Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Asheville City Hall

AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Asheville

__ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
11th

STATE
North Carolina

CODE
37

COUNTY
Buncombe

CODE
021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	X GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
City of Asheville Mayor Richard A. Wood

STREET & NUMBER
P. O. Box 7148, Asheville, N.C. 28807

CITY, TOWN
Asheville

__ VICINITY OF

STATE
North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Buncombe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Asheville

STATE
North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	_UNALTERED	X_ORIGINAL SITE
_GOOD	_RUINS	X_ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Asheville City Hall is a colorful, massive, and eclectic building of predominantly Art Deco character. In accord with its architect's goal of having "fortress-like strength . . . and a sense of verticality," it rises eight full stories from a reversed quincunx ground plan through a series of three set-back levels to a stepped octagonal roof crowned by a heavy conical tower. The ground floor, seven bays deep and five wide, is sheathed with mottled pink Georgia marble. A block modillion cornice runs along the top of the first story. Above it is a blank frieze of vertically-jointed rectangular marble slabs. A three-bay arcaded entrance porch is recessed in the central three bays of the main (northwest) facade.

First-floor fenestration consists of rectilinear casement windows set in molded architraves. Beneath each lintel is a sunken marble bas-relief composed of a rigidly upright stylized feather (parallel nested V's bisected by a single vertical member) flanked by a curvilinear vine-and-rosette design. The feather motif was described by the architect Douglas Ellington as the "prevailing ornament . . . devised as being lightly reminiscent of the Indian Epoch."

Floors two through seven are faced with light brown pressed brick laid in mechanical bond. The three tall windows of the second story of the main facade are framed in marble--flanked by pilasters that carry a stylized pediment with modillions underlining the rake of each pediment. Each pediment contains a feather bas-relief identical to those of the ground level windows. The remainder of the second story, as well as the third, fourth, and fifth stories, has rectangular casement windows with variously arranged metal mullions.

The two set-back cornices (between the fifth and sixth floors and the sixth and seventh) are trimmed with small bricks set in extremely thick, protruding mortar hence appearing cream-colored from below. Fenestration at the sixth level is dramatized by stone obelisks which bisect the triangular-topped casement windows and then rise free through a dramatic, heavy zigzag cornice at the set-back line. Each gigantic pinnacle is incised with a heavy "stylized feather." The cornice of the eighth floor is covered with a frieze strip of sawtooth bricks. The octagonal roof is covered with bands of elongated triangular terra-cotta red tiles; between the two levels of the roof are angular pink Georgia marble piers between which are precise vertical rows of ornamental green and gold motifs--reputedly inverted rhododendrons--not unlike the recurrent feather device. Above, the belfry tower repeats the angular pink marble piers open below and joined above with similar ornamental bands.

City Hall is entered through the arcaded covered portico of the northwest facade. This recessed porch is framed by two large octagonal lights located at the right angles formed by the abutment of the arcade walls with the outer facade walls. Each corner light rests on a marble plinth and has an exposed metal skeleton consisting of adjacent stylized feather motifs inset with thick polychromed glass.

The entrance porch is groin-vaulted and has two hanging lamps similar to those outside the arcade. Large pink mottled marble blocks cover the porch floor and continue partially up the walls like a tall wainscot. The rest of the walls as well as the ceiling vaults are covered with green, yellow, and brown flecked mosaic tiles. The

continuity of these surfaces is interrupted only by a checkered band of hot pink, black, and white tiles which runs horizontally around the porch just above the upper edge of the marble wainscot.

The lateral walls of the porch are pierced by heavy wooden double doors with block raised panels arranged in three horizontal tiers. Each side entrance is framed by a flat-paneled marble surround and surmounted by a marble bas-relief depicting the City Seal on a monumental scale. Each seal is superimposed on a diamond-shaped arrangement of chamfered vertical uprights terminating in smooth-faced roundels (a favorite Ellington motif). The inner wall of the porch contains three towering round-arched plate glass windows, each opening at the base into a double leaf glass door. The doors of the central arch are further interrupted by a rectangular box-shaped vestibule which projects onto the porch proper.

The interior arrangement is typical of many office buildings of the 1920s. Rectangular offices occur at the perimeter of each floor. Most of the remaining central space is filled by a large service core which contains public elevators and an enclosed maintenance stairway.

The second floor, however, is distinguished by the city manager's office and the monumental city council chambers, located in the western corner and along the northwest elevation, respectively. Both are decorated in an unhistorical Neo-Georgian fashion with paneled wainscot and walls finished with a grey-green stain. The city manager's office contains a handsome built-in wooden bookcase of door height. The lower third of the front has three heavy horizontal raised panels and each lateral end has a single vertical flat panel. The upper two-thirds of the front of the bookcase has three unpretentious double frosted glass leaves. Each leaf is ornamented with a delicate rectilinear grid and in the large upper middle panel of each appears the ubiquitious stylized feather motif.

Decoration in the city council chambers is frankly over-stated and includes cumbersome plaster ceiling medallions as well as large paintings of Indians and early settlers in the area framed into the wall. Heavily paneled aprons, consisting of a roundel symmetrically flanked by raised panels, are at the base of each painting frame. A sawtooth "chairrail" (actually above head height) encircles the room. The chambers' double door is ornamented on each inner leaf with a decorative plaque applied to a vertical flat panel.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ~~1929~~ 1926-1928 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Douglas D. Ellington

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Asheville City Hall, built 1926-1928, is a massive and flamboyantly polychromed office building, combining some Beaux Arts form with vivid Art Deco character. Its curious, "fortress-like" form designed especially for the mountain city of Asheville and the stylized American Indian-derived feather motif that dominates the decorative scheme make/in a distinctive expression of Asheville's pre-Depression heyday and one of the chief monuments of Asheville's Art Deco master, architect Douglas Ellington.

The city of Asheville was formally established in November, 1797, and was organized as a municipality in 1798. It is uncertain how the town was governed during the early years of its existence (no records pertaining to this period are available), but it is believed that a group of commissioners elected at intervals oversaw its affairs. In January, 1841, the North Carolina General Assembly created a body politic known as the Board of Commissioners for the town of Asheville and invested it with powers to act "for the good government of said Town." Records from 1849 suggest that the board of commissioners elected that year made the first efforts to adopt rules and regulations to govern its deliberations and official actions. It is not known, however, where this body held its meetings.

The first reference to formal quarters for the town government appeared in 1869. Minutes from that year's meetings reveal that Mayor Thomas D. Johnston was paid $25.00 per year for the use of his private offices as the commissioners' monthly meeting place. By 1889 city officials had responded to public agitation for a designated meeting place by authorizing a bond issue in the amount of $25,000 for the purpose of erecting a suitable municipal building. This structure was occupied in August, 1892. It was situated on the east end of Pack Square and contained a fire station, a police station, and a city market. It served Asheville until 1926, when it was condemned and razed.

The present City Building was originally proposed as part of a joint city-county plaza development. Different political factions are said to have controlled the city and county governments at this time, and they apparently failed to agree on a common architect and mode of design. When the "twin" buildings were completed in 1928, therefore, they bore little relationship to each other in appearance. The fifteen-story Buncombe County Courthouse was designed by the architectural firm of Milburn and Heister of Washington, D. C. (Frank Pierce Milburn /1868-1926/, a partner in this firm, was a specialist in the design of courthouses and other public buildings. Many of his designs once graced North Carolina cities and county towns, and a few survive today.) It is built of cream-colored bricks, with classic details of Indiana limestone and granite.

The City Building was designed by Douglas D. Ellington, an architect then living

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in Asheville. Born in Clayton, North Carolina, on June 26, 1886, Ellington was educated at Randolph-Macon College, Drexel Institute, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. While in Paris he became the first southerner to win the Prix de Paris, and the only American at that time to be awarded the Prix Rougevin. His measured drawing of the eleventh century Church of St. Trophime at Arles, France, has been cited by experts as the finest such execution of that structure in existence. He was also one of ten first prize winners in the worldwide Christopher Columbus Memorial Competition, in which more than a thousand architects competed. He served for a time as professor of architecture at Drexel Institute, Columbia University, and Carnegie Institute of Technology, and was also noted for his talents as a watercolorist.[1] His first important work in the South was for Old St. Paul's Church in Richmond, Virginia.

According to his obituary in the Asheville Citizen-Times, Ellington first came to the Asheville area in the 1920s. In 1926 he purchased a three-acre tract of land in Chunn's Cove upon which he built his home. (This house was later selected by House Beautiful magazine as one of the fifty most artistic and interesting residences in North America.) Among the buildings he designed in Asheville were the Lee Edwards High School, the First Baptist Church, Biltmore Hospital (which he later redesigned as the home office of the Imperial Life Insurance Company), the S & W Cafeteria Building, and the Merrimon Avenue Fire Station (all of which are still standing), and a large number of residences. In addition, he designed the model town of Greenbelt, Maryland, and restored the Dock Street Theater in Charleston, South Carolina. Beginning in 1937, he is said to have spent a good deal of his time in Charleston, where he was involved in construction and restoration projects. He was active in a number of professional organizations and his practice extended throughout the eastern seaboard. Ellington died at his home near Asheville on August 27, 1960.

In an article published in The Architectural Record shortly after the City Building was completed, Ellington sought to explain the process by which his design evolved. Acknowledging that he had been "privileged to entertain a fresh point of view because of the freedom of surroundings and because of the broad outlook of the officials who had the project in charge," Ellington explained that

> The initial step was a close study of Asheville and its environs, a thorough regard for what nature had done here and a careful consideration of what man had added to it. Then followed a discussion with the officials who had the project in hand concerning its site, its uses, its magnitude and the money appropriation available. Within twenty-four hours thereafter a design was conceived and a sketch made. This first sketch contained all the elements which have been carried into the final structure, except that the roof treatment and tower were projected beyond the point as first indicated. This came about as an evolution of the desire that the contours of the building should reflect the background and that the building be equally presentable from all points of view, above and below. . . .

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There was a desire to have the structure emerge from the ground in fortress-like strength and ascend to its full height with a sense of inevitability, presenting equality in all facades and frankly to express the steel framing of the building as against masonry forms and feeling. Throughout the making of the plans for the structure the material to be employed was in mind; the particular marble, brick and terra cotta were selected so as to embrace a transition in color paralleling the natural clay-pink shades of the local Asheville soil, the order of transition, from base to roof, being from the lighter to the darker, the banded vertical surfaces of the roof being high-lighted in green, blue and gold. The details in connection with the marble and the brick were deliberately confined to the greatest simplicity, the more ornate capping motifs having been equally deliberate and having been studied in the light of the distance from the eye. All openings were of course studied with a view to having them conform to the general spirit sought for. The prevailing ornament, which may be described as a feather motif, was devised as lightly reminiscent of the Indian epoch.[2]

In May, 1927, Asheville mayor John H. Cathey reported that the city was "bringing to completion a municipal home of distinguished architecture and substantial construction which it is hoped will prove an attraction to visitors and a pride to residents." He also announced that the cost of the new city hall was $750,000.[3] When it was completed, the city fathers boasted that no finer municipal building existed anywhere in the United States.

The interior of the building includes symbolic murals in the council chamber on the second floor, the work of Clifford Addams of New York. These depict the story of the Indians and the early white settlers. The carillon in the tower was presented to the city by the Buncombe County War Mothers as a memorial to the county's World War I dead. During World War II the entire City Building was leased to the United States Army, which made the structure the world headquarters for its Weather Wing and Communications Services branch of the Air Forces. During these years the city's offices were housed on the first and fourth floors of the county courthouse. After the war most of the municipal agencies moved back into the first two floors of the City Building, leaving much of the upper-floor office space available for rent.

[1]"Ellington, Architect and Artist, Dies Here," Asheville Citizen-Times, August 28, 1960, sec. 8, p. 8.

[2]Douglas D. Ellington, "The Architecture of the City Building, Asheville, North Carolina," The Architectural Record, LXIV, No. 2 (August, 1928), 89.

[3]John H. Cathey, Four Years in Review and recommendations upon Asheville's civic development of the future (Asheville: n.p., 1927), n.p.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Asheville Citizen-Times. "Asheville City Hall Was Completed In 1928," 80th Anniversary Edition, March 26, 1950; "Ellington, Architect and Artist, Dies Here," August 28, 1960.

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Buncombe County Records, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds Books).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	17	359720	3940000
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Research by Robert Topkins, survey specialist; architectural description by Mary Alice Hinson, consultant

ORGANIZATION Division of Archives and History

DATE

STREET & NUMBER 109 East Jones Street

TELEPHONE 919/829-4763

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh

STATE North Carolina

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL x

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

GPO 892-453

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Cathey, John H. Four Years in Review and recommendations upon Asheville's civic development of the future. Asheville, 1927.

Ellington, Douglas D. "The Architecture of the City Building, Asheville, North Carolina." The Architectural Record, August, 1928.

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Sondley, Forster A. A History of Buncombe County, North Carolina. Asheville: Advocate Printing Co., 2 volumes, 1930.

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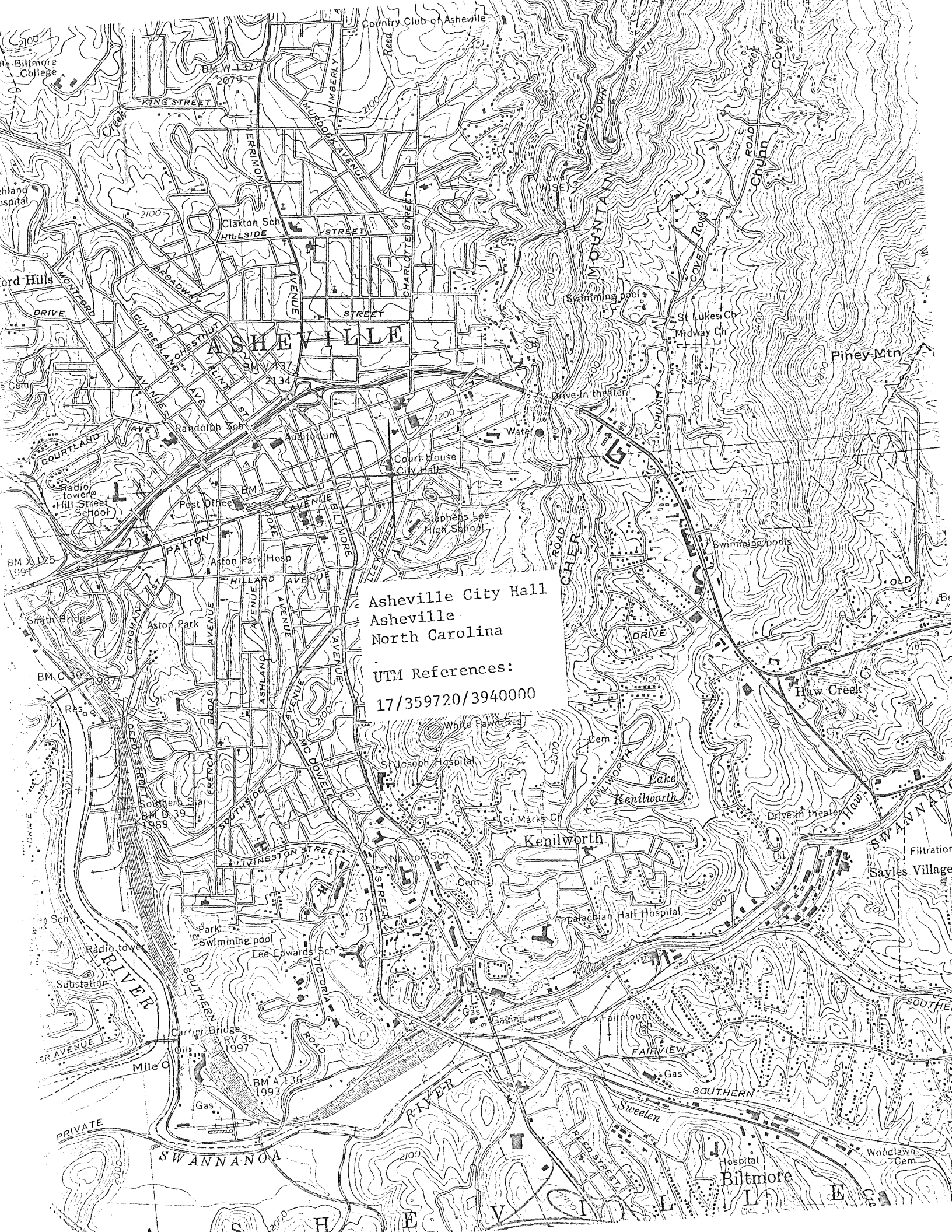
Asheville City Hall
Asheville
North Carolina
UTM References:
17/359720/3940000
ASHEVILLE
BILTMORE
KENILWORTH
SWANNANOA
RIVER
MOUNTAIN
Country Club of Asheville
Biltmore College
KING STREET
MURDOCK AVENUE
KIMBERLY AVENUE
MERRIMON AVENUE
CHARLOTTE STREET
HILLSIDE STREET
BROADWAY
MONTFORD DRIVE
CUMBERLAND AVENUE
CHESTNUT ST
FLINT ST
COURTLAND AVE
PATTON AVENUE
BILTMORE AVENUE
HILLARD AVENUE
ASHLAND AVENUE
BROAD AVENUE
FRENCH BROAD
SOUTHSIDE AVENUE
DEPOT STREET
LIVINGSTON STREET
MC DOWELL STREET
VICTORIA ROAD
FAIRVIEW ROAD
CHUNN COVE ROAD
SCENIC TOWN MTN
COVE ROAD
OLD HAW CREEK ROAD
REED CREEK
Claxton Sch
Randolph Sch
Auditorium
Court House
City Hall
Post Office
Radio tower
Hill Street School
Stephens Lee High School
Aston Park Hosp
Aston Park
Smith Bridge
Reservoir
Water
Swimming pool
St Lukes Ch
Midway Ch
Piney Mtn
Drive-in theater
Swimming pools
Haw Creek
White Fawn Res
St Joseph Hospital
St Marks Ch
Kenilworth
Lake Kenilworth
Newton Sch
Cem
Appalachian Hall Hospital
Park
Swimming pool
Lee Edwards Sch
Radio tower
Substation
Southern Sta
Carrier Bridge
Gaging sta
Fairmont Ch
Sayles Village
Filtration
Hospital
Woodlawn Cem
Sweeten
Mile Oil
Gas
PRIVATE
BM W 137 2079
BM W 137 2134
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BM C 30 1987
BM D 39 1989
BM A 136 1993
RV 35 1997