

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Historic Landmarks Commission



Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight

1201 The Plaza
Charlotte, North Carolina 28205

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
Local Landmark Designation Report
Prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Stewart Gray

Name And Location Of The Property. Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight is located at 1201 The Plaza in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Name And Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.

City of Charlotte
c/o Real Estate Division
600 East Fourth Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Representative Photographs Of The Property. The report contains representative photographs of the property.

Current Deed Book Reference To The Property. The current deed to the property is not listed. The tax parcel number of the property is 08117627. The property to be designated consists of 0.662 acres.

A Brief Historic Sketch Of The Property. The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

A Brief Physical Description Of The Property. The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

Documentation Of Why And In What Ways The Property Meets The Criteria For Designation Set Forth In N.C.G.S. § 160D-945.

1. Statement of Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/or Cultural Importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight possesses special significance in terms of its special local historical and architectural significance. As further detailed herein, the Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:
 - a. The architect of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight was Marion Rossiter “Steve” Marsh (1893-1977), who practiced architecture in Charlotte from 1922 until his retirement in 1964. Marsh was an architect of local and regional importance. He is especially remembered for his design of institutional and commercial buildings, including schools, public housing, movie theaters, retail stores, and warehouses. The Colonial Revival styled Fire Station Number Eight is one of two firehouses Marsh designed in Charlotte and the only one that remains in active service, the other being the mid-century modern style former Charlotte Fire Station Number Two. There is no record that Marsh designed firehouses elsewhere.
 - b. The house-like design of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight is unique among the firehouses built in Charlotte in the decades immediately following World War II. Other Charlotte firehouses of this era are

modernist style architecture.

- c. William Hendrix Palmer, who served as Charlotte Fire Chief from 1927 until 1948, was a persistent advocate for assuring that Fire Station Number Eight would be sympathetic to the built environment of the surrounding neighborhood. Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight therefore stands as a physical reminder of Chief Palmer's illustrious career.
2. Statement of Its Integrity. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the description included herein demonstrates that the exterior and grounds of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight meet this criterion of special significance, and therefore recommends the exterior of the structure and all the property associated with the tax parcel for historic preservation.
- a. Location – HIGH: Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight remains at its original site of construction within Charlotte's Plaza Midwood neighborhood and thereby retains a high degree of integrity of location.
 - b. Design – HIGH: Built in 1949, the station was specifically designed through the collaborative efforts of Charlotte Fire Chief William H. Palmer and celebrated local architect M. R. Marsh to resemble a Colonial Revival style home in order to be sympathetic to and in keeping with the surrounding built environment of the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. A 1999 two-story Postmodern-style addition was carefully designed to minimize its visual impact on the building's original principal section, including the use of a low-pitched hipped roof and a short recessed hyphen connecting the structure's two sections. The addition was also situated so that its north elevation is obscured by the garage. The building thereby retains a high degree of integrity as to its design.
 - c. Setting – HIGH: Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight also retains a high degree of integrity as to setting. It is situated within a substantially intact period streetscape, comprised of many of the contemporary and older residential and commercial structures that existed during and prior to its 1949 construction. The original design philosophy of the station – to blend into the streetscape of its mid-20th century neighborhood – thereby continues to resonate into the 21st century.
 - d. Materials – MEDIUM/HIGH: As to its materials, Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight has a medium to high degree of integrity. A 1999 renovation of the building included replacement of the station's original windows and doors. Otherwise, as the station's primary building has not undergone significant change since its original construction, much of its original material has been retained.
 - e. Workmanship – HIGH: The durability of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight – especially in light of its constant and ongoing use as an active firehouse for more than seventy-five years – as well as the absence of any significant deterioration, indicates the skill and quality of the builder's

workmanship, and hence its high degree of integrity of workmanship.

- f. Feeling – HIGH: In addition to its original location and setting, situated within a substantially intact period streetscape and surrounded by several historic buildings and features from and prior to its initial construction, Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight maintains a high integrity of integrity of feeling due to its historic purpose as a hub for community service via the close proximity of the historic neighborhood that it has supported and protected for the past seventy-six years.
- g. Association – HIGH: Uniquely associated with two significant 20th century Charlotteans – nationally-known Fire Chief William H. Palmer and noted architect M. R. Marsh – Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight’s high degree of integrity of association is further bolstered by the historic consistency of the streetscape and its built environment, as well as the proximity of the station’s original and ongoing primary beneficiary, the historic neighborhood of Plaza Midwood.

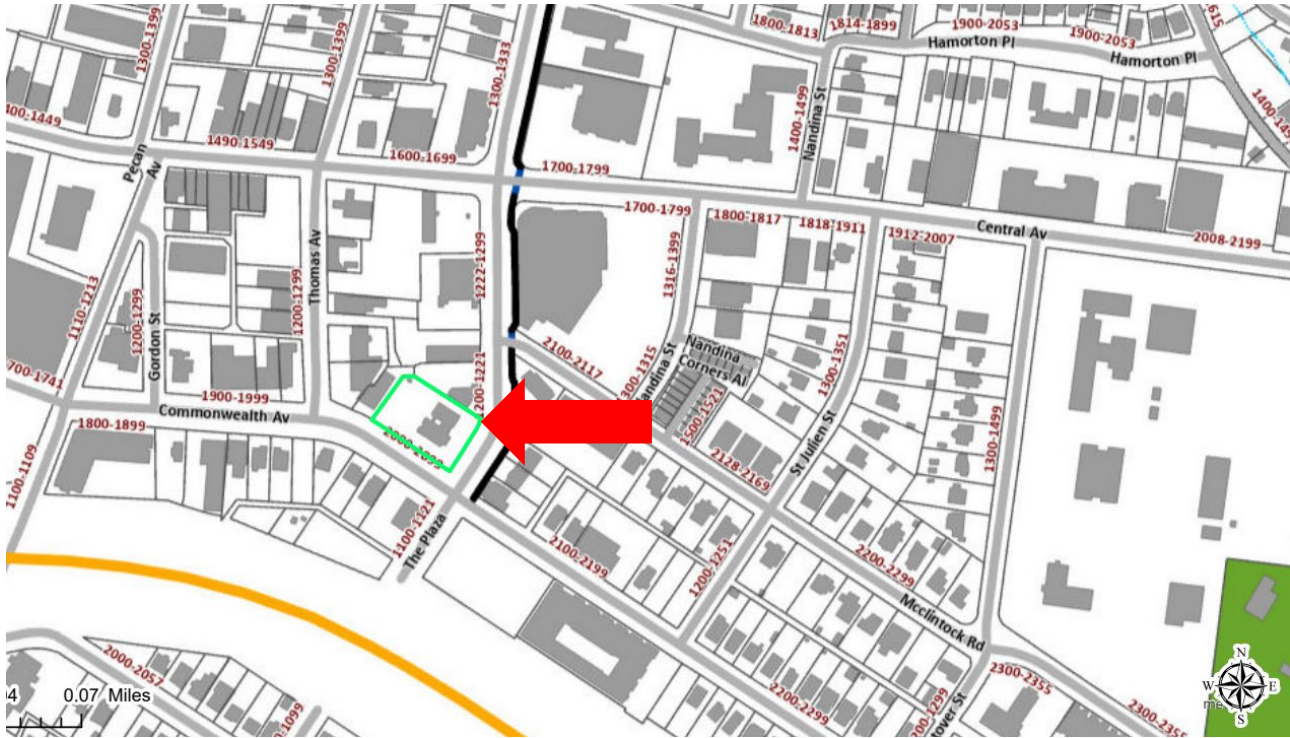
Recommendation for Designation. The Commission recommends the exterior of the house and all of the property associated with the tax parcel for historic designation.

Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property that becomes a designated “historic landmark.” As of January 2025, the current appraised value of the Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight property is \$2,824,500. The property is currently exempt from the payment of property taxes.

Original Date Of The Preparation Of This Report: January 29, 2018

Prepared By: Dan L. Morrill and Stewart Gray (updated by Tommy Warlick, October 2025)

Maps of the Property: Maps of the property are provided below.



Source for above images: Mecklenburg County Land Use and Environmental Services Agency, Polaris 3G database, <https://polaris3g.mecklenburgcountync.gov/>.

A Brief History Of The Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight

Dr. Dan L. Morrill
January 29, 2018
(updated October 2025)



Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight (1949)

The special significance of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight, which opened in April 1949 at 1201 The Plaza, can be understood within the context of the evolutionary nature of fire stations erected by the Charlotte Fire Department since its establishment in 1887.¹ Fire Station Number Eight also has special significance because its house-like design is unique among the firehouses erected in Charlotte during the first two decades following World War Two. Fire Station Number Eight was designed by Marion Rossiter “Steve” Marsh (1893-1977), an architect of local and regional significance. Finally, Fire Chief William Hendrix Palmer (1884-1955) led the effort to assure that Fire Station Number Eight would be sympathetic to the surrounding built environment of the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. It therefore stands as a testimonial to Chief Palmer’s place in the history of the Charlotte Fire Department.

Fire stations occupy a place of special importance in the built environment. Their essential purpose is to house the equipment and personnel needed to fight fires in the neighborhoods they serve. According to former Charlotte Fire Chief Jon Hannan, a “primary concern” in the design of fire stations “is to get the truck out the door as quickly as possible.” Hannan also believes that fire stations have symbolic meaning. “Fire stations need to convey permanence and reliability,”

¹ “New Plaza Fire Station Carolinas Finest, Opens Today,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 25, 1949, 12A.

Hannan contends. They “need to look solid, substantial.”² Historian Rebecca Zurier speaks to this point in her book *The American Firehouse: An Architectural and Social History*. “Because fire stations have been linked with the popular image of firemen and fire engines,” she contends, “they often have had an extra element of humor or fantasy.”³ The Charlotte Fire Department has demonstrated its commitment to both the utilitarian and the symbolic components of fire station design throughout the Department’s history.

Fire stations are more than a workplace. Firefighters give nicknames to the fire stations where they work. A nickname, says Hannan, “is an identifier of the attachment they have for the station they are assigned to.” Fire stations become a “first home” for many firefighters. “We’re going to lock them in a building for one-third of their life,” Hannan explains. “You have no secrets in the fire service.” “If you have trouble at home,” says Hannan, “or your kids are in trouble, the guys or gals in the station are going to know it.” Firefighters sleep in the fire station, eat in the fire station, bathe in the fire station, cut the grass, clip the hedges, and maintain the equipment. Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight is nicknamed the “White House” – an obvious reference to its residential appearance.⁴



Fire engines in Charlotte were initially hand-pulled, later horse-pulled, until 1911, when the City ordered its first gasoline-powered fire truck.⁵ No Charlotte fire stations survive from the hand-

² Interview of Jon Hannan by Dr. Dan. L. Morrill, August 10, 2017 (hereinafter “Interview”).

Thanks to Jon Hannan for supplying photographs of former Charlotte Fire Station Number Nine and former Charlotte Fire Station Number Ten.

³ Rebecca Zurier, *The American Firehouse: An Architectural and Social History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982), 229.

⁴ Interview; Pat Borden Gubbins, “New fire station in northwest to rise by summer 2000,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 4, 1999, 3M.

⁵ Automobile Fire Truck Will Be Purchased; Board Considers Paving Matters, Sewerage Systems,” *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, November 23, 1911, 7.

pulled era, and only one – the original Fire Station Number Two in the Dilworth neighborhood – is extant from the horse-pulled era.⁶ Opening on South Boulevard in 1909, Charlotte Fire Station Number Two, like its counterparts in other communities, was essentially a red brick horse barn with large arched wooden doors and sleeping space for the firefighters on the second floor. It lacked the extravagant embellishment of fire stations built in the late 1800s. “As if to present a no-nonsense exterior to the public,” writes Rebecca Zurier, “the stations designed for the new, professional fire departments followed the austere forms of factory and commercial architecture.”⁷



Original Charlotte Fire Station Number Two (1909)



Fire Chief William Hendrix Palmer Atop a Horse-Drawn Charlotte Steamer

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a major increase in the number of fire stations in fast-growing Charlotte. No longer required to accommodate horses, these stations were smaller than those erected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Still built of brick and two stories tall, they were configured to blend into the streetscapes in which they were located. They occupied small lots. Four are extant: Fire Station Number Four (1926) on West Fifth Street, Fire Station Number Five (1929) on Wesley Heights Way, Fire Station Number Six (1929) on Laurel Avenue, and Fire Station Number Seven (1935) on North Davidson Street. Designed by architect Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938), all are revivalist in configuration. Fire Station Number Five has a tiled roof overhang at the parapet. It has corner columns with embellished capitals at both ends of the front façade. Fire Station Number Six, located on the edge of Charlotte’s upscale Eastover neighborhood, is especially lavish in its architectural detail. The front façade is faced with random fieldstones, thereby allowing it to merge architecturally with the bungalows that dominate the adjoining streetscape. Stone arches highlight both the two engine bays and a bank of five windows that are sheltered by a tiled roof overhang with modillions. These and other decorative details make Charlotte Fire Station Number Six “a perfect companion to the surrounding residential fabric.”⁸

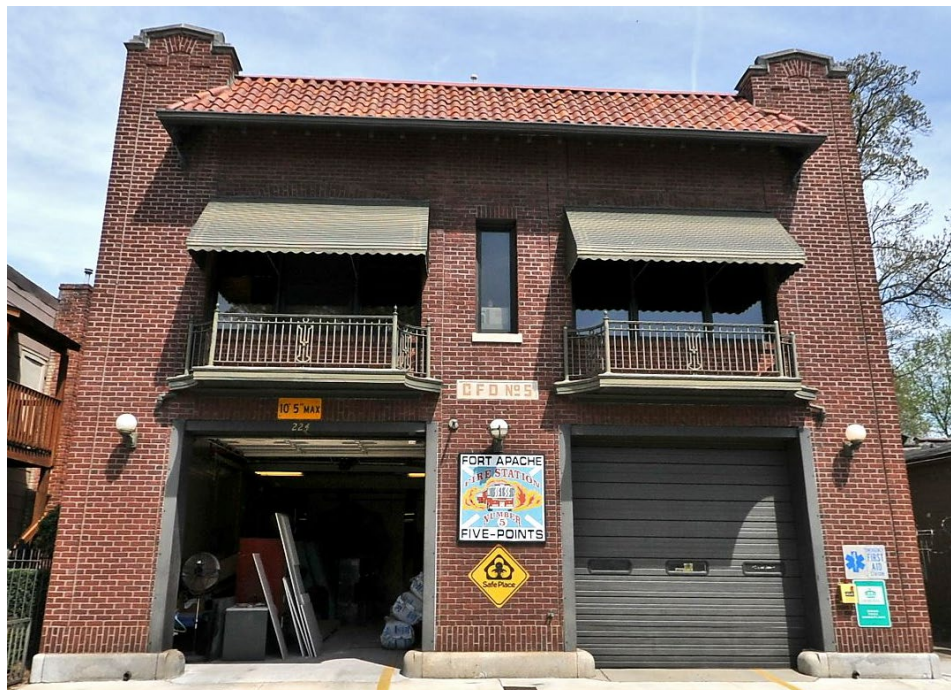
⁶ For a history of Fire Station Number Two, see Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Charlotte Fire Station #2,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/south-inner/charlotte-fire-station-2>, accessed September 16, 2025.

⁷ Zurier, *The American Firehouse*, 81.

⁸ See Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Charlotte Fire Station #6,”



Charlotte Fire Station Number Four (1926) above, and
Charlotte Fire Station Number Five (1929) below.



<https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/south-inner/charlotte-fire-station-no-6>,
accessed September 16, 2025.



Charlotte Fire Station Number Six (1929) above, and
Charlotte Fire Station Number Seven (1935) below.



The post-World War II years saw a major change in the design of many public buildings in Charlotte, including fire stations. Rebecca Zurier calls this time a period of “architectural experiment.” Historian Ernest H. Wood III agrees. He says that a “widespread spirit of experimentation” took hold in North Carolina architecture after 1945.⁹

Fire Station Number Eight at 1201 The Plaza was the first fire station to open in Charlotte after World War II. The architect was Marion Rossiter “Steve” Marsh (1893-1977). A native of Jacksonville, Florida, Marsh acquired his training as an architect and engineer by taking correspondence courses from Columbia University and working in his brother’s architectural firm in Jacksonville. He came to Charlotte in 1916 to become chief draftsman in James M. McMichael’s (1870-1944) architectural office and later was chief architect for a chemical engineering firm before forming his own practice in 1922. M. R. Marsh retired in 1964 after having gained the reputation of being one of the most influential and successful architects and engineers in Charlotte and its environs. In August 1938, the *Charlotte Observer* described Marsh as a “prominent Charlotte architect who has drawn plans for some of the main buildings in the Carolinas.”¹⁰



Marion Rossiter “Steve” Marsh (1893-1977)



Catherine Lavonne Marsh (1897-1948)

Marsh’s lifestyle reflected his status as a member of Charlotte’s social elite. He and his wife, Catherine Lavonne Maxwell Marsh (1897-1948), resided in the affluent Myers Park suburb of Charlotte, first on Dartmouth Place and after 1928 on Hertford Road.¹¹ Marsh was a member of

⁹ Zurier, *The American Firehouse*, 237; Ernest H. Wood, III, “The Opportunities Are Unlimited: Architects and Builders since 1945,” in Catherine W. Bisher, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood III, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 353.

¹⁰ “Fire Station Plans Offered,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 7, 1947, 7; Thomas W. Hanchett, updated by Catherine W. Bisher, “Marsh, Marion R. (1893-1977),” in *North Carolina Architects & Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000535>, accessed September 16, 2025; “Marsh Named Architect for ‘Y’ Modernization,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 5, 1938, section 2, page 1.

¹¹ 1929 *Sanborn Insurance Charlotte*, Vol 1., Plate 506; *Charlotte City Directory*, 1926, 518; “St. Peter’s Circles To

the Charlotte Country Club, where he spent many hours playing golf, a game at which he excelled. He was a charter member of Christ Episcopal Church. Marsh and his wife, whom he married in 1917, routinely entertained guests at stylish social gatherings in their home. Mrs. Marsh was a housewife and mother. She and her lady friends gathered often at the Charlotte Country Club to play bridge.¹² M. R. Marsh and his wife lived well.¹³



The Myers Park home of Marion and Lavonne Marsh (circa 1929) at 1642 Hertford Road

Meet Monday Afternoon,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 1, 1931, section 2, page 4; Interview of Marion Bruner by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, November 10, 2018 (hereinafter “Bruner Interview”). Marsh’s self-designed Hertford Road house is also a local designated historic landmark. Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Marion R. and Lavonne Marsh House,” <https://mecknc.widen.net/s/mt6lnzkrvq/marsh-house-designation-report>, accessed September 29, 2025; Charlotte City Council Ordinance Book 67, Page 536 (November 25, 2024).

¹² “Club Tournaments,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 9, 1931, 18; “Christ Church Plans Building Fund Campaign,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 15, 1944, section 2, page 1; “Mrs. Marsh to Give Bridge Party,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 21, 1924, section 3, page 1; “Mrs. M.R. Marsh Gives Pretty Luncheon Here,” *Charlotte News*, April 14, 1929, section 2, page 1; *Mecklenburg County Marriage License*, August 11, 1917. Catherine Lavonne Marsh died at home of a heart attack on October 28, 1948, at age 51. *Mecklenburg County Certificate of Death 22868*.

¹³ This writer interviewed Marion Bruner (1951-Present), M. R. Marsh’s granddaughter. She remembers her grandfather as a consummate “Southern Gentleman.” “He always wore a dress shirt and a tie. I never saw him in anything else,” says Ms. Bruner. Her grandfather was “very formal” but had a “great sense of humor.” He was a skillful storyteller. For example, one evening when pineapple was served at dinner, Marsh convinced his guests that he owned a pineapple plantation in Hawaii. Bruner remembers that her grandparents “used to have quite a number of parties and go out quite a bit.” “They both liked to go out and to entertain and to have people to their home.” Marsh was an avid golfer. Every January he and a friend traveled to Cuba and spent the entire month on the links. He would also purchase Cuban cigars. “He loved his cigars,” Ms. Bruner recalls. During Prohibition, when the production and sale of whiskey was illegal, Marsh found a way to enjoy a cocktail or mixed drink. “When my grandfather built the house on Hertford Road, in the den behind the bookcase,” says Bruner, “he had a secret compartment built, and that’s where he kept his booze. It was delivered to him by the lady who did the laundry.” M. R. Marsh typically introduced himself as “Steve Marsh.” Bruner explains why. When Catherine Marsh met her future husband on a blind date, he was introduced to her as “Marion Marsh.” She told him that she did not like the name and stated that she would call him “Steve Marsh.” The name stuck. Catherine Marsh died of a heart attack in the Marsh home on Hertford Road. She and M. R. Marsh were having dinner, and she told her husband that she was not feeling well. She went to her bedroom on the second floor. M. R. Marsh checked on her a few minutes later and found her dead. M. R. Marsh never regularly attended Christ Episcopal Church thereafter. Bruner Interview. This writer is indebted to Marion Bruner for supplying photographs of her grandparents and her mother.



Advertisement, *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1923, B10.

M. R. Marsh advertised himself as an “architect and engineer.” He was licensed in both professions. Marsh was considered an expert who understood the impact of technological innovations on building design. As early as 1921, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Charlotte Chapter of the American Association of Engineers. In 1938, he was appointed to a committee to upgrade the electrical code of the City of Charlotte. Marsh had won second prize for designing the “best wired and lighted retail” store in the Southeast. In March 1923, Marsh presided over a meeting of the Charlotte Engineers Club about the advantages of reinforced concrete. That same year he prepared plans for the first apartment building in Charlotte that contained an electric elevator. In an address to the Charlotte Rotary Club on March 17, 1931, discussing his twenty-five-year professional career, Marsh enumerated what he considered the major trends in the practice of architecture. He told his audience, “Application of modern methods and materials and the trend of American business has brought elevators, plumbing, electrical apparatus, and acoustical materials into the modern architectural picture.” He went on to stress the importance of an architect’s “thorough knowledge of business and the ability to advise a client in the matter of financing, borrowing money, etc.”¹⁴ Marsh insisted that his approach to developing and implementing architectural plans was practical, up-to-date, and cost effective.

Steve Marsh was an astute businessman who consistently emphasized budgetary issues when overseeing projects. James Stenhouse (1910-1996), who worked for Marsh in the 1930s, commented on Marsh’s business acumen, telling the *Charlotte Observer* that “Marsh was paid 6% of the construction cost” for the design of Eastover Elementary School (1935), a project that Stenhouse (a young draftsman in Marsh’s office at the time) actually completed. “It must have been the all-time profit margin. That’s how he managed to play golf all day and drive two Cadillacs during the Depression.”¹⁵ Like many other architects in Charlotte, Marsh depended mostly upon

¹⁴ Advertisement, *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1923, B10; “Complete Program for the Engineers’ Banquet,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 24, 1921, 10; “Electric Code Is Discussed,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 8, 1938, section 2, page 3; “M. R. Marsh Awarded Prize,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 1, 1931, section 2, page 1; “Engineers To Meet,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 12, 1923, 4; “Big Apartment To Cost \$70,000,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 27, 1923, 4; “Rotary Listens To Shop Talk,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 18, 1931, 6.

¹⁵ Lew Powell, “Eastover’s 3rd-Graders Meet History Up Close And Personal,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 19, 1982, 5C. James A. Stenhouse was a charter member of the Charlotte- Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

governmental contracts for his survival economically in the 1930s. “He did talk about how in the 1930s during the Depression getting those public work jobs really saved him,” says his granddaughter, Marion Bruner. “He got contracts to prepare plans for schools,” including Eastover School. According to Bruner, Marsh “designed Fairview Homes and some other public housing projects.”²⁸ He was also named the North Carolina administrator of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), a Federal New Deal program to document historic buildings and sites.²⁹ During World War II, Marsh served in the Construction Division of the Federal War Production Board, headquartered in New York City.¹⁶



Eastover Elementary School (1935) above, and
Coca-Cola Bottling Company (1930) below.



M. R. Marsh designed an impressive and diverse list of buildings in Charlotte and its environs during his 42-year career. He would take his grandchildren on tours of Charlotte to see the

He was an early and forceful advocate of historic preservation in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

¹⁶ Bruner Interview; Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Midwood Elementary School,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/plaza-midwood/midwood-elementary-school>, accessed September 16, 2025; “Advertisement for Bids,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 27, 1939, section 4, page 12; “State Architects Are To Get CWA Work,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 3, 1934, 9; “WPB Official Visits Family In Charlotte,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 13, 1943, section 1, page 10.

structures he had fashioned. While houses were consistently part of his portfolio, Marsh is best known for the commercial and institutional buildings he designed.¹⁷ The Coca-Cola Bottling Company building on West Morehead Street “was his baby,” says Bruner.¹⁸ Marsh was also the architect of the Builders Building, the Charlotte Cadillac Building, the Myers Park Branch Public Library, and the Liggetts Drug Building on the Square, plus many more. The Coca-Cola Bottling Company building, the Builders Building, and the Charlotte Cadillac Building have all been designated as local historic landmarks.¹⁹ His training as an engineer allowed him to design buildings that required technical expertise, such as movie theaters. He was the architect for the Imperial Theater on South Tryon Street, the Plaza Theater on Central Avenue, and the Astor Theater on 36th Street in North Charlotte.²⁰

M. R. Marsh was the architect of two fire stations in Charlotte, both of which opened in 1949. His design for Fire Station Number Two on South Boulevard, which is no longer an active firehouse, was in keeping with the contemporary modern look of the great majority of post-World War Two fire stations. It is a two-story poured-in-place concrete structure that contains no embellishments that harken to the past.²¹ Marsh took a very different approach in his design of Fire Station Number Eight.

¹⁷ For examples of Marsh’s early house designs, see “Permit For Parsonage Of Trinity Methodist Issued,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 29, 1923, 4, and “Building Permits Total \$18,985 Here Yesterday,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 3, 1923, 5.

¹⁸ Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Coca-Cola Bottling Plant,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/west-inner/coca-cola-bottling-plant>, accessed September 16, 2025.

Marion Bruner says that her grandfather designed several houses on Hertford Road that he sold to “people he liked.” Bruner Interview. For other houses Marsh designed, see “Public Buildings,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 9, 1925, B6; “Permits Issued For Five Homes,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 6, 1936, section 2, page 2; “Many Building Jobs To Get Under Way,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 2, 1937, section 1, page 14.

¹⁹ Charlotte City Council Ordinance Book 36, Page 377 (March 23, 1988); Charlotte City Council Ordinance Book 53, Page 141 (November 15, 2004); Charlotte City Council Ordinance Book 53, Page 636 (June 20, 2005); Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Builders Building,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/uptown-charlotte/builders-building>, accessed September 16, 2025; Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Carolina Cadillac Company,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/south-inner/carolina-cadillac-company>, accessed September 16, 2025; “Cadillac Home Work of Marsh,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1927, section 4, page 8; “New Store For Square,” August 5, 1945, section 1, page 1; Bruner Interview.

²⁰ “Elegant New Theater Ready For Charlotte People Monday,” *Charlotte News*, February 17, 1935, section 4, page 1; “Modern New Theater Will Open Tonight,” *Charlotte News*, September 18, 1941, 15; “New Theater,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 30, 1947, section 2, page 1.

²¹ Dick Young, “Plaza Fire Station To Be In Operation Around Feb. 1,” *Charlotte News*, November 20, 1948, section 2, page 1; “Old Gives Way To New Station,” *Charlotte News*, May 12, 1949, section 2, page 1.



The Marsh-designed Charlotte Fire Station Number Two (1948)
1215 South Boulevard

On March 11, 1946, the Charlotte City Council passed an ordinance to seek voter approval to spend \$112, 500 “for the erection of new fire stations.” The citizens of Charlotte backed this expenditure in a bond referendum on April 23, 1946, by a margin of nearly three to one.²² On the recommendation of Fire Chief William Hendrix Palmer (1884-1955), City Council selected M. R. Marsh in August 1946 to be the architect “to draw up plans for two new fire stations to be erected when materials are available.” The terms of the contract were approved on September 10, 1946. Marsh, in keeping with his standard practice, received 6 percent of the total project costs as his compensation. One fire station was to be constructed at The Plaza and Commonwealth Avenue, and a second on South Boulevard.²³

Chief Palmer played a pivotal role in the design of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight. Commonly known as Hendrix Palmer, he was a notable person in the history of the Charlotte Fire Department. A native of York, South Carolina, Palmer was a Charlotte firefighter for 44 years and served as Fire Chief from 1927 until 1948. Palmer was recognized internationally as an innovator in firefighting. He was twice elected president of the North Carolina Firemen’s Association. In 1940, Palmer became president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. Understanding the importance of training for firefighters, Palmer was instrumental in obtaining Federal funding for the establishment of a training school, the Palmer Fire School, on East Seventh Street, built in 1938-

²² Charlotte City Council Minute Book 31, page 328-29 (March 11, 1946); “School and Essential Services Bonds Voted,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 24, 1946, 1A. The vote was 4,028 in favor and 1,373 against the measure. Charlotte City Council Minute Book 31, page 379 (April 25, 1946).

²³ “Chief Palmer Favors Architect’s Rendition,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 13, 1946, section 2, page 1; Charlotte City Council Minute Book 31, page 455 (August 13, 1946); Charlotte City Council Minute Book 31, page 475 (September 10, 1946).

1940. The Palmer Fire School became a designated local historic landmark in 1990. It was his leadership that no doubt prompted a sensitively designed fire station in what was then the Chantilly neighborhood. The “Chantilly unit is planned to resemble a private residence,” declared the *Charlotte Observer*. Indeed, the *Observer* reported, Fire Station Number Eight “may be the first such unit in America designed to harmonize completely with its residential surroundings.”²⁴

A calamitous fire that destroyed Atlanta’s Winecoff Hotel and resulted in 119 fatalities on December 7, 1946, prompted many municipalities to expedite improvements in fire protection.²⁵ Charlotte was no exception. On December 9th, Charlotte City Manager Henry A. Yancey met with Fire Chief Palmer and M. R. Marsh to discuss the prospect of accelerating the preparation of construction drawings for the two approved fire stations.⁴³ The Charlotte City Council, insisting that the fire stations were “urgently needed,” approved a motion on December 17, 1946, stipulating that the fire houses be “built without a further extended delay.”²⁶



M. R. Marsh released this rendering of Fire Station Number Eight in January 1947.
Charlotte Observer, January 1, 1947, B1.

Marsh delivered the final construction drawings for the two fire stations to City Manager Yancey

²⁴ Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department, “Palmer Fire School,” <https://hl.mecknc.gov/Properties/Designated-Historic-Landmarks/charlotte/elizabeth/palmer-fire-school>, accessed September 16, 2025; Charlotte City Council Ordinance Book 39, Page 80 (June 18, 1990); “City Will Take Bids March 3,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 10, 1948, 10A; “City To Streamline New Fire Units,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 1, 1947, B1.

²⁵ Timothy Szymanski and Billy Goldfelder, “The Winecoff Fire – Our Nation’s Deadliest Hotel Fire,” <http://www.firehouse.com/news/10568390/the-winecoff-fire-our-nations-deadliest-hotel-fire>, accessed September 16, 2025.

This writer was nine years old in 1946. He remembers his mother weeping when she learned from a radio broadcast that James Little, a young man from Charlotte, had been killed in this tragic blaze. One hundred nineteen people died in the Winecoff Hotel fire. Ibid.

²⁶ “Yancey Urges Hotel Fire Inspections,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 10, 1946, A14; “City To Draw Plans For Two Fire Stations,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 18, 1946, B3.

on October 6, 1947. Fire Station Number Eight looked nothing like any of the other firehouses built in Charlotte in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition to Marsh's Fire Station Number Two on South Boulevard (1949), these decades witnessed the completion of Fire Stations Number Nine, Number Ten, and Number Eleven. All were one-story brick boxes.²⁷



Fire Station Number Nine (1954), top; Fire Station Number Ten (1957), bottom.

²⁷ "Fire Stations Plans Offered," *Charlotte Observer*, October 7, 1947, B7.

Several factors induced architects to give fire stations a "modern look" after World War II. Largely because of the innovative building techniques resulting from World War II, new construction materials became readily available after 1945, such as pre-hung aluminum windows, pre-engineered walls, and large expanses of glass. Air conditioning and thermostat controlled heating systems transformed fenestration patterns. Automatic roll-up doors manufactured of aluminum and glass eliminated the need for large arched front doorways. Drying cabinets allowed architects to eliminate hose towers, an identifying component of pre-World War II fire stations. Another stimulus for changing the design of fire stations in the late 1940s and 1950s was the fact that strategic planners, not architects, increasingly held sway over the design process. More and more fire departments hired firefighting experts to fashion and implement master plans. Before World War II, cities were organized along railroad corridors and streetcar lines. Planners understood that the automobile would be the driving force behind city growth in the post-war years. Accordingly, they selected sites on streets with easy access to major thoroughfares for suburban fire stations. Planners also analyzed the arrangement of rooms in a fire station and concluded that one-story layouts were the most efficient. Corridors and hallways were reduced to a minimum. As for the exterior appearance of fire stations, planners wanted buildings that broke with the past and embraced a bright, optimistic vision of the future.



Fire Station Number Eleven (1958), bottom.

R. C. Hicks Construction Company received the contract in March 1948 to build Fire Station Number Eight. Construction cost approximately \$60,000. On February 21, 1949, M. R. Marsh reported that the firehouse was ready for occupancy. Fire Station Number Eight went into active service on April 25, 1949. The *Charlotte Observer* commented expansively on the new firehouse. “STATELY AND BEAUTIFUL is this ultra-modern residential-type suburban fire station located at the corner of The Plaza and Commonwealth Avenue,” the newspaper proclaimed. Representing “the last word in design and equipment, it is one of the first residential-type structures to be built in this part of the country for use as a fire station.” “Outwardly it appears to be a residence,” the article stated. “However, the interior is perfectly arranged as a fire station.” Charlotte Fire Department Chief Donald Charles encapsulated the design philosophy for the new station: “We have tried to build [a station] in keeping with the neighborhood, so all of the people out here would be proud of it.”²⁸

Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight has been modified over the years, but its essential exterior appearance, form, and setting remain intact. A maintenance shop was added to the rear of the firehouse in or about 1954. In 1999, the interior of the building was essentially gutted, and a second-floor exit was installed.²⁹ Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight continues to command an imposing presence in the Plaza Midwood Neighborhood, largely due to the talents of Marion Rossiter “Steve” Marsh and the leadership of Fire Chief William Hendrix Palmer.

²⁸ “New Plaza Fire Station Carolinas Finest, Opens Today”; “Fire Station Finished,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 22, 1949, 7A.

²⁹ Harry Golden, Jr., “Fire Station, Garage Projects Recommended,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 27, 1954, 1B; Gubbins, “New fire station in northwest to rise by summer 2000.”



Firemen Preparing Meal in Station Number 8



Firemen Planting Garden at Station Number 8



Exterior of Charlotte Fire Station Number Eight in April 1949



M. R. Marsh at Social Event (date unknown)



M. R. Marsh with Daughter Mary (date unknown)

Charlotte Fire Station Number 8 Architectural Description (updated October 2025)



Charlotte Fire Station Number 8 sits on a 0.662-acre lot at the corner of The Plaza and Commonwealth Avenue, in the Plaza-Midwood section of Charlotte. The station faces roughly east on the relatively flat lot. The station is composed of two buildings attached by a short hyphen.



Charlotte Fire Station Number 8, circa 1980.



The principal building is a two-story side-gabled solid masonry building that resembles a Colonial Revival-style house. The building's façade is five bays wide and is symmetrical. The façade is dominated by a two-story, flat-roofed, partial-width porch that shelters the three center bays. An iron handrail that originally bordered the porch roof was removed recently for restoration; it will be reinstalled at its original location in due course. The porch roof is supported by a boxed beam that rests on four tall square posts with simple bases, and two pilasters. The posts and the beam are covered with metal. The concrete porch floor is at grade and is covered with blue stone set in mortar. The ceiling is covered with metal panels.

The porch shelters a doorway centered on the façade. The doorway contains a six-panel replacement door with two single-light sidelights and a short, direct-glazed transom. Other than the doorway, the symmetrical fenestration on the first story consists of four metal six-over-six windows that replaced the original six-over-six windows on the façade. All of the original windows on the building appear to have been replaced during a 1999 renovation. All of the windows on the principal section of the building feature sloped brick sills and are bordered by non-functional shutters. The second story is pierced by five windows that align directly above the first story fenestration. While all of the windows on the façade are six-over-six sash windows, the second story windows are shorter than those on the first story. The second-story windows extend directly to a simple metal-clad freeze with a simple cornice moulding. The soffit is composed of perforated panels supported by a metal-clad fascia. The side-gabled roof is moderately pitched.



The south elevation of the principal section of the building features symmetrical fenestration. The running-bond brick of the elevation runs uninterrupted from below grade. Two six-over-six windows pierce the first story, with two shorter six-over-six windows piercing the second story set directly above the first-story windows. The elevation features cornice returns. The metal cladding on the rakes may hide original moulding. The gable is topped by a louvered vent that rests on a sloped brick sill.



The north elevation of the principal section is largely obscured by a one-story hyphen that attaches the principal section to a garage. Above the hyphen the gabled elevation is blank. An original short window that once pierced the second story and a louvered vent that was set high in the gable have been removed, including the sills, and the openings have been infilled with brick.



The brick hyphen is one bay wide and is pierced by a six-over-six window. The hyphen's roof ridge runs parallel to the front elevation. The hyphen connects the principal section of the building to a hipped-roof, two-bay garage. Like the principal section, the garage features brick laid in running bond. The garage's corners feature corbelled brick quoins. The two large, roughly square garage bays contain replacement overhead doors. The bay openings feature conical, cast iron corner protectors. The garage is topped by a hipped roof. The garage opens onto a wide concrete driveway. A fuel pump is located adjacent to the northeast corner of the garage.





The north elevation of the garage is four bays wide. Unlike the front elevation, the brick in the north elevation is laid in a 1-to-5 common bond. Each bay contains a six-over-six window. Unlike the front corner, the rear corner does not feature a quoin.



The rear of the garage features a single doorway centered on the elevation, and is otherwise blank. The brick is laid in common bond. At the rear of the garage the ridge of the hipped roof ends in a louvered roof dormer. The south elevation is largely obscured by hyphens and a large addition to the rear of the principal portion of the building.



A two-story, hipped-roofed wing projects from the rear of the principal section of the building. The south elevation of the wing is two bays wide and is setback slightly from the south elevation of the principal section of the building. On the first story a four-over-four sash window is adjacent to the principal section, and to the rear of that window the south elevation of the wing is pierced by a six-over-six window. The second story fenestration is aligned with the windows on the first story and is composed of shorter four-over-four and six-over-six windows. The wing's rear and north elevations are obscured.



In 1999 a brick, three-bay-wide, two-story, Postmodern-style addition with a low-pitched hipped roof was attached to the rear of the rear wing of the principal section of the building. The addition's entrance is located on the rear elevation in a recessed two-story center bay. A metal door with a large single light is bordered on each side by large sidelights, each composed of eight square lights. The doorway opening is topped by a soldier course. Above the doorway, the second story is pierced by a large round window, divided into quarters and bordered by a circle of rowlock brick. To the north of the recessed entrance, the first story is pierced by a twelve-light (three high by four wide) window featuring thick bars and muntins, sitting on a flat rowlock sill. A second twelve-light window pierces the second story of the bay. The frame for the second-story window extends to the top of the wall. The south bay contains a tall twelve-light window (six high by two wide) that extends from the first story to the top of the wall. The 1999 addition features a recess at the top of the wall. This negative space references the freeze that tops the walls of the original sections of the building.



The south elevation of the 1999 addition is two bays wide and features a tall twelve-light window (six high by two wide) in the west bay that extends from the first story to the top of the wall. The east bay contains a small six-light window piercing each story. The rear addition is connected to the original building by a short, recessed hyphen. The north elevation of the addition is obscured by the garage.



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