1. **Name and location of the property:** The property known as Myrtle Square Apartments is located at 1121 Myrtle Avenue in Charlotte, North Carolina.

2. **Name, address, and telephone number of the owner of the property:**
   Kline and Company
   1711 East Blvd
   Charlotte, NC 28203
   794-333-9601
   (Kline and Company is the property manager. The units are individually owned.)

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

4. **Map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.
5. **Current deed book reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is recorded in the Mecklenburg County Deed Book. The tax parcel numbers for the property are 12305801-12305872.

6. **A brief historical summary of the property:** This report contains a brief historical summary of the property.

7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

8. **Documentation of why and 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 Myrtle Square apartments does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

   1) Myrtle Square is the most sophisticated example of a garden court multi-family housing property type in Charlotte. Garden court communities have their genesis in the English Garden City Movement and gained popularity in Europe due to the massive need for housing that arose from the destruction of World War One and the rapidly urbanizing effects of industrialization. Natural spaces, most often demonstrated with
a central courtyard, and common areas were utilized to facilitate interaction and community involvement among urban residents.

2) Myrtle Square is a rare local example of Art Moderne architecture and is indeed a rare residential example of this architectural style. Art Moderne is a subdued derivative of Art Deco, utilizing decorative features such as glass brick walls, porthole windows, distinctive iron work and smooth geometric lines. Art Deco and Art Moderne were the first rejections of historicity that gained popular acceptance.

3) Myrtle Square represents the need for transient housing that arose from tremendous population growth Charlotte experienced prior to World War Two. The city’s expansion attracted a wide range of workers across the entire economic spectrum.

b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or Association:** The commission contends that the physical and architectural descriptions included in this report demonstrate that the Myrtle Square apartments meet these criteria.

9. **Ad Valorem tax appraisal:** The commission is aware that designation would allow owners 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 total parcel assessment is $6,167,800.

10. **Date of the preparation of this report:** 1 October 2006

11. **Prepared by:** Jason Nichols
    jsnicho1@aol.com
Historical Overview

Myrtle Square Apartments can be best understood within the broader context of the historic development of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Transformative changes in the first four decades of the twentieth century greatly altered the city’s social and economic landscapes. Rapid industrial expansion, with textile manufacturing at its center, stimulated unprecedented population growth, which initiated a building boom in multi-unit housing that continues to this day. Myrtle Square is a sophisticated garden court example of apartment housing and is a stylish example of residential Art Moderne architecture.

Summary Statement of Significance

Myrtle Square Apartments can be best understood within the broader context of the historic development of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Transformative changes in the first four decades of the twentieth century greatly altered the city’s social and economic landscapes. Rapid industrial expansion, with textile manufacturing at its center, stimulated unprecedented population growth, which initiated a building boom in multi-unit housing that continues to this day. Myrtle Square is a sophisticated garden court example of apartment housing and is a stylish example of residential Art Moderne architecture.

Overview

By the 1930s, Charlotte was a leading manufacturing and trading center of the southeast and had surpassed Charleston, SC as the largest city in both Carolinas. Inexpensive labor, an abundance of raw materials and an extensive railroad network, which extended Charlotte’s trading reach from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, placed the city at the very center of a manufacturing region of nearly eight hundred
textile mills and various other industrial plants. In fact, it was during this period that southern textile manufacturing surpassed that of the north.\[1\] The expanding economic base attracted thousands of new workers, which led to an unprecedented period of population growth. In only twenty years, Charlotte’s population more than doubled from 46,000 in 1920 to 101,000 in 1940.\[2\] It was within this broad context of Charlotte’s development that multi-unit housing became a commonplace site along the city’s streets.

Charlotte was late among large population centers in the adoption of apartment living. Critics, probably influenced by the negative conceptions of urban tenement housing, argued that multi-unit dwellings would destroy traditional family life. More pragmatically, however, was the fact that land was cheap and so there was little motivation to concentrate populations into single structures.\[3\] Though apartment housing appeared during the first two decades of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1920s that multi-unit dwellings gained popular acceptance. From 1920 to 1930, the city experienced a seventy-five percent population increase of over 36,000 people.\[4\] The traditional accommodations for transient populations, boarding houses and hotels, could no longer meet the demand for temporary housing. Apartments were the obvious solution for a city experiencing mounting population pressures.

The earliest apartments in the city were located downtown, which happened to coincide with the exodus of single family residences into the desirable suburbs of Dilworth and Myers Park. But soon thereafter, apartment complexes began to appear anywhere public transportation was accessible and especially along trolley lines and bus lines where deed restrictions did not prohibit their construction.\[5\] Without question, the most popular form of early apartment design was the quadruplex, which was a single structure divided into four separate units. In appearance, the quadruplex was very similar to a single family house, so it was common for these dwellings to be intermingled among suburban neighborhoods. In fact, the first apartments away from downtown appeared along East Blvd in Dilworth. Each unit was complete with full bathrooms and kitchens, which distinguished this new middle class living arrangement from poor tenements. By the late 1920s, apartment living in Charlotte expanded beyond the quadruplex and into multilevel rectangular block buildings such as the Frederick Apartments on N. Church and the Tryon House apartments at 508 N. Tryon. These early examples were three and four stories in height with a central hallway running the length of the building on each level. In 1926, the Addison apartments in Dilworth became the city’s first high rise apartment complex.\[6\]
Discussion of the historic significance of Myrtle Square would be incomplete without a brief introduction to Dilworth, Charlotte’s first suburb. Edward Dilworth Latta, a prominent industrialist, envisioned a neighborhood where the middle class and wealthy could enjoy “country” living, but remain an easy commute to downtown. In 1890, the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (4C’s), founded by Latta, began building the first homes in a grid-like street pattern on what was once a 442 acre farm. A year later, the 4C’s introduced the first electric streetcar that connected the Dilworth neighborhood to downtown, thus making it convenient for those who desired a home away from the urban center.[7]

In 1911, an expansion of Dilworth occurred in response to the population increases of the city, a flourishing economy, and the overall success of the neighborhood as a residential development. Impressed with the curvilinear and naturally landscaped Baltimore suburb, Roland Park, Latta contracted the most prominent development firm in the United States to design this new section of Dilworth. The Olmstead Brothers, sons of famous landscape designer Frederick Law Olmstead, submitted a design that greatly diverged from the grid pattern of the original neighborhood. The expansion included a northern and southern section in an hourglass shape connected by a grand boulevard, Dilworth Rd., which was intersected with curvilinear streets. The southern section below Latta Park was the first to be developed and adhered exactly to the Olmsteads’ plan. The northern section, however, was altered- probably out of the desire to develop more of the land than the
Olmsteads’ had allowed with their numerous small parks. The streetcar was extended into this northern section around Morehead, Berkley, Myrtle, and Mt. Vernon, but ceased operation one year before construction of Myrtle Square Apartments in 1939. The modern appearance of Myrtle Square indicates the northern section’s later development from the more traditional architecture in the southern portion of the expansion.8

Two years after the Addison apartments opened on Morehead St. in Dilworth, an engineering survey plat was conducted further down the road along Mount Vernon, Lexington, and Myrtle Avenues. The survey indicates that all the land had been subdivided except lot “39,” which included some significant frontage along Myrtle.9 Because of the triangle created by the intersection of these three streets, a significant portion of usable land would have been left fallow if simple single family residences were placed along the open lots on Myrtle Ave. This space proved to be an ideal location for placement of a large multi-unit complex, particularly one that could incorporate this large swath of natural landscape.

But the lot would remain barren and in the ownership of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company until November 29, 1937, when it was sold to Birton Realty Company. Birton then transferred the land to Myrtle Square Apartments, Inc one week later.10 In June 1938, F.N. Thompson Company was hired to construct what would become Charlotte’s most sophisticated garden court community.11 Founded in 1887, F.N. Thompson has a long history in the area, relocating to Charlotte from Florida in 1930. The company’s decision to move after forty years in Florida was certainly motivated by the potential wealth that could be made in rapidly expanding Charlotte.12 By 1939, Charlotte was the leading city in the Carolinas for building permits and construction values as the city was emerging from the economic woes of the Great Depression. For example, permit values had increased to $4,000,000 in 1939, which was an impressive recovery from the depression induced low of $727,000 only six years prior in 1933.13

Importantly, the existence of Myrtle Square is remarkable considering the convergence of two important factors- the dearth in construction in the 1930s and the relatively short life of Art Moderne architecture. These considerations reveal the small window of time for a building like Myrtle Square to have even been constructed. Not until the end of the decade, did construction in Charlotte start its economic rebound, and by the time garden court apartment construction accelerated after the World War Two, Art Moderne had outlived its popularity. Art Moderne as a residential application arrived in Charlotte over a decade after it first appeared in other places around the country and shortly after it arrived, this modern design was replaced with the traditional or revivalist motifs exemplified in places like the Morningside...
Apartments and Cotswold Homes, both “superblock” complexes devoid of architectural distinction. Conversely, Myrtle Square is Charlotte’s best example of an early garden court community that exhibits sophisticated architectural design.

In its first year, Myrtle Square filled ninety percent of the seventy two units, and though the turnover each year was close to seventy five percent, new residents kept the apartments near full capacity. As was typical with Dilworth, the residents of Myrtle Square were middle and upper middle class. Teachers, warehouse managers, FBI agents, and medical professionals called the Myrtle home. The most common profession, however, were traveling salesmen. This demographic remained consistent throughout the subsequent decades and occupancy was annually above ninety percent until Myrtle Apartments converted into condominiums in 1983. After the conversion, vacancy increased to double digit levels, with a high of 17 unoccupied units in 1986, but has since rebounded to full ownership rates.

Architectural Description
Myrtle Square Apartments are an exemplary model of the garden court philosophy of urban planning, which came to prominence during the first decades of the twentieth century. The genesis of the garden court and super block movement lay with the British urban planner, Ebenezer Howard. Howard’s 1898 book, Garden Cities of To-morrow, conceptualized a new vision for the industrialized city, combining urban and rural living into a harmonious relationship. Essential to the new urban city were carefully planned communities that eliminated derelict areas and preserved large natural spaces for public enjoyment. Green space was best preserved by concentrating housing into large multi-family complexes, called “super blocks,” which were integrated respectively with the natural environment. The super block/garden court movement began in Europe, where the immense destruction of World War One created an immediate need for housing, and fortuitously for urban planners and architects, a “clean slate” for which to implement these new ideas. Government commissions for public housing provided ample opportunities for experimentation, the results of which would soon be adopted in the United States as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal program to improve urban areas. [17]

Note the curvilinear similarities between the “Garden City” inspired planned community of Radburn, NJ and the section of Dilworth where Myrtle Square condominiums are located (center of photograph). Radburn, which opened in 1928, was the creation of New York architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright.
Myrtle Square Apartments are the oldest garden court complex in Charlotte and is a rare residential example of Art Moderne architecture. Art Moderne, a streamlined style with crisp geometric lines and restrained ornamentation, derived from the Art Deco movement of the 1920s. Art Deco architecture emerged from “The Exposition des Arts Decoratifs” in Paris in 1925, where rejection of historicity and in particular, Beaux Arts classicism, has its origin. Modern industrialized societies, these new architects argued, deserved more than revivalist or historical adornments. Highly stylized and embellished decoration became indicative of the Art Deco movement. In its truest form, Art Deco was a celebration of the moment and an expression of optimism for the modern society. It permeated all facets of culture, being applied to fashion, art, and even household appliances.

Art Deco and Art Moderne were not altogether new architectural expressions, but rather they were artistic movements that were incorporated into existing building designs. Unlike later reinventions of structural principles, such as the International Style, Art Deco emphasized stylistic rejection of revivalist appearances. A close examination, however, reveals that this new architecture readily adhered to the axial balanced symmetry of classical design. Art Deco simply exaggerated these principles with embellished ornamentation. Accordingly, architecture became the most profoundly affected discipline of this universal artistic movement. Proponent designers of Art Deco and Moderne stripped away the columns and capitals of historicity and replaced them with fresh and invigorated shapes that expressed a new era. Buildings were streamlined, as if tested in a wind tunnel, and designed only with features that avoided association with the past. Indeed, architecture and art blended seamlessly in an aesthetic expression of joy, movement, and exuberance. Myrtle Apartments are indicative of this convergence of structure and style and is especially representative of the Cubist inspiration behind the Art Moderne philosophy.
Cubism, in its most fundamental form, is an art medium that expresses movement, life, and three-dimensionality as it would naturally appear on a two-dimensional surface, or in essence, without perspective. The flattened forms of cubism inspired new building designs that incorporated minimal projections and decorative features that remained affixed to wall surfaces, thus greatly differing from traditional architectural elements such as irregular and protruding massing, scroll work, dormers, and pedimented porticos. Myrtle Square is a special testament to the power of the artistic canvas when it is projected onto a three-dimensional form.

Art Deco and Art Moderne, however, were applied predominantly in public and commercial buildings rather than residences. It has been surmised that people enjoyed “visiting” these artsy buildings, but preferred the comfort and sense of continuance revilalist residential motifs provided. Charlotte’s residential neighborhoods clearly exemplify the public’s preference for traditional architecture. As historian Tom Hanchett stated, “Once Charlotte discovered the romantic revivals, it was loath to give them up.” The overwhelming residential architectural design of the city is revilalist in appearance. A brief stroll through any of Charlotte’s historic neighborhoods would validate this statement. Colonial, Greek, Tudor, and other European revivals dominate the streetscape. Dilworth, in particular, has many fine examples of Victorian architecture, which in stark contrast to the modernity of Myrtle Square, exemplify the historical evolution of the neighborhood. Art Moderne’s relatively short architectural lifespan coupled with its paucity in residential applications greatly contributes to Myrtle Square’s overall historic significance.

Though Charlotte’s citizens continued to construct and reside in revilalist homes, the city’s concerns with appearing modern and progressive encouraged integration of Art Deco and Art Moderne into its commercial landscape. Beginning in 1929, Charlotte received its first of several Art Deco styled building, the regional headquarters for Southern Bell. The Federal Reserve Bank, Coco Cola Bottling Company and the Charlotte Water Works followed soon thereafter and are all striking examples of this architectural expression. Currently, there are two Local Historic Landmarks in the Art Moderne motif- the Excelsior Club on Beatties Ford Rd. and the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex on W. Worthington Ave. Though few Art Deco and Art Moderne examples remain today, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce photographic evidence revealed that the style was adopted by a range of businesses, including Graybar Electric Company, Trailways, Compton-Knowles Loom Works, WSOC Radio, and several others.
The city’s brush with Art Deco and Art Moderne, however, was short lived. The emerging International Style, which also originated in Europe after World War One, rejected Art Deco as the appropriate architecture for modern industrialized societies. The International modernists lamented the exaggerated and stylized embellishments of Art Deco and instead stressed minimalist designs, clear structural logic, and judicious use of materials. Art Deco was no longer fashionable for a progressive city and so Charlotte transitioned its architectural sensibilities into this new modernism in the 1950s and 1960s.
Physical Description:

Myrtle Square Apartments are a three building complex located on 1121 Myrtle Ave., between the Mt. Vernon and Lexington Ave. intersections. The complex is comprised of seventy-two units of five basic configurations, each ranging in size from 384 sq.ft. to 1076 sq.ft. The three buildings, “A,” “B,” and “C,” form a rectangular boundary around a naturally landscaped courtyard. In total area the grounds and the living spaces equal 153,000 sq.ft. Building “A” is a structure located on the westerly portion of the land, has two stories and a basement, a small portion of which has a concrete floor and contains twenty four units. “B” is located on the easterly portion of the land, has two stories and a small basement, located near the center of the structure, with a larger basement area at the southerly end of the structure, and contains twenty four units. “C” is located on the southerly portion of land, has three stories and a basement at the easterly end of the structure and contains twenty four units. Concrete walking paths extend along the perimeter of the interior courtyard, with two paths joining in the center at what was once a fountain (currently used for planted vegetation). Original lamps, each with a distinctive “M” design on the lantern, illuminate the walking paths. The entryway into the courtyard from Myrtle Ave. is demarcated with a brick wall that heightens incrementally in a series of three piers (on each side of the walkway), the last topped with a spherical lamp bulb.

The building has a masonry foundation with metal bar joists. Exterior walls are solid masonry with full brick laid in common bond with sixth course headers. Windows are of the metal casement type and appear in three configurations: a pair of casements each with four vertical panes, a pair of four pane casements under a two pane transom, and a pair of four pane casements under a four pane transom with two four pane sashes. Brick stringcourses act as sills and lintels for each window type. Walls between units are constructed of hollow clay tile. There are concrete slabs between the floors of the building. The building stairs are steel pan stairs with terrazzo flooring. The roof of the building is a flat, “built up” roof over a concrete deck.
two level porch occupies a recess in both “A” and “B” buildings. A three level fire escape is at the rear of “C” building.

Two entrance types are represented here. The porthole window over the entrance on the left and the glass brick wall over the entrance on the right. “A” and “B” buildings are consistent in this design.

The other entrance type of the “C” building. Notice to the left of the tree the porthole window and glass brick wall that combine to span the three stories.

Notice the how the buildings stagger in alternate protrusion. Building “A” forms the right side of the overall rectangle, building “B” the left side, and “C” connects the two at the bottom.

Art Moderne motif is clearly expressed in Myrtle Square. The building’s ornamentation is understated and achieves overall beauty not through ostentatious means, but by a thoughtful, modest and subtle application of design. Characteristic Art Moderne elements, such as glass brick walls, porthole windows and brick stringcourses adorn the smooth wall surfaces in a replicated, yet distinctive fashion. The “A” and “B” buildings stagger according to unit divisions, with the protruding “A5-B5” and “A2-B2” exhibiting a dynamic glass wall positioned over a curving canopy and extending nearly to the minimalist brick cornice. The inset buildings “A3-B3” and “A4-B4” lack the glass wall feature, but instead have a prominent porthole window illuminating the second level landing. The “C” building, three stories in height, employs both the glass wall and porthole windows in a dynamic expression of artistic verticality. The flat roof eliminates distraction from building, fixating the viewer attentively to the crisp geometric lines and attenuated decoration. Wrapping the corners are stringcourses of contrasting color, which deftly punctuate the building outline.
The consistent and refined metal work suggests a design that could be replicated if needed, yet demonstrates that beauty can be attained from the industrial process. Metal surrounds with glass brick sidelights frame metal paneled doors with eight pane angular radiations. The unembellished common area is adorned only by iron railings, spiral balustrades and copper mailboxes. Indeed, the entry is austere, yet exudes a cleanliness that resists the outside. The cream colored walls are penetrated with casement windows, whose metal muntins project a feeling of industry in an otherwise organic environment. In wonderful Moderne fashion, the mechanical systems of the complex are treated with artistic considerations. In appearance, the downspouts could be mistaken as a decorative element, as they drop well below the roof line, challenging our normal perception of mechanical water removal. Round ventilators are stylized in two rows of five directly over the entry ways and also in single rows of three over certain window bays. And the most subtle artistic flare is the foundation ventilation grates with slightly curving bends. Indeed, Myrtle Square misses no stylistic opportunity, but at no time does it ever approach pomposity.

This is a structure secure in its machined cosmetics, yet resides complementary within its natural environs. Towering Oak trees provide a lush canopy under which one can enjoy the ample green space; an area so welcoming and serene that it belies its location in the heart of an urban environment. The confluence of lush vegetation and the arrangement of walking paths invite one to explore and experience the outdoor beauty that marks Myrtle Square as the most sophisticated garden court in Charlotte. The relationship between the building and its site is exemplary. In fact, it is a disservice to consider the structure without recognition of its context- a natural environment that acts not as a mere complement, but rather surrounds, encompasses, and amplifies the grace and beauty of the attenuated Art Moderne decoration. Brick, mortar, glass, and steel marry harmoniously with ivy and Maple, providing a buffer from the “outside” world- a world replete with the dissonance and clatter from the artifacts of modern urbanity. Though noise also abounds within its walls, it originates not from machine, but rather from birds, gentle breezes and the slight sounds of neighbors as they greet one another in modest tones. Indeed, to capture the essence of its architecture one must receive and surrender to its message- Come in, stay awhile, reflect and rest.
Room Configurations: [24]

On balance, the interiors of the units, especially kitchens and bathrooms, have changed significantly from their original appearance.

Building “A”-
  A1: units with two bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, six closets, one dining room.
  A2: units with two bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, four closets, one dining room.
  A3: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.
  A4: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.
  A5: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.

Building “B”-
  B1: units with two bedrooms, one bathroom, five closets, living room, kitchen, one dining room. Two units have one bedroom.
  B2: units with two bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, dining room, four closets.
  B3: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.
  B4: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.
  B5: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, living room, kitchen, no dining room, four closets.

Building “C”-
  C1: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, two closets.
  C2: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, two closets.
  C3: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, two closets.
  C4: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, two closets.
  C5: units with one bedroom, one bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, two closets.


Hanchett, 188-189.

*Charlotte: Now a City of More Than 100,000 Population*. p.9.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Map Book 3, Page 438, Mecklenburg County N.C. Public Registry.

Mecklenburg Register of Deeds, Book 919, Page 291.

City of Charlotte Building Permit #4014.

Interview with Jane Boland, Director of Marketing for FN Thompson. Conducted 28 September 2006. Ms. Boland is in the process of compiling a history of company’s involvement in Charlotte. FN Thompson is currently a division of BEK Building Group.


*Hills Charlotte City Directory*.

Ibid.

*Polk’s Charlotte City Directory*.


*Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 1940*. Accessed at UNCC Special Collections.

Unit Ownership File 182, Page 1, Mecklenburg Register of Deeds.

Mecklenburg Register of Deeds, Book 4637, Page 177. This deed pertains to the Myrtle Square’s incorporation as condominiums and the structural description is provided in Article III.

Unit Ownership File 182, Pages 2-4. Mecklenburg Register of Deeds. The architectural plan that I am referencing was creating in 1983, thus it is possible configurations have changed.