United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking “x” in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter “N/A” for “not applicable.” For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property
   historic name Chapel Hill Town Hall
   other names/site number

2. Location
   street & number Northwest corner of Rosemary and Columbia Streets
   city, town Chapel Hill
   state North Carolina code NC
   county Orange code 135
   zip code 27516

3. Classification
   Ownership of Property
   □ private
   X public-local
   □ public-State
   □ public-Federal
   Category of Property
   □ building(s)
   □ district
   □ site
   □ structure
   □ object
   Number of Resources within Property
   Contributing 1 buildings
   Noncontributing
   buildings
   sites
   structures
   objects
   Total
   Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
   Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this □ nomination □ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
   In my opinion, the property □ meets □ does not meet the National Register criteria. □ See continuation sheet.
   Signature of certifying official
   Date
   State or Federal agency and bureau

   In my opinion, the property □ meets □ does not meet the National Register criteria. □ See continuation sheet.
   Signature of commenting or other official
   Date
   State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification
   I, hereby certify that this property is:
   □ entered in the National Register.
   □ See continuation sheet.
   □ determined eligible for the National Register. □ See continuation sheet.
   □ determined not eligible for the National Register.
   □ removed from the National Register.
   □ other, (explain:)
   Signature of the Keeper
   Date of Action
6. Function or Use

<table>
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<th>Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)</th>
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<td>Work in Progress</td>
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7. Description

**Architectural Classification**
(enter categories from instructions)

<table>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Materials (enter categories from instructions)</th>
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<td>walls brick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roof slate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other limestone wood</td>
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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheets.
7. Description

In present appearance, the Chapel Hill Town Hall is a red brick two-story Georgian/Federal (Colonial) Revival structure laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers, with a full basement, and a hipped slate roof. The crest of the roof is topped by an arced octagonal wooden cupola with a domical, copper-glazed roof, set on a louvered base.

Its south, or Rosemary Street facade features five bays with a pedimented central three-bay pavilion with a wooden modillioned cornice and bull's eye window featuring an Indiana limestone surround with keystone embellishments at all quadrants. The modillion cornice continues around the entire building. All windows are doublehung 9/9 with splayed brick lintels, wood sashes, and limestone keystones. All second-story spandrels feature blank limestone panels. The building has a brick belt course running completely around it at sill height. Two of the second story windows of this facade are bricked in.

The main entry features a fanlighted transom surmounted by a broken, or swan-neck, pediment with quatrefoil and urn embellishment; its panelled door with panelled limestone reveals is flanked by fluted pilasters with foliated capitals. The entry steps are brick, replacing the original granite steps. The partially below grade basement windows feature segmental relieving arches throughout. This story is defined by a shouldered brick water table on three of the building's facades.

The west facade is also five bay, the rear two of which are recessed. The windows echo those on the front, with the exception of the rear two first-story ranks, which feature 6/6 lights and panelled wooden spandrels. A door with simplified Georgian/Federal Revival features, transom, and square, dentilled wood architrave is approached by an exterior staircase with a wrought iron railing on the southwest corner.

The rear facade, finished like the first two, contains a full-height extension housing an interior stairwell, entry to which is from a later, broken-pedimented, first-story door.

The east, or Columbia Street facade features six bays, the rear two of which are recessed and originally contained two double-leaved, multi-lighted, first-story fire engine doors, now infilled with multi-lighted doublehung windows, single-pane transoms, solid panels, and tall lunettes in sunburst motifs surmounted by brick arches and limestone keystones. Above the former fire engine bays are two tri-part, doublehung, second-story windows.

The building sits on a sloping corner lot at the crest of the tongue-shaped hill for which Chapel Hill was named, one block northwest of the principal commercial intersection of Franklin and Columbia Streets. It is surrounded on the west and north sides by a gravelled parking lot and sits flush with the sidewalk on both street elevations. It is currently being remodeled and is leased to a local branch of the Interfaith Council who, with financing from donations and a town grant, is rehabilitating the facility as a shelter for the homeless.

In several prior remodellings, most of the interior features were removed from this building leaving little that is original except the main steel and concrete staircase. Ca. 1963, a mezzanine was added over the former first-story fire engine garage which accounts for the
necessity of dividing the main floor to disguise the mezzanine floor. This space is accessible by a rear staircase that was also added at that time. The present remodeling has removed most of the interior fabric except the mezzanine, leaving the outer shell of masonry with plaster overcoating. The fact that this building was a utilitarian building to begin with, that the 1963 general remodeling and subsequent temporary alterations to spaces and features compromised the building's interior to an important extent, and that the significance of the building depends primarily on its site, exterior design, and history, render the impact of these changes and consequent loss of interior integrity less than might otherwise be the case.

NOTES

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally  ☐ statewide  ☑ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  [ ] A  [ ] B  [ ] C  [ ] D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  [ ] A  [ ] B  [ ] C  [ ] D  [ ] E  [ ] F  [ ] G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Community Planning and Development

Architecture

Period of Significance  1938-1941

Significant Dates  1938-1941

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder
Atwood and Weeks, Architects
H. F. Mitchell, Burlington, NC, Contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheets.
8. Summary

The Chapel Hill Town Hall is significant under Criteria A and C in the respective areas of Community Planning and Development and Architecture. It is important as a catalyst to the maturing of the consciousness of Chapel Hill as a civic entity distinct from its parent institution, the University of North Carolina. The building of the Town Hall signaled the town's coming-of-age as a municipality; its construction and the questions associated with its siting stimulated the town government to undertake further refinements to the services it offered the citizens, to establish a review and approval capacity through planning that it had heretofore eschewed, and, by this means, to affect the architectural design of future structures. Its construction signaled the maturing of a community becoming aware of its responsibility for Chapel Hill's public atmosphere. Significance under Criterion C extends to its status as the work of Atwood and Weeks, an architectural firm active in the design of numerous University of North Carolina buildings as well as buildings throughout the state between 1931 and 1943. It is also significant as the first downtown Chapel Hill building of any prominence that was built in what became, in the following decade, the architecture of choice for virtually every new building built in Chapel Hill, an architectural preference for Colonial Revivalism stimulated by the Williamsburg restorations that were being imitated region-wide as the appropriate architecture for the southern civic environment. It was thus a trend-setter for a movement that was to transform and establish the architectural character of downtown Chapel Hill for the next 50 years. The period of significance begins with the letting of contracts for building the structure in April, 1938 and ends in 1941 with the establishment of a town planning board, an act stimulated by questions about the role of planning in Chapel Hill government that attended the building's construction and siting, and the beginning of an era of unprecedented local control over private architectural decisions in Chapel Hill.

Community Planning and Development Context and Historical Background

The decade preceding the decision to build the Chapel Hill Town Hall gives evidence of a town in transition from being a slumbering southern backwater to becoming a full-service municipality. Founded as a cluster of residential structures and boarding houses adjacent to the country's first state-sponsored university in the late 18th century, Chapel Hill remained for more than a century within the orbit of the University of North Carolina, its principal land owner and cultural standard-bearer.

Because of Chapel Hill's peculiar relation to the university, it was, in a number of respects, both an ivory tower and a company town; in fact, "town", in the words of one commentary, "was purely peripheral to town." A village of 7,000 souls in the late '30's (including the 3,500 students), its enterprises supported student life; its leading citizens were professors. So insulated were Chapel Hillians that news of the war in Europe received virtually no local press coverage in the years immediately following the Town Hall's construction.
The town's second town hall, the Chapel Hill Town Hall was the most presentable municipal structure constructed in the town's 144 years of history\(^2\), its lateness itself signaling the slow discovery of Chapel Hill's separate identity as a community. Self-governing since 1851\(^,\) it didn't have a mayor until nearly 20 years after being chartered, before which it was run by five commissioners and an elected official called the "Magistrate of Police."\(^3\)

Throughout its early history, it was one of only three villages of any size in agricultural Orange county, its municipal government thus subservient to the county as well as the university. The University of North Carolina, as the county's largest employer well into the 1950's, owned and operated the town's waterworks, telephone system, laundry, power plant, and its only hotel.\(^4\) Other public services were provided by Orange County government. Not until the late '20's did Chapel Hill seriously begin to undertake, or at least initiate, some of its own services, including police and fire protection, the building of a sewerage facility (with university help), and, as the town's pre- (and post-) World War II residential edges inched outward from its downtown core, drainage, design, and traffic control.

Throughout the '30's, Chapel Hill town government, fortified by the money from the Works Progress Administration of the New Deal, made significant strides in taking responsibility for its own welfare and direction. Whereas early town business addressed stump removal from paths (there being no sidewalks) and citizen complaints about puddles, minutes from later in the decade indicate a growing awareness of the need to develop budgetary sophistication and administrative competence. At the same time, the university budget had undergone several revisions downward as the Depression deepened, so that some of the services it had rendered were taken over by the town.

This development reached a watershed with the construction of the Town Hall. The idea was born of necessity; Chapel Hill had, in the words of the Chapel Hill Weekly editor, Louis Graves, "as poorly lighted, as stinking, and as generally filthy a courtroom as there is anywhere in the world"\(^5\) in its old town hall. The women of the sewing circle, who used the town hall for meetings, reported they were freezing and requested that some heat from the courtroom on the second floor be diverted to their meeting room on the first\(^6\). Administrative offices were housed in rental space all over town, and a new "Police House" was needed.\(^7\)

The availability of WPA money to finance 45% of the costs of construction hastened the decision to build a full service building to house all municipal functions. The decision about where to put it was cut and dried, generating no comment in town minutes of the period\(^8\); it was assumed that it would replace the old town hall on the same site, the 60' x 100' town-owned lot at the intersection of Rosemary and Columbia Streets, and, accordingly, the old town hall building was auctioned off and removed.\(^9\)

Ironically, the speed with which this was accomplished attracted enough comment to set in motion a movement that both accelerated Chapel Hill's civic maturing and created an architectural statement. When the bond issue referendum to raise the town's share of the Town Hall costs came before the citizens in July, 1938, the Weekly published four editorials in its
support, some of which called (more-or-less for the first time) for more citizen involvement in town government affairs. At least one citizen took up the challenge. In a column adjacent to the second editorial, a letter from professor and town resident John M. Booker complained about the haste with which the town hall site had been selected, and offered to purchase and donate an appropriate lot for the building near the center of town on Franklin Street, the main thoroughfare, in the hope that this would trigger the development of a "civic center." In his fourth editorial, Graves called the Booker recommendation "a good proposal" and suggested "that the municipality of Chapel Hill work out a plan in advance with respect to buildings and other ventures instead of treating each improvement as a problem unconnected with the development of the community as a whole." Another letter to the editor, published simultaneously (from J. L. Morehead a UNC alumnus, Durham Attorney, and financial advisor to the University), suggested, further, that "the appearance of Chapel Hill could be vastly improved if a harmonious architectural plan were followed."

In August, 1938, after the voters had approved the town hall financing by a vote of 211 to 27, Booker wrote another, longer letter decrying the rush with which the town hall was planned and approved, and suggesting planning itself as a municipal function. "No agency exists", he wrote, "for obtaining support of any plan developed outside the circle of town authorities." His recommendation was for town-sponsored planning meetings that would be attended by citizens.

This call for local planning capacity was taken up and championed by Graves in what we'd now call a media campaign to create a body primarily to oversee the development of a comprehensive process that has been called, for its insistent Colonial Revivalism, the "Williamsburging" of the town.

Between the time this suggestion was made and the time it was implemented, the new town hall was built and occupied. Originally, the building featured three floors of departmental space and housed all of the municipal functions of the community, the fire and police station, the administration offices, the court room, and the jail. On the first floor, to the right of the main entrance, were two rooms designated as the City Manager's office. The first room to the left was the main office of the police department. Behind this was a room for the regular meetings of the Board of Aldermen, but it was specified in the town minutes (June 14, 1939) that this room would also be used as a general meeting room for anyone who wanted to use it subject to approval by the Board of Aldermen. The town's maintenance department was located at the rear of the fire engine garage. The jail, four steel cell blocks in the basement, were to be segregated by race; two communal bathrooms with showers are presently extant to record this period of the town's history. The entire eastern section of the second floor was used by the Town of Chapel Hill fire department for recreation and sleeping quarters. This section was directly above the fire engine storage space and was accessible by a bright brass pole. The south western portion of the second floor was the courtroom, a room seating 225 people with standing room for 50, with an adjoining room for the clerk of the recorder's court and attorneys.
The call for planning stimulated by the building of the town hall had permanent, visible effects. While the building was not built as a civic center, it was nevertheless central, administratively, to the next phase of town growth, the establishment, in 1941, of the first town planning board, who oversaw the architectural development of Chapel Hill for the next decade.

Architectural Context

Stylistically, the Chapel Hill Town Hall fits one of HABS' William Lebovich's two "escapist" categories of city hall architecture built in the Depression: Category I in which buildings "evoked...this country's glorious early days". According to Lebovich, Category I buildings, like Schenectady, New York's 1930-31 city hall, an award-winning Georgian/Federal Revival design by McKim, Mead and White, "counter the emotional gloom of the Depression by recalling America's past, specifically the time when the colonies won independence." The revivalism of the Chapel Hill Town Hall is clearly reminiscent of such tendencies.

The Town Hall was not the first Colonial Revival building built in Chapel Hill, nor was it the first building designed by Atwood and Weeks. It was, however, pivotal, in that its site selection and design induced the town to undertake, through design review, a wholesale effort to influence its architectural character in a coordinated way for the first time in its history.

Engineer Thomas C. Atwood was brought to Chapel Hill in 1921 at the invitation of a wealthy and influential Carolinian, John Sprunt Hill. Atwood had had a successful practice in the constructing of a variety of projects, among them the Yale Bowl and several "monumental" pumping facilities and filtration plants in Boston, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. In Chapel Hill he coordinated a major university construction program undertaken during the tenure of UNC president Harry Woodburn Chase along the lines of the 1919 plans for the campus drawn up by planner John Nolen and the architectural design work of the noted New York firm of McKim Mead and White. Needing an architect on site, Atwood hired Ecole des Beaux Arts-trained architect Arthur C. Nash, with whom he formed a successful partnership, Atwood and Nash, until Nash left the firm for Washington, D.C. in 1930. H.R. (Howard Raymond) Weeks, associated with Atwood and Nash from 1923, replaced Nash as partner, and the firm became Atwood and Weeks until Atwood's death in 1943.

Weeks was born in Palmyra, Missouri in 1901 and was educated at Furman University and Georgia Tech, from which he graduated with a degree in architecture in 1923. In the course of his career, he became the first president of the North Carolina State Architects Association, which became the NC branch of the American Institute of Architects, and later served as president, vice president, director, and executive committee member of the NCAIA. He was also influential in developing the state "Minimum Standards for Human Habitation" Act which was passed in 1946, and was involved in building code development in Durham. His work
included numerous educational buildings, including the Durham High School and gym, Chapel Hill High School (demolished), and dormitory and classroom buildings for the University of North Carolina, North Carolina Central University, Meredith College, and Davidson College. He also designed churches, hospitals, and other public buildings, including the University of North Carolina's Ackland Art Center, the first Raleigh-Durham Airport terminal, and the Raleigh City Auditorium, the Department of Revenue Building, and the State Fair Pavilions (all 1932), and the restoration of the State Capitol Building (1933).

The Chapel Hill Town Hall was designed midway in Weeks' career, and features much of what became one of his hallmarks, the "correct" interpretation of Georgian/Federal Revival themes thought to be the most appropriate architectural mode by Chapel Hill's leading citizens. These included Louis Graves, J. L. Morehead, insurance executive Collier Cobb, J. M. Booker, university comptroller William D. Carmichael, H. G. Baitly, Clyde Eubanks, and Joseph Hyde Pratt, the latter five of whom became the first appointees to the town's five-member Town Planning Commission on April 14, 1941, after more than a year's worth of urging by Graves' Weekly that such a body was necessary to oversee the orderly development of Chapel Hill.

The establishment of this body followed on recommendations by a five-member committee (the same five that were appointed to the first commission) formed to outline the planning tasks of such a Commission. These included (among other things):

"[stimulating] the improvement of the appearance of the streets, especially in the business section, after securing the advice of the best available consulting architect whose duty it would be to pass on the elevations of all renovated or newly erected buildings before they are renovated or erected, with a view to securing harmony in the designs of the various architects employed by the owners"19

Thereafter, and for the remainder of the decade, through a multi-fronted effort including the active interest of local citizens, standard architectural practice, business predispositions, and strategically placed stories by Weekly editor Louis Graves, the architectural character of the town was shaped, of-a-piece, to fit notions thought suitable for small towns after Williamsburg. Weeks' Town Hall thus forms the first bracket of this era. The capacity to influence and disseminate planning principles to professionals nation-wide through the establishment of UNC's first Department of City and Regional Planning in 1947, and the construction of Colonial Revival buildings in Chapel Hill which continued into the 1950's, form its closing bracket.

While city hall architecture is as various as architectural styles in general—small town city halls can be studied today as examples of the traditions of Neo-Classical (Wilmington, North Carolina), Beaux-Arts (St. Joseph, Missouri), Greek Revival (Salem, Massachusetts), Second Empire (Alexandria, Virginia), Richardsonian Romanesque (Springfield, Ohio), Art
Deco (Tacoma, Washington), and more--, the Georgian/Federal Revivalism of Chapel Hill's 1939 Town Hall continues to evoke our roots as a nation of ordinary citizens engaged in our ongoing experiment in self government.

NOTES


2 Chapel Hill Weekly, "Chapel Hill Opens Only Town Hall In 144 Years," April 14, 1939.

3 Historic Buildings, op. cit.


5 Editorial, Chapel Hill Weekly, June 24, 1938, p. 2.

6 Minute Book No. 6, January 15, 1930-July 5, 1942, Board of Aldermen, Town of Chapel Hill, p. 739.

7 Ibid. p. 740.

8 There is no mention of a selection of a site at all; it was apparently assumed that the structure would replace the old town hall building after its removal (which was discussed).


10 Editorial, op. cit.

11 J. M. Booker, Letter to the Editor, Chapel Hill Weekly, July 1, 1938, p. 2.


13 J. L. Morehead, Letter to the Editor, Weekly, ibid.


16 Minutes, Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen, June 14, 1839, pp. 898-9.


Previous documentation on file (NPS):
☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings
☐ Survey # ________________________________
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
☐ Record # ________________________________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

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Verbal Boundary Description

Block H,
Lot 10, Map 85, Section 9788. Town of Chapel Hill, NC

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses all of the property historically associated with the Chapel Hill Town Hall.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Mary L. Reeb
organization: Historic Preservation Services
date: November, 1989
street & number: 608 Laurel Hill Road
city or town: Chapel Hill
date: November, 1989
telephone: (919) 967-2303
state: NC
zip code: 27514
All of Lot 10 in Block H, as shown by shading on this portion of Map 85, Chapel Hill Tax Maps.