



## THE HAWTHORNE LANE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



*This report was written on May 4, 1992*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is located at 501 Hawthorne Lane, Charlotte, in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:** The owner of the property is:  
Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church  
Robert W. Lawing, Chairman of the Board of Trustees  
501 Hawthorne Lane  
Charlotte, North Carolina

Telephone: (704) 332-8131

Tax Parcel Number: 080-204-08

**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 maps which depict the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to Tax Parcel Number 080-204-08 is not listed in Mecklenburg County's Tax Office.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ms. Paula M. Stathakis.

**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 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 Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) the congregation of the church was organized in 1914 as Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church to serve the Elizabeth-Piedmont Park community and became a United Methodist Church in the 1960's;
- 2) many of Charlotte's most prominent business leaders, including J. B. Ivey, B. D. Heath and E. A. Cole, were charter members of Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church;
- 3) Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church was designed by a leading Charlotte architect, Louis Asbury;
- 4) the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church was built in a popular church design of the period, the "Akron Plan";
- 5) the first service at Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church was held on December 3, 1916;
- 6) the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has many exterior features, such as the bell tower and slate roof, intact and in very good condition;
- 7) the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has many interior appointments, such as the ceiling lined with American chestnut and stained glass windows with cast stone tracery, intact and in very good condition;
- 8) the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is architecturally significant as a fine example of an early 20th century Gothic Revival church; and
- 9) the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has, since 1914, continuously served the neighborhood and the city of Charlotte with its active programs for both members and non-members.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials feeling, and / or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ms.

Nora M. Black included in this report demonstrates that the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church 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 \$610,450. The current appraised value of Tax Parcel 080-20-08 is \$149,000. The total appraised value of the property is \$759,450. Churches are exempt from ad Valorem taxes. The property is zoned R6.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** 4 May 1992

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
in conjunction with  
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### *Historical Overview*

*Prepared by: Ms. Paula M. Stathakis*

The congregation of Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church was organized in 1914. The establishment of this congregation was the end result of two years of preliminary work of a committee created to investigate the necessity of building a Methodist church to serve the Elizabeth and Piedmont Park neighborhoods. The proposal to create a new congregation and church to serve the Elizabeth-Piedmont Park community was approved at the meeting of the joint quarterly conference of Charlotte Methodist Churches on April 14, 1914. Among the members of this committee were some of the most prominent men of the Charlotte business community; J.B. Ivey, B.D. Heath, and E.A. Cole were all charter members of Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

The congregation held its first service on December 5, 1915. Before the sanctuary on Hawthorne Lane was completed, the congregation met at Elizabeth College and Conservatory of Music, now Presbyterian Hospital. Charles B. King, president of Elizabeth College, agreed to rent the Elizabeth College Chapel to the Hawthorne Lane congregation for \$50.00 a month. This fee included the chapel, two recitation rooms on the first floor for Sunday School, electricity, and the sexton's salary. In the winter, an additional fee for coal was assessed. The pipe organ was also rented to the group for an additional \$4.00 a month.<sup>2</sup>

The congregation met at Elizabeth College until the new church was completed. The first service in the new facility was held on December 3, 1916. The church was designed by Charlotte architect Louis Asbury.<sup>3</sup> Asbury used the "Akron Plan", a popular church design of the period that used roll up partitions to divide the building into classroom and sanctuary sections.



*The interior of the church, featuring details of the "Akron Plan"*

The seating in the sanctuary is arranged in a semi-circle around the altar. Two large, fine stained glass windows depicting John Wesley speaking on the grave of his father and Jesus at age twelve in the Temple of Jerusalem flank the altar. The church was built upon land that was donated to the congregation by charter member B.D. Heath.<sup>4</sup>

The first service in the church celebrated the completion of the structure as well as the first anniversary of the congregation. The service was conducted by Rev. R.D. Sherrill; his sermon was "Our Indebtedness to the Past and to the Future" during which he exhorted the members of the new generation, whom he judged to be

especially well endowed with material wealth, to maintain the blessings of the past and to perpetuate God's work: "What might we accomplish as a church at large with the old life and power in our new equipment?"<sup>5</sup>

Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church's primary significance lies in its role as a neighborhood church for the Elizabeth suburb. Elizabeth is Charlotte's second oldest streetcar suburb and until the construction of Myers Park, Elizabeth was Charlotte's most fashionable suburban address.<sup>6</sup> Residential construction began in 1891, and by 1925, Elizabeth had four neighborhood churches. Hawthorne Lane Methodist was the second church built in the suburb preceded by St. Martin's Episcopal.<sup>7</sup>

Although the formal organization of Hawthorne Lane Methodist was guided by some of the most prominent men of Charlotte, the congregation was composed of people from different socio-economic levels. Most members contributed to the maintenance and the welfare of the church in the best ways they could. Robert E. Evans, who joined the congregation in 1923, went to the church at 11:00 on Saturday nights to start the coal furnace so everyone would be warm on Sunday mornings. Air conditioning was installed in 1969, thanks to Terry Hodges. Prior to leaving for Vietnam in 1968, Terry asked his parents to make a contribution to the air conditioning fund in his name if anything happened to him. Terry Hodges was killed on August 19, 1968. The air conditioning fund became the church's tribute to Terry. Within a year, \$30,215 was raised to install air conditioning in the church. On hot summer Sundays, the parishioners can thank Terry Hodges for the air conditioned sanctuary.

Charter member J.B. Ivey was in a position to be generous with both his money and his time. Ivey served the congregation as a Sunday School teacher and as the Sunday School Superintendent. One of his former Sunday School students, Zelda Thomas Shoemaker, recalled that Ivey visited her one Sunday when she was home sick. Ivey brightened her day by taking her a pair of earrings he made out of peanuts. Ivey also held Easter Egg hunts in his gardens at the corner of Central Avenue and Louise Avenue.<sup>8</sup>

The most renowned member of the Hawthorne Lane congregation was Hal Kemp, a band leader popular in the 1930s. Kemp began his musical career with his childhood friend John Scott Trotter in the Sunday School Orchestra. Kemp's band, which included John Scott Trotter on piano, Skinney Ellis on Drums, Saxie Dowell on sax, and Ben Williams on clarinet, immortalized such hits as "I've Got a Date With an Angel" and "You're the Top".<sup>9</sup>

The congregation of the church has traditionally been involved in missionary and outreach activities. Since December 1915, the women of the church have contributed to Charlotte community projects, such as providing social activities at Camp Greene during World War I, contributing to the Florence Crittendon Home and the Bethlehem Center. The church has sponsored missionaries in India and Japan. Various youth organizations meet at the church, both Methodist groups, such as the

United Methodist Youth Fellowship and secular clubs, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Many of the members of the church have attended the same Sunday School class for years.<sup>10</sup>

As the needs of the neighborhood changed, the mission of the church adapted. Whereas the church once focused on the needs of its members, most of whom lived in the neighborhood, the church now extends its services to the neighborhood in general. Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church assists in the support of Crisis Assistance Ministries, and keeps an account at Stanley Drugstore, where homeless individuals are sent for meals.

Hawthorne Lane Methodist church is also important to its congregation. Many members have moved out of the Elizabeth neighborhood but return every Sunday for church. Many young adults who grew up in this church also maintain their membership there. The most striking testimony to the significance of this church to its members is the Heritage Room. The Heritage Room houses every document and relic that is historically significant to the Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church. Great pains have been taken to catalog information through photographs, videotape, and transcripts of interviews. Much of the information is kept in scrapbooks. The Heritage Room is very clearly a labor of love and an eloquent expression of the important role this church has played in the lives of its members.

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Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> *Histories and Organization Notebook: Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church. Souvenir Booklet, Dedication Day, April 27, 1924.*

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Charles B. King to J.B. Ivey, October 21, 1915. Letter property of the Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Asbury also designed the E.B. Gresham House and the Mayfair Manor (now the Dunhill Hotel).

<sup>4</sup> B.D. Heath established the cotton and banking firm of Heath Brothers; he owned several textile mills in North and South Carolina, and was also president of the Oakhurst Land Company. The cost of construction, equipment and fixtures for the new church was \$350,000.00. A parsonage was constructed adjacent to the church in 1916. The two story four bedroom, two bathroom house was torn down in the 1960s and a new parsonage was built at 4818 Hardwicke Road. The original location of the parsonage is now a parking lot.

<sup>5</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, "Hawthorne Church in New Building." December 4, 1916, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hanchett, *Charlotte and Its Neighborhoods. The Growth of a New South City, 1850-1930. Section III. The Streetcar Neighborhoods*. Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1981-1985, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> All anecdotes taken from the *Histories/Organization Notebook*, 1915-, property of Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hanchett, *Charlotte and Its Neighborhoods*, p. 19; *Charlotte Observer*, February 5, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> *History of the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church. Stepping Stones, 1911-1980*. p. 3.

### *Architectural Sketch*

*Prepared by: Ms. Nora M. Black*

The Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is located in Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood on the northwest side of Hawthorne Lane at the intersection of East Eighth Street. In recent years, the section of Hawthorne Lane in front of the church has become a busy thoroughfare connecting Independence Boulevard with East Seventh Street and the Presbyterian Hospital complex. Due to the large number of people who pass the church each day, Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is probably one of the most easily recognized churches in Charlotte's early neighborhoods.

The front-facing gable of the church's southeast facade faces Hawthorne Lane; one side of the nave parallels the busy street. The distinctive bell tower is located on the southeast facade; the double doors of the main entrance are located in the base of the tower. The northwest facade serves as the connecting side for passageways to additions that are not being considered for designation; mechanical equipment also lines this facade. The cross-gable of the southwest facade faces East Seventh Street. The northeast end of the building has a low gable wing used for offices.

The Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is a fine example of an early 20th century Gothic Revival building. Following the Civil War, the Gothic Revival style was one of the most popular styles of church architecture in North Carolina. Many denominations supplied official publications on church building to help local congregations emulate the current fashion. At the turn of the century, the Classical style of building began to gain favor. "The Gothic Revival style, however, never lost its hold on church architecture...Urban and rural congregations of every denomination built brick, frame, and stone churches in the Gothic style..."

Louis Asbury, the architect, used the "Akron plan" for the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church. The Akron plan is so named because it first appeared at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio.<sup>2</sup> The Akron plan is a distortion of the circular plan since the square or rectangular nave has a semicircular arrangement of pews around a point of focus which is the sanctuary and choirs. The preference for this arrangement was not new. Early Christians favored a round church, based on the Roman baths and mausoleums, over the long church which was adapted from Roman courthouses.<sup>4</sup>

The rise of evangelism at the turn of the century brought the older form back to popularity as Bishir points out in the following excerpt:

"Although the established plans and styles of religious architecture enjoyed continued vitality, important changes had begun to appear as well. Mainstream Protestant churches adopted a new church plan drawn from their own history and designed to accommodate their worship: the theater or auditorium plan. Mid-nineteenth-century English and American evangelists preaching in cities had often rented theaters to accommodate the throngs they attracted. The arrangement of theaters, with their sloping floors, provided an excellent model for evangelical Protestant churches, for it offered a maximum number of good seats from which to see and hear the preacher. Sanctuaries with sloping floors, curving rows of seats, and aisles radiating out from the pulpit became widely popular in the late nineteenth century as denominational publications presented designs for auditorium or theater-plan churches in large and small sizes...In North Carolina, this new arrangement appeared in many churches."<sup>5</sup>

Louis Asbury's design for the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church included a 52'x 76' auditorium to seat 650 people. Roll-up partitions separated the Sunday School auditorium from the main church. When those partitions were opened, the church seated 1,100 people. The basement of the building had a kitchen, library or club room, a reception hall, and other conveniences. The construction contract was awarded on 12 February 1916 to Mr. J. A. Jones based on a bid of \$38,119. That bid did not include heating, plumbing, electrical wiring, windows, seats, fixtures and equipment. The building committee estimated that the church, completed and equipped, would cost \$50,000. Not included in that figure is the cost of the lot.

Donated by Mr. B. D. Heath, it was valued at \$7,500.<sup>6</sup> Appraisal cards at the Mecklenburg County Tax Office give the estimated replacement cost of this structure as \$984,591.

## **Exterior**

The Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is constructed of red brick laid in running bond with white mortar joints. Brick buttresses with cast stone elements give the structure a sense of weight and rigidity. At the same time, the buttresses add vertical interest. Each buttress has a gabled cast stone top decorated with a recessed trefoil arch. The top sections of the brick buttresses also have recessed panels. These sections resemble niches of the original Gothic churches that held statuary. The gable roof at the top of each buttress reminds one of a house and the Biblical quote that "...in my Father's house there are many mansions..." A belt course of cast stone encircles the building; cast stone courses also decorate the gable ends. The walls of the gable ends rise to a parapet topped with a cast stone coping. The cross-gabled roofs have a steep slope; however, the front-facing gable hides the roof and keeps it from becoming the dominant element. The original slate roof is laid in a simple, coursed pattern.

Most of the windows in the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church contain the original stained glass. Some windows have cast stone pointed arches with cast stone tracery. Windows with pointed arches have cast stone hood-moulds to throw off rain. A few windows, including most of those on the southwest facade, are double hung wooden sash; each sash contains stained glass. All double hung sash windows have cast stone lintels and sills. The three large stained glass windows on the southeast facade are covered with clear plexiglass to prevent breakage. The plexiglass has a grid support system that attempts to match some of the pattern of the cast stone tracery.

The bell tower dominates the front elevation. The tower rises above the roofline of Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church to end in corbeled brick battlements. The tower buttresses differ from the buttresses of the main structure; they lack the recessed "house" niches at the top (described on page 7). Louvers in the tower are set in cast stone surrounds with pointed arches. Stained glass windows below the louvers also have cast stone surrounds with trefoil arches. The main entry to the church is through the base of the tower. The double doors have a cast stone surround with a center-pointed, compound arch. The wooden doors, painted dark brown, have black wrought iron hinges. The single light fixture over the entry is a simple frosted globe suspended on a curved metal arm. A cast stone panel, recessed into the brick wall between the light fixture and the point of the entry arch, is decorated with foliage carved in high relief. Similar panels are recessed into the wall above the point of the louver arches. Brick bulkheads topped with cast stone copings form balustrades for the twelve granite steps leading to the main entry. An iron pipe railing has been attached to each balustrade.

The Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has one minor entry on the southwest facade. It is located on the southwest wall of a recessed section of the structure that is opposite the location of the tower. The double doors lead to the northwest vestibule and a passageway to the Education Building. Short towers at each corner of the southwest facade have battlements topped with cast stone copings. The gable end of the southwest facade is quite different from the southeast and northwest facades. Although the wall has three large cast stone arches similar to the other two facades, the arches frame much smaller windows. The size of the windows reflects the fact that there are three floors on the southwest end of the building. Below the belt course, the sills of the double hung wooden sash in the basement are at ground level. A small, narrow chapel running parallel to East Eighth Street has rectangular windows. The windows on the third level, located in the balcony, are small arched, double hung sash windows within the larger arched surrounds. The two center windows in the third level have brick rowlock arches with cast stone keystones. The southwest gable end is a very elegant and well-executed solution to a difficult problem - that of providing ventilation in the era before air conditioning.

## **Interior**

The interior of the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has not been changed to any great degree since its opening in 1916. Most of the historic fabric is not only intact but visible. The Akron plan, discussed on page 6, gives clear definition to the organization of the church. All sight lines of the auditorium are focused on the center of the northeast wall. The choir is recessed into the northeast wall of the auditorium. In front of the choir, an area for a small orchestra and organ pit is shielded from the sanctuary by a tall wooden screen decorated with trefoil arched panels. The sanctuary, raised above the level of the auditorium floor, is defined by a wooden balustrade. The floor of the nave slopes up from the sanctuary to the southwest wall of the auditorium. The area at the southwest end of the nave, originally used for Sunday School, is now treated as part of the nave. Six groups of curving, cushioned pews remain in their original locations. Five aisles radiate from the sanctuary. The center aisle runs from the sanctuary to the southwest wall. The two side aisles that run from the sanctuary to the vestibules appear to be the most used. A semi-circular balcony provides additional seating. Clearly, this intact version of the Akron plan is serviceable and well liked by the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church congregation.

Interior appointments are simple but elegant and very well maintained. The beautiful trefoil arched wainscot and woodwork are stained dark brown. That color provides a good contrast for the warm ivory of the textured plaster walls. The floor of the nave is covered with green carpet. Stained glass windows, many of opalescent glass, make the interior dim and shadowy. The stained glass window on the southeast wall depicts John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement in England, standing on his father's grave while speaking to a small group of people. On the northwest wall,

the stained glass window depicts Jesus at the age of twelve with the elders and high priests in the Temple of Jerusalem.

The ceiling of the main section of the nave is one of the church's finest features. The entire ceiling is paneled with narrow strips of irreplaceable American chestnut. Non-structural ribs delineate a pattern of squares on the flat section of the ceiling. Within those large squares, some smaller squares are rotated at a 45 degree angle. Light fixtures are suspended from chains fastened in the centers of the smaller squares. The elaborate wooden trusses spanning the nave are decorated with St. Andrew's crosses set in carved and molded squares. The curved sections of the ceiling are also paneled with American chestnut. Paneled vaults emphasize the two large stained glass windows depicting the young Jesus and John Wesley (discussed above). When all the lights of the church are illuminated, one can see that the American chestnut paneling is a rich, glowing honey color with a distinctive grain.

Doors on the southeast and northwest sides of the building's exterior open to large square vestibules. The vestibule on the southeast corner is contained within the base of the tower. Each vestibule has two sets of double doors opening into the auditorium; each door has a large beveled glass panel over a single wooden panel. Marble thresholds separate the floors of the vestibules and the nave. Doors on the northeast side of each vestibule open to wide aisles that lead directly to the communion rail in front of the sanctuary.

Open stairways on the southeast and northwest walls lead to the balcony. The stairways are located to the southwest side of the vestibules in the portion of the nave that once served as the Sunday School. The balcony has curved rows of wooden fold-up seats with metal stanchions. The wooden balustrade at the front of the balcony is similar to the wainscot used throughout the auditorium. On either side of the balcony, there is a small room with a roll-up partition. Many years ago these two small rooms were used for Sunday School classrooms. Enclosed stairways, located near the balcony stairways, lead from the main floor of the nave to the basement and to exits at basement level.

The southwest end of the main floor contains a narrow, rectangular chapel that runs parallel to East Eighth Street. The sanctuary for this small chapel, located on the northwest end, is separated from the seating area by a wooden communion rail pierced with trefoil arches. Two groups of straight pews, separated by a center aisle, offer a startling contrast to the curved pews in the nave. Two window air conditioning units have been installed; they are located at opposite ends of the chapel. The wainscot in the chapel has a rectangular design. Double swinging doors at each end of the chapel provide access to the nave. Each door has a glass panel in a pointed arch with intersecting tracery over a large wooden panel.

## **Conclusion**

The Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church is an intact example of an Akron plan, Gothic Revival style church from the early years of the 20th century. It played an important role in the settlement of the Elizabeth and Piedmont neighborhoods. As a new suburban church, it offered a place of worship to citizens in the first exodus from Charlotte's four wards. The appointments, finishes and decorative details exhibit a wide range of superior materials and expert craftsmanship. Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church has a long legacy of providing comfort and nourishment for the souls of its members and others within Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1990), 310-328, 390-395.

<sup>2</sup> Roger G. Kennedy, *American Churches* (New York, 1982), 238.

<sup>3</sup> The sanctuary is considered to be the raised area around the main altar of a church; at minister delivers the sermon. The nave is the main area for the seating of the congregation. The singers seated in the choir, located behind the sanctuary, are raised Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church, it includes the platform from which the above the floor level of the nave and the sanctuary.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, 237.

<sup>5</sup> Bishir (reference to Jaeger, "The Auditorium and Akron Plans - Reflections of a Half Century of American Protestantism"), 321-322.

<sup>6</sup> *Bulletin - Hawthorne Lane M. E. Church* (Charlotte, N. C., May 1916), Vol. A, No. 1,1-2.