

A brief history of 205 College Street, "The Carrier Building"

In 1920, Albert Heath Carrier decided that his architecture business was going well enough that he and his wife Sarah should purchase an investment property in downtown Asheville. For the previous 15 years, Carrier teamed up with Richard Sharp Smith, one of Asheville's most prolific and influential architects in beginning of the 20th century. Smith came to Asheville as the supervising architect on George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate. After the Biltmore project was complete, Smith, an immigrant from England, could have gone just about anywhere, but he saw the potential in this up and coming mountain town. Smith and Carrier were at the height of their careers when they decided to build a new office for themselves at 205 College Street on the land that Carrier and his wife had purchased.

Smith and Carrier previously had a nice office above The Majestic Theater, which featured vaudeville acts as well as motion pictures. It has been said that Carrier, had a window cut in his office wall so he could watch performances. The new office at 205 College Street, also designed by Smith and Carrier, was on the second floor above the new showroom for Overland-Knight automobiles. The view overlooking Beaucatcher Mountain would have been a welcome change of pace from the distraction of a good vaudeville act.

Only one year after the building was complete, Richard Sharp Smith died in 1924. Carrier continued the architecture business out their new College Street office but before long he decided to focus the majority of his remaining days tinkering as an inventor and helping his father on the peanut farm in Albany, GA.

Meanwhile, at 205 College Street, the Overland-Knight automobile showroom was quite successful. The Asheville Citizen reported that some 3,000 people came to their opening night on April 7, 1923, which would have been roughly 10% of the population of Asheville. The cars shown in the well-lighted corner of Valley and College would have turned heads. The pictures of these automobiles help remind us of what the roaring 20s would have looked like in Asheville.

During the great depression, the corner of College and Valley was home to Three Mountaineers, a local craft manufacturing company. Three Mountaineers had a big hand in the local art scene. They started as a member of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, making mostly handcrafted pottery and woodwork. Then as they grew to be more successful, many of their Appalachian themed crafts were mass produced. Three Mountaineers called the old Carrier Building their home from 1932 until 1951

when a fire destroyed most of the building.

In 1960, the print shop Biltmore Press was working out of the Valley Street portion of 205 College Street, while Rogers Plumbing and Heating occupied the College Street side. As the needs of Biltmore Press grew, they realized they could use the whole building. So in 1979, Biltmore Press purchased the property from Three Mountaineers Inc.

Biltmore Press's roots date back to 1925 when they were located in Biltmore Village. In the 1930s they moved to Patton Ave in downtown Asheville. Twenty years later, they moved to the Carrier building. One of the reasons they stated for the move was for "better parking." I imagine those reading this today may get a laugh out of this statement.

For four decades, 1952 to 1994, Biltmore Press became a landmark in Downtown Asheville. Institutions like Winn-Dixie Grocery across the street or the David Millard Junior High catty-corner to the Carrier Building came and went. In 1994 Biltmore Press had outgrown the Carrier Building. With 55 employees and growing, they moved to a new 40,000 square foot facility in West Asheville. Buncombe County Government saw this property and decided to purchase it for their Parks and Recreation Department. County Commissioner minutes state that the bottom of the building could house Physical Facilities shop space and chemical storage. Commissioner Patsy Keever made the motion and it was seconded by Commissioner Bill Stanley. The motion passed 4 to 1.

Since 1995, Buncombe County Government has moved many government services in and out of the Carrier Building. Some of the occupants included County Commissioners, Congressman Heath Shuler, the County Attorney, the County Manager, the I.T. Department, and Public Relations. Then, in 2015 to make way for the new Family Justice Center, the county decided to rehab the building for its current occupant: the Buncombe County Register of Deeds office.