

## 501 West Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

The Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitor's Bureau has been housed at the street front location of 501 West Franklin Street in Chapel Hill since 2002. Amidst the vibrant "west end" of historic Franklin Street, and around the curve from hip and hopping Carrboro, visitors may feel that the bureau is at the heart of town, but in a historical sense, that is not the case.

Chapel Hill came into existence with the emergence of the University of North Carolina, chartered in 1789 as the new nation's first state-supported university. The town grew out from where Franklin Street (its name first appeared in documents as early as 1806) and the campus meet at Henderson Street (named after Major Pleasant Henderson, a Revolutionary War veteran who moved to Chapel Hill and opened a general store and boarding house there in 1797). It was from this point where all the businesses sprang that were needed to support the school construction, and the population that followed. Housing began down Henderson Street and to the east, with businesses continuing westward toward the long-traveled north-south roadway that ran between Hillsborough and Pittsboro. The road at that intersection would be named Columbia Street.

A few blocks west of Columbia, were the homes, farms, churches and businesses for the African American population, the ever-growing army of workers who cooked the meals, washed and ironed the linens and student clothing, tended the grounds, built the stone walls, and built, cleaned, and repaired the buildings of the university. Their heyday started to diminish along Franklin Street after World War II, when the building boom began on the west end of Franklin Street. In 1948 there were 10 residences and 19 commercial properties on the north side of West Franklin; by 1953, there were three residences and 35 commercial enterprises.

Businesses were assigned addresses in 1928, the year that the Ralph Pendergraft Chevrolet Agency burned down at 501 W. Franklin St. In 1933 a small brick building that housed Squires Grocery Store and Burroughs Auto Service was constructed. Burroughs Auto Service, on the left side of the building, later became MacMillan Chevrolet Agency. In 1943, Jack Hazzard bought the agency.

The building where the Visitors Bureau is located, was among 25 others constructed in the Williamsburg Colonial Revival style following World War II. The town had adopted the architectural style for new downtown businesses before

the war, with the first building erected at the corner of Henderson and Rosemary streets (now Tru Deli and Wine Bar).

One of the first built post-war, was at 431 W. Franklin St. (across Roberson from the bureau). It housed the Farmer's Dairy Cooperative, an enterprise of which George Watts Hill was involved, later known as "The Dairy Bar," from 1945-1977. Many remember the location from its years as Chapel Hill's first health food restaurant, The Pyewacket, from 1977 to 2002. Though the building has known many changes, the distinctive characteristics of the original style can be found in the hip roof with cupola and large windows. The cow on the weathervane denotes the building's original theme.

Wanting his Chevrolet agency to fit the new look of the street, Jack Hazard commissioned the construction of the Hazzard Motor Company in 1948, which was completed in 1949, bringing modern functions into his dealership. Fronting Franklin Street was the showroom, with interior end chimneys, a high ceiling with parapet walls and large, multi-paned windows; and above the front door entrance, a swan's neck pediment. Extending along Roberson Street were the bays of the one-story, flat-roofed garage. Jack Hazzard went on to build Colonial Stores at 505 W. Franklin St. in 1951 in the same style. In 1956, Hazzard sold his agency, which became the Harriss-Conners Chevrolet agency.

In 1963, Orville Campbell bought the building to produce the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, and named it the Bentley Building. A few years later he opened the Colonial Press, a publishing company, next door at 503. By 1973, the newspaper had outgrown the space, growing from six full-time employees to over 50. The newspaper moved to the western corner at 505 W. Franklin, where the *Chapel Hill News* was produced until 2014. Bentley was Orville Campbell's mother's maiden name and his middle name.

By 1975, the back offices housed a variety of businesses and the front space was taken by the Chapel Hill Telephone Company, until Ma Bell stepped in, and from 1977-81 it was the local Southern Bell office. After a few years of vacancy, Bear Mayhew Realty moved in. In '86, Algonquin Books graced the space for two years, followed by several entities until 1991 when the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors fronted the building.

In **1996**, the Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitor's Bureau moved to its new headquarters, in the back offices of the historical Bentley Building at 501 W. Franklin St. In 2002, the Bureau moved to the street front location in the building

and a walk-in Visitors Center, operated 6 days a week, was added to accommodate the area's growing tourism industry.

Today a staff of six Orange County staff members occupy the majority of space at the Bentley Building, helping to build and maintain Orange County's \$187 million annual tourism industry.

Additionally, Orange County provides space to Guardian Ad Litem in an office suite within Bentley Building.

As a result of the attractive office suite and welcoming West Chapel Hill corner, more than 15,000 annual visitors seek information and assistance from this office.