

Survey and Research Report

On Charlotte Fire Station Number 4



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 is located at 420 West Fifth St. in Charlotte, N.C.

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

Bank of America Community Development Corporation

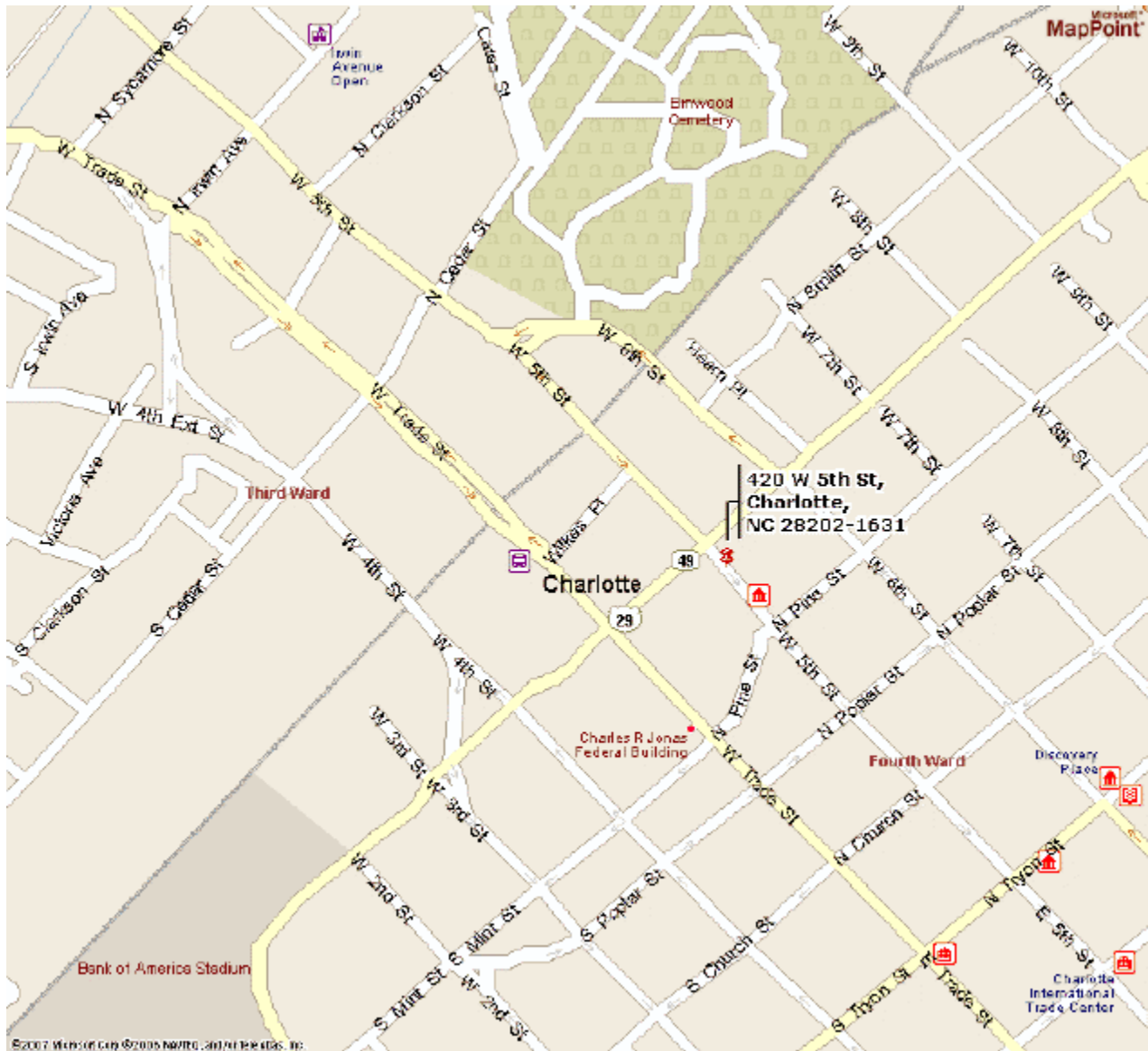
525 North Tryon St. #3 NC1-023-03-02

Charlotte, N.C. 28255

Email Contact: robert.vail@bankofamerica.com

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 depicting the location of the property. The UTM coordinates of the property are 17 514056E 3898492N.



5. **Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to the property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book #17833, page 916.
6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.
7. **A brief architectural and physical description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural and physical description of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.
8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.**

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that Charlotte Fire Station No. 4 possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) Fire Station No. 4 was designed by Charles Christian Hook, an architect of local and regional importance.

2) Fire Station No. 4 is reflective of the architectural design of firehouses in the 1920s.

3) Fire Station No. 4 is the only pre-World War Two extant building in center city Charlotte that once served as a fire station and one of only six pre-World War Two extant buildings in Charlotte that are or were associated with firefighting.

4) Fire Station No. 4 is an instructive artifact in the history of firefighting in Charlotte.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that Fire Station No. 4 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 a "historic landmark." The appraised value of the building is \$109,300. The current appraised value of the 0.478 acres of land is \$1,041,100. The total appraised value of the property is \$1,150,400. The property is zoned Downtown District 1. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 07805307.

10. Amount of Property Proposed for historic landmark designation. The exterior of the building, the interior of the building, and the entire tax parcel.

Date of Preparation of this Report: September 20, 2007

A Brief History Of Charlotte Fire Station Number 4

Dr. Dan L. Morrill



Photograph from *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887*

The historical significance of Fire Station Number 4 is best understood within the context of the evolution of firefighting in Charlotte, N.C. Like other emerging industrial and commercial cities, Charlotte had to find ways to prevent widespread destruction of its man-made environment by fire. The increased concentration of structures, many built with highly combustible materials, and some soaring to unprecedented heights, jeopardized the viability of urban life and necessitated the development of more systematic means to combat conflagrations.¹

As elsewhere, the first firefighting companies in Charlotte were made up of volunteers. Three were operating by 1865, the Hornet Steam Engine and Hose Company, the Independent Hook and Ladder Company, and the Neptune Hand Engine Company, the last organized and manned by African Americans.² Theretofore, the residents of Charlotte, like those in other cities, had joined together as volunteers in bucket brigades to put down flames.



Members of the Neptune Volunteer Fire Department. Photograph from *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887*

The City of Charlotte established the Charlotte Fire Department on August 1, 1887, after the volunteer firemen resigned over disagreements with the City.³ Volunteer firefighters throughout the country were generally not held in high esteem. The public saw them as a "public menace," as a rowdy bunch that exhibited many of the worst habits of male behavior.⁴ The heroic image of firemen as rescuers did not fully emerge until the late nineteenth century, when firefighters became municipal employees and began to emphasize the saving of human life rather than the protection of property.⁵

Charlotte's first municipal fire station, destroyed in the 1970s, stood at East Trade Street and College Street. A major improvement in Charlotte's firefighting facilities occurred in 1891, when an imposing municipal building was erected at the corner of North Tryon and Fifth Sts. This City Hall and Fire Station served Charlotte until October 1925, when the City moved its operations to a new municipal complex on East Trade St. and the former City Hall was destroyed.⁶ Architecturally, Charlotte's first two fire stations were grand, lavishly decorated brick structures. Partly a manifestation of the design

tastes of the era, these buildings, it was hoped, would serve as commodious living quarters for firefighters and thereby improve their sense of morality and civic duty and underscore their heroic image. ". . . the picture of the fireman risking all to save a child from a burning building was utmost in everyone's mind," writes historian Rebecca Zurier.⁷

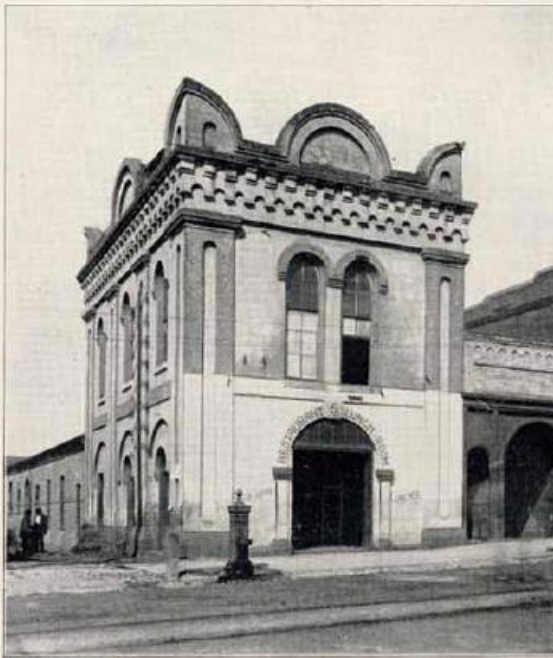
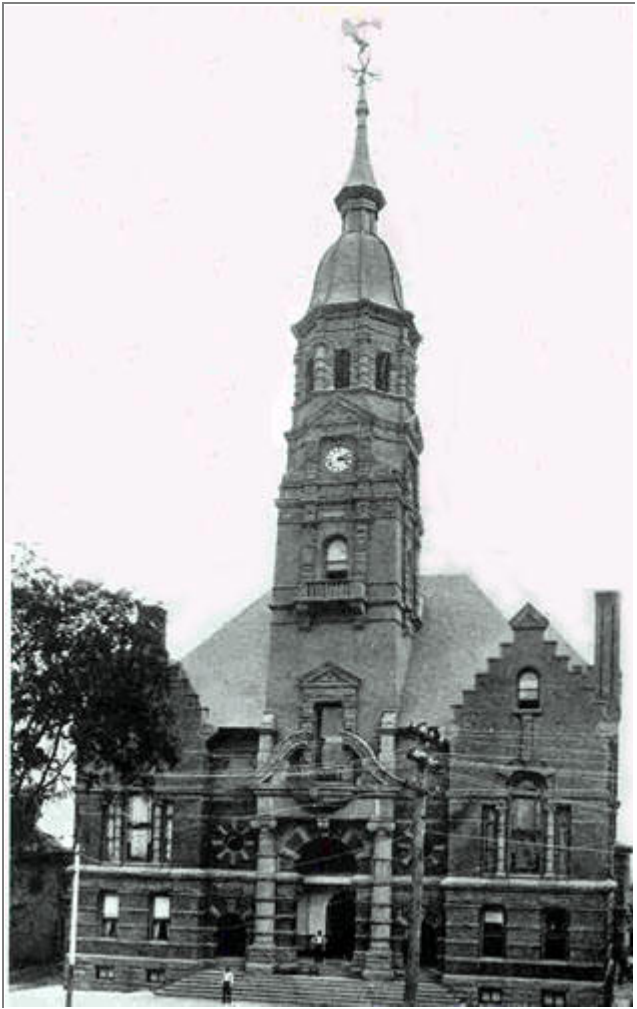


Fig. 17. Old City Hall, Charlotte, N. C., 1888.

This building doubled as the City Hall and the Fire Station.



The 1891 City Hall also housed Charlotte's Fire Station.



This 1916 photograph shows a mixture of horse-drawn and engine equipment.

Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 was built in 1925-26 and was designed by Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938), an architect of local and regional importance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ A native of Wheeling, W. Va. and graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, Mo., Hook had settled in Charlotte in 1891 to teach mechanical drawing in the Charlotte Public Schools and had established an architectural practice here the next year. Initially involved primarily in the design of homes in Dilworth, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb, Hook would go on to be the architect for a broad array of structures in Charlotte and its environs, including many municipal buildings.⁹



C. C. Hook in his twenties.

Also the architect for the new City Hall and Fire Station on East Trade St. that opened in 1925, Hook fashioned Fire Station Number 5 as a facility reflective of the design principles and programmatic needs that had come to be associated with firehouses by the 1920s.¹⁰ The replacement of horses by the first motorized fire engines in Charlotte in 1911 meant that stations thereafter would not have to accommodate draft animals.¹¹ "With the shift 'from oats to gasoline,' the requirements of the fire station changed," states Rebecca Zurier.¹² A greater ability to focus upon the health of firefighters now became possible, which led to the incorporation of such amenities as cement floors rather than wooden floors, ample windows for ventilation, and the placement of kitchens in stations to support a two-platoon system of labor, thereby shortening the work week for firemen.¹³



The opening of the new Fire Station Number 1 on E. 4th St. in 1925 necessitated the building of Fire Station

Number 4 to provide protection for the west side of the center city. This building is not extant.

Architects were also increasingly called upon to design fire stations that would be acceptable to suburbanites, many of whom were irate over the prospect of institutional buildings appearing in their neighborhoods.¹⁴ That Hook was able to respond effectively to this requirement is also demonstrated by his design for Charlotte Fire Station No. 6, erected in 1928-29 on Laurel Avenue, which continues to function as a firehouse on the edge of the fashionable Eastover neighborhood.¹⁵ Fire Station No. 4 responds to the same imperative of being sensitive to its surroundings. Most of West Fifth Street in the 1920s was composed of two-story, brick commercial buildings. Hook accordingly selected a similar motif for Fire Station No. 4.¹⁶



Charlotte Fire Station No. 6 (1928-29)

Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 served as a firehouse until 1972, when it was replaced by a new fire station that still functions at 525 North Church St.¹⁷ The building has accommodated several adaptive reuses over the years, including an art gallery and currently a firefighting museum.¹⁸ Only three pre-World War Two fire stations in Charlotte continue to serve their original purpose. They are Fire Station Number 6, Fire Station Number 7 built on North Davidson St. in the North Charlotte mill village in 1935, and Fire Station Number 5 erected in 1929 on Tuckaseegee Road, now Wesley Heights Way.¹⁹



Charlotte Fire Station No. 5



Two other pre-World War Two properties survive in Charlotte that once belonged to the Charlotte Fire Department. They are: former Fire Station Number 2, erected on South Boulevard in 1909 in Dilworth and the Palmer Fire School on Monroe Road on the edge of the Elizabeth neighborhood.²⁰





Charlotte Fire Station No. 2

Architectural Description Of Charlotte Fire Station No. 4

Stewart Gray



Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 is a flat-roofed, three-bay-wide, two-story brick building set back less than twenty-five feet from West Fifth Street in Charlotte's Fourth Ward. The building is located near the intersection of Graham and Fifth Streets and faces south on a half-acre lot that slopes to the rear. The building is now bordered by empty lots. Until recently the neighboring building to the east was a ca. 1927 one-story, brick car dealership. New high-rise construction dominates the neighborhood to the south and to the east. To the west and to the

rear of the fire station there is a good collection of one, two, and three-story commercial buildings that extend north along Graham Street. The fire station has retained a high degree of integrity and is in good condition.

The building is fronted by a concrete apron that is integrated into the neighboring sidewalk and features a single curb-cut. The facade is symmetrical with three large doors designed to accommodate fire engines. At ground level the brickwork of the façade is buttressed by large curved concrete blocks. These blocks served to protect the load-bearing walls and piers from damage that could have been caused by the fire engines.



The rusticated bricks on the exterior of the building are laid in a veneer of running bond over thick solid brick wall laid in a six-to-one American Bond.



The exposed brickwork in the interior of the building demonstrates the six-to-one American Bond pattern, with six rows of stretcher bricks laid between each row of locking header bricks

Original large folding wooden doors have been replaced by overhead doors. Bolt-holes in the brickwork appear to show where the original hinges were located. The doors openings are now filled with segmented, rolling overhead doors that date from the mid twentieth century. The doors are constructed of oak, and are six segments tall, and each segment is composed of six panels. The lower two segments and the top segment in each door contains plywood panels, while the remaining segments are glazed.



Detail of
Overhead Door

Each door opening is bordered on the top by a course of soldier brick that conceal the steel lintels that support the wide door openings. Each of the door openings is topped with a recessed rectangular brick panel highlighted with narrow vertical stone blocks set at each side of the panels. The panels are bordered by vertical stone trim that is set into the brickwork and extends four courses of brick below the top of the door openings. This vertical stone trim protrudes slightly from the brickwork and each section of trim is composed of two narrow stone blocks, one set above the other.



Detail of facade shows trim, brickwork and steel lintels.

The second story is pierced by three large segmental-arched window openings that utilize projecting moulded stone band as a common sill. Below each window unit and below the stone band is a course of soldier bricks that align with the panels and door openings below. The wide window openings are divided into three window frames that originally held double-hung multi-light sash. All of fire staiton's exterior windows have been replaced with large single units of insulated glass directly glazed into the frames.



The windows are topped with one-and-one-half brick segmental arch, featuring a tall tapered keystone. Above the center window opening is a stone panel with "C.D.F No 4" painted in two-dimensional letters. Plain round stone shields or medallions are set into the brickwork and are located above the other second-story window openings on the facade. The facade appears to be topped with a low parapet wall decorated with a stone cap that is now partially obscured with metal.



Facade Detail



West Elevation

The west elevation of the fire station is four bays deep and features tall segmental-arched window openings, all of which have been filled with fixed panels that resemble closed shutters. The segmental arches are composed of a simple courses of soldier bricks, and the window sills are a simple row of corbelled bricks. The second story is pierced with eight shorter, equally spaced segmental-arched window openings. The fourth window opening from the rear has been enlarged into a doorway and connects to a metal fire escape-type stairway. The remainder of the windows on the second floor, like the front, are directly glazed with a single unit of insulated glass.

The fire station's rear features a dramatically square-shouldered external chimney centered on the elevation. A square brick flue is located near the east corner. The rear is pierced by a segmental-arched doorway accessed by original concrete steps. A narrow window opening is set low in the wall and may have given light to a basement mechanical room. The second story contains two wide double window opening, each divided into two window frames. Scuppers at the rear of the building allow for rainwater to drain off the roof into downspouts.



The east elevation features an original segmental-arched doorway adjacent to the facade. The doorway contains a replacement door and large transom, now covered with a panel. Other fenestration on the first story includes two tall windows, and two squat window openings adjacent to the rear of the building, that originally illuminated the watch room. Second-story fenestration on the east elevation is composed of eight evenly spaced windows. The parapet wall on the

side elevations is topped with a stone cap, and steps down a single course of brick to the rear.



From the Northwest



Rear Elevation



Early 20th-Century Photograph



East Elevation

The interior of the Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 has retained a high degree of integrity. The first-story floor is poured concrete slab. The building's exterior walls are exposed brick in the interior. A high, poured-concrete "baseboard" runs along the perimeter of the slab floor. In the first story, windows feature simple sloping and flush concrete stools. The interior space in the first story is largely open and does not require posts or interior load-bearing walls. A series of massive 24" deep steel I-beams span the width of the building. The ceiling and the beams are clad in plaster over metal lath. A new watch office has been constructed on brick piers in the rear of the interior space. The original watch office and captain's office remain and have been converted to a storage area. Original features including doors, interior windows, beaded board walls, and wooden trim have survived in the watch office and captain's office. A

staircase at the rear of the building has been reconfigured below the the original midway landing.

The upper story of the fire station features the original narrow-strip pine floor, plaster walls and ceilings. The walls feature tall baseboards with moulded caps, and are topped with moulded crown trim. Windows and surviving original door openings are surrounded with simple wooden trim. Some new interior walls have been added to what was originally a large open space where the firefighters lived in a barracks-like room.



The outlines of three original fire-pole holes are still visible in the second story



The dining room features a large fireplace



Floor and skylight are original features of the bathroom

Some of the original rooms in second story of the fire station have survived in their original configuration. The largest of the surviving original rooms is the dining room. The dining room features large brick fireplace with a simple concrete hearth and wooden shelf. A soldier-course of brick was added at some point to reduce the size of the fireplace opening. An original bathroom feature a raised tile floor and a skylight.

In terms of Charlotte's built environment, Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 is significant as one of several fire stations built in Charlotte before World War II in response to the growth of the city and the technical and professional development of firefighting. Of the four surviving fire stations built during this period, the three-bay-wide Charlotte Fire Station Number 4 is the largest. The size of the station reflects the historical commercial and residential density of the center city area.



Station No.4



Station No. 5



Station No. 6



Station No. 7

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1. The most complete treatment of the history of firefighting in the United States is found in Mark Tebeau, *Eating Smoke. Fire in Urban America, 1800-1950* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
 2. *Charlotte Observer* (July 29, 1987).
 3. For information on the first 100 years of the Charlotte Fire Department see Sally Young and Douglas D. Hickin, "A Brief History of the Charlotte Fire Department" in *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1988).
 4. Rebecca Zurier, *The American Firehouse. An Architectural and Social History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1978), p. 119.
 5. Tebeau. p. 3.
 6. <http://landmarkscommission.org?surveycityhall.htm>.
 7. Zurier, p. 119.
 8. Charlotte Building Permit 9628 (December 3, 1928). The building permit estimated that the fire station would cost approximately \$16,000 to construct. The building contractor was the Carolina Company. The building went into service on April 24, 1929, the same day as Charlotte Fire Station No. 6. on Laurel Avenue. 10 firemen initially worked at Fire Station No. 5. Captain R. F. Barkley and Lieutenant A. W. Phillips were in charge. *Charlotte News* (April 23, 1929). *Charlotte Observer* (April 24, 1929).
 9. <http://landmarkscommission.org?surveycityhall.htm>.
 10. *Charlotte News* (September 17, 1938), p. 12.
 11. *Charlotte Observer* (July 29, 1987).
 12. Zurier, pp. 159-160.
 13. Zurier, pp. 160-163.
 14. Zurier, pp. 163-166.
 15. <http://landmarkscommission.org/surveys&firestation6.htm>
 16. *Charlotte News* (April 23, 1929). *Charlotte Observer* (April 24, 1929). C. C. Hook demonstrated throughout his career of more than four decades a marked ability to adjust to changing architectural philosophies. Illustrative of this fact is the design he and his then-partner Frank Sawyer fashioned sometime before 1902 for a fire station in Durham, N.C. The Durham station stands in bold contrast to the contextual sensitivity exhibited by Charlotte Fire Station No. 5 and Charlotte Fire Station No. 6.

See 1892-1902 *Some Designs By Hook & Sawyer Architects* (Charlotte: Queen City Printing and Paper Company, 1902).



17. *Charlotte Observer* (July 29, 1987).
18. *Charlotte Observer* (September, 1981; September 12, 1997).
19. *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1988).
20. <http://cmhpf.org/essays/FireStation2.html>; <http://landmarkscommission.org/surveys&rpalmer.htm>