

# North Charlotte

*by Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett*

In the 1980s, North Charlotte was almost forgotten. Half a dozen former cotton mills and textile-related factories are strung like beads along the tracks of the Southern Railway and the old Norfolk and Southern mainline. East of the mills, look-alike rows of workers' cottages line straight streets named for dimly-remembered mills, mill owners, and textile processes: Mercury Street, Holt, Spencer, and Charles streets, Warp and Card streets. Beyond the mill housing there is a scattering of middle-class bungalows dating from the first years of the twentieth century, before one abruptly enters areas of much newer construction. At the heart of the North Charlotte neighborhood is a small commercial district of one- and two-story brick buildings on Davidson and Thirty-sixth Streets, now mostly vacant except for a post office, fire station, bakery, and one or two workingmen's bars. North Charlotte represents an important phase in the development of the City of Charlotte. Few people are aware today that the city and surrounding Mecklenburg County were for many years a leading industrial force in North Carolina. Not only did the offices of textile concerns, cotton brokers, and banks cluster along South Tryon Street, billed as "The Wall Street of the South", but many of the cotton mills themselves were to be found within the county's borders. From the mid 1890s into at least the mid 1920s, Mecklenburg County was among the top three textile manufacturing counties in North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> North Charlotte was developed in 1903, near the beginning of that era.<sup>2</sup> It was the creation of a group of wealthy textile leaders who conceived North Charlotte as an almost self-contained industrial district. Its state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities contributed greatly to Mecklenburg's leadership role in textile production. Today the mills are quiet and the city has grown out around the district, but North Charlotte survives as the county's largest grouping of textile-related buildings. It is an important reminder of this vital facet of Charlotte's history.

## **The Beginnings of North Charlotte:**

Following the opening of Charlotte's first mill in 1881, Mecklenburg County progressed rapidly to a place of leadership among North Carolina's textile counties. Most of the early capital came from the immediate area, a fact which remained true through the late 1890s. But inevitably, Mecklenburg's prosperity began to attract the attention of outside investors. One of the first such men was William Edwin Holt, Sr., son of the famed founder of the Almanance Mill. Holt had begun his career as manager of the pioneer Almanance Mill during the 1860s, and in succeeding decades he founded a series of new factories in the northern North Carolina Piedmont, including the Glencoe Mills near Burlington and the Wennonah Mills at

Lexington.<sup>3</sup> In 1892 Holt made a large loan to Charlotte's troubled Highland Park Mill.<sup>4</sup> The enterprise had been founded in 1891 under the leadership of local real estate and streetcar tycoon Edward Dilworth Latta.<sup>5</sup> The company had built a new weaving plant that year at Brevard and Sixteenth Streets beyond the northern boundary of the city. But rapid shifts in officers during the first years were a sign that the mill was slow to prosper.<sup>6</sup> Though Holt had agreed simply to supply needed capital in 1892, by 1895 he was the corporation's president.<sup>7</sup> Holt's vice president and secretary-treasurer in the Highland Park concern were an extremely able pair of local men. Jesse S. Spencer was an elderly and established Charlotte banker. He had long headed the Commercial National Bank of Charlotte, an institution founded in 1874 by Edwin M. Holt.<sup>8</sup> Secretary-treasurer Charles Worth Johnston by contrast was a hard-driving young textile man. Born in rural Cabarrus County in 1861, he had begun his career as a store clerk in the north Mecklenburg village of Davidson.<sup>9</sup> Before he was well into his twenties he had married the storekeeper's daughter, helped start the nearby Cornelius mills, and found the village of Cornelius, North Carolina. Spencer took note, and in 1892 brought Johnston to Charlotte to help the Highland Park concern.<sup>10</sup> Holt, Spencer, and Johnston quickly proved to be a highly effective trio. In 1895 they added a spinning mill to the Brevard Street weaving plant and dubbed the whole "Highland Park #1."<sup>11</sup> In 1898 they negotiated purchase of the existing Standard Cotton Mill in nearby Rock Hill, South Carolina, which was renamed "Highland Park #2."<sup>12</sup> In between they found time to form a new corporation of their own, Anchor Mills Incorporated, which operated a mill in Huntersville, North Carolina, fourteen miles north of Charlotte.<sup>13</sup>

In 1903 Holt, Spencer and Johnston turned their attention back to Charlotte itself. The city was in the midst of a period of great economic prosperity, reflected in an 82% jump in population between 1900 and 1910.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, North Carolina textile industry capacity was increasing at a rate that overshadowed even the rapid build-up of the last years of the 19th century. In the decade of the 1900s the number of spindles in the state would rise some 140%.<sup>15</sup> In this climate, Holt, Spencer and Johnston concluded that the time was ripe for development of a new textile industrial district on the edge of Charlotte. The area that would become North Charlotte was largely rolling farmland at the start of 1903. Located about a mile north of Highland Park #1, the land was held by two different owners. One tract had once been part of the antebellum plantation of W.W. Phifer, whose holdings had extended from the plantation house on Phifer Avenue at the edge of downtown, all the way north to present-day Thirty-fourth Street. By 1903, the undeveloped portions of the Phifer estate were in the hands of the Pegram-Wadsworth development company. The land was particularly desirable for factory sites because it bordered the east side of the Southern Railway mainline, the major artery of the burgeoning Carolina textile region. On February 17, 1903, Highland Park Manufacturing purchased 102 and 56/100 acres of the old Phifer estate

from Pegram-Wadsworth for \$15,000.<sup>16</sup> This triangular-shaped tract included the area bounded today by the Southern Railway on the northwest, Charles Avenue (for Charles W. Johnston) on the south, and Thirty-fourth Street on the north. This land would soon become the site of the Highland Park #3 mill, village and powerhouse, as well as the warehouses of the South Atlantic Cotton Waste Company and eventually the Johnston YMCA. The second tract of land lay just to the north, and was owned in 1903 by Mecklenburg County and the Charlotte Water Commission. Part of this land had long been the site of the County Poorhouse.<sup>17</sup> Part had been the nineteenth-century farm of country physician Dr. D.T. Caldwell.<sup>18</sup> In the 1890s a pair of small lakes formed by Sugar Creek had been tapped as part of the city water supply, and a pumping station had been built.<sup>19</sup> Despite this recent investment, Johnston and his powerful associates were able to convince the Water Commission to sell the lakes and land. A 1905 report of the Water Commission defended the sale:

On January 27th, 1903, the Commissioners in session, agreed to vacate the Sugar Creek water shed, "*provided the Commission is satisfied that a corporation will undertake the erection of a manufacturing plant to cost approximately \$400,000, and the adoption of this resolution made it possible for the Highland Park Manufacturing Company to erect the splendid cotton mill now under construction on the northeastern border of Charlotte ...*"<sup>20</sup>

It is not clear, in fact, whether the land did actually go directly to the Highland Park concern. Johnston, Holt and Spencer took title to at least part of it themselves in spring of 1903.<sup>21</sup> Before a decade had elapsed the land -- bounded by Thirty-fourth and Clemson Streets on the south, Herrin Avenue on the north, the Southern Railway on the west, and The Plaza on the east -- held the Johnston and Mecklenburg mills, the Mecklenburg mill village, the General Fire Extinguisher Company, a small commercial district, and a middle-income housing development undertaken by North Charlotte Realty Company.

### **The Highland Park #3 Mill and Village:**

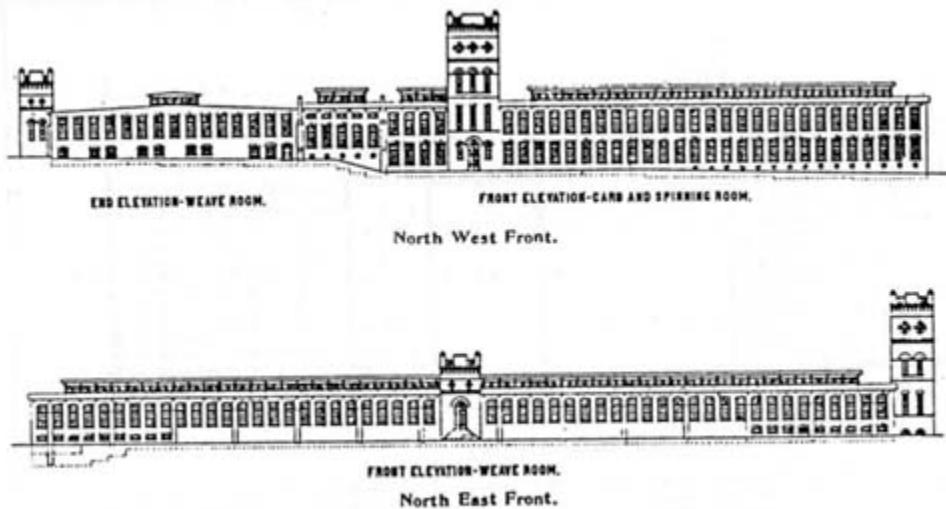
On February 27, 1903, the Charlotte Observer announced the start of construction on Highland Park #3. It was to be a state-of-the-art factory, and by far the city's largest:

#### **\$600,000 PLANT TO BE BUILT THE FIRST ELECTRIC-DRIVEN MILL**

Work will begin Monday on the new cotton mill that is to be erected by the Highland Park Manufacturing Company.... The plant will occupy 102,125 square feet. R.A. Brown, of Concord, has the contract for the brick work of the mill, and the wood work will be done by A.K. Lostin of Gastonia. It is expected that the mill will be completed and running by next January. ... C.W. Johnston ... informed an *Observer* reporter

yesterday that his company had decided to build a power plant on Sugar Creek, 1,000 feet from the new mill and about one mile from the Gingham Mill (Highland Park #1 .... The power plant will have 2,000 horse power and will generate electricity to run both the Gingham Mill and the new mill; and the two mills will be the first electric driven plants in North Carolina.... The new mill, which will be called the Highland Park Manufacturing Company plant #3, will consist of two buildings. One will be one story high and 450 feet long by 125 feet wide; the other will be two stories high and will also be 425 [sic] feet long and 125 feet wide. The mill will employ over 800 operatives and will have 30,000 spindles and 1,000 looms. The Gingham Mill, which is considered a large plant, has only 500 operatives .... The No. 3 mill will make a specialty of ginghams, and will give the Highland Park Company a total of 27,000 spindles on ginghams alone.<sup>22</sup>

Architect and engineer for the new mill, powerhouse, and mill village was Charlotean Stuart Cramer. Cramer designed and outfitted hundreds of mills all over the eastern United States and he had a national reputation as a textile machinery innovator. He had pioneered the development of heat and humidity controls for spinning mills, and is credited with coining the term "air conditioning."<sup>23</sup> By the 1900s he had offices not only in Charlotte, but also in Atlanta, and even in the cradle of American textiles, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.<sup>24</sup> There is evidence that Cramer considered Highland Park #3 his finest work; he used it as the major illustration in his four volume *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers* in 1906, devoting seventy-three pages to reproductions of its plans, machinery layouts, and specifications.<sup>25</sup>



*An illustration of the Highland Park mill from Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers*

The main components of the plant were the huge two-story spinning room building and the equally large one-story weave room building. Cramer arranged these two buildings at right angles to each other, and put the machine room, and smaller slasher, warping, and picker rooms in between so that the whole formed an unbroken "L". The structure was built in the standard "mill construction" developed at the behest of New England insurance firms in the late nineteenth century. Wooden post-and-beam supports carried floors of heavy wooden planking. Walls were brick, with a brick firewall between each room. The brick was made on the site.<sup>26</sup> Stairways were isolated in tall brick sturtowers at the center of each facade. Clerestories at the centers of the low-pitched roofs provided natural light, as did more than two hundred windows along the walls. The brick arches of the windows, and elaborate corbelling and crenellated parapets in the towers gave the factory a Victorian flavor. The most ornate tower was the four-story one on the west facade of the building. It marked that side as the main front of the mill, and it faced the bustling Southern Railway mainline with its numerous passenger trains, rather than the dirt track of Davidson Street (originally Caldwell Street) behind the plant. Inside the "L" was the one-story dye room, a three-bay cotton warehouse, and a cotton gin, all separate unconnected buildings.<sup>27</sup> The mill was able to buy unprocessed cotton directly from farmers, and thus save on brokerage fees, if it wished. Cramer was particularly proud of a piping system between the warehouse and the mill that allowed cotton to be pneumatically blown from storage to factory rather than carried.<sup>28</sup> The most significant feature of Cramer's plan was the now demolished powerhouse. The massive two-story structure was located just south of the #3 mill, next to a small reservoir created by damming Sugar Creek. A one-story pumping room took reservoir water into the high-ceilinged boiler room where it was converted to steam. The steam drove a huge Westinghouse engine in the adjoining engine room, which in turn generated electric power. Transmission lines carried the electricity to both Highland Park #3 and #1. Cramer's powerhouse was something of an engineering landmark in the Charlotte area and perhaps the state. Previously all local mills had been powered directly by steam engines. Complicated systems of belts and driveshafts connected mill machinery directly with the engineroom, limiting the flexibility of machine layout, and requiring each factory to have its own powerplant. Electricity freed designers to create more efficient machine arrangements, and also gave an advantage to large concerns like Highland Park which could operate several mills with a single generating station. The Highland Park installation was probably not the first electric textile facility in North Carolina, but Cramer's mill was one of the state's earliest designed specifically for electric power. America's initial experiment with electric textile production was in 1893 when General Electric installed a pair of generators at the Columbia Mills Company in Columbia, South Carolina.<sup>29</sup> The first new mill building in the country constructed for electric operation was Columbia's Olympia Mill in 1899.<sup>30</sup> North Carolina experiments with the power source are believed to have originated with the

Fries Manufacturing and Power Company's hydroelectric power plant on the Yadkin River in 1898.<sup>31</sup> By 1904 the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of North Carolina listed a number of mills equipped for electric power.<sup>32</sup> It is not known if any of these were specifically designed for electricity, how many were actually in operation, or how many of the facilities survive to the present.

The Highland Park facility was actually used as designed for only a few months. In 1904 financier James B. Duke helped the Catawba Power Company build the first hydroelectric power generating facility on the Catawba River.<sup>33</sup> This new, cheap source of power was the beginning of what is now the Duke Power Company, one of the nation's largest utilities. Catawba Power had inexpensive electricity to offer, and they needed a steam plant to provide back-up to their customers. About 1905 the Highland Park Company and Catawba Power worked a trade, and the powerhouse site is still part of a Duke Power substation today.<sup>34</sup> The powerhouse itself is gone, but a handsome brick Transformer House built nearby about 1906 still stands, a well-preserved reminder of an important turning point in the region's industrial growth. Across Davidson Street from the Highland Park #3 mill were rows of workers' houses. As designed by Stuart Cramer, the village was to have a grid plan with a central square between present-day Alexander and Yadkin streets.<sup>35</sup> Two stores, a pair of churches, a hotel and a school were to face onto the square. As built, most of the east-west streets in the grid were omitted, as was the square. The hotel was apparently the only one of the proposed public buildings to be erected, and it stands today at 3020 North Alexander Street. It is a long, two-story clapboard structure in the Colonial Revival style, with a broad front porch and a Palladian window in its front gable.<sup>36</sup> The rows of workers' cottages formed eight parallel tiers. They lined the east side of North Davidson Street (originally North Caldwell), both sides of Yadkin Avenue (originally North Davidson), North Alexander Street, and north Myers Street, and the west side of North McDowell Street. Additional Highland Park #3 millhouses could be found on Charles Street, Mallory Street (originally Highland Avenue), and Faison Street. A *Charlotte Observer* article in June of 1903 reported, "There will be 80 houses in the mill town and they are going up at the rate of a dozen a day."<sup>37</sup> All were one-story, and most were designed for one family. The predominant type was composed of a gabled, center-entry wing facing the streets and rear "el." Interspersed were a smaller number of more spacious "overseers' houses," which Cramer described thus:

This plan comprises a house of five rooms composed of a living-room, two bed-rooms, dining room and kitchen, closets, hall and porches; with brick fire places and plastered throughout. Finished in yellow pine, hard oiled. Foundation latticed between piers on front and sides.<sup>38</sup>

Along with the single-family workers' and overseers' houses there were a few two-family residences, mainly on Faison Avenue. In 1979 and 1980 the Southern Oral History Project of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill interviewed some forty long-time Charlotteans, a number of whom had lived in the Highland Park village in the 1910s and 1920s. They remembered it as a community that was still quite rural, reflecting the backgrounds of the farmers and mountaineers who came to work in the mills. "Most everybody in the village had a hog," and salt-cured their own meat.<sup>39</sup> There were chickens, cows, horses -- and lots of flies. Mill workers raised vegetables on vacant land around the village and canned the produce. It was not easy to find time for such activities, because men, women and teen-age children worked 10 or 11 hours in the mill Monday through Friday, and 5 hours on Saturday. Ralph C. Austin remembered quitting school to go to work full-time in 1914 at age 14 after spending two summers in the mill.<sup>40</sup> He began as a doffer, taking off full bobbins and putting on empties. Pay was \$11 per week. Occasionally the pressure of the work resulted in labor unrest. Austin recalled that the doffer boys spontaneously cut off their machines and left the factory one day, upset by a hard-driving supervisor. In 1923 the United Textile Workers of America attempted to unionize Highland Park #3.<sup>41</sup> When the mill fired eight long-time employees who had become active in the union, a strike was called. Fewer than half the mill workers went out, and the strike failed after a week. When they found free time, North Charlotte workers might go into town on the trolley car that ran down Davidson and Brevard streets. Such trips were not all pleasure -- some people remembered being taunted as "lintheads" for the bits of cotton that stuck to their coats and hair. There were other entertainments without leaving North Charlotte. The Highland Park Company turned the former county poorhouse on 36th Street and its grounds on the upper municipal lake into a recreation area.<sup>42</sup> The company periodically held picnics there, as described in a 1923 press release:

A barbecue and picnic dinner attended by 1,200 to 1,500 employees of the Highland Park Mills #1 and #3 was given by the Highland Park management Monday at the North Charlotte community center. Practically all the workers of the two mills attended. Music for the occasion was furnished by the Highland Park band and the Duncan Memorial Methodist church orchestra.... The feature of the afternoon was the baseball game between teams representing the two mills. Mill No. 3 won 7 to 5 .... In addition to the picnic dinner, barbecue and Brunswick stew, during the morning watermelons were served.<sup>43</sup>

On Sundays church was an important gathering place, including the community's own North Charlotte Baptist Church on Thirty-sixth Street or the original Spencer Memorial Methodist on North Davidson. Sometimes traveling revivals came, too. "All the shoutin' I'd see'd was in the tent," remembered Alice P. Evitt. "They had tent

meetin'. Tent'd move around and they's have tent meeting. That was like they have revival now in the churches. But I never don't remember havin' revival in the church back then.<sup>44</sup>

But the village was far from being an ideal community. "North Charlotte was a pretty dangerous place back in those days," recalled streetcar motorman J.B. Ashe. "So many people got cut up, fighting all the time. Especially weekends."<sup>45</sup> Remembered former residents John and Minnie Robinson, "In Highland Park people stole chickens .... People in North Charlotte have had a bad name for years."<sup>46</sup> The area was far from stable, as workers moved in and out of the look-alike houses as if they were interchangeable parts in a machine. The promise of better pay, shorter working hours, or improved conditions drew families from mill to mill all over the Southeast. Edna Hargett of the Hoskins village on the other side of Charlotte was something of an exception: "People would quit the mills and go up to another mill. But after I came over here I liked it so well I just stayed."<sup>47</sup> Once the new Highland Park #3 mill was ready for operation in 1904 and its village was filling with workers, the leadership of the corporation changed. The financial work of W.E. Holt and J.S. Spencer was largely complete, and management expert Johnston could step to the fore. By 1906 Holt had sold all but a small amount of his stock, and Spencer had passed away leaving his widow Henrietta his minority interest in the firm.<sup>48</sup> Johnston controlled the majority of shares through proxies. Anchor Mills held the largest number. New York commission merchants F. Vietor & Achelis, who had long sold the products of the Cornelius Mill on the New York market, held a large minority share, as did New York City investor J.E. Prower.<sup>49</sup> Johnston was empowered to vote all these shares in addition to his own holdings. In 1906 he voted himself Chairman of the Board of Highland Park Manufacturing, and Holt stepped down.<sup>50</sup> Charles W. Johnston headed the company until the eve of his death in 1941.<sup>51</sup> His son took over the reins in 1938 and continued to run the concern through the boom years of the Second World War much as his father had.<sup>52</sup>

## The Mecklenburg Mill and Village



*Mecklenburg Mill*

Even as Highland Park #3 was beginning construction, Holt, Johnston and Spencer sold a nearby tract to the newly-formed Mecklenburg Mills for a factory site, May 25, 1903.<sup>53</sup> The acreage was on Davidson Street near one of the former municipal lakes. The major investors in the project were Charlotte businessman Robert L. Tate and Durham financier B. Lawrence Duke.<sup>54</sup> Duke was the son of millionaire James B. Duke's half-brother Brodie Duke, and was heir to a portion of the Duke Tobacco fortune.<sup>55</sup> Like W.E. Holt, he was attracted by the prosperity of Charlotte's rapidly expanding textile economy. The Mecklenburg Mill was much smaller than the Highland Park #3, having initially 6,500 spindles, and seems to have been devoted mainly to spinning at first.<sup>56</sup> The main body of the building was two stories tall with large arched windows and a stair tower on the east side of the building facing Davidson Street. A one-story wing on the south side held a cloth room. Another wing on the north side held the machine room and a power plant of some kind, topped by a towering brick smokestack. At least one source maintains that the Mecklenburg Mill bought electric power from Highland Park.<sup>57</sup> Another source shows water intake pipes leading from the old municipal lake to the Mecklenburg Mills engine room, indicating the presence of a steam engine which could have served either as the primary power supply or a back-up unit to supplement purchased electric power.<sup>58</sup> Across Davidson Street from the mill was the Mecklenburg Mill village. Three straight streets held most of the earliest fifty-odd single-family mill cottages: Mercury Street (originally Holmes Road), Thirty-seventh Street (earlier Thrift Street and originally Rural

Avenue), and Herrin Avenue.<sup>59</sup> Because of the former municipal lake in its midst, bordered by stands of trees, the village was quite attractive in its early days. In 1919 the Southern Textile Bulletin published a full-page story on the mill and its village.<sup>60</sup> It noted that by 1919 the mill worked 14,048 spindles and 350 looms, and employed approximately 175 operatives. The glowing description of the workers' housing included the information that:

Each cottage has a large space for a vegetable garden and many fine vegetables are raised both in summer and winter, also a good quantity of beans, peas, corn, etc., are canned in the summer. There is a piggery where the mill community keep their hogs in a segregated spot, and many hundreds of pounds of pork is raised each year. Of course there are some chickens in the village but these are not encouraged for they are always liable to get out and do damage in the gardens. There are quite a number of cows that furnish plenty of milk and butter, and these are kept in perfectly sanitary stables away from the houses. The employees manifest considerable civic pride in keeping their village and their homes in a neat clean manner.<sup>61</sup>

Sometime later Patterson Street, Card Street, and Warp Street were added with additional mill houses.<sup>62</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s the Mecklenburg Mill fell upon hard times. The concern went bankrupt about 1925 and closed for several months before being sold at a foreclosure sale to a newly-formed corporation named Mercury Mills.<sup>63</sup> The plant was sold again in August of 1929 to Martel Mills, Inc., a Delaware-based corporation.<sup>64</sup> On the eve of World War II, the Johnston family acquired the mill.<sup>65</sup> They added it to their growing "Johnston Group" of textile plants, which was headquartered in the handsome sixteen-story Johnston Building (1924) on South Tryon Street.

### **Other North Charlotte Industries:**

North Charlotte got its third textile mill in 1913 when Charles Worth Johnston established his own Johnston Mill.<sup>66</sup> Unlike the other projects that he was involved with at the time, Johnston Mill was wholly owned by its chief executive. It was not even incorporated until 1921, when Charles Worth Johnston, his son R. Horace Johnston, and his daughter Rosa Johnston Stokes were listed as the stockholders.<sup>67</sup> The Johnston Mill building was erected about 1913 on North Davidson Street immediately south of the Mecklenburg Mill. It seems to have had no mill houses of its own.

The Johnston Mill was located between the Southern Railway and the new Norfolk and Southern mainline. The Norfolk and Southern opened about 1911 from Norfolk, Virginia, through Raleigh, North Carolina, terminating in Charlotte.<sup>68</sup> It came into Charlotte through the heart of North Charlotte, crossing Herrin Avenue on a low

trestle, cutting through the center of the Mecklenburg Mill village at grade, running along the west front of Highland Park #3, and then heading along Brevard Street toward downtown. The new line was undoubtedly welcomed by North Carolina industrialists, because shippers now had access to two competing railroads. By the time that the Norfolk and Southern opened, North Charlotte already boasted a pair of textile-related industries in addition to its mills. The warehouses of the South Atlantic Waste Company stood southwest of Highland Park #3.<sup>69</sup> The company was one of several in the city that bought and sold cotton waste. The material was a by-product of the textile manufacturing process -the tangled ends and remnants of yarn which were sold to industries which used it to wipe down machinery, and to railroads which used it in the journal boxes of railroad cars. At present-day Thirty-sixth Street and the Southern Railway tracks stood the large brick factory of the General Fire Extinguisher Company, also known as the Grinnell Manufacturing Company. The concern made building-wide sprinkler systems for fire-control in textile mills. According to Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps published in 1911, Highland Park #3 and the Mecklenburg Mill were among the many factories in the region which used Grinnell systems.<sup>70</sup>

The last major industrial concern to locate in North Charlotte was the Larkwood Silk Hosiery Mill. If Highland Park had signaled the start in Charlotte of a regional trend toward non-local investment in textile mills, the Larkwood extended that movement. Its president was not merely from out of town, as W.E. Holt had been, but from out of state. President William Sachsenmaier lived in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Vice President Robert H. Moeller, Secretary Frank H. Hoffman, and Treasurer Elwood W. Sachsenmaier were all Charlotte residents, however.<sup>71</sup> The red-brick plant of the Larkwood mill opened about 1932 on North Brevard Street just south of Charles Avenue. Its design was much less ornamental than the earlier mills had been, with little trim beyond modernistic cast-stone work around its N. Brevard Street entrance. The facility was the work of Richard C. Biberstein, a noted Charlotte industrial architect.<sup>72</sup> Biberstein had worked under Stuart Cramer in the 1890s before founding his own firm and becoming known as one of the South's most prolific mill designers.<sup>73</sup> The Larkwood facility was a knitting mill rather than a spinning and weaving mill like the Johnston, Mecklenburg and Highland facilities.<sup>74</sup> Along with North Charlotte's four textile mills and two major textile-related facilities, there were two or three smaller concerns along the rail lines.<sup>75</sup> Sinclair Refining had a small gasoline storage facility on Thirty-sixth Street at the Norfolk and Southern crossing next to the Grinnell Company. There was also an electrical equipment warehouse on Thirty-fifth Street at the tracks.

## The North Charlotte Commercial Area:

Even before work was complete on the Highland Park #3 and Mecklenburg mills, a small commercial district began to develop along North Davidson Street. The thoroughfare, running parallel to the Southern Railway tracks, connected the two mill villages and also served as the route of the streetcar line to downtown Charlotte. On August 4, 1904, the *Charlotte Observer* carried a story entitled "Progress at North Charlotte" that noted in part:

Messrs. John M. Atkinson and W.G. Shoemaker have purchased a corner lot near the centre of the settlement and will build a handsome merchantile building. The building will be two or three stories high and will contain two stores, while the upper stories will be used for lodge rooms and an auditorium. In one of the stores Mr. Atkinson will run a branch drug store. In the other Mr. Shoemaker will run a grocery store.<sup>76</sup>

Before long there were two blocks of one- and two-story brick store buildings stretching from Thirty-fourth to Thirty-sixth streets. They were of very simple design, reflecting the prevailing architectural trend in the period. The more ornate featured segmental-arched side and upper story windows, and a corbelled brick course to mark the front cornice line. By the time the area was included in Charlotte city directories in 1929, the district included a barber shop, drug store, dry goods store, lunch room, doctor's office, and five small grocery stores. The Hand Pharmacy building at 3201 North Davidson had a second-floor meeting hall, but the upper stories of most of the other structures were used for apartments.<sup>77</sup> Two noteworthy non-commercial structures were to be found within the business district. One was a large Victorian mansion at North Davidson Street. It was a two-story frame structure on a high foundation. It boasted a corner tower and the complex hip roofs favored by architects at the end of the nineteenth century. The structure has been used as a boarding house throughout most of the twentieth century but title research indicates that it was built about 1906 for physician Thomas Costner, the son of a prominent Lincoln County family.<sup>78</sup> The other building of interest is Charlotte Fire Station Number Seven which opened about 1936 at 3210 North Davidson Street.<sup>79</sup> The two-story red brick building shows Colonial Revival influence in its railed balcony, pilasters, and pediment-like decoration at the top of the front facade. The facility is similar to Stations Five and Six, built under the direction of prominent Charlotte architect C.C. Hook in 1929 on Tuckaseegee Road and Laurel Avenue.<sup>80</sup> An interesting difference is a one-story two-cell holding jail at the rear of the North Charlotte facility, a necessity because the area was so far from the main jail downtown. For many years the North Charlotte commercial district was limited to North Davidson Street. It was not until the World War II era that stores were built on Thirty-sixth Street. The most notable of these newer buildings is the flashy facade of the Astor Movie Theatre, one of a number of neighborhood movie houses built in the period throughout the city.

### **Middle-Income Housing in North Charlotte:**

The mills and workers' housing along the railroad and the commercial area on North Davidson used less than half of the land which Charles Johnston, William Holt, and Jesse Spencer owned. In 1906 the North Charlotte Realty Company was incorporated to develop the balance of the area as suburban houselots.<sup>81</sup> The incorporators included not only Holt, Johnston, and Spencer's widow Henrietta, but also Holt associate J.E. Prior of New York City, and, most significantly, Edward Dilworth Latta of Charlotte.<sup>82</sup> Latta was the city's leading real estate man, having developed the Dilworth neighborhood as Charlotte's first suburb beginning in 1891.<sup>83</sup> He also controlled the city's streetcar system, the important factor in suburban development. Latta could provide expertise, capital, and vital streetcar connections to the North Charlotte project. By 1908 North Charlotte Realty had laid off their land into square blocks of house lots.<sup>84</sup> The blocks nearest the mills had the smaller lots -- mostly 50' x 195' -- while the blocks near The Plaza had lots 80' or 100' wide by 195' deep. The area covered was irregular in shape, but North Charlotte Realty streets include all of 35th, 36th, Hudson, Holt, Spencer, Whiting, and Wesley streets, plus the 700 and 800 blocks of 37th Street, the 1100 block of Herrin Avenue, the 1100 block of Academy Street, the 3200 and 3300 blocks of North McDowell, and the 3200 blocks of North Alexander, North Myers, Yadkin, and North Davidson streets. A streetcar track reached the area via North Brevard, Mallory and North Davidson streets, then turned the corner onto Thirty-sixth Street and continued eastward almost to The Plaza. Yet despite its typical streetcar suburb appearance and good trolley connections, the area was too far from downtown for commuters. Most North Charlotte homeowners ran stores in the business district adjacent to the mills, or worked as upper level employees in the factories.

One of the finest Victorian-influenced dwellings was that of S.A. Abbey, Superintendent of Construction at the General Fire Extinguisher plant. His 1911 residence at 1210 East Thirty-sixth Street features art-glass transoms above its front windows and beveled cut-glass around its front door, all sheltered by a broad front porch with Doric columns.<sup>85</sup> Less elaborate variations on the same theme housed Assistant Superintendent C.B. Miller at 1212 East Thirty-fifth (built 1913), and company engineer Paul Valaer at 1211 East Thirty-fifth (1918).<sup>86</sup> An example of a shopkeeper's house is the Eugene Turner house at 1101 East Thirty-fifth Street. Built in 1913, it combines Victorian and Bungalow influences in its simple hip-roofed form. Perhaps the finest storekeeper's home is at the corner of Holt and Matheson streets. It is a two-story wood-frame structure with a spacious "T"-shaped plan, gable roofs, and stick-like trim in the gables. It was the residence of Jasper K. Hand, long-time proprietor of Hand's Pharmacy at North Davidson and Thirty-fifth streets. In addition to his drug business, Hand also profited by renting out the second floor of his store for

lodge and union meetings. The Hand family was also involved in the production and distribution of Liv-o-lax tonic, a nationally-distributed elixir produced in Charlotte in the 1920s.<sup>87</sup>

### **North Charlotte Since World War II:**

Up through the 1940s, North Charlotte seems to have remained much as it was conceived in the 1900s. The textile mills and related factories hummed along the railroads. Workers lived in company-owned villages and shopped at the stores in the commercial district. The whole area remained at the edge of the city of Charlotte, surrounded on four sides by farms and fields. After the War, this began slowly to change. In 1949 David R. Johnston, grandson of North Charlotte's founder, took over the family interests.<sup>88</sup> By this time, these included Highland Park and its village, the Mecklenburg Mill and its village, and the Johnston Mill. One of Johnston's first actions endeared him to area residents. In 1951 Johnston's North Charlotte Foundation built a large red brick Georgian Colonial style community center on North Davidson Street adjacent to the Highland Park #3 Mill.<sup>89</sup> The white-columned building on its spacious tree-shaded grounds was said to have "cost more than \$500,000 in memory of Richard Horace Johnston and [was made] available as the new home of the North Charlotte Branch YMCA."<sup>90</sup> About the same time, the Spencer Memorial Methodist Church, which had long occupied part of the YMCA site, was moved to new quarters on East Thirty-sixth Street, where the old Highland Park Mill's community center had been. At the same time, post-war housing development and industrial areas sprang up beyond the old mill area. The area's major north-south street, once known as North Caldwell, was eventually extended to connect with the main Charlotte grid and was renamed North Davidson Street. North Charlotte was now swallowed up within the larger city. Subsequent changes were more painful. In 1953 Johnston sold off all the workers' houses to their occupants or other interested parties.<sup>91</sup> As time went on, Johnston found it harder and harder to operate the aging factories at a profit. In 1969 the mighty Highland Park #3 plant ceased operations.<sup>92</sup> The Mecklenburg Mill, or the Mercury as it was then commonly known, closed about the same time. In 1973 Johnston sold the North Charlotte mills along with the others in the "Johnston Group" to an outfit called the Washington Group.<sup>93</sup> It was run by a pair of entrepreneurs who had assembled a financial empire around a Richmond, Virginia, fast food franchise. The empire proved shaky. In 1975, strapped for cash, the Washington Group announced the closing of the Johnston Mill.<sup>94</sup> Some of its machinery and a few operatives would be transferred to other former Johnston Mills in Monroe and Mineral Springs, N.C. Within months the Washington Group declared bankruptcy. Federal bankruptcy trustees blamed David Johnston, accusing him of collaborating with the Washington Group to milk the mills:

[Johnston's] annual salary and the added fringe benefits were inconsistent with such provisions and noncompetition contracts in general in the textile industry at that time. More importantly, the salary far exceeded salaries for chief executive officers and presidents of comparable and even much larger companies.<sup>95</sup>

The closing of the Johnston Mill in March of 1975 marked the end of an era not only for North Charlotte but for the city as a whole. In 1975, the Johnston Mill was Charlotte's last major operating textile mill.<sup>96</sup> When its machines went quiet, the city which had once been a national leader in textile production now no longer spun cotton into yarn. Today, the North Charlotte industrial buildings are mostly split up among a variety of small warehousing and manufacturing businesses. The Mecklenburg Mill is vacant. The South Atlantic Cotton Waste Company has been demolished, but its foundations may still be seen near the historic Highland Park powerhouse, which is part of a Duke Power electrical facility. The commercial district remains intact, but Hand's Pharmacy, the old union hall upstairs, and most of the surrounding storefronts are empty. The workers' cottages and adjacent middle-income houses from the early years of the century continue to be well-used, however. In part this is a result of federally-funded renovation efforts which began in the mid-1970s.<sup>97</sup> It is also a testament to the will power of the residents, still mostly working-class white homeowners. They have fought several well-publicized battles to keep their neighborhood a good place to live, among them an ongoing effort to end the showing of X-rated films -- and accompanying prostitution -- at the old Astor neighborhood theatre on Thirty-sixth Street.<sup>98</sup>

Though it has been forgotten by much of the rest of Charlotte, some of the residents are quite aware of North Charlotte's historic role in the development of Charlotte. Says the Reverend A. Guy Patterson of the Johnston Memorial Presbyterian Church, the neighborhood's weakness is that "the movers and shakers aren't here." According to a 1984 *Charlotte Observer* report, "His dream is to see the neighborhood revitalized as a historic attraction. 'This is one of the places where the artifacts remain -- the mills, the company houses,' he said. 'I can see shops on Davidson, a cinema showing a presentation of the old mill life. If we wipe this place out,' he said, 'we've lost a real history.'"<sup>99</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Printing of the State of North Carolina*, 1894, 1900, 1901, 1904, 1910, 1919-1920, 1925-1926. Title changes slightly in some years. The Bureau began collecting detailed statistics on North Carolina industries in 1887, but was not able to gather comprehensive data until the 1890s. The annual

reports provide a wealth of information on factory size, workforce, power sources, output, and much more. Unfortunately the Bureau lost most of its funding in the mid 1920s and ceased publication. When it resumed in 1930, it no longer published factory-by-factory information.

<sup>2</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, February 27, 1903.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South* (Columbia, S.C.: James R. Young, 1963), pp. 100-103. Brent Glass, "Southern Mill Hills: Design in a 'Public' Place," in Doug Swaim, ed., *Carolina Dwelling: Towards Preservation of Place...* (Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 1978), pp. 138-139.

<sup>4</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: deed book 82 p. 276.

<sup>5</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of corporations book A, p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> Highland Park Manufacturing Company memo with penciled date July 25, 1964, in the files of the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. and Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of corporations book 1, p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, July 17, 1904. It is a significant measure of Charlotte's postbellum prosperity that this was evidently the Holt family's major banking venture in these years. See Samuel A. Ashe and Stephen B. Wade, ed., *Biographical History of North Carolina from Colonial Times to Present* (Greensboro, N.C.: C.L. Van Noppen, 1908), Vol.7, p. 186. Edwin Holt seems to have had small financial dealings in the county as early as 1869: Deed Book 5, p 729.

<sup>9</sup> Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South*, pp. 108-109, 766. Blythe and Brockman, pp. 420-421. *Charlotte News*, July 5, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> *Charlotte News*, July 5, 1941.

<sup>11</sup> Highland Park Manufacturing Company memo.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of incorporation book 1, p. 48. The Anchor concern evidently took over the existing Virgin Mills which had been

chartered in 1891. See records of corporations book A, p. 215; Deed Book 121, p. 224. See also Blythe and Brockman, p. 422.

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, "1950 Census Data" (Charlotte: Chamber of Commerce, 1950). This report conveniently includes city-wide and ward data back to 1850.

<sup>15</sup> Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Printing in the State of North Carolina, 1910, p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 178, p. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Butler and Spratt, "Map of Charlotte Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, From Recent Surveys ... 1892." Copies are in the collections of the History Department of the Mint Museum, Charlotte, and the City of Charlotte Historic Districts Commission. The Plaza was called "Poorhouse Road" according to the Butler and Spratt map, and later "County Home Road," according to a 1904 plat map on file at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 209, p. 460. The poorhouse building appears to be incorporated in today's fellowship hall of the Spencer Memorial United Methodist Church on Thirty-sixth Street.

<sup>18</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: deed book 178, p. 253; Deed Book 129, p. 616. Blythe and Brockman, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Fifth Annual Report, Superintendent Charlotte Water Works, Charlotte, North Carolina. (Charlotte: Charlotte Water Works?, 1904), pp. 2, 7, 8, 18, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 178. p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, February 27, 1903.

<sup>23</sup> *Charlotte News*, August 15, 1983. Blythe and Brockman, p. 276.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart W. Cramer, *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers* (Charlotte?: Stuart Cramer, 1906). Title page of volume four, which evidently came out shortly after the first three volumes, includes the Pawtucket office.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Vol. 3, pp. 1227-1300.

<sup>26</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 18, 1903.

<sup>27</sup> The factory layout undoubtedly changed over the years. Interior descriptions here are based on Cramer's 1906 plans. The dye building, warehouse and gin are as they appeared on the 1929 map of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company (microfilm copy on file at the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library).

<sup>28</sup> Cramer, p. 1255.

<sup>29</sup> Sidney B. Paine, "Electric Power as Applied to Textile Machinery," in Marjorie Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South* (Columbia, S.C.: James R. Young, 1963), pp. 684-686.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Lefler and Newsome, p. 509. There is not total agreement on this. See LeGette Blythe, *Robert Lee Stowe, Pioneer in Textiles* (Belmont, N.C.: Heritage Printers, 1965), pp. 133-136.

<sup>32</sup> Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Printing for the State of North Carolina, 1904, pp. 93-97.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Maynor, *Duke Power, The First Seventy-Five Years*. (Charlotte?: Duke Power Company, 1979?), p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Cramer, p. 1272.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 1227.

<sup>36</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 18, 1903 noted that "the mill settlement hotel is going up. The hotel is on the highest point of ground and shows up splendidly."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cramer, p. 1251.

<sup>39</sup> Ralph Charles Austin, interview with Jim Leloudis in Charlotte, June 1979. Southern Oral History Program files in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Information is from tape index abstract.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, August 14, 15, 18, 22, 25, 1923. The stories are of special interest because they were written by a summer intern named W.J. Cash, who later

became famous for his analysis of Southern culture, *The Mind of the South*. See Joseph L. Morrison, *W.J. Cash: Southern Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of Charlotte, 1929, plate 260. Microfilm copy on file in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>43</sup> *Southern Textile Bulletin*, September 6, 1923, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> Alice P. Evitt, interview with Jim Leloudis in Charlotte, July 1979. Southern Oral History Program files in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Quote is from a typed transcript.

<sup>45</sup> J.B. Ashe, interview with Allen Tullos in Charlotte, June 1980. Southern Oral History Program files in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Quote is from a typed transcript.

<sup>46</sup> John and Minnie Robinson, interview with Allen Tullos in Charlotte, January 1980. Southern Oral History Program files in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Quote is from a typed transcript.

<sup>47</sup> Edna Hargett, interview with Jim Leloudis in Charlotte, July 1979. Southern Oral History Program files in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Quote is from a typed transcript.

<sup>48</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Records of Corporations Book 2, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. J.E. Prower is probably the same person as J.E. Prior listed as Johnston's partner in North Charlotte Realty. See Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Records of Corporations Book 2, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> Highland Park Manufacturing Company memo. See also Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Records of Corporations Book book 2, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Charlotte News*, July 5, 1941. Highland Park Manufacturing Company memo with penciled date July 25, 1964, in the files of the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. For more on the younger Johnston, whose primary interest seems to have been in polo "and the breeding and training of fine horses," see Marjorie R. Young, ed., pp. 110-111, 767.

<sup>53</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 179, p. 206.

<sup>54</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Records of Corporations Book 1, p. 344.

<sup>55</sup> Robert F. Durden, *The Dukes of Durham, 1865-1929* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975), p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, August 8, 1903.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1929, plate 259.

<sup>59</sup> The number comes from the *Southern Textile Bulletin*, December 25, 1919, p. 203. It coincides with the number of dwellings along Mercury, Thirty-seventh, and Herrin shown on the 1929 Sanborn Insurance Map, plate 259, on microfilm at the Charlotte Public Library. Since no other streets are shown in the vicinity, it is probable that these constitute the majority of the earliest cottages.

<sup>60</sup>. *Southern Textile Bulletin*, December 25, 1919, p. 203. The Bulletin's annual "Health & Happiness" issues in the late 1910s and early 1920s profiled numerous Southern factories and villages -- a gold mine of information for today's researcher.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> These streets are not shown on the 1929 Sanborn map.

<sup>63</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 628, p. 554.

<sup>64</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 748, p. 1; Deed Book 846, p. 336.

<sup>65</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: deed book 1065, p. 279. Thanks to Dr. William Huffman for this information.

<sup>66</sup> Morrill, "A Survey of Cotton Mills..."

<sup>67</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Records of Corporations Book 7, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Blythe and Brockman, p. 263. John Gilbert and Grady Jefferys, *Crossties Through Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C.: The Helios Press, 1969), p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Sanborn Insurance Map of Charlotte, 1911, plate 89, on microfilm in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. General Fire Equipment was chartered in 1899 by G.W. Brown, H.B. Parks, and S.F. Stephens. Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of incorporations book 1, p. 106.

<sup>71</sup> Charlotte city directory, 1933, in the collection of the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>72</sup> Biberstein, Bowles, Meecham and Reed job records in the collection of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, N.C.

<sup>73</sup> William H. Huffman, "Richard C. Biberstein House: Survey and Research Report" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> The Larkwood plant experienced more serious labor unrest than the Highland Park mill in its early years. In 1933 workers attempted to unionize as a chapter of the American Federation of Full-Fashioned Hosiery Workers. The company fired seven employees who belonged to the union, declaring that employees could join a company-sponsored union but not a national organization. Approximately seventy-five percent of the Larkwood employees walked out, closing the plant for several days. The company hired new employees and reopened, foiling the workers. *Charlotte Observer*, June 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 1933. Clippings in the Harriet Laura Herring Collection in the North Carolina Collection at the Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>75</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1929, plates 259, 261. Microfilm copy in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>76</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1904.

<sup>77</sup> The hall was probably the meeting place for the union in the 1923 strike attempt. See *Charlotte Observer*, August 14, 1923. "The meeting was held in the Union Hall over the Hand Drug Company in North Charlotte."

<sup>78</sup> For chain of title see Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: deed book 3465, p. 1; deed book 3134, p. 27; deed book 2405, p. 337; deed book 1545, p. 468; deed book 669, p. 210; deed book 664, p. 174; deed book 327, p. 276; deed book 216, p. 209; deed book 198, p. 604.

<sup>79</sup> Information based on city directories in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

<sup>80</sup> E.R. Blalock of the Central Services Office of the City of Charlotte, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, January 1985. Blalock noted that Number 7 was very similar to Number 5, especially in the arrangement of its upstairs quarters. For more on Stations 5 and 6, see the chapter of this manuscript entitled "Crescent Heights."

<sup>81</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of corporations book 2, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> J.E. Prior was probably the same person as J.E. Prower who was listed as a stockholder in the Highland Park Company in 1906. See Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: records of corporations book 2, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (1890-1925): Builders of New South Charlotte," 1983, draft manuscript in the files of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. See also the section of the present manuscript on the Dilworth neighborhood.

<sup>84</sup> This plat superseded a 1904 layout that featured a similar street pattern but smaller lots. Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: map book 209, p. 460; map book 230, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 3658, p. 405; Deed Book 992, p. 474; Deed Book 836, p. 344; Deed Book 583, p. 148; Deed Book 482, p. 176; Deed Book 408, p. 39; Deed Book 283, p. 347. See also city directories.

<sup>86</sup> Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: deed book 378, p. 16; Deed Book 312, p. 7; Deed Book 394, p. 144. Thanks to David Inman for help with these title searches.

<sup>87</sup> Jasper K. Hand lived at the location from about 1908, and the residence is still in the family in 1985, according to tax records. Hand's relative W.L. Hand ran the Liv-o-lax company, according to the city directories. An advertisement facing page 442 of the 1925 directory promised, "Children Love Liv-o-lax, The Family Regulator."

<sup>88</sup> Highland Park Manufacturing Company memo. Marjorie R. Young, ed., pp. 110-111, 767.

<sup>89</sup> *One Hundredth Anniversary: Young Men's Christian Association of Charlotte and Mecklenburg* (Charlotte: Charlotte YMCA, 1974), p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> So many properties were sold at once that Johnston had form deeds printed for the transaction. See for instance Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 1633, PP. 367, 411.

<sup>92</sup> *Charlotte News*, March 13, 1975.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. and August 19, 1978.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. and *Charlotte Observer*, March 14, 1975.

<sup>95</sup> *Charlotte News*, August 19, 1978.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. and March 13, 1975, as well as *Charlotte Observer*, March 14, 1975.

<sup>97</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, March 25, 1984.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

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### **THE (former) HIGHLAND INN**

**1903**

**3020 North Alexander Street  
(North Charlotte neighborhood)**

The Highland Inn was one of the first buildings to be completed in the North Charlotte area. The two-story building was a key structure in the village of the Highland Park #3 mill, begun in the summer of 1903. A June 18, 1903 *Charlotte Observer* article noted that "the mill settlement hotel is going up. The hotel is on the highest point of ground and shows up splendidly." As designed by noted mill engineer Stuart Cramer, the Highland Park #3 village was to be a model of humane planning. Drawings published by Cramer indicate that he intended the hotel to front on a square flanked by a school and store. These plans were not carried out and today the hotel is

surrounded by a sea of one-story mill cottages. The large hotel stands out as an architectural landmark in the mill village. The design of the hotel building probably came from the office of Stuart Cramer, who designed all the rest of the Highland Park #3 industrial and residential structures. Cramer is regarded as one of the South's most important industrial designers and inventors, and is credited with coining the term "air conditioning" based on his development of climate control mechanisms for mills. Plans for the Highland mill and village were published in his 1906 manual *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers*.

The Highland Inn is constructed in the Colonial Revival style. The weatherboarded structure is six bays wide and two bays deep with a hip roof and a decorative front center gable. The gable features a three-part Palladian window surrounded by wood shingle siding. Cornices are simply boxed, and include returns in the gable.

Most windows are six-over-six pane double-hung sash. The presence of four large brick interior chimneys indicates that the building may originally have been heated by wood stoves. A long one-story veranda runs along the entire front of the structure. The building almost certainly had such a porch originally, but the present square tapered columns on brick posts likely date from the 1920s. Two doors open onto the first level of the porch, and three open onto its roof. They are placed with a curious disregard for symmetry that may either indicate that they are not original or that Cramer's engineer-draftsmen had little patience for stylistic fine points.

### **HIGHLAND PARK MANUFACTURING COMPANY: TRANSFORMER HOUSE**

c. 1906

**2417 North Brevard Street**

The Highland Park Transformer House stands between the Southern Railway and the old Norfolk and Southern mainline, just south of the Highland Park #3 Mill. The 1903 powerhouse which stood adjacent to it originally has been demolished, but the Transformer House echoes master mill architect Stuart Cramer's published drawings of that structure. The Transformer House is a long rectangular structure of red brick. Its gable roof is covered with Spanish tile, and has five metal ventilators along the ridgeline. Twelve round-arched window openings run under the eaves of the east wall and originally provided natural light to the interior. A corbelled brick belt course runs beneath the windows and brick pilasters accentuate the corners of the building. On the south facade, several courses of corbelled brick add a decorative touch just below the eaves, and there is a round vent or window opening at the center of the gable end. Below the round opening is a row of three square openings from which project objects that appear to be massive electrical insulators. A corbelled brick course sets the gable end off from the first-story facade, which consists of a doorway flanked by a pair of tall window openings, all with segmental arches. The north facade is different,

featuring three large square openings surrounded by circular brick courses in the gable end, and no windows at the ground level. The Transformer House was not part of Stuart Cramer's original 1903 plans for the Highland Park #3 complex, believed to be one of North Carolina's first all-electric textile plants. Cramer evidently added it about 1906 when the company began buying electricity from J.B. Duke's fledgling Catawba Power Company and put the North Charlotte powerhouse to work as a back-up unit for the Duke system. The Transformer House is known to have been in place by 1911.

### **HIGHLAND PARK MANUFACTURING COMPANY: #3 MILL**

**1903-1904**

**2901 North Davidson Street**

Highland Park #3 is Mecklenburg County's largest single textile mill, and an important landmark in the career of nationally-known mill architect and engineer Stuart W. Cramer, Sr. Built during 1903-1904, it was designed to hold 30,000 spindles and 1,000 looms, and it ranked among the dozen largest mills in North Carolina when it opened. Cramer designed the facility to be electrically powered and built a generating station nearby which gave the plant the distinction of being the first all-electric mill in Mecklenburg County and one of the first plants in the state designed specifically for this revolutionary new power source. Charlotean Stuart Cramer planned the facility for investors C.W. Johnston, W.E. Holt, Sr., and J.S. Spencer. It was one of hundreds of mills all over the eastern United States designed by this engineer and inventor whose work with climate control led to his being credited with coining the term "air conditioning." Cramer evidently considered Highland Park #3 his most important work, for he used it as the major illustration in his four-volume *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers* (1906) which was distributed from his offices in Charlotte, Atlanta, and Pawtucket , Rhode Island. The brick mill building is arranged in a massive "L" with each leg approximately 450 feet long and 125 feet wide. The two-story south wing held the vast first floor carding room and second floor spinning room plus the picker room, spooling room, and dye room. The one-story east wing held the weaving room, if such a word as "room" can be used to describe a space the size of one-and-a-half football fields. The building is constructed with brick walls, including a firewall between each room, and wooden columns carrying floors and roofs of heavy slow-burning planking. The brick was made on the site. Stairways are isolated in projecting brick towers at regular points around the facade to enhance fire resistance. The most ornate tower is on the west front of the building facing the busy Southern Railway mainline. It is four stories tall with a crenellated parapet and elaborate corbelled brickwork. Circular windows light the top-most level, while lower levels feature round-arched windows. The tower is one of Charlotte's better examples of Victorian masonry craftsmanship. More than two hundred windows along the main walls of the building were designed to provide

natural light, and were supplemented by clerestories along the ridgelines of the low-pitched roofs. Today the plant is no longer used for textile production but is split among a number of small warehousing and manufacturing firms. Various small buildings crowd the space within the "L." Among them are the original two-bay cotton warehouse, expanded to three bays sometime between 1911 and 1929, facing Mallory Street, and a one-story wooden office building near the front gate on Davidson Street which probably dates from the early 1920s.

**JASPER K. HAND PHARMACY BUILDING**

**c. 1908**

**3201 North Davidson Street**



The Hand Pharmacy Building is the most architecturally interesting of the commercial structures that line North Davidson Street and Thirty-sixth Street in North Charlotte. The district was developed beginning in 1904 as a link between the Highland Park #3 and Mecklenburg Mills. Jasper K. Hand opened his drug store in 1908, according to city directory evidence, at which time it was North Charlotte's only pharmacy. The building housed not only a drug store but also what seems to have been North Charlotte's main meeting hall. The space was a regular spot for fraternal organizations. The Woodmen of the World, a popular working-class secret society in the period, had a "North Charlotte grove" which seems to have met in this building from the 1910s into the 1930s. The hall was also the meeting place for members of the United Textile Workers of America when they attempted to unionize Highland Park #3 in 1923. When the mill fired eight long-time employees who had become active in

the union, the union called a strike. According to a *Charlotte Observer* report written by W.J. Cash on August 14, 1923, "The meeting was held in the Union Hall over the Hand Drug Company in North Charlotte." The strike was not successful.

The Hand Pharmacy Building is a handsome two-story brick structure. Corbelled brick forms its front cornice facing Davidson Street, and extends downward to flank the flat-arched second-story widow openings. On the Thirty-fifth Street side of the building is a cast-iron stairway, complete with a gate at the bottom, which leads up to the meeting hall. Wooden double-doors at the second-story level give access to the hall, and they are flanked by windows which provided natural light to that space. The building, with its dark-brown pressed brick still unpainted, appears to be in good original condition despite the fact that it has been little used for several years. The wooden frames of the main shop-front windows have been replaced with aluminum ones, but the early center-entry and transom arrangement has been retained. Upstairs windows are covered with easily-removed corrugated fiberglass paneling.

### **CHARLOTTE FIRE DEPARTMENT ENGINE COMPANY #7**

**c. 1936**

**3210 North Davidson Street**

Fire Station #7 was opened about 1936 in an effort to extend city services to the North Charlotte area, much of which had just been annexed to the city in 1928. The station contained not only space for a fire truck and quarters for its crew, but also a two-cell jail. Officials may have decided that this unusual feature was needed because of North Charlotte's distance from the main police facility downtown, or because the textile workers in North Charlotte had a reputation for rowdiness. The North Charlotte Station appears to be a smaller version of Stations #5 and #6 built on Tuckaseegee Road and Laurel Avenue in the late 1920s and designed by leading Charlotte architect C.C. Hook. All feature boxy two-story massing, parapet roofs, and brick exteriors which have decorative trim only on the front facade. According to fire department officials, the one-bay North Charlotte station has much the same interior arrangement as the two-bay earlier facilities. Colonial Revival style trim was used on Station #7. The front parapet roof includes as pediment-like decoration and pilasters. A bank of small-paned windows and a central door at the second-story level open onto a front balcony. The balcony has an ornate iron railing, and it is supported by heavy brick piers that flank the truck door below. Inside, there is little decorative work except for the slim brass fire pole that once allowed firefighters to slide quickly from their upstairs quarters to the ground. A front corner stair leads to the second floor. At the rear of the building, the one-story wing that housed the holding cells may still be seen, but inside it has been remodeled as a recreation room for the firemen.

## **DR. THOMAS F. COSTNER HOUSE**

**c. 1905**

**3228 North Davidson Street**

The Dr. Thomas Costner House is the oldest and most imposing structure built as a private residence in North Charlotte, an area of textile mills and dwellings developed beginning in 1903. It is a two-story structure on a high foundation, a late example of the Queen Anne style of Victorian architecture popular in the last years of the nineteenth century. The frame structure features the complex massing characteristic of the style, including side wings, a two-story corner bay-window, and a one-story gable-roofed rear wing. The main block of the house is covered by a hip roof with wide, flared eaves supported by chunky brackets. The exterior walls are clad in grooved "novelty" siding. The house has had a number of alterations during its years as a boarding house. The original front porch and many of the original windows are gone. But despite these changes, much trim remains, including the original front door and sidelight frames, exterior window surrounds, and even a dentilled belt course between first and second floors. Thomas Costner was born in Lincoln County, North Carolina, the son of business and agricultural leader Ambrose Costner who served five terms as a North Carolina legislator. Thomas Costner began practicing medicine in Mecklenburg County around the turn of the century. On December 1, 1904 he and his wife Dora G. Costner purchased an entire block in the heart of the new North Charlotte area for \$800.00 from developer C.W. Johnston's Anchor Mills Corporation. Costner evidently built the house soon after, but then changed his mind and moved into town to a residence on South Tryon Street. On September 27, 1906, R.M. and S.W. Turbeville purchased the block from the Costners for \$5,600.00, a price jump that indicates the presence of a house. Sam W. and Robert M. Turbeville operated Turbeville Brothers Drygoods in the bustling business district that was developing around the house. In 1914 the block was broken up into several lots for commercial development, and stores began to appear around the house. The family sold the structure to John Crosland, a prominent Charlotte developer, in 1927. At that time, if not before, the Costner House began its long career as a boarding house, which remains its use today. Owners after Crosland have included M.E. Herrin (1927-19 ), M.K. Harrill (19 -1952), J.L. Rayner (1952-1963), E.M. Clark (1963), C.H. Sears (1963-1969), Lillian Sears Blocker (1969-1972), and Donald Powers (1972- ).

## **MECKLENBURG MILL**

**1903-04**

**3401 North Davidson Street**



The Mecklenburg Mills company purchased this site May 25, 1903. The land was between the Southern Railway mainline and a small lake (now drained). Major investors in the project were Charlotte businessman Robert L. Tate and Durham financier B. Lawrence Duke. Duke was the son of millionaire James B. Duke's half-brother Brodie Duke, and was a heir to a portion of the Duke tobacco fortune. The company fell upon hard times in the 1920s. It went bankrupt about 1925 and the plant closed for several months until a buyer could be found. Mercury Mills operated it from 1925 until 1929, and the plant today is still known to residents as The Mercury. Martel Mills, Inc., a Delaware-based corporation purchased the plant in August of 1929, and on the eve of World War II it passed into the hands of Charlotte's Johnston family. It remained part of the "Johnston Group" until it closed in the late 1960s. Today the Mecklenburg Mill is among Charlotte's best-preserved textile factories, despite the fact that it has long been vacant. Its exterior is almost exactly identical to a photo of the plant published in the *Southern Textile Bulletin* in 1919, and to a fire insurance map of the complex drawn in 1911. The structure is built in the tradition of late-nineteenth century New England mills. The main block is two stories tall and built of brick with abundant wooden windows. At the centers of the east and west facades there are projecting brick stair towers with decorative corbelled brickwork. The main facades are composed of eight bays on either side of the staitower. Each bay features large segmental-arched window openings at the first and second floors. Each window opening holds a pair of nine-over-nine pane double-hung sash windows,

plus a twelve-pane transom. Though vandals have destroyed some windows, most are intact today, an unusual occurrence since the advent of climate control in mills earlier in this century has meant that windows in most factories are bricked up. The main building is shown in 1911 as being divided into two huge rooms on each floor, providing separate spaces for spinning, carding, spooling and weaving. To the south of the main block is a one-story building with identical windows. It was the cloth room. To the north of the main block are a series of two-story wings with small segmental-arched windows. These spaces included the mill's powerplant, and the northern-most section has a tall, round brick smokestack. Today only three of Mecklenburg County's twenty-one pre-1920 textile mills survive in their original form. The 1889 Alpha Mill on Twelfth Street, the circa 1904 Hoskins Mill on Hoskins Road, and the Mecklenburg Mill all retain their windows and overall exterior appearance. These mills are an important reminder of that crucial period in the county's history when Mecklenburg was among the top three textile-producing counties in North Carolina. In large part, Charlotte's rise to prominence as the largest city in North and South Carolina can be traced directly to this period of textile prosperity. The buildings, with their handsome brickwork and well-lit interior spaces, deserve to be preserved and given new uses so that future generations may understand Charlotte's textile heritage.

### **JASPER K. HAND HOUSE**

**c. 1908**

**2900 Whiting Av.**

Jasper K. Hand was a leading figure in the life of the North Charlotte area during its years as a textile mill community. He was evidently a relative of prosperous downtown Charlotte druggist W.L. Hand, whose Hand Drug Company concocted the widely-distributed patent medicine "Liv-O-Lax Tonic" during the 1920s. Jasper K. Hand opened the first drug store in the newly-developed North Charlotte community on the edge of the city about 1908. The Hand Pharmacy occupied a handsome two-story brick building at North Davidson and Thirty-fifth Streets. It was more than just a drug store, however. The upper floor of Hand's building was the community's main meeting hall, home to both fraternal organizations and incipient labor unions. Jasper Hand and his wife Erwin took up residence in the new community at the same time that they opened the pharmacy. Their house is the largest in the suburban area developed adjacent to the mill villages and commercial district by the North Charlotte Realty company. It is a two-story weather-boarded structure with a cross-shaped plan. Wide eaves are supported by brackets and exposed purlins in the Bungalow style and the ends of the gables have wood shingling with stick-like trim. The one-over-one pane double-hung sash windows have wide plain surrounds. There is a one-story front porch with brick columns and a gable roof whose decorative treatment echoes that of

the main gables. Today the recently-constructed Matheson Avenue thoroughfare runs directly in front of the house, making it one of the most visible structures in the North Charlotte area to the general public of the city. The house remains in the Hand family in 1985.