

OCT 30 1986 # 3  
DEC 11 1986

State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

Rockingham COUNTY  
Reidsville QUAD

# INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR  THEMATIC NOMINATION

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

North Washington Avenue Workers' Houses

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

E side 300 block N. Washington Ave.  NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Reidsville

VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE  
037

COUNTY

CODE  
157

North Carolina

Rockingham

## 2 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

N/A

NO

MILITARY

OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

B&D Investment Co.

STREET & NUMBER

207 N. Davie St.

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Greensboro

VICINITY OF

North Carolina

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Rockingham County Register of Deeds, Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Highway 65

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Wentworth

North Carolina

## 6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Allison Harris Black, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Black & Black  
Preservation Consultants

DATE

November 1985

STREET & NUMBER

620 Wills Forest Street

TELEPHONE

919 828-4616

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The five workers' houses located on the east side of the 300 block of North Washington Avenue in Reidsville are the simplest of frame houses, consisting originally of three rooms--one-over-one with a shed room behind. The side gable roof extending over the rear shed room produces a saltbox form. The central entrance on the single-bay facade is sheltered by an attached, shedroofed porch which spans approximately two-thirds of the facade. Basic materials include plain weatherboard siding and a standing seam metal roof. A brick chimney rises between the front and rear rooms, and six over six windows light each room on both stories on the north and south side elevations. Door and window surrounds are flat-board post and lintel with a beaded lintel. The foundation is brick piers with cinder block infill. At the rear, a ca. 1940 shed-roof addition provided a bathroom and back porch. On three of the five houses, this rear porch has been enclosed. The bathroom is clad in German siding.

The interior of the houses is as simply finished as is the exterior. The front room, approximately twelve feet by fourteen feet, has plaster walls, tongue and groove ceiling and stair enclosure, a picture molding, and flat board surrounds and baseboards. Mantels are simple post and lintel, although at least one has brackets below the shelf. The fireplaces in the front rooms have been fitted with gas stoves. This room is used as a combination sitting and bed room.

To the right of the fireplace is a door with five horizontal panels, which leads to the rear room--a kitchen, finished with a combination of plaster and tongue and groove sheathing. A thimble from the chimney serves either a gas heating stove or a wood cookstove. Modern electric stoves have been provided as has running water. When first built, the houses were lit by oil lamps, and water came from a communal well. In the northwest corner of the kitchen, a partially enclosed stair rises to the second-story room, which has plaster gable-end walls and knee walls with tongue and groove sheathing on the east and west sides sloping to the narrow ceiling.

The five houses stand approximately ten feet from each other and appear to march up the slope of North Washington Avenue, from north to south. Mature cedar and gum trees shade the houses, and mid-twentieth century frame sheds provide storage space at the rear of the houses. During the last 60-65 years, the houses have aged, as have the trees which were planted to make the property more attractive; a street has been cut in front of the houses, with resultant intense residential development of the surrounding area; and minor changes have been made in their appearance. The only significant alterations have been the installation of modern conveniences, so that, overall, the houses appear much as they did when built and present a picture of life as it was for black tobacco industry workers in the first half of the twentieth century.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ STATE   X   LOCAL

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Black History
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES    ca. 1917                            BUILDER/ARCHITECT   Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The cluster of five simple frame houses located on the east side of the 300 block of North Washington Avenue is significant in the history of Reidsville as the only surviving, intact group of a type of house built in the early 20th century for black workers employed by the American Tobacco Company shortly after construction of its tremendous new facility in Reidsville in 1912. As such, they are representative of a larger pattern of housing construction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as increasing numbers of industrial workers, drawn from the depressed agricultural sector to work in the cotton mills and tobacco factories, required housing in growing towns across the state. The five essentially identical houses are also closely related to traditional rural house forms, such as the early North Carolina single-pen houses of both log and frame construction.

The cluster of five small houses located on the east side of the 300 block of North Washington Avenue in Reidsville is the most intact local collection of a type of inexpensive rental housing built for black workers at the American Tobacco Company Plant in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Constructed along lines typical of rural North Carolina's more modest housing in the nineteenth century, these frame cottages were part of a larger trend of housing construction.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. The cluster of five workers' houses is a significant remnant of the late 19th and early 20th century efforts to provide inexpensive housing for workers drawn from the state's rural farming areas to jobs in the burgeoning industrial towns, particularly in the textile and tobacco industries.

C. The houses are gems of small-scale design, virtually intact examples of an urban manifestation of rural folk housing traditions of the 19th century in North Carolina.

See continuation sheets

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheets for Multiple Resource

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## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	61,920,0	4,025,070
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

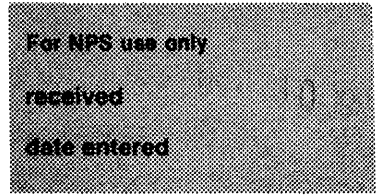
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property being nominated consists of parcel 19, block 3, Rockingham County tax map 10, as shown on the attached map, outlined in red.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheets STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE Item number 8 Page 1

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large numbers of white and black rural farm workers left the depressed agricultural sector and moved to the growing towns to seek employment in the burgeoning industries, in North Carolina particularly textiles and tobacco. Typically, white men and especially white women were hired to work in the cotton mills, while the majority of tobacco factory employees were black. In order to house these proliferating ranks of industrial workers, owners of cotton mills built groups of modest frame cottages, from a handful to several hundred, around the mill itself, creating "mill villages." The tobacco industry did not follow this practice. In Reidsville, local businessmen built inexpensive rental houses for the black tobacco workers as investments, taking part in the town's development as an industrial center, as the corporate giant American Tobacco Company began and later expanded its operations in Reidsville in the early twentieth century.

Much like the cotton mill houses, the cottages built for tobacco workers were urban manifestations of rural folk housing types and, therefore, familiar to their occupants. The modest frame dwellings can be said to derive from the single-pen houses, of both log and frame construction, which were typical of North Carolina's rural landscape throughout the nineteenth century and still evident early in the twentieth. Scattered individual examples of this house form can be found in Reidsville, but the majority, probably numbering in the hundreds, were built in clusters near the American Tobacco Company's growing complex in the northern part of Reidsville, on previously sparsely populated land.

Through a process of gradual attrition, a great number of these reflections of an early twentieth century housing construction pattern have been lost, as the growing prosperity of many industrial workers has enabled them to move to more substantial brick and cinder block houses around the city. Most of those which survive have been significantly altered through the application of a variety of synthetic siding and roofing materials, changes to windows and doors, and major additions. However, during the 1978 survey of Reidsville's historic resources, several intact groups of this house type were indentified and recorded. Since that time, all but one of those clusters have been demolished, with only the five houses on North Washington Avenue (there were seven as recently as 1978) surviving to provide tangible, faithful documentation of a nearly vanished house type and construction practice.

In addition to the integrity of the individual houses themselves, an important component of the documentary significance of this group of houses consist of their surroundings and the relationship between them, which make a forceful statement in spite of encroachments by urban development. When the houses were built, the area was relatively undeveloped, and no street ran in front of the houses as it does today. Fortunately, wooded areas survive across Washington Avenue from the cluster and to the rear, recalling the original setting. The houses stand close to one another, in a neat row marching up a gentle but definite slope, creating a rhythmic effect of gabled rooflines and shedroofed porches. Mature cedar and gum trees, probably planted when the

**United States Department of the Interior  
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received  
date entered

Continuation sheet STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE Item number 8 Page 2

houses were built, provide shade for the shallow front yards.

It seems likely that these houses were built in 1915--or shortly thereafter--when local pharmacist Thomas Littleton "Lytt" Gardner (1883-1972), owner of the Gardner Drug Company, bought an approximately one-half acre tract of land from John Oliver, a retired black day laborer.<sup>2</sup> As early as 1912, the local newspapers had been stating the need for housing for the increasing number of industrial workers in Reidsville, and Gardner became one of many local businessmen to answer the call for inexpensive rental housing.<sup>3</sup> Further evidence of a ca. 1915 construction date was provided by Mrs. Georgia Carter, the only original tenant still living in one of the houses, who stated that she had lived there for sixty-five years.<sup>4</sup>

The initial rent charged for each house was \$1.50 per week.<sup>5</sup> For the next fifty years, most tenants in these houses were black workers at the American Tobacco Company plant, which is about one-half mile to the east. For instance, the 1935 Reidsville City Directory lists all five occupants as being employed at "the factory," as the plant has been locally known for many years.<sup>6</sup> During that period, the only non-cosmetic changes made to the houses have the installation of modern conveniences, including electricity and indoor plumbing, the latter involving construction of a bathroom and small porch on the rear of the houses.

Following Gardner's death, Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, as executors of his estate, sold the property with the five houses to J. R. and Edna W. Rose of Reidsville, who continued to rent them to the previous occupants.<sup>8</sup> J. B. Byerly and Larry Eugene Davis, operating as B & D Investment Company of Greensboro, acquired the property in June 1985 from Mrs. Rose after her husband's death. The new owners have undertaken work to improve the houses, including making necessary repairs, painting the exteriors, and the houses now rent for seventy dollars per month. The majority of current tenants are retired.<sup>10</sup>

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Laura A. W. Phillips, Reidsville, North Carolina: An Inventory of Historic & Architectural Resources (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History and Reidsville Historic Properties Commission, 1981), pp. 32-33; and Reidsville historic architectural survey files, Survey and Planning Branch, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dyson Rodenbough, ed., The Heritage of Rockingham County, North Carolina (Winston-Salem: Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc. and Hunter Publishing Co., 1983), item 473; RCRD deed book 184, p. 492; and United States Census, 1900 and 1910 population schedules.