

Survey and Research Report

On

Charlotte Fire Station Number 7



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as Charlotte Fire Station 7 is located at 3210 North Davidson Street in Charlotte, N.C.

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

City of Charlotte

c/o Curt Walton, City Manager

600 East 4th Street

Charlotte, N.C. 28202-2816

Telephone: (704) 336-2244

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 maps depicting the location of the property. The UTM of the property is 17 517722E 3900253N



5. Current Tax Parcel Reference to the property: The tax parcel number of the property is 083-085-15.

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 description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description 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 the property known as Charlotte Fire Station 7 possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) Charlotte Fire Station 7 stands as originally built in 1935, when the city of Charlotte established the station to service the North Charlotte neighborhood.

2) Charlotte Fire Station 7 represents the economic importance and social vitality of the North Charlotte neighborhood, even as it has seen the area evolve from a mill town to a thriving, local historic district.

3) Charlotte Fire Station 7 has special historical and institutional significance as a structure that originally housed both a fire company and a jail cell.

4) Charlotte Fire Station 7 has special significance architecturally as a typical local example of the “storefront style” urban fire station designed to blend in with the pre-existing built environment.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that Charlotte Fire Station 7 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 current appraised value of the building is \$297,300. The current appraised value of the 1.335 acres of land is \$66,800. The property is zoned C700. The property is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem Taxes.

A Brief History of Charlotte Fire Station #7

The historical significance of Fire Station Number 7 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



Fire Truck in front of Fire Station 7

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.

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

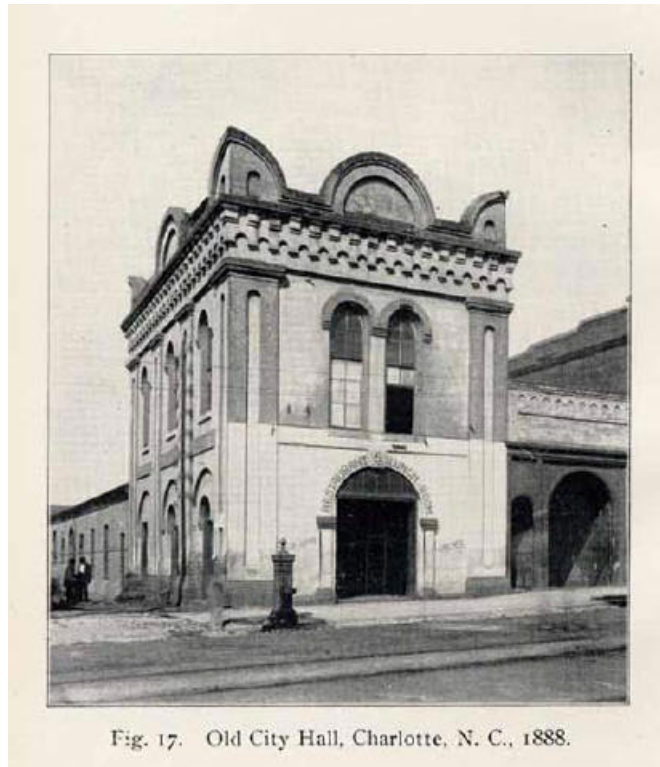


Fig. 17. Old City Hall, Charlotte, N. C., 1888.

Charlotte's First Municipal Fire Station

Charlotte's first municipal fire station, destroyed in the 1970s, stood near the intersection of 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



This photograph, taken of a parade on E. Trade St. for the Confederate Veteran's Parade in 1929, shows the original Fire Station in the streetscape on the left.

Charlotte Fire Station Number 7 was built in 1935 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

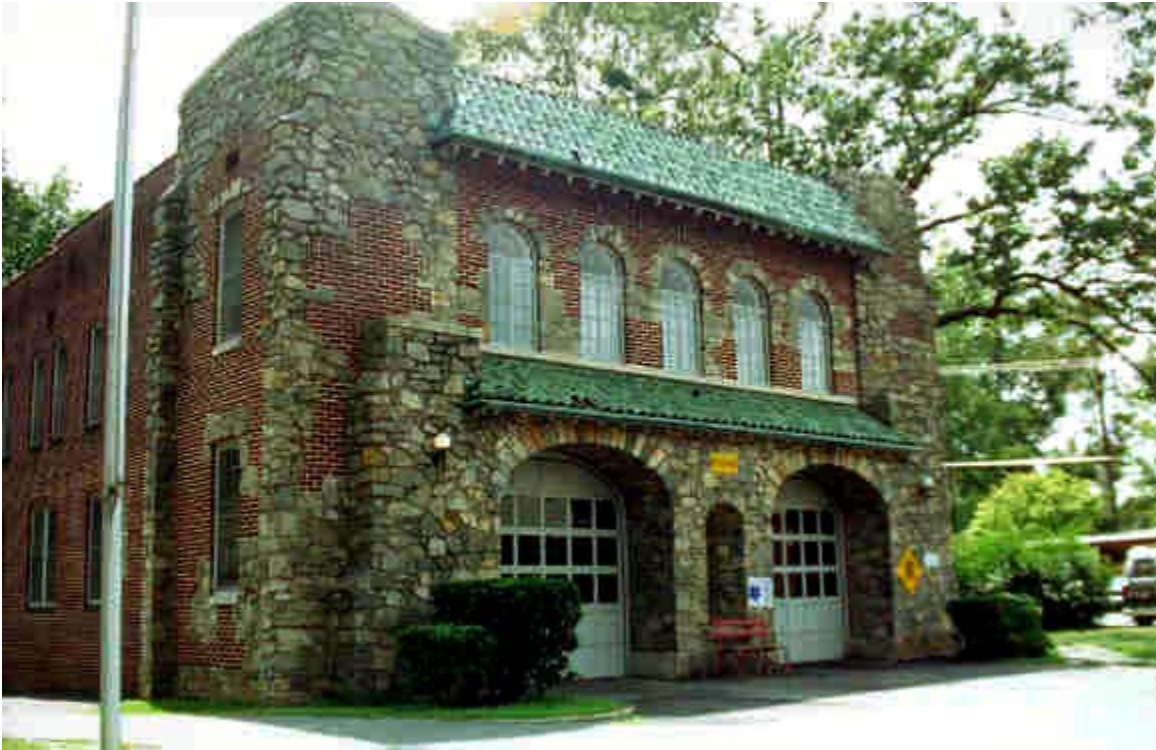


C. C. Hook



Former Fire Station No. 1. The building is not extant.

Also the architect for the new City Hall and Fire Station on East Trade St. that opened in 1925, Hook fashioned Fire Station Number 7 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



Charlotte Fire Station No. 6

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 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. 7 responds to the same desire to be sensitive to its streetscape. Situated in the commercial core of the North Charlotte Mill Village, it takes on the characteristics of the surrounding buildings in terms of scale, style, and construction materials.¹⁶ Also reflective of its industrial neighborhood was the fact that a jail cell was placed in the building, most likely to hold "rowdy" textile workers who labored in the nearby Highland Park Manufacturing Plant No. 3, the Mercury Mill, and the Johnston Mill.¹⁷



North Charlotte Textile Workers On An Outing

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, and Fire Station Number 5 erected in 1929 on Tuckaseegee Road, now Wesley Heights Way.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹



Fire Station No. 5



Palmer Fire School



Fire Station No. 2

¹ Mark Tebeau, *Eating Smoke: Fire in Urban America, 1800-1950* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), *passim*. This is the most complete treatment of the history of firefighting in the United States. Much of the information contained herein on Fire Station No. 7 is taken from Guy Aiken, "Survey and Research Report on Charlotte Fire Station 7," a manuscript completed in December 2007 for a graduate course at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

² Sally Young and Douglas D. Hickin, *Charlotte Fire Department Since 1887* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1988), 6.

³ Rebecca Zurier, *The American Firehouse: An Architectural and Social History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1978), 40.

⁴ Young and Hickin, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ Lois Moore Yandle, *The Spirit of a Proud People: Pictures and Stories of Highland Park Manufacturing Mill #3 and the People in the Village of North Charlotte* (Columbia, SC: Lois Moore Yandle, 1997), 7. Charlotte Building Permit No. 506 (December 15, 1934).

⁹ Levine Museum of the New South, *Cotton Fields to Skyscrapers: Charlotte and the Carolina Piedmont in the New South*, permanent exhibit (Charlotte, 2002).

¹⁰ Yandle, 8.

¹¹ Charlotte Building Permit 506 (December 15, 1934).

¹² *Charlotte News* (September 17, 1938).

¹³ Zurier, 32.

¹⁴ Ibid., 81.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 72 (caption), 71 (caption).

¹⁷ Aiken, Yandle. For additional information on the development of the North Charlotte Mill Village see [surveys&rmeckmill.htm](#) , [surveys&rjohnstonmill.htm](#) , [surveys&rhighlandmill3.htm](#)

¹⁸ Young and Hickin.

19. <http://cmhpf.org/essays/FireStation2.html>; <http://landmarkscommission.org/surveys&rpalmer.htm>

Charlotte Fire Station Number 7

Architectural Description



Charlotte Fire Station Number 7 is a narrow, two-story, one-bay-wide, brick building that faces west and sits close to North Davidson Street in Charlotte. The building is located near the middle of the 3200 block, which is in the heart of the small commercial district that historically served the North Charlotte neighborhood. Neighboring one and two story brick storefront buildings date from the early years of the 20th century, and are mixed with later commercial/retail buildings. The fire station has retained a high degree of integrity and is in good condition; and, despite its relatively small size, the building remains prominent in the streetscape.



The building's decorative architectural elements are concentrated on the symmetrical facade. Built on a concrete slab, the brick walls rise from the grade and are laid (on the front elevation) in Common Flemish Bond. The truck entrance to the firehouse is sheltered by a shallow portico supported by two square brick posts. The posts have inset corners on all sides, giving the appearance of a pilaster on the front of the posts. The posts rise from granite bases and support a wooden framed balcony.



The brick post extend through the balcony floor and form low brick handrail posts that are topped with simple cast caps. The posts support original iron railings that feature a geometric design. Metal supports rest on the low brick posts and support an aluminum awning that was added to the building late in the 20th century. The low brick posts are connected to the facade by a narrow section of iron railing. The balcony and the doorway below it are recessed slightly into the facade. Square pilaster frame the opening. The pilasters are topped with moulded wooden trim. The balcony's rear wall is composed entirely of original wooden millwork. An original wooden eight-light door is centered in the balcony, and is topped with a three-light transom. Pairs of eight-light casement windows border the doorway and are topped with four two-light transom sash.



The pilasters are topped by pediment decorated with dental moulding. The pediment protrudes slightly from the facade and is protected by step-flashing. The recessed center section of the facade gives the outer sections the appearance of wide pilasters. This effect is most notable above the shallow pediment. The large pilasters feature stone bands at the second-floor ceiling height. Above the stone bands the outer corners of the pilasters are inset. The facade is topped with a gabled parapet which is capped with a course of stone.





In contrast to the Common Flemish bond on the facade, the brickwork on the side and rear elevations is laid in an American bond with five rows of stretchers laid between each row of headers.

The fire station's side elevations can be divided into bays that are delineated by narrow brick piers. The piers stop at the ceiling height of the first story and are topped with sloped stone caps. The projecting brick piers indicate the location of three interior steel beams that run the width of the building, allowing for the open floor plan in the first story. Door and window openings are unadorned, with a soldier-course of brick laying across each metal header. New metal-framed doors and windows have replaced the original wooden millwork in the original openings. On the south elevation, the first story features a single-light door adjacent to the facade. The upper floor features single and double windows. The rearmost wall opening has been infilled with brick. An iron arm attached into the brickwork might indicate that the opening originally served to load coal into the basement. A moulded wooden band tops the side walls and meets a narrow eave overhang.

The iron arm shown in this photograph was used to load fuel into the basement.



The north elevation is partially obscured by a recent one-story addition. The small brick addition is topped by a low-pitch hipped roof, and is set-back from the front of the building in a sensitive manner so that it does not detract greatly from the historic facade. Similar window openings as those found on the south elevation pierce the north elevation.



This photograph of the southwestern corner of the building demonstrates the two different brick patterns on the exterior of the building. The facade features Common Flemish Bond, a bond with five rows of stretchers separated by a single row of alternating headers and stretchers. The side and rear elevations feature a much more typical American Bond pattern, with five rows of stretcher bricks laid between each row of locking header bricks



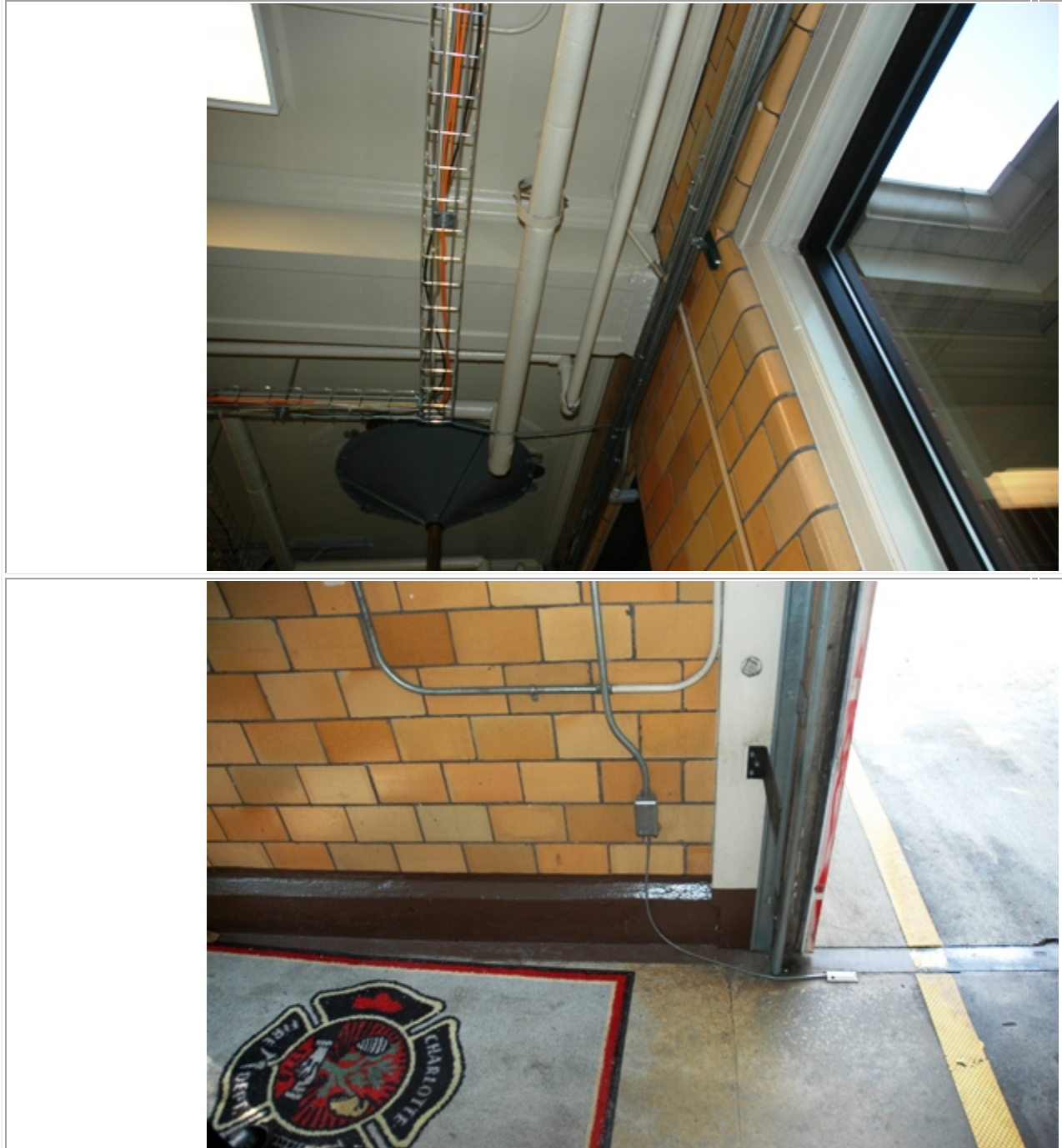


The rear of the fire station features a one-story wing that once served as a small jail. Sanborn Maps indicate that the one-story wing was of fireproof construction. This probably means that in addition to the solid masonry walls common to the entire building the jail portion features a concrete roof. The roof has been covered with a composite roofing material. The rear wing is inset from the principal section of the fire station. The flat roof of the wing slopes slightly to the rear and is bordered on both sides by low, flat parapets capped with a course of cast concrete blocks. The flat roof was designed to serve as a balcony, and the original iron pipe railings have survived. An original door opening on the south elevation has been retained, but all of the original window openings have been filled with brick.

The design of the fire station's low-pitched gabled-roof is most apparent from the rear. The second story features simple eave returns and an original wooden half-round louvered vent in the gable. A simple square brick flue is located where the south elevation of the rear wing meets the principal section of the building. The flue rises from the basement and is topped with a simple concrete cap.

Interior of Charlotte Fire Station Number 7





The interior of the Charlotte Fire Station Number has retained a high degree of integrity. The first-story floor is a poured concrete slab. Glazed tile rise from an integrated concrete baseboard and cover nearly all of the wall surfaces on the first floor. The tiles are various hues of tan, except for a row of black tile that was laid at the six-foot level. The first story features several original interior panel doors, including a two-panel six-light door leading to a rear

office. Perhaps the most prominent interior feature is a staircase built against the south wall. The stairs feature a wooden newel post with dadoed accents, a curved handrail, and simple squared balusters set in a geometric pattern.

Piping, ducting, electrical boxes, and conduit are located on many of the walls and on the ceiling, reflecting the continual changes and upgrades made to the building. The ceiling is flat plaster with simple moulded trim. Three beams support the ceiling in the large open fire truck bay. The beams feature a simple recessed panel and are constructed of plaster and metal lath over a wooden box that hides a steel beam that carries the load of the floor above.

The rear wing of the building, the former jail, has been altered with new walls and ceilings and has not retained any original interior features. The upper story of the fire station has also been largely altered so that it is difficult to determine the original configuration of the space.

In terms of Charlotte's built environment, Charlotte Fire Station Number 7 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 single-bay Station Number 7 is the smallest.



Station No. 7



Station No. 5



Station No. 6



Station No. 4