

Carnegie Library Building At Johnson C. Smith University



This report was written on September 5, 1984

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Old Carnegie Library Building at Johnson C. Smith University is located on the campus of Johnson C. Smith University, 100 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte, North Carolina.

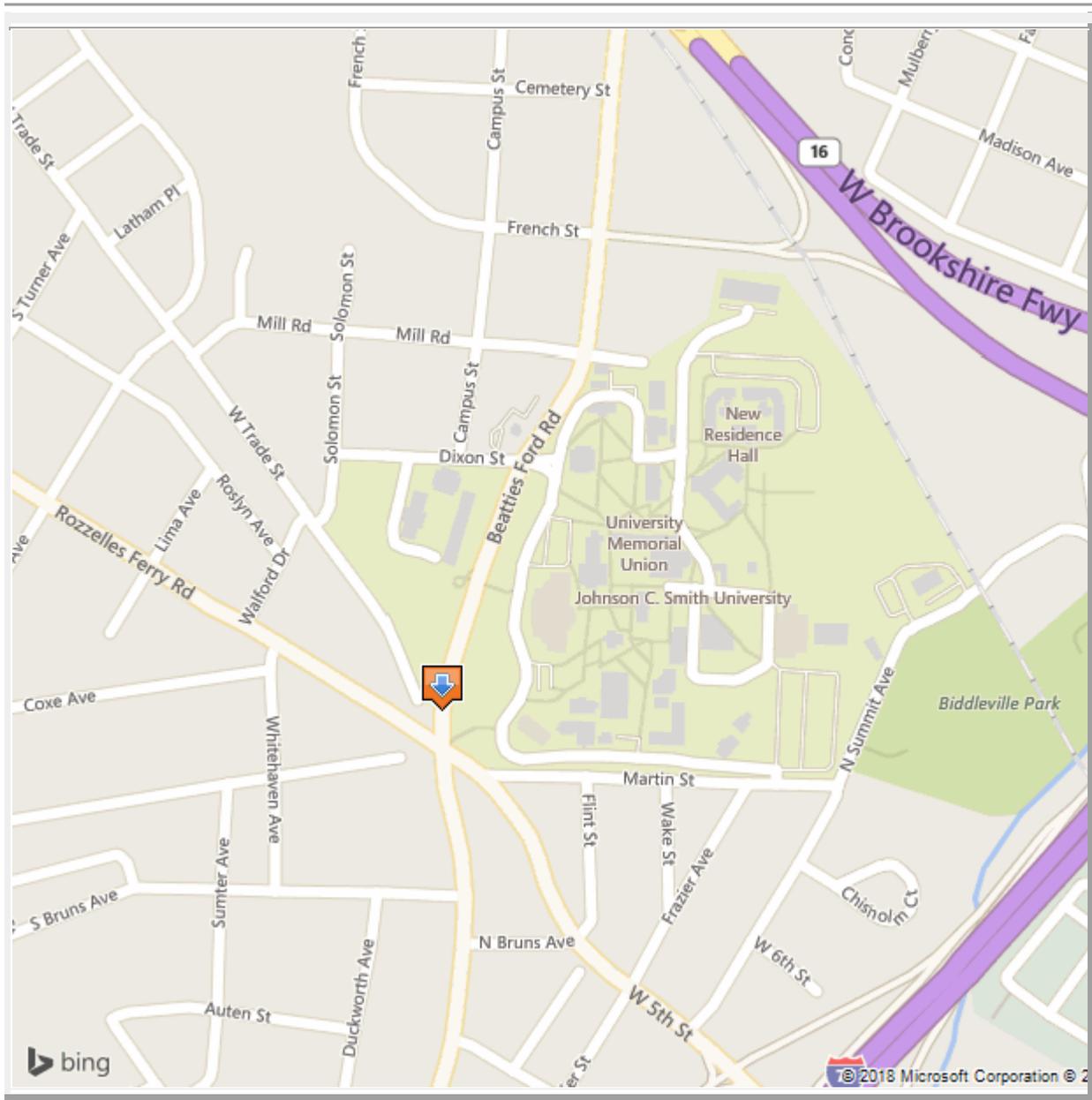
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

Johnson C. Smith University
100 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, N.C. 28216

Telephone: 704/378-1000

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: There is no individual deed to this property listed in the Deed Books of Mecklenburg County. The Tax Parcel Number of this property is 078-201-06.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Lisa A. Stamper.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Old Carnegie Library Building at Johnson C. Smith University does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Old Carnegie Library Building at Johnson C. Smith University, erected in 1911-12 and designed by the Charlotte architectural firm of Hunter and Gordon, is one of the older examples of the Neoclassical style that survives locally; 2) Hunter and Gordon were influential architects in Charlotte in the first quarter of the twentieth century; and 3) the building served as the library of Johnson C. Smith University from 1912 until 1978 and continues to contribute to the success of this important black institution of higher education.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper demonstrates that the Old Carnegie Library Building at Johnson C. Smith University 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 which becomes "historic property." The Old Carnegie Library Building possesses no individual Ad Valorem Tax Assessment. However, the entire 44.24-acre campus has an appraised value of \$575,120 for the land and \$11,607,330 for the improvements, or a total appraised value of \$12,182,450.

Date of Preparation of this Report: September 5, 1984

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
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Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman
January, 1983

One of the finest examples of its style of architecture in the area is the solid, timeless Carnegie Library building on the campus of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte. This handsome edifice is also one of the earliest surviving Neo-classical buildings in the county. For more than seventy of the school's one-hundred and fifteen-year history, it has been a landmark feature of the campus along with Biddle Hall.

Johnson C. Smith University began as a post-Civil War theology school which was set up under the Committee on Freedmen of the Presbyterian Church, USA. The purpose of the school was to train young, newly-freed blacks to become ministers and teachers throughout the South. Under the direction of two white ministers sent from the North, the first session opened May 1, 1867, with eight or ten students, in a church at Fourth and Davidson Streets.

A Philadelphia resident, Mrs. Mary D. Biddle, responded to an appeal in the church paper for funds by donating a total of \$1,900.00. One thousand dollars of this sum was given in honor of her husband, Major Henry J. Biddle, of the prominent Philadelphia family of that name, who was killed in action in 1862, and an additional \$400.00 was presented with the stipulation that the school be chartered as "The Henry J. Biddle Memorial Institute." She later added another \$500.00 to the total. In addition to this gift, the Freedmen's Bureau of the United States contributed another \$3000.00 to the fledgling enterprise.

In seeking to establish its own quarters, one of the school's directors, Reverend S. C. Alexander, bought the old Confederate Navy building on Trade Street between College and Brevard for \$150.00, with the intention of reconstructing it near Seventh and Caldwell in First Ward. Legend has it that as the materials were being loaded on a wagon, Colonel William R. Myers, one of Charlotte's leading entrepreneurs whose rank was from Confederate Army service, upon discovering the purpose of their labor, offered the school eight acres of farmland he owned to the northwest of the city, provided they could raise the money to purchase it. The offer was cheerfully accepted, and the now-loaded wagon turned around to head west instead of east. Once the money was raised and offered, Colonel Myers reportedly refused it, thereby donating the land, since he was now convinced that the school had sufficient funds to continue operating in the new location. Eventually seventy-five acres were purchased from Colonel Myers.

Thus in 1869, Biddle Memorial Institute was opened in its new hilltop quarters and the following year, Reverend Dr. Stephen Mattoon (1815-1886), a native of New York State with outstanding missionary service, was elected the first president. Under Dr. Mattoon's leadership, the Institute, which had a faculty of three and a student body of eighty at the beginning of his tenure, became firmly established on the road to becoming one of the foremost black colleges in the nation, and also became a significant part of Charlotte's development. Around it grew Biddleville, aided by Dr. Mattoon's purchase of land in the vicinity which he sold to faculty members, and the opening of the streetcar line in 1903.

In 1876, the school was chartered as Biddle University by the state legislature, which gave the institution the authority to grant degrees. Two years later, in 1878, a disastrous fire destroyed the combined president's house/administration building/library which also contained all the school's early records. A new brick house was built for the president, and after a drive to raise \$40,000 for a new administration building, to which local residents contributed generously, a fine three-story brick building was opened in 1883. The elegant new structure, Biddle Hall, contained twelve classrooms (one of which doubled as a library) and a large lecture hall; it is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

About 1904, during the tenure of Biddle's first black president, Reverend Daniel J. Sanders (served 1891-1907), the need for a new library was quite clear, and so Dr. Sanders wrote to the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie requesting a gift for that purpose. Dr. J. S. Fisher, of Pittsburgh, head of the Presbyterian Freedmen's Committee, also endorsed the request. The Pittsburgh tycoon responded that he would give the school \$12,500 for a new library if they could raise an equal amount for an endowment to maintain it. Before the challenge could be met, Dr. Sanders died in 1907. That year, Dr. Henry L. McCrorey was elected president of the university, and he guided the institution's growth and change for forty years to one of the leading black colleges in the nation. He was himself a graduate of the school's preparatory department and theological seminary (1895) and had served as a professor in the college of arts and sciences and the seminary.¹ At the top of Dr. McCrorey's priority list for the university was completion of the drive for the new library. Three years later, success was announced in the *Charlotte Evening Chronicle* on October 29, 1910: The money had been raised, and the architectural firm of Hunter and Gordon was commissioned to draw up plans and specifications for the new campus building. The proud announcement goes on to say,

The news of the good fortune of Biddle University will be received with a marked degree of pleasure not only by the colored people but by the white people of Charlotte and this section. Probably no colored college institution in the South is better known or has done a more valuable work than has Biddle with the exception of the larger and richer institute of Dr. Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, Ala.²

The following April, 1911, the construction contract was awarded to the R. N. Hunter Company of Charlotte. The building cost was now projected to be \$15,000, necessitating a further \$2,500 for completion, which was also successfully raised.³

The architects of the library, Hunter and Gordon, were very active during this period of boom times in New South Charlotte. Leonard LeGrand Hunter (1881-1925) was born near Huntersville in Mecklenburg County, and came to Charlotte about 1905. He died suddenly at the age of 43 after living twenty years in the city. ⁴ Frank Gordon (1870-1930), a Maine native, came to Charlotte the same year as L. L. Hunter and was first employed as the supervising architect of the Selwyn Hotel. ⁵ About four years later, Hunter and Gordon formed their partnership (until about 1917). Among a number of important commissions, the two designed Charlotte's Mercy Hospital, the E. C. Marshall mansion in Myers Park, and the Chalmers A.R.P. Church on South Boulevard. ⁶ Robert N. Hunter (1878-1927), the contractor, was not directly related to the architect.

On November 15, 1911, a gala occasion took place on the campus: the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new library. Dr. McCrorey was master of ceremonies, and in his address to the gathered faculty, students and distinguished guests, he recounted the work of the school, its beginnings, and generous support, including the gifts of Colonel Myers and Mrs. Biddle. Another address was given by Heriot Clarkson, a prominent Charlotte attorney and former Solicitor for the 12th Judicial District (which includes Charlotte) in which he praised the school and its graduates. Also present was Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1852-1911), who was one of the leading industrialists of Charlotte and the Piedmont Carolinas, primarily in textile mills, mill machinery manufacturing and related industries. After 1882, he was also the major owner of the *Charlotte Observer*. In his address, President McCrorey lauded Mr. Tompkins for his unselfish interest in the prosperity of the school. Tompkins thought that

... Biddle is a model school and that it would well repay those who are interested in the solution of the race questions existing everywhere throughout the world to visit this place and study the methods that have made this institution one of the most conservative influences in the land.

Among the papers deposited in the cornerstone was an address by Andrew Carnegie on "The Negro in America," which had been delivered before the Philosophical Institution in Edinburgh, Scotland on October 16, 1907." ⁸

As Dr. McCrorey had hoped, the Carnegie Library was ready for its dedication at the forty-fourth commencement, May 30, 1912. A "large number" of people attended the ceremony and heard the principal speaker, Dr. C. C. Hayes, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Johnstown, Pa. ⁹ By the fall term, 1912, the library was open and ready for use. On the lower level, there was a lecture room and storage space. The main floor had sixteen-foot ceilings, and included a reading room, a board room and a stack room. The latter had a capacity of 5,000 volumes in the wall stacks and an additional 11,000 volumes in floor stacks to be constructed as needed. Additionally, the lighting and central heating were the most modern of the time. ¹⁰ At the time of its opening, the library already boasted a collection of 8,000 volumes. ¹¹

In 1921, another fire in which the theological dormitory, kitchen and dining room were lost seriously threatened the existence of the entire school, since extensive funds would be needed for rebuilding. Fortunately for the university, Mrs. Mary Jane Smith of Pittsburgh, Pa. provided

money for rebuilding when she learned of the circumstances. She subsequently visited the campus and made significant contributions, totaling \$700,000 in the memory of her late husband, Johnson C. Smith, a druggist, for the endowment, a teacher's cottage and a gate. In 1923, the name of the school was changed to Johnson C. Smith University in recognition of its benefaction. The following year, the will of James B. Duke made a gift to the university estimated to be worth one to one and a half million dollars. Thus the future of the school was secure, and, starting with the academic year 1924-5, it became the second school for blacks to be rated as a standard four-year college by the state.¹²

The library itself languished because of a lack of professional staff. In 1930, however, the university hired Theodus L. Gunn, a 1927 graduate of Johnson C. Smith, as its first full-time, trained librarian. Mr. Gunn lost no time in taking inventory and reorganizing the entire library. At his instigation, the building was completely renovated, which added more stacks, improved lighting and made a number of improvements. The growth of the collection over the years meant a chronic shortage of space, however, and in 1957 the funds were appropriated to enlarge the library with the addition of another floor for stacks and reading space.¹³ Twenty-one years later, in 1978, the modern James B. Duke Memorial Library replaced the venerable old Carnegie as the location of the university's library services. The Carnegie Library building presently houses various student services, including financial aid, counseling, testing and placement offices.

The classically-designed Carnegie Library at Johnson C. Smith University stands as a proud and stately monument to the many people, both black and white, who committed themselves not only to the survival of the school, which was often not certain, but also to achieving a level of academic standards which successfully made it one of the leading institutions of its kind in the country. The library's standout role in the history of Johnson C. Smith, the Charlotte community and indeed, the nation is without question. One can only wonder at the number of black leaders in the ministry, law, medicine and business throughout the country who spent many hours in the rooms of the Carnegie Library. It is a legacy of dreams, dedication, philanthropy and a determination to succeed.

NOTES

¹ Arthur A. George, *100 Years, 1867-1957: Salient Factors in the Growth and Development of Johnson C. Smith University* (Charlotte: Johnson C. Smith University, 1968); Jack Claiborne, "To the West," in Jack Claiborne's *Charlotte* (Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1974), pp. 50-52; Margaret E. Battle, "A History of the Carnegie Library at Johnson C. Smith University," unpublished M. S. Thesis, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, 1960.

² *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, October 29, 1910, p.9.

³ *Ibid.*, April 12, 1911, p.5

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, February 21, 1925, p 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1930, p 10.

⁶ Information supplied by Thomas W. Hanchett and Dan L. Morrill.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, February 19, 1927, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, November 16, 1911, p. 4

⁹ *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, May 30, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, April 14, 1911, p 6.

¹¹ *Battle*, p.29.

¹² *George*, pp. 30-34; *Claiborne*, p.52; *Battle*, p.23.

¹³ *Battle*, pp. 31-36.

Architectural Description

by Lisa A. Stamper
March 4, 1984

Standing near nationally historic Biddle Hall on the campus of Johnson C. Smith University, the Neo-Classical Carnegie Building (formerly Carnegie Library) greatly contributes to the campus' architectural history. Money donated by the extremely successful philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and matching funds raised by the university's president Henry L. McCrorey, allowed the Carnegie Library to open in 1912. At that time the institution was named Biddle University. The handsome Carnegie Library was designed by Charlotte architects L. L. Hunter and Frank Gordon, and the contractor was R. N. Hunter Company, also of Charlotte. Although the interior of the library is now being used for offices, the exterior has been virtually unaltered in almost seventy-two years.

The symmetrical Carnegie Building is T-shaped with a flat roof. Made primarily of tan colored brick with white terra cotta columns and trim, the building consists of two-levels. The main level is raised slightly above the ground, a device used to make the building resemble a Roman temple, while the lower level is partially underground.

The main entrance to the building is located in the center of the northwest facade. It is emphasized by a full-height Roman Doric portico of mostly terra cotta. The gabled roof of this portico is made of wood, with the front portion painted to resemble marble. The back portion is painted black and is adorned with plain rounded antefixes at the ridgeline.

Behind the protruding portico, but not contained within the main massing of the building, a small entryway is located. The interior walls of this entryway are made of brick, and terra cotta antae appear to intersect with two of the mainly brick pilasters on the northwestern facade wall. The change of exterior materials leaves no doubt where the portico/entrance area ends and the main area of the building begins.

The tall double-door of the entrance is wood framed with a large single glass pane dominating each side. It is topped with an elegant sunburst window. Above this doorway is the name "CARNEGIE BUILDING" spelled in black lettering obviously applied after the old library was converted into academic offices. However, above this new lettering is the original name "CARNEGIE LIBRARY" in relief inside the entablature.

Continuity of the building is formed by the brick and terra cotta entablature as well as a terra cotta string course. The entablature surrounds the building on three sides, including the portico. In place of the portico's pediment, the entablature of these facades have a simple brick attic to hide the roof and add grandeur to the structure. Rectangular vents with geometrically designed grills are located in this attic section of the entablature. The only facade without this elaborate cap is the back (southeast) facade.

A string course of terra cotta visually separates the main and lower levels of the building. This course surrounds all but the southeastern facade, as does the entablature. The continuity of the string course is physically broken only at the intersection with brick pilasters and the portico; however, visually it appears to run behind these obstacles.

Discussion of the windows may be divided into two parts: Those of the top of the T-shape (includes northwest facade) and those of the stem of the "T" (includes southeast facade). The main level windows in the top of the "T", or front part of the building are all tall, round-arched openings. Their evenly cut terra cotta voussoirs and thin keystone help give a stately, elegant look to the building. Another string course of terra cotta connects these windows at the ends of their arches, and concludes at the pilasters. The lower level windows in this section are small and rectangular, with the long side parallel to the around.

The main level windows in the stem of the T-shape are all rectangular. They are topped by terra cotta lintels cut into three-pieces, the middle piece being a keystone shape. The lower level windows in this back section are simple rectangular windows without lintels.

Since the portico was placed on the northwest facade, it was obviously intended to be the front of the library. Therefore, it is naturally the most impressive facade. It is five bays wide, with two large arched windows flanking the portico. Simple lower level windows are located directly underneath those of the main level.

The southeastern facade was considered the back of the library. Of course, it was meant to be the least impressive side. Four pilasters (one at each end and two in between) divide the facade into three equal sections each containing two main level and two lower level windows.

The back sides of the top of the "T" also face southeast. The side to the northeast contains a round arched window on the main level and a simple doorway on the lower level. The side to the southwest contains no openings.

The southwest and northeast facades are almost identical. Both have front sections containing two main level arched windows, separated by a brick pilasters. Their back sections each have four main level rectangular windows, with three brick pilasters; one located at each end and one in the middle. Both have lower level windows placed directly underneath those of the main level. The two facades differ only in the slightly varying size of the lower level windows, depending on the ground level slope; the doorway replacing one of the front section lower level windows on the southeastern side; and the interior chimney located on the northeastern side.

Near the northern corner of the northwest facade, a marble plaque is set within the exterior wall. The vertically inscribed Latin words are ***LECTO PLEMUM HOMINEM FACIT***. This means: *Reading makes a full (as in well-rounded) man.*

The original ambiance of the old library interior has been lost by two main alterations. The first is the construction of many walls to create academic offices and the second is the installment of a drop ceiling. The main floor originally had three rooms: a reading room, a board room, and a stack room. The lower level contained a lecture room and storage space.

The original height of the main level was an impressive sixteen feet. The wooden ceiling is still intact above the drop ceiling. The floors were once wooden also, but a newer floor covering was placed over the original boards.

Although the interior has changed drastically, there are remnants of the past still present. The entryway is one good example of this. Large, horizontal paneled doors exist on each wall. Behind them are shallow closets. The double-door which leads to the main part of the building strongly resembles the entrance door; however, the fanlight which once allowed light to enter the old library interior can not now be seen from inside because the drop ceiling hangs below it.

The staircase, located to the right as one enters from the entryway, also seems to have been altered only slightly. Constructed of wood, it is simple but graceful. The newel post is squarish in design, and the railing is made of many squarish vertical components topped by a simple handrail. Wainscoting, resembling that exposed in small quantities in the main level and restroom, decorates the wall of the staircase.

A brick mantel is located in the room located to the left as one enters from the entryway. It is plausible that the mantel was first placed in the board room. This mantel has a wooden top supported with brackets made of brick. Brick egg and dart molding is an unusual decorative trim.

Between the glass and paneled partitions, original columns can sometimes be seen. The columns of the main level are round, while those of the lower level are square, but all are massive. One column in the main level still has an old and worn light fixture attached.

The old Carnegie Library is an excellent example of the Neo-Classical style prevalent in academic buildings across the nation. Remarkably enough, no imposing alterations have been added to this building; however, some of the windows have been covered with boards and a few of the modillions have fallen. Charlotte has always been supportive and proud of Johnson C. Smith University; therefore, it seems reasonable that the city would find the institution's architectural history worthy of protection.