

## Charlotte City Hall



*This report was written on Feb. 6, 1980*

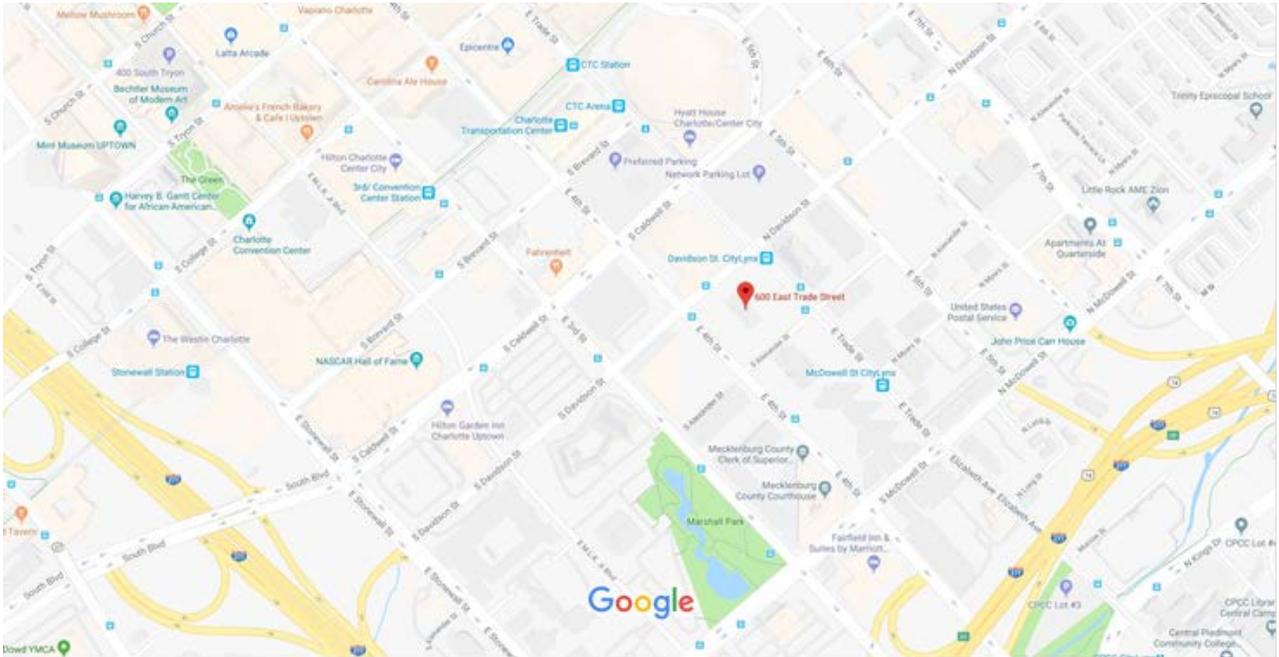
**1. Name, and location of the property:** The property known as the Charlotte City Hall is located at 600 East Trade St. in Charlotte, N.C.

**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner and occupant of the property is:

City of Charlotte 600  
E. Trade St. Charlotte,  
NC 28202

**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:** The current deed to this property is re- corded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 547, Page 265. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 125-021-01.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:**

In 1891, Charlotte erected an imposing city hall at the corner of N. Tryon and Fifth Sts. Designed by Gottfrid L. Norrman (1846-1909), the building housed all city services, including the police department and the fire department. <sup>1</sup> By the early 1920s, Charlotte had outgrown this facility. Consequently, James Oscar Walker (1879-1947), who was elected Mayor on May 3, 1921, advocated the construction of a new municipal complex. The City purchased an entire block on East Ave, now E. Trade St., in the midst of what was then a fashionable residential area. <sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the *Charlotte Observer* proposed that the Board of County Commissioners sell the courthouse, situated on S. Tryon St., and join with the City in erecting a single structure on this location. Happily for Mayor Walker, who did not favor this proposition, the citizens rejected the idea of a joint facility at the polls on July 28, 1923. <sup>3</sup>

On January 26, 1924, City Council authorized Mayor Walker to negotiate a contract with Charles Christian Hook(1870-1938) to design the new city hall. <sup>4</sup> A native of Wheeling, W. Va., and graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, Mo., Hook was the first architect who lived in Charlotte. He moved here in 1891 to teach mechanical drawing in the Charlotte

Graded School, which stood at the corner of South Blvd. and E. Morehead St. By 1892, he was designing structures for the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, the developers of Dilworth.<sup>5</sup> C. C. Hook occupied a place of pivotal importance in the evolution of the built environment of Charlotte, N.C. Indeed, he introduced the Colonial Revival style in this community and, consequently, established the aesthetic norm which dominated the architecture of the affluent suburbs of Charlotte.<sup>6</sup> The Charlotte City Hall is the most imposing public building of this genre which Hook designed.

The complex consisted of four structures. An administrative building, commonly known as the City Hall, was placed in the middle of the block, thereby allowing for future expansion. A fire station, a police station and public health building were constructed along the southern edge of the property. Governmental agencies occupied the new facilities on October 30, 1925, and the initial meeting of City Council occurred there on November 1, 1925.<sup>7</sup> The J. A. Jones Construction Co. erected the four structures.<sup>8</sup> Mayor Walker had resigned on December 4, 1924, so that he might devote his energies more fully to the management of an automobile dealership which he owned in Columbia, S.C. The *Charlotte News* was expansive in its praise of Mayor Walker, stating that he was a man "gifted with a disposition that makes for affability." The newspaper went on to explain, however, that Mayor Walker had his share of detractors. "His

have been accomplishing administrations, and, of course, as is always the case, progress and progressive policies bring about disaffections and cause sore toes," the article explained.<sup>9</sup>

Unquestionably, the decision to transfer municipal headquarters from N. Tryon St. to the residential district on E. Trade St., was of pivotal importance in terms of the physical history of this city. In addition to its symbolic significance, the placement of City Hall at this new location set into motion a series of forces which eroded the viability of the surrounding neighborhood. Noteworthy in this regard is the fact that the Board of County Commissioners did dedicate a new courthouse on an adjacent parcel on March 10, 1928.<sup>10</sup> City Council selected the site on E. Trade St. for the City Hall because it was, "one of the most beautiful wooded areas of the city wooded in the city."<sup>11</sup>

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Henry F. Withey & Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*(Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., Los Angeles, 1970). p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Charlotte Observer* (May 4, 1921), p. 1. *The Charlotte News* (February 10, 1924), pp. 1 & 5. *The Charlotte News*(October 31, 1947), pp. 1A & 12A. *Charlotte Observer* (November 1, 1947), pp. 1 & 3. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 547, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Jack O. Boyte and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the Mecklenburg County Courthouse" (a report prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission) April 5, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> City Council Minute Book 17, Page 357.

<sup>5</sup> *The Charlotte News* (September 17, 1938), p. 12. *Charlotte Observer* (April 3, 1892), p. 4. George Welch, a resident of Charlotte, did design several structures in the city in the 1870s, including Second Presbyterian Church, the opera house and the jail. Apparently, Welch was not a professional architect (*The Charlotte News* (April 15, 1901), p. 1.).

<sup>6</sup> *Charlotte Observer* (Sept. 19, 1894), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> City Council Minute Book 179 p. 508. City Council Minute Book 18, p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte Observer* (July 10, 1924), p. 6. *Charlotte Observer* (Nov. 1, 1925), sec. E., p. 5. J. A. Jones, a native of Randolph County, N.C., moved to Charlotte in the spring of 1888.

<sup>9</sup> City Council Minute Book 18, p. 57. *The Charlotte News* (December 5, 1924), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Jack O. Boyte and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the Mecklenburg County Courthouse" (a report prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission) April 5, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> *The Charlotte News* (February 10, 1924), pp. 1 & 5.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Caroline Mesrobian, architectural historian.

**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 Charlotte City Hall does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the structure has served as the seat of municipal government for approximately fifty-five years and is, therefore, the symbolic landmark of Charlotte's governmental agencies; 2) it is one of the finest local examples of the beaux-arts Classicism style; and 3) it was designed by Charles Christian Hook, Charlotte's first resident architect and an architect of regional importance.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:**

The Commission judges that the architectural description included herein demonstrates

that the property known as the Charlotte City Hall meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The Ad Valorem Tax appraisal on the 3.290 acres of land is \$787,710. The Ad Valorem Tax appraisal on the improvements is \$1,819,120. The property is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem Taxes.

## **Bibliography**

Jack O. Boyte and Dr. Dan L. Morrill. "Survey and Research Report on the Mecklenburg County Courthouse" (a report prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission) April 5, 1977.

*The Charlotte News.*

*The Charlotte*

*Observer.*

City Council Minute Books 17 and 18.

Gravestones in Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, N.C.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Henry F. Withey & Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*(Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., Los Angeles, 1970).

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** February 6, 1980.

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties  
Commission 3500 Shamrock Dr.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

## *Architectural Description*

Construction of the Charlotte City Hall, located at 600 East Trade Street, was begun in the summer of 1924 after designs by Charles C. Hook. The building was occupied officially on October 29, 1925, during the administration of Mayor H. W. Moore. This municipal building was one of four edifices that were erected simultaneously on the spacious block bounded by East Avenue (East Trade Street) and South Davidson, South Alexander, and Fourth Streets. The other structures were the Fire Department on the southwest corner, the Court Building or Police Department on the southeast corner, and the Health and Welfare Department, it being placed to the rear of the central administration building.

City Hall was placed approximately in the middle of the block facing to the north so that it could be enlarged if needed without increasing the height or resorting to other purchases of land. The land in front of the building was to serve as a park-like setting for the structure as well as a place where the public could assemble for official speeches. Wide curved walkways lead from either side of the grounds to the front of the municipal building and to a massive granite stairway bounded on both sides by balustrades with turned members and ornamental, round, limestone impost blocks.

Hook chose one of the most commonly employed styles for governmental buildings during that period for the design - beaux-arts Classicism. The plan is a rather simple and symmetrical rectangle (166 feet long by 70 feet wide) typical of that style. The building, of steel frame, rises three stories with a basement and an attic space.

The entrance facade is divided into eleven bays with the seven central bays being set-back to provide a break to the otherwise continuous front plane. The first story or ground floor is articulated with rusticated well-dressed ashlar masonry of buff Indiana limestone. It is pierced by eleven symmetrically placed arched openings which have no pronounced keystone. The central, recessed section contains five entranceways, the esplanade being flanked on either side by a blind archway. The two projecting sections each contain two arched windows. Window sills are of white pine painted white. The original wrought iron drill doors to City Hall have been replaced with fireproof glass and steel frame doors, these being most incongruous with the design of the facade.

A pronounced beltcourse and balustrade divide the first story from the second. The second and third stories of the central section of the front facade are joined by colossal, fluted, Corinthian limestone columns which rise from bases in the balustrade. There are six pairs of columns flanked by a single column on either side, all of which have straight bases and standard entasis in the upper sections. The capitals of the monumental order closely resemble those of the Tower of the Winds, Athens, whose capitals are of a plain, unusual type, without volutes, the upper row of leaves resembling those of the palm. The central sections of the second and third stories are set back from the row of columns, each floor being pierced by seven rectangular windows. The bays are divided by paired pilasters flanked by single pilasters,

all of which are located directly behind the free standing columns and which bear similar Corinthian capitals. The windows between the two stories are separated by plain paneled blocks. The architrave and frieze are unadorned excepting for roundels placed over each abacus.

The projecting side bays are smooth-walled and contain two rectangular windows on both stories. The spandrels are ornamented with floral swags crowned by rosettes. The cornice contains pronounced dentil work which extends the course of the building; the balustrade also runs the extent of the edifice's flat roof. Both provide continuity and fluidity to the projecting and receding planes and to the broken rhythm of the columned center section of the facade.

The South Davidson (west) entrance is reached by granite stairs flanked by round limestone impost blocks. The rusticated limestone facade is divided into five bays, the ground floor consisting of four arched windows and a centrally located arched doorway, the door proper not being original to the building. The first story is distinguished from the upper sections by a pronounced beltcourse. Five symmetrically placed rectangular windows pierce the second and third stories; the spandrels are adorned with swags capped with rosettes. The cornice work and balustrade are continuous and unifying features of the building.

The South Alexander (east) facade of City Hall is identical to the west facade.

The land slopes downward on the rear (south) side of the building so that the basement is exposed, it containing the entrance to this facade. This seven-bayed entrance area is shielded by a copper marquee on a steel frame (now painted white). The scheme of the upper three stories of this facade is similar to the front facade. The first story is rusticated and contains a seven-bayed recessed central section with arched windows flanked by two bays containing arched windows. The second and third stories bear no free standing order but are articulated by colossal Corinthian pilasters and symmetrically placed rectangular windows. The projecting double-bayed sections of the facade are pierced by rectangular windows separated by spandrels containing swags and rosettes. Unadorned architrave and frieze, dentil work, and balustrade (closed in the central section) define the uppermost sections of the building.

The lobby, which is entered immediately from the East Trade Street side, runs the length of the central section of the facade. The exterior bays are defined on the interior by exposed ceiling beams which are met by fluted, marble pilasters located both between the arched entrance openings and the service desks directly opposite them. Wide marble staircases located to the sides of the central entrance area rise in two flights with one landing to the second and third floors. A staircase, located under the northwest set, descends to the basement, which housed the central heating plant (now offices also). The lobby continues to each side of the central service area and leads to the two side entrances facing South Davidson and South Alexander Streets.

The lobby, with the exception of the entrance doors, has been kept basically in its original state. The main floor and corridors are finished in pink Tennessee marble. The pilasters, arched door frames capped with ornamental scrolls, and wainscoting on all walls also consist of the light-colored marble. The wainscoting is trimmed with a chair rail and baseboard of

verde antique marble the upper sections of the walls being plastered. The staircases, with turned newel posts, duplicate the marble band arrangement on the walls. Handrails are of polished hardwood while the railing is of wrought iron painted a dark green.

Two arched elevators, located in the west corridor, are framed with light-colored marble and capped with scrolls. The segmental pediments are of verde antique marble with round, light-colored marble indicators. The doors themselves are not original.

The four service windows and centrally located doorway (door not original) are occupied by revenue and accounting departments devoted to the collection of taxes and water and light fees. The large windows are framed by polished copper, fluted pilasters and classical detailing carrying a straight entablature. The desks from which the pilasters rise are of light-colored marble; the baseboards are trimmed with verde antique marble.

The 15'-10" plaster ceiling bays are defined by rectangular panels into which are set the original light fixtures. The cross beams and cornices contain two decorative bands, the lower consisting of a fret motif, the upper of a stylized, foliated scroll pattern. The cross beams also bear an upper band which contains a row of dentil work topped by delicate egg and dart decoration.

The other floors of the building have been altered from their original state and function. Entrances to the upper floors from the staircases are closed with fireproof doors. The 15'-8" second story and 12'-10" third story ceilings have been lowered. Walls are often sheathed in fabric, and the composition floors are carpeted.

The mayor's office at the northeast corner of the second floor appears to be one of the few offices kept in something of its original state. Its plaster ceiling is intact and is articulated with cross beams and decorative wreaths. The walls are of American black walnut (all other interior wood trimming is of white pine). A fireplace with a central cartouche and floral consoles adorns the south wall of the office.

The second floor also originally housed a Confederate museum located in the north-central section as well as a veterans' assembly room in the northwest corner of the building.

Charlotte City Hall should be protected from further damage and alteration. The exterior of the structure has been well preserved (with the exception of the entrance doors) and is a fine example of a restrained and elegant use of beaux-arts Classicism. Its grounds should also be preserved as they greatly compliment and provide a park-like setting for the building. The first floor lobby with its rich marble textures and colors, the classical pilasters, ornamented cross beams and the copper-framed service windows should also be preserved.