

## GATEWAY AND CENTURY BUILDINGS



*The Century Building*

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*The Gateway Building*

*This report was written on Mar. 28, 1990*

- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Gateway and Century Buildings is located at 402 - 412 West Trade Street in Charlotte, N. C.

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

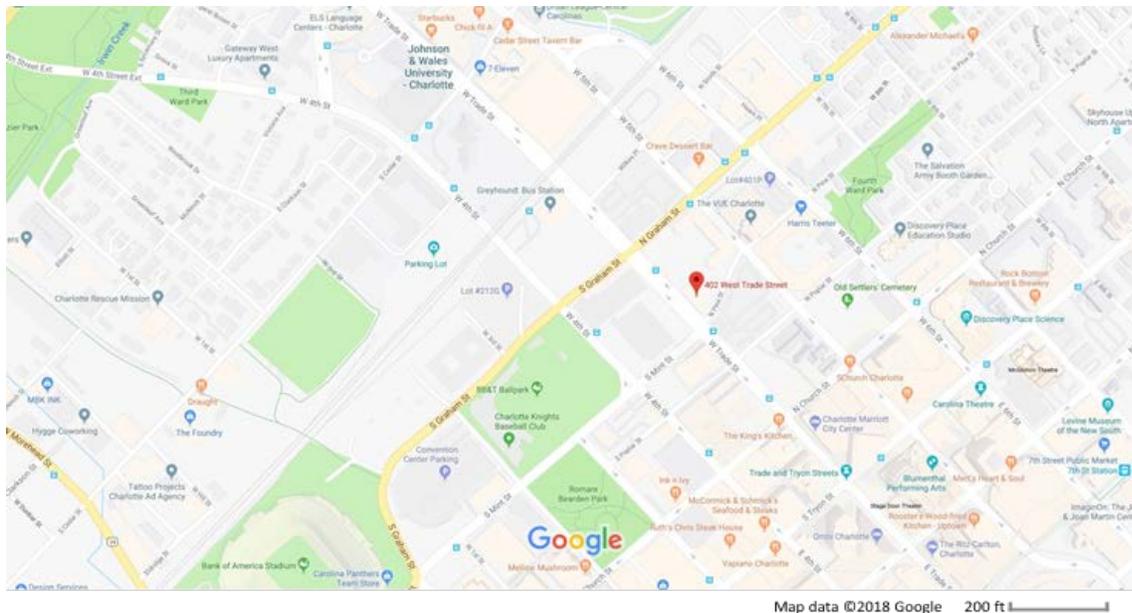
West Trade Street Associates  
900 Cameron Brown Building  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204 Telephone:

(704) 334-2849

Tax Parcel Number: 078-054-05

**3. Representative photographs the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5123 at page 341. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 078-054-05.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman and Ms. Nora M. Black.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Ms. Nora M. Black.

**8. Documentation of why and In what ways the property meets criteria  
Redesignation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and cultural**

**importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Gateway and Century Buildings does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following consideration:

- 1) the Gateway and Century Buildings were built and owned by John Hastings Cutter, a prominent commercial real estate developer of the early 20th century; 2) the Gateway and Century Buildings were designed by Charles Christian Hook, a Charlotte-based architect of statewide prominence;
- 3) the Gateway Building, with its handsomely detailed limestone facade, provided retail space to central Charlotte in an era of rapid expansion;
- 4) the Century Building, with its colorful green terra cotta facade, enlivened West Trade Street and served as an early port of entry; and
- 5) both buildings, in their remodeled state, contribute to the revitalization of West Trade Street.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or**

**association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ms. Nora M. Black which is included in this report demonstrates that the Gateway and Century Buildings 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 designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the improvements is \$883,240. The current appraised value of the 0.472 acres is \$205,560. The total appraised value of the property is \$1,085,800. The property is zoned UMUD.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** 28 March 1990

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill in  
conjunction with  
Ms. Nora M. Black  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission  
1225 South Caldwell Street, Box D  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

## *Historical Overview*

While Charlotte was enjoying a period of rapid expansion during the Twenties, two distinctive buildings were built as part of the growth of the city's central business district, the Gateway and Century Buildings on West Trade Street. Constructed in 1924-25 and 1925-26 respectively, they are distinguished by their architecture. The designer was one of the region's finest architects, Charles Christian Hook. The Gateway and Century Buildings are also the last small-scale retail business buildings comprising part of the center city that remain from the first half of the twentieth century on West Trade Street in Charlotte. As in many other cities large and small in the 1920's, Charlotte experienced unprecedented growth. Not only were new residences being built at an ever increasing rate in suburban areas of the city, the downtown business district also reflected the mushrooming prosperity. Older retail buildings, some dating from before the Civil War, were treated to new facades, and former vacant lots were filled in among the main business streets of Trade and Tryon Streets with new retail buildings of varying kinds, hotels, restaurants and government buildings. Prior to the Twenties, the central business district only stretched two or three blocks from the Square, where Trade and Tryon cross, but during that decade it expanded in all directions.<sup>1</sup>

As part of this expansion, in 1924, John H. Cutter, local commercial real estate developer, decided to build a two-story retail store and office building in the fourth block of West Trade Street, almost directly across the street from the former branch of the U . S. Mint . He north side of the street, where the new building was to go, had remained residential in part into the early Twenties.<sup>2</sup>

John Hastings Cutter (1878-1958) was a Georgia native who first came to Charlotte in 1905. The following year he started cotton brokerage, the J. H. Cutter Company, and was a member of the New York Cotton Exchange. For twenty years, from 1927 until 1947, he operated the Cutter Manufacturing Company, textile mill in Rock Hill, South Carolina. For many years, J. H. Cutter was also active in commercial real estate development in Charlotte, this led to his involvement in the building of a number of important structures in the city. One of the most important was the Carolina Theater on North Tryon Street which was to be converted as part of Cityfair. However, most of the retail component of that structure was torn down; only the flyhouse and auditorium remain, as yet not renovated. Cutter's second structure of importance was the Hotel Charlotte, it became the victim of implosion on 6 November 1988.<sup>3</sup>

To design the Gateway Building, Cutter engaged the services of Charles Christian Hook (1869-1938). Born in Wheeling, West Virginia, Hook was the son of German immigrants, and received his higher education at Washington University in St. Louis. When he came to Charlotte in 1900, his first position was as teacher of mechanical

drawing in the old South School. He began the practice of architecture by designing houses for Edward Dilworth Latta (1851-1925) in the city's first streetcar suburb, Dilworth, in 1893. During the subsequent forty-five years of his practice, He undertook many important commissions in the city and in various locations throughout the state, and his skilled work includes some of the best of the region's built environment. Hook was in partnership with others at various times in his career: Frank Sawyer, 1902-1907, Willard Rogers, 1912-1916, and with his son, W. W. Hook, 1924-1938. Among his best-known designs in Charlotte are the old Charlotte City Hall, the Charlotte Women's Club, the James B. Duke Mansion, the Belk Department Store East Trade Street facade of 1927 (now demolished), and the William Henry Belk mansion. Beyond the city, his designs include the west wing of the state capital in Raleigh, the Richmond County courthouse, Phillips Hall at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Science Hall at Davidson College, and the State Hospital in Morganton, North Carolina. <sup>4</sup>

Shortly after completion of the first two-story building at 402-406 West Trade Street (the present Gateway Building) by the contractor Thies-Smith Realty Company of Charlotte in 1925, Cutter decided sufficient demand existed to build a second building alongside the first. He proposed a new building at 408-412 West Trade (the present Century Building) to house more retail space and a bus terminal. C. C. Hook was selected to render a design for this second building as well, but this time he chose to make the facade quite different from the first by putting on an unusual green terracotta face tile. The J. A. Jones Company of Charlotte won the construction contract from Cutter's development firm, the Piedmont Realty and Development Company, which he had established in 1923.<sup>5</sup>

By 1926, both buildings were completed and mostly occupied. The Gateway Building had several long-term tenants. Number 402 housed Smith's Book Store for over thirty years, and number 404 was an A & P grocery store (The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company store) for over twenty years. Upstairs at 404-1/2, in the "Cutter Building" offices, were found variety of tenants, including notaries, realtors, a textile machinery representative, and the American Red Cross. Completing the list of tenants for the 1924-1925 building was Holloway's Music House, a piano store, in number 406.<sup>6</sup>

The green terra-cotta Century Building of 1925-1926 had a somewhat different history. The storefront at 408 West Trade Street was often vacant in the 1920's. From the late 1930's to the late 1960's, the storefront was occupied by a barbershop, during World War II it became known as the "Victory Barber Shop," a name it retained for over twenty years. The second-story offices at 408-1/2 were occupied from the late 1930's until the early 1960's by King's Business College, which continues to operate at another location in the city. The "anchor" tenant for the Century Building was the Union Bus Terminal at 410-412 West Trade Street.<sup>7</sup>

Until 1940, when Cutter sold the lot just west of his West Trade Street building to the bus company so that they could build larger depot (the now defunct Trailways Bus Station at 418 West Trade Street),<sup>8</sup> the city's only bus station was located in the green terra-cotta building. The combination of the bus station and the Southern Railway Station (across Trade Street and a block further to the west), formed the port of entry to Charlotte, thereby its "gateway.", Associated with the bus station when it first opened were the Terminal Cigar and Soda Shop, the Terminal Barber Shop (later the Terminal Beauty Shop) and the Terminal Cafe (later the Terminal Lunch, the Charlotte Grill Restaurant and finally the Central Restaurant). The Stonewall Hotel and Hotel Charlotte, both located within the two blocks toward town, provided nearby rooms for travelers. it would have been easy for salesmen, or a runners as they were called, to come into Charlotte, get a shave, haircut (and even a shower in the barbershop), and have a bite to eat before calling on their prospective customers and staying the night, whether they arrived by train or bus.<sup>9</sup>

Over the years, the offices and storefronts were occupied by variety of tenants in addition to the ones mentioned above. By the late 1970's and early 1980's, the familiar longtime tenants had moved to other quarters or gone out of business. The buildings became vacant, evidence in part of a general decline of the West Trade Street area.<sup>10</sup>

The City of Charlotte fostered a revival of the "gateway" concept for the West Trade Street area in the 1980's. The new development, centered on the AT&T building, is the first glimpse of Charlotte for visitors who exit I-77. The Greyhound Bus Terminal is still located on West Trade Street, however, the train station has closed its doors. Some of the older buildings are once again flourishing in a remodeled state. Among those experiencing second life are the Gateway and Century Buildings, once again part of the activities of the central city.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Garibaldi and Bruns Building," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, February, 1983; *ibid.*) "A Historical Sketch of the Thomas Trotter Building," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, January, 1985, Thomas Hanchett, "Charlotte Neighborhood Survey" Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1984, Sanborn Insurance Maps 1900, 1905, 1911, and 1929; Charlotte City Directories, 1900-1930, LeGette Blythe and Charles Brockman, *Hornets Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1961), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 3494, dated 15 September 1924, Sanborn Maps, cited above, Charlotte City Directories, cited above.

- <sup>3</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, July 11, 1958, p. B1.
- <sup>4</sup> Information on file at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission office.
- <sup>5</sup> Building Permit cited in note 2; City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 6394, dated 30 September 195.
- <sup>6</sup> Charlotte City Directory. 1926, p.1076.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926-1985.
- <sup>8</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1029, p.1940, 31 December 1940.
- <sup>9</sup> Charlotte City Directories. 1926-1985.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Architectural Description*

The two buildings known as the Gateway and Century Buildings are located on the north side of West Trade Street just four blocks from the Square (the intersection of Trade and Tryon Streets). Although quite different in style, the two buildings are excellent examples of the facilities available for professional offices, personal services, and retail shops in Charlotte during the early part of this century.

The original design of the buildings was executed by Charles Christian Hook, a Charlotte architect. In the late 1980's, both buildings were completely renovated. The renovations converted the two buildings into an office building offering eight office suites, an elevator lobby with a rectangular atrium, and some unleased service space. The interiors were gutted to the masonry walls; only the floor and the structure supporting it remained. New finishes and trims were applied to the walls and floors; the partitions installed created new room arrangements within the space. Mr. John H. Cutter, III, of West Trade Street Associates (owners of the buildings), stated that the owners tried to recreate the finishes that would have been present in an office building of that era. <sup>1</sup>

The buildings consist of two floors totaling approximately 25,400 square feet. The structure is wood frame beneath masonry. The Gateway and Century Buildings share a common entry to the lobby facing West Trade Street. Original windows were removed

during renovations, reconditioned, and replaced wherever possible. The rear facade (facing the parking lot) of the two buildings displays an irregular pattern of windows of several different sizes. Each building has a wood framed door on the rear facade for access from the parking lot. The rear facade has a parapet coped with red clay tiles.

### **Gateway Building**

The Gateway Building has a two-story symmetrical facade covered with limestone facing West Trade Street. The rear facade facing the parking lot is of brick laid in common bond with sixth course headers. The Pine Street facade is no longer visible due to the construction of a new building on that side.

The mansard roofline covered with green terra cotta roof tiles (only on the facade facing West Trade Street) might suggest some Italian Renaissance or Spanish Eclectic influence on the architect; however, the slight boxed eave overhang, modillions, and simplified cornice all place the building in the Neoclassical style. The Neoclassical style is further evidenced in two other decorative elements: 1) the plain, recessed panels beneath each pair of second floor windows; and 2) the round patera with stylized rose petals between each of the recessed panels.

The second story has six pairs of one-over-one wood sash windows with limestone sills. The first floor has three large windows that replicate the original storefronts. Green awnings shade the first floor windows from the sun.

The rear facade of the Gateway Building has paired four-over-four sash with segmental arches consisting of three courses of brick laid in rowlock course. Smaller four pane windows have the same style of segmental arches.

### **Century Building**

The Century Building is quite different from its next door neighbor. Conceived by Hook in 1925, it is an excellent example of Art Deco with pronounced verticality and motifs of recessed panels and sunrise patterns. The rear facade does not demonstrate the Art Deco style, it is constructed of brick laid in common bond with sixth course headers. The northwest facade, of brick painted tan, has only two windows remaining on the second floor level, all other openings on the northwest facade have been infilled with brick. A panel that protected the bricks from possible damage by the Trailways Buses runs the length of the northwest facade. It is approximately four feet high.

The bright green terra cotta facade stands out along the Trade Street corridor. The golden tan decorative motifs contrast sharply with the restrained Neoclassical details of the Gateway Building. At the time of the 1980's renovations, missing tiles were replaced by replicating the originals. More than 30,000 pounds of clay were formed, colored, and fired by a local artisan to make the replacement tiles.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, all surfaces were cleaned and joints were repainted.

Like the Gateway Building, the Century Building has twelve one-over-one windows on the second floor level, however, these windows are arranged in groups of four giving a strong tripartite division to the West Trade Street facade. Over each pair within the group of four windows, a small arched window continues the vertical reach of the facade divisions. The first floor also has three large windows that replicate the original storefronts with large green awnings for shade.

The rear facade of the Century Building has large rectangular, industrial-style windows. Some portion of three windows has been infilled with brick; two windows have been infilled completely.



*Detail*

The entry to the lobby is located on the facade of the Century Building. The area surrounding the door becomes part of a tower, a characteristic of Art Deco. The wood framed door has a wood framed transom above. All wood is finished in natural oak tones.