**INFORMATION FORM FOR**

**1 NAME**

**HISTORIC**

Jennings-Baker House

**AND/OR COMMON**

**2 LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER**

608 Vance Street

**CITY, TOWN**

Reidsville

**STATE**

North Carolina

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

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<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<td>BEING CONSIDERED</td>
<td>YES UNRESTRICTED</td>
<td>RELIGIOUS</td>
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**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

**NAME**

Mr. Jerry Wagoner

**STREET & NUMBER**

Wagoner & Wagoner Real Estate, 115 N. Scales St.

**CITY, TOWN**

Reidsville

**STATE**

North Carolina

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

**COURTHOUSE**

Rockingham County Register of Deeds, Courthouse

**STREET & NUMBER**

Highway 65

**CITY, TOWN**

Wentworth

**STATE**

North Carolina

**6 FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME / TITLE**

Allison Harris Black, Architectural Historian

**ORGANIZATION**

Black & Black Preservation Consultants

**DATE**

January 1986

**STREET & NUMBER**

620 Wills Forest St.

**TELEPHONE**

919 828-4616

**CITY OR TOWN**

Raleigh

**STATE**

North Carolina
Built in the late 1880s just beyond the southwestern edge of the town limits of Reidsville, the Jennings-Baker House is an unusual example of a vernacular combination of elements of the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles of architecture popular in the mid nineteenth century. Its original owner, William G. Jennings, was a native of Virginia who apparently had recently opened a brick yard in Reidsville and purchased a three-quarter acre lot (number 28) on the Wentworth Road on which to build this house. Standing on a slight rise and facing east, the house now sits on a lot reduced to slightly more than one-half acre and is surrounded by a somewhat unkempt yard with mature oak and pine trees in a predominantly residential area some two-thirds of a mile from the city limits.

The two-story Jennings-Baker House is of solid masonry construction, unlike the majority of dwellings being built in Reidsville at the time, which were frame. It features a single pile, center hall plan with a one-story rear ell extending from the left (south) section of the main block. The first floor currently consists of five principal rooms, while only two rooms and the center hall comprise the second. A brick foundation supports the structure whose brick walls are laid up in 1:5 common bond with grapevine mortar joints. The exterior of the house is handsomely ornamented with a variety of details in brick which may have been intended to serve as an advertisement for the product of the Jennings brick yard and the masonry skills of its workers.

A number of unusual elements distinguish the exterior of the house. Most notable are the symmetrical two-story, five-sided projecting bays which flank the central entrance bay of the three-bay facade. At the base of each of these projecting bays are recessed brick panels. The three widest (exposed) sides of the bays contain narrow one over one sash windows on each floor, for a total of six windows in each bay. These windows are set in flat-arch openings but are accentuated by two rows of headers which project from the wall surface to form a triangular pattern above, the principal evidence of the Gothic Revival influence on the exterior. This triangular pattern is repeated—with three rows of brick instead of two—above the main entrance and above the doorway opening from the second floor onto the porch. A two-tier porch with a hipped roof shelters the entrance and echoes the five-sided configuration of the bays. The original porch floor and steps have been replaced with poured concrete. A balustrade with turned members joins the slender turned posts framing the entrance, which is composed of double-leaf, half-glazed doors. The second floor balcony entrance consists of a single, four-panel door, identical to those found throughout the interior. A final distinguishing feature of the facade is the decorative corbel table which graces the parapet rising above the low-pitched gable roof.

The side and rear elevations are much less ornamental than the facade. Simple corbeling marks the parapet on the north and south elevations of the main block, while its rear elevation is severely plain. Just below the corbeling are three triangular brick attic vents. One two over two sash window in a segmental arch opening is centered on each floor of the side elevations. One such window is located on the second story rear wall, where it lights the central stair hall. Symmetrically placed interior chimneys rise through and parallel to the rear wall; the north chimney has been rebuilt above the roofline.
The rear ell extends to a depth of three rooms behind the south room of the main block, with a small fourth room—perhaps a pantry—to the north of the rearmost room of the ell, this latter likely a semi-detached kitchen. This small room appears to be an early addition to the house, opening onto a porch, rather than the rear room of the ell. The partially enclosed porch (in very deteriorated condition) extends from this fourth room to the central rear door of the main block. A gable roof of standing seam metal with a box cornice and wide fascia tops the ell, with a shed roof extending over the porch and small addition. Some time in the mid 20th century, another small shed-roofed room—covered in brick veneer—was added in the angle formed by the rear porch and the main block. This room appears to have been a bathroom. Windows and doors in the rear ell are set in segmental arch openings, like those in the main block, composed of one row of soldiers. A small chimney rises to the south of the window in the rear wall of the kitchen; the corresponding opening, likely for a wood stove, has been plastered over.

An unusual feature of the rear ell is the parallel pair of wide segmental arch openings near the center of the ell. Each arch is made up of alternating rows containing one stretcher and one header in each. The opening on the south elevation appears to have been bricked up some years ago, leaving only double casement windows with diamond and lozenge pattern, multi-pane glazing. Sheetrock was used more recently to fill in the opening on the north elevation, which has been partially punched out. It seems probable that these openings formed a breezeway connecting the semi-detached kitchen to the ell (dining room) and main house. A similar arrangement is seen on the Robert Williams House, an Italianate style brick dwelling constructed on South Main Street probably in the 1870s. A brick-lined well is a few feet from the south opening, and a concrete pad runs from this archway to a door near the end of the ell.

For the most part, the interior of the Jennings-Baker House is much more simply finished than the exterior. Common throughout the house are plaster walls, pine flooring, simple baseboards, four-panel doors with rim locks and china knobs and relatively plain though molded post and lintel mantels, all standard Victorian finish details. Door surrounds in the ell are flat post and lintel, while those in the main block are post and lintel with molded backbands. The most significant interior feature appears in the wide central hall, where a semicircular open-string stair rises to the second floor. A heavy, turned newel post anchors the staircase, with slender balusters curving up the stairs and across the second floor landing. Beaded tongue-and-groove wainscoting walls the area under the stairs. In recent years, the present owner has installed new sheetrock ceilings and applied crown moldings throughout the house and added closets next to the chimneys in several rooms.

A number of changes have occurred in the house's surrounding environment since its construction nearly one hundred years ago. Its immediate neighborhood, which was originally outside the town limits and presumably relatively undeveloped, is now fairly solidly built up with modest houses constructed in the early to mid twentieth century. To the south of the Jennings-Baker House is a small 1960s brick-veneered structure housing a Masonic Lodge, while a service station stands
on a corner of the nearby intersection of Vance and Harrison streets. As already noted, the lot on which the house stands has been reduced from its original three quarters of an acre to slightly over one-half acre. In addition, two small outbuildings shown on the 1929 Sanborn maps of Reidsville (the first series on which the Jennings-Baker House appears) are no longer standing. The house became rental property in the late 1950s. Unoccupied in recent years and vandalised several times, the house itself remains in basically sound condition, with few alteration in its appearance and character.

Footnote

The Jennings-Baker House, built in the late 1880s at the western edge of the growing town of Reidsville, is one of only six brick houses dating from the years prior to 1890 known to survive in the city. Five of these can be described as in the Italianate style or exhibiting Italianate influence. This house, a distinctive example of a vernacular use of elements of the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles, combines elements of residential, commercial, and, perhaps, military institution architecture. The house was constructed during a period of substantial growth and development in the early history of Reidsville, as it grew from little more than a crossroads community to a thriving town which was a major trade center and producer of tobacco products. Its original owner and probable builder was William G. Jennings, a brick manufacturer, whose brick yard supplied brick for construction of the town's first cotton mill. It later was owned and occupied for more than 50 years by members of the family of George W. Baker, prominent Rockingham County farmer and merchant, including two of Baker's daughters, local photographer Mary Madison Baker and Maude Baker Hester, whose husband was a prominent Reidsville attorney.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. The Jennings-Baker House is associated with the late 19th century growth and prosperity of industrial Reidsville, which engendered similar growth in the building trades.

B. It is associated with the lives of brick manufacturer William G. Jennings and members of the family of prominent Rockingham County farmer and merchant George W. Baker, including his daughters Mary Madison Baker and Maude Baker Hester, and the latter's husband, Eugene Hester.

C. It is a distinctive and locally unique example of the vernacular use of several different Victorian architectural styles combined in one structure and one of a small number of pre-1890 masonry dwellings surviving in Reidsville.

D. It is likely to yield information important in our history.
Jennings built his new house at the western edge of the growing town on a 3/4 acre lot on the Wentworth Road. The exact location of Jennings' brick yard has not been determined (the deeds make no reference to streets and it does not appear on Sanborn Insurance Company maps for the period), but it was somewhere on the southwestern edge of town. It is possible that the brickyard was located on or near the present-day Brick Street, a one-block street less than three hundred yards from the Jennings House and around what would have been the town's southwestern edge in the 1890s. It was advertised thus in the Reidsville Times in September and October 1887--

JENNINGS & GUNN

Manufacturers and Contractors of all kinds of Brick and Brickwork, and can also furnish any one with fire proof Brick. Have none but the best of Workmen.

Gunn was the aforementioned Walter Gunn, son-in-law of Jennings, although no further mention is made of him in connection with the business.

The business appears to have been relatively successful; the Reidsville Times reported in May 1889 that, "Mr. W. C. Jennings furnished the Reidsville Cotten Mill with 400,000 brick since April 1st . . . . He has an improved machine for making brick which has a capacity of 20,000 a day." And six years later, it was reported that Jennings had received the contract for producing about 900,000 brick for additions to the same mill. However, it was not until 1898 that he actually acquired the land on which his brick yard was situated. In February of that year, he purchased from J. C. Walton, 6 97/100 acres, being " . . . the lot on which Jennings Brick yard is located." 9

Jennings paid off his debt to Richardson by the summer of 1891, but in 1900 he sold it to J. M. Sullivan, a shoe-maker from Burlington in Alamance County. He also sold his interest in the brickyard to Jonathan Robinson and J. W. Jennings. James W. Jennings was a son of W. G. Jennings and apparently intended to carry on the family business in Reidsville in association with Jonathan Robinson. A brief statement in the 8 March 1900 issue of Webster's Weekly indicated that,

Messrs. Jas. Jennings & Jonathan Robinson have associated themselves together for the manufacture of brick, the latter having bought the interest of Mr. W. G. Jennings in the firm of W. G. Jennings & Son. They have a superior clay and a first-class plant for the manufacture of brick and will push the business for all it is worth. We wish them much success.

However, in late 1901, J. W. Jennings sold his interest in the brickyard, the business, and the land to his partner. Little is known about Jonathan Robinson, beyond the information contained in the 1900 census, in which it is indicated that he was born in either Canada or England in 1861 and emigrated to the United
States in 1871. In 1900, he is listed as a brickmaker, single, living with his sister, two nieces, a nephew, and his widowed mother. He does not appear in the 1910 census for North Carolina.

After selling his house and business in Reidsville, William G. Jennings moved to Guilford County, where he was to engage in the furniture business; the 1900 census lists him as a furniture dealer, and the 1905-06 Greensboro city directory has him as a woodworker. By 1909, he was again in the brick manufacturing business, having established a company with two of his sons, James W. and George H. Jennings. This concern apparently continued in operation until the mid-1920s, although Jennings seems to have retired several years prior to his death in December 1924.

J. M. Sullivan sold the house to Avery Baker in 1905 and returned to Burlington. The house remained in the ownership of the Baker family for more than fifty years following its 1905 purchase by twenty-two-year-old Avery Baker (1882-1956), a son of George Walter and Mary (Madison) Baker, who had six other children. George W. Baker (1851-1931) was a merchant, farmer, and miller at Baker's Crossroads, about four miles southwest of Wentworth, prior to his son's acquisition of the Jennings-Baker House. Shortly thereafter, Baker moved his family to Reidsville to live in the house. Baker worked in Reidsville as a merchant, being associated with the firm of Harris and Ware. The 1910 census shows the family living at this location, with George Baker listed as a salesman of general merchandise, his wife Mary M. as doing "fancy work" at home, and all seven of their children as living with them. The oldest son, Carl, age 33, was listed as a piano tuner, while his twin sister, Eulalie, also did "fancy work" at home. Maud E. Baker, 30, was a deputy collector at the Revenue office. Avery, who was then 27, was a census enumerator for Reidsville. Unfortunately, much of what he indicated as his own occupation is illegible, although the word "literature" is clear. The third son, G. DeWitt, 26, was a telephone lineman, while the two youngest children, Mary M. and Reuben R., 13, were presumably in school.

Eventually, several of the children moved out of the house, with three of the sons getting married. In December 1913, Avery, who by then was a clerk with the U. S. Post Office (a position he held for more than thirty years) and was shortly to marry Martha Reid, sold the house to his father. George W. Baker and his wife continued to live in the house in Reidsville until the early 1920s, when they returned to the farm at Baker's Crossroads. Only one of the daughters married; in 1912, Maude E. Baker, who had been living in Raleigh for one or two years, married F. Eugene Hester, a Raleigh attorney; according to his obituary, the Hesters moved to Reidsville in 1924. They were living in the house in 1929, together with Mrs. Hester's sister Mary Madison Baker. At that time, Maude Hester was the assistant deputy collector in the local office of the U. S. Internal Revenue Service, which also employed her sister Mary.

George W. Baker died in 1931, and in his obituary, he was called "... one of the leading citizens of Rockingham County, public spirited and always worked.
for the best interests of his community." A holographic will was submitted for probate after the death of Baker's widow in 1934. Their third son, George De Witt, had predeceased both in a 1915 accident in Norfolk, Virginia, and the estate was divided among the surviving children, with George De Witt's 1/7th share going to Eulalie. Avery and Eulalie were appointed executors, with F. Eugene Hester, their brother-in-law, asked to provide them with legal advice. In February 1935, the three surviving Baker brothers and their wives and Eulalie Baker deeded to Maude Hester and Mary M. Baker their shares in "the old Jennings' Place."

Eugene Hester (1879-1945), a graduate of the University of North Carolina, became a prominent Reidsville attorney, active in both civic and political affairs. His widow survived him by twelve years. In the early 1930s, Mary M. Baker opened a photographic studio on Gilmer Street (apparently in the same building in which her brother-in-law had his law office), and her sister Maude worked for several years as her receptionist. The two sisters continued to live in the house until Maude's death in 1957. Having no children from her marriage to Hester, she left her estate, including her share in the brick house in which she had lived for more than 50 years, to her niece Maude Electra Baker, her sisters, Mary Madison and Eulalie Baker, and her brother Reuben, with Mary and Reuben as her executors. Two months after the will was probated, the above legatees entered into a family agreement, by which the brick house "... shall be the joint property of Mary Madison Baker and Eulalie Baker for and during their natural lives or the life of the survivor of them." At the death of the survivor, 3/4 in interest in the real estate would go to Maude E. Baker and 1/4 interest to Reuben Baker. However, the legatees, if they agreed jointly, could sell the real estate at any time. They chose to do so in 1959, when the house was acquired by Jerry S. and Phoebe C. Wagoner and Holt and Nettie S. Allen. In 1978, the Wagoners purchased the interest of the Allens in what was then called the "Baker Property, lots 6, 7, 16, and 17. Since 1959, the Jennings-Baker House has been rental property, although it has been vacant for the last several years.

The Jennings-Baker House is architecturally significant for several reasons. For all of Reidsville's early history—well into the 1920s—the great majority of dwellings were of frame construction. Only six brick houses dating from the years prior to 1890 are known to survive in the city, and it is unlikely that any substantial number more were built. Of these six, five can be described as in the Italianate style or exhibiting Italianate influence. The two most sophisticated and substantial are the William Lindsey House (ca. 1868) and the Robert Williams House (ca. 1880) on South Main Street, while the two Sharp houses (ca. 1885) on Lindsey Street and the Hitchcock House (ca. 1885) on North Main Street are more modest in their use of Italianate details. But all of these clearly fall into the mainstream of residential design of the time. The Jennings-Baker House is a much more vernacular and personal expression of Victorian tastes, as it combines elements of several styles. The triangular patterned brickwork above windows and doors on the facade have a vaguely Gothic flavor, while the segmental arch openings on the side and rear elevations and in the ell are like those on two houses on Lindsey Street and are typical of masonry construction.
of the period. The facade's projecting bays and porch suggest the influence of architecture predominantly found at military institutions, while the corbel table on the facade and the parapeted side elevations of the main block are reminiscent of commercial architecture in the late nineteenth century. This combination of elements strengthens the possibility that Jennings may have intended his house as a sort of advertisement for what was then a young enterprise, exhibiting the products of his brick yard and demonstrating the masonry skills of his workers.

The original lot number 28 on which Jennings built his house consisted of approximately three quarters of an acre of land. The Baker family, during its ownership of the property, acquired several adjoining parcels, so that by the late 1950s, when the house was sold, the surrounding "Baker Property" consisted of slightly less that two-and-one quarter acres. The parcel now associated with the house is just over one-half acre. The 1929 series of Sanborn maps for Reidsville (the first on which this house appears) shows two outbuildings on the property, neither of which is still standing. The character of the neighborhood has changed over the years, as well. It seems likely that the area was relatively undeveloped when Jennings built his house. Today, the area is fairly well built up, and several buildings of twentieth century construction stand within fifty yards of the house. But the house itself remains virtually unaltered.

The structure, of course, is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

Footnotes

1 Guilford County Register of Deeds, Death Certificates, Book 11, p. 1151; "W. G. Jennings Dies at Residence Here," Greensboro (N. C.) Daily News, 13 December 1924, p. 9; and Rockingham County Register of Deeds (hereinafter cited as RCRD), deed book 80, p. 84.

2 RCRD, deed book 82, p. 430.

3 RCRD, deed book 3T, p. 351.

4 U. S. Census, 1900, population schedule; and Rockingham County Clerk of Superior Court, Marriage Records.


6 Reidsville (N. C.) Times, 28 October 1887, p. 2.


RCRD, deed book 125, p. 379; and Reidsville Review, 16 March 1900, p. 3.

RCRD, deed book 125, p. 297.

Guilford County Clerk of Superior Court, will book J, p. 322; and Webster's Weekly (Reidsville, N. C.), 8 March 1900, p. 4.


U. S. Census, 1900, population schedule.

Reidsville Review, 16 March 1900, p. 3; U. S. Census, 1900, population schedule; and Greensboro City Directory, 1905-06, p. 197.


RCRD, deed book 151, p. 39; RCRD, Death Certificates, book 47, p. 238; and U. S. Census, 1900 and 1910, population schedules.


U. S. Census, 1910, population schedule.


Webster's Weekly, 27 September 1912, p. 1; Raleigh city directories, 1911-1917; Reidsville Review, 13 April 1945, p. 5; and RCRD, Death Certificates, book 32, p. 234.

Reidsville City Directory, 1929, p. 143.

Reidsville Review, 27 May 1931, p. 5.
ville Review, 6 April 1915, p. 1.

26 RCRD, deed book 288, p. 505.

27 Reidsville Review, 13 April 1945, p. 5.

28 Reidsville city directories, 1929-1957; and RCRD, Death Certificates, book 49, p. 203.

29 Rockingham County Clerk of Superior Court, will book K, p. 258.


33 RCRD, map book 9, p. 97; and Rockingham County tax records.

34 Sanborn Insurance Company maps, Reidsville, N. C., series, 1929.
The Jennings-Baker House, built in the late 1880s at the western edge of
the growing town of Reidsville, is a distinctive example of a vernacular use
of elements of the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles of architecture popular
in the mid-nineteenth century. The house was constructed during the fourth
quarter of the nineteenth century, a period of substantial growth and develop-
ment, as Reidsville grew from little more than a crossroads community with a
handful of general stores and small manufactories to a thriving town which was
a major trade center and producer of tobacco products. The builder of the
house, William G. Jennings, was a brick manufacturer whose company provided brick
for construction of the town's first cotton mill, which was established to add
industrial diversity to the town's economic base. Jennings' bricks were also
likely used in the construction of commercial buildings and warehouses, as well
as for chimneys and foundations for residences. The majority of dwellings being
constructed in Reidsville during this period were frame, and it is probable that
Jennings intended his brick house to serve as a demonstration of the product of
his brick yard and the masonry skills of his workers.

William G. Jennings (1844-1924), a native of Pittsylvania County, Virginia,
and a Confederate Army veteran of the Civil War, constructed the house between
1887 and 1890, the former being the year in which he purchased lot number 28 in
the town survey from James M. and Annie E. Harris. In 1890, a deed of trust was
executed by local attorney A. J. Boyd with regard to a mortgage on the property
held by T. A. Richardson. In the deed of trust, reference was made to "... lot
No. 28 in the survey and it being the land on which is situated the 2 story Brick
Dwelling House now occupied by the said W. G. Jennings as a residence."

Although it has not been determined when or why Jennings moved to North
Carolina, he seems to have arrived in the state between 1880 (when he does not
appear in the North Carolina census) and 1883. In July of the latter year, he
was listed as a resident of Rockingham County in a deed conveying to him 238
acres, "... part of the Josiah Settle plantation of Hogan's Creek ...", from
Hugh K. and Caroline S. Reid. Other indications regarding the date of his arri-
val in North Carolina include the listing of Virginia as birthplace of his son,
George, born in 1873 and the marriage of his daughter Irene to Walter Gunn of
Rockingham County in 1885, when the Jennings family appears to have been living
in the county.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheets for Multiple Resource

GEOPHYSICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A | 1,7 | 6,1,8,5,8,0 | 4,0,2,3,9,6,0 |
B | 1,7 |
C | 1,7 |
D | 1,7 |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property being nominated consists of lots 3A and 4, block 7,
Rockingham County tax map 41, as outlined in red on the attached map.
Jennings-Baker House
608 Vance Street
Reidsville, North Carolina
Rockingham County

Reidsville Multiple Resource Nomination