

THE LATTA ARCADE



Interior



Exterior

This report was written on 20 July 1994

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Latta Arcade is located at 316 South Tryon Street in the central business district of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

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

Crosland-Erwin and Associates/The Crosland Group, Inc.

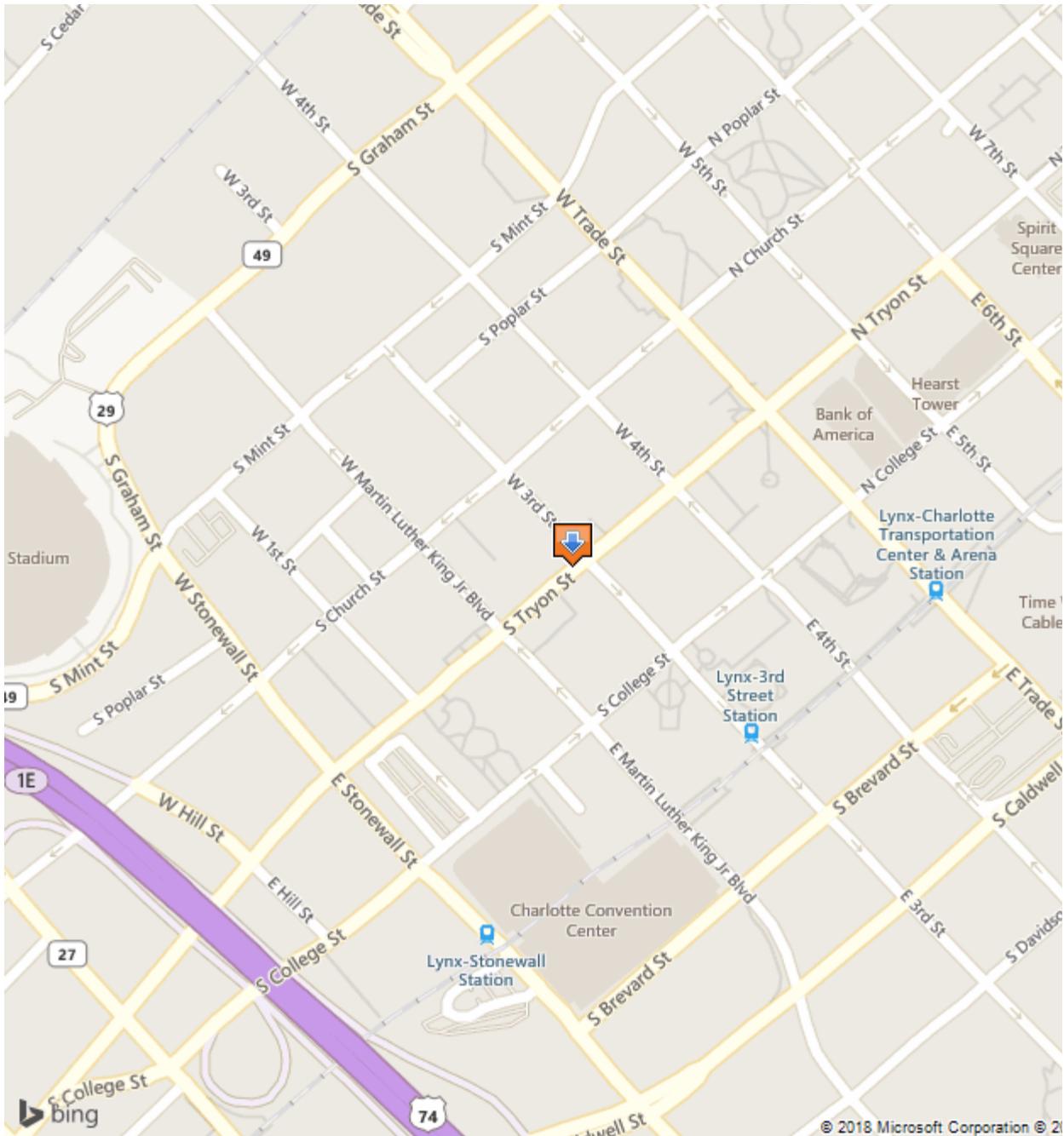
125 Scaleybark Road

Charlotte, North Carolina 28209

704-529-1166

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

4. Maps depicting the location of the property: This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



5. Current deed book references to the property: The Latta Arcade is sited on Tax Parcel Number 073-021-26 and is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5140 at page 461.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Mattson, Alexander and Associates.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Mattson, Alexander and Associates.

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 history, architecture, and cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Latta Arcade does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgement on the following considerations: 1) Latta Arcade was designed by important Charlotte architect, William H. Peeps, and built in 1914; 2) Latta Arcade was developed by Edward Dilworth Latta and his Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, which was instrumental in the development of early twentieth century Charlotte; 3) the Latta Arcade was built as part of large scale commercial construction program undertaken by Latta during the boom years of the early twentieth century when Charlotte emerged as the largest city in North Carolina; and 4) the Latta Arcade has already been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the interior of the Latta Arcade has designated as a local historic landmark by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Mattson, Alexander and Associates included in this report demonstrates that the Latta Arcade property 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 to the Latta Arcade is \$399,530.00. The current appraised value of Latta Arcade, Tax Parcel Number 073-021-26 is \$1,772,100.00. The total appraised value of the Latta Arcade is \$2,171,630.00. The tax deferral for the current historic designation totals \$25,850.00. Tax Parcel Number 073-021-26 is zoned B-3.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 20 July 1994

Prepared by: Frances P. Alexander and Richard L. Mattson
Mattson, Alexander and Associates
for
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
P.O. Box 35434
Charlotte, North Carolina 28235

(704) 376-9115

Architectural Description

Introduction

The 1914 Latta Arcade is a two-story, brick commercial building with a first-floor pedestrian passageway, which serves as an inter-block artery linking South Tryon and South Church streets in uptown Charlotte. The Arcade constitutes part of a contiguous row of office and retail properties along the west side of the 300 block of South Tryon Street, the most densely developed commercial street in Charlotte. Brevard Court is joined to the rear (west elevation) of the building at ground level, and serves as an extension of the first-floor Arcade thoroughfare. The Court consists of two parallel rows of one-story brick offices and retail shops facing a brick open-air pedestrian walkway. Although built sporadically during the years following the completion of the Latta Arcade, these rows of facades share common materials and detailing, and form a harmonious unit with the Arcade. The interior of Latta Arcade was largely restored between 1969 and 1973, and the main facade was remodeled during a second renovation which followed a change of ownership in 1982. The proposed designation includes the portions of the Latta Arcade which were not designated in 1975, and the parcel on which the building is situated.

Architectural Description

The Arcade is divided into two blocks. The front (east) block is covered by a gable roof which rises into an asymmetrical parapet along both the north and south elevations. This gable-front roof extends the length of the Arcade and shelters the pedestrian walkway on the ground floor. The gable is covered with a slightly tinted glass installed ca. 1985. The glass skylight looks clear from the ground and floods the walkway with natural light. Muted green Spanish tiles sheath the eastern slope of the roof and produces a slight overhang which is underlined by a row of decorative modillions. The rear block is covered by a tripartite roof consisting of two pent roofs which flank and buttress the taller center gable roof. The front block is a trapezoid measuring 99 feet wide, and 84 feet deep on the north side and 76 feet deep on the south. Reflecting the 1980s facelift, the South Tryon Street (main) facade is composed of a plastered brick veneer, plate-glass display windows, and limestone detailing. The main entrance is recessed and framed by a limestone arch, with a keystone transom. The recessed entry leads to a double-leaf plate glass door with transom and unbroken sidelights framed by brushed aluminum. A separate storefront flanks each side of the entrance bay. Each includes limestone pilasters, a frieze with applied decorative wood molding which echoes the interior frieze motif, and marble-faced aprons below display windows. The storefronts lead into a restaurant (south side) and drugstore (north side), each with modern interiors.

The second-story windows across the facade are all replacements and have fixed sashes. The main doors of the Arcade open onto a center hall with a black-and-reddish terra cotta tile floor. The cornice of the foyer ceiling is embellished with acanthus rope molding, which is also inlaid along the lateral beam. The north wall has a row of three plaster pilasters leading to a pair of wide, marble-faced ones which mark the entrance into the Arcade proper. An early metal wall mailbox and a wooden shoeshine stand are situated on the northeast side of the foyer. Located on the south side is a marble-faced staircase which joins the two floors of the building. The

elaborate stair design consists of a lower flight running east-to-west leading to a transverse landing. Staircases rising from the landing provide access to both the eastern office block and the principal western block on the second floor. The stair balustrade comprises slender cast-iron balusters with small horizontal tie-beams connecting each baluster at top and bottom, resulting in a lattice-like effect along the diagonal passages of each flight. Originally, the second story housed the offices of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (4C's), the conglomerate presided over by Edward Dilworth Latta, financier and developer for whom the Arcade was built. Located in the southeastern corner is the entrance to the former Latta office, designated by a casement transom with ornate leaden tracery. The original door to this office--a large single leaf Philippine mahogany door with 15 raised panels--is now a closet door in the northeastern corner of the block.

The western block of the Arcade is also a trapezoid and measures 104 feet deep on the south side, 100 feet deep on the north, 87 feet wide on the east, and 88 feet deep on the west. It is this area which gives the building its remarkable character. Here, original structural and decorative elements are combined with contemporary refurbishing. The color scheme throughout is a combination of gray, black, and cream uniform white globe-shaped lights are located beside the doorways and define the shop and office front bays. Perpendicular, wooden signs identify the businesses. At the rear, a large double-leaf door with wood surrounds, sidelights, and an arched transom opens onto Brevard Court. Whereas the front of the Arcade has a plastered-brick veneer, the rear elevation has exposed red brick, and three original segmental-arched upper story windows with stone sills. The larger center window has a transom and sidelights ornamented with stained glass Art Nouveau designs. Each flanking window is capped by a rectangular Art Nouveau designed transom. The interior of the first floor west block is divided in half by the eight-bay-long walkway, the Arcade proper of the building. Retail shops and offices hue its perimeters. The easternmost bay, beside the foyer, is flanked by shop fronts recessed in an octagonal space. Sections of the original terra cotta tile floor have been replaced in this area by slightly larger tiles of similar pattern and colors. A modern planter/fountain in a circular marble-faced container is the centerpiece.

The shop front on the south side of this space has been modernized with a glass-curtain facade and double-leaf door opening into the rear of the restaurant ("Gus' Sir Beef") and public restrooms. The other bays of shop and office fronts lining the Arcade display original design elements. These fronts consist of plate-glass curtains divided into show windows atop marble-faced aprons, rectilinear doors with wood surrounds, and transoms. Engaged pillars define the bays and support a simple frieze ornamented with three rectangular wooden dentils above each pillar. Above this frieze is a wooden balustrade which rims the large rectangular wall of the upper level. The balustrade is composed of rectangular balusters, a rectangular handrail, and square-in-section posts of lateral bracing. The wall, is 92 feet long and 12 feet wide and emphasizes the dramatic open plan of the building while allowing the glazed roof to cast natural light onto the walkways.

The upper tier of office bays is set back from the well. The office fronts consist of plate glass windows resting on flat-paneled aprons which alternate with full-length plate glass doors. The bays are defined by pilasters topped with geometric caps projecting from an entablature which stretches the length of the Arcade. Atop the entablature is a broad frieze divided into eight bays

and decorated by wooden molding strips. Each bay features a bold central diamond-shaped panel with a recessed plastered center. Flanking the center diamond are rectangles broken into chevrons along their inner sides to conform to the contours of the diamond. Above the frieze stretches a clerestory divided into three plate glass rectangular windows per bay. On the north wall at the eastern end of the well are a pair of double-hung etched windows with simple molded surrounds. At the next to the last bay of the western end is a partition which designates an office waiting room. The lower plate-glass section includes two entrance doors flanking the well. The upper half of the partition features, in bold relief, a broad trabeated design with splayed feet. A rounder medallion enclosing a clock surmounts the lintel.

The roof is supported by seven evenly spaced exposed metal fan trusses consisting of thin metal rafters and purling. Arched hind-braces reinforce the truss tie-beams. Modern circular fans extend down from the trusses.

Conclusion

The 1914 Latta Arcade ranks among the most significant early twentieth-century office buildings erected in Charlotte. Although the main facade has been substantially remodeled, the remarkable interior arcade survives largely intact, with parallel rows of shop fronts and office suites beneath the skylit roof. The design continues to reflect its original purpose, which was to accommodate a variety of small businesses as well as provide natural light for the grading of cotton, all within an architecturally sophisticated space. The interior clearly illustrates the use of innovative design and attention to detail to achieve both functional and aesthetic results.

Historical Overview

Designed by Charlotte architect, William H. Peeps, the Latta Arcade was built in 1914 on South Tryon Street, one of the principal commercial thoroughfares in the city, for the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company. The Four C's, as this real estate company was known, had been started by prominent Charlotte developer and entrepreneur, Edward Dilworth Latta (1851-1925), and other local business leaders in 1890. A South Carolina native, Latta had moved to Charlotte in 1876 and established a retail clothing store under the name, E.D. Latta and Brothers. However, his legacy was real estate development, which was fostered in the post-Civil War years by urban growth and a rising manufacturing base in Charlotte. Latta, as one of the exemplars of the New South philosophy of progress through industrialization, was able to capitalize on the growth and wealth associated with the burgeoning textile industry. During the 1880s, when the first cotton mills were opened in the city, Latta established a trouser company, and quickly became one of the principal boosters of Charlotte as a New South city (Morrell 1985, 295). During the nascent period of industrialization in the city, Latta boldly established the 4C's in 1890, and the company quickly acquired 442 acres south of the city. Here Latta and the company

planned to establish Dilworth, the first suburban development in Charlotte, an area targeted at the new industrial workers.

One year later, in 1891, The Four C's acquired the horse-drawn streetcar line, which had been started in 1887, converted it to electric trolley service, and extended one line from downtown to Dilworth with a second providing cross town service. The streetcar was operated by a Latta subsidiary, the Charlotte Railway Company. In order to attract the new urban middle class to Dilworth, The 4C's built a power plant to supply the community with electricity, a sewage system, a waterworks, and a gasification plant, all constructed in the 1890s (Glass 1975).

Through his real estate venture at Dilworth and his control of early utilities, Latta was instrumental in establishing Charlotte as a major industrial center in North Carolina. Between 1890 and 1910, the population of the city tripled to 34,014, and eleven cotton mills was opened (Blythe 1961, 449). By the end of the 1890s, Mecklenburg County was one of the three largest textile manufacturing counties in North Carolina (Hanchett 1981). With the new industrial expansion, Charlotte also became a commercial and financial center with banks, cotton brokerages, and other service-related industries supporting the textile boom. As the city grew, the Charlotte Railway Company extended trolley service to the emerging ring of streetcar suburbs including Piedmont Park, Elizabeth, and Biddleville. By the early 1900s, however, Latta and the 4C's began to lose the monopoly they had once held in public utilities. Competition from J.B. Duke's Catawba Power Company (incorporated in 1905 as the Southern Power Company) as well as other developers and entrepreneurs undermined Latta's exclusive hold on urban services.

In 1910, the Southern Power Company was awarded a franchise to provide streetcar service, and in the same year, the Charlotte Power Company began supplying gas. Shortly thereafter, The 4C's sold its trolley line and gas subsidiary to J.B. Duke's Southern Power Company (Morrill 1985, 312). With the end of its utilities activities in 1910 and the annexation of Dilworth into the city in 1907, Latta and the 4C's were able to focus more intently on real estate ventures. In 1913, Latta, with officials of the Southern Power Company, established the Mercantile Development Company, which acquired a large tract on South Tryon Street, one of the primary commercial streets of downtown (Morrill 1985, 314). Most of these sites held older residential properties, and Latta planned an ambitious campaign of commercial office construction, which spurred a building boom in the center city. Reputedly E.D. Latta's favorite achievement, the Latta Arcade was constructed on South Tryon Street in 1914 during this large scale building program. Located on the west side of South Tryon Street between Second and Third Streets, the Latta Arcade site was bought from Mary S. Brevard for \$44,000 (Glass 1975).

Architect William H. Peeps (1868-1950) was commissioned to design the new office building, and T. L. Caton acted as the building contractor. A native of London, England, Peeps had first settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he began his American career as a furniture designer. In 1905, he moved to Charlotte where he spent the remainder of his life (*Charlotte Observer* 11 September 1950, 21). President of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Peeps designed a number of important local works including a second arcaded office building, the Court Arcade, on East Trade Street; the clubhouse at Myers Park Country Club; the J.B. Ivey Company Department Store (1924); and an orthopaedic hospital in Gastonia. Peeps also became a major residential architect, following his success with the Latta Arcade and the

J.B. Ivey department store, and he received a number of residential commissions in the new streetcar suburbs of Myers Park and Dilworth. In Myers Park, he built a Colonial Revival house for John Bass Brown, one of the leading retailers in Charlotte, and Tudor Revival dwellings for local entrepreneur, Osmond Barringa, and F. D. Lethco. His Dilworth designs included a 1925 English country house for Ralston and Frances Pound (Boyle 1983, 7A). Opened in January 1915, the Latta Arcade was built with six stores fronting on South Tryon with an arcade extending to the rear through the city block. Sixteen small, specialty stores faced onto this arcade.

The design for the arcade was inspired by the Grand Central Palace Exposition, constructed in London in 1851, a building which was widely influential during the early twentieth century when a number of arcaded commercial buildings of similar design were built throughout the U.S. (White n.d., 26). The *Charlotte Observer* praised its appearance, particularly the interior. Marble stairs and railings and walls strike the eye as one enters from the front and a complete view of finely-worked wood and marble and decorative effects extend in panoramic fashion before the gaze of the visitor (*Charlotte Observer*, 16 January 1915). The building was an instant success. The Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company moved into offices on the south side of the second floor, while architect Peeps occupied another office. The skylights, supported by steel trusses, provided the correct lighting for grading cotton, and the cotton brokerage firm of Andason-Clayton also became early tenants. Other early occupants included an iron-making company; lawyers, John K. Kenyon, Julia Alexandra, and C. D. Moore; and insurance firms (White n.d., 26). With the popularity of Latta Arcade, several other business leaders soon approached Latta about extending the building. Instead of undertaking the new project himself, Latta purchased two adjoining tracts to the rear and sold them to the interested parties. Albert Brown, also a Charlotte real estate developer, was evidently responsible for this new project. Called Brevard Court, the newer building mimicked the arcade design, although the shops fronted onto an open courtyard. Brevard Court extended from the rear of Latta Arcade through to Church Street (Glass 1975).

Several years after construction of Latta Arcade, illness forced Latta from daily participation in the work of the Four C's. The deed to the Latta Arcade was conveyed from the elder Latta to his son, E. D. Latta, Jr. in 1923, and E.D. Latta, Sr. moved to Asheville. In Asheville, Latta continued his development activities, but died two years later in 1925, as one of the wealthiest men in North Carolina. At his death, Latta owned 20 to 30 buildings in Charlotte in addition to considerable real estate holdings in Asheville (Glass 1975). The Latta Arcade was a prime office and commercial address throughout the interwar years, but fell into neglect during the 1950s and 1960s. After World War II, the property was bought by Jack Heath, who with fellow Charlottean Randolph Scott, had tried acting in California before coming home to begin his realty firm, F. J. Heath Realty Company. In 1969, Heath began renovations on Latta Arcade, the designs for which were undertaken by the architectural firm of Wolf Associates, Ltd. Wolf earned the 1973 Award of Merit from the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for this renovation (Glass 1975). In 1982, the John Crosland Realty Company bought the arcade from the estate of Jack Heath. Additional renovations were undertaken after this change in ownership with designs by Jack Boyte of Boyte-Williams Architects. During this second renovation, the exterior was remodeled, and a rear door of wood and glass, similar to the original, replaced a solid glass entrance of the 1970s. Interior modifications included restoring the plaster detailing and globe

lights to their original appearance. In addition, clear glass replaced the plastic corrugated panels which had been added to the skylights (Maschal 1986, 6B).

Conclusion

The Latta Arcade was built in 1914 as part of a large scale, building program, which transformed areas of downtown from residential to elegant commercial uses in the early twentieth century. This change in land use reflected the new status of Charlotte as the largest city in North Carolina and a major industrial and commercial center in the state. The Latta Arcade is one of the rare early twentieth century, commercial buildings remaining in the central business district. In addition, with the demolition of the Latta home on East Boulevard, the Latta Arcade is the only extant building in the city which the prominent Charlotte developer, Edward Dilworth Latta, actually occupied.

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