



BROOKLYN McCROREY BRANCH YMCA

334 South Caldwell Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
Local Landmark Designation Report
Prepared by Gate City Preservation L.L.C.

August 2020

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Historic Landmarks Commission

HISTORIC NAME(S) OF PROPERTY

- The Henry Lawrence McCrorey Memorial YMCA
- The Negro Branch YMCA
- The Second Street Branch YMCA
- McCrorey Branch YMCA
- Brooklyn YMCA
- **Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA (recommended by consultants)**

ADDRESS OF PROPERTY

- 334 South Caldwell Street, Charlotte, NC 28202
- Located on parcel of 416 E. 3rd Street
- Historically located at 317 South Caldwell Street

PARCEL ID #: 12506401

DEED BOOK & PAGE: BOOK 32352, PAGE 108

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COM

Amount of land/acreage to be designated

0.22 acres (9,422 sq. feet)

Interior to be designated

☐ Yes ☒ No

Property Owner's Address:

SLT-Brevard L.L.C.
516 North Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Applicant's Address:

Gate City Preservation L.L.C.
111 W. Lewis Street
Greensboro, North Carolina 27406

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I. Abstract

Statement of Significance

The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA is being proposed for designation through its local historical significance as a center for Charlotte's African American community from 1951 until 1969. The site served the community as a resource for education, recreation, and business-development in Brooklyn, a vibrant Black community in Charlotte that thrived as a "city within a city" during the Jim Crow Era. With nearly a century of contributions to Charlotte's Black community, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA represents a progressive chapter in the city's history. The building is among the earliest African American branches of the Young Men's Christian Association network in the Carolinas. Completed in 1951, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA facility promoted Charlotte's early Civil Rights Era by providing community programs and forums to promote social equity.

The building, with its hopeful and forward-looking architectural style, serves as a remarkable if not miraculous touchstone to the Queen City's Brooklyn, which was almost entirely demolished by urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. Architecturally, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA, constructed from 1950-1951, is a rare iteration of the PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style (Appendix 1). The building was erected by Laxton Construction Co. according to the plans by Louis Asbury and Son, a local architect in the 1950s. This building is one of the last remaining buildings of the Brooklyn community which was displaced by urban renewal. The well preserved PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style architecture represents the progressive, forward-thinking beliefs of the community the building served.

Archaeological Comments

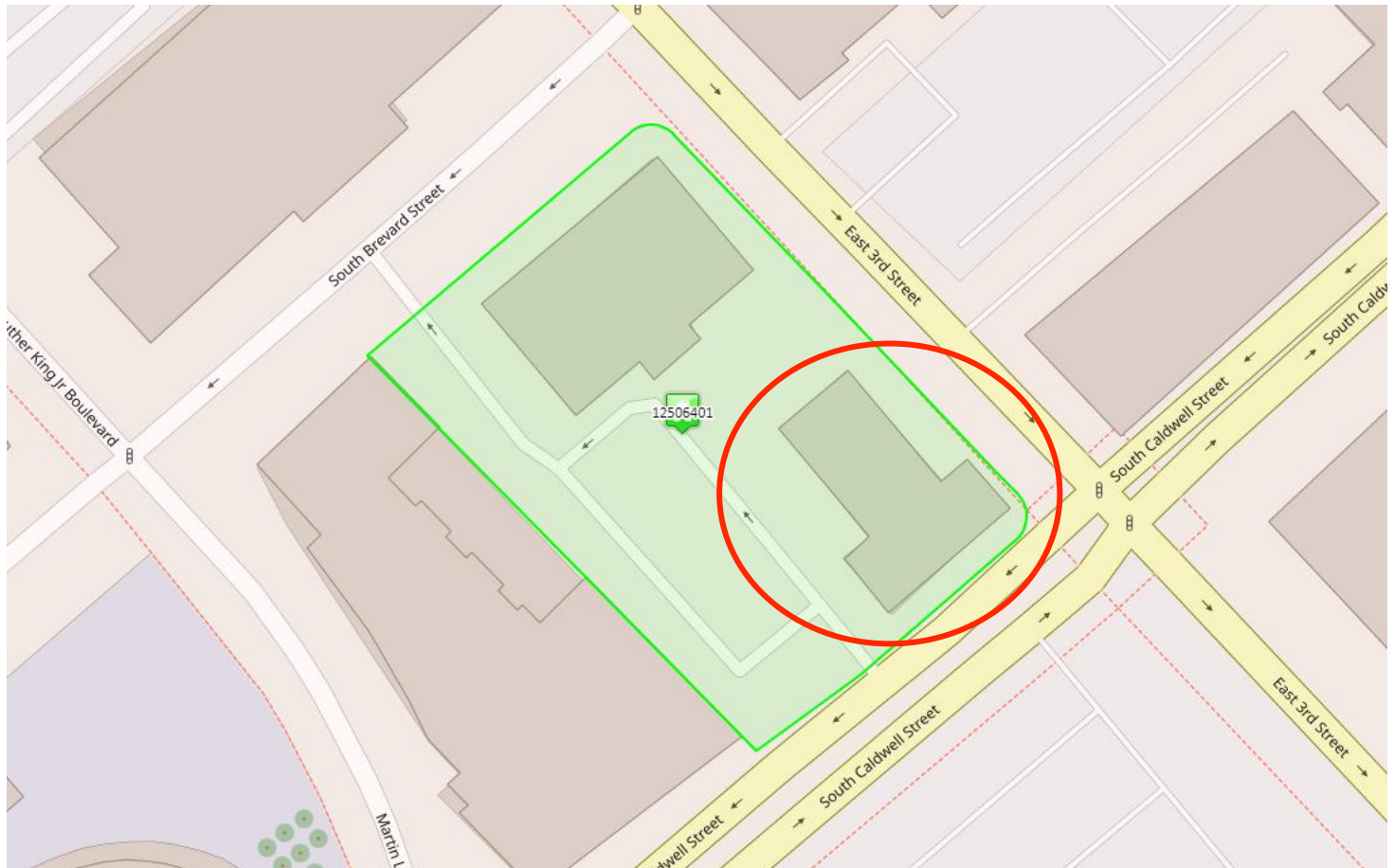
No known archaeological features are present at this time.

Integrity Statement

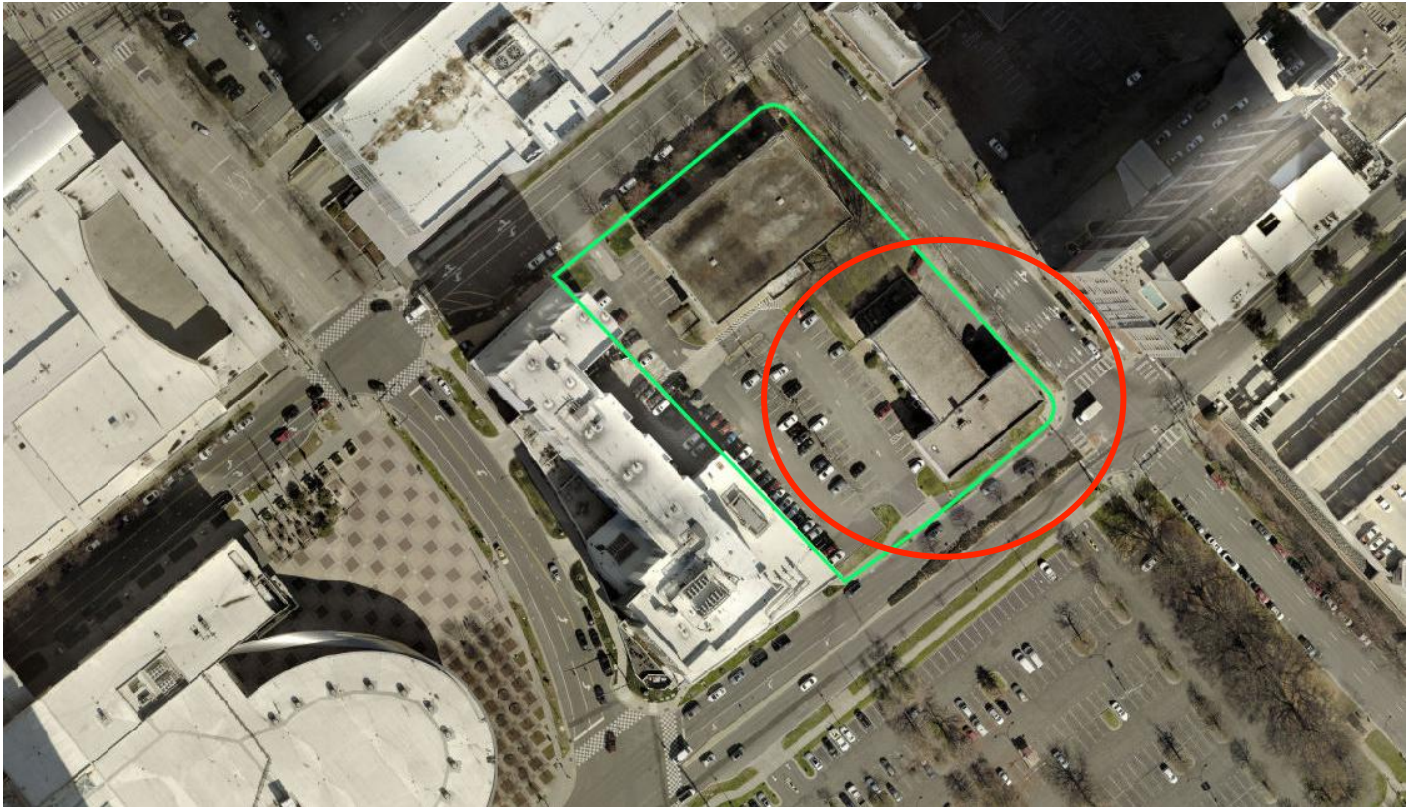
- **Location:** The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA is one of the only buildings that remains in its original location from historic Brooklyn. The building is surrounded by new development and construction in the district's Second Ward.
- **Design:** The PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style exemplifies the forward-thinking African American community at the time of construction. The exterior of the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA has remained largely unchanged since its 1951 construction. Looking at the 1953 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, it is clear that the original design and materials are present (two-story, brick, with segmented columns, steel-framed windows).
- **Setting:** The setting of The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA, on a busy mercantile block of South Caldwell Street, has significantly changed since the erection of the building. There have been significant intrusions by new construction and demolition.
- **Workmanship:** The exterior architectural details of The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA show a high level of forward-thinking modern style for its time. Specifically, the segmented columns and steel-framed casement windows.
- **Materials:** Many of the materials from The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA's original construction are still present in the building, including the exterior brick, steel-framed casement windows, central and side doors.
- **Feeling:** Because of new construction and development that is consistently taking place around The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA, the feeling of this site has been altered significantly.
- **Association:** The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA is associated with the once prominent African American neighborhood of Brooklyn. Mr. Goodwin said the construction of the first unit "will help us to meet our present need for expanded facilities for young men." The building is currently vacant.

Proposed Boundary Justification

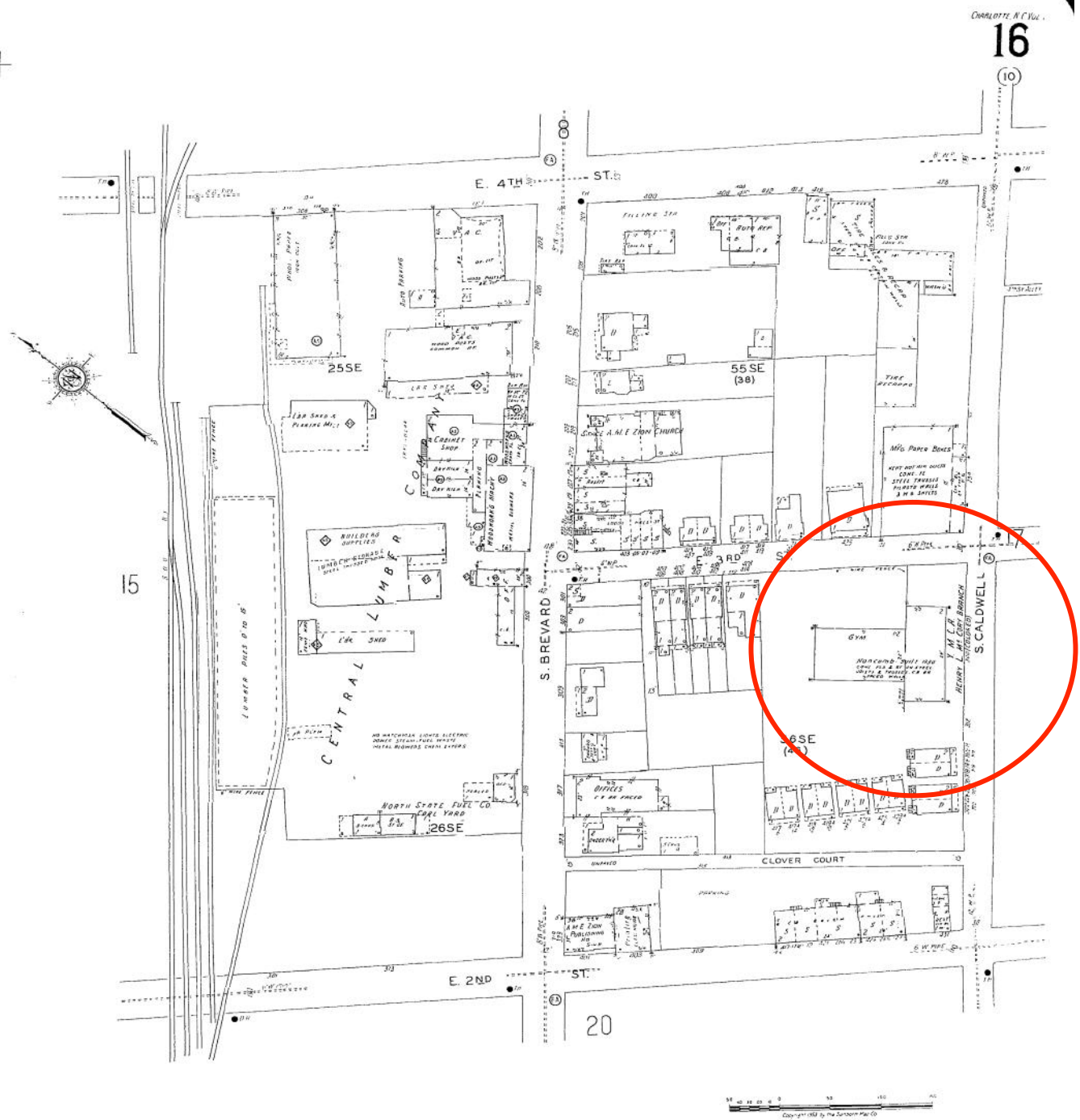
The proposed boundary for local landmark designation is the building's footprint, 9,422 sq. feet.

II. Maps and Floor Plans***Mecklenburg County Tax Map***

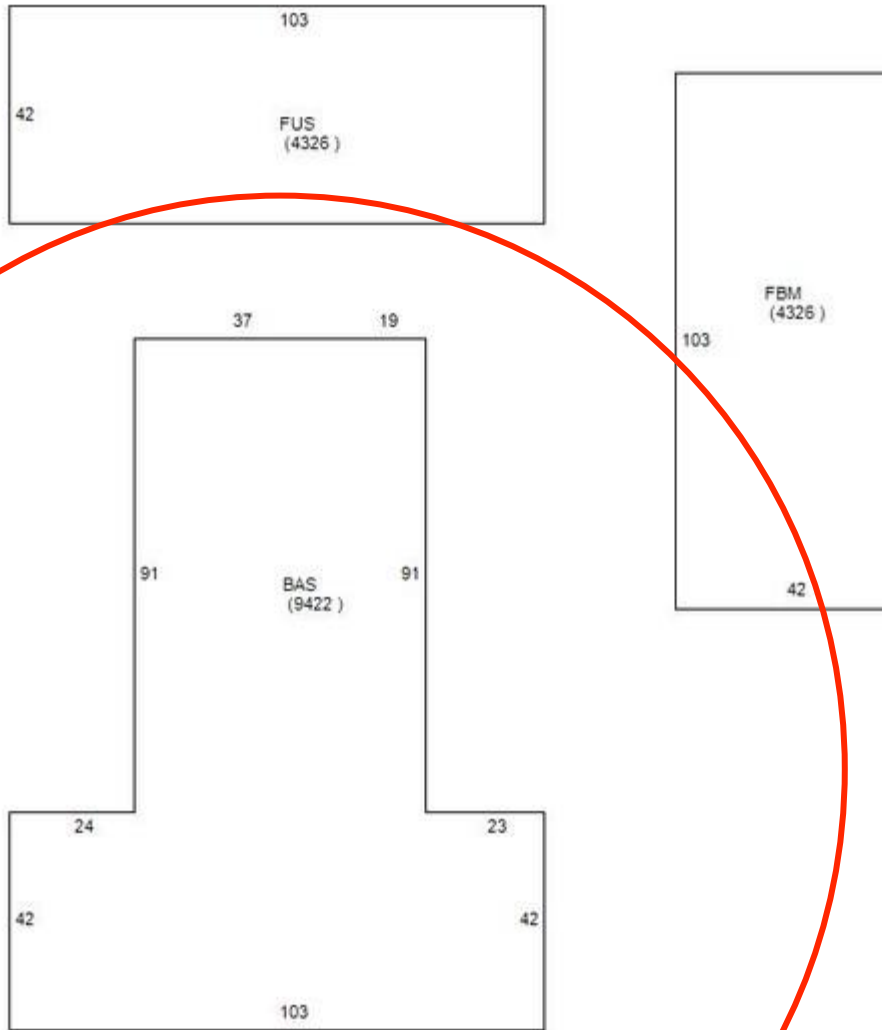
Aerial Map



Sanborn Map 1953



Architectural Drawings



III. Architectural Assessment

Architectural Importance

The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA (period of significance 1951-1969) is architecturally significant to Mecklenburg County because of its high integrity and uniqueness of its architecture. The PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style exemplifies the forward-thinking, progressive African American community the building served during the Jim Crow Era. Located in its original setting on the corner of South Caldwell Street and East Third Street since its completion in 1951, the building is set apart from its surroundings and exemplifies the historic concept and promise of the Brooklyn neighborhood.

Architectural Context

The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA is a rare example of PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style in Charlotte (Appendix 1). Moreover, it is one of the only remaining buildings still standing from Charlotte's Brooklyn neighborhood after it was destroyed in the 1960s and 1970s in the name of urban renewal. Because of the unique nature of its architecture and its rarity as one of the only remaining structures from Brooklyn, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA is architecturally significant on the local level.

Architectural Description

Setting

The setting of the Brooklyn McCrorey YMCA, located at 334 South Caldwell Street, has been significantly altered since the building's original construction from 1950-1951. Originally, the YMCA was one of many Black owned and operated businesses in Brooklyn, surrounded by other commercial and residential structures that served the community. Today, the YMCA is located in Charlotte's Second Ward, an urban, commercial district with relatively modern buildings. The YMCA shares a parcel with an office building to the north that was constructed in 1968. The building is located on a busy downtown street and is surrounded by multi-story, large commercial buildings.

Front (South) Elevation- Facing South Caldwell Street

The Brooklyn McCrorey YMCA is a two-story commercial building constructed of common bond brick and stucco (Fig. 4). The front facade is symmetrical and divided using gutters with decorative caps. An accessible ramp with metal railing provides access to the metal front facade double door with vertical half-lights (Fig. 12a) and extends the majority of the front facade. In the brick portions of the facade there are six sets of metal framed louvered windows with two-over-two and three-over-three configurations, respectively (Fig. 1). The stucco centered portion of the front facade consists of two one-over-one metal framed louvered windows on the first level. The second level consists of two one-over-one metal framed louvered windows and one two-over-two metal framed louvered windows.

The most significant character defining feature is the "YMCA" ghostmark signage that is still visible and located in the horizontal band on the front facade (Fig. 13).

Side (East) Elevation - Facing East Third Street

The Third Street (east) elevation consists of three distinctive facades with architectural significant features. The first of three facades consists of one one-over-one metal framed louvered window (Fig. 3). The second of the three facades consists of six even distributed one-over-one metal framed louvered windows (Fig. 6). The last of the three facades consists of six four-over-seven metal framed casement windows divided evenly by six brick columns (Fig. 5-6). Two exterior metal framed double doors with vertical half-lights are directly underneath a set of casement windows located on this side of the facade (Fig. 12f-12e).

Rear (Northeast) Elevation

The rear elevation consists of common bond bricks with decorative brick hall wall pavers that enclose the mechanical units of the building (Fig.6).

Side (West) Elevation

The (west) side elevation faces a paved parking lot and consists of three distinctive facades with architecturally significant features. The first of three facades consists of one one-over-one metal framed louvered window (Fig. 8). The second of the three facades consists of five one-over-one metal framed louvered windows and one exterior metal framed single door with vertical half-light (Fig.11c, 12b). The last of the three facades consists of six four-over-seven metal framed casement windows divided evenly by six brick columns (Fig. 8). Two exterior metal framed double doors with vertical half-lights are directly underneath a set of casement windows located on this side of the facade (Fig.12c-12d).

IV. Historical

Brooklyn Community History

Located in what is now Charlotte's Second Ward, Brooklyn was a predominantly Black commercial district and neighborhood that thrived as a self-sustainable "city within a city." With vibrant Black-owned businesses, schools, and places of worship, Brooklyn was home to a socioeconomically diverse African American community. During the 1960s and 1970s, Brooklyn was razed in Charlotte's first wave of "urban renewal," displacing thousands of businesses and neighborhood residents and ultimately destroying more than 1,480 structures. One of the only extant structures is the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA.

Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA History

The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA, historically located at 317 South Caldwell Street in central Charlotte, is perhaps the best touchstone to the service of the YMCA to African Americans in North Carolina. The world's first YMCA was created in London, England in 1844. Seven years later, the first North American YMCAs were established in Boston and Montreal, Canada.¹ In 1853, the first African American-oriented YMCA organization in the United States was established in Washington, DC as the "YMCA for Colored Men and Boys." In North Carolina, the first community YMCA was established in Wilmington in 1857, followed by Charlotte that same year. These associations reorganized after the economic and social turmoil caused by the Civil War.² The National Chapter of the YMCA sought to encourage African Americans to organize their own branches, and separate Black associations were established in Northern cities, as well as Charleston, South Carolina and surrounding Palmetto State towns in the early 1870s.³ The African-American initiatives in South Carolina foundered due to financial instability.

In the late nineteenth century, Black citizens had a choice when establishing community YMCAs. They could either organize as a branch of a larger, white-managed YMCA, or as a freestanding unit. Through the work of Henry Edwards Brown, a traveling secretary for YMCA's national African American association initiative, an apparently autonomous YMCA organization for Black citizens was established in Charlotte in 1883.⁴ The early Charlotte association, co-founded by Robert B. Bruce (1861-1920), reportedly raised some funds toward a new building around 1899. Leadership, including John Rufus Kirkpatrick (1865-1910) entrusted the treasury to "one of their most prominent members," who spent it "for personal purposes." The

¹ University of Minnesota Libraries, "A Brief History of the YMCA and African American Communities," accessed on July 25, 2020, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guide-afam-history>.

² Stephen B. Weeks, "A History of the Young Men's Christian Association Movement in North Carolina. 1857-1888. A Historical Sketch," (Raleigh, Observer Printing Company), 3-7.

³ Nina Mjagkij, "Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946", (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky), 19.

⁴ Mjagkij, "Light in the Darkness," 34.

young men of Charlotte pressed the confessor and he promised to repay the amount stolen. Meanwhile, supporters initiated a new fund-raising campaign, and after new funds were attained, another treasurer was appointed who then left town.⁵ In 1890, the national office of the YMCA established a “Colored Men's Department” that supported creation of “branches” that coordinated within the white-controlled main YMCA boards in each city.⁶ Seed money was allocated on the national level to leverage additional charity on the local level. This ultimately provided an avenue for a Charlotte branch to serve the city’s growing Black community in Brooklyn.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the YMCA grew popular as a Christian organization that sought to instill moral values in a community by supporting job training, good health, and community engagement. In 1936 the Charlotte YMCA board approved a three-year planning objective that sought to boost the capacity of the organization by revising the organizations’ bylaws, eliminating debt, completing much needed renovations to existing facilities, starting a summer camp, expanding membership, and establishing permanent branch centers across the city.⁷ Perhaps broader national initiatives inspired members of Charlotte’s Brooklyn community to seek a partnership with the organization to bolster their long sought goals.

This strategy must have been successful, for plans were announced in late 1936 for a branch to serve Black citizens through the Charlotte YMCA, “as the culmination of a movement that has been on foot here for 35 years.”⁸ The new branch opened in rented space in a commercial storefront formerly occupied by the North Carolina State Employment Service office located at 416 East Second Street. The day of opening was said by Lex Kluttz, general secretary of the Charlotte YMCA, to be “the most momentous day.” Prominent attendees of the African American community included W. H. Moreland, J. L. Bowser, L. P. Harris. The Rev. J. W. Herritage, Arthur Anderson, T. M. Martin, Adrey Robinson, D. E. Moore, P. C. Phillips, J. T. Sanders, and Fred Williams.⁹

In time, this branch was known as the Second Street Branch. The location for the branch was likely chosen for its proximity to South Caldwell Street and the Brooklyn neighborhood, the heart of Charlotte’s social, spiritual, entrepreneurial, and educational activities among Black citizens. The Second Street YMCA is remembered by many as a cornerstone of the neighborhood. Later replaced by the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA, the historic facility is sometimes referenced as the Brooklyn YMCA.¹⁰

The primary functions of the branch in its earliest years included night classes in arithmetic, grammar, citizenship, club meetings, Bible studies, recreation, presentations, and musical programs.¹¹ In 1941, Hugh R. Hill, a social worker from Athens, Georgia was hired as the first professional staff to administer the facility. Hill earned a B.A. from Virginia State College and took two years of postgraduate work at the Atlanta School of Social Work. His job included general operations as well as coordination of activities with area schools and churches.¹²

By 1942, the branch was renovated, presumably to provide dormitory space. A special newspaper contribution by C. T. Perkins, executive secretary of the branch, outlined the evolving mission of the organization, “Every week from three to five boys drift into the YMCA; ragged, and most of the time, forlorn and hungry. They come from Georgia, South Carolina or from the smaller cities in North Carolina, after having heard of the many defense jobs in this area. They are more or less penniless, without either

⁵ Mjagkij, “Light in the Darkness,” 58.

⁶ Weeks, “A History of the Young,” 11.

⁷ “Y.M.C.A. Approved 3-Year Objectives,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 8, 1953, 13.

⁸ “Negro Y.M.C.A. Is Organized...Help Of Number Of Directors,” publication unknown, October 4, 1936.

⁹ “Negro YMCA Formed Here,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1938, 40.

¹⁰ “Brooklyn was the center of black life in Charlotte. Until the bulldozers arrived,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 18, 2019, retrieved July 30, 2020 on www.charlotteobserver.com.

¹¹ “To Start Classes,” *Charlotte News*, October 11, 1939, 6; and “Many Enroll,” *Charlotte News*, June 3, 1938, 32; and “Detective will Make Address,” March 20, 1936, 20.

¹² “Negro Y.M.C.A. Official Takes Up Duties Here,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 24, 1941, 19.

enough money to go or to stay, but somehow [sic] they manage to find the “Y”; looking at it for that salvation which will free them from worry. When asked why they are such a long distance from home, the answer usually is ‘All the other boys are leaving home so mama let me leave too.’ They are young boys oft times only 16 or 17, good fellows at heart, but unless given help, prospective delinquents.”¹³

The YMCA made a difference in the quality of lives of African American men and boys in Charlotte. A report promoting membership for the 1943 campaign explained the many functions of the Second Street YMCA that ranged from “operating a dormitory, or carrying on educational activities, or work with boys, and of assisting with employment problems.” The organization boasted of reaching 1,000 men in the preceding 60 days, including African American soldiers who needed a place to relax and spend the night. In addition, “the organization conducts classes in art and literacy and is serving as a center for the fostering of much inter-racial goodwill.”¹⁴

As YMCA gained traction during this era as a religious-based charity to serve an otherwise underserved population, greater programming and capacity was needed. “As a contributing factor in the battle against juvenile delinquency,” the *Charlotte News* stated, “and in the appeal of Christianity to the young manhood of either race, the YMCA has proven itself of incalculable value.”¹⁵ At the request of the Second Street YMCA administration to plan for future growth, the Charlotte War and Community Chest made a resolution that requested the branch be allowed to initiate a capital campaign to raise funds for a new building after the end of World War II.¹⁶ This initiated work to begin a major fund drive within Charlotte’s donor base.

In 1944, architect R. L. Rayburn was commissioned to make a preliminary study to survey the Second Street Branch. His report was a first step in preparing for a capital campaign and likely included a program of needs and uses as well as a budget of costs.¹⁷ Later that year, two lots on the corner of South Caldwell and East Third streets were purchased by the Charlotte YMCA for the purpose of the new branch facility to expand service in the Brooklyn neighborhood. The lot, formerly owned by the Torrance family, had a combined frontage of 145 feet on South Caldwell Street, a prestigious address for Black business owners.¹⁸ A few months later, a third lot was acquired, bringing the frontage on South Caldwell Street to 195 feet.¹⁹ In 1945, a columnist remarked upon a conversation he had with John R. Hemphill, a board member of the Second Street YMCA, who promised “It will be the finest Negro YMCA between Washington and Atlanta.”²⁰

Nationally, attitudes were evolving in favor of diminishing institutional racism and segregation in the YMCA organization. In 1944, the YMCA’s National Council questioned for the first time the long-accepted practice of operating “equal but separate services.” YMCA administrators struggled with the application of Christian ideals to support a racially segregated system and challenged the organization to “translate its high purpose into steady and courageous action.”²¹ Perhaps these changing standards prompted Charlotte’s YMCA administrators to initiate an expanded new facility that could exemplify their city as a part of a new socially progressive southern perspective.

Segregation of YMCAs as a national policy was ended in 1946 when the organization’s National Council passed a resolution calling for local associations to “work steadfastly toward the goal of eliminating all racial discriminations.” The Council also abolished all racial designations and dissolved its Colored Work

¹³ “What Curlee Found,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 22, 1943, 40.

¹⁴ “Negro YMCA Seeks 300 More Members,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 14, 1943, 12.

¹⁵ “Negro YMCA: A new Building is a Need for the entire community,” *Charlotte News*, August 17, 1943, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁷ “Survey to be made of Negro YMCA Branch,” *Charlotte News*, May 30, 1944, 12.

¹⁸ “Negro YMCA Site Bought,” *Charlotte News*, September 11, 1944, 3.

¹⁹ “Negro YMCA Obtains Lot,” *Charlotte News*, December 5, 1944, 11.

²⁰ “This Is Charlotte: Dick Young,” *Charlotte News*, June 16, 1945, 22.

²¹ Mjagkij, “Light in the Darkness,” 126.

Department.²² These changes were applied and adopted at varying degrees across the nation, but it is suspected that these broad decrees influenced administrators in Charlotte.

With property in hand and an enlightened outlook on their service to the African American community, Charlotte YMCA and Second Street Branch officials began to build a case to fund construction of the new facility in the Brooklyn neighborhood. The message was clearly one of progressiveness and positivity. An interview by executive secretary C. T. Perkins in the *Charlotte Observer* underscored that “the last two years have marked an era of progress for the Second St. Branch of the YMCA, which has grown in such leaps and bounds since its organization six years ago, that new accommodations are now considered “imperative.”²³ Further, Perkins was quoted to reveal the YMCA’s new slogan: “The recognition and use of the good in all man-kind,” which struck a tone of equity and inclusivity.

Fundraising was slow in the years after the close of World War II, and numerous Charlotte YMCA initiatives, including the Second Street YMCA, competed for funds. Francis O. Clarkson, chair of “the committee on co-operation with the Negro branch Y” stated that the needs for new buildings for [the] Negro YMCA and YWCA have priority and precedence over any YMCA renovation other than emergency needs.” These emergency needs included painting and washroom facilities in the city’s primary YMCA facility.²⁴

In March 1949, preliminary plans were approved for the new building, though public details were scant. It was announced that the project would be contracted in installments, but the first phase would not be started until more funds were raised. To-date, \$85,000 had been raised, with another \$35,000 needed for the first phase, of an anticipated \$250,000 project goal.²⁵ The first phase was the administrative wing, which was to contain locker rooms and showers in the basement, offices and lounges on the ground floor, and clubrooms and a kitchen on the second floor.²⁶ A proposed gymnasium was considered an add-on.

Groundbreaking for the administrative wing of the new branch took place on January 11, 1950, presided over by Dr. J. W. Herritage, chair of the board of management of the Second Street branch. Building committee members included Edward H. Brown (chair), J. E. Hemphill, A. E. Spears, Dr. H. L. McCrorey, and A. S. Grier. The first phase of construction was anticipated to cost \$150,000.

Dr. Herritage was a respected figure in Charlotte during the first half of the twentieth century. Born in 1888, he received his education and training from St. Augustine’s College in Raleigh and his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Bishop Payne Divinity School in Petersburg, Virginia. He was ordained in the Episcopal church in 1910 and came to Charlotte to serve as rector of St. Michael’s and All Angels in 1933. His service as a founder and former president of the board of the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA was joined by other important roles such as a trustee of St. Augustine’s College. He died of injuries sustained through an automobile accident in 1952.²⁷

Laxton Construction Company, a Charlotte-based company established in 1941, was selected as the contractor for the new building.²⁸ The project architect was Charlotte’s Louis Asbury and Son. Asbury Sr. was an organizer of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and a graduate of Trinity College (Duke University) as well as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.²⁹ His commissions were wide-ranging, including the Mecklenburg Courthouse (1926), the Mayfair Manor Hotel (1929), and numerous residences across the city. His son was added to the business in 1939, having graduated from Duke

²² *Ibid*, 127.

²³ “Accommodations Needed: Six-Year Milestone Reached In Uphill Growth Of Negro YMCA,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 12, 1945, 3.

²⁴ “Renovation Fund Discussed: Harris Is Renamed YM Vice President,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 15, 1945, 13.

²⁵ “YM Plans Are Given Approval,” *Charlotte News*, March 16, 1949, 2.

²⁶ “Would Build Gym at Negro Unit: \$23,000 Needed To Complete YMCA,” *Charlotte News*, February 24, 1950, 3.

²⁷ “J.W. Herritage Rites Thursday,” *Charlotte News*, February 19, 1952, 20.

²⁸ “Laxton Construction Company,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 25, 2001, 209.

²⁹ “Louis H. Asbury Sr., 97, Architect of Courthouse,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 20, 1975, 8.

University and NC State University.³⁰ The pair were responsible for several commissions, including the Doctors Building (1950) and the Elks Club of Charlotte (1951).³¹

Media chronicled the YMCA expansion project as construction progressed through the year, and solicitations were made to keep the project funded. By March 1950 the foundations and first floor system were installed, but \$20,000 was still needed to keep the project moving.³² Later in 1950, the total project budget of \$150,000 was procured allowing for the construction of the gymnasium in the initial phase of construction through a \$40,000 loan.³³

Importantly, fundraising for the new branch was a broad community effort, with a high percentage of contributions made to the campaign by African American families, figures, and institutions as memorials. Examples of these acts include a November 1950 gift by Mrs. F. J. Anderson, who donated furnishings for a room in memory of her late husband, Dr. Floyd J. Anderson.³⁴ Other memorial gifts included were the men's lobby donated by W. Frank Dowd, a club room by the family of Thad Tate, and the boys lounge in honor of the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church in honor of their late pastor and former elders.³⁵ The new YMCA branch was funded by Black citizens, rich and poor.

The new YMCA was opened to the public on April 15, 1951, and the facility was named the Henry Lawrence McCrorey Memorial YMCA in honor of the president emeritus of Johnson C. Smith University (1907 to 1947) and YMCA building committee member.³⁶ Former Governor Cameron Morrison shared the podium with the Rt. Rev. Edwin A. Penick, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina in dedicating the new building.³⁷

Dr. McCrorey was a notable figure in Charlotte history. Born in Fairfield County, South Carolina in 1863, he was educated at the Willard Richardson School at Winnsboro, SC and in 1892 was awarded a B.A. from the Johnson C. Smith School of Theology followed by a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree in 1895. He completed graduate work at the University of Chicago in 1896. In 1895 he began a distinguished career as an educator in Charlotte, including his service as president of Biddle University (JCSU) beginning in 1907. Dr. McCrorey was presented honorary doctorates in divinity from Smith and Lincoln universities. It was during his administration that major gifts were received by the university from Mrs. Johnson C. Smith and from James B. Duke before he resigned his position in 1947. He died just months after the dedication of the new YMCA branch named in his honor.³⁸

The building made an immediate impact on the community, with the letters Y M C A emblazoned high across the building's parapet over South Caldwell Street. It was also designed with anticipated expansions, "The handsome brick building is the first of three units planned for Negro YMCA members. It will serve as a community center. The two proposed wings, to be built at each end of the present structure, will house dormitory facilities and a swimming pool."³⁹

The architecture of the building was progressive for the time. Louis Asbury Sr. was well known for his traditional Neoclassical facades that reflected a European order based on Greek and Roman antecedents. With assistance from his son, Louis Asbury Jr., the pair composed a clean and architecturally progressive

³⁰ "Charlotte church architect Louis Asbury dies at 78," *Charlotte Observer*, March 31, 1991, 118.

³¹ Elks Reported Ready to Rebuild On Old Site," *Charlotte Observer*, August 28, 1948, 13; and "New Doctors' Building Will Cost \$500,000," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1949, 1.

³² "Seek Funds to Keep Job Going," *Charlotte News*, March 4, 1950, 3.

³³ "Dedication Services Set For Negro YMCA," *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951, 23; and "Negro YMCA Dedication Set," *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951, 1.

³⁴ "Planning Memorial," *Charlotte News*, November 17, 1950, 26.

³⁵ "Negro YMCA Dedication Set," *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951, 1.

³⁶ "New Y Branch Honors M'Corey," *Charlotte News*, February 24, 1951, 12.

³⁷ "Scenes at New YMCA Here," *Charlotte News*, April 13, 1951, 17.

³⁸ "Noted Negro Leader Dies in Charlotte," *Charlotte News*, July 14, 1951, 13.

³⁹ "Dedication Services Set For Negro YMCA," *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951, 23.

façade for Charlotte's Black citizens. African Americans were not always proponents of staid European architectural themes and many chose to look to the future for inspiration. For the facility, a rare iteration of the PWA Moderne or Federal Moderne Style represented a futuristic, and hopeful, vision for the future.

With construction complete on the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch, the organization was able to more fully serve the community in ways previously not possible. The Charlotte branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) met inside the branch for community meetings, exemplified by their April 24, 1952 lecture on "Human Rights and Equality" by attorney Robert D. Glass.⁴⁰ Glass was an astute choice as speaker. Later in his career, on June 26, 1987, Glass was sworn in as the first African American Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, capping a distinguished legal career.⁴¹ Lectures such as this represented that civil rights activism was growing throughout the United States during mid-twentieth century and was occurring within the influence of the YMCA.

With the experience of the nationwide sit-ins of 1960 and growing racial and societal tensions, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch sponsored a series of discussions in 1961 that dealt with the role of African Americans in community leadership. One lecture entitled "The Christian's Role in Good Community Relations" included Charlotte Mayor Stan R. Brookshire, real estate agent Lee Kinney, and Dr. T. A. Jenkins, minister of Statesville Avenue Presbyterian Church. Said the Mayor at the event, "We are trying to build better community relations and that takes a united effort on the part of all groups and individuals."⁴² Other presentations in the series included titles such as "Political and Spiritual Unity of the Negro," "Responsibility of Negro Leadership Today," and The Negro Forgetting the Past by Looking Toward the Future."⁴³

Kelly M. Alexander, president of the state branches of the NAACP spoke at the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch in 1964. Alexander, a North Carolina native, later served as chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He is most remembered for field work in North Carolina, where he earned the unofficial title of "Mr. N.A.A.C.P." where he spoke at sites such as the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch for social equity and civil rights.⁴⁴

Other activities of the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA were less directly related to civil rights but bolstered social equity efforts. In 1951, the branch offered a course in parliamentary law, with special focus on presentation and disposition of motions, voting, committees, and debate on motion.⁴⁵ In 1953, the branch began to offer adult education including literacy alongside golf and tennis.⁴⁶ In 1952 the facility served as a gallery exhibit for Walker Foster, a prominent Charlotte artist with a national reputation.⁴⁷ The Professional and Business Men's Club of the Brooklyn McCrorey YMCA shared initiatives and networking opportunities to facilitate African American entrepreneurial efforts.⁴⁸ At times, the group included topics of social empowerment. For example, in 1960, the Men's Club invited Louis E. Austin to speak at their meeting in the branch. Austin was a Durham publisher who was the first southern Black man to be elected for public office on the Democratic ticket.⁴⁹

The facility helped facilitate direct communication and conversation between men in the Brooklyn community and local politicians through a candidates' forum in 1962. Democratic and Republican candidates were invited to a Sunday afternoon "political action" forum sponsored by the NAACP. Candidates

⁴⁰ "Meeting of NAACP Scheduled Tonight," *Charlotte News*, April 24, 1952, 8.

⁴¹ "Judge Glass, A Giant of A Man," *Hartford Courant*, December 11, 2001, 71.

⁴² "City Briefs: Better Relations Require Unity," *Charlotte News*, September 23, 1961, 4.

⁴³ "Speakers Announced: McCrorey YMCA To Sponsor Talks," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1961, 6.

⁴⁴ "Kelly Alexander Of N.A.A.C.P. Dies," *New York Times*, April 4, 1985, 30.

⁴⁵ "Parliamentary Course," *Charlotte Observer*, November 13, 1951, 17.

⁴⁶ "McCrorey 'Y' Will Sponsor Adult Courses," *Charlotte Observer*, January 13, 1952, 34.

⁴⁷ "Artist And One Of His Favorites," *Charlotte Observer*, August 10, 1952, 10.

⁴⁸ "Men's Club Officers," *Charlotte Observer*, February 28, 1958, 16.

⁴⁹ "Durham Publisher Will Speak To Club," *Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1960, 10.

were sent questionnaires and asked for their views on issues and topics of interest to Charlotte's Black citizens.⁵⁰

Not all YMCA events were for men. Community groups had access to the YMCA meeting rooms as well. The McClintock Club, a women's organization for home improvement, met at the facility to plan their Home Improvement Tour in the Woodland neighborhood held in the summer of 1952.⁵¹ Quoted in a newspaper article, Edgar C. Goodwin, the Brooklyn McCrorey director stated "Originality and ingenuity are probably our primary tools here. We are hard to put each year to think of new things to offer to keep interest in McCrorey alive. We seem to have accomplished that part of our objective pretty well. Maybe too well. Maybe too well. We have so many activities on the fire that what facilities we have are booked almost 'round the clock."⁵²

The Brooklyn McCrorey Branch also continued programs and activities that included physical activities and camps. A special feature in 1953 showcased the primary purpose of the branch as:

Christian living and good citizenship. McCrorey Branch YMCA is the center of community life for hundreds of boys and their elders. The Y offers low-cost dormitory housing; conducts a broad physical education program; provides lounge facilities with magazines, games, radio and television as positive attractions to youngsters; gives quarters and leadership to a variety of club groups for all age levels.⁵³ "One of our newer programs," reported Goodman, "is our health club here. We have weightlifting and body building courses that are quite popular among the men as well as the boys."⁵⁴

During the 1950s and 1960s, the national YMCA administration established committees to review social equity and equal rights. The Commission on Interracial Policies and the Program and the Committee for Interracial Advance studied and reviewed the impact of institutional racism and made recommendations for change. In 1967 this work led to the adoption of a resolution that required all local associations to annually certify that "their policies and practices provide that eligibility for membership or participation in programs shall be without any discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin" as a condition of membership.⁵⁵ However, urban renewal programs in Charlotte had a powerful impact on the trajectory of the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA.

Beginning under the legislation provided by the National Housing Act of 1949 (and 1954), cities began to rethink their future by re-imagining areas termed "blighted" by replacing them with new commercial, recreational, and residential development.⁵⁶ The law gave local communities such as the City of Charlotte the ability to stimulate growth and build new roads in areas deemed "blighted" through the power of eminent domain, by funding clearance and relocation costs, and by providing mortgage insurance for new residential development. Charlotte city officials targeted the Brooklyn neighborhood for the use of such powers and financial resources.

The Brooklyn neighborhood held a diversity of uses and residents but to city officials it was a burden to the city. It was referenced as a 238 acre slum by city officials, who claimed city expenses for the area fell short of income from taxes.⁵⁷ Other officials cited concerns the high infant mortality and tuberculosis rates in

⁵⁰ "NAACP Asks To Hear Views Of Candidates," *Charlotte Observer*, May 19, 1962, 12.

⁵¹ "H. D. Woman Chart Plans For Home Tour," *Charlotte Observer*, June 29, 1952, 10.

⁵² "McCrorey YMCA: Something Better Than Dingy Alleys," *Charlotte News*, July 7, 1960, 22.

⁵³ "Target, Christian living and good leadership," *Charlotte News*, October 26, 1953, 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

⁵⁵ University of Minnesota Libraries, "A Brief History of the YMCA and African American Communities," accessed on July 25, 2020, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guide-afam-history>.

⁵⁶ Richard Longstreath, "Housing Washington, Two Centuries of Residential Development and Planning in the National Capitol Area," (The Center for American Places at Columbia College: Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 255.

⁵⁷ "Charlotte's Brooklyn Area Could Be Tax Bonanza: Our Slums Are A Losing Proposition," *Charlotte Observer*, January 10, 1960, 35.

the neighborhood, or the proportionately higher calls for fire department assistance. Authorities and the press stated their claim on Brooklyn in 1960:

A crowded collection of ram-shackle housing almost in midtown, it is sliced by the city's busiest thoroughfare but is clogged internally by narrow streets and alleys. Legally, it is a slum. Under the procedure set up by the state law, the city planning department made a house-to-house survey of the area and found it more that 77 per cent "blighted" under the law's standards.⁵⁸

"The basic reason for tearing down the rot that was Brooklyn was to get those poor people out of those slums," stated the *Charlotte Observer*, and removal of residents resulted in the loss of the population served by the Brooklyn McCrorey YMCA.⁵⁹ In the words of McCrorey board chair Howard C. Barnhill, the board felt that the facility had to be "near the people we want to serve."⁶⁰

A motion to relocate the branch was approved by facility administrators, and the property was sold to the United Community Services, which proposed construction of a headquarters facility adjacent to the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch at the corner of Brevard and Third streets.⁶¹ The UCS initiated a fund drive to erect their new office, and to build a new facility for the branch YMCA on an 18-acre site on Beatties Ford Road 4.5 miles north of center city. The new facility, a 21,000-foot center with an Olympic-size pool, regulation size gymnasium, and dressing rooms for men and women was designed by architect Jack O. Boyte and cost \$350,000.⁶² It opened in 1969.

The old Brooklyn McCrorey YMCA was adaptively reused for the needs of the UCS organization. The gymnasium was converted to a 400-seat auditorium that could also be used for banquets. The remaining 4,000 square feet of space in the building was available as additional office space.

The story of the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch of the YMCA in Charlotte is one of empowerment. Inspired by national-level initiatives through the YMCA that invested in the bodies and minds of Black women and men, boys and girls, of Charlotte through the lens of Christianity, the organization promoted early civil rights advocacy in the Jim Crow Era South, and provided aspirational role models and speakers to uplift the Black community as a whole. Alongside churches and educational institutions, the Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA can be credited with facilitating the Civil Rights Movement in the Queen City and helped raise a generation of citizens to a higher standard of living. This site is a remarkable surviving touchstone to the Brooklyn neighborhood, and is a star in the constellation of Civil Rights sites within the state of North Carolina.

V. Chain of Title

1. Book #2988 Page #312

- a. Recorded on December 15, 2017
- b. Grantor: United Way of Central Carolinas, INC.
- c. Grantee: SLT-Brevard, LLC

2. Book #2917 Page #290

- a. Recorded on November 22, 1967
- b. Grantor: United Community Services in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County
- c. Grantee: Redevelopment Commission of the City of Charlotte

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 35

⁵⁹ "Redevelopment Backers Worried: Brooklyn – Who Is To Build What?" *Charlotte Observer*, April 8, 1965, 56.

⁶⁰ "McCrorey Board Votes to Move 'Y'," *Charlotte Observer*, June 10, 1966, 31.

⁶¹ "Brevard St. Land Sale OK Is Expected," *Charlotte News*, April 12, 1967, 4.

⁶² "McCrorey Branch YMCA Planned For Neighborhood," *Charlotte Observer*, February 6, 1968, 15.

3. Book #2309 Page #136

- a. Recorded on March 15, 1962
- b. Grantor: Sadie E. Anderson
- c. Grantee: Redevelopment Commission of the City of Charlotte

4. Book #2313 Page #134

- a. Recorded on May 18, 1962
- b. Grantors: Dr. Thomas Watkins and wife, Louise Watkins
- c. Grantee: Redevelopment Commission of the City of Charlotte

5. Book #2359 Page #227

- a. Recorded on January 8, 1963
- b. Grantors: H.B. Keller and wife, Elfreda S. Keller
- c. Grantee: Redevelopment Commission of the City of Charlotte

6. Book #1579 Page #11

- a. Recorded on September 3, 1952
- b. Grantor: Commercial National Bank of Charlotte
- c. Grantees: Sadie G. Anderson and husband, Robert C. Anderson

7. Book #256 Page #26

- a. Recorded September 9, 1909
- b. Grantors: Charles B. McDowan, Annie Bigger and husband, Edward D. Bigger, Bernard Nixon, Trustee
- c. Grantee: Thomas H. Gaither

V1. Finding Aid for Photographs

- Fig. 1: Setting
- Fig. 2: Setting
- Fig. 3: Setting
- Fig. 4: Front (South) Elevation
- Fig. 5: Side (East) Elevation
- Fig. 6: Rear (Northeast) Elevation
- Fig. 7: Side (West) Elevation
- Fig. 8: Parapet
- Fig. 9: Exterior Brick Column
- Fig. 10a: Four-over-seven metal framed windows
- Fig. 10b: Two-over-two metal framed windows
- Fig. 10c: Two-over-two metal framed windows
- Fig. 11a: Front Door
- Fig. 11b: Side (West) Elevation Door
- Fig. 11c: Side (West) Elevation Door
- Fig. 11d: Side (East) Elevation Door
- Fig. 11e: Side (East) Elevation Door
- Fig. 11f: Side (East) Elevation Door
- Fig. 12: YMCA ghostmark signage

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VII. Appendix

Appendix 1

Examples of PWA Moderne/ Federal Moderne



Venice Police Station in Los Angeles, California



United States Post Office in Gardena, California



Old Federal Courthouse in Seattle, Washington

VIII. Figures

Fig. 1: Setting



Fig. 2: Setting



Fig. 3: Setting



Fig. 4: Front (South) Elevation



Fig. 5: Side (East) Elevation



Fig. 6: Side (East) Elevation



Fig. 7: Rear (Northeast) Elevation



Fig. 8: Side (West) Elevation



Fig. 9: Parapet



Fig. 10: Exterior Brick Columns



Fig. 11a: Four-over-seven Metal Framed Casement Windows



Fig. 11b: Two-over-two metal framed windows



Fig. 11c: Two-over-two metal framed windows



Fig. 12a: Front Door



Fig. 12b: Side (West) Elevation Door



Fig. 12c: Side (West) Elevation Door



Fig. 12d: Side (West) Elevation Door



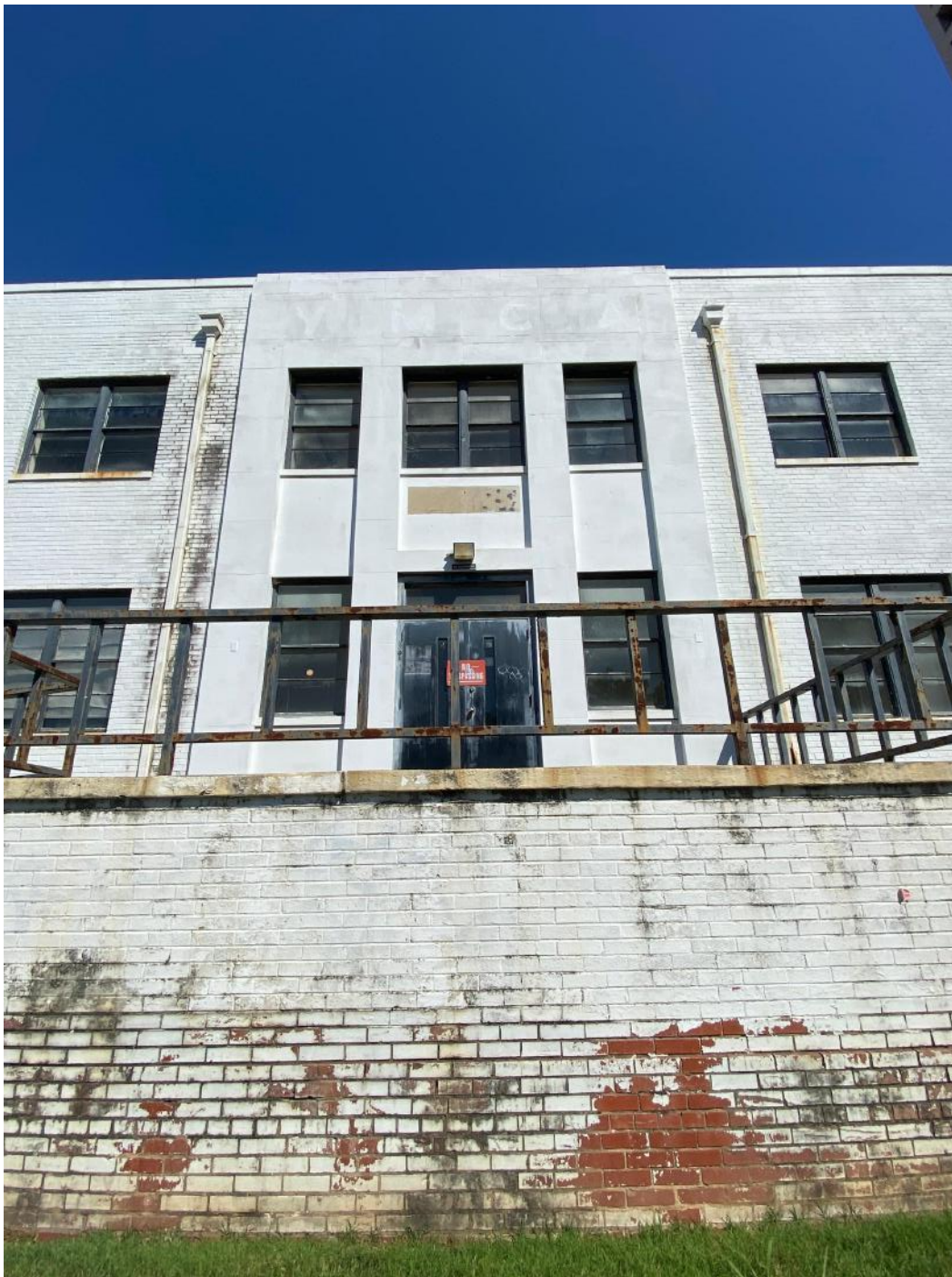
Fig. 12e: Side (East) Elevation Door



Fig. 12f: Side (East) Elevation Door



Fig. 13: YMCA Ghostmark Signage



I, THE UNDERSIGNED, HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE AND ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF; AND SUPPORT LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF THE PROPERTY DEFINED HEREIN.

I also acknowledge that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission may require additional information.

Signature of Owner

Date

Signature of Owner

Date

I also acknowledge that the designation includes the interior, interior features and details; exterior, exterior features and details of all structures; and land, unless otherwise noted in the report. Any alterations of the property and/or features designated, requires an approved *Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)* issued by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

Signature of Owner

Date

Signature of Owner

Date