United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Robinson-Gardner Building
other names/site number Robinson Brothers Building

2. Location

street & number 173-175 W. Main Avenue
not for publication

city or town Gastonia
not for publication

state North Carolina code NC county Gaston code 071 zip code 28052

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date 2.23.19

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other. (explain)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
5. Classification

<table>
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<th>Ownership of Property</th>
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<td>☐ object</td>
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Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

6. Function or Use

<table>
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<td>COMMERCE/restaurant</td>
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<td>COMMERCE/business</td>
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7. Description

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<td>Renaissance Revival</td>
<td>foundation BRICK</td>
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Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
Robinson-Gardner Building

Name of Property

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Property is:

- Architecture

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Analysis Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, NC
Robinson-Gardner Building
Name of Property

Gaston Co., NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _less than 1__________

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Zone 3 4 0
Easting 0 3 8 4
Northing 0 2 0 8 0

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian

organization N/A
date July 1, 1998

street & number 637 N. Spring St.
television 336/727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem
state NC
zip code 27101

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets
Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Sparkles, LLC. (Anne & Gary Schenk)

street & number 2366 Pineview Rd.
television 704/853-3382

city or town Gastonia
state NC
zip code 28054

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.
DESCRIPTION:

Summary:

The Robinson-Gardner Building is a two-story, brick, commercial building located on Main Avenue, the principal thoroughfare of Gastonia's commercial center. Typical of downtown commercial buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Robinson-Gardner Building is aligned with the sidewalk in front, abuts the buildings on either side, and opens to an alley and parking area in the rear. Constructed in 1899, the Robinson-Gardner Building is the oldest known commercial building in downtown Gastonia. Although its first-story shop front has been remodeled, consistent with the type of alterations made on most downtown commercial buildings after mid-century, the second-story facade remains intact, displaying a handsome Renaissance Revival design. Despite some alterations on both exterior and interior (described hereafter), the Robinson-Gardner Building retains a strong degree of historical integrity in terms of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building is in good condition and is currently undergoing a sympathetic rehabilitation.

Exterior:

The facade of the Robinson-Gardner Building is remarkably intact. The only changes from the original are the loss of the capitals from the first-story pilasters, the mid-twentieth-century alteration of the glass shop front, and the over-painting of the signage at the top of the facade. Although the present shop front, composed of plate glass and metal framing, is clearly modern, its overall effect differs little from the original shop front as shown in a 1906 publication (Illustrated Handbook, 42). Like the original, the present shop front consists primarily of glass and has a recessed central entrance. Flanking the shop windows are rusticated brick pilasters, each topped by a molded metal cornice and a triangular pediment. An additional molded cornice carries across the entire facade of the first story between the two pilasters.

The well-preserved second story exhibits a handsome Renaissance Revival design with a variety of classical motifs. This level of the facade is divided into three bays. The dominant center bay, wider than the two that flank it, is defined by a pair of brick pilasters with capitals supporting a full entablature. Originally the entablature's frieze carried the name "Robinson Bros," but this signage has been over-painted. The projecting metalwork cornice features a dentil course, modillions, and fleur-de-lis cresting.

The center-bay pilasters enframe a pair of one-over-one sash windows with a molded metal band at sill height. The windows are surmounted by a round arch with a decorative cartouche at the
Robinson-Gardner Building
Gaston County, North Carolina

keystone position and terra cotta swirls at the bases. Encompassed by the arch, a pressed metal swag hangs between a pair of ribboned wreaths pierced by vertical torches. Between the arch and the entablature, pressed metal wreaths hold another, larger, metal swag.

Two narrow, identical bays flanking the center bay comprise the remainder of the facade. Each consists of a one-over-one sash window with a molded-metal, sill-height band and a rusticated, lintel-height stone band. Above these features are another molded metal band and a round-arched, louvered ventilator crowned by a pair of round brick arches with terra cotta swirls at the bases and a brick keystone, echoing the larger round arch of the center bay. Above the arches are two brick string courses, and the whole is capped by a plain metal coping.

Unlike the decorative facade, the rear elevation of the Robinson-Gardner Building exhibits a simplicity typical of commercial buildings dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At second-story level, three two-over-two sash, segmental-arched windows with rusticated stone sills and three-row brick lintels remain intact. Their first-story counterparts--a central doorway and two windows--have been enclosed with brick (although the doorway has been replaced with a smaller door). The enclosures date from the addition of the rear shed (now removed) in 1946. Although the added shed was removed in 1998, the brick basement level of the shed, with its west side loading entrance leading to the basement, was retained. It was capped by a concrete slab, which was enclosed by a simple ironwork railing, creating a patio area. Steps lead from the patio to the ground.

Interior:

Through the years, the interior of the Robinson-Gardner Building has been modified to serve its various uses. Prior to 1927, the first floor served as a shoe store; between 1927 and 1945 it was divided into a clothing store and a shoe store. From 1945 to 1975 the first floor was again used as a single store, and thereafter it continued to be used as a single commercial establishment. A 1900 newspaper advertisement and a 1906 photograph show that the second floor was originally used, at least partly, for professional offices (The Gastonia Gazette; Illustrated Handbook, 42). Sanborn Insurance Maps and city directories imply that during the 1920s, the second floor was used--in conjunction with the second floor of the adjacent building to the east--as a meeting hall for various fraternal organizations (Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930; City Directory, 1927-1928). During these early decades, the only way to access the second floor was by a set of stairs located in the building to the east (Gardner Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1904, 1908, 1915, 1922, 1930). By 1945, and perhaps earlier, Warren Gardner’s clothing store had expanded to the second floor of the building (Gardner photos from the 1930s and 1940s.)
Although both the first and second floors of the interior have been remodeled, both retain significant features from the 1927-1946 portion of the building's period of significance. Recent floor plans (see attached) show the present interior arrangement.

The first floor is currently used as a restaurant. As such, a kitchen and serving area, restrooms, and small storage areas have been created where there had been a single large room. However, earlier features remain and have been sensitively incorporated into the present design. Surviving from earlier years are the pressed metal in geometric patterns that covers the front three quarters of the ceiling, the majority of the handsome wood cabinetry along the east and west walls that once displayed clothing, and the ironwork-balustraded curved stair, dating from a 1946 remodeling, that gracefully rises to the second floor at the rear of the building.

During the period of the clothing store occupancy, the second floor consisted of one large room lined on east and west sides by wooden clothing display cabinets. Most of these survive, although the single room has been divided into a west side hall, east side offices, and an office and conference room suite across the front of the building. At the rear of the second floor, spaces have been enclosed for a bathroom and the HVAC system. Even with these changes, the cabinetry along the west wall of the hall and the east wall of the side offices remains not only visible but a significant element of the current design. In one of the offices, a wooden door in the cabinet wall opens to reveal the metal door that originally provided access to the second floor from the stairs in the adjacent building. The beaded board ceiling of the second floor survives, but is exposed only in the front office and conference room. The remaining beaded-board ceiling, some of which is in poor condition, has been covered with acoustical tiles. At the rear of the second floor, the original molded casing with bull's-eye cornerblocks survives around the windows, as it does around the metal door. The same casing also remains in the rear portion of the first floor.

Beneath the building lies an unfinished basement, accessed from an enclosed stair at the southeast corner of the first floor. Most of the basement floor is covered with wood, though the rear portion has been replaced with concrete. Other features include brick walls, brick center support piers, and exposed wood joists. A five-panel, double-leaf, wood door opens from the rear of the main basement to the basement of the 1946 shed, where a concrete ramp leads to the ground level at the rear of the building. The store's clothing press was originally housed in the shed basement on the side opposite the ramp.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Summary:

Built in 1899 for J. Lee and Samuel A. Robinson, the Robinson-Gardner Building survives as the oldest known structure in Gastonia's commercial center. The building's well-preserved facade is the most intact of those from the late Victorian period and is a handsomely articulated example of the Renaissance Revival style. The Robinson-Gardner Building served as the long-time location of two prominent mercantile businesses in Gastonia. The Robinson Brothers Shoe Company occupied the building from 1899 to 1927, when the Robinsons sold it to merchant B. B. Gardner. From then until 1975--nearly half a century--the Gardner family used the building for their men's clothing store, known first as The Young Men's Shop and later as Warren Gardner's Inc. Gardner's was the premier clothier of fashionable men in the area. Since 1975, when Gardner's downtown location closed, the building has had several commercial uses. The present owners are undertaking a careful rehabilitation to update the building for profitable use while preserving its significant historical and architectural character.

Due to its local architectural and commercial significance in Gastonia, the Robinson-Gardner Building fulfills Criteria C and A, respectively, for listing in the National Register. Its period of significance spans the years from the building's construction in 1899 to 1948, shortly after the Gardner family remodeled the interior for continued stylish service and the last year in which the building meets the fifty-year criterion for listing in the National Register.
Gastonia is a superb example of the dramatic impact created by the arrival of the railroad in combination with the growth of the textile industry. Located in the center of Gaston County, Gastonia began as Gastonia Station in 1872 when the Atlanta and Charlotte Railroad was built through the area. When the Chester and Lenoir Narrow Gauge Railroad intersected the Atlanta and Charlotte several years later, Gastonia Station became a significant transportation center for the region. The town of Gastonia, centered on the crossing of the two railroads, was incorporated in 1877 with a population of 236 (Brengle, 148).

During Gastonia's first decade, its growth was slow but steady. In 1887, however, the town's development accelerated when the Craig and Jenkins Banking Company (later the First National Bank) was established, followed soon thereafter by the formation of the Gastonia Cotton Manufacturing Company. The introduction of textiles to Gastonia brought phenomenal growth in the 1890s and 1900s. By 1910 Gastonia had become a major textile center with twelve mills and a population of 5,759. One result of this rapid expansion was the transfer of the county seat from Dallas to Gastonia. Another was the growth of a bustling commercial district near the railroad tracks (Brengle, 148).

Gastonia's commercial district developed primarily along Main Avenue between Oakland Street on the east and York Street on the west, with the most concentrated growth occurring in the 100 and 200 blocks of West Main. The Sanborn Insurance Maps, covering the years from 1893 to 1930, provide a graphic image of this development. In the 1890s, one- and two-story stores, both frame and brick, were scattered along Main, with an occasional dwelling interspersed among them. There was a bank; small specialty shops for such things as shoes, notions, hats, meat, groceries, and drugs; and larger buildings for a hotel, general stores, liveries, harnesses, furniture, and hardware—in short, businesses typically found in towns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1910, the south side of the 100 block of West Main Ave., where the Robinson-Gardner Building is located, had been completely filled in by commercial buildings, and nearly the same could be said of the north side of the 100 and 200 blocks. The south side of the 200 block of West Main and the 100 block of East Main were somewhat slower to develop commercially. These trends continued in the 1910s and 1920s, with the addition of such buildings as a post office, more banks, a newspaper office, movie theaters, and a business college. All the while, the earliest frame stores were being replaced by brick buildings, and later in the period, new brick buildings replaced some of the earlier ones (Sanborn Maps, 1893-1930).

Unlike many commercial buildings in downtown Gastonia, the history of the Robinson-Gardner Building is associated primarily with only two businesses, the Robinson Brothers Shoe Company and the clothing store operated by the Gardner family. Deeds, Sanborn Insurance Maps,
city directories, and old photographs, along with newspaper articles and local memories, help to tell the story.

On August 3, 1899, brothers J. Lee and Samuel A. Robinson purchased a lot on Main Street (Avenue) from Martha M. Glenn and others (Deed Book 40, p. 369). They immediately had a two-story brick building constructed, and by 1900, it appeared in a photograph of Main Avenue (Gastonia Street Scene). Although it is not known when in 1900 the photograph was taken, a newspaper advertisement in the February 15, 1900 issue of the The Gastonia Gazette announced the location of the office of Dr. P. R. Falls over the Robinson Brothers Store. A 1906 photograph of the building confirms that Dr. Falls, a dentist, did indeed occupy an office on the second floor of the building (Illustrated Handbook). Meanwhile, the 1904 Sanborn Insurance Map recorded the building for the first time; it had replaced a small, one-story, frame building shown on the 1893 and 1898 maps. Later Sanborn Maps continue to illustrate the building and also indicate that its address changed through the years from 546, to 131, and finally to 173-175 West Main Avenue (Sanborn Maps, 1893, 1898, 1904, 1908, 1915, 1922, 1930).

Gastonia's oldest available city directory, dating from 1910, lists the Robinson Shoe Company at this location and indicates the prominence of its owners, who proudly displayed their names, "Robinson Bros.," on the upper frieze of the building. President J. Lee Robinson was also president of the Gaston Loan and Trust Company and vice president of the First National Bank. His brother, Samuel A. Robinson, who served as secretary-treasurer of the Robinson Shoe Company, was also vice president of the Gastonia Commercial Club. The Robinson Shoe Company continued to occupy the building until around 1927 (City Directories, 1910, 1923-1924). On May 20, 1927, the Robinsons sold the building to B. B. Gardner (Deed Book 226, p. 153).

Bate Blanton Gardner was a local merchant who was also a county commissioner (Gardner Interview). Gardner had had a clothing store at another location on Main Avenue since 1919. After buying the Robinson Shoe Company building, he operated The Young Men's Shop on one half of the ground floor, while the Cinderella Shoe Shop used the other half. This arrangement continued until 1945, when The Young Men's Shop began to occupy the whole building. The following year the name of the business was changed to Warren Gardner's Young Men's Shop, and later simply to Warren Gardner's (The Gastonia Gazette, April 5, 1964; City Directories, 1927-1928, 1930-1931, 1934, 1940, 1942, 1945, 1954-1955). Warren Y. Gardner was B. B. Gardner's son, who had assumed leadership of the company. In 1946 the store was remodeled with a new stair at the back of the building and the addition of a rear shed (Gardner Interview). On July 16, 1947, B.B. Gardner formally transferred ownership of the building to his son (Deed Book 506, p. 143).

In 1955, Gardner's expanded to another location in a suburban shopping center and continued to operate both stores until 1975, when the downtown store closed. (The Gastonia Gazette, April 5, 1964; City Directories, 1956, 1971, 1975, 1976). On April 17, 1981, the building was sold to James
Thomas and Donna H. Morris, after which it was used for several years as the Army Navy Store (Deed Book 1364, p. 569; City Directory, 1995).

A new chapter in the history of the Robinson-Gardner Building began in 1997, when, on May twenty first of that year, the Morrises sold the building to Sparkles, L.L.C., under the ownership of Anne and Gary Schenk (Deed Book 2662, p. 792). Appreciating the historic and architectural character of the building and concerned with its preservation, the Schenks have been undertaking a careful rehabilitation. At present, the first floor is used as a restaurant, while the second floor houses several offices.

Architecture Context:

Gastonia’s earliest frame commercial buildings no longer survive. Those built in brick during the early twentieth century are generally modest, reflecting the commercial design aesthetic of the time. Typical features include various forms of decorative brick work, molded and corbelled cornices, large first-story display windows, recessed entrances, and upper-story windows with arched openings. Examples include the Frost Torrence Building at the southwest corner of West Main Ave. and South St. and the John F. Love Building at 213-223 West Main Ave. Unfortunately, many of these buildings have been heavily remodeled.

Among the finest and best preserved of the brick commercial buildings of the period—and the only one known to survive from the nineteenth century—is the 1899 Robinson-Gardner Building. Its design goes beyond the typical, including such classical features as pilasters; a cartouche used as the keystone of an arch; garlands, wreaths, ribbons, and torches; and a central overhanging cornice with dentils, modillions, and decorative cresting. Many of these features are made of pressed metal.

In the 1910s, Neoclassicism made a bold entrance to the downtown scene with the 1910 construction of the Gaston County Courthouse, designed by the Washington architectural firm of Milburn and Heister. Two other fine examples followed: the Citizens National Bank in the early 1920s and the Gastonia City Hall in 1926, both designed by prominent Gastonia architect Hugh White (Brengle, 163, 168).

Gastonia’s two skyscrapers, both seven stories tall and located in the 100 block of West Main Ave., continue a strong classical influence. The First National Bank, constructed 1916-1917, was designed by Columbia, South Carolina architects Wilson and Sompayrac. The Third National Bank, completed in 1923, is another Milburn and Heister building (Brengle, 166, 168).

A departure from the classical traditions came with the introduction of the modern Art Deco style. The S. H. Kress Building, with its multi-colored decoration, is the foremost example. It was built in 1925. A decade later, in 1935, the U.S. Post Office combined classicism with the Art Deco.
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section Number  8  Page 8

Robinson-Gardner Building
Gaston County, North Carolina

It was designed by Charlotte architects Charles C. and Walter W. Hook (Brengle, 167, 170).

After mid-century, many of Gastonia's downtown commercial buildings were remodeled in an
effort to "modernize." Consistent with the trend common throughout North Carolina and the rest of
the country, this usually meant alteration of the first-story shop fronts with more glass and metal and
sometimes the installation of metal canopies. The entire facades of some buildings were covered
with modern materials. In more recent years, some buildings have had their original second-story
windows enclosed or filled with single panes of glass.

Nevertheless, downtown Gastonia still exhibits a number of architecturally significant
buildings, most dating from 1910 to 1940. Of the earlier buildings, the Robinson-Gardner Building
survives not only as probably the oldest, but also as the most architecturally sophisticated and one of
the least altered.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gaston County Records, Office of the Register of Deeds, Gaston County Courthouse, Gastonia, N.C.


Gaston Street Scene, 1900. Photograph exhibited at Gastonia City Hall and Gaston County Public Library; original owned by Helen Babington.


*The Gastonia Gazette*, February 15, 1900; April 5, 1964.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 10 & Photos Page 10
Robinson-Gardner Building
Gaston County, North Carolina

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Verbal Boundary Description:
The boundary of the nominated property is defined as Parcel 55 on Gaston County Tax Map 36. It is shown by the heavy black line on the accompanying tax map, drawn to a scale of 1" = 50'.

Boundary Justification:
The nominated property, consisting of a town lot of less than one acre, constitutes the historic and current setting of the Robinson-Gardner Building.

PHOTOS:
The following information for #1-5 applies to all nomination photographs:

1) Robinson-Gardner Building
2) Gaston County, North Carolina
3) Laura A. W. Phillips
4) 5/98
5) State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina
6-7) A: Facade, view to S
    B: Facade detail, view to S
    C: Rear elevation, view to N
    D: Interior, first floor, view to SE
    E: Interior, second floor, cabinetry, view to N
    F: Interior, second floor, door to adjacent building, view to E
    G: Context, Main Ave., view to SE