

## **THE FREDERICK APARTMENTS**



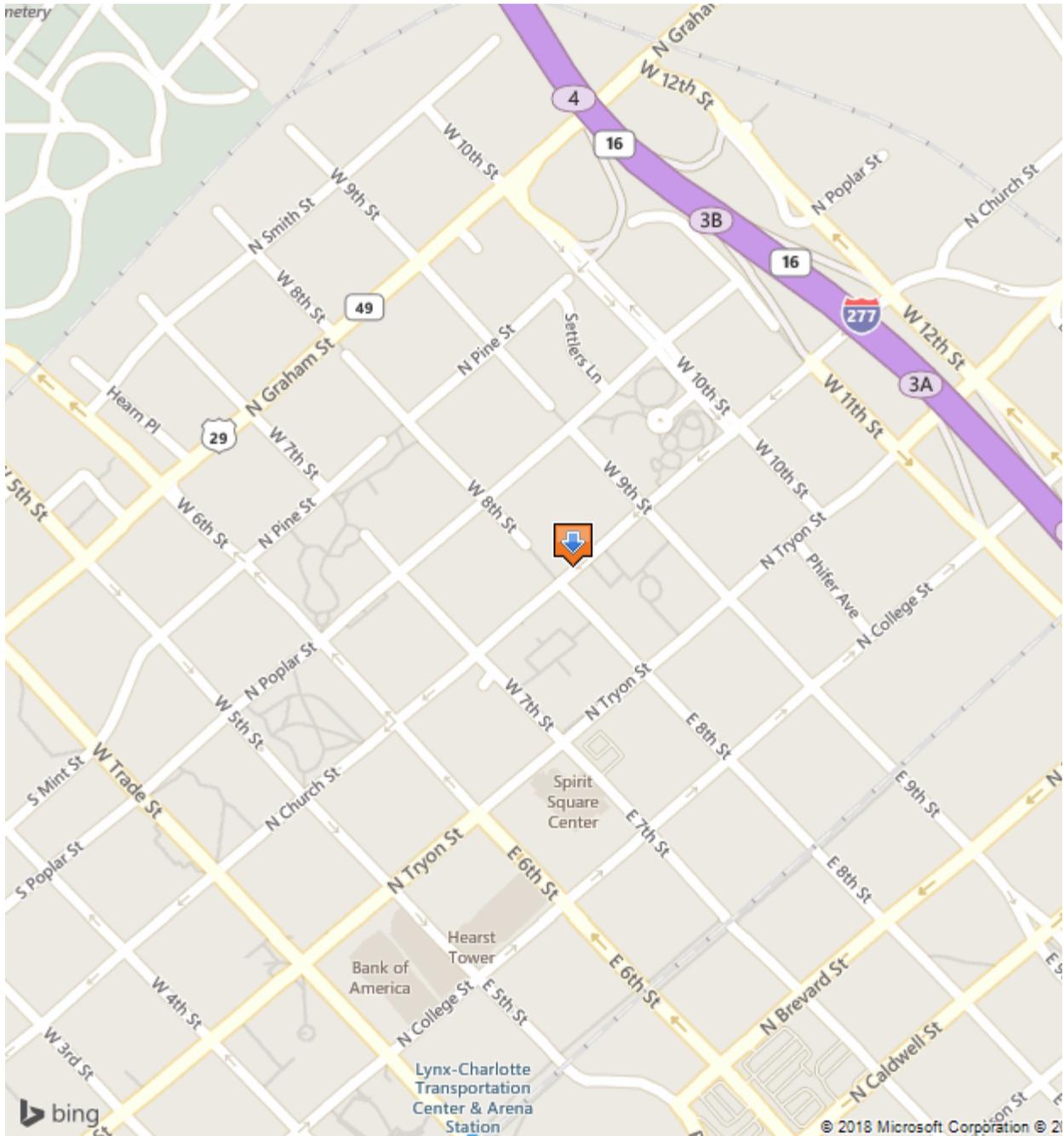
**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Frederick Apartments is located at 515 N. Church Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:** The present owners of the property are:

Frederick Place, LLC  
137 Brevard Court  
Charlotte, NC 28202

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative black and white photographs of the property. Color slides are available at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission office.

**4. Maps 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 this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 9981 on page 850. The tax parcel number of the property is #078-035-14.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets 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 the Frederick Apartments does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Frederick Apartments, built in 1927, was erected during a significant local building boom. Newspaper articles written during the period of construction boast that "the greatest volume of construction operations ever carried on in this country during a single month was established in August," and that "building operations in the Queen City surpassed those in all other Carolina cities during August."

2) W. Fred Casey's decision to erect an apartment building was a direct response to a changing demographic and the resultant need to house large numbers of new residents. The Frederick is representative of a wave of medium-sized apartment houses that were built in the late 1920s, when apartment construction in Charlotte was at a record high level.

3) The building reflects the spatial organization and social concept of apartment life in the 1920s. It was designed to include two categories of apartments-- bachelor apartments and housekeeping units--to appeal to two distinct types of renters. "Bachelor apartments," with one or two rooms, were designed to house young men who, it was presumed, would not cook or entertain. "Housekeeping units" were larger, with full kitchens and living rooms, and were marketed primarily to females and couples.

4) Architecturally, the Frederick is a fine example of a medium-sized apartment house from the 1920s. Though it was apparently created without the benefit of an architect's services, the design reflects a good degree of sophistication. Further, the use of colored, molded clay elements on the facade is unmatched in the local architecture of the era.

5) The Frederick Apartments was home to W. J. Cash, a newspaperman who was best known for his seminal volume, *The Mind of the South*. He lived in the building while he was writing what has been called a "masterpiece," and which, sixty years later, is still considered to be an important social history.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description which is included in this report demonstrates that the Frederick Apartments meets this criteria.

**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 designated "historic landmark." The current total appraised value of the improvements is \$ 18,540. The current total appraised value of the lot is \$ 493,080. The current total value is \$ 511,620. The property is zoned UMUD.

**Date of preparation of this report:** July 20, 2000

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## *Historical Overview*

### **Statement of Significance**

The history of the 1927 Frederick Apartments reveals that it is an important product of the times and conditions in which it was built. W. Fred Casey's decision to build an apartment house was a direct response to the decade's rapid population increase and the resultant need to house large numbers of new residents. It was built during a peak year for multi-family dwelling construction in the midst of the particularly active 1920s building boom. Architecturally, it is a fine example of a medium-sized apartment house whose design reflects a good degree of sophistication, and whose configuration reflects the social concepts of apartment living of the time. Its use of polychrome terra cotta design elements is unmatched 1920s-era architecture in Charlotte. Additionally, it was the home of acclaimed author, W. J. Cash, during the time he wrote his masterpiece social history, *The Mind of the South*.

### **Background and Context**

The 1920s were boom years in Charlotte, and the combination of prosperous economic times and a burgeoning population resulted in a notably high levels of building activity. Prior to 1928, the city boundaries encompassed only an area that reached from North Charlotte to Elizabeth to Dilworth to Biddleville. The United States Census counted 46,388 people living in Charlotte at the beginning of the decade, and 82,675 people in 1930--a total increase of seventy-eight percent, or 36,287 people. A *Charlotte News* article from April 1927 exposed data collected by Miller Press (publishers of the annual city directory) that showed a

population growth spike from 76,000 in 1926 to 82,000 in 1927, or 6,000 new residents. By 1930, Charlotte had become the largest city in the two Carolinas.

The increase in population necessitated an increase in housing, and the construction industry responded. Although there were inevitably some minor downswings, the overall trend was toward record levels of new construction. Articles from *The Charlotte News*, written in 1927, substantiate the local building boom. In August, the paper reported on a slump but noted that "Charlotte was the only city in the state whose total building permits showed a substantial increase in July over those issued in June." The dip was short-lived, however, as less than two months later the same newspaper analyzed national data and exclaimed that "the greatest volume of construction operations ever carried on in this country during a single month was established in August." The article further stated that "building activities in August reached a total well above the previous record, set in July, 1926." There is no doubt that this trend reached Charlotte. On October 2, *The Charlotte News* boasted that "building operations in the Queen City surpassed those in all other Carolina cities during August." In 1927, the total value of building permits issued in Charlotte was \$5,499,364. While these figures encompass building activity of all types, a significant portion was residential. A report from the F. W. Dodge Corporation, as reported in *The Charlotte News*, breaks down statewide figures for August 1927. They calculated that thirty-eight percent (38%) of all construction was for residential buildings.

By the 1920s, the term "residential buildings" did not refer only to single-family dwellings. Beginning in the 1870s, Americans began to embrace apartment living in large, densely-populated cities, such as New York, Boston and Chicago. It is generally accepted that the building type matured in New York during the late-nineteenth century. In places where land was not quite as scarce or expensive, however, apartments were slower to gain acceptance. In Charlotte, for instance, the first apartment houses appeared just after the turn of the twentieth century. It would be another twenty-five years, however, before the form would explode in popularity here. In the early years of the twentieth century, a distinction was made between a "bachelor apartment" and a "housekeeping unit." A bachelor apartment was generally smaller, perhaps just one room and bath, with very small or no kitchen facilities or public rooms (the presumption was that a single man would not cook or entertain). A housekeeping unit, on the other hand, had a full kitchen, living and dining rooms, and was better suited to family life. The Frederick Apartments was designed with both types of units. The number of multi-family residences in Charlotte increased significantly during the 1920s. A 1927 newspaper article explains: "conspicuously interesting as a mile post in Charlotte's steady march toward a greater city is the noticeable tendency to construct apartment houses modeled after the fashion of those in metropolitan cities." Analysis of the "Apartment Houses" section of the city directories is revealing. It shows that there were thirty-five named apartment buildings listed in 1920, and fifty-nine were mentioned in 1925. In 1927, there were eighty-seven entries under the heading. That figure rose to 102 the next year, and jumped again to 122 in 1929. This shows that the number of apartment buildings almost quadrupled during the decade. Thirty five of the new buildings (forty percent of the total) were erected between 1927 and 1929, the peak years for apartment construction during the period. About half of the total number of apartment buildings were located in the core downtown area, although they were found in all sectors, including Dilworth, Elizabeth and Myers Park.

In Charlotte, virtually all apartment buildings of the period stand two or more stories tall. The "quadriplex" form was popular--it contained four units (generally four rooms apiece) arranged on two floors, sharing a common entry. Larger buildings, though, were gaining hold on the market. The largest extant apartment building from the period is the Addison Apartments at 831 E. Morehead St. (it is both listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark). At nine stories high, the Addison was originally constructed with 64 apartments. At three stories and thirty-six units, the Frederick Apartments could be described as a medium-sized building. Other nearby apartment buildings of this size include the thirty-nine unit Poplar Apartments at 301 W. 10th St. (a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark), and the Jefferson at 409 N. Church St. with thirty-six units.

## **Frederick Apartments**

William Frederick Casey (1874-1957) commissioned the construction of the Frederick Apartments in 1927. Casey, who was originally from Tennessee, moved to Charlotte in 1914, the same year he married Mae E. Cook (1884-1950). He ran a business and was a member of several organizations, including the Masons, the United Commercial Travelers, and the Brotherhood of Railroad Conductors. He was a charter member of the First Methodist Church. He also bought and sold real estate.

By trade, Casey was a manufacturer's agent of building materials and contractor's equipment. An advertisement in a trade publication describes his company as "distributors and representatives" of a variety of items, including ornamental bronze and iron, elevator enclosures, dumb waiters, and incinerators. He also handled ornamental terra cotta roofing tile and clay products--both of which are used on the facade of the Frederick Apartments.

W. Fred Casey and Company provided materials for a variety of construction projects around the region. In Winston-Salem, his iron products were found in the North Carolina Baptist Hospital, Bowman-Grey School of Medicine (Wake Forest College), and in several buildings at the Winston-Salem Teacher's College. Incinerators he sold were installed in buildings in Durham and Greensboro, and at Fort Bragg. Glazed tile he brokered was used in the American Tobacco Building in Durham. In Charlotte, the General Dyestuff Building on Wilkinson Boulevard utilized terra cotta he procured, and Presbyterian Hospital's laundry chutes were provided by Casey's company. Considering his profession, Casey was undoubtedly aware of market conditions and opportunities in the construction field. He probably looked at the trend toward apartment housing and saw the potential for profit. He was personally familiar with apartment living, as he had lived in the Churchill Apartments on N. Church St., where his wife served as building manager in 1918. In 1926, he purchased a lot at 515 N. Church St., and contracted with J. A. Jones Construction Company to build the Frederick Apartments.

The J. A. Jones Construction Company, which has since grown into a large conglomerate, was founded in 1894 by James Addison Jones (1869-1950). The company reached prominence in 1909 when they constructed North Carolina's first steel-frame skyscraper, the Independence Building in Charlotte (demolished in 1981). They built many significant buildings locally,

including Ivey's Department Store (1914), the Masonic Temple(1914, now demolished), the Hotel Charlotte (1924, now demolished), City Hall (1925), the Addison Apartments (1926), and Nebel Mill (1928). During the 1930s, the company expanded its region and its vision. They were awarded various contracts by the Public Works Administration (PWA). They built an air base in the Panama Canal Zone, and were later awarded other military construction contracts. During World War II, the company built a large steam power plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. They were subsequently contracted to build two "super-secret" uranium plants, which were instrumental in producing materials for the atomic bombs that were used by the United States during the war.

The J. A. Jones Construction Company applied for a building permit on April 18, 1927, two weeks after the project was announced in the local paper. A brief article that appeared on April 2 boasted that the Frederick Apartments would have "all the modern conveniences that can be put into an apartment house." It specifically mentioned "an electrical dish washer, electric cooling and ventilation system, refrigerator and many other devices." The building permit estimates the total cost at \$125,000, but does not list the name of an architect. Instead, the word "owner" was written in and then crossed out--suggesting that Casey may have furnished the plans himself.

It took the J. A. Jones Company about five months to complete the Frederick Apartments. The first advertisements for rental units appeared on September 18, 1927. It may be that the entire building wasn't quite ready for occupancy yet, as only the larger units were mentioned. They were described as "four-room family housekeeping apartments," with "all modern conveniences." Two weeks later, another ad touted "exclusive modern apartments, fireproof, consisting of: Bachelor apartments, single rooms and baths, double rooms and one bath, also housekeeping apartments." The city directory for 1928, the first year the Frederick was listed, showed that thirty out of the thirty-six units were already rented.

The owners themselves were among the original occupants of the Frederick Apartments. W. Fred and Mae Casey lived in unit #101 during the time they owned the building, from 1927 through 1929. Other original tenants held jobs in a variety of professional occupations. There were two dentists and one physician, several salesmen, and two insurance agents. Perhaps the most intriguing position was that of T. H. Tracy, who was an agent in charge for the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigations. Almost all of the original tenants were employed within walking distance of the building . One-third of the residents worked in one of Charlotte's new skyscrapers--five people worked in the nearby Professional Building (Tryon and 7th Sts., now demolished), and seven commuted the seven blocks to the Johnston Building (212 S. Tryon St.).

There were several long-term residents over the years. Allen W. Sutton was a sales manager at Pyramid Chevrolet Company while he lived in the building from 1928 through the mid 1940s. David H. Yarbrough was employed by the Pure Oil Company during the 1940s, working his way up from marketer, to clerk, to department manager, and finally reaching the status of special representative in 1950. Hyman Usilowitz, who lived in the building from 1945 through early 1960s, was an assistant manager for the Reliable Loan Company. Unit #106 was rented by a photographer, L. Davis Phillips, and his wife, from 1930 through 1938. Another married couple was Appleton F. and Addie C. Bolles, who lived in the building from 1938 through the early

1950s. Appleton worked for the Southerland-Helms Company (a local optician), being at various times a stock clerk, stock manager and salesman. After his death, Addie remained in the building and took a job as a magazine agent for Periodical Publishers. Another working widow at the Frederick Apartments was Mace H. Kister--she was an office secretary for various firms during the 1940s.

Several long-term residents were employed in the retail sector during the 1940s and 1950s. Samuel Pittle was a salesman at the National Hat Shop. Mrs. Olive F. Dowling was a saleswoman at Montaldo's, a purveyor of better woman's clothing. Mrs. Nannie Marie Wallace worked at a local department store, Ivey's. Ivey's also employed other residents of the Frederick Apartments--both J. Elmer Jordan and Allen S. Plexico worked there, both serving as buyer and department manager at various times. During the late 1930s, the Frederick Apartments was home to the acclaimed author, Wilbur J. Cash (1900-1941), who is best known for his seminal social history *The Mind of the South*. Cash was born Joseph Wilbur Cash in Gaffney, South Carolina (he later changed his name to Wilbur Joseph Cash), and moved across the state line to Boiling Springs, North Carolina at the age of twelve. He developed an interest in journalism while a student at Wake Forest College in the early 1920s. After graduating in 1922, Cash held a variety of teaching posts and writing jobs. He was influenced by the writer H. L. Mencken, and contributed articles to Mencken's magazine, *American Mercury*. Cash worked at both of Charlotte's rival newspapers--*The Charlotte Observer* in the summer of 1923, and *The Charlotte News* in 1926, and again after 1935. In 1937, he was lured back to town by *The Charlotte News*, where he accepted the position of associate editor. He lived for a short time at the Selwyn Hotel (no longer standing), before moving to the Frederick Apartments in 1938. Cash occupied apartment 210a in 1939 and apartment 308 in 1940, and it was at the Frederick where he completed his manuscript in July 1940. He also courted and married his wife while he lived there. Cash wed Mrs. Mary Ross Northrup on Christmas day, 1940, and they began their married life in his apartment at the Frederick, which they found too small for two people. In early 1941, Mary's mother took a job in Chapel Hill, and the newlyweds moved into her unit at the Blandwood Apartments on S. Tryon St. The apartment at the Blandwood was larger, and Mary delighted in housekeeping there.

*The Mind of the South* was published in February 1941. Virtually all of the reviews were positive, and it was immediately recognized as being an important work. Glowing accounts appeared in newspapers and magazines around the state and region. The national press even reviewed the book--*Time* magazine, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *The New Republic* all had good things to say about Cash's volume. Later evaluations would view the book with a wider perspective. In 1979, it was described as "the product of exhaustive reading, perceptive observation, and creative insight," and as "a brilliant masterpiece that transcended the limitations of his own and the historian's craft." In 1970 it was called "perhaps the most intellectually influential book ever to come from North Carolina."

The publication of the book, and its good reviews, gave Cash a certain degree of prominence. It led to a Guggenheim fellowship, which he eagerly accepted. He and Mary traveled to Mexico City, where he was to spend the next year writing a novel. Cash had difficulty adjusting to Mexico City, and suffered a variety of mental and physical ills. He apparently committed suicide

on July 1, 1941, in the midst of a nervous breakdown. Regrettably, he never lived to witness the impact his work was to have on future generations of scholars.

Many of these working professionals stayed in residence through changes in the legal ownership of the building. Fred Casey had taken out two separate deeds of trust on the property during the construction period in 1927. Casey entered into a third deed of trust in November of that year with the J. A. Jones Construction Company and Edwin L. Jones (son of company founder J. A. Jones). A deed of trust is a document which accompanies a loan and guarantees transfer of ownership of the collateral property in the event of default. Casey was apparently unable to repay the loans, which totaled \$130,000. Jones Construction Company foreclosed and took title to the property in September 1929. It was quickly transferred to Edwin L. and Annabel L. Jones, who retained ownership until 1972. At that time, it was conveyed to their daughter's company, Jones-Brown Realty, who held the title until 1979. Thus, the Frederick Apartments was owned by family members of the original contractor for fifty years. It is currently being renovated and converted to condominiums.

### *Architectural Description*

The Frederick Apartments, is a three-story, thirty-six unit brick apartment house built in 1927. At 515 N. Church St., it is located in the downtown area of Charlotte, five blocks north and one block west of the square. The streets in this section are laid out in a regular grid pattern and the lots are long, narrow, and rectangular. The Frederick Apartment building, and its companion paved parking lot, together have 108 feet of street frontage. The building is set close to the sidewalk, separated only by a set of concrete steps leading up to a wide platform. The spaces on either side of the steps are landscaped with small plantings, and an old magnolia tree at the front left (south) corner of the building stands as tall as the structure itself. The streetscape is urban in nature and contains buildings in a mixture of types, styles and vintages. Its immediate neighbors are the c. 1890 Liddell-McNinch House (a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark) on the south, and its paved parking lot on the north. A modern brick fire station stands across the parking lot. A new, large multi-family dwelling is located immediately across N. Church St. from the Frederick Apartments.

The Frederick is a solid masonry structure. The body of the building is constructed of red brick, laid up in common bond. The facade, however, is fancier and sports buff colored brick set in stretcher bond with decorative patterning in places. The facade is symmetrical, and features a center entry and a slightly projecting center bay. A set of concrete steps trimmed in brick lead up to a flat tiled platform which spans the front of the building, in lieu of a porch. The building's roof is flat and not visible from the street, however, a narrow, false hipped roof is applied to the facade, which is supported by paired, decorative brackets, and covered with flat green tiles. Together with the arched center entry, the tiled roof hints at an Italian Renaissance Revival design influence.

The green tiles on the roof coordinate with the polychrome facade detail. Colored terra cotta pieces comprise key design elements that are found around the door and windows, on decorative panels, and on the building's nameplate. The nameplate is centered above the front door and is made of beige tiles with raised green letters spelling out "FREDERICK." The entry has double French doors and is topped by a half-round fanlight and a high-relief scroll keystone. The entire entry is ringed with terra cotta tiles in green with raised edging and circular designs in beige with dark red dots in the center of each circle.

Similar tile trim, though without the red dots, surrounds the windows. The trim springs from narrow cast stone sills, and is joined at the top corners by tiles with a raised floral design that consists of sculptured green leaves and dark red accents. The design on the corner pieces is three-dimensional and finely-detailed. Windows on the second and third stories (which correspond with the building's interior hallway) are paired, multi-light casements. The second floor window has a simple, wrought-iron balconet. A decorative panel between the second and third stories is comprised of a single floral tile on a light beige background that is surrounded by a soldier course of bricks, mitered at the corners, and a narrow beige edging. In the side bays, the narrow, multi-light casement windows are set in groups of ten--five taller windows side-by-side topped with five half-sized windows. Each window grouping is surrounded by the same decorative trim as the center-bay windows. Above the window groupings, between the different stories, are panels marked by chevron-pattern brick work punctuated by a single flower tile set on the diagonal).

The buff-colored brick used on the facade wraps around the corners and extends back one bay on each side elevation. The rest of the building is red brick laid up in six-course common bond. The expansive side elevations are pierced by paired, one-over-one windows at regular intervals. There is a secondary entrance on the north facade, approximately halfway back. The rear facade is five bays wide with single glazed doors in the center bay of each story that open onto a wrought-iron fire escape. There is a full basement.

On the interior, the building has a center hallway running the full length of the building, which is finished with crown molding and a chair rail. About halfway back, it opens into a stair hall on the right (north). Apartments consist of three basic floor plans. The smallest, the "bachelor" plan, has a single room with a dressing closet, bathroom and kitchenette opening off of one side. The largest, the "housekeeping" unit, has four rooms, plus bath and entry hall. Its floorplan is arranged so that one enters into a narrow hallway which leads toward the back of the apartment on one side, or into the living room on the other side. The living room is in the front of the apartment, and the front units have benefit of the expansive, multi-paned casement windows on the facade. Behind that is the dining room and kitchen. The kitchen opens onto the hallway, which leads to the bedroom and bathroom in the back. Hardwood floors and original bathroom tile and fixtures are found throughout the building.

The Frederick Apartments is a fine building with a well-executed design. The polychrome facade with its three-dimensional clay tile detailing is unmatched in 1920s-era architecture in Charlotte. The form and layout of the building reflect the spatial organization typical to the building type, which exploded onto the Charlotte marketplace during the late 1920s. The integrity of the

exterior and of the public spaces is excellent. The interior of the apartments are currently undergoing renovation.