

Cities and public architecture

As cities grew, they wanted to show off the new wealth that business and industry had brought. Before the Civil War, North Carolina had few public buildings besides courthouses, and they tended to be small. In the Gilded Age, public architecture became more expensive and more elaborate.

The photographs on this page show public buildings in Charlotte in 1888 and 1898 — its courthouse and its railway station. Charlotte's population was growing rapidly at this time — from 7,094 in 1880 to 18,091 in 1890 and 34,014 in 1900, increasing by almost five times in only twenty years. The city's wealth was increasing just as rapidly, and these public buildings show it.

- How would you describe the differences between the older and newer buildings?
- How many people would you suppose used each?
- Why would the new buildings have been necessary?
- How might residents of Charlotte have felt about the old and new buildings?



Figure 1. Charlotte's old courthouse, 1888.



Figure 2. The new courthouse, 1898.



Figure 3. Charlotte's old railway station, 1888.



Figure 4. The new railway station, 1898.

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