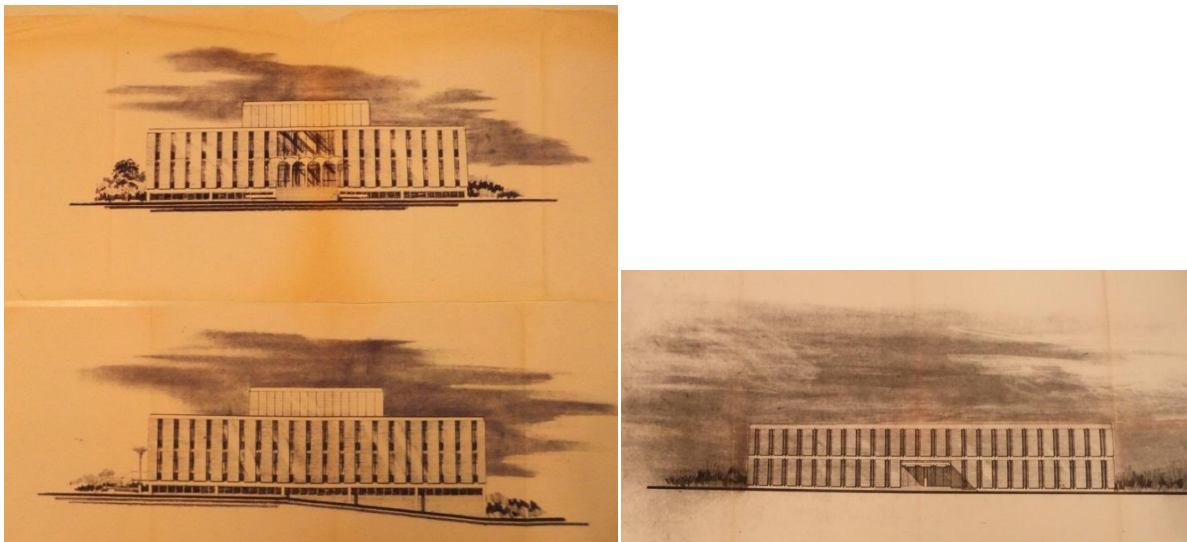


This Is How The New Charlotte College Will Look

Drawings for the first two buildings took Odell and Associates roughly six months to execute. In March 1960 the *Charlotte Observer* described Charlotte College's Science and Engineering building (later known as Kennedy) as "Clean, open, efficient-looking with straight lines – in a word businesslike"⁸⁷ The three-story, 43,000 square foot science building cost \$897,000 to construct, and constituted the first stage of construction

⁸⁷ "The New Look: Modern But Dignified," *Charlotte Observer*, March 17, 1960.

at Charlotte College's new home.⁸⁸ Kennedy initially housed ten classrooms, twelve faculty offices, and a lecture room with elevated seating. Originally designed to serve as a temporary library, the first floor of Kennedy housed 18,000 volumes until the Atkins Library was built in 1963. The Macy building, erected contemporaneously with Kennedy and containing administrative offices and classrooms, measured 18,000-square-feet and was constructed for a cost of \$418,000.⁸⁹



Above left: Kennedy Conceptual Design Renderings (front and rear elevations), Odell, circa 1960.
 Above right: Macy Conceptual Design Rendering of the front façade elevation, Odell, circa 1961.

The custom-made, ten inch windows in both Kennedy and Macy were specially designed to cut down on the cost of heating and cooling. Attenuated aluminum columns are affixed to the outside of the windows and contribute to the Modernist aesthetic of the buildings. They also, by shading one side of the window for part of the day, lessen the impact of the sun on the internal temperature. Considerable care was made in determining the exterior appearance of the buildings. For instance, the brick selected for Kennedy and Macy was manufactured exclusively in North Carolina out of red Carolina

⁸⁸ Building Costs, Replacement Values, and Areas, Fact Book, 2005-2006.

⁸⁹ Building Costs, Replacement Values, and Areas, Fact Book, 2005-2006.

clay.⁹⁰ The Board of Trustees urged Odell to utilize as much of the central space in both buildings as possible. Therefore, after numerous sets (seven) of conceptual and preliminary drawings, Odell incorporated double corridors with laboratories between them for the Science and Engineering Building (later Kennedy) and placed the classrooms along the outer walls.⁹¹



Kennedy and Macy, 1963.

Correspondence and full sets of plans indicate that Odell & Associates listened to the needs and wants of its client and made changes in keeping with the Board's suggestions and requests. In one instance, Bonnie Cone asked several faculty members for their ideas regarding the design of the interior spaces of the two buildings. A mathematics professor expressed concern about the lack of adequate storage space in

⁹⁰ Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Charlotte Community College System, (1958-1963) University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 1, Book 2.

⁹¹ "Charlotte College Likes It Fine," *Charlotte Observer*, October 21, 1959.

Kennedy and asked that Odell revise the plans. “Your architect is clearly not aware of the housekeeping issues that can arise due to lack of storage....” She continued: “a certain amount of space is necessary for the proper functioning of a classroom environment...”⁹²

The very next day Cone wrote to Odell, requesting that storage space be made available to house the personal belongings of students. The final set of plans (set seven) for the Kennedy building depict “coat closets” in the rectangular spaces on the perimeters of each of the classroom units. Clearly, Odell heeded Cone’s advice and responded affirmatively to the faculty member’s request.



Architect A.G. Odell’s rendering of the Kennedy and Macy buildings, (1959), as shown on the cover of the program for the Groundbreaking Ceremony.

In the fall of 1961 students stepped onto the brand new Charlotte College campus for the first time. In a letter to A.G. Odell, Jr. dated September 13, 1961, J. Murrey Atkins wrote: “I believe we have gotten a great deal for our money, they are attractive without being extravagant, and appear very functional and conveniently arranged. We

⁹² Bonnie Ethel Cone Manuscript Collection 112, University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Correspondence from faculty member to Bonnie Cone.

are grateful to you for your large part in this new landmark in Mecklenburg County and in the Piedmont Carolinas.”⁹³

⁹³ Charlotte College Records (1949-1965), University of North Carolina at Charlotte Library, Box 2, Folder 38.

PRESERVATION OF THE EXTANT STRUCTURES OF CHARLOTTE COLLEGE

"A country without a past has the emptiness of a barren continent; and a city without old buildings is like a man without a memory." – Graeme Shankland

The 2010 Master Plan for the University of North Carolina at Charlotte proposes that “the Denny Complex (the quad encompassing Barnard, Denny, Garinger, Macy, and Winningham) will undergo demolition, to extend the north-south views between the North Mall and the present location of the Denny Complex.”⁹⁴ The Master Plan also shows that two separate buildings will be constructed on the present location of the Denny Complex to frame the Belk Tower and opening up the “east-west view” from the Belk Tower to Cato Hall.



Figure 3: UNC Charlotte campus: 1961 - 1969.



Figure 32: Denny Complex Site

Above Left: Figure representing the campus as it looked in the 1960s. Above Right: the proposed changes to the present site of the Denny Complex, as shown in the 2010 Master Plan for UNC Charlotte.

⁹⁴ UNC Charlotte 2010 Master Plan, http://masterplan.uncc.edu/sites/masterplan.uncc.edu/files/media/MasterPlan/UNCC-2010MasterPlan-FullReport_Revised-2011_04April27.pdf (accessed December 18, 2012).

The original buildings of Charlotte College are an irreplaceable reminder of the era in which Charlotte College and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte took shape. The Denny Complex also contains buildings named for individuals who played vital roles in the early years of Charlotte College. They include Macy (1961), Garinger (1965), Winningham (1965), Denny (1965), and Bernard (1969). Pierre Macy headed the Foreign Languages Department. Elmer Garinger was the Superintendent of Charlotte Public School who first brought Bonnie Cone to Charlotte. Edyth Winningham devised the original Political Science curriculum. Mary Denny was chair of the English Department. Bascom Barnard was the founder and first director of the Charlotte College Foundation.

A variety of tools are available to protect and advance the preservation of the Denny Complex and the other structures from the institution's early years, such as the Cone Center (initially the Student Union) and the original section of the Library (both completed in 1963). Among the most important is the National Register of Historic Places, established by Congress on October 15, 1966, through the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. The National Register is a planning tool to advance the preservation of historic districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects of local, state, and national significance.⁹⁵ It accomplishes this purpose by mandating that Federally-licensed and Federally-funded projects undergo environmental review to determine the impact these projects will have upon properties listed and deemed worthy of listing in the National Register, by providing financial support to State Historic Preservation Offices, and by awarding grants for conducting surveys of historic resources and for rehabilitating

⁹⁵ National Park Service, *Federal Historic Preservation Laws: The Official Compilation of U.S. Cultural Heritage Statutes* (Washington D.C.: Cultural Resources, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2006), 37.

same. As a general rule, properties must be at least 50 years old to qualify for the National Register. It is very likely that the original Charlotte College buildings except for the original portion of the Atkins Library, specifically Kennedy, Macy, and the Cone Center, would be declared eligible for listing in the National Register; and the remaining components of the Denny Complex either are or will soon be eligible.⁹⁶

North Carolina law provides significant legal protection for historic resources. Each municipality can establish a historic district commission, a historic landmarks commission, or a preservation commission which combines the two.⁹⁷ The Charlotte Historic Districts Commission and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission have authority over the UNCC Campus. Evidence indicates that the Cone Center, Kennedy, and the Denny Complex would meet the standards of special significance required for historic landmarks, which is the most powerful legal instrument to safeguard historic resources except fee simple ownership. Designating a property as a historic landmark, which legally does not require owner consent, allows the Historic Landmarks Commission to exercise design review over any material alterations to the landmark, to delay the demolition of the landmark for up to 365 days, and to recommend to the City of Charlotte that it purchase through eminent domain landmarks scheduled for demolition.⁹⁸

The University's historic buildings could be documented through record drawings and photographs. The contemporary motif of the original campus was respected by the school and its planners for many years. Structures such as the Rowe Arts building and

⁹⁶ For a full list of criteria see North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office *National Register Fact Sheet 2, National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/criteria.htm> (accessed December 13, 2012).

⁹⁷ North Carolina G. S. 160A-400.8, *Powers of the Preservation Commission*.

⁹⁸ North Carolina G. S. 160A-400.0, *Certificate of Appropriateness Required*.

the original high-rise dormitories were fashioned in such a manner that they were in keeping with the original design philosophy that A. G. Odell Jr. produced for the college. It was during the tenure of Chancellor James H. Woodward (1989-2005) that the University abandoned the original Master Plan. Under Woodward's direction, revivalist style structures became favored; the most notable example being the Health and Human Services Building, replete with a cupola.

CONCLUSION

“We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” – Winston Churchill

It has been fifty two years since the opening of Charlotte College’s suburban campus on Highway 49. Today, the built environment of what was once Charlotte College remains largely intact. The presence of the Charlotte College buildings serves as a material reminder of the efforts that went into establishing Charlotte College, now the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

School structures provide a significant challenge for historic preservationists. Student bodies are ephemeral and are always expanding. Technologies are ever-evolving. Thus, school buildings often outlive their original intended purposes and in the minds of some become disposable. The structures of Charlotte College, however, are physical reminders of the beginnings of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and have preeminent meaning in the University’s history. They also stand as normative examples of the type of architecture found on many campuses during the mid-twentieth century.

These buildings are significant for four principal reasons. First, they are the original structures of Charlotte College – a two-year commuter community college that was accepted into the University of North Carolina system in 1965. Second, they were designed by an architect of local and regional significance, A.G. Odell, Jr. Third, they provide a striking example of Modernism in Charlotte, a city that was embracing change when Charlotte College opened its doors at its suburban location in 1961. Fourth,

portions of the campus and some of the buildings still retain distinctive original architectural features.

With their form intact, the Charlotte College structures are representative of a larger socio-economic movement -- boosting Charlotte's image as a city of the New South. Possessing architectural integrity, the original edifices on campus are worthy of preservation because they are cultural artifacts of the physical beginnings of what is now the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The preservation of the extant structures of Charlotte College will go a long way towards highlighting and documenting the history of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the evolution of higher education in Mecklenburg County.

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