

Survey and Research Report

On Charlotte Fire Station Number 5



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charlotte Fire Station Number 5 is located at 224 Wesley Heights Way in Charlotte, N.C.

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

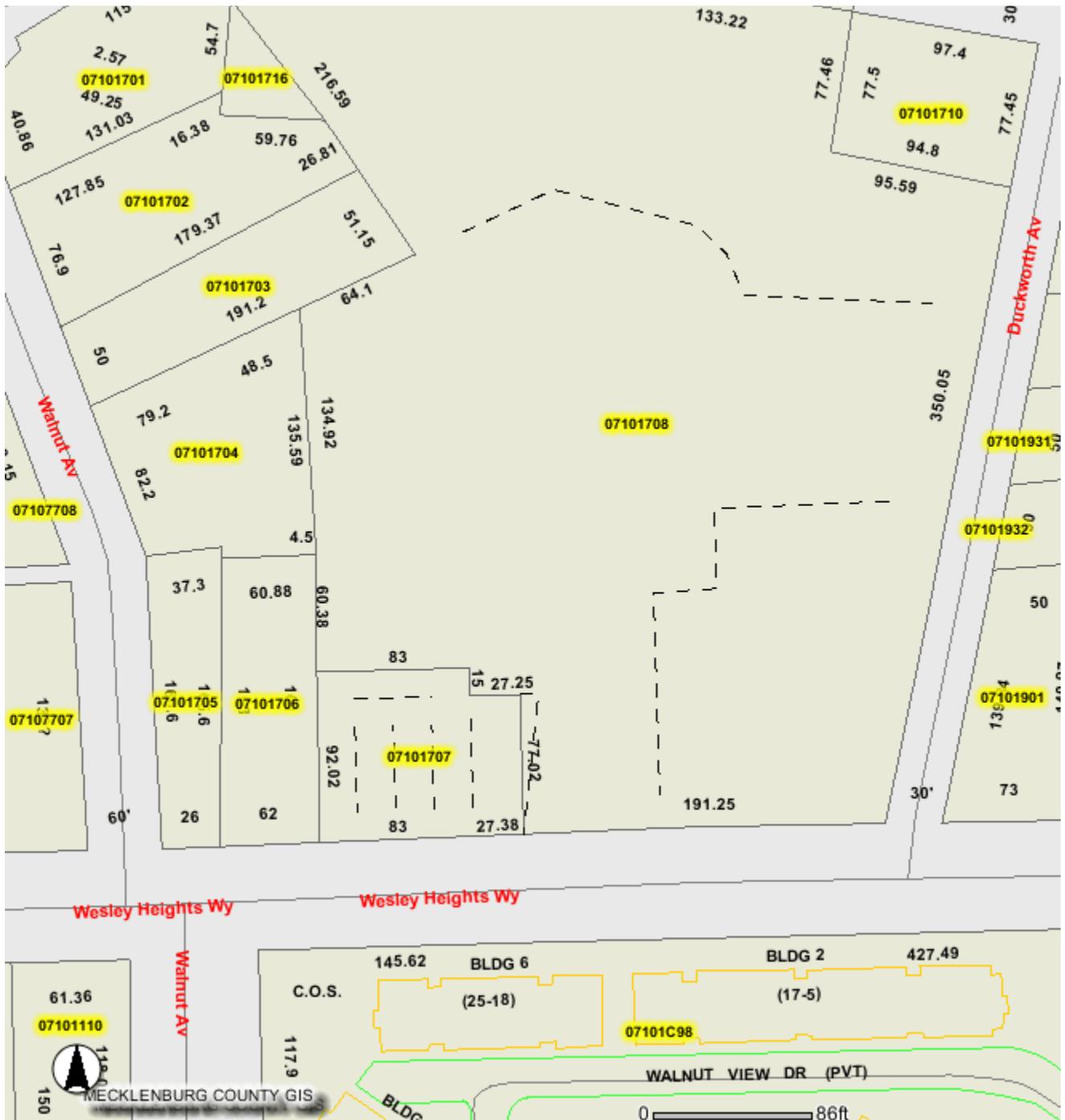
City of Charlotte

600 East Trade Street

Charlotte, N.C. 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 depicting the location of the property.



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. 5 possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) Fire Station No. 5 was designed by Charles Christian Hook, an architect of local and regional importance.

2) Fire Station No. 5 is reflective of the architectural design of firehouses in the 1920s.

3) Fire Station No. 5 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. 5 meets this criterion.

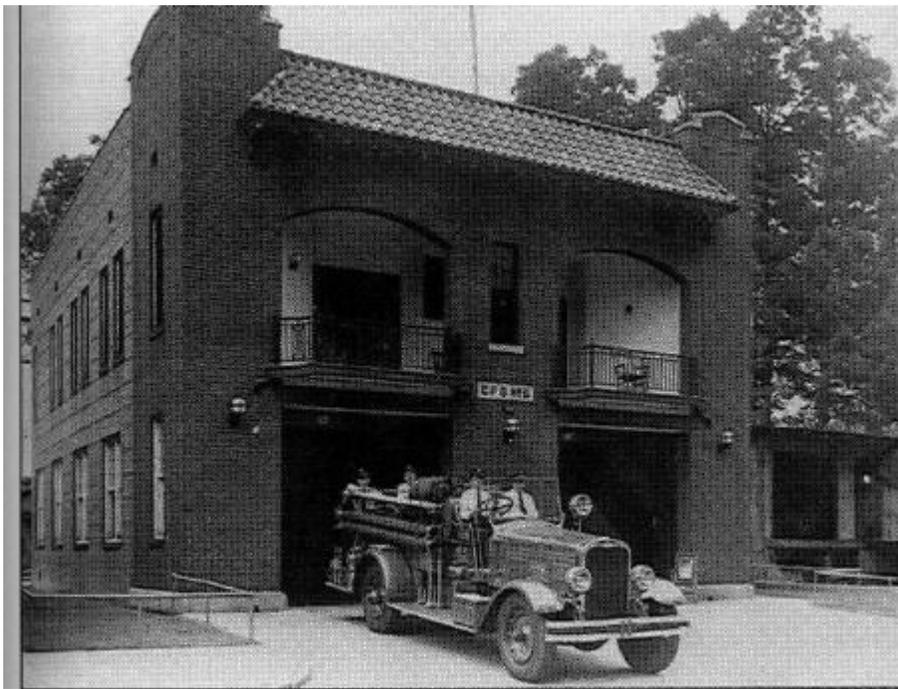
9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark." The appraised value of the building is \$326,600. The current appraised value of the 9882 square feet of land is \$19,800. The total appraised value of the property is \$346,400. The property is zoned R-22MF. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 07101706 .

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: March 1, 2009

A Brief History Of Charlotte Fire Station Number 5

Dr. Dan L. Morrill



Photograph from *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887*

The historical significance of Fire Station Number 5 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 5 was built in 1928-29 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. 5 responds to the same imperative of being sensitive to its surroundings. Fire Station No. 5 continues to serve two of Charlotte's early 20th century neighborhoods, Wesley Heights and Seversville.¹⁶

Only three pre-World War Two fire stations in Charlotte continue to serve their original purpose. They are Fire Station No. 5, Fire Station Number 6 (1929), and Fire Station Number 7 built on North Davidson St. in the North Charlotte mill village in 1935. ¹⁹



Charlotte Fire Station No. 6 (1928-29)



Charlotte Fire Station No. 7

Three 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, former Fire Station Number 4 built on W. Fifth St. in 1925, and the former Palmer Fire School on Monroe Road on the edge of the Elizabeth neighborhood.²⁰



Former Palmer Fire School



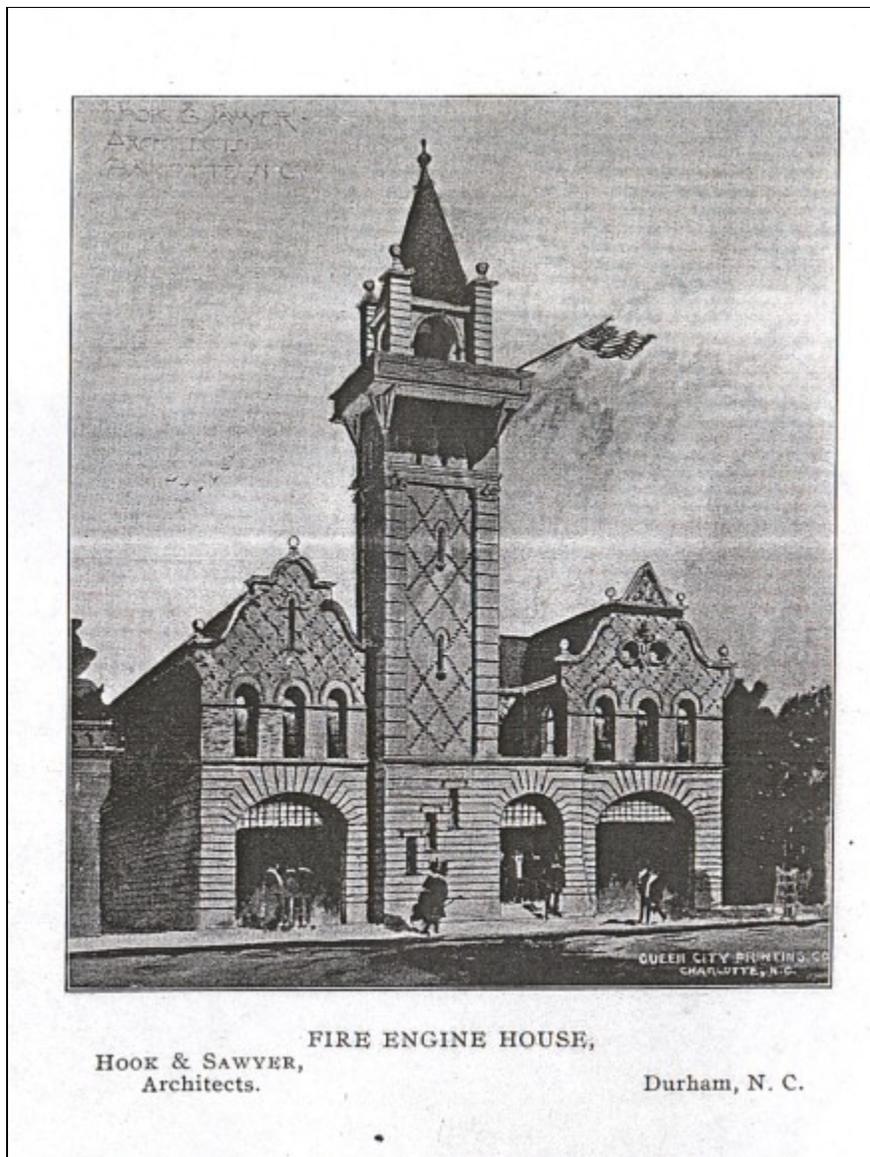
Former Charlotte Fire Station No. 2



Former Charlotte Fire Station No. 4

[Architectural Description Of Charlotte Fire Station No. 5](#)

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>