

**Staff Report and Comments  
Midwood Elementary School  
1817 Central Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28205  
Application for COA HLC343**

**Exhibits presented to and considered by the Commission:**

**Exhibit A –** Project description

Demolition

**Exhibit B –** Map

**Exhibit C -** Designation Report

**Based upon the information presented in the application, staff offers the following suggested findings of fact:**

- A.** The proposed demolition is incongruous to the HLC STANDARDS.
- B.** The HLC cannot deny a COA for demolition, but it can delay the effective date of the COA for 365 days.
- C.** The HLC must act on a COA application within 180 days of its filing. [NCGS 160D-9-47 (d)] and if the HLC fails to issue a COA before February 6, 2024 for the demolition for the Midwood Elementary School, the owners will be able to proceed without a COA.
- D.** The last regular meeting of the HLC before the 180 day period is over is January 8, 2024, and however unlikely the HLC may not have a quorum at their January 8, 2024 regular meeting.
- E.** HLC Staff has met with the owners of the property and they are willing to discuss options other than full demolition of the historic building.

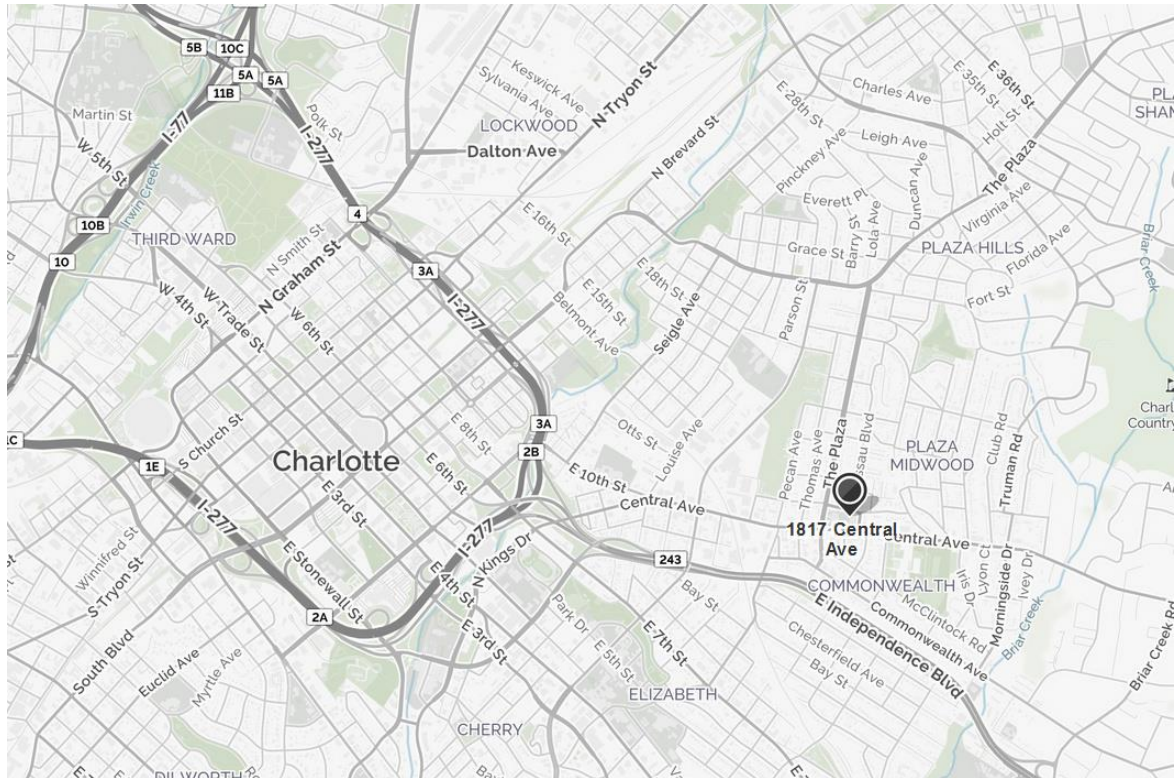
**Staff recommends that the Commission vote to issue the COA no later than December 11, 2023.**

**During that delay Staff can work with the applicant and other parties to develop a feasible plan to prevent the demolition of the Midwood Elementary School.**

**Survey and Research Report  
On Midwood Elementary School  
(Formerly Known as Lawyers Road School)**



- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as Midwood Elementary School is located at 1817 Central Avenue in Charlotte, NC.
- 2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner of the property is:  
  
Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education  
701 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Charlotte, NC 28202  
Telephone: (704) 343-6011
- 3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the exterior of the property.
- 4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map that depicts the location of the property. The UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) is 17 517357E 3892290N.



5. **Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The tax parcel number is 09507803. The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 866, Page 127, on June 28, 1934.
6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a historical sketch of the property prepared by Tracy A. Martin and Susan V. Mayer.
7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Tracy A. Martin.
8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.**
  - a. **Special significance in terms of its historical, pre-historical, architectural, or cultural importance:**
  - b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:**

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:**

Written December 10, 2001 by Tracy A. Martin  
 Updated on November 3, 2009 by Mary Dominick  
 Updated on April 20, 2016 by Susan V. Mayer

First opening in 1935 and ceasing function as a school in 2011, Midwood Elementary School continues to serve as an important community institution in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. Designed by the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh, Midwood Elementary was built to serve the Central Avenue corridor. The area known today as Plaza Midwood slowly grew from its inception as streetcar suburbs in the early 1900s to a popular post-World War II area conveniently located to downtown. Midwood Elementary flourished along with the neighborhood until the 1980s, when declining population and condition of Plaza Midwood and other former streetcar suburbs in Charlotte lead to the closure of the elementary school. Today, Midwood Elementary School has been reborn as a home of the Midwood International and Cultural Center as well as other non-profit institutions.

### **Development of Plaza Midwood**

The modern neighborhood known as Plaza Midwood is actually a conglomeration of various developments occurring primarily during the first thirty years of the twentieth century with some later developments following World War II. These neighborhoods, located beyond the former Seaboard Air Line Railroad tracks crossing Central Avenue, include Oakhurst (1903), Logie Avenue (1909), Forest Circle (1909), Chatham Estates (1912), Club Acres (1920s), Midwood (1920s), Johnston Courts (1920s), Eastern Retreat (1947), and Masonic Drive (1951). Due to its indirect access to downtown Charlotte, the Seaboard Air Line Railway line and sporadic streetcar service, the Plaza Midwood area developed very slowly in comparison to Dilworth, Elizabeth, and streetcar suburbs.<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte's first streetcar suburb, Dilworth, was developed in 1891 just south of downtown. Elizabeth, located to the east along Seventh Street, was founded the same year.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hanchett, "Plaza Midwood," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, <http://landmarkscommission.org/educationneighbhistplazamidwood.htm>, accessed March 28, 2016.

Further development to this area of Charlotte occurred in 1899, when Piedmont Park was platted by George Stephens and F.C. Abbott along Lawyers Road. Stephens and Abbott would continue to be influential in the expansion of suburban Charlotte—Stephens developed Myers Park in 1911, while Abbott became a prominent realtor in the city. These three developments—Dilworth, Elizabeth, and Piedmont Park—were considered to be within the first tier of streetcar suburbs ringing the city.<sup>2</sup>

The first residential development in the second tier of streetcar suburbs was Oakhurst, located beyond the Seaboard Air Line Railway along Central Avenue. Benjamin D. Heath, president of Charlotte National Bank, purchased the former Chadwick farm property on Central Avenue out toward The Plaza for \$100 per acre. Starting in 1903, he sold lots for large homes along Central at Louise Street, designated an industrial district along the railroad tracks, and platted a blue-collar residential area that includes modern Plaza Midwood streets Clement, Pecan (then Chadwick), School, and Gordon and portions of Thomas, Kensington, Chestnut, and Hamorton (then Peachtree).<sup>3</sup>

Smaller developments Logie Avenue and Forest Circle were attempted further down Central Avenue in 1909, but little to no construction occurred. The following year, the Mecklenburg Country Club was established on a former farm on Briar Creek just north of Central Avenue. But little growth in the area occurred without extension of the streetcar lines. In comparison, other new developments in Charlotte prospered because of their access to streetcars, including Wesley Heights west of downtown in 1910, Myers Park to the south in 1912, and Wilmore west of Dilworth in 1914.<sup>4</sup>

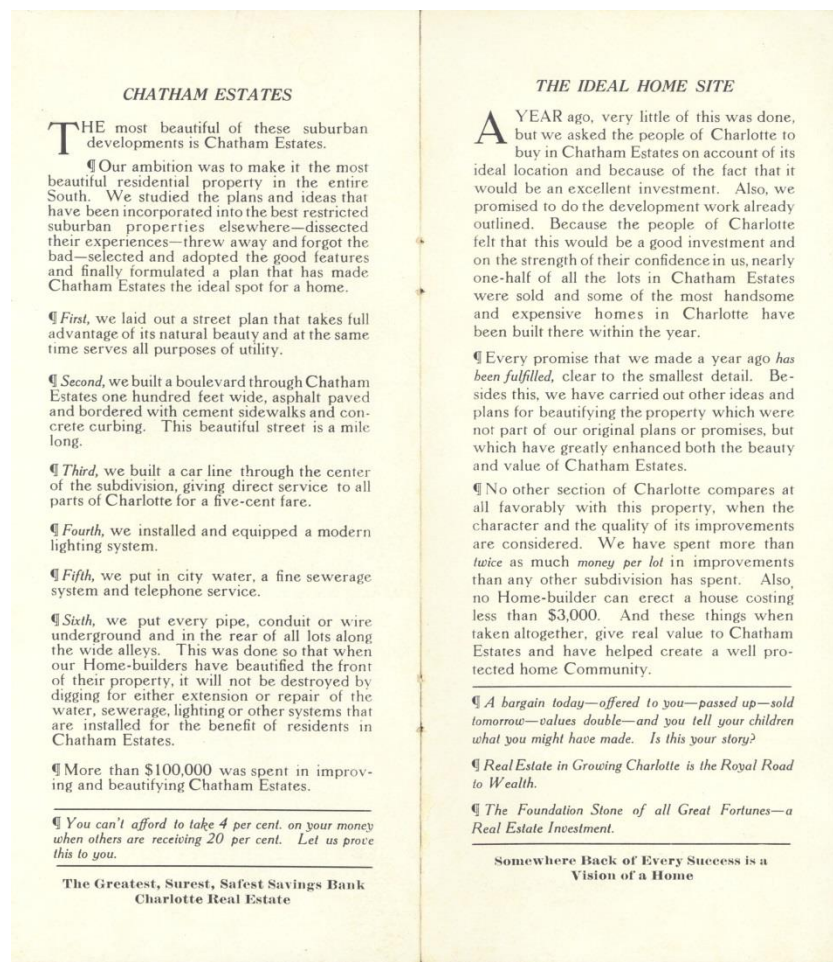
---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hanchett, “Why Central Avenue,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

<sup>4</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.





**Figure 1** Pages from a 1914 promotional brochure for Chatham Estates. VanLandingham Family Papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Chatham Estates, the first major development of what would eventually become Plaza Midwood, was the idea of Paul Chatham, son of the owner of Chatham Woolen Mills in Elkin and a transplant to Charlotte in 1907. Chatham hired landscape architect Leigh Colyer to plan the new suburb. Larger homes for the wealthy would be built along The Plaza with more modest homes along the secondary streets in the neighborhood. Key to Chatham's development was a streetcar line to run along Central Avenue and up The Plaza to the Charlotte Country Club.<sup>5</sup> However, three major issues hindered the ability of Chatham Estates and its adjacent neighborhoods to rival Dilworth as Charlotte's premier streetcar suburb: the area's distance and

<sup>5</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood; Susan V. Mayer, "From Rails to Roads: Public Transportation in Charlotte, North Carolina, 1890-1960," thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2013, 26.

accessibility to downtown Charlotte, the Seaboard Air Line Railway line, and a dependable streetcar system.

While the intersection of Central Avenue and The Plaza is only one-half mile farther in distance from downtown Charlotte than Dilworth, which enjoyed a direct connection with downtown via South Boulevard, access to Chatham Estates and other neighborhoods via streetcar was by an indirect route. Streetcars traveled down Elizabeth Avenue and turned left on Hawthorne Avenue to head to Chatham Estates. The location of the Central Avenue corridor made it an attractive choice for suburban expansion, but a second problem made development inconsistent.<sup>6</sup>

The heavily-trafficked Seaboard Air Line Railway, a major rail route carrying Charlotte and Gastonia textile products to the port at Wilmington and to Atlanta via a junction at Monroe crossed Central Avenue between Piedmont Park and Chatham Estates. Many manufacturers and other industrial businesses were located along the railroad tracks in this area, including Louise Cotton Mill, Charlotte Casket Company, Barnhardt Company, and Cole Manufacturing Company. Unlike streetcar lines to Dilworth and Elizabeth, the Chatham Estates line had no bridge over the railroad tracks, but instead had to wait for one of the upwards of thirty passenger trains and even more freight trains to pass before continuing down Central Avenue.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

<sup>7</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.



**Figure 2** The storage battery car type used on the Charlotte Rapid Transit Company line to Chatham Estates also ran in Concord. Storage battery street car, Concord, N. C., Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013646432>.

Reliable streetcar service to Chatham Estates became a major problem for the continued growth of the area, primarily for two reasons. First, Chatham chose to utilize the storage battery car rather than the traditional streetcar powered by overhead power lines. This unreliable technology choice was remembered by Piedmont Park resident Jake Newell as the “poor old four-wheeled rattle trap from Chatham Estates.”<sup>8</sup> Secondly, Chatham had raised the ire of Edward Dilworth Latta, developer of Dilworth and the city’s streetcar system. Latta saw Chatham’s Charlotte Rapid Transit Company (CRTC) as a threat to his monopoly on power generation and urban rail travel in the city, which at the time was being challenged by James Buchanan Duke and his Southern Public Utilities Company (SPUCO). Because of this perceived slight, Latta refused to allow Chatham’s streetcar to tie into the city system. Chatham Estates residents and domestic workers traveling from other parts of the city had to disembark from the

<sup>8</sup> “Street-car Service,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 10, 1919.



SPUCO streetcar on Hawthorne to transfer to Chatham's CRTC line. In May 1913, tired of problems with the storage battery cars, CRTC contracted with SPUCO for streetcar service.<sup>9</sup>

As noted by historian Kenneth Jackson, the growth of streetcar suburbs needed to be balanced by the profitability of the streetcar. In 1918 CRTC defaulted, leaving Piedmont Park and Chatham Estates without streetcar service. Chatham's choice of the storage battery car had been unfortunate, but the lack of consistent growth of Oakhurst, Logie Avenue, and Forest Circle among other neighborhoods below the Seaboard railroad tracks had combined to doom the development of Central Avenue as a streetcar suburb to rival Dilworth. For two years, the Central Avenue corridor had no public transportation service, and residents had to rely upon the good faith of automobile owners to offer a ride. Some relief came in the form of a new transit service when the jitney, a forerunner of the taxi, emerged concurrently with World War I training camp Camp Greene on the west side of Charlotte. Jitneys provided service from the Hawthorne streetcar stop to Charlotte Country Club beginning in April 1919.<sup>10</sup>

As the automobile became more affordable to middle-class Charlotteans, residential development in the Chatham Estates area resumed in the 1920s. Previous developments Logie Avenue and Forest Circle began selling lots. Club Acres, located around the Charlotte Country Club, had also begun development around 1910, but the neighborhood did not truly take off until the following decade. To continue the trend, Midwood had been platted in 1914, but its growth stalled through the 1920s and was not fully developed until the 1950s. Other small developments during the period included Johnston Courts and Club Drive.<sup>11</sup>

Commercial enterprises followed as residential development occurred in Plaza Midwood. A streetcar shopping strip grew along Central Avenue approaching its intersection with The

---

<sup>9</sup> Mayer, 17, 26-28.

<sup>10</sup> Mayer, 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

Plaza. Led by Long's Grocery, which opened in 1916 at the corner of Central and Pecan avenues, the commercial corridor saw more growth through the 1930s. A grocery store operated by W.T. Harris (which grew into the major Southern grocery chain Harris Teeter) and a Pure Oil gas station both opened in 1936. Merchants named this stretch of Central Avenue Charlotte's "Miracle Mile" because the variety of businesses meant that residents could shop within their own neighborhood for basic necessities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Lawyers Road School/Midwood Elementary School**

While Chatham Estates and adjacent neighborhoods were slow to grow in comparison to other Charlotte streetcar suburbs, the area had increased in population enough to warrant the establishment of an elementary school. Nearby residential developments such as Chantilly, platted in 1913 just off Central Avenue between Pecan Avenue and the Seaboard railroad tracks but also initially slow to grow, had swelled the population of the Central Avenue corridor. Children in the neighborhoods attended Elizabeth Elementary School, which had become overcrowded.

However, the United States was in the throes of the Great Depression, which had begun in October 1929. The Mecklenburg County Board of Education felt the financial pinch most acutely, with the yearly budget dropping 61% between the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 school years. Due to this budget cut, salaries were slashed, staff was laid off, the twelfth grade was discontinued, and the school term was lessened to eight months for the first time since 1882. With the population of Charlotte having exploded from 46,338 in 1920 to 82,675 in 1930, new schools were desperately needed, but funding was obviously in short supply.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

<sup>13</sup> Harry Harding, *The Charlotte City Schools* (Charlotte, NC: Public Library of Charlotte Mecklenburg County, 1966), 119-120.

In June 1933, Charlotte successfully petitioned the State School Commission to allow the creation of a school district for the city separate from that of Mecklenburg County, under jurisdiction of the state commission. An attempt to raise revenue through property tax valuations at 20 cents per \$100.00 was unsuccessful in August 1933, and city schools continued to operate on limited budgets. But a second election in April 1935 saw voters approve a 25 cent per \$100.00 in property value tax to fund city schools. With this infusion of funding, teacher salaries were increased, the twelfth grade reinstituted, and the school term was restored to nine months.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the budget crisis, the Charlotte city school system still needed more schools to serve its burgeoning population. In September 1933, the School Board took the necessary steps to get funds through the Public Works Administration for a building program. Schools approved for the building program were Lawyers Road, Eastover, and Glenwood (near Tuckaseegee Road in northwest Charlotte) elementary schools, a high school in Irwin Park, and additions to Wilmore School and Charlotte Technical High School. Cost of these new school buildings was estimated to be \$690,000.00, a high price necessary for the fire-resistant structures recommended by the Charlotte school superintendent. But the Mecklenburg County superintendent, who had been granted the power by the state school commission to make the budgetary decision, ordered a less-expensive building type to be used for all the schools at a cost of \$400,000.00.<sup>15</sup>

Among the approved new schools to be built was an eight-room elementary school on Central Avenue. Approximately 2.5 acres of land was purchased for \$2,700.00 from E.A. Cole, a founder and executive of the Cole Manufacturing Company located near Central and Pecan

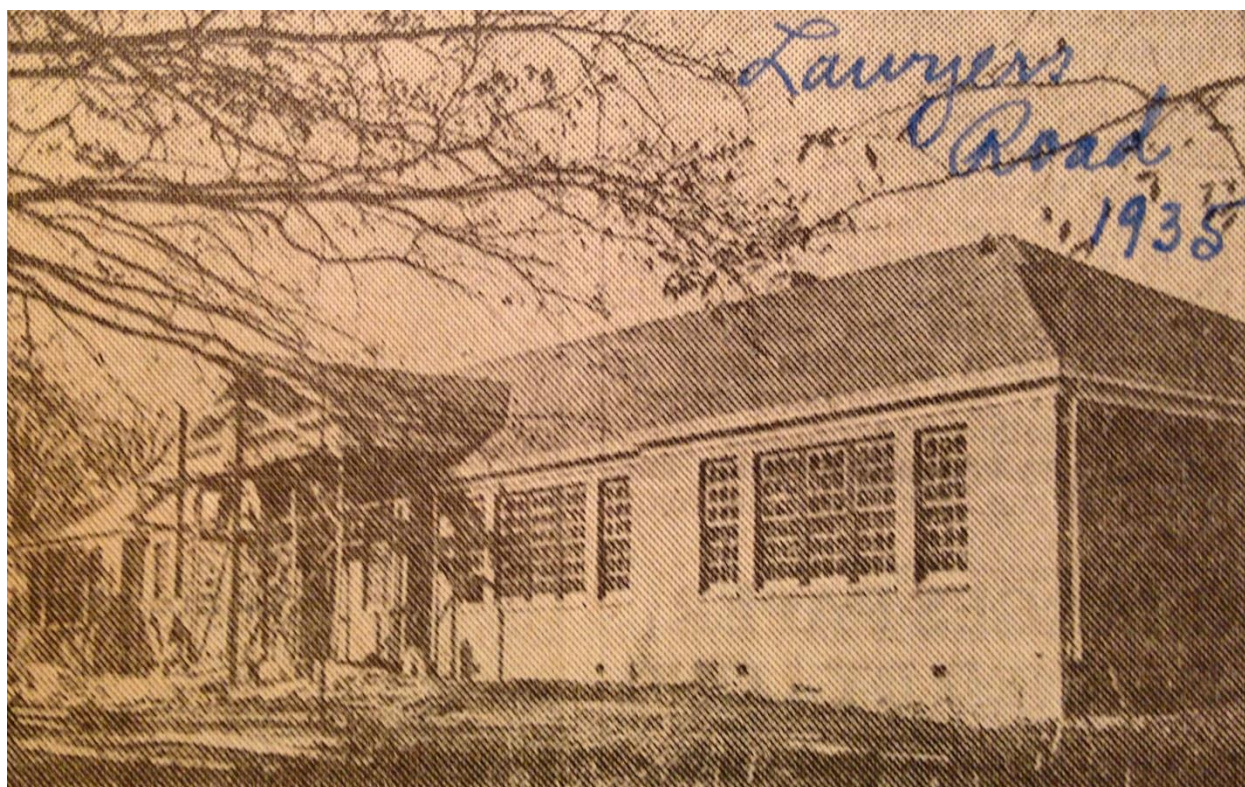
---

<sup>14</sup> Harding, 122-124

<sup>15</sup> Harding, 124-125.

Avenues along the railroad tracks in Plaza Midwood. Cole resided in a large mansion at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and The Plaza, next door to the new school site.<sup>16</sup>

Charlotte architect Willard G. Rogers was commissioned to design the new Lawyers Road School at an estimated cost of \$31,508.46. A native of Cincinnati, Rogers had formerly been employed with engineer Stuart Cramer as well as a partner with C.C. Hook from 1905 to 1916. Notable Hook and Rogers projects in Charlotte included the Egyptian-revival Masonic Temple as well as Chatham Estates-area Cole Manufacturing Plant and VanLandingham house. Later, Rogers operated his own firm, designing the Davidson Graded School gymnasium among other projects across North Carolina.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 3** Lawyers Road School under construction in 1935.

From Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

<sup>16</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 866, Page 127; Harding, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Mecklenburg County Board of Education Minutes, Book 6, Page 12, November 14, 1933; Michelle Michael, "Hook and Rogers," North Carolina Architects and Builders, 2009, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000269>, accessed April 5, 2016.

At the same time Lawyers Road School was being designed, the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh (1901-1977) was at work on Eastover Elementary School. Born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1901, Marsh studied architecture through correspondence courses and through work with his brother's architecture firm. Marsh practiced in Charlotte his entire career except for a brief period during World War II, when he was stationed in New York and Washington with the War Production Board. Between 1922 and 1964, Marsh designed several well-known Charlotte buildings, several residences, and many institutional structures. The most visible surviving structure of his is the main office of Mutual Savings and Loan at 330 South Tryon Street, which was completed in 1962.<sup>18</sup>

James A. Stenhouse (1910-1996), an architectural draftsman working for Marsh who had recently graduated from Georgia Tech University in Atlanta, was assigned Eastover as his first project out of college. Completed in two weeks' time, Eastover had six classrooms. The design was modified for Lawyers Road School to include two additional classrooms. Rogers remained the architect overseeing the Lawyers Road project, however. The reason for the use of modified Eastover plans for the school was most likely cost, since the estimate for the Marsh design was for about \$8,000 less than Rogers' design estimate.<sup>19</sup>

Lawyers Road School opened in fall 1935. Eva H. Burch (1895-1988) was assigned as the first principal of Lawyers Road School. She had previously served the same position at Parks Hutchison School on Graham Street.<sup>20</sup> [genealogy site says she was first female principal in NC]

---

<sup>18</sup> "Oasis Temple Designer, Marion Marsh, Dies at 76," *Charlotte Observer*, September 5, 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Lynn Morrill, "Eastover Elementary School History," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, <http://landmarkscommission.org/Eastover%20Elementary%20School%20History.htm>; City of Charlotte Application for Building Permit No. 952, July 25, 1934.

<sup>20</sup> "Idea of Reopening Midwood School Warms Hearts," *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1984; Harding, 128.



Lawyers Road School was an instant success—eighty students had to be turned away because enrollment was full. The new school was already inadequate to serve the number of students in the area. In November 1936, the citizens of Charlotte authorized a bond of \$584,000.00 to be used in the school building program of 1937. Out of this funding, Lawyers Road School was allotted \$18,000.00 for an addition to the building and \$1,780.00 for extra equipment. A new classroom wing was constructed at the northeast corner of the original building.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 4** The new two-story addition to Midwood Elementary School is seen in the background of the photo. "Open House Planned for School Section," *Charlotte Observer*, February 26, 1942.

On August 1, 1941, a fire damaged classrooms in the north wing of Midwood Elementary School (the name Lawyer's Road School was dropped in the early 1940s). While an inconvenience, especially considering the new school year would begin a little over a month, the

<sup>21</sup> Harding, 132-133.

fire came at a somewhat opportune time. Midwood Elementary had more students than it had space, with the enrollment of 592 students in spring 1942 being double the number of students just five years before. The school building program of 1941 remedied this by repairing the classrooms that were damaged by the fire as well as adding a new auditorium to the west of the original building and a two-story classroom wing at the northeast corner of the property.<sup>22</sup>

During the years following World War II, residential development across the United States rapidly expanded. Charlotte would double in population between 1940 and 1960, becoming a city of over 200,000 residents. The city faced a housing shortage in the late 1940s. Underdeveloped neighborhoods such as Midwood and nearby Chantilly began to fill up, and additional developments Eastern Retreat and Masonic Drive were platted and sold.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 5** Midwood School Orchestra, 1938-1939 school year. From Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Like many other elementary schools on the city limits, Midwood Elementary School was overcrowded. Many city and county schools were in need maintenance as well since building materials had been reserved for wartime efforts. Bonds for the funding of over \$10,000,000 in

<sup>22</sup> Harding, 143; "Open House Planned for School Section," *Charlotte Observer*, February 26, 1942.

<sup>23</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

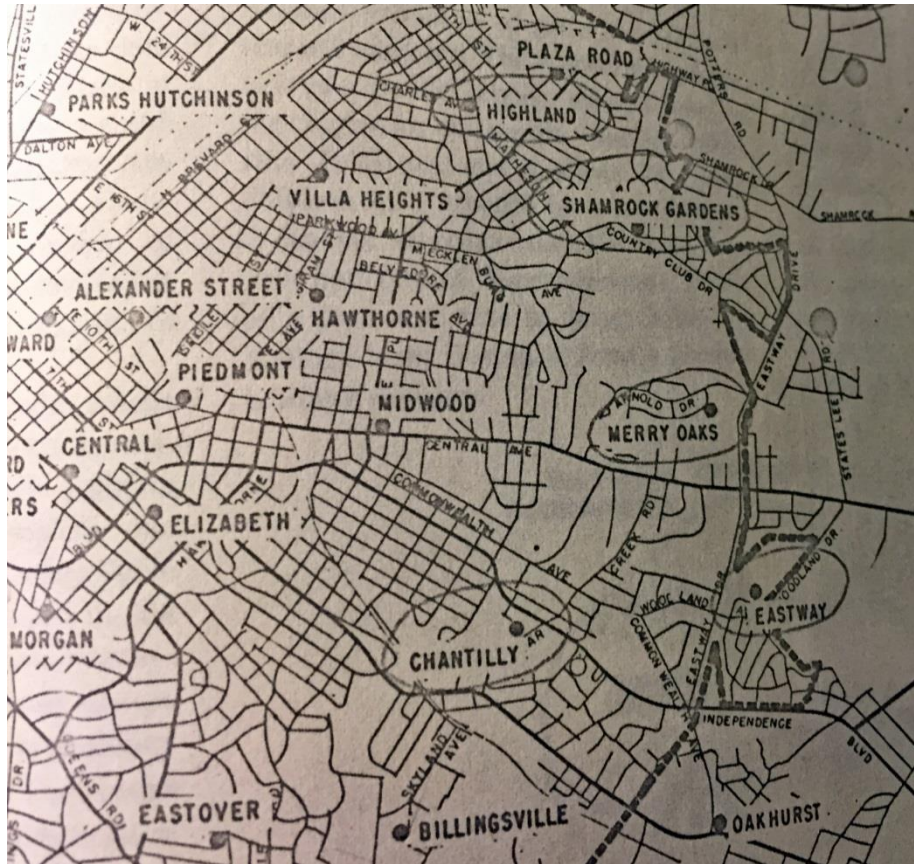
city and county improvements, of which nearly \$6,000,000 was earmarked for schools, were approved by voters on April 23, 1946. The building program of 1946-1949 looked to address these issues by building several new schools, including Chantilly Elementary School, Park Road Elementary School, Eastway Junior High School, and Myers Park High School. An expansion of Midwood designed by M.R. Marsh was completed in 1948. The two-story addition, which expanded the two-story addition made in 1942, included a new cafeteria, visual education room, and three classrooms as well as improvements in the heating system.<sup>24</sup>

But despite this additional space, Midwood continued to be crowded. A year after the addition, every available room in the school was dedicated to class space. The school nurse's office was made into a classroom. Louise Andrews taught her 39 third grade students on the stage of the school auditorium. But the auditorium was also used by the school orchestra during first period since the music room was occupied by another class. Mrs. Andrews's class could not be conducted while the orchestra was practicing, so the students would spend time in the library and playground until their class space was once again available.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> "City, County School Needs are Urgent," *Charlotte News*, April 15, 1946; Harding, 148-149; "Work Started or Contracted on 13 Projects," *Charlotte Observer*, May 28, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> "Schooling Comes Hard in Crowded Classes," *Charlotte Observer*, September 15, 1949.



**Figure 6** This 1956 map of shows the schools around Midwood Elementary. "The Individual School and the Community, Charlotte, N.C.," *Architectural Record* 120 (October 1956), 237.

The new schools designated in the building program of 1946-1949 began to open in the early 1950s. On February 10, 1950, Chantilly Elementary School opened on Briar Creek Road. The new school, also designed by M.R. Marsh, had been built to relieve overcrowding at Midwood and Elizabeth Elementary School. However, the new school opened to crowded conditions itself, and classes had to be held on other school campuses as well as nearby churches. A 10.3 acre tract between Eastway Drive and the Charlotte Country Club was purchased by the school board in 1952 for a new elementary school to relieve crowding at both Midwood Elementary and Plaza Road Elementary School, located north of Midwood near the North

Charlotte neighborhood. The new school, Merry Oaks Elementary School, would open in 1953.<sup>26</sup>

Although Midwood Elementary School had no new building additions after 1948, updates would be made periodically. As part of a system-wide program to update wiring and lighting, Midwood had its outdated lighting (though only about 15 years old) replaced with new fluorescent fixtures in 1951-1952. An expansion of the kitchen and cafeteria facilities was made in 1953.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 7** Miss Marion Price and her kindergarten class at Midwood Elementary School, 1958. Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte Mecklenburg County.

As residential development spread farther from downtown Charlotte in the 1960s and 1970s, Chatham Estates, Midwood, and other surrounding neighborhoods with their older homes became less desirable to homebuyers who desired newly built properties. In 1962 the city of Charlotte implemented a comprehensive zoning plan that targeted older neighborhoods, rezoning many areas from single-family homes to business and multi-family occupancies. As noted by Thomas Hanchett in his history of the area, “as original owners grew old and died, speculators

<sup>26</sup> “New Chantilly School Packed Opening Day,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 11, 1950; “City Purchases Tract for New School Plant,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 1, 1952.

<sup>27</sup> “Only Eight Schools Left in Relighting Program,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 9, 1951; “Permits Issued on 3 Schools,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1953.



bought up houses with the idea of running them down as rental property, then demolishing them to build new apartments and offices.”<sup>28</sup> It was during this time that the former E.A. Cole residence adjacent to Midwood Elementary at the corner of Central Avenue and The Plaza was razed in favor of a strip shopping center.

Both new residents to the area and older denizens sought to fight these changes. One method was to create a cohesive identity for the collection of neighborhoods that had grown over a fifty year period. A neighborhood group successfully fought against the proposed extension of Matheson Avenue through Club Acres. The group became permanent as the Plaza Midwood Neighborhood Association (PMNA), and the area was dubbed Plaza Midwood. PMNA organized activities and events such as the Miracle Mile Street Fair in October 1982 to feature the area’s commercial core and Plaza Midwood: A Neighborhood Heritage Celebration to highlight the history of the neighborhood.<sup>29</sup>

However, the decline of the Plaza Midwood area had taken its toll. Midwood Elementary School closed in June 1983 due to declining enrollment. At its prime in the 1950s, the school had 1,000 students, but during the 1982-1983 school year Midwood only had 272 students. A short year later, school superintendent Jay Robinson proposed reopening Midwood Elementary to relieve overcrowding at nearby Eastover Elementary School, but the plan was abandoned.<sup>30</sup>

With its closure, Midwood Elementary School began to deteriorate. The plaster on the walls peeled and broke and vandals broke many of the windows. Charlotte Mecklenburg

---

<sup>28</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

<sup>29</sup> Hanchett, Plaza Midwood; “Midwood Salutes Shops at Miracle Mile Street Fair,” *Charlotte News*, October 22, 1982; Plaza Midwood: A Neighborhood Heritage Celebration, brochure, Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood Association Records, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>30</sup> “Idea of Reopening Midwood School Warms Hearts,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1984.

Schools sought to utilize the building lest it fall too far into disrepair. The county department of social services used the former school as a site for distributing surplus food.<sup>31</sup>

In February 1985, an elementary school in Plaza Midwood was reborn once again, albeit briefly. An arson fire caused considerable damage to Albemarle Elementary School, and 300 second and third graders needed a new school. The abandoned Midwood building was only five miles away and was the only viable option. Getting the old building ready was a massive undertaking. The school had been left in decay for several years. After an initial inspection of the building, work started almost immediately the following Saturday afternoon. Over seventy workers had until Monday night to have the building prepared for students on Tuesday morning at an estimated cost of \$10,000 in overtime pay to workers and \$6,000.00 for materials.<sup>32</sup>

After Albemarle Elementary School had been repaired, the former Midwood Elementary became home to the Dolly Tate Teen-Age Parents Services School (TAPS), a program for teenage mothers in the Charlotte Mecklenburg school system. TAPS was established in 1971 to provide expecting female students a supportive learning environment and encourage them to remain enrolled following childbirth. Also, the under-utilized cafeteria at Midwood Elementary became the preparation site for a hot lunch program for seniors in eastern Mecklenburg County, Mint Hill, and Matthews in 1986.<sup>33</sup>

In 1992 the campus became Midwood High School, an alternative school aimed at drop-out prevention. TAPS, which shared the campus, provided in-school daycare for students, and CMS implemented the Mastery Learning Program to provide flexible class schedules.

Placement of the alternative school in the former Midwood site was unpopular with some

---

<sup>31</sup> "Midwood School Restoration 'A Miracle,'" *Charlotte News*, February 19, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "Murphy Drops Plan to Close TAPS," *Charlotte Observer*, April 9, 1992; "Mint Hill Gets Hot Lunch Program," *Charlotte Observer*, December 28, 1986.

community residents, who complained that students parked on side streets, loitered at local businesses, and verbally harassed residents. The school closed in June 2011.<sup>34</sup>

Once again, the former Midwood Elementary School was vacant. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools decided to utilize the building as a school for students who needed an additional year to transition from middle to high school, termed the Grade 8.5 curriculum. In October 2006, the school board accepted a bid by Hendrick Construction Company to renovate 22 classrooms and make major improvements to plumbing, roofing, and other elements of the building at a cost of approximately \$2.3 million.<sup>35</sup>

On January 27, 2013, the Midwood International and Cultural Center officially opened in the former Midwood Elementary School. The primary tenant was International House, a non-profit which encourages cultural diversity and immigrant acceptance into the Charlotte community founded in 1981. The following year, the Light Factory Contemporary Museum of Photography also relocated to the former school. Established in 1972, the Light Factory hosts traveling exhibits and offers photography classes.<sup>36</sup>

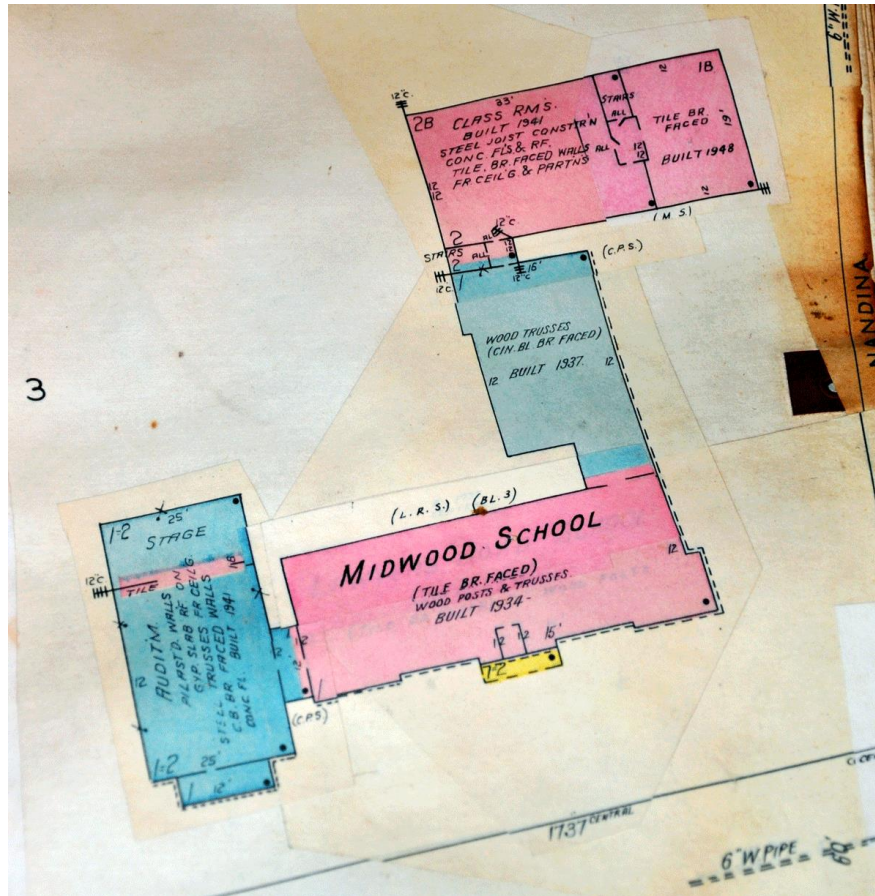
---

<sup>34</sup> “Kids Voting,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 27, 1992; “Relations Sour Between School’s Evening Program, Its Neighbors,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 2, 1993; “The Student She Knew It Was Hers to Achieve,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 2, 1993; “CMS Shuffles Its Listing of Needy Schools,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 20, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> “Contracts for Projects at 3 Schools Are Approved,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 15, 2006; “Old Midwood School to be Used in New Role,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 15, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> “International House Now in Plaza Midwood,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 3, 2013; “Longtime Backers Lead Light Factory Revival,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 2014.

## Architectural Description



**Figure 8** This 1951 Sanborn fire map of Midwood Elementary School shows the various additions made to the school throughout the years. Sanborn Map Company, *Charlotte, North Carolina*, Scale 50 feet = 1 foot, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1951, 222.

Midwood Elementary School, designed by the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh, is an important example of the Traditional Revival architectural style that was used for many institutional buildings in Charlotte during the 1930s and 1940s. The school is located on Central Avenue and Nandina Street in Plaza Midwood, a collection of streetcar suburbs developed in the early twentieth century. The area experienced a major decline in the 1970s and 1980s, but today Plaza Midwood is a vibrant, diverse area of Charlotte known for his historic homes and variety of businesses.

Midwood Elementary School is situated on a 2.54 acre parcel. The topography of the property is level. The building is made up of four distinct masses forming an exaggerated L

shape. The original building faces Central Avenue, as does the circa 1941 auditorium located to the west. The circa 1937 one-story addition is attached to the original building perpendicular to its northeast corner. Perpendicular to this wing of Midwood Elementary is a multi-level building—a three-level portion added circa 1941 and a two-level portion circa 1948.

Midwood Elementary retains integrity as an example of the smaller, less elaborate architecture that became popular for schools during and after the Great Depression. The original structure is the long, one story rectangular building constructed circa 1935. The front of the building has a projecting portico with four columns. Inside the gable end of the portico is an octagonal attic window. Under the portico are two large twelve-over-twelve windows.



The majority of the roof is gabled with asphalt shingles excepting the flat-roofed classroom addition at the far northeast corner of the property. The school is sheathed in red brick, which is laid with four rows of common bond and one row of Flemish bond brickwork. This pattern is repeated up the elevation and is capped with soldier rows. Quoins adorn the corners of the auditorium, later converted to a gymnasium, and the multi-level classroom addition. The majority of the building is one story except the classroom additions, which are two stories. The windows used in the two-story addition are ten over ten. There is one external brick chimney on the original structure and two porches.





Aside from the front portico, there is an uncovered gabled porch that connects to the gabled end of the auditorium/gymnasium addition. This portico also has an octagon shaped attic vent above the door, and above the door is a neatly carved cornice. The predominant window type of Midwood Elementary is double-hung nine-over-nine in a variety of groupings. The large arched windows of the gym have been bricked in with metal vents installed in their place.



**9** View of chimney.



**10** View of side portico.



**11** View of quoins.

The interior of Midwood Elementary remains unchanged. There are a total of twenty-four classrooms. Many of the doors to the classrooms have retained the large eight-pane transoms.