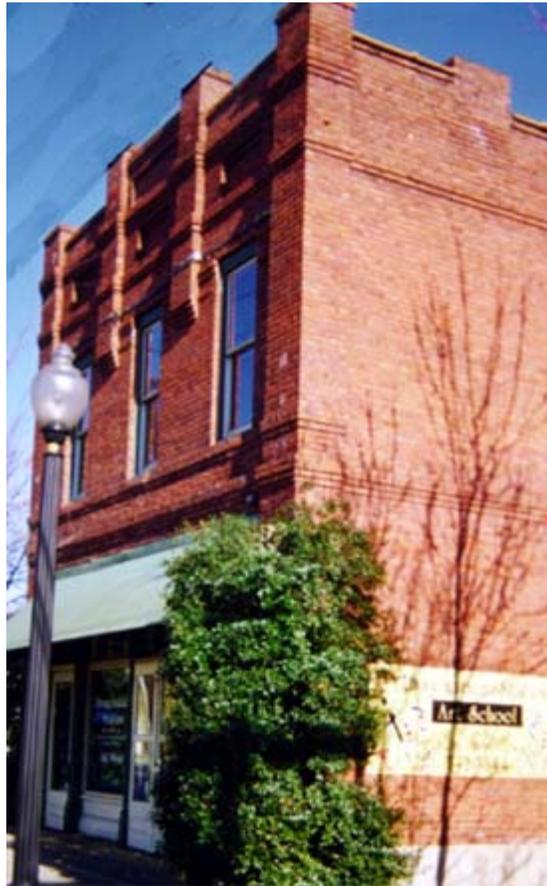


THE LEEPER AND WYATT STORE BUILDING



This report was written on December 5, 1988

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Leeper and Wyatt Store Building is located at 1923 South Boulevard, Charlotte, N.C.

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

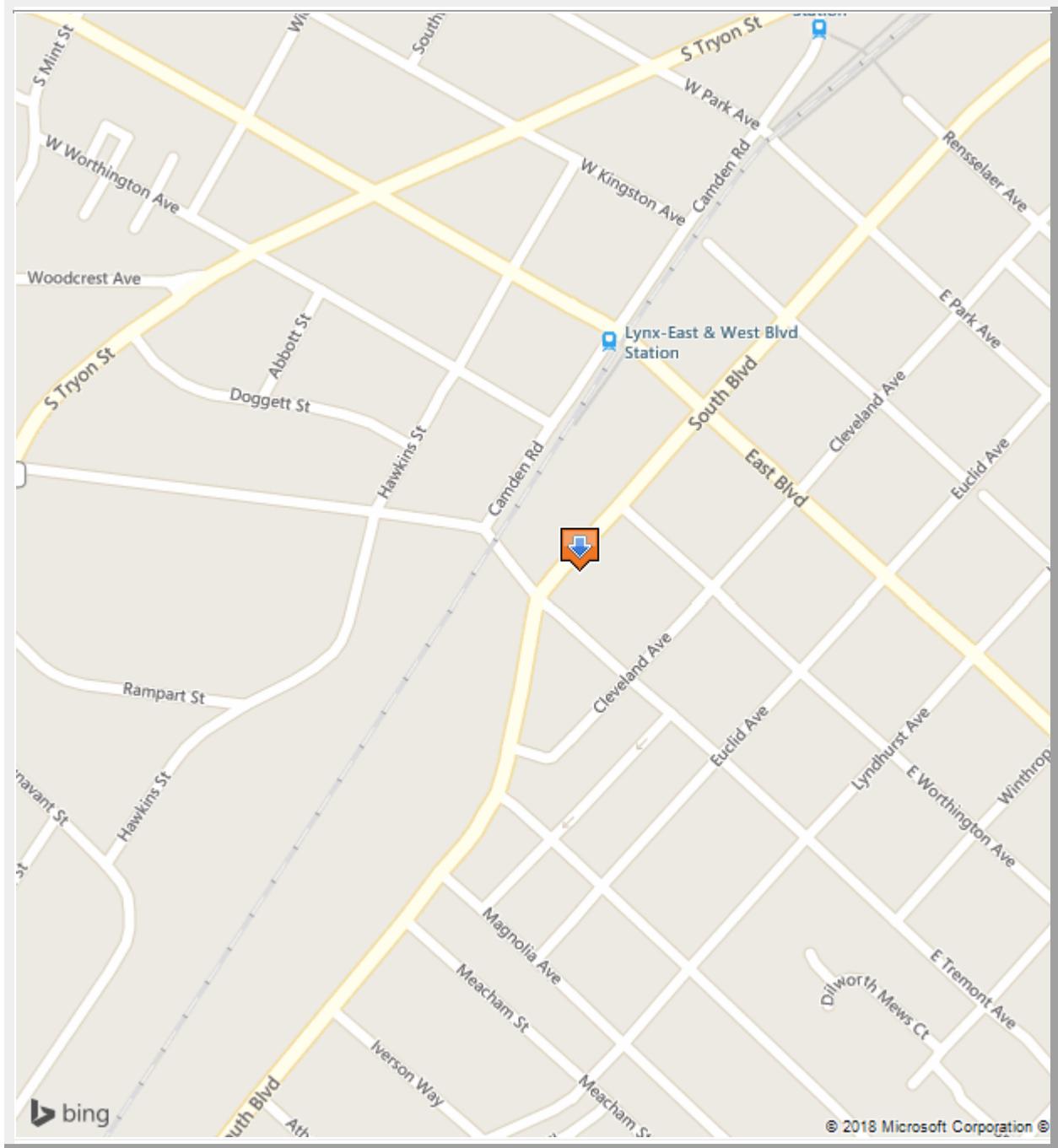
The owner of the property is:
Sanford Berkeley Associates, Inc.
c/o John Trotter Company

129 West Trade St.
Suite 710
Charlotte, N.C., 28237

Telephone: (704) 373-1239

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.



Click on the map to browse

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5683, page 882. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 121-055-19

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

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

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 Leeper and Wyatt Store Building does possess special significance in terms Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Leeper and Wyatt Store Building, erected ca. 1903, was initially owned by Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1851-1914), a New South industrialist of regional influence; 2) the Leeper and Wyatt Store Building belonged to a collection of buildings, including the Atherton Mill and mill village, the Atherton Lyceum, the Tompkins Dilworth Machine Shop, and the Tompkins Foundry, which the D. A. Tompkins Company and its affiliates occupied in Dilworth, Charlotte's initial streetcar suburb; 3) the Leeper and Wyatt Store Building served Charlotte as a neighborhood grocery for more than fifty years; and 4) the Leeper and Wyatt Store Building is the oldest surviving retail brick commercial building in Dilworth's first business district, which was situated along South Boulevard.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Dr. William H. Huffman which is included in this report demonstrates that the Leeper and Wyatt Store 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 \$41,100. The current appraised value of the .390 acres of land is \$38,250. The total appraised value of the property is \$79,350. The most recent annual Ad Valorem tax bill on the property was \$995.44. The property is zoned I1.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 5, 1988

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St. Box D
Charlotte, N.C., 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

Historical Overview

The Leeper and Wyatt Store is the oldest surviving retail brick commercial building in the Dilworth community's old business district along South Boulevard. Built about 1903 by New South entrepreneur D. A. Tompkins, it was planned to serve his Atherton Mill village as well as the fledgling Dilworth community. Dilworth, the city's first streetcar suburb, was the creation of another local New South business pioneer, Edward Dilworth Latta (1851-1925). The Princeton-educated South Carolina native opened a men's clothing store in Charlotte in 1876, and in 1883, as part of the city's industrial boom of that decade which centered around new cotton mills, he opened a men's pants factory. In 1890, Latta formed a development firm, the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (known locally as the 4C's) and bought 422 acres a mile or so southwest of town, and had a new subdivision laid out in grid fashion. Along the main boulevards and some major side streets, large houses would be built for the well-to-do, and more modest bungalows would mostly fill in the side streets. To draw prospective buyers out from the city, in 1891 Latta bought out the city's horse-drawn streetcar line and installed a new electric trolley system that would run from the Square out to Dilworth. Other attractions were a major amusement park (Latta Park) with boating lake, a pavilion for travelling shows, ball fields and a racetrack. Sales promotion was boosted by selling lots on easy installment terms, so that a prospective buyer could be enticed by using the "rent money" to purchase a new home.¹

After an initial flurry, lot sales began to lag, but were given a needed boost by the building of the Atherton Mill at the southern edge of the suburb in 1892-3. The Atherton was the showcase mill of Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1852-1914), one of the region's most important New South industrialists. Tompkins, a South Carolina native who was educated in engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic, first came to Charlotte in 1883 as a representative of the Westinghouse Corporation. Recognizing the industrialization potential of the post-Reconstruction Piedmont, he opened his own mill design and machinery supply business, the D. A. Tompkins Company, in 1887. Within two years, Tompkins had built Charlotte's second, third and fourth cotton mills, the Alpha, Ada and Victor, and organized his own mill furnishings business, the Charlotte Supply Company, which supplied mills throughout the Piedmont region.² The industrialization impact of Tompkins' company in the Piedmont region may be seen by these figures: during Tompkins' active career, his company built over one hundred cotton mills and numerous fertilizer plants, electric light works, and cotton ginneries. He also turned cotton oil from a waste product into a profitable industry by building over two hundred processing plants, which included his own, the Southern Oil Company. In 1892, Tompkins bought the sinking *Charlotte Chronicle*, turned it over to a skilled editor, J. P. Caldwell, who made the new *Charlotte Daily Observer* into a leading regional daily. Tompkins first love was to be a consulting engineer, and later, author of books, mostly on cotton mill and mill house construction. At the time, his mill books were said to be the most influential ones on the subject in the Southeast.³

To further his unceasing advocacy of Southern industrialization, he also helped establish textile schools at N. C. State University, South Carolina and Mississippi. By 1905, his national reputation led to an appointment by President McKinley to the Federal Industrial Commission, and former President Grover Cleveland insisted on Tompkins being made a member of the board

of Equitable Life in 1905 to help save it from bankruptcy.⁴ In January, 1901, the D. A. Tompkins Company bought twenty lots from the 4C's on both sides of South Boulevard at the edge of Dilworth that adjoined his Atherton Mill property (Tremont Avenue was the dividing line).⁵ On several of the west side properties, Tompkins built a foundry (1902) and a machine shop (1904-5).⁶ Across the street, at the southeast corner of Worthington and South Boulevard, was the house he built for the mill superintendent (1892-3).⁷ At the next intersection to the south where Tremont crosses South Boulevard, the northwest corner held the Atherton Lyceum, a school owned by the mill, and across the street was a small general store owned by G. H. Hall.⁸ Tompkins personally bought the lot two doors to the north of the corner store in March, 1903, and built a two-story building for use as a grocery store to serve the mill and Dilworth communities.⁹ "Leeper and Wyatt (H. Y. Leeper & P. L. Wyatt), grocers, Atherton" first appears in the City Directory for 1904/5, so it seems likely that they began business in the new store in late 1903 or early 1904.¹⁰

Rev. Hugh Y. Leeper and his wife Mary, who lived on South Boulevard at the corner of Park Avenue, do not appear in the directories before 1904/5, or after 1907; thus nothing further is known about them.¹¹ Starting in 1908, the grocery business was known as the Wyatt Company, with Pleasant Lafayette Wyatt (1864-1942) the principal partner.¹² Tompkins built P. L. Wyatt a house on the adjacent lot to the north around the same time the store building was completed, but retained ownership of both.¹³ P. L. Wyatt was a native of Rowan County, the son of Pleasant L. Wyatt and Delilah Parks, and in the 1880s married Mary Gilbert (1864-1946), with whom he had eight children.¹⁴ At the turn of the century, which is about the time he came to Charlotte, he was an overseer at a cotton mill, and in 1902 clerked in the Poole Brothers Grocery at 1309 S. Boulevard (between Templeton and Arlington).¹⁵ About 1908, when Leeper left the business, P. L. Wyatt's son, C. L. (Charles Lorenzen, 1889-1971) became a clerk in the store, and then or later, a partner in the business.¹⁶ For over a half century, which witnessed many changes, the Wyatt grocery served the Dilworth, Wilmore, and surrounding communities. One can imagine it as the typical old neighborhood store with the friendly owners and clerks who knew all of the customers by name.

Entering through a screen door with a strong spring that would make the door bang if you weren't careful, you would smell the wood fixtures and floors mixed with the scents of the other goods inside. Walking up to the counter (about ten feet or so inside the door) with your list, the grocer would chat with you about the weather as he picked the things off the shelf that you called out. The counter stretched to the right and left of the center (with candy in jars on top), while two legs went back from each side that had drawers with beans, etc. in them. Along each side were aisles that went back to the rear of the store.¹⁷ By the 1930s, most of the orders came in by phone, which earlier were delivered by horse and wagon, but then by an international truck. During the Depression, the county would call in the "charity orders," (a No. 1 or No. 2 standard order), which were delivered once or twice a week. P. L. Wyatt's grandson, Rex Gribble, Sr., recalls helping with deliveries on Saturdays in the 1930s that might go on until one or two in the morning. Deliveries at that time stretched out to Myers Park (to the Lethco house on Roswell and the Robert Stephens house on Sherwood) as well as other areas some distance from the store. Most orders were done on credit.¹⁸ D. A. Tompkins died in 1914, and five years later, P. L. and C. L. Wyatt bought the store property from the estate, and P. L. Wyatt bought his house next to the store as well.¹⁹ Pleasant Wyatt died in 1942 at the age of 78, but his son kept the business

going until about 1958.²⁰ After World War II, Charlotte's inner neighborhoods began the decline that was typical of many American cities, which was accelerated by the suburban building boom of the 1950s. That combined with competition from new supermarkets sealed the fate of old-fashioned neighborhood grocery stores like the Wyatt's. Since C. L. Wyatt's death in 1971, the building has had several owners, and been used variously as a night club and antique store.²¹ The Leeper and Wyatt store building is a handsome and unique survivor of the turn-of-the-century commercial district of Dilworth/Atherton. and clearly merits recognition as an important historic site.

NOTES

¹ Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (1890-1925): Builders of a New South City," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 62(1985), 293-316.

² Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey of Cotton Mills in Charlotte," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1979 *Charlotte Observer*, October 19, 1914, p. 1.

³ Dan L. Morrill, "A Historical Sketch of the Atherton Mill House," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1981.

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, cited above.

⁵ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 151. p. 328.

⁶ William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the D. A. Tompkins Foundry," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. 1987; by the same author, "A Historical Sketch of the Tompkins Machine Shop," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1987.

⁷ William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Atherton Mill Superintendent's House." Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1987.

⁸ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 151, p.331.

⁹ Ibid. Book 178. p.123.

¹⁰ Charlotte City Directory, 1904/5, p.298.

¹¹ Ibid., 1904/5, p.298; 1905/6, p.485; 1907, p. 337.

¹² Ibid.,p.336.

¹³ Mecklenburg County Deed Books 394, p. 454; 402, p.515.

¹⁴ Mecklenburg County Certificate of Death. Book 61, p. 197; *Charlotte Observer*, December 1, 1942, Sect.2, p.2.

¹⁵ Interview with Mrs. Hyman Woodrow, Charlotte, NC 9 June 1988; Charlotte City Directory, 1899/1900, p. 336; 1902, p.485.

¹⁶ Charlotte City Directory, 1908, p. 336: et passim.

¹⁷. Interview with Rex Gribble, Sr., Charlotte, NC 9 June 1988.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mecklenburg County Deed Books 394, p.454; 402, p.515.

²⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, December 1, 1942, Sect.2, p.2; Charlotte City Directory, 1942-1959.

²¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Books 3357-325; 3450-451; 4275-535.

Architectural Description

The Leeper and Wyatt building is the sole surviving retail commercial brick building in that block of South Boulevard in Charlotte. Located just north of the intersection of Tremont Avenue and South Boulevard, it was part of a cluster of three retail store buildings that served the Dilworth and Atherton communities. The adjacent two original buildings are no longer extant. South Boulevard was originally built as a major thoroughfare of Dilworth, the city's first streetcar suburb, and linked the central city to the Atherton mill village surrounding the Atherton mill. It is now a secondary north-south artery (U.S. 521) that runs from central Charlotte to Pineville and on into South Carolina. The Leeper and Wyatt store is in the process of being rehabilitated and adapted for re-use as an office building. A two-story building with basement, rectangular in plan, three bays wide by four deep, the former store is constructed of brick laid in common bond one-to-five. The roof is built-up tar and gravel on wood that slopes to the rear, and is enclosed on the front and sides by parapet walls; the parapets on the sides are stepped down toward the rear. The two-story facade facing South Boulevard has two entry doors at the street level. One is a double door with two glass panels on each side, leading to the ground floor. The other is a single door of solid wood on the north end of the facade, and leads to the second floor. The double entry doors are flanked by large display windows. A two-light transom is over the north door, and is matched by three-light transoms over the double entry doors and display windows; the latter three have been covered by a wood panel that will be removed in the

rehabilitation. The ground floor facade doors and windows are enclosed in wood framing that has fluted pilasters on either side of the display windows. Just above the transoms was a canopy that is no longer extant; however, the wood brackets that held it are, and the rehabilitation of the building will include the replacement of the canopy. Three windows penetrate the second story of the facade that are crowned by two-row-brick flat arches.

The original sash is no longer extant, but will be replaced with two-over-two double-hung sash, which appears to have been the original installation. The second-story facade is capped by decorative stepped parapet wall, with the highest in the center, which is flanked by two pilasters that rise from the lowest of two horizontal rows of brick corbeling. Both ends of the facade have pilasters that extend from the street level up above the parapet wall, and decorative corbelling runs between the pilasters on the summit of the wall. Because of the interior stairwells and use of space, the windows on the sides of the building are not the same in number or spacing. On the south side, there are four single, segmental-arch windows on the basement level that have been bricked in. The first floor level has four single, segmental-arched windows that were placed high to allow more wall space for shelves and storage. The original sash is no longer extant, but they will be replaced with two-pane fixed sash. On the third floor, there are five tall, segmental-arch windows, for which the original sash is no longer extant, but will be replaced with two-over-two double-hung sash. Four of the second story windows on the south side have small, fixed-sash, segmental-arched windows above them, just above a row of decorative brick corbelling. Another brick corbeled row separated the first and second floors, that begins on the sides of the facade and wraps all the way around the building. On the north side, there is a wood entry door and two single, segmental-arched, bricked in windows on the basement level. The door will be bricked in and the whole parged over to match the existing adjacent parging. On the first floor are three single, segmental arched windows placed high on the wall, the original sash of which is no longer extant, but will be replaced with two-pane fixed sash. The second floor has four symmetrically-spaced tall segmental-arched windows, without original sash, that will have two-over-two double-hung sash replacements. The rear of the building at the basement level has an off-center entry door that is bracketed by two windows that will have two-over-two double-hung sash replacements for the original.

The second floor rear has two entry doors, one for the first floor and one leading to stairs to the second floor on the south side. They were reached by replacement steel stairs and landing, which has been removed, and will be replaced by wood stairs and first-floor porch. Two windows bracket the first floor entry door, that have two-over-two double-hung, original sash. The second floor has two symmetrically-placed windows, the original sash of which had been replaced with six-over-six double-hung sash, but will have, after restoration, two-over-two double-hung sash as the original. The integrity of the store building is high, in both the interior and exterior, with the exception of the window sash as noted. Interior beams, trim and floors are essentially intact. All brickwork is in good condition, and will be repainted. The interior at the basement level shows post-and beam support construction. The first and second floors are totally open spaces except for the stairwells against the north wall. A stairwell leads from the north front entry door to the second floor, and in the rear, there is one leading to the second floor on the north wall and the basement on the south. The stairwells will be replaced with new construction.