



Survey and Research Report  
On the Parkwood Avenue Associate  
Reformed Presbyterian Church



1. Name and Address Of The Property: The Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is located at 1017 Parkwood Avenue in Charlotte, North Carolina. UTM Coordinates: 17 516815E 3898979N

2. Name and Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.

The subject property contains three tax parcels. The Parkwood Avenue A.R.P Church is located on Mecklenburg County Tax Parcel 08309309. The owner of this parcel is:

Carolina Annual Conference Inc. C.M.E. Church  
5937 Ruth Drive  
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

The subject property also contains Tax Parcels 08309307 and 08309308. The owner of these parcels is:

Trustees Parkwood C.M.E. Church  
802 Tom Hunter Road  
Charlotte, N.C. 28205

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

4. Map Depicting The Location Of The Property.



5. Current Deed Book References To the Property. The current deeds to the property are recorded in the following Mecklenburg County deeds.

Parcel 08309309: Deed Book 11124, Page 477

Parcel 08309308: Deed Book 06350. Page 233

Parcel 08309307: Deed Book 06350, Page 233

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

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

8. Documentation Of Why And In What Ways The Property Meets The Criteria For Designation Set Forth In N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church has special significance for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgement on the following information.

1) The Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, which opened in January 1929, was and remains the most architecturally significant church building in the Villa Heights neighborhood, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Charlotte suburb.

2) The Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church draws special significance from its place within a collection of imposing church buildings erected by Associate Reformed Presbyterian congregations in Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century.

3) The architect of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was Louis Asbury, Sr., the first North Carolinian to belong to the American Institute of Architects and an architect of local and regional importance. Among the church buildings in Charlotte designed by Asbury are Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church, and Myers Park United Methodist Church.

4. The transfer of ownership of the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to the Parkwood Institutional Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was a manifestation of the changing racial population of the Villa Heights Neighborhood, a phenomenon that was occurring in many inner suburbs of Charlotte and throughout the South in the mid-twentieth century as increasing numbers of whites moved farther from the city centers.

b. Integrity Of Design, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the physical description of the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church included in this report demonstrates that the Associate Reformed Presbyterian

Church meets this criterion for special significance both in terms of the church building itself and its setting in the Villa Heights neighborhood.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission is aware that historic landmark 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. The current appraised tax value of the three parcels constituting the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church property is \$1,359,100.00. The property is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem Taxes.

Date Of The Preparation Of This Report: May 8, 2017

Prepared By: Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Mr. Stewart Gray



Meeting of the First Presbytery of the A.R.P. Synod at Villa Heights A.R.P. Church  
April 10-11, 1923

A History Of The Parkwood Avenue  
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church  
1017 Parkwood Avenue, Charlotte, N.C.

Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
April 2017



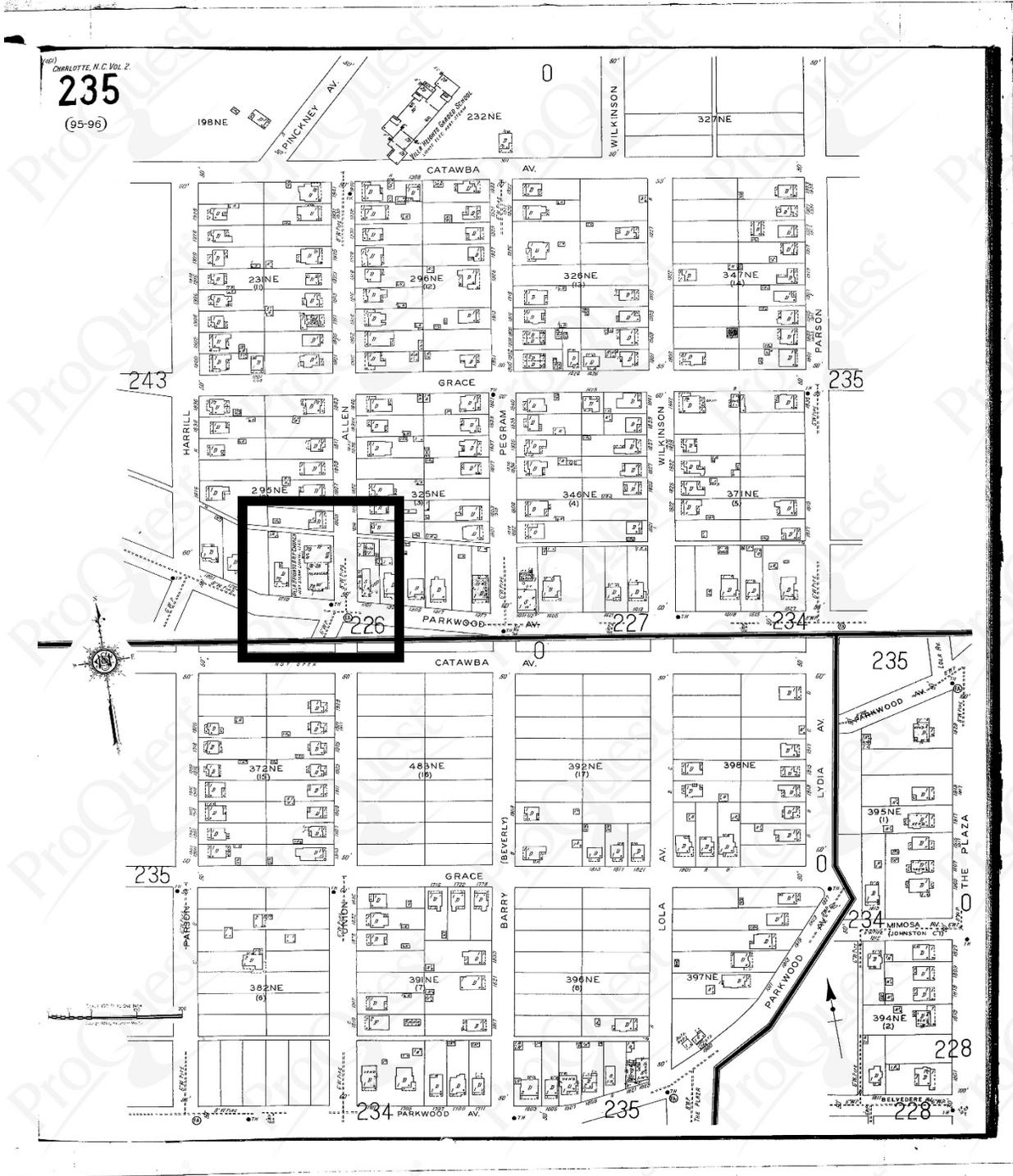
**Summary Of Significance.** The history of the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is intimately bound up with the process of suburbanization that occurred in Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century. Villa Heights was one of several Charlotte suburbs that came into existence in the early 1900s. In 1985, Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett, then a preservation consultant for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, opined in his survey of the built environment of Villa Heights that the Parkwood A.R.P. Church (1929) is the “most architecturally noteworthy church in the area.”<sup>1</sup> Also attesting to the special significance of the Parkwood A.R.P. Church is that the architect of record was Louis H. Asbury, Sr. (1877-1975).<sup>2</sup> Not unimportant is the fact that the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, when combined with other twentieth century A.R.P church buildings in Charlotte,

especially First A. R. P. Church, East Avenue Tabernacle A.R.P. Church, and Chalmers Memorial A.R.P. Church, demonstrates that the Associate Reformed Presbyterians were experiencing significant growth in Charlotte in the early 1900s but were unable to sustain their initial success.<sup>3</sup> Finally, a fundamental cultural shift occurred in 1968, when the Christian Institutional Methodist Episcopal Church acquired the property on Parkwood Avenue formerly owned by the Associate Reformed Presbyterians. Thereafter, the sanctuary became primarily a place of worship for African Americans until 2015, when the sanctuary was abandoned.

**Villa Heights.** On December 30, 1900, an advertisement in the *Charlotte Observer* announced that one hundred lots in Villa Heights were being offered for sale. “This



property is beautifully located, commands a splendid view of the city, and is fast becoming thickly populated,” the newspaper reported.<sup>4</sup> Located on the eastern ridge of the Little Sugar Creek Valley and developed by Brown & Co., Villa Heights was one of many middle class suburbs that appeared in Charlotte at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Charlotte’s population increased from 11,557 in 1890 to 34,014 in 1910, an increase of 33.9%. Spurred mainly by the establishment of textile mills and the city’s emerging role as a wholesale distribution center, Charlotte’s economy was on the upswing, thereby giving rise to a greater demand for moderate-income housing. On November 26, 1909, the *Charlotte Daily Observer* reported there were “some 40 odd residences” in Villa Heights.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper noted that in Villa Heights and other Charlotte suburbs “are heard the ring of the hammer and the harsher tone of the saw as new homes are going up.”<sup>7</sup> In 1911, a bridge was constructed which crossed Little Sugar Creek at 18<sup>th</sup> street “because of the considerable amount of traffic, that comes to Villa Heights.”<sup>8</sup> The Sanborn Insurance Map of 1929 reveals that Villa Heights had indeed become the location of a significant concentration of middle class homes by the end of the 1920s.<sup>9</sup>

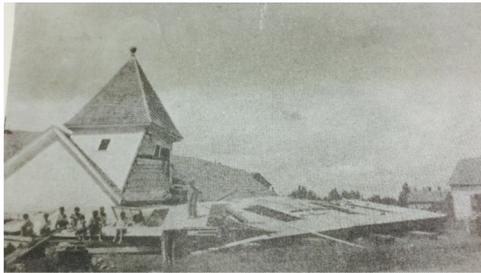


1929 Sanborn Insurance Map Of Charlotte, Vol. 2. Page 235

**Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.** The residents of Villa Heights understandably wanted churches built in their neighborhood. The

impetus for the establishment of an Associate Reformed Presbyterian congregation in Villa Heights was provided by members of East Avenue A.R.P. Church in center city Charlotte.<sup>10</sup> The origins of the A.R.P. denomination harken back to 18th century Scotland, when opponents of the Established Presbyterian Church refused to submit to Royal supremacy and episcopal forms of church governance. Caught up in the Scots Irish migration to America in the 1700s, two groups of these dissenters, the Associate Presbyterians and the Reformed Presbyterians, united to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod in Philadelphia in 1782. As increasing numbers of Scots Irish settled in the Carolinas and Georgia, the need to establish A.R.P. churches in the South amplified. Mecklenburg County was no exception. One of the earliest and most influential A.R.P. churches was Sardis Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church, which would establish a close relationship with the Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church. Mostly because of their geographic separation from their fellow believers in Pennsylvania, the A.R.P. congregations in North Carolina and South Carolina created their own Synod of the Carolinas in 1822. It was to this organization that Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church would eventually owe its allegiance.<sup>11</sup>

Until 1929 known as the Villa Heights Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church,



the A.R.P congregation on Parkwood Avenue began as a “Sabbath School” in October 1907 and was organized as a church in 1908. A lot was purchased on Parkwood Avenue at the present church location. The building

formerly used by Sardis A.R.P. Church was dismantled, and the materials were used to erect a frame sanctuary for Villa Heights A.R.P. Presbyterian Church. That building was almost totally destroyed by a wind storm that swept through the neighborhood on August 31, 1911; and a second wooden church was constructed, which served as the house of worship for the congregation until 1928.<sup>12</sup>



### **Villa Heights A.R.P. Church 1912-1928 (Dedicated April 1, 1912)**

Charlotte newspapers are chock-full of articles that describe the routine activities of the Villa Heights A.R.P. Church. Weddings, funerals, Bible classes, bazaars, revivals, prayer meetings, worship services, all were regular happenings. By 1927, the congregation had grown to a degree that it needed a new, larger facility. On July 24, 1927, a “special program” was held so “plans for a new church building” could be presented to the congregation.<sup>13</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* reported on May 19, 1928, that worshippers would meet in a nearby school until the “new church is completed.”<sup>14</sup> The building permit for a “two-story brick and tile church” was issued on June 7, 1928; and by July 1<sup>st</sup> the foundations of the building were in place.<sup>15</sup> On the afternoon of January 6, 1929, a large crowd gathered at the new church to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone. “The erection of a church in any neighborhood,” said one of the speakers, “means more to a community in a moral and spiritual way than the erection of a dozen houses, or banks, or structures of any sort.”<sup>16</sup> The first worship service was held in the new home of Villa Heights A. R. P. Church on January 20, 1929.<sup>17</sup> With an imposing new building, the congregation renamed the church the Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church<sup>18</sup> Like most early twentieth-century suburbs in North Carolina, Villa

Heights had housing that was essentially modest and simple. It was in their churches that residents of such suburbs gave expression to their desire for more sophisticated architecture.<sup>19</sup>

**Louis H. Asbury, Sr.** The architect of record of the Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church was Louis H. Asbury, Sr. (1877-1975).<sup>20</sup> A native of Charlotte, Asbury, who

had helped his father build houses as a lad, graduated from Trinity College, now Duke University, in 1900 and received his architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, completing his studies in 1903. After working as a draftsman in New York City, Asbury moved back to Charlotte in 1908. He established an architectural firm and remained professionally active in Charlotte and the Piedmont until his retirement in 1956.<sup>21</sup>

Asbury made major contributions to the professional standing of architects in North Carolina. He was the first native North Carolinian to be elected to the American Institute of

Architects. Asbury was one of the founders of the North Carolina chapter of the A.I.A. and was among the initial group of architects licensed to practice in North Carolina, receiving license #4.<sup>22</sup>



Asbury designed an impressive array of structures in Charlotte and its environs. The *Charlotte Observer* editorially called Louis Asbury the “Builder Of A City.”<sup>23</sup> Asbury, an adroit businessman as well as an architect, responded to the conservative proclivities of the majority of his clients. Most of his plans looked to the Neoclassical and Gothic Revival styles for their inspiration.<sup>24</sup> Such prominent Asbury-designed buildings in Charlotte as the Hawthorne Lane United Methodist Church, the Mount Carmel Baptist Church, the Myers Park United Methodist Church, the Mecklenburg County Courthouse, the Mulberry Presbyterian Church, the First Christian Church, and the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, attest to this truth.



**Myers Park Methodist Church**



**Mulberry Presbyterian Church**



**First Christian Church**



**Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church**

Thomas Hanchett argues that the preference of Charlotte's upper and middle classes for revivalist architecture in the 1920s was a reflection of their satisfaction with the status quo. "To be 'Fine Architecture,'" says Hanchett, "a building now had to be clothed in an identifiable historic style, to seem old and romantic and -- the watchword -- quaint." He continues: "The more literal the imitation of the past, the better the building was regarded."<sup>25</sup> The 1929 sanctuary of the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church fits readily within this genre of architectural style and illustrates Asbury's commitment to revivalist design.



**Sanctuary of Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church**

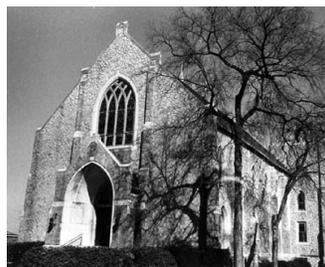
**The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.** The Associate Reformed Presbyterian denomination has had churches in Mecklenburg County from at least the late 1700s. Isaac Grier (1776-1843), a Georgia graduate of Dickinson College, became the first minister of Sardis A.R.P. Church in c. 1804.<sup>26</sup> Conservative on social issues and committed to Biblical inerrancy, Associate Reformed Presbyterian congregations were located mainly in rural sections of the two Carolinas. A vexing problem for the A.R.P. denomination has been its inability to make significant inroads into the cities. “A truism of ARP history” is that the denomination “has never made it into the city,” writes one observer.<sup>27</sup>

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed what at first seemed to be a promising opportunity for major growth of the A.R.P. presence in Charlotte. The Associate Reformed Presbyterians “overcame a long standing inability to gain a foothold in cities,” write Lowry Ware and James W. Gettys in their history of the

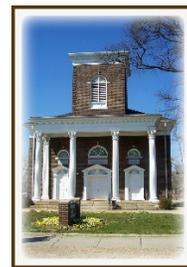
A.R.P. Church.<sup>28</sup> Many of the new residents of Charlotte and other Southern cities had previously lived in the rural countryside and were therefore sympathetic to the traditional beliefs espoused by the Associate Reformed Presbyterians. The early success of the Villa Heights Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the construction of its new sanctuary in 1929 contributed to this optimism about the prospects for the A.R.P. denomination in Charlotte. East Avenue A. R. P. Church completed a grand building in 1914 at what is now the intersection of East Trade Street and McDowell Street.<sup>29</sup> The First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church erected a stone Gothic Revival style sanctuary on North Tryon Street in 1927.<sup>30</sup> Chalmers Memorial A.R.P. Church was situated at the corner of South Boulevard and East Boulevard in Dilworth.<sup>31</sup> None of these A. R. P. congregations exists today.<sup>32</sup>



**East Ave. A.R.P.**



**First A.R.P.**



**Chalmers A.R.P.**

The second half of the twentieth century has seen profound shifts in the dominant cultural and religious sentiments in the United States, especially in urban centers. The Civil Rights Revolution, the Women's Movement, and, more recently, demands for acceptance of a broader expression of gender identities, have weakened support for conservative social perspectives. Not surprisingly, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church has experienced consequent retrenchment. In 1928, the six A.R.P. churches in Charlotte had a total membership of 2258.<sup>33</sup> A striking manifestation of the denomination's decline in Mecklenburg County occurred in 1951, when Sardis Presbyterian Church, the church that had donated its unused sanctuary to the Villa Height A.R.P. Church, voted to withdraw from the A.R.P. Synod.<sup>34</sup>

**Parkwood Institutional Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.** On February 5, 1967, the members of the Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church approved a motion by a vote of 112 to 22 to relocate. On September 17, 1967, the congregation voted

to merge with Plaza Hills A.R.P. Church to form New Covenant A.R. P. Church. Parkwood Avenue A.R.P., once a centerpiece of the neighborhood, closed its doors.<sup>35</sup> A major reason for the church's decline was the changing racial makeup of Villa Heights.<sup>36</sup> Ownership of the Parkwood Avenue property was conveyed in 1968 to the Parkwood Institutional Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which belonged to a historically African American denomination. Established in Jackson, Tennessee in 1870 by formerly enslaved people and known as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church until 1954, the C.M.E. Church had established congregations in Charlotte by the 1890s.<sup>37</sup>

The Parkwood Institutional C.M.E. Church held its first worship service in the former Parkwood A.R.P. Church on June 9, 1968. Bishop Henry C. Bunton came from Washington, D.C. to deliver the sermon.<sup>38</sup> The daily happenings at the C.M.E Church resembled in many respects what had occurred while the Associate Reformed Presbyterians had worshipped there – weddings, funerals, revivals, Bible studies, and the like. There was one



important change, however. Political activism became a significant component of the church's role in the community. Interestingly, a memorable event in the political career of Elisabeth "Liz" Hair (1920-2014) occurred at Parkwood C.M.E. Church in the early 1970s. Hair, a Democrat, who was the first woman to be Chair of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners, visited the church during her first campaign for public office. She was introduced as "the most powerful woman in Mecklenburg County." Hair would later state that this was a "turning point" in her career. It made her aware of the impact she could have in the community.<sup>39</sup>

On September 20, 1998, the Parkwood Institutional C.M.E. congregation gathered for a service on Tom Hunter Road to celebrate the groundbreaking of a new sanctuary.<sup>40</sup>



The church had relocated to its new home by February 2000.<sup>41</sup> The church used the 1929 sanctuary on Parkwood Avenue as a satellite site until 2015.<sup>42</sup> The former Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is now vacant and being marketed for sale.

1 Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett, "The Belmont-Villa Heights-Optimist Park Survey Area," 1985, for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. See <http://www.cmhpf.org/kids/neighborhoods/belmont-et-al.html>. Hereinafter cited as "Hanchett Villa Heights." Dr. Hanchett refers to the church as the "Former Villa Heights Associate Reform Presbyterian Church." The correct nomenclature for A.R.P. is "Associate Reformed Presbyterian." This church had the name "Villa Heights Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church" from its founding in 1908 until 1929. In 1929 the name of the church was changed to "Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church." This report uses that name. There are two other extant churches in Villa Heights.



2 City of Charlotte Building Permit 8969, June 6, 1928. Interestingly, the list of projects in the Louis Asbury Papers in the Special Collections Department of the Akins Library at UNCC does not include either Villa Heights Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church or the Parkwood Avenue Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. This writer believes that the Building Permit provides adequate proof of Asbury's having designed the building.

3 None of the churches listed has an active congregation today.

4 *Charlotte Observer*, December 29, 1900.

5 *Ibid.* The head of Brown & Co. was Clayton O. Brown ("Hanchett Villa Heights").

6 *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 26, 1909.

7 *Charlotte Daily Observer*, March 17, 1910.

8 *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 26, 1911. Automobiles were included in the traffic.

9 The convenience of residing in Villa Heights was positively impacted by the completion by 1914 of a streetcar line that ended at the intersection of Pegram Street and Parkwood Avenue ("Hanchett Villa Heights"). Automobiles also appeared on the streets of Villa Heights in the early years of the neighborhood. See *Charlotte Daily Observer*, March 17, 1910.

10 *Charlotte Observer*, July 31, 1938.

11 The Centennial History Of The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (LEEAFBooks.com, nd.).

12 *Charlotte Observer*, July 31, 1938,

13 *Charlotte Observer*, July 23, 1927.

14 *Charlotte Observer*, May 19, 1928.

15 *Charlotte Observer*, July 1, 1928.

16 *Charlotte Observer*, January 7, 1929.

17 *Charlotte Observer*, January 20, 1929.

18 *Charlotte Observer*, February 9, 1929

19 For a scholarly discussion of the built environment of early twentieth-century suburbs in North Carolina, see Catherine W. Bishir and Lawrence S. Earley, Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina. (Edwards Brothers, Inc., Lillington, N.C., 1985).

20 City of Charlotte Building Permit 8969, June 6, 1928.

21 Ryan L. Sumner and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the Parks Hutchinson School," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, September 1, 2002. Hereinafter cited as *Parks Hutchinson School*.

22 <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000449>.

23 *Charlotte Observer*, March 24, 1975.

24 *Parks Hutchinson School*.

25 Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte Architecture: Design Through Time Part 2," for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

26 <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/GRIER.pdf>

27 <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/whither-or-wither.php>

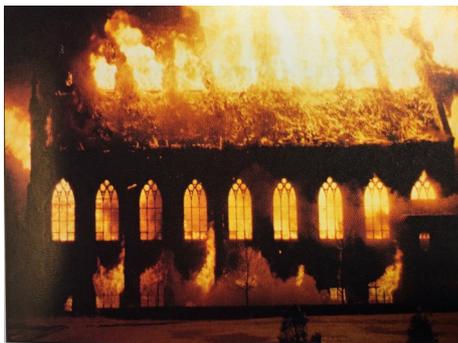
28 Lowry Ware and James W. Gettys, *The Second Century. A History Of The Associate Reformed Presbyterians 1882-1982* (1982), p.3. The Associate Reformed Presbyterians held to traditional Scottish traditions, which taught that forms of worship should adhere strictly to the dictates of the Bible. Only the Psalms were to be sung, not hymns written and composed by humans. Many congregations excluded musical instruments, including organs, from their sanctuaries. The A.R.P. Church had regulated or closed communions. They strictly observed the Sabbath.

29 <http://cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/surveys&reastavetab.htm>

30 <http://www.cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/surveys&rfirstarp.htm>

31 For a sketch of Chalmers A.R.P. Church, see *Charlotte Observer*, September 19, 1909.

32 The East Avenue A. R. P. Church is now the Aunt Stella Center, a venue for a variety of cultural events. The First A.R.P. was totally destroyed inside by a fire on November 14, 1984. It is now the McColl Center for Art + Innovation.



The Chalmers Memorial A.R.P. Church, which never acquired its steeple, is still used as a church but not by Associate Reformed Presbyterians.

33 Ware and Gettys, p. 18.

34 <http://sardis.org/about/our-history/>

35 Session Minutes Of Parkwood Avenue A.R.P. Church (located in archives of New Covenant A.R.P. Church).

36 Email from Scott Robar to Dr. Dan L. Morrill, April 17, 2017. Technically, Chalmers Memorial A.R.P. Church did not cease to exist. It moved to the Starmount neighborhood.

37 *Charlotte Observer*, November 18, 1894.

38 *Charlotte Observer*, June 1, 1968.

39 *Charlotte Observer*, March 19, 2014.

40 *Charlotte Observer*, September 16, 1998.

41 *Charlotte Observer*, February 23, 2000.

42 Interview of Rodney Faulkner by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (April 19, 2017).