

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building

other names/site number Starnes Jewelers and Opera House

### 2. Location

street & number 127-133 West Main Street N/A  not for publication

city or town Albemarle  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Stanly code 167 zip code 28001

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William S. Pringle SHPO 1-24-95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is: Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            |                 | buildings  |
|              |                 | sites      |
|              |                 | structures |
|              |                 | objects    |
| 1            |                 | Total      |

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register

-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/speciality store

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/speciality store

VACANT/Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Moderne

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Metal

other Glass

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Commerce
- Entertainment/Recreation

**Period of Significance**

1907- ca. 1939

**Significant Dates**

1907  
1908  
ca. 1939

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Moody, Locke Anderson, contractor/builder

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building  
Name of Property

Stanly County, North Carolina  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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 See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Davyd Foard Hood

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 14 November 1994

street & number Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road telephone 704/462-4331

city or town Vale state N. C. zip code 28168

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Francis Eugene Starnes, III/Mrs. Catherine Pickler

street & number P. O. Box 398/P. O. Box 215 telephone 704/982-1013 (Starnes)  
704/463-7470 (Pickler)

city or town Albemarle/ New London state N. C. zip code 28001/28127

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building

## 7. Architectural Description

The Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building, standing at 127-133 West Main Street in downtown Albemarle, is a well-preserved two-story-with attic level brick commercial building covered with a parapet-front standing-seam metal roof. The handsome Colonial Revival style building, rising above its mostly two-story neighbors, was erected in 1907-1908 by Locke Anderson Moody, an Albemarle contractor. Its original construction featured a pair of one-story plate-glass storefronts, with recessed entrances, which flanked a center doorway: it opened onto a stair which rose to the suites of rental offices and the opera house on the second story. About 1939, these storefronts were remodeled and fitted with black Carrara glass panel facades and plate glass and chromium display windows and entrances. This treatment, representing an important, if modest, local interpretation of the art moderne style, has survived intact to the present and has achieved a significance in its own right. From 1908 until 1972 the handsome five-bay fenestration treatment of the second-story and attic levels remained intact and in public view. In November 1972, this portion of the facade was covered by the Binswanger Company by a gold-colored aluminum grill. In the autumn of 1990, the grillwork was removed and the facade was restored for owners by S & D Construction Company of Albemarle. The architects for the project, which included renovations to the salesroom of Starnes Jewelers, were Architectural Engineering Concepts, P.A. For ease of reference the term "opera house" rather than the full name will be used in this description to denote the building.

The opera house, forming a dominant part of a continuous streetscape of mostly turn-of-the-century commercial buildings, features a principal facade facing north onto West Main Street. The facade and the rear elevation measure approximately forty-six feet in width. The side elevations, extending a depth of about eighty-six feet are concealed by the contiguous buildings to the east and west. In practical terms, the facade has a two-part composition reflecting the two principal periods: the original construction of 1907-1908, and the ca. 1939 remodeling of the first-story storefronts. The first-story level of the building has a three-part division featuring individual commercial storefronts flanking a central entrance which opens onto the stair rising to the second story. These storefronts, generally equal in width, are covered with black Carrara glass panels and fitted with plate glass and chromium display windows and entrances. This ca. 1939 treatment carries below a simple metal cornice, original to the building, which stretches across the complete width of the opera house. The storefront of Starnes Jewelers, at 127 West Main Street, has the name "STARNES" in black letters on a white glass panel above the entrance: white glass diamond shapes are positioned to either side. The recessed center entrance is flanked by plate-glass display windows which splay in a four-part fashion from the flush facade to the door. These windows are

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enframed by Carrara glass and have flush edges held by metal clamps. The design of the storefront at 133 West Main Street, occupied by a succession of commercial tenants over its eighty-six years, features the same materials. Here the center entrance is deeply recessed between plate glass display windows which are flush with the street, for parallel lengths, and then splay inward and south toward the door. Clearly, the design of the Starnes Jewelers storefront was specifically geared toward the display of small items of jewelry, silver, porcelain, etc., whereas the storefront of #133 was fitted up in a more generic fashion to appeal to various possible commercial tenants. The center, first-story bay of the facade contains the recessed entrance for the second-story suites and performance hall. Here, a short flight of poured cement steps rise to a landing protected by a two-leaf metalwork security door. Behind it is a double-leaf door surmounted by an unusually tall single-pane transom which illuminates the interior stairwell. The leaves of the door are original and feature tall panes of glass above a pair of molded horizontal panels. In recent years a security panel has been applied over the outside face of each leaf: these are ornamented with simple applied moldings.

The second story and attic levels of the opera house are designed en suite and are symmetrical in their balance and arrangement. The broad elevation is laid up in one-to-five common bond and is enframed by projecting pilasters at each side which rise to the corbelled cornice. Both levels have a five-bay fenestration pattern. On the second story, a series of arch-headed window openings hold paired one-over-one sash windows below traceried fanlights. The fanlights are enframed by three-part header-course surrounds which rise from white marble spring blocks to a like keystone. The keystone in the center bay is inscribed

OPERA  
HOUSE  
1907.

Immediately above each window opening, a series of five circular windows are set in the upper attic level of the facade and illuminate the interior balcony level of the opera house. The symmetrical tracery of these windows repeats the design of the fanlight. They, too, are set in three-part, header-course surrounds highlighted by four symmetrically placed keystones. These windows, side-hinged to tilt open for ventilation, are set in molded wood enframements like the second story windows. There are two metal ventilating grills symmetrically spaced above the second and fourth circular windows. The parapet top of the elevation is corbelled forward and articulated by five recessed field panels which reflect the fenestration.

The rear elevation has a symmetrical arrangement of door and window openings on the three principal floors as well as the basement levels. These openings have

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arched heads marked by two-course header lintels. The lintels of the doors and windows are themselves flat. The basement and first-story levels of the building reflect the two storefront arrangement of facade. In the basement level there are broad openings holding board and batten doors for receiving merchandise: these are set in the westernmost bay per storefront. There are window openings in the easternmost bays. The first-story level of the building has a six-bay arrangement with doorways in the center of each three-bay storefront. The doorway of Starnes Jewelers has been partially infilled and fitted with a conventional blind security door. A metal and neon sign over the door bears the slogan "Starnes, Leading Jewelers Since 1898." The window openings to either side have been infilled with glass bricks. The doorway of 133 West Main Street retains its original double leaf doors below a four-plane transom, as well as its double-leaf screened doors. The original wood doors feature six molded horizontal panels per leaf. The window openings to either side contain two-over-two double-hung sash. Each of the two first-story doorways is preceded by a metal stoop with steps down to ground level. The stoop at Starnes Jeweler's door connect with the metal fire escape which rises to the third story.

The second story of the building, illuminating the rear mezzanine levels of each storefront, has a symmetrical six-bay pattern of fenestration. Each of the six openings holds original two-over-two double-hung sash windows. The third story of the opera house repeats that same fenestration pattern; however, there is a seventh bay in the center of the wall and a doorway (in the bay above the entrance to 133 West Main Street): it opens into the west corner dressing room adjoining the opera house stage. The six window openings on the third story are all infilled with glass bricks.

The principal interior finish and arrangement of Starnes Jewelers dates to a ca. 1947 remodeling of the jewelry store by Morrison Furniture and Fixture Company of Statesville. The blond mahogany display cabinets, counters, and wall units reflect a simple art moderne styling with curved ends which is in sympathy with the ca. 1939 exterior remodeling. The front (west) three quarters of the space is given over to the sales floor and features a generally symmetrical arrangement of counters and display units to either side of the center passage on axis with the front door. In the wall to either side of the customer entrance are paneled doors which open into small access closets behind the display windows. The side walls of the sales floor are lined with glazed or open shelves above drawers and cabinets. There are aisles for sales staff between these wall units and glazed tops counters which carry in parallel fashion from the front of the sales room toward the rear. On the west wall, there is a metal door into a brick vault (positioned under the stairway to the opera house). The vault contains a safe manufactured by the Cary Safe Company of Buffalo, N.Y.: the company name and "F. E. Starnes" appears in gilt letters on the black door of the safe. On the sales floor, the most visible effect of

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the 1990 remodeling project is the clerestory-like ceiling treatment which features recessed lighting. The floor is carpeted.

The stairway to the store's rear mezzanine level, enclosed in the rear southwest corner of the sales floor, appears to be in the position of the original stair and perhaps incorporates parts of the old staircase. The mezzanine level includes a landing with doors opening into a lavatory for staff and the store office which has always been located here. There is a large storage closet/mechanical room off the office. The floor, wall, and ceiling finishes of all these spaces are of various dates. Below the mezzanine, in the rear (south) quarter of the store, are a series of rooms partitioned for use as a diamond sales office, a laboratory, a jewelry repair room, and a storage/wrapping passage. Here, also, is the board and batten door which opens onto the stairway (below the mezzanine stair) down to the basement level. The basement receiving room has a poured cement floor, exposed brick walls, and is fitted with shelves, counters, and tables for receiving, processing, and storage.

The interior of the storefront at 133 West Main Street, occupied by a succession of commercial tenants, has a wide range of visible floor, wall, and ceiling finishes which are of an indiscriminate character. The original pressed tin ceiling of this storefront remains intact and is now concealed by a later-day dropped ceiling. Presently, the space is occupied by a bridal shop and has partitions for dressing rooms and displays. There is a permanent partition which separates the rear quarter of the storefront from the public sales floor. This back space, apparently long used for processing and other nonpublic purposes, retains much of its original tongue-and-groove ceiling on the walls and ceilings. There are two early partitioned enclosures in the southwest corner containing commodes: the common sink is hung on the wall between them. The original stairways to the rear mezzanine and basement are separate here. The staircase to the store's mezzanine level has been taken down and it has long been inaccessible to rental tenants. The basement has a poured cement floor, exposed brick walls, and tongue-and-groove ceiling on the ceiling.

Just as the upper facade of the opera house has survived virtually intact from 1908, so, too, have the interior plan and finishes of the suites of offices and the opera house--and its balcony--which occupy the second story and attic levels, respectively. Here the only serious losses have been the alteration of the stepped/sloping floor of the performance hall to a flat level, about 1919, and the ca. 1990 removal of the pressed tin ceiling of the hall which was seriously affected by water damage: sections of the tin ceiling panels have been salvaged for reuse or possible duplication. In the 1920s or early 1930s, it would appear, lavatories were enclosed in the second-story hall, framed wall mirrors were installed for use by the beauty shop operators, and some ceiling

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light fixtures were added to both suites. Otherwise, these suites and the opera house with its attendant dressing rooms and balcony represent a remarkable survival of early-twentieth century commercial/public spaces and their finishes. The stairwell, hall, and office suites occupy the front (north) third of the second story: the opera house balcony is located on the level above these rooms. The opera house takes up the rear two-thirds of the second story with the stage, flanked by dressing rooms, at its south end.

The double-leaf doors, at street level, open directly onto the wood staircase which rises to the south to the hall. The stairwell has plaster walls with a molded-top baseboard and chair rail which carries the hand rail. The stairwell is protected, at the hall level, by a three-sided turned baluster railing with square newels and a shaped-top hand rail. The floor of the hall is oak and the ceiling is sheathed with traditional tongue-and-groove ceiling. The walls in the hall and the office suites have a tall dark-stained wainscot of vertical tongue-and-groove ceiling between a molded-top baseboard and a molded chair rail. The upper walls are plaster and painted. At the head of the stairs is a broad opening fitted with original double-leaf wood doors which opens into the opera house: each door has a five, horizontal panel arrangement. The plan of the hall is rectangular with an extension to the north which incorporates the center-bay window for illumination. In this extension, a pair of lavatories were enclosed, ca. 1930, along its east wall.

From the hall, doors open into the east and west suites of rooms which are slightly uneven in their square footage. The principal doors into these suites, in the northeast and northwest corners of the hall, feature a large glazed panel above three horizontal panels: the doorways are fitted with glazed transoms and screen doors for ventilation. There are two additional doors into the (four) rooms in the larger west suite of offices. One is a conventional five-panel turn-of-the-century wood door while the second one has a glazed pane above three wood panels: it bears two slogans, "Colored Waiting Room" and "Laboratory."

The west suite of offices contains four rooms of unequal size. They have pine floors, the aforementioned tongue-and-groove wainscot, plaster walls, and celotex ceilings. The woodwork in these rooms has been painted. Three of them retain their ca. 1930 single-globe pendant light fixtures. The extreme northwest corner room has an early wall-mounted porcelain sink. The smaller east suite originally contained three rooms; however, the partition between the two rooms on the east side was removed to create one large work space for the beauty shop operators. The room opening off the hall was a customer waiting room: it has a ca. 1930 three-light metal chandelier. On the west wall of the "back" room, there are large mirrors mounted in rounded-edge frames on the wall above the wainscot. A door beside (north of) these mirrors opens into a storage closet under the staircase which rises from the opera house to its balcony.

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The opera house's performance hall is a large, tall space nearly square in plan with the stage and its flanking dressing rooms on the south and the balcony rising above the main level on the north. The pine floor of this hall is now level whereas it was originally either stepped or sloped. The height of the uppermost floor level would appear to be continuous with the elevated (about eighteen inches) landing in the hall's northeast corner from which the enclosed stair rises to the balcony. Most of the opera house's original tongue-and-groove wainscot remains in place. There is a break in the wainscot and some roughness to the plaster wall at the south edge of the east wall where P. J. Huneycutt cut an opening in the brick wall to connect the opera house with his adjoining undertaking chambers; this opening has long since been infilled. The upper walls of the hall are plastered. As noted the pressed tin ceiling of the opera house has been taken down and so, too, was the plaster ceiling behind it; both were weakened and damaged by water leakage. The wood lath is visible throughout the opera house.

Nearly half of the south wall of the opera house is given over to the proscenium which fronts the performance stage. The arch is simply splayed on its three faces and has a plaster surface over which pressed tin panels were applied. Most of this decorative patterned tinwork including a center shell motif remains in place. Whatever curtaining once concealed the elevated stage has long since disappeared. To either side of the stage, there are doorways at the extreme edges which open from the house into the side dressing rooms. Simple flights of wood steps with plain hand rails rise from the opera house floor to the doors. The single doorway on the west is fitted with a door featuring a glazed pane above three horizontal panels. The broad doorway to the east is fitted with double-leaf doors having a conventional five-panel turn-of-the-century arrangement.

In practical terms, the stage and the flanking dressing rooms are one large single space which carries across the south end of the opera house. The dressing rooms are partitioned to either side of the stage by simple wings, of unequal heights, which are sheathed on the stage side with tongue-and-groove ceiling. The stage and dressing rooms have pine floors, plaster walls, and a ceiling of tongue-and-groove ceiling. These spaces were originally illuminated by the six windows on the on the south exterior wall; however, these have been infilled with glass bricks. The exterior door opens from the west dressing room onto the fire escape. In each dressing room, and the stage, a single light socket hangs at the end of a long cord suspended from the ceiling.

The balcony, carrying across the rear (north) elevation of the opera house, is fronted by a low blind railing of vertical beaded boards. It curves from the side walls inward and flattens where it carries above the double-door entrance

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into the stair hall. On the aforementioned landing, a board and batten door of tongue-and-groove ceiling opens onto the simple flight of wood steps which rises to the balcony. In the balcony this stairwell is protected by a low blind railing of vertical flush boards with round ball finials on the newels. The floor of the balcony steps in six levels from the front (south) to the rear (north). It would appear that there were no fixed seats in the balcony. Spectators either stood or, probably, sat on portable benches.

On the floor of the balcony, there are stacks of the pressed tin ceiling panels that were salvaged when the ceiling was taken down. Also stored here, in random stacks, are panels of painted canvas scenery which have survived from the earliest days of the opera house and its live productions. They are painted to represent walls with a wood grained wainscot, green walls, and a grained frieze at the top. They have a maker's stencil on the back which reads:

Built & Painted  
By The  
Sosman & Landis Co.  
236 & 238 S. Clinton St.  
Chicago, Ills.

There is a further hand printed notation:

Jas. Pathe Co.  
Week Feb. 15th 1909.

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Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building  
8. Narrative Statement of Significance  
Summary Paragraph

The Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building, a two-story with mezzanine Colonial Revival style brick building, is of unusual significance in the history of Albemarle, the seat of Stanly County. Erected in 1907-1908 by Locke Anderson Moody, Albemarle's foremost builder at the turn of the century, the well-preserved and handsome building was constructed for Francis Eugene Starnes, Doctor Franklin Parker, and Julius Ceasar Parker: their descendants continue to own the building. As with other downtown buildings of its period, the Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building was a mixed-use building which included commercial storefronts on the first story and rental offices on the second story as well as the opera house performance hall. The building holds significance in the areas of architecture, commerce, and entertainment/recreation. The opera house is important in the architectural history of Albemarle and Stanly County as an impressive, intact building which reflects the capabilities of Locke Anderson Moody (1862-1938), Albemarle's most prominent builder/contractor at the turn of the century. The opera house is also important as the finest and best preserved commercial building of a series, erected in the 1890s and 1900s, which marked Albemarle's transition from a village of mostly frame buildings to a bustling town of brick stores, houses, and hotels which encircled the 1893 brick court house, which was also erected by Moody. The Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building is also important in the area of commerce as the most distinguished building in Albemarle which reflects the emergence of the town as an important trade and manufacturing center at the turn of the century. From 1908 until the present, it has housed the sales room of Starnes Jewelers, the oldest continuously operating business in both Albemarle and Stanly County. Established in 1898 by Francis Eugene Starnes (1874-1932), the company has been successively managed by his son Francis Eugene Starnes, Jr. (1914-1976) and his grandson Francis Eugene Starnes, III. Housing a large performance hall on its second and mezzanine stories, the building also holds significance on the local level in the area of entertainment/recreation. From 1908 until the end of 1913, the Opera House was the principal venue for traveling vaudeville shows, theatrical troupes, and lecturers in Albemarle. It was the first and only such hall erected for that purpose in the city. It might well have continued to house traveling shows had not World War I curtailed them and had moving pictures not superseded them as a principal form of public entertainment in the later 1910s. It was here, in the opera house, that moving pictures were first shown to an Albemarle audience on Wednesday, 20 May 1914.

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The Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building  
8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Historical Background, Commerce, and Entertainment/Recreation Context

The Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building (hereinafter called the opera house), completed in 1908 by Albemarle's foremost turn-of-the-century contractor, remains today the most impressive and best preserved commercial building in the county seat. As one of a small group of surviving brick commercial houses lining the blocks at the junction of Main and Second Streets, it stands above its neighbors as a symbol of the dramatic flowering of Albemarle as an important manufacturing and trade center in the decades at the turn of the century. Prosperity had come late to Albemarle, over a half century after Stanly County was formed in 1841 and Albemarle was designated as the county seat. The town, laid out in 1841-1842 on the lands donated by Nehemiah Hearne's heirs, developed slowly in the half century from 1841 until 1891. Created as a political center to serve the affairs of Stanly County citizens, the townscape slowly enlarged beyond the courthouse and a few frame houses to include hotels, stores, law offices, and a cluster of related buildings.

The key event which sparked Albemarle's unprecedented growth occurred in 1891. In that year, the Southern Railroad Company erected a connecting line through Albemarle linking Salisbury, one of its principal hubs, with Norwood, a small town near the Yadkin River in eastern Stanly County. This new railroad, called the Yadkin Railroad, was not an isolated venture but part of the great expansion of interconnecting railroad lines across the breadth of North Carolina--and indeed the nation--at the turn of the century. In 1911 the Winston-Salem Southbound Railroad was completed through Albemarle which, in turn linked the county seat with the rapidly growing town of Winston-Salem to the north and the Seaboard Airline Railroad terminal at Hamlet, some forty-five miles away. Additional rail improvements came in 1913; however, it was the opening of the Yadkin Railroad in 1891 that proved to be the single most influential event to occur in Albemarle since it became the Stanly County seat.

During its first years of operation, the Yadkin Railroad carried lumber, agricultural produce, and other local resources out of Stanly County to faraway, more lucrative markets. Its cars brought, in return, manufactured goods and other products which found their way into Albemarle and Stanly County homes by way of a growing number of stores in Albemarle, Norwood, and other, smaller places along the line into Salisbury. Local manufacturing enterprises, principally textiles, were developed in short order. The first to be organized in Albemarle was the Efird Manufacturing Company which put its first plant into production in 1897: the company was a partnership of Irenus Polycarp Efird (1834-1902), a local farmer and land speculator, and James William Cannon (1852-1921), the founder and president of Cannon Mills in Cabarrus County. The

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opening of the Efird plant immediately provided steady employment and a guaranteed wage for those who departed the farms for factories, it created a quick increase in the population of Albemarle as workers relocated to the town, and it was the spur for the development of a significant commercial center around the town square at the junction of Main and Second Streets. Clearly, Cannon had seen a larger purpose and potential to his investment in the Efird mill. In 1898 he organized the Wiscassett Mills in Albemarle and in 1899 he opened the first Wiscassett plant beside the original Efird plant and on the edge of the Yadkin Railroad line. Housing for mill employees was a critical part of Cannon's operation. In conjunction with the Yadkin Railroad, these two mills formed the underpinning and the impetus for Albemarle's industrial and commercial growth in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

One impressive result of the new prosperity was the series of new construction projects in the heart of Albemarle which saw the town transformed from a cluster of frame commercial houses and hotels encircling the brick 1893 court house to a new and impressive place distinguished by brick buildings. On 27 July 1905, the STANLY ENTERPRISE published J. P. Cook's assessment: ". . . the old frame store houses have given away to splendid, modern brick buildings, and all over the place you see elegant and handsome houses of modern architecture." Most of these brick stores and buildings were two-story with Italianate detailing. Two years later, Francis Eugene Starnes and Doctor Franklin Parker would undertake the construction of a "house of modern architecture" which remains today the handsomest surviving commercial building of its generation in Albemarle.

The construction of the Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building reflected both a decade of business experience in the county seat and an investment which provided new quarters for Mr. Starnes's jewelry house and a performance hall in which all the citizens of Albemarle could enjoy traveling shows, lectures, concerts, plays, and other presentations. Francis Eugene Starnes (1874-1932), the son of Babel Alexander Starnes (1839-1882), had opened a jewelry store in Albemarle in 1898: during its early years it was located in a building on Second Street. In 1902 Starnes was married to Letha Parker (1884-1964). The company and Mr. Starnes prospered and at the end of his first decade in business his store was housed in handsome new quarters. Starnes's partner in the construction of the new building was his father-in-law Doctor Franklin Parker (1850-1932). On 28 February 1907, the STANLY ENTERPRISE informed its readers of proposed new buildings for Albemarle: one of these was ". . . a brick building by F. E. Starnes--with upstairs planned for a hall or club room." Three months later the STANLY ENTERPRISE provided further details of the building in its 23 May 1907 issue: "Messrs F. E. Starnes and D. F. Parker have purchased 25 feet frontage on Main street, in addition to that purchased sometime ago, and they will soon erect a two-story brick building, adjoining P. J. Huneycutt & Co's store." The newspaper's promise held true, and on 11 July 1907, the STANLY ENTERPRISE provided a full account of the new building under the heading "NEW BRICK BLOCK."

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Messrs F. E. Starnes, D. F. Parker and J. C. Parker have united in the erection of a handsome brick building to adjoin the Smith & Biles building now occupied by P. J. Huneycutt & Company, on Main Street.

The building is to be two stories, covering 50 x 80 feet. The lower floor will be finished for store rooms, using the Crane patent front, with solid plate glass joined by metal clasps. The second floor will be finished for an opera house, a thing much needed in our little city for various public gatherings.

The contract has been awarded to L. A. Moody, and the work will be prosecuted just as fast as material and labor can be applied.

Thus it will be seen that Albemarle continues to grow.

Apparently construction on the brick building began in the summer or early autumn of 1907. The building was sufficiently finished in May of 1908 so that the senior class of the Albemarle Graded School could perform Thomas Dennison's play, "The Danger Signal," in the opera house on Thursday, 21 May. On Sunday, the 24th, the baccalaureate address was given in the opera house to the graduating class and on Monday evening the graduation exercises were held in the new public hall. A month later the building was nearing completion. The STANLY ENTERPRISE carried a notice to that effect in its local news column on 25 June 1908:

The large Crane's patent plate glass front for the Parker-Starnes building has arrived and the finishing touches are fast being put on. The New York Dry Goods Store, under management of A. N. Dry, will occupy one room and Mr. Starnes the other.

The brick building completed in 1908 for Starnes and Parker was a two-story mixed-use building that was typical of its period. On the first story, at street level, there was a pair of storefronts which flanked the center doorway opening onto the stair to the second story. The storefronts contained a large rectangular selling floor with a shallow mezzanine at the rear: they also had in-store access to the basement receiving and storage areas which, in turn, had exterior doors on the rear of the building. The storefronts were virtually identical in design and size. The staircase, enclosed between the stores, rose from the street to a hall which was illuminated by the center window of the facade. At the top of the stairs a pair of doors open into the opera house: the stage and dressing rooms of the theatre space were also accessible by way of a metal stair on the exterior rear of the building. There were/are also doors opening from the hall into two small suites of rooms/offices which were laid out in the front corners of the second story.

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As the STANLY ENTERPRISE noted, one of the building's two storefronts was outfitted and occupied by the jewelry store operated by Francis Eugene Starnes (1874-1932). Since 1908, Starnes Jewelers has been operated here at 127 West Main Street, by Mr. Starnes, his son Francis Eugene Starnes, Jr. (1914-1976), and his grandson Francis Eugene Starnes, III (born 1941), the current owner. The Starnes jewelry company is the oldest continuously operating business in both Albemarle and Stanly County and has occupied these premises for eighty-six years. The storefront to the west, at 133 West Main Street, has been a rental, income-producing commercial space from the beginning. The first tenant was Mr. Dry's New York Dry Goods Store. Thereafter, the space was occupied by a succession of operations, including dry goods, shoe stores, and pawn shops. It now houses a bridal apparel shop. In the late 1930s, both storefronts were remodeled and fitted with one-story black Carrara glass facades: the recessed entrances of each store are flanked by plate glass display windows.

The suites of rooms at the front of the second story have likewise housed a succession of commercial tenants and professional offices. According to family tradition, the east suite of rooms was used for a period of time by Francis Eugene Starnes for his optometry offices. For a period of time, probably beginning in the later 1930s, these rooms housed a beauty shop operated by Ruth Peeler (born 1912) who had married F. E. Starnes, Jr., in 1937. A beauty shop was operated in these premises as late as the 1960s. The suite is now used for storage by Starnes Jewelers. The west suite of rooms have mostly housed professional medical and law offices. At different times, George Dana Broadman Moore, an attorney and the husband of Julius Caesar Parker's daughter Elizabeth, had his offices in the chambers. In the 1940s, the suite was occupied by Dr. Cecil Duckworth, an optometrist. Presumably, it was for his practice that a door opening from the hall into a small room in the suite was painted with the term, "Colored Waiting Room," which survives in place. These rooms have remained empty for several decades.

The railroads which carried goods into and out of Albemarle, and brought it an era of prosperity at the turn of the century, were also critical factors in the life of the opera house. The traveling performers and theatrical companies who performed in the opera house from the time of its opening in the autumn of 1908 until it ceased to present live entertainment in 1913 all came into Albemarle on one or another of the three railroad lines. Although the Albemarle Graded School's graduating class held three events in the opera house in May 1908, it is clear that the building was incomplete at that time. The STANLY ENTERPRISE, on 25 June 1908, reported in its local news column that "The new seats are being placed in the opera house, which with the new curtains to be provided, will make it quite a handsome interior and a distinct credit to the town." The same paragraph informed readers that "The new opera house will book one of the

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most attractive plays on the boards at its fall opening. The management has closed contract for THE CLANSMAN, Tom Dixon's well-known play, and it has been booked for October 6." As events have proved, the performance of "The Clansman" was not the opening event in the newly-completed opera house. That honor was bestowed on a minstrel show staged in the opera house on Monday evening, 14 September, by "Polk Miller, The Famous Story Teller, and his Negro Quartette." Three weeks later, "The Clansman" was performed in the opera house.

From a review of the advertisements and notices in the local newspaper in 1908 and early 1909, it is apparent that F. E Starnes and his colleague Mike Peeler were determined to bring good and varied shows to the opera house for its opening season. The Wake Forest College Male Quartette performed on 21 December. Barnard's Orchestra Concert Company performed on 9 January 1909. Luther Manship presented two lectures, "The Dialects of Nations" and "Lights and Shadows of Slavery Days" on 20 February. On 18 March, Dr. Oscar Haywood of New York presented a lecture. The second season of the opera house was under the management of Dr. S B. Kluttz and S. D. Arrowood.

From 1909 through 1913, plays, concerts, lectures, and other events were staged in the opera house on a regular basis. The invention of motion pictures spelled the end of the short but brilliant period in Albemarle's cultural life played out at the opera house. On 4 December 1913, the ALBEMARLE ENTERPRISE carried an advertisement for the three-day series of performances by the "Williams Vaudeville Co. and Big Indoor Circus" to be held in the opera house on 4-6 December. It appears that these performances were probably the last live shows held in the opera house: at least, the advertisement for them is the last one which has been found in the scattered issues of the surviving local newspapers of the period.

Ironically, the era of moving picture shows at the opera house also proved to be short lived and by about 1919 the opera house ceased to be the venue for public entertainments. According to local tradition, the first moving pictures were shown at the opera house in 1914 under the auspices of Lane Ode Parker, the son of Doctor Franklin Parker, and a colleague. An advertisement for the "Edison Talking Pictures" show, to be held on Wednesday and Thursday, 20-21 May 1914, appeared in the ALBEMARLE ENTERPRISE on 14 May 1914. This is the first known showing of moving pictures in the building. Moving pictures were shown in the opera house for the next two years until the Alameda Theater, Albemarle's first movie theatre, opened in 1916.

From 1916 until 1919 the opera house was apparently little used. The public's preoccupation with moving pictures and the opening of the new theatre was one reason. Another was the reduction in the ranks of touring companies which paralleled the rise of the moving pictures and the United States's entry into

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World War I. In 1919, P. J. Huneycutt, the proprietor of a furniture and undertaking business in the building to the east of the opera house, leased the opera house for use as an annex of his undertaking operation. A passage was cut in the building's east brick wall, near the steps leading from the house to the east corner dressing room: its location is now marked by architectural ghost marks.

Huneycutt is also said to have removed the original sloping or stepped floor of the main level of the opera house and installed a level floor when he began his lease of the space. The original height of the floor at the rear of the house remains visible where a section survives at the landing at the foot of the stair to the balcony. Huneycutt leased the old opera house chamber until about 1929. For the past sixty-five years the opera house has been used for storage. For most residents of Albemarle, it passed from memory. Recently there have been discussions concerning a renewed, public use for the performance hall; however, these have not been successful.

From the time of its building to the present the opera house has remained in the ownership of the Parker-Starnes family. It appears that the original construction of the building had been a joint venture of Doctor Franklin Parker (1850-1932), his son-in-law Francis Eugene Starnes (1874-1932), and his brother Julius Caesar Parker (1855-1939). The ownership of the building devolved in one-half interests to the heirs of Mr. Starnes and Julius Caesar Parker. The block comprising Starnes Jewelers, 127 West Main Street, passed from Starnes to his son Francis Eugene Starnes, Jr. (1914-1976) and, thereafter, to his grandson, Francis Eugene Starnes, III (born 1941), the present owner and the proprietor of Starnes Jewelers. The west half of the building, 133 West Main Street, remained the rental commercial property of Julius Caesar Parker until his death on 15 July 1939. It was inherited by two of his daughters, Ina Parker Atkins (1895-1989) and Gladys Parker Cotton; the west storefront is now the property of Mrs. Atkins's daughter, Catherine Atkins Pickler (born 1934).

During the eighty-seven years between 1907, when construction began, and 1994, three projects have been undertaken by the Parker-Starnes ownership which have affected the exterior appearance of the opera house. From its completion in 1908 until the late 1930s the building stood virtually unchanged on the exterior. In an absence of absolute documentation, it is tempting to suggest that the remodeling of the first story storefronts coincided with the deaths of three original owners in the building: Doctor Franklin Parker and his son-in-law Francis Eugene Starnes both died in 1932; Julius Caesar Parker died at the age of eighty-three years in 1939. While the entrance to the suites and opera house on the second story remained unchanged, the original entrances of both storefronts were remodeled ca. 1939. The first story elevations were sheathed with black Carrara glass panels and the entrances reset between new plate glass and chromium display windows. This replacement treatment has

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achieved significance in its own right as an important, if modest, example of the art moderne style in Albemarle. In November 1972, the Binswanger Company installed a gold-colored aluminum grill across the facade of the opera house completely concealing its handsome brickwork. In September 1990, the owners of the building removed the metal grillwork, restored the handsome facade of the opera house, and returned it to public view. In September 1991, the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina awarded the Gertrude S. Carraway Award of Merit to the owners, Catherine Pickler and Francis Eugene Starnes III, for their sensitive and successful restoration of the opera house facade.

Architectural Context

The architectural significance of the Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building derives from two principal considerations. To anyone viewing the buildings comprising the historical commercial core of downtown Albemarle, the architectural merit and character of the opera house is readily apparent. The opera house is the most impressive and best preserved early-twentieth century commercial building in Albemarle. The fact that the two-story-plus-attic level building contains an important and largely intact early-twentieth century performance hall is little known. The words "Opera House" and the date "1907," inscribed in a keystone on the facade of the building, garner little attention. Even less well-known, until recently, is the fact that the opera house remains one of the best preserved and handsome surviving buildings designed and constructed by Locke Anderson Moody, Albemarle's best known turn-of-the-century contractor/builder.

At present a full understanding of Moody's career as a builder and contractor in Albemarle remains to be documented; however, the broad details of his life and his association with certain important buildings in the county seat are known. He was born on 14 January 1862 in Albemarle and was the son of John A. Moody (1828-1902) and his wife Nancy (1829-1903): he was the second of at least five sons born to the couple. In 1885, Moody was married to Louisa Burleyson (1866-1893), the daughter of Absalom and Sarah Burleyson. When and under what circumstances Moody came to learn the contracting business is not understood at present. Family tradition confirms the fact that he drew the plans of many of the buildings he erected. He did not erect any of the major textile buildings or mill villages of the turn of the century in Albemarle: these were probably handled by outside contractors until the arrival of D. A. Holbrook in 1913. Instead, Moody appears to have specialized in residential commissions and in the construction of smaller commercial and institutional buildings.

The first known building constructed by Locke Anderson Moody is the handsome Queen Anne style house he erected in 1891 for attorney J. M. Brown, Sr., on Pee Dee Avenue. The design of the two-story weatherboarded frame house featured

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projecting bays and a well-detailed porch which terminated with an octagonal pavilion: the exterior has been remodeled. The next documented building erected by L. A. Moody was the brick courthouse which he completed in 1893 on the town square. Said to have been modeled on the nineteenth-century Moore County Court House, the two-story public building featured symmetrical elevations enlivened by arch-headed window openings and corbelled brickwork. The entrance was marked by a mansard-roof tower which rose two levels above the principal roofline of the court house. The court house was demolished in 1973.

The Stanly County Court House was one of the first of a series of brick buildings which transformed Albemarle from a village of mostly frame buildings to a prosperous-looking town at the turn of the century. Moody is credited, by family tradition, with the construction of many of these commercial buildings. The most important group is the block of adjoining two-story buildings which stand on the west side of South Second Street, between Main Street and South Street. These buildings, erected mostly in the late 1890s, are crowned by corbelled brick cornices of varying designs. The first story elevations of all of these storefronts have been remodeled; however, the fenestration patterns and decorative brickwork of the second story and cornices mostly remain intact.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Moody is credited with the construction of two major buildings on West Main Street. Of these, only the opera house survives. Moody started work on the opera house in the summer of 1907 and completed the building in 1908. As with many commercial buildings erected at the turn of the century, it was a mixed-use building which contained commercial storefronts, suites of rooms for professional or commercial offices, and the performance hall. The Maralise Hotel, completed at the southwest corner of West Main and South First Streets, was a large three-story brick hotel with arch-headed window openings and a paneled frieze around the parapet roof. It has been demolished.

It would appear that when Mr. Starnes and the Parker brothers decided to build the opera house, they also determined to build a stylish building which would reflect larger architectural ambitions than those of their fellow merchants and investors. They obtained from Moody a handsome Colonial Revival-style building which appears likely to have been the first of its type in the county seat. On the first store the two storefronts featured recessed entrances flanked by the aforementioned "Crane's patent plate glass front." The second story and attic levels of the building were treated in a consistent fashion. A quintet of broad window openings with paired sash windows surmounted by fanlights carried across the second story level. The circular form of the fanlights was repeated in the circular windows which carry across the front of the building at the attic level and illuminate the opera house balcony.

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Moody's final major building of the pre-World War I era was also designed in the Colonial Revival style. Erected between 1910 and 1915, the John Solomon Efird House was a very grand and handsomely finished two-story brick house dominated by a two-story portico. It was probably the finest house of its generation in Albemarle and was the home of Efird (1857-1927), the long-time president of the Efird Manufacturing Company, and his second wife Bertha Snuggs (1875-1949). It stood on West Main Street until it was demolished ca. 1968.

The Efird house was the last major landmark which Moody erected in Albemarle. It is unclear now what prompted him to relocate to Washington, D.C. in 1915/1916; however, it is reasonable to surmise that the arrival of contractor D. A. Holbrook in Albemarle in 1913 might have been a factor. Holbrook is said to have come to town to erect a residential village for the Wiscassett Mill company. He stayed in Albemarle and became the town's major builder/contractor in the period up to World War II. His firm and the company headed by J. D. Harwood were responsible for most of the major buildings in Albemarle of the 1920s and 1930s. About 1926/1927, Moody returned to Albemarle and erected at least two buildings: the Ridgecrest School and the West Albemarle Baptist Church which was dedicated in 1928. These two buildings are surely among the last he built. Moody returned to Washington, D.C. ca. 1930 and died there on 9 April 1938. He is buried there rather than in Albemarle, the city whose turn-of-the-century appearance he had largely influenced.

Footnote

1. There are two principal sources for the Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building. Donna Dodenhoff was the author of both. Chronologically the earliest is the "Historic Preservation Certification Application: Part 1--Evaluation of Significance" for "Starnes Jewelers and Opera House" which was prepared in 1991 while she was in Albemarle at work on the publication manuscript of the county architectural survey. The second principal source for the building and those related buildings which form its architectural context is STANLY COUNTY: THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF A RURAL NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY. Lu Koontz, heritage room librarian of the Stanly County Library, provided assistance on the research of Locke Anderson Moody.

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9. Bibliography

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description: The acreage included in this nomination is the site of the building which comprises parcels #016-26-5 and #016-26-6 on Stanly County Tax Map #6548.13.

Verbal Boundary Justification: The boundaries are drawn to include the lots on which the Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building was erected in 1907-1908.

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Additional Documentation

Schedule of Photographs

The following numbered list of photographs is a schedule of those photographs included in this nomination. The following information applies to all of the photographs.

Name of property: Opera House/Starnes Jewelers Building  
127-133 West Main Street  
Albemarle  
Stanly County  
North Carolina

Photographer: Davyd Foard Hood

Date of photographs: 21 October 1994

Location of original negatives: Division of Archives and History  
109 East Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601-2807

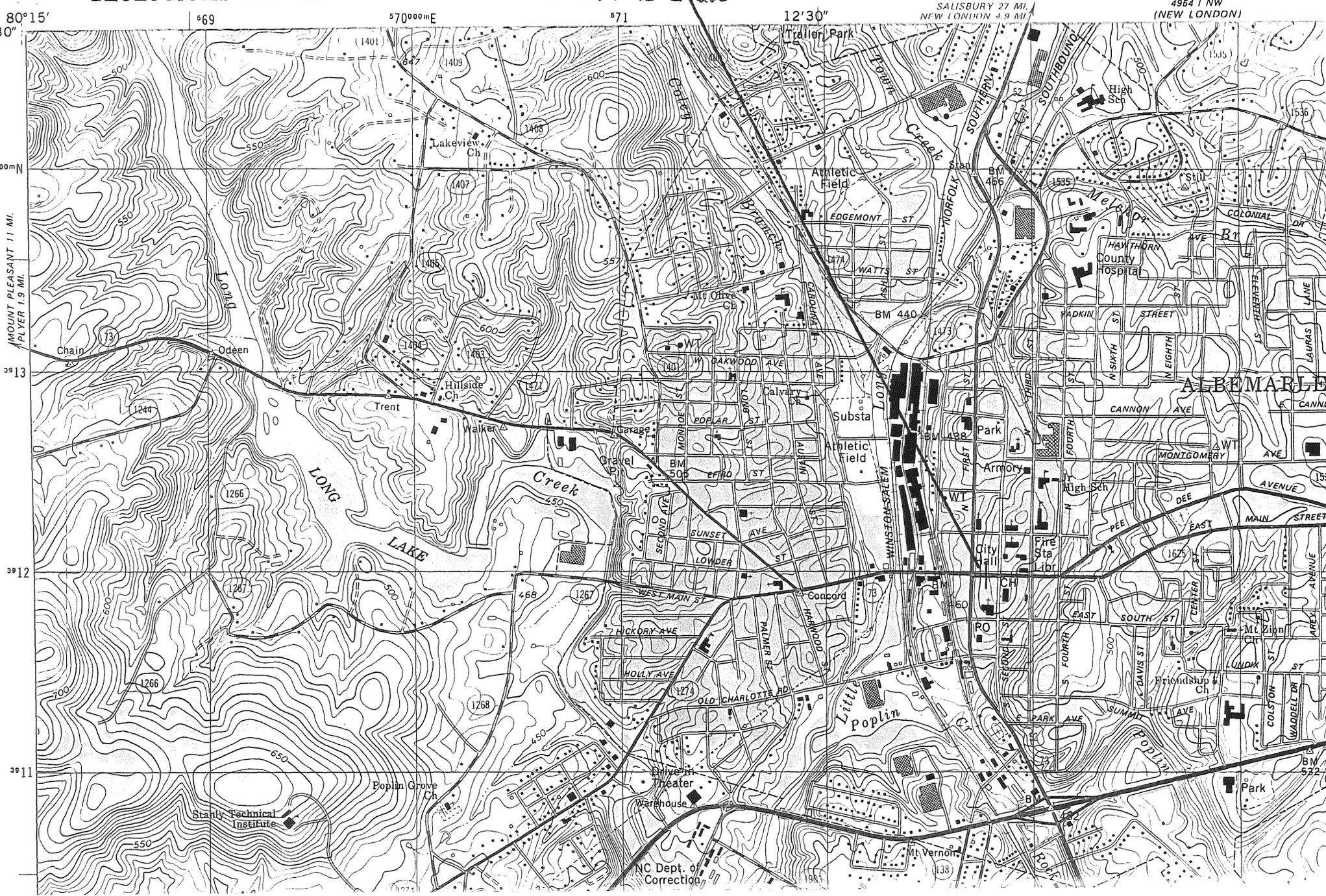
1. North facade of building, looking south.
2. Entrance to Starnes Jewelers, looking south.
3. Starnes Jewelers showroom, looking north/northeast.
4. Second-story hall of the opera house, looking south over railing protecting the stairwell to the double-door entrance into the opera house performance hall.
5. View in the opera house performance hall, looking south from the balcony to the proscenium. View shows the levels of the balcony and the railing protecting the stair up from the main level: it also shows the stage, behind the proscenium and the doors, to either side, opening from the house into the dressing rooms.
6. View in the opera house balcony, looking northeast. View shows the railing protecting the balcony, the six levels of the floor, the round mezzanine windows which illuminate it, and the lath on the ceiling.

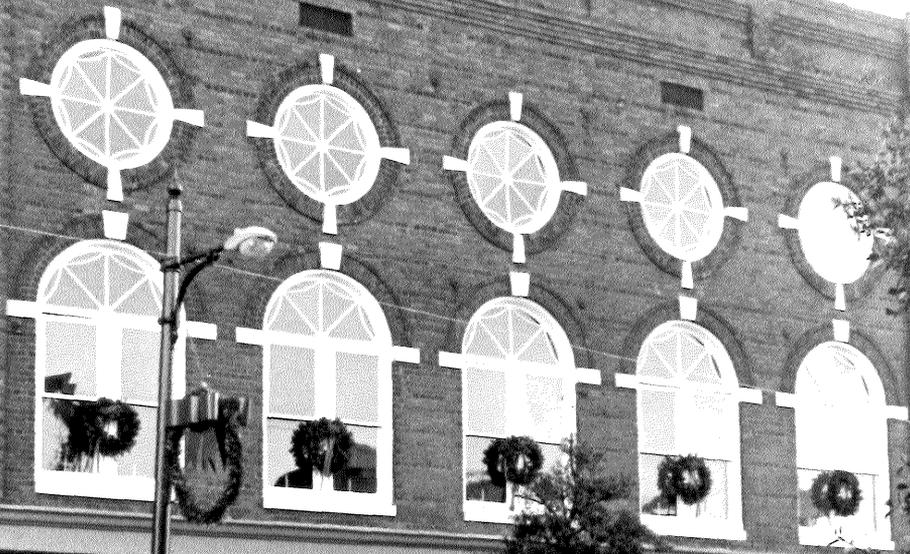
UNITED STATES  
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GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

*Opera House / Starnes Jewelers Building  
Stanly County, N.C. Zone 17  
Easting 572780  
Northing 3911980  
Albemarle Quad*

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FIELD





STARNES

SATIN AND LACE

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LET'S