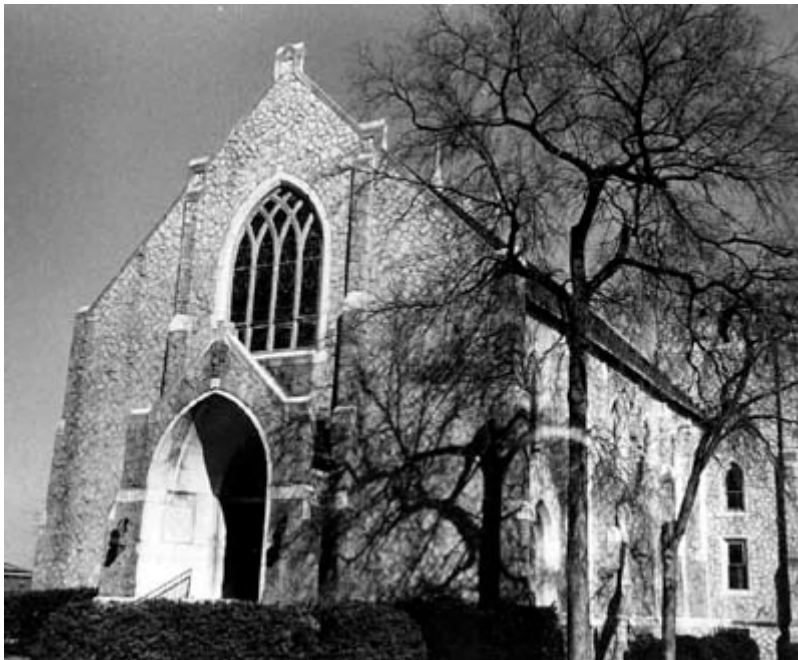


THE FIRST ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



First A. R. P. before the 1985 fire



First A. R. P. after the fire

This report was written on September 7, 1987

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is located at the corner of N. Tryon Street and West Eleventh Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.

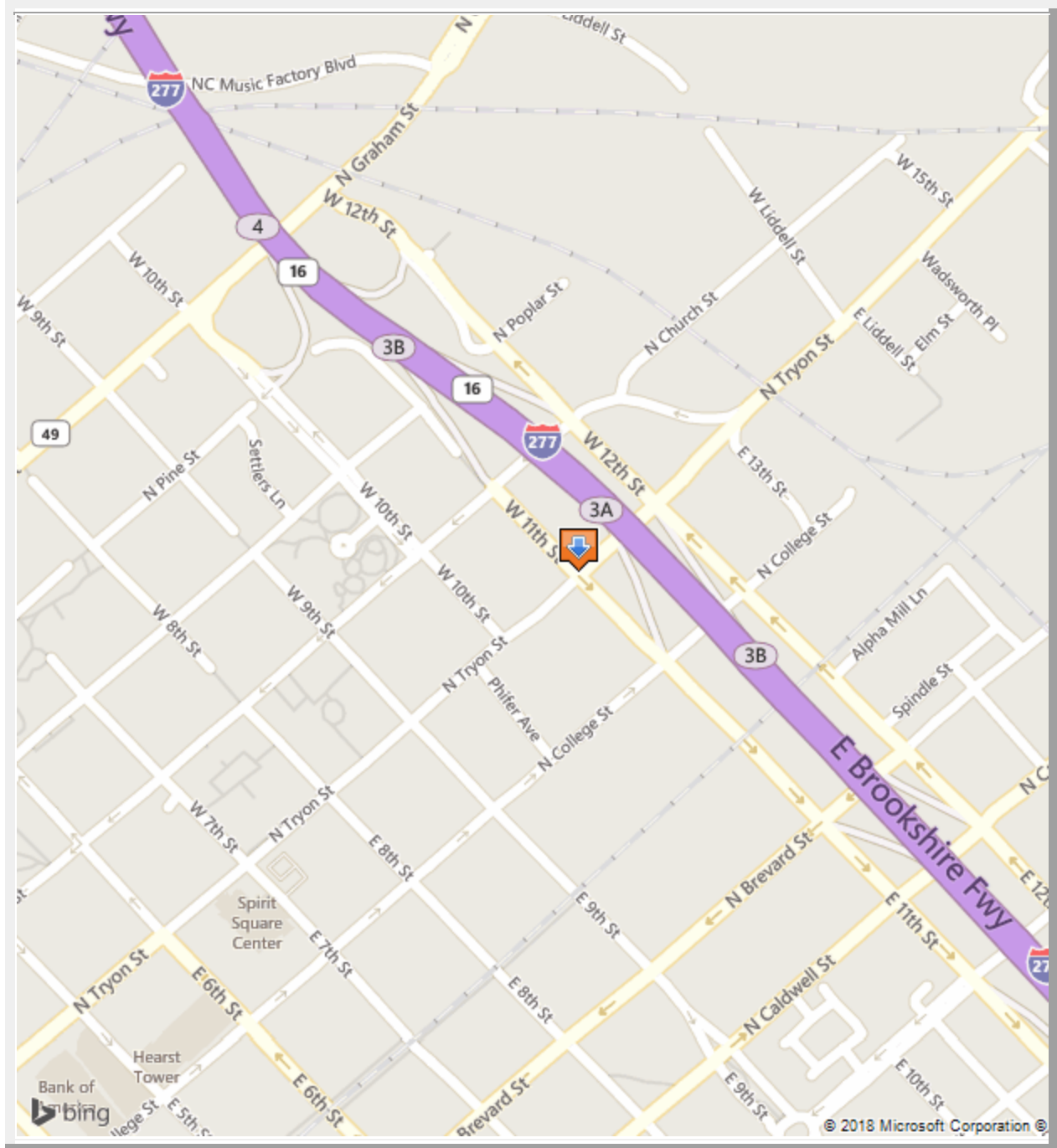
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Bentink Corp. N.V.
Pietermaai 15
Curacao
Netherlands Antilles

Telephone: Not available

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.



Click on the map to browse

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg Deed Book 5332, Page 751. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 078-045-03.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Ph.D.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation 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 First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was designed by James Mackson McMichael (1870-1944), an architect of local and regional importance; 2) the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, although a ruin, is the only vestige of a Christian congregation which once played an important role in the religious life of this community; 3) the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is one of a collection of imposing church edifices which adorns North Tryon Street; and 4) the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church occupies a significant place in terms of the cityscape of the Fourth Ward neighborhood.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill which is included in this report demonstrates that the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, although a ruin, does possess its essential integrity in terms of overall form and massing.

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 \$600. The current appraised value of the 1.117 acres of land is \$632,280. The total appraised value of the property is \$632,880. The most recent property tax bill on the property was \$4,259.44. The property is zoned UMUD.

Date of Preparation of this Report: September 7, 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

Architectural Description

Dr. Dan L. Morrill
September 7, 1987

The First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (1927), a Gothic Revival style, gable-roofed, random rubble granite ruined sanctuary with a two-story, flat-roof-with-parapet ruined education building on the rear or western portion of the main structure, and a detached two and one-half story Gothic Revival style manse near the northwestern corner of the property, was designed by James Mackson McMichael (1870-1944). ¹McMichael, a native of Harrisburg, Pa., moved to Charlotte in 1901, where he flourished as an architect for over forty years, specializing in churches, built both in Charlotte and throughout the southeastern United States. ² Unlike McMichael's earlier designs, most especially that of First Baptist Church (1909), in which the architect exhibited boldness, innovation, and even flamboyance, First Associate Reformed Presbyterian (A.R.P.) Church is a somewhat unimaginative and predictable expression of Gothic Revivalism. ³

Taking its inspiration from the romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which rejected rationalism and extolled the supposed virtues of Medieval Christendom, the Gothic Revival style, at least in the United States, gained greatest and most enduring favor in church architecture. ⁴ In keeping with this design tradition, the overall massing of First A.R.P. Church, which faces east toward North Tryon Street, approximates a cruciform with a taller north transept tower and a shorter south transept tower. Throughout the edifice, except for the interior, which was totally destroyed by fire in November, 1985, one encounters the architectural details readily associated with Gothic Revivalism. Such features as crenelated battlements, trefoils, tracery, buttresses, a steep gable roof atop the main sanctuary (now destroyed) and above the entrance portico, pedimented center merlons on the transept towers, a stone finial at the apex of the front gable, and, of course, the pointed arch, employed with special dramatic impact in a large window (now destroyed) above the front

entrance and in a deeply recessed front doorway surround, combine to produce the perpendicularity that constitutes the essential aesthetic motif of the Gothic Revival style.⁵

The manse, which happily was not seriously damaged by the fire of 1985, mimics the architectural adornments of the church, even to the extent of having a tower with crenelated battlements. A garage with connecting breezeway, subsequently enclosed, is original, thereby revealing that by 1927 an automobile had become a necessity, even for a Christian minister.⁶ Unfortunately, the interior of the manse has lost its significant architectural details, most likely to vandalism. The grounds are generally undistinguished, and sufficient ground disturbance has occurred over the years to render them unimportant for archeological purposes. Two stone stanchions, most likely used to support electric lights, flank a broad cement sidewalk which leads to the ten steps that rise to the front doorway. Steps and sidewalks also lead to entrances near the front of either side of the sanctuary and to another in the north transept tower. A driveway extends from West Eleventh Street to the entrance to the garage at the manse. The Tryon Street edge of the property is delineated by a low concrete curb.

That James Mackson McMichael developed a restrained and conservative design for the First A.R.P. Church is not surprising. Tryon Street is Charlotte's grandest uptown thoroughfare and one of the two axials which make Charlotte historically a crossroads town. Consequently, its streetscape has tended to reflect changes in the dominant aesthetic values of Charlotte's social and political elite. At the turn of the century, when aggressive entrepreneurs, like Edward Dilworth Latta and Daniel Augustus Tompkins, were transforming Charlotte into a major industrial and commercial center of the two Carolinas, architects, like McMichael in his First Baptist Church or William H. Peeps in his Latta Arcade (1915), were free to give physical expression to the excitement of that pioneering era in Charlotte's history.⁷ But, as architectural historian Thomas W. Hanchett writes:

The new leaders (in the 1920's) seemed much less adventuresome, more willing to follow in the directions set by their predecessors. Their homes and offices reflected this increased interest in tradition over innovation, in social correctness rather than risk-taking.⁸

To summarize, although the First A.R.P. Church is not among McMichael's better designs, although much of the main building has been destroyed by fire, this collection of edifices does occupy a significant place in Charlotte's architectural history. The only other Gothic Revival building in Charlotte that McMichael fashioned is Myers Park Presbyterian Church (1928), which survives in the Myers

Park neighborhood.⁹Therefore, First A.R.P. Church allows one to appreciate more fully the corpus of McMichael's work. Also, First A.R.P. Church is an integral component of a group of imposing churches or former churches that adorns North Tryon Street, including First Baptist Church (now Spirit Square), First United Methodist Church, and St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Finally, First A.R.P. Church is extremely significant in terms of the cityscape of Fourth Ward, a revitalized center city neighborhood. Standing at the corner of North Tryon and Eleventh Streets, the property is an anchor for the northeastern edge of the Fourth Ward neighborhood.

Notes

¹ Dr. William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the First A.R.P. Church" (October, 1986), an unpublished manuscript prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

² *Charlotte News*, October 2, 1907. *Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1944.

³ For information on the dedication of First Baptist Church on May 2, 1909 and on the impact of its design, see *Charlotte Observer*, May 3, 1909. *Evening Chronicle*, May 1, 3, 1909. For an early photograph of First Baptist Church, see *Charlotte Observer*, April 11, 1909.

⁴ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969), pp.173-177. John Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers, and Nancy B. Schwartz, "What Style Is It? Part Two." *Historic Preservation* (July-September, 1976), pp. 39-42. Hereinafter cited as *Poppeliers*.

⁵ *Poppeliers*.

⁶ Sanborn Insurance Map , Charlotte, North Carolina (1929), Vol. 2, p. 306.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the New South period in Charlotte's history, see Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company: Builders of a New South City," in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, July, 1985, pp. 293-316.

⁸ Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte And Its Neighborhoods. The Growth of a New South City, 1850-1930" (An unpublished manuscript in the files of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission), Chapter 3, Part 3, p. 8.

⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1944. For a detailed analysis of the architecture of North Carolina's early twentieth century suburbs, see Catherine W. Bishir and Lawrence S. Early, *Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning*(Raleigh: Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985).

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman
October, 1986

The First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church building on North Tryon Street in Charlotte is a product of the robust character of the city's booming economy in the 1920s. Built in 1926 from a design by noted architect J. M. McMichael, it was Charlotte's first Associate Reformed church, and it played an active and important role in the city's history. Its subsequent demise also reflected the changing character of the city, which made it impossible for the church to maintain its center-city congregation.

The Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church originated in eighteenth-century Scotland, when the Associate Presbyterian Church was formed in 1740, and the Reformed Presbyterian in 1743 as dissenters from the official state church. The two bodies merged on these shores in 1782, thus forming the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. In the South, the first two Presbyteries were set up in South Carolina in 1790 and 1801, and they joined to form the Associate Reformed Synod of the South in 1843. Because of growing differences with the Assembly and the Northern Synods over the slavery issue, the Synod of the South withdrew its affiliation with the national body and became independent in 1833. ¹

The First A. R. P. Church in Charlotte first came into being in 1873, when Dr. H. T. Sloan of Cedar Springs, S. C. (where the Second Presbytery was organized in 1801), opened a mission in Miller Hall. On March 1, 1874, the church was formally

organized with fourteen members. The first quarters for the new congregation was a small frame building on the corner of College and Fifth Streets, and its first pastor was the Reverend C. E. Todd. From these humble beginnings, the church flourished and in 1891 it moved to a prestigious location at the northwest corner of South Tryon and Third Streets.²

Beginning in the 1880s, The city experienced an almost uninterrupted economic boom until the end of the 1920s based on the construction of cotton mills in the city and county, and the fact that Charlotte became a regional banking, brokerage, distribution and supply center for the textile industry in the Piedmont Carolinas. The First A. R. P. Church directly benefited from this growth through a great increase in both its membership and the value of its land at Third and Tryon. Cashing in on the latter to better serve the former, the church sold its South Tryon property in 1925 and thereby reaped a windfall that was more than enough to build a large, handsome stone church building at the corner of North Tryon and Eleventh Streets, right on the edge of the prosperous Fourth Ward community.³

To design the new building, First A. R. P. hired Charlotte architect J. M. McMichael, who was well-known nationally for the many fine churches that came from his studio, which include numerous ones for black congregations.⁴ James Mackson McMichael (1870- 1944) was a Pennsylvania native who came to Charlotte in 1901. Some of his most important commissions in the city include the old Charlotte Public Library (now demolished), and its companion building on North Tryon Street, the former First Baptist Church, now Spirit Square; the Little Rock AME Zion Church, now the Afro-American Cultural Center; the Tabernacle A. R. P. Church on Trade Street; the Myers Park Presbyterian Church; St. John's Baptist Church on Hawthorne Lane; and the North Carolina Medical College building at Poplar and Sixth Streets. In all, McMichael designed fifty-two churches and some one hundred eighty-seven buildings in the Charlotte area, and well over nine hundred buildings throughout the country.⁵

On March 6, 1926, Charlotte builders Blythe and Isenhour took out a building permit, and estimated the construction cost to be \$ 139,000.⁶ The following year, 1927, the new building was dedicated.⁷ Total costs for land and buildings came to \$280,000 and so the church, which had sold its other property for \$300,000, was able to completely finance the acquisition of land and construction of a 500-seat stone Gothic church and have \$20,000 left over. "It may be the only church in Charlotte that can make that claim," said pastor Rev. R. Marshall Wilson in 1957, speaking of the fact that it "didn't cost the congregation a penny."⁸

The church was indeed fortunate in that it had no debt prior to the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, and it continued to thrive until about 1950. During that time it was one of the city's most active churches, and it helped launch other A. R. P.

churches in Charlotte, including the Tabernacle, Glenwood, Statesville Avenue (later Covenant), and Chalmers Memorial churches.⁹

About 1950, First A. R. P. began a decline from which it never recovered. The previous year, Rev. William Boyce left its pastorate after ten years of service, following which 300 of the 750 members left to form the Westminster Presbyterian Church in 1952. Subsequently, the postwar growth of suburban areas, the decline of the center city, particularly Fourth Ward, and other problems caused a steady loss of membership, until, in the late 1970s, the church could no longer afford to heat the sanctuary and make needed renovations, so the property was put up for sale.¹⁰ In 1981, a proposed condominium development proposed for the site fell through, but the property was sold the following year to the Chateau Fourth Ward Corporation, the present owners. Disaster struck a heavy blow to the structure when a fire, set by vagrants trying to keep warm, completely destroyed the interior on November 14, 1985.¹¹ The First A. R. P. Church building was at one time a proud member of the several majestic churches, large and small, in the city center, and the community would be well served if it were to be preserved as a historic anchor to that otherwise undistinguished end of North Tryon Street.

Notes

¹ First A. R. P. Church Directory for 1960.

² Ibid.

³ Deed Book 601, p. 516.

⁴ City of Charlotte Building Permit 6719, dated 6 March 1926.

⁵ Information on file at Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission; brochure, Historic Architecture Foundation, Washington, D. C., 1984.

⁶ See note 4.

⁷ Inscription on church entry.

⁸ *Charlotte News*. April 27, 1957, p. ?

⁹ Ibid., September 23, 1978, p. 5A.

¹⁰ Ibid.; LeGette Blythe and Charles Brockmann, *Hornet's Nest The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1961),pp.209-210.

¹¹ Deed Book 4552, p. 577; *Charlotte Observer*. November 15, 1986, p. 7