

Historical Background

Union county was formed, by an 1842 act of the NC General Assembly, it was determined that a county seat would be located within two miles of the center of the county, and would be named in honor of President James Monroe. The town of Monroe was incorporated on December 24, 1844.

The December 1874 completion of the Carolina Central Railway between Wilmington and Charlotte brought important changes in the town's commercial standing. Monroe became a market town where the railroad brought manufactured goods that could be exchanged for regional agricultural products. Monroe's status as a hub in the railroad line meant that it became home to a large transient population known as Railway Men. Traveling salesmen, or "Knights of the Grip," were also drawn to the city by its large wholesale commerce. Finally, travelers stopping in on their north-south journeys enjoyed Monroe hospitality. As early as 1911, the Heath-Houston Realty Company had plans for a large, 100 guest room, modern hotel at the corner of North Main and West Franklin Streets. The name Hotel Joffre was given to the new building in honor of the French WWI general, Marshal Joffre.

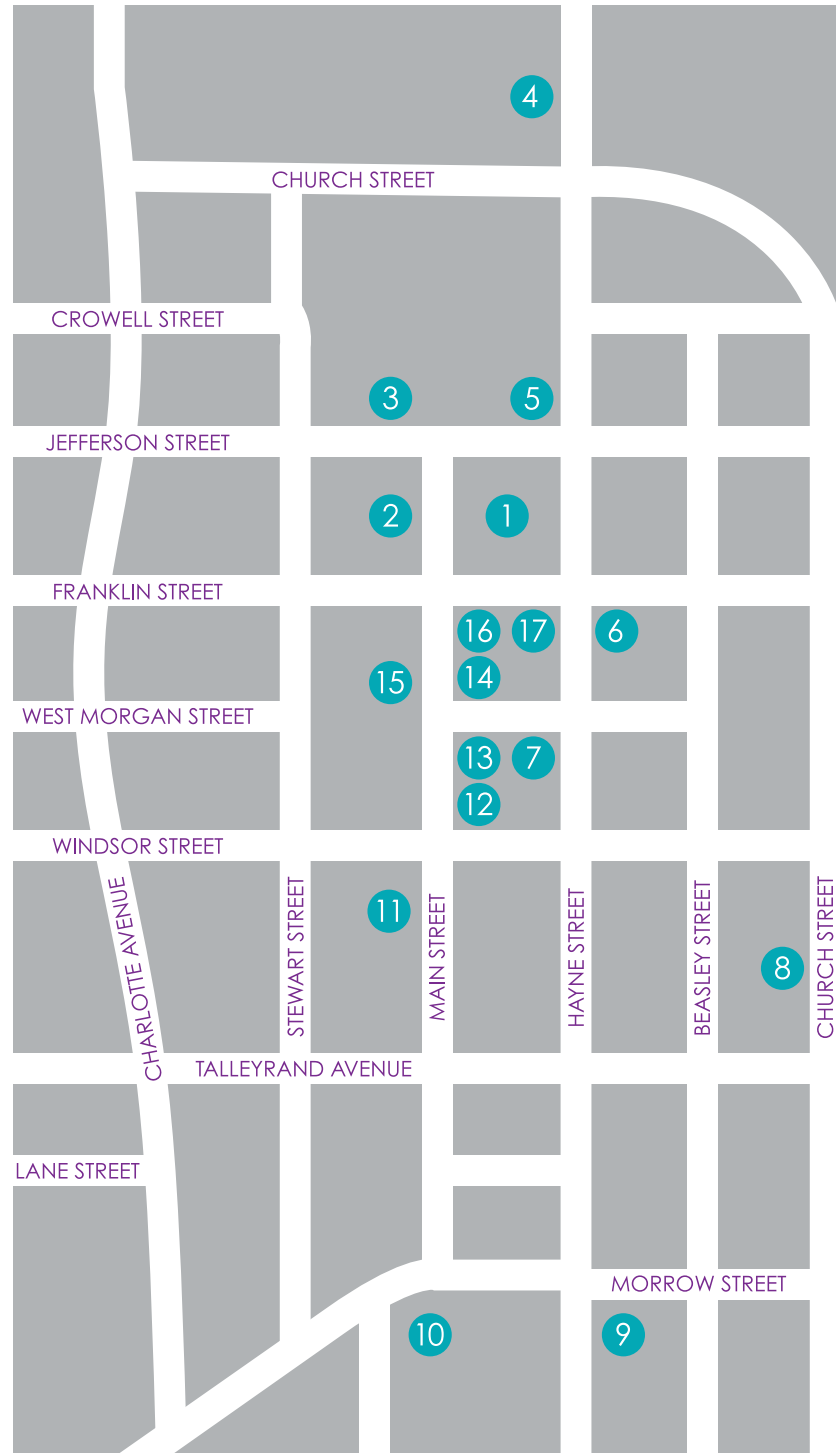
The Depression in the early 1930's brought the development of the downtown nearly to a halt. The establishment of Camp Sutton, a military base, in Monroe during World War II brought large numbers of soldiers and their families to the city, but very little new construction resulted in downtown.

Although a few significant buildings have been demolished, such as the Monroe Opera House and Hotel Joffre, Monroe's Central Business District still reflects the period of Downtown Monroe's greatest prosperity as an agricultural and commercial center. The City of Monroe still remains a hub of industrial and retail activity within the region and remains focus of culture and commerce within Union County. Millions of dollars in renovations and facade improvements, annual festivals, and new interest in professional housing have made Downtown Monroe again the place for commerce and travelers alike. Please enjoy your time in our historic district and thank you for visiting Downtown Monroe.

Legend

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. (Former) Union County Courthouse | 10. First Baptist Church
📍 Lancaster Avenue |
| 2. People's Bank Building
📍 313 North Main Street | 11. Center Theater
📍 120 South Main Street |
| 3. Former U.S. Post Office Building
📍 407 North Main Street | 12. Stewart House
📍 100-108 North Main Street |
| 4. The Depot
📍 100 Smith Street | 13. Monroe Bank & Trust Building
📍 120 North Main Street |
| 5. Old City Hall
📍 100 West Jefferson Street | 14. Belk-Bundy Building
📍 200-204 North Main Street |
| 6. The Jackson Club-United Way Bldg
📍 102 East Franklin Street | 15. Belk Building
📍 201 North Main Street |
| 7. Monroe Hardware Warehouse
📍 101 North Hayne Street | 16. English Drug Building
📍 115 West Franklin Street |
| 8. Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
📍 116 South Church Street | 17. Monroe Hardware-Secret Block
📍 101-111 West Franklin Street |
| 9. Belk House
📍 401 South Hayne Street | |

Walking Tour Map



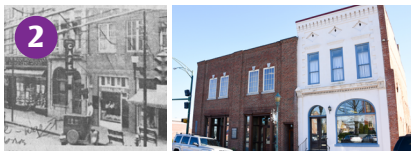
WALKING TOUR

www.historicdowntownmonroe.org



Former Union County Courthouse [1886]

This is the most architecturally sophisticated and impressive building in the county. In keeping with his firm's promise that their "architecture and building will be in the latest style of the art," Thomas J. Holt, younger brother of prominent North Carolina architect Jacob Holt, combined elements from a variety of popular styles to create a building that was everything the Board of Commissioners hoped it would be. By 1926, the courthouse was overcrowded and in need of repair. Wings were added to each side and the interior was renovated. The courthouse was renovated again in 1986. Its restoration and reuse is the most important preservation project undertaken in Union County and the courthouse remains the single most significant property representing the history and development of Union County and its County Seat, Monroe.



People's Bank Building [c. 1875]

The first bank in Monroe, People's was organized in 1874 with H.M. Houston. The building is believed to have been constructed a year later as the bank's first quarters. Around 1900, the first floor was remodeled and the exterior covered with stucco. First National Bank acquired People's Bank in 1905 and occupied the building until 1919.



Former US Post Office [1913]

The Post Office is a mature example of Neo-Classical federal architecture. It was designed by Oscar Wendroth, head of the United States Supervising Architect's Office, who specialized in post office design. The construction of this substantial, sophisticated facility by the United States government indicates the growing importance of Monroe as a trading, industrial, and railroad center. This building functioned as the main post office until 1986.



The Depot [1906] - 100 Smith Street

On February 1, 1906, the Charlotte Observer reported that the Seaboard Air Line Railroad planned to build "Two handsome depots for Monroe, a freight and a passenger." The Depot has a distinctive design that clearly identifies it as a railroad terminal. It was constructed using pressed brick and has special features such as terracotta panels, ornate chimneys and Queen Anne style window sashes. These special features and the need for two terminals, demonstrates the growing significance of Monroe as a railroad center in the region. The Depot is still used for railroad operations today by CSX.



Old City Hall [c. 1847]

Old City Hall was originally constructed as the public jail. It is the oldest public building existing in Union County; the jail was sold to the City of Monroe in 1892 and housed the Monroe government offices until the construction of the new city hall in 1972. The building was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and was renovated in the late 1970's.



The Jackson Club - United Way Building [1905]

This unique structure was built in 1905 for the nominal sum of \$15,000. The building was built using a handsome white pressed brick. The first floor housed the Bank of Union, Shute's grocery, and The Jackson Club on the upper two floors. The Club used the second floor for business and the third for live-in quarters. The cupola was built on top with an entrance through a skylight on the third floor. The glassed in cupola was used by members of the Jackson Club to play poker, which was against the law. The cupola was a good place to play and look-out for the police.



Monroe Hardware Warehouse [1924]

The magnificent structure is a three-story brick and concrete building built in 1924 at a cost of nearly \$250,000. Monroe Hardware used this warehouse until 1962. Monroe Hardware expanded the complex into the 200 block of North Hayne Street following the 1927 burning of retail store that was located on Franklin Street. There is a "ghost mark" on the second floor walls where a bridge connected the buildings across Morgan Street.



St. Paul's Episcopal Church [1911]

This Episcopal congregation was organized in 1874 and built its church in 1911 from designs by Wheeler & Stern of Charlotte with G. Marion Tucker as the contractor. As originally constructed, the gable-roofed red brick church had a cruciform plan with a square, crenellated two-story tower on the north side. In 1922, a gabled porch complementary to the existing building was added over the new entrances at the east end. A one-story brick colonial revival style addition was added to the rear of the church in 1945 for an educational building, and in 1978 additional colonial revival wings were constructed on either side.



Belk House [1903]

This residence is the largest and most impressive of the Neo-Classical Revival residences built in Monroe during the first two decades of the 20th century. This massive frame house was erected in 1903 for Dr. John M. Belk, a South Carolina native, who with his brother William Henry Belk, founded what was to become the largest chain of department stores in the southeast United States.



First Baptist Church [1878-1957]

This church's congregation was organized in October 1852, with nine members (four men and five women). Their first house of worship was within bounds of the Monroe City Cemetery and cost \$500.00 to build. It was used for twenty six years. In 1878, a brick church, the first brick building in Monroe, was constructed on Main Street. The church purchased property at the south end of Main Street in 1949 to build the present church. The sanctuary was completed in 1957.



Center Theatre [1940]

The theater was constructed in a vaguely Art Deco style. It opened on February 9, 1940 and featured "Remember the Night" starring Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray. During World War II, it was used by troops from Camp Sutton, the local army base, as a headquarters and for entertainment. After more than fifty years spanning Cowboys and Indians to romance and murder, the Center Theater closed its doors in December 1991.



Stewart House [1875]

Another John D. Stewart building, also known as the Central Hotel, was constructed in 1875. It was originally a three story edifice, seven bays long, with shops on the first floor and a boarding house on the upper two levels. After the building was damaged by a fire in the 1920s, it was rebuilt with only two stories. George McCorkle and William Henry Belk (founder of Belk's Department Stores) were two of the young boys who were paid 25 cents a day to haul these hand-molded bricks to the masons. It was not until the 1880s when bricks were locally made by machine.



Monroe Bank & Trust Building [c. 1919]

This structure, with its distinctive bank facade, is now the home of the Union County Arts Council and Downtown Monroe, Inc. It was built as the new home for Monroe Bank & Trust Company, which had been organized in 1903 as The Savings, Loan and Trust Company. A newspaper ad found in a 1925 newspaper advertised 4% interest paid on Time and Savings Deposits at the bank that had \$50,000 in capital and \$400,000 in resources.



Belk-Bundy Building [1911]

This unique building was constructed in 1911 on two adjacent lots owned by the Belk brothers and S.B. Bundy. Although the Spanish tile pent cornice has been removed for safety reasons, the yellow brick clad Italian Renaissance Revival Style design enlivened by white glazed terracotta trim conveys the prosperity of Monroe's early twentieth century business district. It housed two shops on the first floor and offices on the upper floors.



English Drug Building [1876]

This is one of many buildings constructed by Monroe businessman and developer John D. Stewart who erected this building for use as rental property. From 1883 to the late 1920's, the first floor contained the English Drug Company, which housed a pharmaceutical drug company, as well as, being a substantial country store supplier. Around 1900, the main entrance to the building was located on the corner and there were two connected shop fronts facing Main Street. Recently the facade has been restored following damage sustained in a snowstorm in 2000.



Monroe Hardware-Secret Block [1927]

This block was rebuilt in 1927 after being completely lost to fire. The two major retailers that dominate this block were Monroe Hardware Company and Secret Drug Store. The Hardware's retail store sits between 109-111 West Franklin Street. The company had its beginning in 1887 as Heath Hardware Company started by B.D. and A.W. Heath; it was located at 109 West Franklin Street facing the county courthouse. This building had the company slogan, "We handle everything under the sun, from a pin hook to a Gatling gun" painted on the front of the building. The company incorporated in 1900 as the Heath-Lee Hardware Company. The Monroe Hardware Company founded in 1901 soon merged with the Heath-Lee Company taking the name Monroe Hardware Company, Incorporated. Secret Drug Store fronts at 101-105 West Franklin Street at the former site of the Law Building that burned in the 1927 fire. Secret Drug was on the corner for many years with their offices in the upper floors. In the early 1900's Mr. Stack, a local attorney, had his office upstairs on the east side where he could look across the street into the Jackson Club to make sure his daughters were not dancing there, a practice frowned on by the Methodists.

Our Mission

It is the mission of Downtown Monroe to recognize, revitalize, preserve and promote the historic, cultural, social and economic significance of Monroe's Downtown area.

Get in Touch!

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