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
Rockford Historic District
AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
See continuation sheet #2
CITY, TOWN
Rockford
STATE
North Carolina

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
_x_ DISTRICT
__ BUILDING(S)
__ STRUCTURE
__ SITE
__ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
__ PUBLIC
__ PRIVATE
__ BOTH
__ PUBLIC ACQUISITION
__ IN PROCESS
__ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
_x_ OCCUPIED
_x_ UNOCCUPIED
__ WORK IN PROGRESS
__ ACCESSIBLE
__ YES: RESTRICTED
__ YES: UNRESTRICTED
_x_ NO

PRESENT USE
__ AGRICULTURE
__ COMMERCIAL
__ EDUCATIONAL
__ ENTERTAINMENT
__ GOVERNMENT
__ INDUSTRIAL
__ MILITARY
__ SCIENTIFIC
__ TRANSPORTATION
__ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Various
NAME
Mr. Haywood Merritt, Chairman
STREET & NUMBER
Surry County Commissioners
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Surry County Courthouse
CITY, TOWN
Dobson, North Carolina 27017
STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Surry County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN
Dobson
STATE
North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
DATE
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE
Rockford is located in a rural, hilly region of northwestern North Carolina that is somewhat isolated, though within easy driving distance of Winston-Salem. The town comprises a short linear district along High Street (S.R. 2221), which leads north from the Yadkin River across the railroad track (which marks the southern boundary of the district), and north up the hill as far as the Methodist Church. The district includes one-half mile of High Street from the track up the hill to the church. The town, once a county seat and area trade center, has dwindled to a few buildings, mostly unoccupied. (There are a few more houses of some significance up the hill from those in the district but they are separated by the few recent additions in Rockford.)

The buildings within the district will be described from north to south along the west side of the road, and then returning south to north along the east side.

The Methodist Church, built in 1912, is a vernacular late Gothic Revival frame building with its three-bay gable end facing the road. Doors and windows are of lancet form with tracery. A simple tower rises from the left corner of the roof and is capped by a pyramidal roof with splayed eaves and a pointed finial.

South of the church is the former courthouse which faces south. The two-story rectangular brick building features four engaged masonry columns marking the deep front pavilion. The front and pavilion are laid in Flemish bond. After the building burned, leaving only the walls, a residence was rebuilt within the walls and a flat roof constructed which detracts from the character of the Greek Revival structure.

South of the courthouse is a late nineteenth century, one-story cottage with balustraded porch that carries across the front of the house and down its south side. The front gable, covered with rows of scalloped and pointed shingles, features a round-arched window.

Beyond an empty lot is the York Tavern, a Federal style building with some turn-of-the-century alterations, including the metal roof ridge ornament, sawn bargeboards on the extended eaves of the roof, and one-over-one sash. The ca. 1800, two-story frame building is three bays wide and two deep with interior end chimneys. The interior consists of four more or less equal sized rooms. The front entrance opens into the right (north) front (east) room which contains a Federal style stair. There are corner fireplaces in all four rooms, both upstairs and down. One mantel has been replaced with a ca. 1900 Neo-Classical Revival one, but Federal style mantels remain elsewhere. While some are quite plain, one has fluted pilasters, a reeded band across the frieze, and reeded lonzenges on the center tablet and end blocks. Most of the doors survive from the Federal period; they have six standard flat panels with delicate applied molding.

Next door is a two-story L-shaped frame house, built about 1900 and owned for most of this century by owner of the York Tavern, Frank Bland. A one-story wrap-around porch with turned posts and balusters carries from the front door (abutting the projecting bay of the front) along the front and side to the rear door. Interior finish is typical of the turn of the century, with a turned stair balustrade and heavy turned posts topped by heavy cone shaped finials, and wide molded baseboards and symmetrically molded architraves with roundels. There are, however, two Federal style mantels in this house which closely resemble those in the York Tavern.
Further down the hill is a cluster of buildings that was the concentration of the commercial area and now contains the only operating store in town. The first building, called the Old Post Office, which appears to date from the late nineteenth century is a one-story frame building with its gable end to the street and a six-panel central entrance door closely flanked by two-over-two sash windows. Next door is a similar but larger building, differing only in that it has a window in the attic area, four-over-four sash, no roof overhang on the gable end, and a center chimney.

The only operating store building is a frame structure in two sections, each with approximately five unevenly spaced bays. About the same height, the buildings are united by a shed porch along the front. This building combines living space and general store type operation complete with gas pump. Beside this store is R. M. Clark's Store (closed), a one-story frame building with gable end to the road. The double-leaf front door is flanked by windows with two-over-two sash, and a shed porch protects the entrance.

The last building before the railroad track is that called the Tobacco Factory, described locally as the oldest in town. It consists of two one-story frame buildings, sited parallel to the road, resting on a stone foundation which is a full story high on the upper (north) west end. The upper (north) portion of the building could have been a small house or office. The north section has sheathing with crude baseboard, chair rail, and mantel.

The southernmost building on the east side of the street is the railroad section foreman's house, a one-story, L-shaped frame house with six-over-six sash. The house sits on the corner of Water and High streets, Water being the only other identifiable street remaining in Rockford.

On the other corner of the intersection is a building of considerable architectural significance—the Grant-Burrus Hotel. Much of the building was burned November 12, 1974, but some of the structure still stands. The building, a T-shaped structure, is the result of three major building periods. The earliest (ca. 1790s) portion appears to be a two-story frame building three bays wide and two deep which had exterior end chimneys. The exposed (south) chimney is double shouldered and of brick laid in one-to-four common bond. To the north is a similar section which was added later; both face High Street, have a common one-story porch, and have a more or less similar roofline, though the five-bay-long north part had a more steeply pitched roof. The chimney at the north gable end is of brick with stepped single shoulders. To the rear is a two-story, four-bay wing with a double porch on the south side which carries across the southeast side of the oldest portion. The balustrade appears somewhat Federal in character and has chamfered posts. An exterior Federal style stair connects the two levels of the porch. Virtually all of the second floor was lost in the fire. The sash is nine-over-six at the first level and six-over-six at the second. The floor plan for the oldest section was a Quaker plan. In the major room (which survived the fire), is a transitional Georgian-Federal mantel with an arched fire opening flanked by fluted pilasters. Two horizontal flat panels with applied molding occur in the frieze with a reeded lozenge pattern separating them; reeded end blocks (lower than usual) cap the pilasters beneath a handsomely molded shelf.
Both flat-paneled doors with applied molding and raised paneled doors exist in the building, and there was in the oldest section an unusual nine-panel front door. A smokehouse survives in the back yard.

In the lot next to the Grant-Burrus Hotel is a small, one-story barn with gable end to the street. To the north of it is a late nineteenth century H-shaped, two-story frame house, three bays wide and two deep with a central entrance.

The next building up the street, the former Masonic Lodge building, is the oldest, most intact building remaining. It is a two-story Federal-style frame structure on a raised stone basement with the two-bay gable end turned to the street and covered by a one-story porch with chamfered posts and a simple balustrade. The north side of the roofline is splayed as if to accommodate a two-story porch which is no longer in evidence, and the flush siding of exposed walls of this side supports the full porch theory. The building has large six-over-six in the south and east walls, and paired, four-light windows in the west attic gable; the east ones were boarded over when the building was re-sided. To the south is a two-bay, square, one-story frame addition with a parapet roof, the current Post Office. The floor plan of the lodge is simple, with one large unheated room occupying the front portion of the building and a smaller room to the rear. The second floor space is the meeting room for the Masonic Lodge. The finish is of simple Georgian-Federal, including the paneled mantels, simple molded door and window frames, and doors with six flat panels with applied molding on one side and robust raised ones on the other. Some marbleizing exists on the door panels on the second floor at the lodge room and some original hardware survives.

Immediately next door to the lodge is a one-story triple gable cottage with a center chimney, and a plain porch across the front; it is sheathed with asbestos shingles. Just up the hill from this is a small, one-story, rectangular frame barn which sits parallel to the road and somewhat lower than road level. This stands roughly opposite the courthouse. There is open pasture from there to the Methodist Church which marks the northern boundary of the district.
PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- PREHISTORIC
- 1400-1499
- 1500-1599
- 1600-1699
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-

ARCHEOLOGY
-PREHISTORIC
- HISTORIC
- AGRICULTURE
ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE
COMMUNICATIONS

SPECIFIC DATES est. 1790

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Rockford was established in 1790 as the county seat of Surry and remained such until 1851. Though a small town with few buildings surviving, those few compose a compact district representative of the periods of growth in the town. The Grant-Burrus Hotel, Masonic Lodge, and York Tavern date from the earliest days of the town. The Greek Revival courthouse, replacing an earlier one, was built at the zenith of the political history of the community. With the coming of the railroad in 1890 the town took on new life reflected by most of the remainder of the buildings. There has been little development since this turn-of-the-century railroad era.

Rockford is a small, semi-deserted town that once thrived as a county seat and local trade center. Its history lies not in dramatic growth, political importance, or great wealth, but in the story of modest events, local people, and social and economic developments at once typical of many small towns and unique to Rockford. The very personal history of Rockford written by Lucy Hamlin Hauck (long-time resident and wife of the depot agent), contains a wealth of information and recollections that give a vivid picture of Rockford. It is from her work that much of the following account is taken.

Surry County, formed in 1771, was divided in 1789 to form Stokes County. The committee appointed to select a new county seat for Surry, purchased 53 acres from Thomas and Moses Ayers on the north side of the Yadkin River at White Rock Ford. The town named Rockford was laid off with three principal streets: High, Cabin and Water. Five commissioners were named and given power to sell lots and manage the town. The courts of late 1789 and early 1790 were held at the home of Richard Horne, two miles east of Rockford. The court of August, 1790, was held "at the courthouse in Rockford," which is believed to have met at the home of Elihu Ayers, until the courthouse was completed. It is unknown when the first courthouse was built.

The location of Rockford was not to prove conducive to the building of a large town because of the fluctuating river and the hills that rose beside it. Much of the business of the early courts was given to the surveying and establishment of roads and appointing overseers for their maintenance. Wagon and stagecoach roads were established above the river hills following routes more easily traveled, and Rockford was reached by roads crossing or branching off from these.

Despite geographical limitations, the county seat became significant, not only as the center of county government, but as a nucleus for hotels, retail stores, physicians, and the crafts needed and produced in that day. There was a blacksmith, a forge or furnace, a tinsmith, and a tannery with an attendant leather trade. There was a public
spring where many families went to do their weekly wash and to carry water for use in their homes.

In 1791, a permit was given to Jesse Lester to run a tavern at his home at Rockford. By 1795 a permit had been issued for operation of a ferry. In 1797 Reuben Grant obtained a permit to operate a tavern in his home, also in Rockford—the beginning of the Grant-Burrus Hotel. Many permits were issued for grist mills, taverns, ferries and forges to be operated throughout the county.

The Masonic Order was first organized at Huntsville as the Shallowford Lodge on January 20, 1795. In 1797 the Charter was changed to Unanimity Lodge #34 and moved to Rockford. The Masonic Hall, still standing, is among the oldest in the state. By 1800 the population of Rockford was 47 people.

In 1827 the court gave orders for repairs to be made on the courthouse, but two years later it was decided that a new courthouse should be built. A square acre of land on a hill overlooking the town and river was purchased from Matthew Hughes and a new brick building was erected. Court records note that "County Clerk's office moved into new courthouse 5th day of October, 1830, A.D." This building stood intact until 1925, when it was gutted by fire. The walls withstood the fire and later a residence was built, using the walls. Below the courthouse on the west side of High Street was a row of log offices used by lawyers.

Mark York acquired considerable land in Rockford in 1837. He operated the York Tavern which shared with the Burrus Tavern the distinction of entertaining many notables of that era. The tavern still stands.

Rockford, a political center for the area, was largely Whig. In 1840 a prize was offered to the county that would show the largest increase in Whig votes and Surry won the prize—a fully rigged ship, hauled by horses from Fayetteville, and placed between the courthouse and public spring. A house was built over it and it remained there to within memory of people now living. An interesting sidelight to Rockford politics concerns itself with the story of an old man named Jenkins, who for some meritorious service to the county was granted the privilege of retailing "spirits" in small quantities without license. On Sunday evenings before each court session Jenkins would make his way through Rockford to a lot known as "the devil's half-acre." It was so named because a "grog shop" was operated there by an old woman. Early Monday mornings Jenkins would procure four forked sticks, drive them into the ground, lay boards on these, and set his jug and cup upon his improvised counter, ready for business.

The Baptist and Methodist churches of Rockford were organized at about the same time, 1849. Land was donated by Mark York for the erection of a church for all denominations, except two which were excluded. It is said that York was not a church member, but his son was a Baptist, and the deed to the land was made to the Baptist Church. All the people of the community, Methodist and Baptists, joined in to erect the small church.
These two were the only two denominations represented in Rockford. The Baptist State Convention was held at Rockford in 1848, and it is believed that it convened in the Masonic building. The Methodists later built their own church, and the old joint meetinghouse was eventually destroyed. Both religious organizations played a strong role in this community.

The decline of Rockford began in 1850 when the county was divided once again, and Dobson, because of its more central location, became the county seat of Surry County. By this time the population of Rockford had risen to 639—quite a respectable figure when compared with nearby Morganton, 558; Raleigh, 4,518; and Wilmington, the largest city in the state, with 7,264. Court continued to be held in Rockford for three years. After 1853 the courthouse at Rockford was used for the most part as a schoolhouse.

In 1890 a branch of Southern Railway from Winston to North Wilkesboro was completed and Rockford took on new life. The need for a railroad maintenance crew and foreman provided employment for some. The Rockford station was one of the busiest on the line, handling passengers, freight, express, mail and telegraph service for Yadkinville, Dobson, and intermediate stores and post offices and the people of the countryside. The growing economy required the establishment of saw mills and expanded the lumber business. The railroad right-of-way and loading yards at Rockford gave evidence of the growth of businesses in the surrounding country. Perhaps nothing received a greater boost or felt the impact of this sudden stimulus more than the Burrus Hotel and livery stable. "Drummers" came from the train to "put up" at the hotel and to engage a vehicle with driver to take them and their huge trunks of samples out through the country to Hamlet and wayside mercantile establishments. Lawyers alighted from and boarded the passenger train as they came and went from court, stopping at the hotel and hiring a horse, buggy and driver to carry them to their destination. Sometimes they found the river so swollen by extended rains or "freshets" that crossing was impossible and a stay of undetermined duration was necessary at the hotel. Mr. Burrus sometimes liked to tell a visitor whose horse was stabled that the horse was resting in the law office of Andrew Jackson, since the new barn was built partially of logs which Mr. Burrus had purchased when the old offices across the street, where Jackson is said to have practiced law, were torn down.

The turn of the century found Rockford doing well economically but the town was no longer listed individually in the population statistics as a city. As the general economy progressed, the railroad became the chief carrier of mail, passengers, freight, and express. Wagons were hauling constantly to and from the local depot, and passengers arrived daily to board the train. Many people were riding into town for their mail or to trade. There were three prosperous general stores, E. S. Reece, J. D. Hamlin and W. P. Dobson and Company. Tobacco was fast becoming the chief money crop, but big corporations were being established and small manufacturers were going out of business. During the tobacco season the depot was often filled to overflowing with hogheads of tobacco being shipped to Winston, and the freight trains ran so far behind schedule...
that the agent had to remain on duty until far into the night when the east bound freight arrived or an extra was dispatched to relieve the situation. Railroad cars that provided temporary housing for the bridge-force were parked for a month at a time on the side-track and added to the railroad scene and local trade.

Families continued to move to the West by rail, which brought extra business and problems to the railroad agent. When one or more wagons drove up with household goods, the agent was said to exclaim, "Where to now, New Castle, Indiana or Marshalltown, Iowa?" The tedious process of determining the tariff for each individual item was not a cherished one, for the tariff was constantly changing.

Bad roads did not deter business. Sheds were erected behind the station for the storage of empty hogsheads and two warehouses stored car loads of fertilizer and other commodities. One could see the long-time mailman from Yadkinville, Nathan Vestal, as he drove up, hitched near a hogshead, and lay corn on it for his horse. Neighborhood chickens would then fly up to share the repast and a war of words and switching would take place until the horse was left in peace to eat. Nathan then took his place in the office behind the pot-bellied coal stove to wait for the train, while local people and passengers congregated in the adjoining waiting rooms or bought tickets through the little window in the wall. The mailman also carried passengers and no trip was greater for any boy or girl who rode with him to visit kin folks.

The river at Rockford does not look so wide today, but to one who forded the river in a buggy or two-horse Nissen wagon, the river crossing was not accomplished by going straight across, for there were too many big rocks and treacherous holes. One followed the ripple which ran in an arc from one side to the other, above which nature had made a good crossing. Below the ripple it was too deep. It was from this that the weekly paper, established in 1892 and presently owned and operated by William E. Rutledge at Yadkinville, got the title, The Yadkin Ripple.

Business had warranted the addition of a second passenger train, a mixed train called the "Shoo-fly." It left North Wilkesboro for Winston early in the morning and returned in the late afternoon, allowing shoppers several hours in the city. This train was often so crowded when it left Winston, that it was impossible to get a seat, and it often ran late.

The flood of 1916 created great excitement and many problems. It was not believed that the river could rise so high. Instead of evacuating the railroad station, the freight and express packages were piled above the level they thought the water might possibly reach, but the water continued to rise. The last to come out was the agent with his pockets and arms full of records. The water rose to a height of nine feet in the office. It was a long time before the station and railway were operating normally, and the sand deposited in the river bottoms created a problem for years.
A better road was finally built through Rockford around 1920. This construction changed the look of things. The rocks over which horses, mules and oxen had, for more than a century, strained and tugged to transport heavy loads, were blasted out and the bed of the road was brought far below the original level. It was several years before the road was hardsurfaced, but it was a great improvement at the time.

After World War I Rockford began to feel the changes that were coming to all the country. Motor vehicles were increasingly taking over transportation and the "good-roads" system was being expanded to accommodate the new method of travel. Though the people sought to get good roads and a river bridge, Rockford was passed by and local travel continued without benefit of either.

Efforts were repeatedly made through the years to get a bridge across the river without success. With motor vehicles fast becoming the common mode of transportation, the ford with roads leading to it on both sides of the river became obsolete and the ferry was the only means of crossing. Frank Bland built a low-water toll bridge of two spans—one connected the Yadkin side with the island and the other connected the island with Surry. Upon its completion, a celebration with picnic lunch was planned for July 4, 1930. The joy was short-lived because soon after the celebration flood waters badly warped the bridge and it required major repairs. The bridge was so badly damaged in the 1940 flood that it was not repaired. After the bridge was destroyed, the ferry was once again put into operation, but in 1944, this too was destroyed by flood waters.

The train doesn't stop in Rockford anymore and it was a sad day for the community when the last passenger train ran through in 1951. It was still furnishing transportation for some who went to Elkin or North Wilkesboro to shop. In 1963 the present, one lane, low water bridge was constructed.

In 1974 the Grant-Burrus Hotel burned while restoration work was in progress. Only a handful of families live in Rockford now and there is a growing interest in retaining what is left of the early and once-bustling, former county seat.

---

1 Surry County Records, Surry County Courthouse, Dobson, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds, Court Records).

2 Ibid.


4 Ibid., pp. 70-98, passim.
Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: approx. 15 acres

UTM References

Zone: Easting: Northing:
B [1,7] 5 [1,3] 16,210 4 [1,3] 5,410
C [1,7] 5 [1,3] 12,120 4 [1,3] 6,610
D [1,7] 5 [1,3] 13,410 4 [1,3] 8,810

Verbal boundary description

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Form prepared by

Name / Title: Research and architectural description by Charles Greer Suttlemyre, Jr., survey specialist

Organization: Division of Archives and History

Street & Number: 109 East Jones Street

City or Town: Raleigh

State: North Carolina

State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

National: __ State: _ Local: x

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]

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: 30 April 1976

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Director, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

Attest:

Keeper of the National Register
The Rockford Historic District extends north 0.5 mile from the Southern Railroad track, up S.R. 2221 and 100 yards east and west of S.R. 2221.
Surry County Records, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
(Subgroups: Deeds, Court Records).
United States Census Office, 1790-1900, Surry County, North Carolina