

The Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant



This report was written on Feb. 2, 1987

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant is located at 1401-09 West Morehead Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

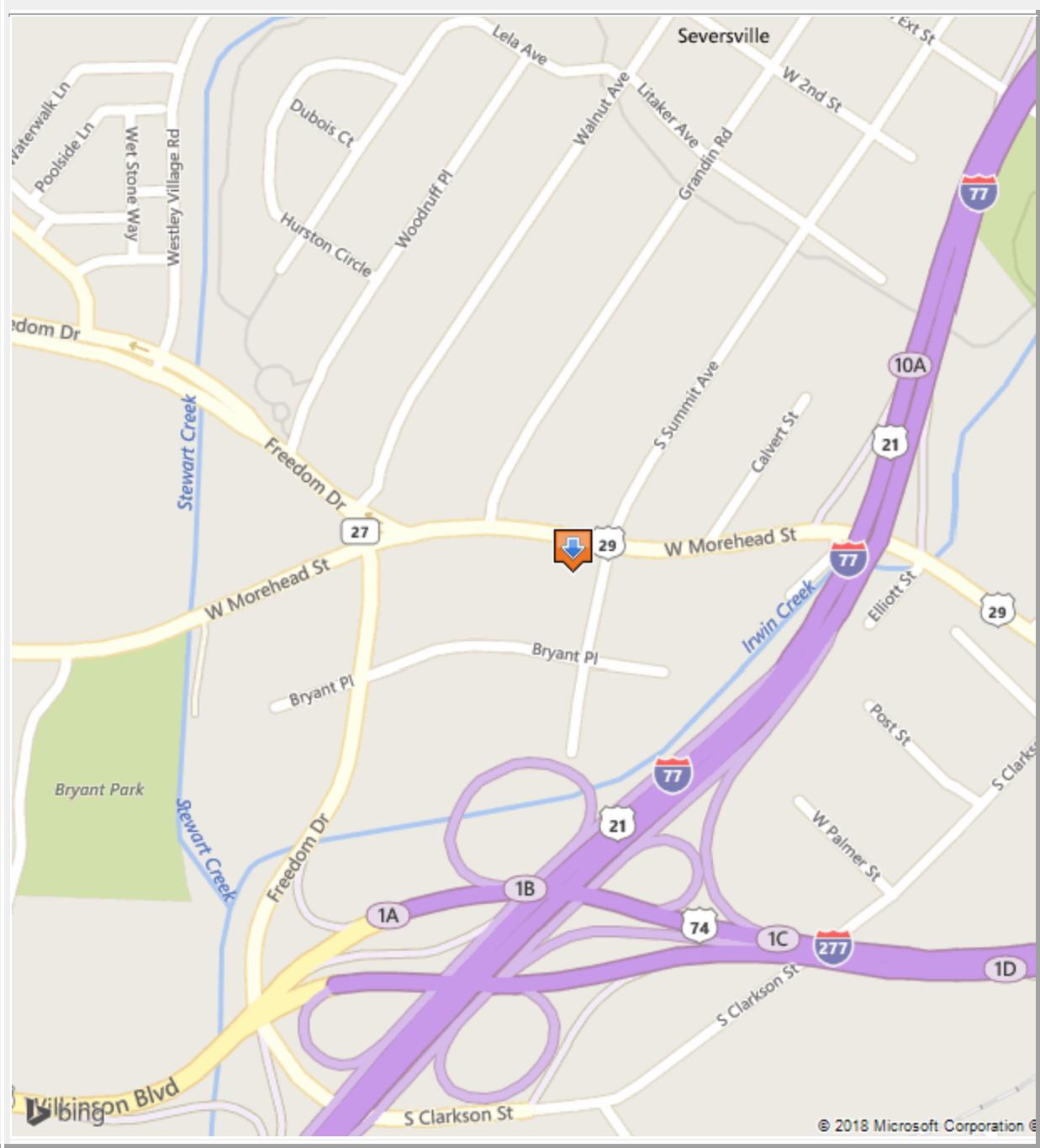
The owner of the property is:
Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company

P. O. Box 10186
Charlotte, N.C., 28201

Telephone: 704/551-4400

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 most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 759, Page 307. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 067-012-04.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Deborah Swanson and Dan L. Morrill, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: A brief architectural report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Nora Mae Black.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation as 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 Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant, erected in 1930, is an especially bold and striking example of commercial building Art Deco style architecture in pre-World War II Charlotte;
- 2) the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant was designed by M. R. "Steve" Marsh (1901-1977), an architect of local and regional significance, and is an important example of Marsh's work;
- 3) the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant contains distinctive decorative detail fashioned by Ornamental Stone Company of Charlotte; and
- 4) J. Luther Snyder, the founder of the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company, was a leader in the civic and business life of Charlotte during the first half of the twentieth century.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the original portions of the property known as the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Plant meet 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 "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$303,210. The current appraised value of the 1.807 acres of land is \$129,890. The total appraised value of the property is \$433,100. The property is zoned I2.

Date of Preparation of this report: February 2, 1987

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St. Box D
Charlotte, N.C., 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

Historical Overview

Deborah Swanson and Dr. Dan L. Morrill
February 2, 1987

In April, 1902, J. Luther Snyder, a Virginia native, moved from Atlanta, where he had worked for the Coca-Cola Company for two years, and established the first Coca-Cola bottling plant in the two Carolinas, at 7 South Church Street. ¹ "When I came to Charlotte, the city had 17,000 people, eighteen saloons, two breweries . . . and I had a terrible time selling soft drinks with that kind of competition," Snyder remembered years later. ² But Snyder, an adroit businessman, must have known that several factors were working in his favor. The temperance movement was sweeping the South, and it would soon sound the death knell for the breweries and the saloons. Charlotte was becoming a major textile manufacturing center; and the industrial workers, forced to labor for long hours in the stifling atmosphere of the mills, would eagerly buy Snyder's "soft" drink, especially when they could no longer quench their thirst with "hard" liquor. And there was always the blistering North Carolina summer sun, which could drive even the most steadfast to seek liquid refreshments. ³

At first, the bottling and distribution systems for Coca-Cola in Charlotte were primitive by today's standards. The capping and bottling equipment were foot-powered, and a seasoned operator could fill and cap just four bottles a minute or ten cases per hour. Horse-drawn wagons, customarily carrying ten cases, meandered through the streets of Charlotte, hauling Coca-Cola to industrial establishments, neighborhood grocery stores, and other outlets. Long distance deliveries were shipped in metal packing crates by railroad. Indeed, it was probably the excellent railroad network radiating from Charlotte that persuaded Snyder to locate his fledgling bottling operation here. ⁴

Success dictated that Snyder find bigger facilities for his bottling plant. In 1907 it moved to 14-18 South Poplar St.; in 1913 to 522-24 West Fifth St.; and in 1918 to 213 N. Graham St. ⁵ But it was in 1930 that Snyder made his most substantial commitment to modernizing his operations. "The Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company has purchased a site on West Morehead Street and will begin immediately the construction of a new plant to cost approximately \$100,000," the *Southern Public Utilities Magazine* proclaimed in January, 1930. ⁶ Designed by Marion Rossiter "Steve" Marsh, the building was completed in November, 1930, and continued to serve as headquarters for Coca-Cola Bottling operations in Charlotte until 1974. ⁷ The wonderfully playful ornamental detail work on the exterior of the building, which includes Coca-Cola bottles, was done by Ornamental Stone Company of Charlotte, owned by William F.

McCandless.⁸ The building, although abandoned, is still owned by the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company, but it is for sale.

M. R. Marsh (1901-1977), a native of Jacksonville, Fla., came to Charlotte in 1916 as chief draftsman for Charlotte architect J. M. McMichael, later worked as a designer for the chemical engineering firm headed by Peter Gilchrist, and in 1922 opened his own practice in Charlotte. Although his training was limited to correspondence courses from Columbia University and to on-the-job experience with his brother's architectural firm, Marsh and Sexleby (sp?) in Jacksonville, Marsh oversaw the design of many edifices in Charlotte and its environs, including the Charlotte Armory (destroyed), Fairview Homes (Charlotte's first public housing project), the Builders Building, the Oasis Temple, the Plaza Theater, Liggett Drug Company, the Frank Sherrill House in Dilworth, and the F. Siefert residence in Eastover.⁹

J. Luther Snyder had "a well-deserved reputation as a civic leader and welfare worker," wrote historian Hugh Lefler.¹⁰ He was president of Merchants and Farmers National Bank from 1931 until 1933, headed the Chamber of Commerce during the Depression years, and was a member of the airport board. On balance, J. Luther Snyder, the founder of the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company, was a credit to his family, his city, and his region.¹¹ And the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company Building, at 1401 W. Morehead St., is the most dramatic physical reminder of J. Luther Snyder's business career.

Notes

¹ Special staff of Writers, *North Carolina - Rebuilding An Ancient Commonwealth, 1584-1925* (The American Historical Society, Inc., Chicago and New York, 1929), Vol. III., p. 75. *Charlotte Observer*, April 11, 1977, *Advertising Supplement*, p. 3. Hereafter cited as *Supplement*. Coca-Cola was invented in 1886 by John Pemberton, an Atlanta druggist; and Asa Candler became president of the Coca-Cola Company. Initially, Coca-Cola was available only in drugstores; but in the late 1800's two lawyers in Chattanooga, Tenn., Benjamin F. Thomas and Joseph Whitehead, purchased the first franchise to bottle Coca-Cola and distribute it. Snyder spent one year with the Chattanooga Bottling Company before going to Atlanta.

² Hugh T. Lefler, *History of North Carolina, Family and Personal History* (Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1956), Vol. IV., p. 793. Hereafter cited as Lefler.

³ For a summary of the development of the textile industry in Charlotte, see Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey of Cotton Mills in Charlotte, North Carolina" (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1981). Also see Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte And Its

Neighborhoods: The Growth of a New South City" (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission). Hereafter cited as Hanchett.

⁴ *Supplement*, p. 3 and p. 6. For a discussion of the development of railroads in Charlotte, see Hanchett.

⁵ Charlotte, N.C., City Directory, 1907, p. 251; 1913, p. 126. Interview with George C. Snyder, Sr., by Deborah Swanson (October 3, 1986). Hereafter cited as Interview.

⁶ *Southern Public Utilities Magazine* (January, 1930), p. 34. For land acquisitions on West Morehead St. by the Charlotte Coca-Cola Bottling Company, see Mecklenburg County Deed Book 701, p. 246; Book 759, p. 307.

⁷ *Southern Public Utilities Magazine* (January, 1930), p. 34. Marsh also designed the Coca-Cola Bottling Company plant in Greenville, SC (*Ibid.*, August, 1931, p. 15). Issues of this magazine are located in the archives of Duke Power Company in Charlotte, N.C. Mecklenburg County Building Standards Department, Building Permit # 10903, March 13, 1930. *Supplement*, p. 6. Interview.

⁸ Interview. Charlotte, N.C., City Directory, 1929, p. 641. ⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, September 5, 1977. Lefler, Vol. III., p. 86. Hanchett. Thomas W. Hanchett, "The Work of M. R. Marsh and Successor Architects" (an unpublished manuscript in the offices of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, November, 1983). In 1945 Marsh entered into partnership with Teebe Hawkins. Marsh retired in 1964. The firm remains in business as Hawkins - Kibler Associates and retains many of Marsh's old job records.

¹⁰ Lefler, Vol. IV., p. 793.

¹¹ *Ibid.* The J. Luther Snyder House, located at 1901 Queens Rd., is also a significant local landmark. It was designed by Martin Boyer, a prominent Charlotte architect.

Architectural Description

By Nora Mae Black

The Coca-Cola Building, located on the southwest corner of the intersection of West Morehead Street and South Summit Avenue, was probably the fourth building to be constructed on one of the tracts of land carved from the Wadsworth Farm. When construction was completed in 1930, the building joined the Carolina Transfer and Storage Building and the Crane Corporation Building as the basis for a new light industrial and commercial district that was forming on the

outskirts of Charlotte. Within the year, the Grinnell Corporation completed their building west of the Coca-Cola Building. To the north of West Morehead Street, worker housing was built during this period along Summit Avenue and Walnut Avenue.

The architect who designed the building was M. R. (Steve) Marsh. He and J. Luther Snyder worked with the Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta to make the building an advertisement for Coca-Cola as well as a modern bottling plant. Construction on the building began in 1929, at the start of the Great Depression. George Snyder, Sr., son of J. Luther Snyder, was in charge of construction and hired many unemployed people locally, thus avoiding the use of a construction company. The building is of solid masonry construction with steel sash windows, steel steps and a concrete slab roof. Even the counter in the lobby was made of steel. When it opened in 1930, there was only one wooden stair railing making it one of the first fireproof Coca-Cola buildings.

The original building, 185 feet by 110 feet, consisted of three floors totaling approximately 45,000 square feet. The walls ranged in thickness from thirteen inches to seventeen inches. The basement was used as a storage area for large items like drums of syrup. It had a separate boiler room for the coal-fired furnace. The first, or street-level, floor consisted of office space, the bottling area, the garage and the shipping and loading areas. The second floor provided space for advertising and salesmen, a machinery room, and storage for the bottle crowns or caps. A room on the first floor, built as a safe, was connected to the second floor by a chute through which the salesmen could drop the money they collected from their customers.

Carved and molded artificial stone added contrast and shadow detail to the two story facade of russet face brick. Face brick on both the Morehead Street (front) and Summit Avenue (side) facades provided a look of elegance in the otherwise utilitarian neighborhood. William Frederick McCandless molded sand and cement together to make the artificial stone at his shop on South Boulevard. The stone was used on both the front and side facades in many ways. It formed the coping at the roofline and the lintels and ledges for the windows. Vertical bands of artificial stone separate the bays facing Morehead Street. Geometric patterns decorate the lintels while the vertical bands are carved in abstractions of leaves and plant forms. The parapet has the air of an overscaled battlement with its merlons of carved stone and crenels.

One of the most distinctive features of the building was the use of a Coca-Cola bottle on the corners of the building. Molded by McCandless, the large symbols project from the wall to create the image of one-half of a Coke bottle accurately detailed with the standard script logo, the gracefully curved bottle, and the crown. It was a distinctive touch added to many Coca-Cola buildings. In addition to the Coke bottle there is a Coca-Cola logo made of terra-cotta over the main entry.

The one-story center entrance on West Morehead Street is recessed six feet from the facade. One step up from the sidewalk, it is paved with mosaic tiles. The entrance still has the original brass-framed glass doors and windows. Copper light fixtures with pebble glass flank the recessed entry. When standing at the front door now, one can only see a small vestibule, however, the original open floor plan allowed the general manager to see the entire first floor from his office as there were no ceiling-high partitions except for those of the safe/room.

On both the first and second story portion of the facade, there are 8/8 double-hung windows which could be opened for ventilation. Additionally, on the first floor, there are three large fixed glass windows. These three windows gave visual access to the bottling works which were located at the very front of the building. To keep the windows from steaming up from the hot moist air of the bottle washing press, vents washed the windows with air. The idea was much the same as that of a defroster in an automobile. Thus, people were able to pass by on West Morehead Street, recognize the Coke bottle symbols on the building, and catch a glimpse of the beverage being bottled.

Another interesting feature of the windows involves the sills. The Snyders strongly believed in recycling the empty glass bottles and did not like to 'empties' sitting around the office or bottling area. The window sills are sloped so that empty bottles would slide off them. This encouraged the employ to return empty bottles to the bottle washing area.

Originally, the trucks were loaded for delivery through doors on the Summit Avenue side of the building. Over the years, the two doors and six windows were closed with brick for security and climate control reasons. The stone lintels and decoration still outline their former locations.

Utility brick, laid in common bond, was used for the rear wall. Combination windows, of awning and fixed glass, provided light and ventilation through the rear wall. A loading dock at the rear of the building was used for rail transportation. Since the railroad cars were not on the same level as the first floor, an elevator was installed to make the short trip of three or four feet. A coal chute on the rear southeast corner of the building has what appears to be the original black metal grate dated 1926. The rear of the building is surrounded by a high chain link fence.

The original interior was of open design with painted plaster walls and floors of either tile or concrete depending upon the location. The building has had partitions with wooden framing added to make the large open spaces into small offices. The ceilings have been dropped to allow the addition of ductwork for heating and air conditioning system. Tile floors have, in some areas, been replaced with carpet. As the company grew, additions were made to the west side and to the rear of the original structure. A few of the building's original functions are still apparent. The cull room, where broken bottles were cleaned for recycling, remains complete with its floor drain. The walls of the paint room, where cases were repainted, still bear the paint of 44 years of use.

The Coca-Cola Building sits at West Morehead Street and South Summit Avenue in a streetscape, with several buildings of its era. The size and strength of its construction add stability and presence along a heavily traveled corridor. The unique facade lends visual interest to a somewhat undistinguished street.