**1. NAME**

**HISTORIC** Wafco Mills

**AND/OR COMMON**

---

**2. LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER** 801 McGee Street

**CITY, TOWN** Greensboro

**STATE** North Carolina

---

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>PRESENT USE</th>
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<td><em>OCCUPIED</em></td>
<td><em>AGRICULTURE</em></td>
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<td><em>PRIVATE RESIDENCE</em></td>
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<td><em>ENTERTAINMENT</em></td>
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<td>BEING CONSIDERED</td>
<td><em>YES: UNRESTRICTED</em></td>
<td><em>GOVERNMENT</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

**NAME** City of Greensboro

**STREET & NUMBER** Jim Melvin, Mayor

**CITY, TOWN** Greensboro

**STATE** North Carolina

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**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

**COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.** Guilford County Courthouse

**STREET & NUMBER**

**CITY, TOWN** Greensboro

**STATE** North Carolina

---

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

**TITLE** Historic American Engineering Record

**DATE**

**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS** HAER

**CITY, TOWN** Washington

**STATE** D.C.
The Wafco Mill is located in the midst of a quiet residential neighborhood on the outskirts of the downtown area of the city of Greensboro. The original mill building, constructed in 1893, and the 1907 and 1912 additions comprise an industrial complex representative of the era when the economic development of the city depended upon such locally-owned establishments as the Wafco Mill. The contiguous group of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century mill buildings retains most of the original machinery in situ and is a vital reminder of the industrial growth which took place in North Carolina in the late-nineteenth century and aided the development of such cities as Greensboro.

The Wafco Mill complex is made up of three adjoining buildings aligned on a north-south axis which indicate the expansion of the mill as the company grew. Flanking the mill on the east is a railroad track; on the west is a small creek.

The original frame building at the southern end of the complex is made up of three full stories sheathed in weatherboards with a shed-roofed penthouse story which covers the east half of the fourth floor. The fourth floor section originally ran along the east-west axis of the building but was altered in 1941 to a north-south configuration. The building features a flat roof of rolled asphalt. The fenestration consists of six-over-six sash windows set in plain board surrounds. The south elevation has a loading platform sheltered by a shed roof; an open loading dock extends to the south from the east end of the platform and continues along the eastern elevation of the building. The east elevation of the structure features a two-leaf door with five flat panels in each leaf. A chimney stack rises at the southwest corner of the building. The interior of the 1893 building displays exposed framing providing an excellent example of late-nineteenth century construction techniques. Of particular note are the chamfered pillars supporting the flooring; the pillars were processed in Randolph County by the father-in-law of the original owner of the mill.

Immediately to the north of the 1893 frame building and connected to it is a four-story structure of brick laid in five course American bond. It was constructed in 1907. Like the 1893 building, this structure received major alterations in 1941. Originally a gabled structure of three full stories and a gable story; it was expanded by the addition of a full, flat-roofed fourth story on the eastern side of the building; the western side of the fourth story retains the gable roof. This alteration was made in order to provide more headroom for the expansion of the elevator system. The fenestration of the east elevation of this structure consists of segmental-arched six-over-six sash windows with brick sills and plain molded surrounds. Two-segmental-arched openings on the first story feature five panel, double-leaf doors with transom overlights. The left door is of similar design to the door on the 1893 section of the mill. The right door is of five raised panels, four of which are vertical with a fifth horizontal panel. The configuration of the original gable roof is clearly evident from the coloration of the brick in the newer fourth floor; the windows added at the time that the roof was changed match the original windows, however. The west elevation displays the original gable roof configuration with a boxed cornice and a wide eave. A single window is set in the peak of the gable; the window is of the same segmental-arched, six-over-six sash design as of those on the east elevation. The interior of the structure is almost entirely filled with the storage bins and elevators used in the transfer of the grain for the mill. An unusual feature of the construction of the storage bins is the use of one-by-four boards, eighteen inches long, laid lengthwise so that they create eighteen inch thick walls in the bins.
The northernmost and most imposing structure in the Wafco Mill complex is a four-story building constructed in 1912 of brick laid in five course American bond. The lower three stories are four bays wide on the east and west elevations, while the fourth story rises as a two bay central monitor with a flat roof, flanked by a low parapet. The fenestration consists of six-over-six sash windows with plain molded surrounds set in segmental-arched openings. Arched corbeled brickwork emphasizes the window arches. On all elevations the windows are separated by full height brick pilasters—separating each bay on the east and west, and pairs of bays on the north. A double leaf, three panel door opens from the first floor of the east elevation; one single leaf and two double leaf doors open from the north elevation onto a loading platform. The interior of the 1912 building retains the majority of the original equipment used in the manufacture of flour and displays an exposed floor support system.

The west elevation of the Wafco Mill complex features two wings built in 1904 and 1912. The 1904 addition to the frame 1893 structure, consisting of offices for the mill, is a one story brick structure laid in five course American bond with a low hipped roof and segmental-arched six-over-six sash windows. Windows of similar design light the basement of the structure. Connected to the north side of the office building and the west side of the 1907 and 1912 buildings is a two-story brick structure, also laid in five-course American bond and carrying a hipped roof. The building was constructed as the engine room and contained a diesel engine for the generation of power to drive the mill machinery. The fenestration consists of twelve-over-twelve sash and features similar arched openings and corbeling to the 1912 mill building. A final element of the Wafco Mill complex is the framework for a watertower, located at the southwest corner of the engine room.

Footnotes

1 Interview with John D. Watson, Jr., February 15, 1979.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.
SIGNEDANCE

PERIOD

PREHISTORIC

1400-1499

1500-1599

1600-1699

1700-1799

1800-1899

1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

ARCHAEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC

ARCHAEOLOGY-HISTORIC

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

ART

COMMERCE

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNITY PLANNING

CONSERVATION

ECONOMICS

EDUCATION

ENGINEERING

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

INDUSTRY

LAW

LITERATURE

MILITARY

MUSIC

PHILOSOPHY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

RELIGION

SCIENCE

SCULPTURE

SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN

THEATER

TRANSPORTATION

INVENTION

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wafco Mill is significant to the industrial and commercial development of Greensboro as a well-preserved example of frame and brick industrial construction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is associated with the Watson family whose members introduced the roller mill process to the city of Greensboro at the Wafco Mill. The mill is an important reminder of the development of industry in Greensboro which began to overshadow smaller home-style industries there in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. With its collection of milling machinery almost intact, the mill is an excellent example of the technological development of the milling industry and of the type of surroundings in which the employees of such a concern worked.

Criteria Assessment:

A. The Wafco Mill complex is representative of the industrial development of the city of Greensboro in the late nineteenth century as the first roller mill to be established there; it also contributes to the early 20th century development of the town.

B. The Wafco Mill is associated with the Watson family whose members were prominent local businessmen and who were responsible for the introduction of the roller mill process of flour production in the city of Greensboro.

C. The Wafco Mill is representative of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial building techniques through the presence of the three principal stages of its construction. Because the mill retains the majority of its milling machinery, it is an excellent example of the mill industry and the technology that it employed. North, Watson, and Company, who established the mills, were also mill builders, and the complex is a notable example of their work.

SPECIFIC DATES 1893, 1907, 1912

BUILDER/ARCHITECT North, Watson, and Company
Wafco Mills in Greensboro is representative of an institution crucial to the development of local industries—the small industry owned and operated by a single family and handed down from one generation to the next. Its life spanned almost eighty years during which the mills survived five wars and two major depressions. Credit for its durability and success must be given to the Watson family who established the company in 1893 and managed it through all of its active years.

In the 1880s, W. A. Watson, Sr., and his son, W. A. Watson, Jr., operated a heavy construction business with headquarters in Davidson County. Sarah Watson, the daughter of W. A. Watson, Sr., married Tom P. North of Liverpool, England, who then became a partner in the business. The firm of North, Watson and Company, specialists in the construction of textile mills, were building in Guilford County about 1890; the owners were favorably impressed with the area. There were few flour mills in the Greensboro area at that time, and probably under advice of North who had experience as a miller, the firm decided to establish a second business.

Greensboro, a city of approximately 10,000 (1890), was a center of industrial activity in the late nineteenth century. In 1878 there were twenty-five manufactories (not counting merchants) located in the city, but that number increased by nearly 200 percent in the two decades that followed. Small, home-style industries were overshadowed by large factories producing a variety of products for distant as well as local markets. The boot and shoe shops were joined by textile companies; the older foundries succumbed to steel and iron production; and the cabinet shops gave way to furniture manufacturing just to name a few. Greensboro was clearly a progressive city on the move in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

On April 10, 1893, North, Watson and Company of Davidson County purchased lots 94 and 95, and some adjoining property formerly belonging to the Morehead family, from the Greensboro Land and Improvement Company. The land was located just west of Greensboro near the tracks of the Atlantic and Yadkin Railroad. Since North, Watson and Company had considerable experience in construction (including the first Cone Mills at Proximity, 1895; at Revolution, 1898; and at White Oak, 1902), it is likely that the firm built the four-story frame mill first called North & Watson. Within two years the actual building became known as the Greensboro Roller Mills while the company name remained North & Watson.

The roller mills at North & Watson were the first in Greensboro but not in North Carolina. The Grimes Brothers operated a similar mill in Lexington a few years earlier. Roller mills were introduced into the United States after the Civil War and became commonplace by the late 1880s. They differed from grist mills in several ways:
Grist mills usually contained one or two pairs of grindstones (sometimes iron plates), whereas roller mills had a series of spirally fluted rollers followed by pairs of plain rollers.

Grist mills pulverized the entire kernel of wheat or corn including the hard outer shell, the embryo, and the oil. Roller mills, with the rollers adjusted at various heights and tension, allowed for separation of the parts of each kernel of wheat or corn.

Grist mills could produce only a coarse meal or flour which, because of the presence of oil and embryo, spoiled fairly soon. Roller mills, with the ability to separate the oil and embryo from the endosperm, produced a purer and finer flour with a longer period of preservation. The oil and outer shells were turned into byproducts such as corn oil and fodder. Furthermore, adjustments in the rollers could turn out several grades of flour.

The roller mills were generally located in urban areas where steam or electric power could be generated. The superiority of their product started the grist mill industry on a downward trend and relegated the latter primarily to rural areas. Since the Watsons' construction company was centered in Lexington, they may have used the Grimes Brothers' roller mills as a model for their factory in Greensboro.

While W. A. Watson, Sr. and his son were instrumental in establishing the mills, the driving force during the formative years was T. P. North who operated the Greensboro Roller Mills for four years. North succeeded in putting the mill on a sound financial footing through the introduction of a brand of flour to appeal to each segment of society. The names clearly established the relationships:

- Purity: A High Trade Patent
- Star: A Fine Family Flour
- Charm of Greensboro: The Poor Man's Friend

North found it necessary to return to England in 1897 and sold his interests in the mills to his father-in-law, W. A. Watson, Sr.

Upon the departure of North, actual management of the mill fell to W. A. Watson, Jr. who had been the working partner in the firm of North & Watson, owners of the Greensboro Roller Mills. Watson installed new, improved machinery, including a forty thousand bushel elevator. To house the new equipment, he built in 1907 a three and a half story brick addition to the north side of the older mill. By 1910 the Greensboro Roller Mills were capable of turning out one hundred barrels of flour and five hundred bushels of meal every twenty-four hours. A special railroad siding was constructed for long distance deliveries, but local transportation still required horse and wagon. The mill owned a "fleet" of delivery vehicles which were housed in stables behind the building.
After 1897 the firm's name had been changed to W. A. Watson and Co., and in 1912, W. A. Watson, Sr. sold his interests to his son, giving W. A. Watson, Jr. complete title and all interest rights to the property. That same year a five story addition was built on the north side of the mill building adjoining the 1907 addition. The 1912 section became the front of the Greensboro Roller Mills, thus shifting the orientation of the structure from Walker Street to the present McGee Street. Increased space and new machinery trebled the output capacity of the mills by 1917. As a successful mill owner, W. A. Watson, Jr. enjoyed popularity in Greensboro's financial, business, and social circles.

In 1923 John C. Watson, Jr., grandson of W. A. Watson, pioneered the manufacture of formula feed for livestock in North Carolina. The Watson Feed Company was located elsewhere in Greensboro, and for nearly twenty years they ran complementary, but independent, businesses. Byproducts of the corn mill at the Greensboro Roller Mills were shipped to the Watson Feed Company to be processed into formula feed. W. A. Watson, Jr. retired in 1943 and transferring his company to his grandson, John C. Watson, Jr. A merger of the two companies was effected and a new building to house the feed mill was begun on the grounds belonging to the Greensboro Roller Mills. World War II delayed construction, but the feed mill was completed in 1945. The consolidation of the two businesses inspired a new name for the company, Wafco, adopted in 1943. The first two letters stood for Watson, the "f" for flour and feed, and the last two letters for company.

Wafco Mills produced a fairly wide range of grain products, copyrighting such brand names as Feather Soft Flour, Old Southern Corn Meal, Wafco Dog Food, and Wafco Dividend Feed. Produce was shipped to markets throughout North Carolina and southern Virginia. A minor boom period followed the war, according to John C. Watson, Jr., during which the United States government purchased thousands of tons of feed and grain for shipment to Europe under the Marshall Plan. By the late sixties, business for Wafco Mills had succumbed to the pressures of conglomerate competition. After struggling for a few years, the mills were closed in 1972. Six years later the property and buildings were sold to the city of Greensboro for $136,740.

The city of Greensboro sent a prospectus for adaptive use of the buildings, with emphasis on private housing, to approximately 150 potential developers. City planners are hoping that an attractive development at the Wafco site will encourage revitalization of the downtown area, which would help to stabilize the residential section between Greensboro College and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Part of a letter to possible investors read:

While housing is the priority objective, proposals which combine housing with another use, for example, use of the mill, will also be considered. However, no proposal will be considered which does not include housing.
Among the organizations interested in acquiring the property is the Watson Mill Preservation Society formed in early July of 1978. If successful, the Society hopes to renovate the mill for use as "almost a self-contained community, ideal for college students, professors, and retired persons." Others, however, are also bidding for the 2.7 acre tract, and until the city accepts one of the bids, the future of Wafco Mills is uncertain.

FOOTNOTES

1 "Brief History of Wafco Mills, Inc." Typed one page summary prepared by John C. Watson, Jr. in 1945 in collaboration with his father, John C. Watson, Sr., grandson and son of W. A. Watson, Jr. respectively, all of whom owned or operated Wafco Mills. John C. Watson, Jr. was born in 1895, two years after the mills were established, and grew up in the industry. In every instance in which his statements could be checked against documentary records, they proved to be accurate, thus giving reliability to his "history." Copy in Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as "Brief History of Wafco Mills." See also Guilford County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, 201 S. Eugene Street, Greensboro, Deed Book 91, p. 949, hereinafter cited as Guilford County Deed Book.

2 "Brief History of Wafco Mills."

3 Guilford County Deed Book 91, p. 449; and Deed Book 53, p. 550.

4 "Brief History of Wafco Mills"; and advertisement for Greensboro Roller Mills taken from unidentified 1895 newspaper and filed with Wafco Mills vertical file in the Greensboro Public Library, hereinafter cited as Greensboro Roller Mills advertisement, 1895. See also photograph of 1893 mill in Greensboro Record, July 3, 1978, and accompanying article.

5 Greensboro Roller Mill advertisement, 1895.


7 Guilford County Deed Book 93, pp. 605, 768; Greensboro Record, July 3, 1978; and "Brief History of Wafco Mills."
See Greensboro Roller Mills advertisement, 1895.

9 Guilford County Deed Book 109, p. 320; and Deed Book 128, p. 91. See also "Brief History of Wafco Mills."

10 Sketch of W. A. Watson, Jr., Greensboro Record, 1910. Undated clipping in vertical file of Greensboro Public Library, hereinafter cited as Watson Sketch. See also C. E. Weaver, (comp.), Sketches of Greensboro, N.C. (Richmond: Central Publishing Company, 1917), 32, hereinafter cited as Weaver, Sketches of Greensboro; and "Brief History of Wafco Mills."

11 Watson Sketch.

12 "Brief History of Wafco Mills."

13 Weaver, Sketches of Greensboro, 32; and Guilford County Deed Book 238, p. 77.

14 See photograph in Greensboro Record, July 3, 1978, and compare with photograph in Weaver, Sketches of Greensboro, 32. See also description in Guilford County Deed Book 109, p. 320; and address on Greensboro Roller Mills advertisement, 1895.

15 Weaver, Sketches of Greensboro, 32.

16 Watson Sketch.

17 "Brief History of Wafco Mills." See also Arnett, Greensboro, North Carolina, 187.

18 See "Processes: Feed," a typed page appended to Watson's "Brief History of Wafco Mills" and appears to be a part of that history. Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

19 Guilford County Deed Book 1017, p. 593; and "Brief History of Wafco Mills."

20 "Brief History of Wafco Mills."


22 Greensboro Record, July 3, 1978; and "A List of Products," typed page appended to Watson's "Brief History of Wafco Mills" and appears to be a part of that history. Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
23 The date was June 23, 1978. Guilford County Deed Book 2913, p. 433. Copy of deed and attached plat in Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.


25 Greensboro Record, October 9, 1978.


**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**


Greensboro Record, July 3, 7, and October 9, 1978.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Nominated Property: less than 1 acre—39,780 square feet

**QUADRANGLE NAME**

Greensboro

**UTM REFERENCES**

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**QUADRANGLE SCALE**

1:24000

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property is located at the corner of McGee St. and S. Cedar St. and is the small area upon which the mill is located. See attached deed and plat map.

---

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
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**FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME/TITLE**

Description prepared by David W. Parham, Survey and Planning Branch;

Significance prepared by Jerry L. Cross, Research Branch.

**ORGANIZATION**

N. C. Division of Archives and History

**DATE**

---

**STREET & NUMBER**

109, East Jones Street

**TELEPHONE**

(919)-733-6545

**CITY OR TOWN**

Raleigh

**STATE**

North Carolina

27611

---

**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 89-666), 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**

---

**DATE**

March 8, 1979

---

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

**DATE**

---

**ATTEST:**

Keeper of the National Register

**DATE**

---

**CHIEF OF REGISTRATION**

---

GPO 021-803