

THE OLD HAND'S PHARMACY BUILDING



This report was written on August, 1986

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Old Hand's Pharmacy Building is located at 3201 N. Davidson Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

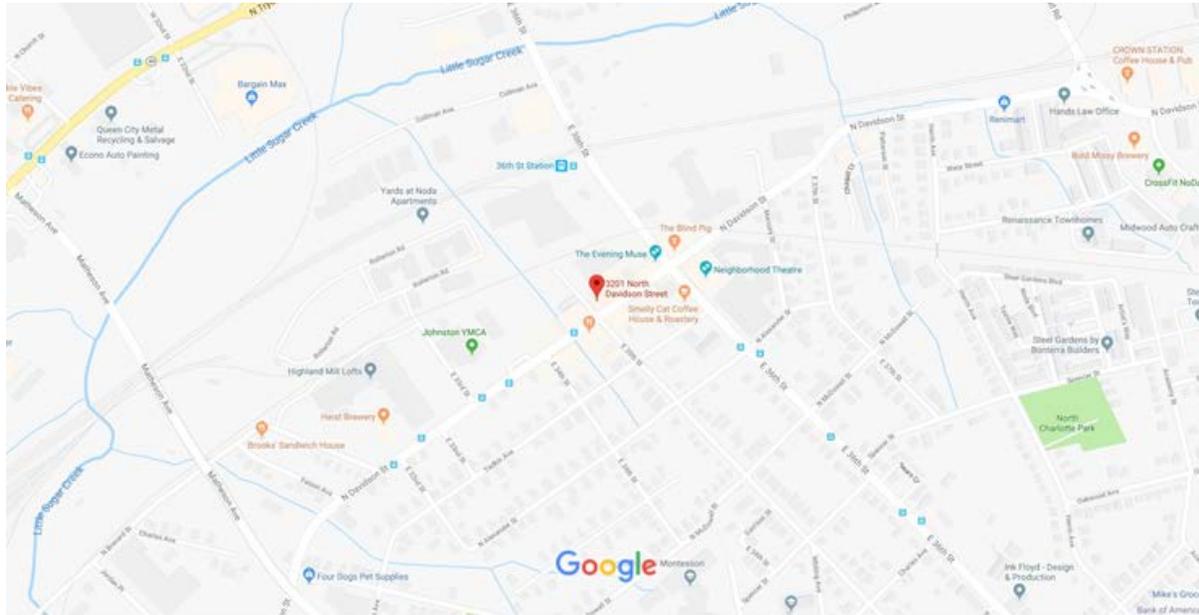
The owner of the property is:

Mr. Frank R. Hand
2900 Whiting Ave.
Charlotte, N.C. 28205

Telephone: 704/332-5529

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 246, p. 343. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 083-084-10.

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

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This 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 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 Old Hand's Pharmacy Building does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Old Hand's Pharmacy Building, erected ca.1912, was an important component of the commercial district of North Charlotte, one of Charlotte's most important mill

communities; 2) the Old Hand's Pharmacy Building is one of the best-preserved examples of brick commercial architecture of the early twentieth century in CharlotteMecklenburg, and 3) the Old Hand's Pharmacy Building is one of the most important buildings in terms of the historic streetscape of North Davidson Street, because it occupies a corner lot at a major intersection.

b. Integrity, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the old Hand's Pharmacy Building 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 "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$16,950. The current appraised value of the land is \$4,920. The total appraised value of the property is \$21,870. The property is zoned B1.

Date of Preparation of this Report: August, 1986

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
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Historical Overview

The Hand's Pharmacy Building, located on the northwest corner of 35th and N. Davidson Streets, is one of the original brick commercial buildings in the North Charlotte community, and for many years housed both a pharmacy and community meeting place. Jasper Kennedy Hand (1878-1947), who had the pharmacy building constructed about 1912, was a Gaston County native, the son of Samuel and Catherine Lineberger Hand. The Gaston town of Lowell was his early home, and he attended Davidson College and the Pharmaceutical School at the University of North Carolina.¹ Since his career was established, in 1902 he was married to Erwin Robinson (1881-1977), who was also from Lowell. Five years later, J. K. Hand decided to locate

in Mecklenburg, and so in July, 1907, he bought Froneberger's Drug Store on North Caldwell (now Davidson) Street in the North Charlotte community.² The development of North Charlotte, which is located about two and a half miles northeast of the Square, began in 1903, and was tied in with the expansion of textile manufacturing in Mecklenburg County from the 1880s to the 1920s, during which time the county ranked variously second or third in textile production in the state.

In 1903, the Charlotte textile entrepreneurs William E. Holt, Jesse S. Spencer, and Charles W. Johnson built the Highland Park Mill No. 3 on what was open farmland and some of the city's reservoir system along sugar Creek. It was located on the Southern Railway tracks just over two miles from the city center, and was not only the county's largest mill, but was probably one of the first mills in the state designed to be electrically driven. Across from the mill the owners built a large mill village, complete with houses, churches, a school and hotel; and the County Poorhouse grounds on 36th Street were made over into a recreational park (the road leading there from town used to be called Poorhouse Rood, then the County Home Road).³ Shortly after work began on Highland Park No. 3 in 1903, an heir to the Duke tobacco fortune, B. Lawrence Duke, and Charlottean Robert L. Tate bought a site from Highland Park and began construction of a smaller plant, the Mecklenburg Mills, just to the north along the railroad track on the other side of Caldwell, now Davidson Street. Another mill village was put up to accommodate the workers. The last mill built in the area was the Johnston Mill in 1913, which was under the ownership of C. W. Johnson.⁴

By 1904, as the first two North Charlotte mills and their company-owned houses were nearly finished, enterprising merchants were already beginning to establish businesses along the main road, Caldwell street, between the present 34th and 36th Streets.⁵ When J. K. Hand bought Froneberger's Drugstore in 1907, it was in a wood-frame building located on the same side of the street and one block south of his later two-story brick store.⁶ Apparently wanting a better and more permanent structure for his business, in 1909 Hand bought a corner lot which then was on the northeast corner of North Caldwell and 31st Streets, which had fifty and one-half feet of frontage on Caldwell and was ninety feet deep.⁷ About three years later, ca. 1912, Harvey C. Garrison, a local contractor, was hired to construct the building, and it may have been the case that he designed it as well. By 1915, the Hands moved into a handsome one-year old house at 2900 Whiting Avenue, where, two years later, their only son, Frank R. Hand, who still lives in the residence, was born.⁶

The building was really twice as large as Hand needed for his pharmacy, but he envisioned that the second floor, which has a separate outside stairway entrance, would be used as a community meeting place, a brotherhood hall. Since there were also facilities available elsewhere, the second floor was mostly used for light storage, and, for many years, a local physician, Dr. McClosky, practiced medicine there in waiting and examining rooms in the front of the building.⁹ The pharmacy itself was located entirely on the first floor, and contemporary photographs show a typical small-town

drug store building from the exterior: plain storefront windows with painted Pepsi-Cola, slogans written in script at the top, which were bracketed by the words "Drugs" and "Soda." The interior fixtures were all oak or marble, not fancy, but certainly substantial. Merchandise was neatly laid out in glass wall cabinets and display cases along the south wall and back half of the north. Along the front half of the north wall was the marble soda fountain, which had a large "Hires Root Beer" barrel and three glass candy jars on it. In the back, two tables with four chairs each were available for soda fountain patrons. Just under the pressed tin ceiling, posters decorated the store all the way around. One announced, "Jonteel Compacts: Face Powder in Handy Form;" another showed a picture of a camera and said, "Kodak as you go." Of the three in the back of the store, one was titled "Prescriptions," and showed a kindly pharmacist dispensing medicine for a mother and her child, while the one on the right proudly trumpeted "Rexall means King of All."¹⁰

In such a small community, Hand's Pharmacy was important to the very fabric of its daily existence. Not too long after it was established in North Charlotte, however, Gamble Drugs opened across the street, and both concerns struggled for many years in competition for the relatively small amount of business in the community. During the Depression, it was common for Hand to go for long periods without being paid for drugs and remedies he dispensed, if he was ever paid at all.¹¹ For thirty-eight years, J. K. Hand provided service and merchandise for North Charlotteans through the ups and downs of two world wars, the Great Depression, mill layoffs and strikes. On V-J Day, 1945 (victory over Japan, the day of its surrender ending World War II on August 14). Hand sold the business to John D. Dover, who had previously worked in the store. A few years later, it became Dorton's Drug Store, and finally the North Charlotte Pharmacy until 1978. Since that time, the building has housed various tenants, but none were related to the drug store business.¹² For many years, the Hand's Pharmacy Building was one of the solid landmarks of the center of the North Charlotte community. Its past role is worthy of recognition, and its future role in a revived community is worthy of accomplishment.

NOTES

¹ *Charlotte Observer*, April 5, 1947, Sec. A, p. 7.

² Interview with Frank R. Hand, Charlotte, NC, 2 August 1986.

³ Thomas Hanchett, *Charlotte and Its Neighborhoods*, unpaginated, unpublished typescript.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Interview with Frank Hand.

⁷ Deed Book 246, p. 343, 20 April 1909.

⁸ Interview with Frank Hand.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Photographs supplied by Frank R. Hand.

¹¹ Interview with Frank Hand.

¹² Ibid.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Jasper K. Hand Pharmacy Building, located on the north corner of the intersection of North Davidson Street and 35th Street, is an architecturally distinguished example of the privately-owned buildings that formed a commercial district to serve residents of north Charlotte during the beginning of this century. At the time of construction, the pharmacy stood alone on its corner; however, Jasper Hand had the building which abuts the northeast wall of the pharmacy constructed later and leased it to other neighborhood businesses. No other buildings are connected to the pharmacy and no additions have been made to it. The Hand Pharmacy was constructed in 1912 by Harvey Edgar Garrison. The basement was excavated using mules and drag pans. The building, 22 feet wide by 70 feet long, is of masonry and timber construction. In recent years, a steel beam was added in the basement. Running the length of the building, it was used to shore up the massive timbers that supported the first floor.

Mr. Hand continued to operate the pharmacy on North Davidson Street until August 14, 1945, when he sold the business as well as the furnishings and fixtures. However, he

retained ownership of the building. The building consists of three floors. The basement was used as a service area and for storage of coal. The first, or street-level, floor housed the pharmacy. The second floor provided a large meeting hall for organizations within the north Charlotte community. The Hand Pharmacy has a two story facade on North Davidson Street of pressed, or face, brick. The dark brown brick was joined with mortar colored to compliment it. The brickmason added a row of corbels of the same dark brown brick about one foot below the roofline of the facade to form a cornice. At either side of the facade there are longer corbels. The corbels project about six inches from the wall giving it a sense of depth and rich detail. The one-story center entrance on North Davidson Street is recessed four feet from the facade. One step up from the sidewalk, it is paved with red clay tiles. Formerly, a canvas awning at the level of the first floor ceiling could be extended over the sidewalk to give shade to the show windows and the horizontal row of stationary windows above the transom.

The canvas awning has been replaced by a horizontal metal awning below the transom while the windows above the transom have been covered with an aluminum panel. The glass show windows, framed in aluminum, are approximately seven feet high set on a brick ledge that is approximately two feet high. They are replacements for the original windows which were framed in bronze. Modern standard double glass doors have replaced the original entry doors of walnut with beveled glass panels. The red brick beneath the show windows was used to repair the facade after an automobile accident on July 4, 1953. On the second story portion of the facade, there are three large windows which have been covered with translucent fiberglass panels to prevent further breakage of the window panes. A portion of one sign from a recent tenant hangs over the Davidson Street sidewalk on the 35th Street corner of the building. Otherwise there are no signs painted on or attached to the building. However, the North Davidson Street facade has several small scars caused by the attachment of signs, electrical service and awnings. Utility brick, laid in common bond; was used for the side walls and the rear wall. There are six large windows on each side wall of the second floor. Across the back of the building there are three large windows on both the first and second floors. All of the large rectangular windows (including the three on the second floor, front facade) have flat masonry arches, usually called jack arches, and brick ledges. All of the side and back windows have been covered with one piece panels of either ribbed aluminum or translucent ribbed fiberglass panels. In addition to the panels, the windows on the first floor rear wall have iron bars over them.

The original windows, double hung with wooden sashes, are behind the panels. However, much of the glass has been broken. Double wood paneled doors were used as a service entrance for the first floor. Located near the rear (northwest) corner of the building on the 35th Street side, they had neither steps nor a platform. There are four basement windows, two on either side of the basement door, on the 35th Street side. The lot slopes away from that side of the building allowing the windows to provide light for the dirt-floored basement; however, the windows had to be bricked up because of water seepage and break-ins. The windows have segmental masonry arches of two rowlock courses. The window closest to the corner of North Davidson Street and 35th

Street was used as a coal chute with the coal for the heaters being stored in the front section of the basement. Concrete steps lead down to a bricked well with a wooden door with a segmental masonry arch. The basement was only used as a storage and service area because of dampness. In fact, Jasper Hand had the first two or three steps of an interior stairway beginning on the first floor built, but then he closed up the opening and never finished the stairway. The side walls are stepped down in four equal steps to follow the slope of the roof with the highest part of the roof being parallel to North Davidson Street. The roof is supported by unpainted wooden rafters and wooden sheathing.

A metal gutter with one downspout runs across the rear wall. The original metal standing seam roof was badly damaged by a storm during World War II. After further damage in another storm, the roof was replaced with a built-up roof. However, a few leaks have caused some interior water damage that is apparent in the rear portion of the second floor. Some plaster has fallen from the walls and part of the floor has been covered with black water-proofing material. A metal cantilevered stairway leads to double wooden panel doors on the second floor. Originally one big meeting room, the second floor has been partitioned at the rear and at the front. The rear partition secludes an area of water damage. The partition at the front, parallel to North Davidson Street, provides a space that was subdivided into two smaller rooms. The two rooms served as an office and examining room for Dr. Joseph Hamilton McLeskey about the time of the depression. The second floor has pine flooring, painted plaster walls and a tongue and groove ceiling. Some of the original light fixtures still hang from the ceiling. Several built-in flues for heaters have now been closed to prevent water damage. Without the two partitions, the second floor would look much as it did in 1912 with one major exception. A gas system, providing heat and air conditioning, has been installed in the center of the second floor. The ductwork extends radially from the system. Several holes have been cut in the floor to pass ducts to the first floor. Some partitions have been added on the main floor since the building is now used for offices rather than a pharmacy. In 1912, the main floor would have appeared quite large since it had only one nine foot high partition near the rear of the building.

Beneath several layers of flooring material, there is a floor of hardwood. Probably birch, it was cleaned with oiled sawdust and a pushbroom in the early days of the Hand Pharmacy. The stamped tin ceiling was installed when the building was constructed. The ceiling, approximately 15 feet high, is painted white. It had been damaged by a fire in 1977 (which incurred no structural damage to the building) and again when holes were cut in it for the ducts mentioned earlier; however, after the 1977 fire, the building underwent major refurbishing. Few of the building's original fittings have survived. However, one of Jasper Hand's original utility tables is stored on the second floor along with several drawers from one of his cabinets. The Jasper K. Hand Pharmacy Building provides a solid architectural presence at the corner of North Davidson Street and 35th Street. Since so much of the original fabric is unchanged and in relatively good condition, it could be rehabilitated and adapted for reuse as a landmark building in a revitalized north Charlotte neighborhood.

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Frank R. Hand, son of Jasper K. Hand, was kind enough to be interviewed by telephone and to give the author a tour of the building as well. The historical notes are based on his recollections.