United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic  E.B. Ficklen House

and/or common  Buckingham

2. Location

street & number  508 W. 5th Street

city, town  Greenville

3. Classification

Category  Ownership  Status  Present Use
__ district  __ public  __ occupied  __ agriculture  __ museum
x building(s)  x private  __ unoccupied  __ commercial  __ park
__ structure  __ both  __ work in progress  __ educational  __ private residence
__ site  __ Public Acquisition  Accessible  __ entertainment  __ religious
__ object  __ in process  __ yes: restricted  __ museum
__ being considered  __ yes: unrestricted  __ educational
n/a

4. Owner of Property

name  Ronald H. Garris

street & number  Rt. 3, Box 444

city, town  Ayden, NC  28513

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Pitt County Courthouse

street & number  3rd Street

city, town  Greenville

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title  Greenville Architectural Inventory

has this property been determined eligible?  __ yes  __ no

date  1982

depository for survey records  N.C. Division of Archives and History

city, town  Raleigh

7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Proudly overlooking its terraced grounds and sited amid a mature grove of trees, the E.B. Ficklen House inspires reminiscences of a period in Greenville's history when the pulse of its economic development stemmed from its growing tobacco industry and commerce associated with the recently constructed spur line of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Originally dominating a full city block, the Ficklen House, also called Buckingham, borders to the east the main railroad spur line into Greenville, and it once was one of several impressive late nineteenth and early twentieth century homes lining 5th Street, a fashionable residential neighborhood. Flanked by two giant magnolia trees, this impressive Queen Anne style residence is the most elaborately detailed house of its type remaining in Greenville today.

Characteristic of the Queen Anne style, the two-story frame E.B. Ficklen House is dominated by a corner tower, projecting gable, and complicated porch configuration. As in most North Carolina Queen Anne houses, an exaggerated hip roof is pierced by lower projecting gables protecting an extended bay, side wing, and rear ell as well as the front porch. The most common and easily identifiable feature of the style is the stately circular corner tower. Capped by a conical roof with flared eaves and a tall bold finial, the tower rises from ground level and contains bowed window sash and a decoratively patterned slate roof.

Featuring classically derived details, the front porch dominates the facade with a one-story wraparound configuration which is complemented on the second floor by a central gable front projection and a smaller hip-roof porch area. Elevated on a raised brick foundation, the house has a central entrance which is accented by the first and second floor front gables of the porch. Each gable face is designed differently with the first floor one delineated by graduated vertical panels. On second floor, this front gable rises from a base with a segmentally arched face and semi-circularly arched sides. The gable itself is sheathed with butt shingles and features a recessed paired attic window.

The first floor wraparound porch is supported at the central gable by a cluster of three Ionic columns and elsewhere by groupings of one, two, or three columns. Each rests on a brick pedestal and has stylized fluting. Linking each pedestal is a balustrade highlighted by robust turned balusters and a heavy molded handrail. For the second floor porches, a shingled apron serves as the balustrade in addition to supporting the simpler Tuscan columns located here. Also handsome brackets serve as cushions between the simple one-story porch frieze and the Ionic columns. Another decorative feature is the simply molded brackets skirting not only the porch eaves but also the eaves of the facade's main roof and tower.

A variety of auxiliary features round out the overall character of this impressive Queen Anne house from the plain weatherboard sheathing to simple cornerboards. Most windows contain typical one-over-one sash; however along the front facade there are a number of ornamental windows. Originally containing stained glass, several of these windows have semi-circular transoms and one is oval in configuration. The double leaf entrance has a transom which also once contained stained glass. Each door has three lower panels with the upper area glazed with beveled glass. A classically inspired Palladian window highlights the east wing gable face. Another notable feature is the handsome brick chimneys with decorative corbelled caps and quoin-like corners.
After entering a small tile floored vestibule, the interior of the E.B. Ficklen House opens into a large entrance hall replete with formal staircase and fireplace. Large double sliding doors provide access to the two front rooms. Behind the formal front hall there is a rear service hall with a back stair also leading to the second floor. Family and service rooms opened off this rear hall area.

Although some interior decorative features were removed by the Ficklen family through the years, the major stylistic elements remain unchanged such as the staircases along with the irregular floor plan. The front and back halls both have handsome flat paneled wainscoting featuring two rows of panels. The formal multi-flight staircase repeats this paneling design along the enclosed string of the main flight and on the side and soffit of the upper two flights. Landings separate each flight of steps. Square-in-section newels with paneled sides, turned balusters, and a heavily molded handrail all compose the balustrade. As the stair rises the exposed base of each newel is ornamented with a drop finial. The door and window surrounds are symmetrically molded and in the formal rooms the bull's-eye cornerblocks are capped with tulip motifs. Beneath each window in the front west room are paneled aprons. Most baseboards throughout the house are deep ones with molded edges.

Continuing the classical inspiration found on the exterior, each interior mantel is composed of detached columns resting on pedestals and supporting a mantel shelf. The face and hearth of each fireplace is protected by tile, and in the case of the hall mantel its raised surfaces depict elaborate floral motifs with griffins and urns. The most elaborate mantel is located in the hall with plainer variations throughout the house.

There are two outbuildings to the rear of the house. The garage, a one-story hip roof brick structure, was built between 1923 and 1929 and is now used for storage purposes. The other, built before 1929, is a one-story frame smokehouse covered with a high hip roof. Later, the smokehouse was converted to servants' quarters and it was again remodelled in 1953 for a children's playhouse. It was further remodelled into a rental unit after 1975 when the present owner purchased the property.
Invention

The most sophisticated and elaborate Queen Anne-style dwelling in Greenville, Buckingham, located at 508 West Fifth Street was built in 1902 by Edward Bancroft Ficklen. Distinguished by expansive porches, a tall corner tower, and projecting gables, it stands as a reflection of Greenville's importance as a tobacco marketing and processing center before and after the turn of the century.

Spurred by the arrival in 1889 of a branch of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and the increasing demand for Pitt County's tobacco, Greenville during the 1890s and early 1900s became the site of numerous tobacco warehouses and processing facilities. Ficklen moved to Greenville in the 1890s from Danville, Virginia, where he had been involved in the tobacco business. He quickly emerged as one of Greenville's principal tobacconists. E. B. Ficklen Tobacco Company, established in 1902, grew throughout the twentieth century and merged with three other companies in 1963.

Ficklen purchased three lots in the Skinnerville section in 1899 and 1901. His home, completed by about November, 1902, sheltered Ficklen, his wife, and three sons. One of the sons, Louis Stuart, purchased the property in 1953. Ronald H. Garris bought the Ficklen property in 1975. Since that time Buckingham has been used for rental purposes.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Associated with the significant rise and development of the tobacco industry in Greenville and Pitt County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

B. Associated with Edward Bancroft Ficklen, a prominent local tobacconist, who established E.B. Ficklen Tobacco Company in 1902.

C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Queen Anne-style with its elaborately detailed porches, tower and complementary roof form. Although no architect has been linked with the house's construction, an unidentified one was surely associated with its design. Known as Buckingham, it survives as the most outstanding Queen Anne-style residence in Greenville.
Edward Bancroft Ficklen's ornate Queen Anne-style mansion is a significant reflection of Greenville's rapid economic development during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The city's growth, manifested in part by the construction of many handsome residences, resulted from several factors. Beginning in the late 1880s, railroad construction work of proponents of commercial investment and tobacco's increasing importance as a cash crop fostered Greenville's expansive development. Ficklen's successful involvement in the local tobacco industry enabled him to erect one of the city's largest, most elegant homes.

Pivotal changes in the local economy occurred during and after the 1880s. The economy of Greenville and Pitt County had been largely based on the cultivation and marketing of cotton, the price of which declined during the decade. Farmers had depended heavily on steamboats plying the Tar River to take their cotton to markets in Greenville and elsewhere. Greenville's development had lagged behind that of such neighboring towns as Wilson, Tarboro, and New Bern, primarily because it lacked adequate transportation facilities. The county's citizens in 1885 had rejected an opportunity to participate in a proposed Goldsboro, Snow Hill, and Greenville Railroad. Four years later, however, a branch of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad spurred dramatic changes in the area's soporific economy.

In the late 1880s the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad proposed the construction of a branch from Halifax to Kinston via Scotland Neck and Greenville. The Scotland Neck and Greenville Branch reached Greenville in August, 1889, and the railroad was completed to Kinston by May, 1890. The heavy freight and passenger traffic along this railroad had a revolutionary impact on Greenville, which for the first time had an adequate avenue for commerce.

Progressive local leaders led by Daily Reflector editor David Jordan Whichard recognized the potential of the railroad. Editor Whichard clamored for capital investment in the city. He spurred the organization in April, 1889, of the Business Association which was chaired by former Governor Thomas Jordan Jarvis. The association established committees to attract such assets as a hotel, a clothing factory, a cotton seed oil mill, and increased investment in tobacco.

The ascendancy in Pitt County of tobacco as a cash crop, a response to the growing demand for tobacco stimulated by the development of the American Tobacco Company and the cigarette industry, dramatically affected Greenville. Several Pitt County farmers experimented with tobacco as early as 1885 and raised significant crops in 1886. In 1889 farmers grew 39,369 acres of cotton and 71 acres of tobacco. Within ten years, tobacco grew on 12,931 acres; cotton on only 25,417. One farmer described the trend in 1898: "Go in the old cotton counties of Edgecombe, Greene, Pitt and a number of others, and you will find the old gin houses gone down and tobacco barns erected in every direction; the farmers paying off their old cotton mortgages and moving forward with new life and vigor!" In 1910 Pitt County's farmers produced 10,973,000 pounds of tobacco, probably the largest quantity of any county in the state.

Partly because of the presence of the new railroad, Greenville developed an important tobacco market. The first warehouse, Greenville Tobacco Warehouse, opened in 1891. A buyer for the American Tobacco Company soon located in Greenville. By 1897 the city supported four warehouses, eleven prizehouses, and a hoghead factory. Other concerns, including additional warehouses and the Farmers' Consolidated Tobacco Company (1903) were organized before and after the turn of the century.
All of these factors stimulated Greenville's growth. By 1903 the city contained forty stores, six warehouses, a knitting mill, a gristmill, and a blind, door, and sash factory. The latter enterprise probably supplied materials for the many commercial buildings and handsome residences being constructed at the time.12 Some of these houses rose in Skinnerville, a development begun during the 1880s in the western end of town by Harry Skinner, a prominent local attorney.13 Greenville's population, which had been 912 in 1880, rose to 2,565 by 1900.14

Greenville's thriving tobacco market and healthy economy lured E. B. Ficklen from Danville, Virginia, where he had been involved in the tobacco business.15 He arrived in the 1890s to work as a commission buyer and by 1897 was involved in the firm of Roberts and Ficklen. This company's facilities consisted of a prizehouse and steam dry room, located on Tenth Street at the site formerly occupied by T. E. Roberts & Co.16 Roberts and Ficklen dissolved their partnership in May, 1902, and the latter established E. B. Ficklen Tobacco Company. A local newspaper reported that the new company would occupy the partnership's former quarters, as well as the building on Pitt Street that previously housed B. E. Parham & Company's prizehouse and stemmery.17

Ficklen expanded his business during the twentieth century. By 1911 his operation was located on Pitt Street (later Church Street, now Ficklen Street) at the site formerly occupied by B. E. Parham & Company. Subsequently Ficklen built one-story additions to house steam drying and stemming operations. In 1916 the company stored tobacco in a separate warehouse on Pitt Street, between Ninth and Tenth streets. By 1920 the storage facilities had been moved to a site on Evans Street near Fourteenth Street.18

The prominent tobacconist took an active interest in local business, civic, and religious affairs. Ficklen served several terms as president of the Greenville Tobacco Board of Trade. As a member of the Greenville Board of Alermen's Street Committee, Ficklen in 1901 was instrumental in planning new streets in the Skinnerville neighborhood. He also participated in the Tar River Knights of Pythias. A member of First Presbyterian Church, Ficklen participated in such religious events as a Sunday school mass meeting held in Greenville on December 28, 1902.19

Ficklen supported his family in a manner commensurate with his prominence. He married Elmira Ward Skinner (August 16, 1878 - October 3, 1952) in 1899 and soon acquired property on which a house could be built. On November 20, 1899, the Ficklens purchased at auction lots three and four in the Skinnerville section. A year later they purchased lot five from G. B. King, who had acquired the property in 1899. Thus the Ficklens owned a huge house site bounded by Fourth Street, Elizabeth Street, the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad right-of-way, and the Greenville-Tarboro Road (Fifth Street).20 The family resided in the Macon Hotel until their impressive home, "Buckingham," was completed. By November, 1902, it was nearly ready to be furnished.21 There E. B. and Myra Ficklen raised three sons: James Skinner (May 3, 1900 - September 17, 1955); Edward Bancroft Jr. (April 29, 1903 - May 16, 1914); and Louis Stuart (b. December 15, 1918).22

Buckingham probably manifested an almost rural quality in its early years. The Ficklens built a stable on the back of their property, near Fourth Street. At one time the family owned a few cows, chickens, and other animals. A garden located west of the house provided fresh vegetables.23
Gradually, however, the setting changed. By 1916 the Ficklens utilized a small structure on Fourth Street, perhaps as an automobile garage. Within seven years it was torn down and replaced by a smaller structure directly behind the house. In 1925 E. B. and Myra gave their son James and his wife Lucy a lot on the corner of Elizabeth and Fourth streets, where they soon built a home. James and Lucy Ficklen chose to build a new house in 1933, and Myra deeded them a lot fronting Elizabeth Street and adjoining the property given in 1925. Soon their imposing brick residence rose at 409 Elizabeth Street. Prior to 1929 the Ficklen family built a one-story structure near the rear of Buckingham. Originally a smokehouse, it later served as quarters for servants. The Ficklens built two frame rental houses on Fourth Street between 1923 and 1929. Thus, the E. B. Ficklen House no longer stood in undisturbed splendor on the property purchased at the turn of the century.

The family also altered Buckingham itself. About 1933 Myra Ficklen remodeled the house. Among her changes was the removal of some interior trim, including mirrors and shelves located over the fireplace mantels. During the 1950s Louis Ficklen, who acquired the house in 1953, soon after the death of his mother, added two bedrooms upstairs and modernized the kitchen. Louis also added a disappearing stairway to the attic so his three children could use the attic as a playroom.

Louis and Marie Ficklen owned the house until 1975, when they sold it and the property not previously deeded to James Ficklen. The new owner, Ronald Garris, has rented Buckingham to a variety of tenants. Presently Sigma Tau Gamma Fraternity of East Carolina University occupies the property.

Although many old homes in Skinnerville have been torn down or have been allowed to deteriorate, Buckingham stands as a generally well-preserved reminder of E. B. Ficklen's important role in Greenville's thriving turn-of-the-century tobacco market.
NOTES


3 Price, "The Railroad Comes to Greenville," 69.


5 Price, "The Railroad Comes to Greenville," 72-73.

6 For a brief discussion of the importance of bright leaf tobacco and the development of the tobacco industry in North Carolina during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Nannie May Tilley, "Agitation Against the American Tobacco Company in North Carolina, 1890-1911" North Carolina Historical Review, XXIV (April, 1947), 207-223, hereinafter cited as Tilley, "Agitation Against the American Tobacco Company."

7 Williams, A Greenville Album, 14; King's Weekly (Greenville), July 30, 1897, hereinafter cited as King's Weekly.


9 Tilley, "Agitation Against the American Tobacco Company," 218 n.

10 S. O. Worthington (ed.-in-chief), Pitt County Economic and Social: A Laboratory Study at the University of North Carolina, Department of Rural Science of the Pitt County Club (Greenville: Greenville Publishing Company, 1921), 16.

11 Williams, A Greenville Album, 14; King's Weekly, July 30, 1897. Previously, Pitt County's tobacco had been sold in such established tobacco cities as Henderson, Oxford, and Durham. Henry T. King, Sketches of Pitt County: A Brief History of the County, 1704-1910 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1911), 190, hereinafter cited as King, Sketches of Pitt County.

12 Daily Reflector (Greenville), April 14, 27, 1903; September 1, 1903; November 2, 9, 11, 1903, hereinafter cited as Daily Reflector.
Historical and Descriptive Review, 211-212; Kate Ohno, "Architectural Survey of the City of Greenville" (unpublished report, City of Greenville, 1982), Skinnerville component.

Ficklen (May 22, 1866 - May 11, 1925), a son of James B. and Frances Ficklen, was born in Buckingham County, Virginia. As a young man he moved to Danville, an important center of tobacco trade. Daily Reflector, May 11, 1925; Elizabeth H. Copeland (ed.), Chronicles of Pitt County, North Carolina (Greenville: Pitt County Historical Society, 1982), hereinafter cited as Copeland, Chronicles of Pitt County.

Copeland, Chronicles of Pitt County, 299; Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Greenville, Pitt Co., N.C. (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1896), 4, microfilm, Archives Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Hereinafter, all maps published by this company will be cited as Sanborn Map of Greenville, with appropriate date and page number. Sanborn Map of Greenville, 1898, p. 5.

It is interesting to note that a map published in 1905 does not label any building in the tobacco district as belonging to E. B. Ficklen. The Sanborn map of 1911 shows E. B. Ficklen Tobacco Company as the occupant of the property on Pitt Street previously owned by B. E. Parham & Company. According to Louis S. Ficklen, E. B. Ficklen replaced a frame structure with the three-story brick building that stands today. Sanborn Map of Greenville, 1905, p. 7; Sanborn Map of Greenville, 1911, p. 8. Interview of Maurice C. York with Louis S. Ficklen, Greenville, April 24, 1984 (notes on interview in files of Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh), hereinafter cited as York interview with Ficklen.

After his death in 1925, Ficklen's sons, James and Louis, managed the company. About 1946 they extended the factory to Eighth Street. In 1963 E. B. Ficklen Tobacco Company merged with three other firms to form Carolina Leaf Tobacco Company. Copeland, Chronicles of Pitt County, 299; York interview with Ficklen.

King probably sold his lot after streets in the area were changed in 1901. The town apparently removed the section of Ward Street between Elizabeth Street and the railroad track and made a new connection between...
20(continued) Elizabeth and Fifth streets. Aldermen Minutes, September 5, 10, 1901; October 3, 1901; November 7, 1901.

21Interview of Elizabeth Byrd with Louis S. Ficklen, Greenville, March 22, 1984, (notes on interview in files of Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh), hereinafter cited as Byrd interview with Ficklen; Daily Reflector, November 7, 1902.

22Copeland, Chronicles of Pitt County, 299.

23Byrd interview with Ficklen.

24Over the years the street number for the James Ficklen House was changed from 405 Elizabeth Street to 409 Elizabeth Street.


27L.S. and Marie D. Ficklen to Ronald H. Garris, June 30, 1975, Pitt County Deeds, Book R-43, p. 262; Copeland, Chronicles of Pitt County, 74.
9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: approximately 1.2 acres
Quadrangle name: Greenville SW, NC (1981)

UMT References

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Quadrange scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification:
See attached Greenville, NC tax map #12. Property outlined in red.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

Maurice C. York, Historical Researcher
name/title: Drucilla G. Haley, Architectural Historian
organization: NC Division of Archives & History
date: October 11, 1984

street & number: 117 W. 5th St.
telephone: 919/752-7778

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

- national
- state
- x local

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: [Signature]

For NPS use only:
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: 

Chief of Registration
E. B. Ficklen House

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Daily Reflector (Greenville).


Interview with Maurice C. York, April 24, 1984.

Greenville Board of Aldermen Minutes. Office the the City Clerk, Greenville Municipal Building, Greenville.


King's Weekly (Greenville).

Pitt County Deeds. Pitt County Courthouse, Greenville, N.C.

Pitt County Wills. Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.


Worthington, S. O., ed.-in-chief. Pitt County Economic and Social: A Laboratory Study at the University of North Carolina, Department of Rural Science of the Pitt County Club. Greenville: Greenville Publishing Company, 1912.
E. B. Ficklen House
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Quad: Greenville SW, N.C.
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Northing: 3943375
Greenville, NC, tax map #12
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