**1. NAME**
- **Historic**
  - Southern Railway Spencer Shops

**AND/OR COMMON**

**2. LOCATION**
- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - East side of Salisbury Avenue between 3rd and 8th Streets

- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Spencer

- **STATE**
  - North Carolina

**VICINITY OF**
- 8th

- **CODE**
  - 37

- **COUNTY**
  - Rowan

- **CODE**
  - 159

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

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**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

- **NAME**
  - Southern Railway Company

- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - c/o William McLean, VP of Real Estate

- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Mr. L. S. Crane, President

- **STATE**
  - 920 Fifteenth Street, N.W.

- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Washington

- **STATE**
  - D.C.

- **CODE**
  - 20005

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

- **COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**
  - Rowan County Courthouse

- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - Salisbury

- **STATE**
  - North Carolina

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

- **TITLE**
  - Historic American Engineering Record

- **DATE**
  - 1974

- **DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**
  - National Park Service

- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Washington

- **STATE**
  - D.C.
DESCRIPTION

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Describer the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Southern Railway Shops at Spencer, North Carolina, were opened on October 18, 1896. The first buildings were a machine shop, roundhouse, storehouses, and offices. They were constructed with steel frames resting on substantial masonry, had corrugated steel siding and slate roofs. The brick for these and all future structures on the site was produced by the Isenhour Brick and Tile Company. George W. Isenhour, founder of the firm, came to Salisbury from New London and established the brick plant in 1896.

The original complex was expanded in 1904, 1911, 1925, and 1935. Two of the aerial photographs illustrate the site at its peak of development in the years immediately prior to World War II. The largest building on the site, the Back Shop, was built in 1904-1905. It is 600 feet long by 150 feet wide; with walls of brick on a concrete foundation with steel columns and roof trusses (photo #1, item D). Back Shop was the term applied to the erecting shop where engines and cars were rebuilt and repaired. The northwest side of this building was utilized for heavy repairs while the southeast side was used as a machine shop. In 1907, the first of the tremendous freight transfer sheds was erected. This particular operation of the Spencer complex was gradually expanded until by 1939 there were six parallel sheds each over 600 feet long, with one being 950 feet in length (photo #1, item M).

By 1910, work had expanded from the back shop into a new boiler shop (H), car plant, and planing mill (I). A freight car repair shop was added in 1917. In 1922 the railroad estimated the replacement value of the land, buildings, equipment, and trackage at Spencer to be between $20,000,000 and $25,000,000. A modern engine terminal was completed in 1924 which included a $500,000, 37-stall roundhouse (A), with 100 foot turntable (B); a thousand-ton coal chute and 15,000-ton coaling station (R); a sand processing station (S); and a water station on the Yadkin River with a capacity of 4,000,000 gallons daily. In 1935 the repair shops were again expanded to accommodate heavy repairs.

Shortly after the peak of the Spencer Shop's steam-oriented growth, change came with the coming of diesel locomotive power. The steam locomotive support facilities at Spencer were rapidly modified or destroyed to make way for the new diesels. Southern Railway was one of the first major railroads in the nation to convert completely to diesel power. A large portion of the old steam roundhouse was rebuilt and re-equipped with "drop tables," inspection pits and working platforms for diesels. New fuel oil facilities were installed to replace the old coaling station which was demolished by explosives on June 8, 1953. The boiler shop, back shop, etc., were all adapted for diesel work.

After the shops were closed in 1960, the company tore down the blacksmith shop (G), carpenter's shop (I), car sheds (M), and parts of the power station (T) in 1962. The boiler shop (H) was dismantled by an industry from Marion, North Carolina, and reassembled in that town in the early 1960s. The roundhouse, back shop, electric shop (N), storehouse #3 (E), offices (F), and several smaller buildings remain vacant and for lease. The 37-stall roundhouse is in fair condition and parts of it are still used for diesel repair work. The paint shop (P) is still used for painting railroad equipment, mostly cabooses. The back shop is in varying stages of deterioration. Vegetation along its outer walls has induced many cracks and in one particular instance on the southeast side, structurally weakened the building. The tremendous doors at either
end of the building have fallen off their hinges and few windows are left intact. There are many holes in the roof that allow the weather and a sizable pigeon population access to the building.

The actual area of historic importance comprises approximately 27 and one-half acres bordering the east side of U.S. 29, Salisbury Avenue, between 3rd and 8th Streets in Spencer.

Photograph #1 Aerial enlargement of Spencer Shops, 1941
(A) roundhouse, (B) turntable, (D) Back Shop,
(E) storehouse #3, (F) main office building,
(G) blacksmith shop, (H) boiler shop,
(I) carpenter shop, (M) transfer sheds,
(N) electric/flue shop, (P) paint shop,
(R) coaling station, (S) sand station,
(T) power station.

#2 Aerial looking Southwest, 1975
(A) roundhouse, (B) turntable, (D) back shop,
(E) storehouse #3, (F) main office building,
(G) blacksmith shop, (H) boiler shop,
(I) carpenter shop, (M) transfer sheds,
(N) electric/flue shop, (P) paint shop,
(R) coaling station, (S) sand station,
(T) power station.

#3 Aerial looking Northwest, late 40s

#4 Southwest corner of property looking Northwest, 1976

#5 Roundhouse and turntable looking Northeast, 1976

#6 Heavy repairs side of Back Shop, looking Southwest, 1916

#7 Heavy repairs side of Back Shop, looking South, 1976

FOOTNOTES

1 Southern Railway Spencer Shops, Railroad Gazette, October 23, 1896.

3 Annual Report to Stockholders Southern Railway Company, Richmond, Va., June 30, 1905.


7 "Thar She Blows!", Salisbury Evening Post, June 9, 1953.
### Areas of Significance -- Check and Justify Below

| Period       | Archeology-Prehistoric | Archeology-Historic | Agriculture | Architecture | Art | Communications | Conservation | Economics | Education | Engineering | Exploration/Settlement | Industry | Invention | Landscape Architecture | Law | Literature | Military | Music | Philosophy | Politics/Government | Religion | Science | Sculpture | Social/Humanitarian | Theater | Transportation | Other (Specify) |
|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|----|----------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----|------------|----------|------|------------|--------------------|----------|---------|------------|-------------------|---------|---------------|------------------|
| 1900-1900-1899 | x                      | x                   | x           | x            |    |                |              |           |           |            |                         |                      |            |           |                       |     |            |          |       |            |                    |          |          |            |                   |         |               |                  |

### Specific Dates


### Statement of Significance

Beginning in 1896 and throughout its life, the Spencer Shops, one of the largest railroad shops in the country, played an important role in the economic life of North Carolina as indeed the shops' owner, Southern Railway, continues to do. Despite destruction of portions of the complex Spencer, with its surviving buildings—the large Back Shop, other shops, offices, and vast roundhouse—provides a seldom viewed example of the creation, sustenance and decline of a single-industry town in the New South; the site is perhaps the single most important example of heavy industry and transportation history in the state.

The first railroads in North Carolina were built in the eastern part of the state. Both the Wilmington and Weldon and the Raleigh and Gaston railroads were completed in 1840. However, there was no east-west railroad and the demand for such a trunk line grew stronger with each passing year.

After a great deal of political maneuvering, the North Carolina Legislature in 1848-1849 chartered the North Carolina Railroad Company. Financed mostly with state funds, the North Carolina Railroad connected the larger cities and towns of Piedmont North Carolina. The railroad extended from Goldsboro via Raleigh, Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, and Salisbury to Charlotte, a distance of 223 miles.

The North Carolina Railroad proved to be the greatest economic stimulus in the state's history. Agriculture and industry grew rapidly beside the railroad, as did the area's population. During the Civil War the North Carolina Railroad formed an important part of the Confederate transportation system.

In 1871 the road was leased for thirty years to the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company of Virginia. A few years later the Richmond and Danville went into receivership and was reorganized in 1894 as the Southern Railway Company. On August 16, 1895, the lease of the North Carolina Railroad to the Southern was renewed for 99 years. The terms of the lease require that Southern Railway Company keep the track in good condition and pay taxes on the property. The state has no obligations, but does collect the rental in the form of dividends. The lease also stipulated that Southern "shall have leave to change any shops, tracks, houses, and other things in such a way as to promote the convenience of shipments of freights, travel and the safety of the road and property."
As the Southern Railway Company continued to absorb southeastern railroads under its corporate banner, the need for a central repair shop on the sprawling rail system became a necessity. Soon after the lease agreement with the North Carolina Railroad Company was signed, Southern decided to relocate the Company Shops of the N.C.R.R. from present-day Burlington, to a site halfway between Atlanta and Washington, on the double-track main line. At this point heavily-traveled lines from Knoxville, Savannah and Charleston also converged.

The land, 168 acres, was located two and one-half miles northeast of Salisbury, North Carolina. It was purchased on February 8, 1896, and February 13, 1896, by John S. Henderson, former U. S. Congressman, and a Salisbury lawyer. A 101-acre purchase was made from a black, Robert Partee, for the sum of $25 to $30 per acre. The remaining 67 acres were acquired from other land owners. The deeds to the property were immediately turned over to Southern Railway by Henderson.

On March 23, 1896, Southern began construction of one of the largest railroad shops in the nation on this property. Work progressed throughout the spring and summer of 1896 on the huge industrial plant. The facility was opened in stages between October 18, 1896, and November 1, 1896. The shops were named for Samuel Spencer, president (1894-1906) of the newly organized railroad. The first buildings were a machine shop, roundhouse, and offices. According to an excerpt from the Southern Railway Annual Report for 1897, "Spencer (near Salisbury, N.C.): These shops are new, of modern design, and well equipped. With the exception of the smith shop, the buildings are heated by hot air and are lighted with electricity."

Not only was an industrial complex created out of this Rowan County wilderness but a town to house the railroad workers also emerged. The town of Spencer came to life because of the establishment of one industry. The Southern Railway shops continued as the major employer and taxpayer in this Rowan community well into the 1950s.

The Spencer Shops became the largest heavy repair facility on the entire Southern Railway system. A portion of all steam locomotives in the system underwent heavy repairs here. By 1932 seventy-five engines daily were turned out for "light repairs"; one engine daily was completely rebuilt.

Passenger and freight cars were serviced and assembled into trains and dispatched in all directions from the Spencer yards. During the late 1930s and early 1940s twenty-one passenger and twenty-four freight trains rolled out of Spencer daily. Southern also established the largest freight transfer facility in the south at Spencer. The transfer handled around 250 and 300 cars of freight on an average day. The great majority of the crews who manned these passenger and freight trains lived in Spencer. The total work force of the Spencer complex usually remained between 2,200 and 2,500 employees.
Southern Railway's transition from steam to diesel power was swift. It was one of the first railroads in the country to convert its system completely to diesel power. As the steam locomotive support facilities were modified or destroyed with the rapid rise of the diesel so too were the jobs of hundreds of Spencer man and women. By the early 1950s Southern began laying off large numbers of workers until on July 30, 1960, it closed the Spencer Shops entirely. Only a skeleton work force was maintained to service the sixteen diesel switching engines of the yard. The large shop buildings soon fell into disrepair through neglect as the railroad tried unsuccessfully to lease the property for industrial use.

Today the Spencer Shop's deterioration remains unchecked. Southern Railway plans to vacate the entire site by the fall of 1978. At that time the company will move into its new Linwood, North Carolina, terminal, fifteen miles northeast of Spencer on the double track main line. After the 1978 move to Linwood, the Spencer property's future is uncertain. The projected Southern Railway plan for the Spencer Shops is to develop this property, along with some adjoining railroad property, for industrial use. At present, the buildings are falling increasingly into decay.

FOOTNOTES

1 Rowan County Deeds, Book 81, pp. 79-89, microfilm copy, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.


3 Rowan County Deeds, Book 81, pp. 221-224, pp. 262-264, microfilm copy, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.


MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 27½ acres

UTM REFERENCES

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING
ZON 17 EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Description and significance prepared by Allen Paul, Interpretations Specialist

ORGANIZATION
Division of Archives and History

DATE

STREET & NUMBER
109 East Jones Street

TELEPHONE
733-7862

CITY OR TOWN
Raleigh

STATE
North Carolina

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

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE March 10, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 27½ acres

UTM REFERENCES

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Description and significance prepared by Allen Paul, Interpretations Specialist

ORGANIZATION: Division of Archives and History

STREET & NUMBER: 109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh

STATE: North Carolina 27611

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE 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

DATE: September 8, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER


Spencer Shops
Spencer, NC, Rowan County

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