



Survey and Research Report
On The
Charlotte Fire Station No. 2



History of Structure:

The preservation of the Old Dilworth Fire Station provides future generations a unique vision of the past. Completed in 1909, the structure is characterized by its original design for horse-drawn firefighting apparatus. It stands today a monument to that forgotten era. The City of Charlotte operated several other stations at that time, but they have all been demolished, The Old Dilworth Station is now the oldest extant station in the city.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, Charlotte was a fast-growing city. City government was supported by a mayor, a recorder, and a Board of Aldermen. The Board of Aldermen included seven members, one from each of the four wards of the city, and three elected at large. According to the Federal Census of 1900, the city's population within its corporate limits was 18,091. The municipal census of 1901 indicates 27,752 people living in the city and its surrounding suburbs. The city fathers were building and expanding the foundations of services necessary to support its growing population. By the year 1902 the city owned the city hall, the water works, a sewerage system, a crematory, three school buildings, two fire departments, a modern fire alarm system, and over forty miles of macadamized roads. The street car system and lighting plants were excellent. Latta Park, at the southern end of the street car line, was a "popular pleasure resort. Latta Park was located outside the city limits in an area known as Dilworth. The Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, the 4-Cs, owned the land within this suburb. Edward Dilworth Latta, for whom the development was named, was President of the 4-Cs. In 1891 the 4-Cs launched a campaign to attract industry as well as private residents to settle in Dilworth. At an April meeting of the Chamber of Commerce "it was decided to raise \$10,000 for advertising our city abroad. The 4-Cs agreed to contribute \$5,000 to that end . . ."

On May 20, 1891, the 4-Cs held a large land auction in Dilworth. It was a gala affair with a festival atmosphere. "In three days several hundred lots were sold ranging from \$5 to \$16 a front foot. The bidding was lively and the 4-Cs have every reason to be gratified at the result of their sale." One of the lots sold that week was to be the future location of the Dilworth Fire Station.

"Lot number four in square number 9 . . . being fifty feet by one hundred fifty feet fronting on the street known as 'Boulevard' ..." was purchased by James M. Gates on May 23, 1891. According to early real estate

maps of Charlotte, James Dates owned several lots in downtown Charlotte and probably was a local real estate speculator. He paid the 4-Cs \$375 for lot number four. Gates held the property for 16 years until it was purchased by the City of Charlotte as the location for its new fire station to serve the fast-growing street car suburb of Dilworth.

The growing population in Dilworth, both residential and industrial, began to show concern over the lack of a conveniently located fire station. Before the new station was constructed, Dilworth residents received fire protection from the downtown station headquartered at 6 East 5th Street. Even when a fire was detected in its early stages, horse-drawn apparatus was slow in reaching a fire in the prosperous suburb. Residents were aware that precious minutes during a fire crisis could be saved if a station were located in their neighborhood. Yet, before a station could be built in Dilworth, the suburb had to be designated an official borough of the City of Charlotte. The great desire of Dilworth residents for local fire protection was their main concern when a committee from the suburb appeared before the Board of Aldermen on May 7, 1907 asking that a fire station be constructed in the southern section of the city and that Dilworth be admitted as a borough of Charlotte. That evening Dilworth was admitted as a borough of Charlotte. The request concerning the establishment of a fire station was deferred.

Nearly nine months passed before the issue of a fire station for Dilworth was renewed. The concern was ". . . agitated anew since a recent fire in that ward."¹¹ At a meeting of the Finance Committee on February 27, 1908, Colonel T. L. Kirkpatrick, Alderman from Dilworth, requested an appropriation for the establishment of a station. Still, funds for such a project were not available, and the committee could only give assurances that efforts were being made to raise money needed for such a project.

Several days later, on March 2, 1908, the matter was again discussed at a meeting of the Board of Aldermen. At this meeting a resident of Dilworth, Mr. Joseph Garibaldi, offered to purchase a lot and build a station if the city was not financially able to undertake the project. He offered to "... accept the cities note for 4 or 6 years at 6% interest for same." The Chairman of the Fire Department, Colonel A. L. Smith, agreed at that meeting that ". . . a station in Dilworth was a necessity . . . but owing to the financial condition of the city he

would not press the matter." He suggested that the city might instead consider purchasing an automobile that might provide more efficient service to that part of the city. The matter of establishing a fire station in Dilworth "... was referred to the Finance Committee with power to act." Seven months later at a meeting of the Finance Committee, a committee from the Public Safety Committee reported that several locations for a Dilworth Station had been examined. "Col. T. L. Kirkpatrick moved that it be recorded that it is the sense of the committee that a sub fire station be established in a convenient point for the purpose of serving the Dilworth section and Ward II at a cost not exceeding \$4,000."¹⁶ Ten days later, on October 17, 1908, the Finance Committee unanimously authorized the purchase of the lot owned by James M. Gates on the west side of South Boulevard. The purchase price was \$1,000, and the deed to the property was signed October 20, 1908.

Finally, residents of Dilworth would get their new station. The wheels of bureaucracy turn slowly, but Dilworth would not be deprived of its right to efficient city services. Three branches of city government were responsible for the creation of the Dilworth Station. The aldermen authorized and paid for it. The Board of Public Safety was responsible for the equipment, and the Board of Public Service would build it. Chosen as architect for project was the Charlotte firm of Wheeler, Galliher and Stern. The building contract was awarded to J. A. Jones at a cost of \$3,000. The construction of the station began on January 7, 1909. According to a local newspaper article, the Dilworth Station was the same size and design as Station No. 1, headquarters on E. 5th Street.

Two months later Chief of the fire department, W. S. Orr, reported to the Board of Public Safety that the station was "completed and equipped." Applications were received from 25 men for positions in the new fire station. Five were chosen: J. E. Morris, Cliff Spense, J. A. Lawing, T. M. Davis, and G. P. Caldwell. These men were not assigned to the Dilworth Station in particular. Chief Orr would fill some of the openings at the Dilworth Station with experienced men from other stations. The new station would have three men on duty at all times.²³ W. B. Glenn, who was already employed by the city fire department, was chosen Captain for the new station. Equipment for the station would consist of a combination hose and chemical wagon with two ladders attached and a steamer. Two horses were also purchased for the station."

Most of Charlotte's early firefighting was accomplished with chemical engines. Developed by French scientists in 1864, mixtures of bicarbonate of soda, sulfuric acid and water created a pressurized gas, carbon dioxide. Being heavier than air, the chemical solution removed oxygen from air thus smothering a fire.²⁷ Eighty-five percent of the fires in Charlotte were fought with chemicals in the early 20th century.²⁸ At first these engines were pulled by hand, but in the 1870s, horse-drawn chemical engines were introduced.²⁹ The Dilworth station was equipped with two horse-drawn engines, one chemical and one steam.

When horses were first used in firefighting, it was customary to board them outside the fire stations in nearby stables. But much time was lost bringing the horses to the station for harnessing after an alarm was received. Eventually, the horses were stabled in the fire station along with the equipment and the men. The idea took some getting used to, but soon firemen horses began "more than half a century of mutual affection."

Dilworth's station was originally designed to house its horses on its first floor level. Architectural specifications indicate there were two stalls, one located on each side of the first floor. The stalls are no longer there, but worn flooring bears witness to the years of impatient pawing of horses hoofs. To save time in harnessing the horses after an alarm was received, the heavy harnesses were hung from the ceiling directly above the stalls. Using a system of chains and pulleys the harness could be dropped onto the horse and fastened by the men in a matter of seconds. Remnants of the "quick hitch" system can still be seen in the old station.

In 1912 the City of Charlotte purchased its first motorized firefighting apparatus.⁻
^{*3} By 1917 the era of horse-drawn apparatus ended in Charlotte. By the late 1940s the Dilworth station could no longer accommodate the larger, more sophisticated motorized equipment. The city purchased a lot across the Boulevard from the old station and built a new one. The new Station No. 2 . still serves the Dilworth section today. The old station on lot number four was sold to W. E. Price and Ethel R. DeLaney on June 29, 1948.

Price and DeLaney held the property until January 1976. At that time the station was deeded to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fire Museum, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the old Dilworth

Station No. 2. It is their desire that the station be adaptively utilized as a museum of firefighting history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Nothing will more graphically demonstrate Charlotte's early firefighting history than the preservation and restoration of the Old Dilworth Station. While the City of Charlotte has destroyed, lost, and forgotten much of its past, the Old Dilworth Station has survived. Its preservation will provide the citizens of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County a unique understanding of turn-of-the-century life in Charlotte.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Index to City Minutes. A to M. From June 24, 1816 to May 6, 1935. City Clerk's Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of Aldermen. Books 10 and 11, 1907-1908. City Clerk's Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Minutes of the Meetings of the Finance Committee of the Board of Aldermen. City Clerk's Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Minutes of the Board of Public Safety. May 1, 1908 - April 6, 1909. City Clerk's Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Minute Book - Executive Board. City of Charlotte. May 6, 1909 - February 12, 1913. City Clerk's Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

State of North Carolina, Mecklenburg County Record of Deeds. Office of the Register of Deeds, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Daily Logs of the Charlotte Fire Department. 1891-1909. Charlotte Fire Department, Headquarters Office, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Charlotte, North Carolina, City Directory. 1904-5 through 1911. Charleston, South Carolina: The Welsh Directory Company.

Charlotte Daily Observer. 1907 - 1909. Charlotte Public Library, Carolina Room, Microfilm.

Charlotte Evening Chronicle. 1907 - 1909. Charlotte Public Library, Carolina Room, Microfilm.

Mecklenburg Times. 1907 - 1909. Charlotte Public Library, Carolina Room, Microfilm.

Original architectural specifications of the Dilworth Fire Station. Office of Jack O. Boyte, AIA, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Sanborn Insurance Maps. 1905-1909. Charlotte Public Library, Carolina Room., Microfilm.

Tompkins, D. A. History of Mecklenburg County and Charlotte. Charlotte, North Carolina: Observer Printing House, 1903.

Secondary Sources:

Atkins, Jesse, Chief of Charlotte Fire Department. Interview 22 January 1979.

Ditzel, Paul C. Fire Engines Firefighters. New York, N.Y.: A Rutledge Book, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1976.