

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 Wendell Commercial Historic District

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number North & South Main Street, East & West Third Street N/A not for publication

city or town Wendell N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Wake code 183 zip code 27591

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.)

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:) _____

Wendell Commercial HD

Wake/North Carolina

Name of Property

County and State

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

23 3 buildings
sites
1 structures
objects
24 3 Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

"Historic and Architectural Resources of
Wake County, NC, ca. 1770-1941"

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/storage
HEALTH CARE/medical business/office
TRANSPORTATION/rail-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
HEALTH CARE/MEDICAL BUSINESS/office
COMMERCE/TRADE/business
VACANT/NOT IN USE
TRANSPORTATION/rail-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Early 20th century Main Street
commercial

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT
other METAL/Tin
CONCRETE

Narrative Description

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

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.

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):

n/a

- ☐ 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1906 - 1947

Significant Dates

1906

ca. 1917

ca. 1919

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

n/a

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Wendell Commercial HD
Name of Property

Wake/North Carolina
County and State

0. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property app. 6 acres

UTM References

Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1 7 7 3 7 6 4 0 3 9 6 2 6 8 10
Zone Easting Northing

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
Zone Easting Northing

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 Beth P. Thomas, Consultant
organization date November 17, 1997
street & number 3628 Lubbock Drive telephone 919-881-0362
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27612

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
street & number telephone
city or town state zip code

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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Wendell Commercial HD
Wake County, NC

7. General Physical Description

The Wendell Commercial Historic District is a compact, roughly three-block area in downtown Wendell, a small eastern Wake County tobacco market town. The principal focus of the district is the intersection of North and South Main Street and East and West Third Street. Extending north, east, and west from this intersection are intact blocks of mostly one- and two-story brick commercial buildings dating from ca. 1915 through 1947. The northern boundary of the district is marked by railroad tracks which were laid in 1906 as part of the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad. The east boundary is anchored by the R.B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House at the corner of East Third Street and Pine Avenue, while the rear property lines of the commercial buildings on the south side of Third Street mark the southern boundary. The western district boundary lies along the rear property line of the structures fronting North Main Street. Adjacent to the district to the north are additional, primarily post-1947 and altered commercial resources; a residential area abuts the south boundary. To the east and west are residential and vacant lots.

The topography of the historic district is primarily flat throughout. Streets are laid in a grid pattern. The commercial buildings fronting North Main Street along concrete sidewalks are complimented by landscaping which includes small ornamental trees, benches, and metal poles with projecting arms holding large white glass globe lights.

Distinctive in this small district of mainly one-and two-story modest buildings are the **R.B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House** at 21 East Third Street (#16), a large brick tobacco warehouse dating to ca. 1919; the two-story brick, nicely ornamented ca. 1917 **Bank of Wendell** at 1 South Main Street (#7), and the large, ca. 1915 **W.R. Nowell Drugstore** (#15) at 4 South Main Street. The district contains twenty-four contributing and three non-contributing properties. All of the contributing buildings are of brick masonry construction and date from ca. 1915 through 1947. There is one contributing structure, the 1906 tracks of the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad (now the Norfolk and Southern Railway).

All of the historic buildings are executed in traditional and widely popular commercial vernacular styles of the early-twentieth century which are found in small town commercial districts all over eastern North Carolina. These styles are distinguished primarily by simple masonry details such as corbelled cornices, blind and recessed panels, flat stone or brick sills and lintels. As is typical of early-twentieth century commercial districts, many of Wendell's commercial buildings have experienced storefront alterations. However, they maintain an overall high degree of integrity of design, setting, scale and materials, especially above the shop fronts.

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The east and west sides of N. Main Street, between the railroad and Third Street, have seen revitalization. As a result, modern inappropriate coverings have been removed to reveal original facades on several structures, and some of the metal sidewalk canopies have been removed in other places as well.

Inventory

The resources in the historic district were identified during a comprehensive inventory of Wake County's historic architectural resources, conducted by Kelly Lalley between 1989-1991. Files from the survey are part of the collection at the Survey and Planning Branch, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

The inventory list begins with the railroad tracks and two buildings (#1 and #2) which face north onto the tracks. It then moves south along the east side of North Main Street past the intersection with Third Street to the southern district boundary; then from the railroad tracks south along the west side of North Main Street to the corresponding southern district boundary; then westward along the north side of East and West Third streets from Pine Avenue, through the intersection with North Main, to the western boundary alley behind the buildings fronting North Main; then westward along the south side of East and West Third streets, through the intersection with North Main, to the aforementioned alley.

C = Contributing

N = Noncontributing

Lalley = Wake County Inventory files

C 1A Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad tracks
1906

Now known as the Norfolk-Southern Railroad, these tracks were part of the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad which ran eastward from Raleigh to the Pamlico Sound. The laying of the tracks ensured the existence of Wendell as a transportation point for the region's lumber and cotton. The railroad remains in use today.

East side 00 Block of North Main Street

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- C 1. W.C. Campen Livery Stable
32-A North Main Street
ca. 1915

Local tradition claims that W.C. Campen originally owned this long, rectangular brick building said to have served as a livery stable. Standing seam metal covers the building's distinctive roof, which is composed of a small, parapet gable roof sitting atop a wider, low-pitched gable roof. Small square window openings are set beneath the roof's overhang; others have been filled in with brick. The north gable end contains the altered main entrance, a three-bay facade with large, solid wooden double doors flanked by a single door to the east and a modern door set in a (now infilled) arched opening. A brick commercial structure was added to the south gable end, also retaining a stepped parapet, in the ca. 1930. Vestiges of arched windows, now infilled with brick, can be seen along the east facade; the front of the now-altered building faces East Third Street. Since 1962 the old livery stable has been part of the Perry family's hardware business (Lalley).

- C 2. Storage Building
34 N. Main Street
ca. 1925

Local tradition maintains that W.C. Campen stored fertilizer in this one-story, gable-roofed structure which stands along the railroad tracks. Resting on brick piers, the frame building is covered in metal; the north and south sides each feature two loading bays flanked by windows. The west end of the building also retains a loading dock, to which has been added a one-story, shed-roofed corrugated metal structure which houses a small business.

- C 3. Commercial Building
16-32 North Main Street
ca. 1925

According to local tradition, this one-story, six-bay building was constructed after the 1925 fire which destroyed frame buildings formerly standing on this part of North Main Street. The simply-finished structure features stepped side parapets and slightly recessed, rectangular panels on the intact upper portion of the facade. Slightly projecting brick pilasters separate the storefronts, all of which are altered at street level. The storefronts at 16 and 22 retain hanging

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metal canopies; the rest have replacement canvas canopies sheltering their fronts. Housed in the building currently are commercial establishments (Lalley).

- C 4. Commercial Building
14 North Main Street
ca. 1920

This recently renovated one-story brick building is separated from its neighbor at 16 South Main by a very narrow gated alley. The painted brick structure features a projecting front parapet with brick cap and a center entrance flanked by plate glass display windows. A continuous canvas canopy joins this structure with its adjacent neighbor (6-12 South Main); all are part of Kannon's Clothing, Wendell's oldest continuously-owned family business. Isaac Kannon, a Lebanese immigrant, came to Wendell in 1905 peddling wares door to door; by 1916 he had established the family business which remains a vital part of Wendell. (Lalley)

- C 5. Commercial Building
6-12 North Main Street
ca. 1915

Three recessed panels above the storefronts are the primary decoration of this structure, which houses part of Kannon's Clothing. Recently renovated and painted, the one-story building features street level storefronts of plate glass flanking modern replacement doors (Lalley).

- NC 6. Commercial Building
2-4 North Main Street
ca. 1915

A modern metal covering unifies and obscures the upper facades of these two buildings (one is one-story, the other is a two-story structure) which house Saunders Pharmacy. Hanging metal canopies cover the altered storefronts. The south exterior wall of the two-story building is uncovered, featuring a slightly projecting brick cornice above five one-over-one sash windows and a modern entry at the far eastern end of the first floor (Lalley).

- C 7. Bank of Wendell
1 South Main Street
ca. 1917

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Currently used as an interior decorator's shop, the Bank of Wendell building is a handsome, though simply finished, two-story brick building; it is Wendell's most intact commercial structure. A corbelled cornice and arched window surrounds enliven the two-bay front (north) and five-bay west side elevations. The one-over-one sash windows feature granite sills. The building's entry is set in a cutaway corner which faces the intersection of South Main and Third Street. Narrow sidelights and a single-light transom flank and top the single entry door; the entrance is sheltered beneath a porch featuring a single Doric column which supports a dentilled cornice. This cornice extends across the north facade above the display window. The exterior entry floor is tiled with small hexagonal tiles spelling out "Bank of Wendell." Original wood door and window surrounds, cornice trim, and a patterned metal ceiling survive on the interior. The Bank of Wendell was founded by locally prominent citizen R.B. Whitley in 1907; he served as its president until 1944. The bank remained the town's primary financial institution until its merger with First Union in 1967. This structure was the bank's second site, used until ca. 1936. After this time it was used as the town office and jail and later served a variety of retail businesses (Lalley).

West Side 00 Block of North Main Street

- C 8. Commercial Building
25-33 North Main Street
ca. 1920

Four storefronts occupy this large, two-story brick building which features a corbelled brick cornice and three double-hung sash windows, with concrete sills and lintels, above each storefront. The windows above #27 have been infilled with brick. A continuous metal cornice connects #s 25, 27 and 31 above the first floor levels. All of the storefronts feature entries flanked by plate glass display windows; all have been altered to some degree, primarily with modern doors and infill materials above the display windows. A modern door has been cut between #27 and #31 to allow access to upper floors. Suspended metal canopies shade the sidewalks in front of #s 27, 31, and 33 (Lalley).

- C 9. Commercial Building
21 North Main Street
ca. 1920

Three recessed panels and a concrete cap on the low parapet decorate the upper level of this two-story brick building. Three double-hung sash windows, with concrete sills and flat

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fan-shaped brick lintels, are separated from the storefront level by a heavy metal cornice. The street level features plate glass display windows flanking a centered entry and a canvas canopy (Lalley).

- C 10. Commercial Building
17 North Main Street
ca. 1920

Two bands of mousetooth brick corbelling enliven the upper facade of this two-story tan brick building. Three one-over-one sash windows are set in arched surrounds with concrete sills. A molded cornice rests above the storefront display windows, which are shaded by a suspended metal canopy. An apparently original, recessed door set beneath a round arch at the north end of the front facade offers access to the upper floor (Lalley).

- C 11. Commercial Building
13 North Main Street
ca. 1920

Three rows of brick corbelling above three rectangular windows with concrete lintels and brick sills compliment the facade of this two-story, tan brick building. The south facade wall features a stepped parapet. Alterations at the storefront level include a modern door cut into the south end of the front facade for second story access. A canvas canopy shades the glass door entrance flanked by display windows (Lalley).

- C 12. Commercial Building
9 North Main Street
ca. 1925

The only one-story building in the block, this simply finished structure features a single recessed rectangular panel above its altered street level storefront (Lalley).

- C 13. Commercial Building
5 North Main Street
ca. 1920

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This L-shaped, two-story, common bond red brick building has frontage on North Main and West Third streets. The Main Street facade has been recently refurbished. Canvas awnings shade the three double-hung sash windows with brick sills on the second floor and the first level storefront. A rectangular panel above the windows is the front facade's only decoration. A modern door has been cut into the south end of the front facade. Facing West Third Street in the southwest corner of the building is a two-story office (8 West Third Street). One rectangular panel and a vertically-laid brick cornice decorate the facade. Twenty-light windows set between brick sills and brick lintels light the second floor above the storefront. (Lalley).

NC 14. Commercial Building
1 North Main Street
ca. 1920

The upper floor and entire south elevation of this two-story building are encased in a modern metal covering. The storefront, consisting of plate glass windows flanking a central modern door, is covered by a hanging metal canopy (Lalley).

C 15. W.R. Nowell Drugstore
4 South Main Street
ca. 1915

Documentary photographs of this large commercial building indicate that it had a six-bay front (north) facade which featured four-over-four sash windows with brick sills and double-row, round-arched brick lintels. Brick corbelling across the parapet and projecting, stepped brick pilasters decorated the upper elevation. The eight-bay east facade repeated the same fenestration pattern on the upper level; two single doors in arched surrounds were located near the front corner and at the rear. The northeast corner of the building, facing into the intersection of Third and Main streets, featured a cutaway entrance decorated with mousetooth brick trim. A plain round column supported the porch roof. Along the north street level were four display windows, each divided into two large panes topped by two smaller ones.

The structure has been altered, though relatively slightly. A former arched entrance on the front corner of the east facade has been converted into a window; a modern entry and storefront for the newspaper offices has been cut into the south end of the facade. The front display windows facing West Third Street have been altered and the original window sash on the second floor have been replaced. The eastern half of the building has been painted so that it appears to

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be separate from its neighbor (3 West Third Street), whose first level has been altered with the addition of a modern door providing access to the second floor. A third section at the western end of the building, with the same trim and window configuration, appears to have been added sometime after its original construction; it does not appear in early documentary photos. The storefront of this western third of the structure has been completely reconfigured and infilled with modern materials.

Long a local landmark as one of the town's early drugstores (it also housed a dental office, physician's office and beauty parlor upstairs), the building is currently vacant and slated for retail use (Lalley).

North Side 00 Block East Third Street

- C 16. R.B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House
21 East Third Street
ca. 1919

The sprawling brick structure at the corner of East Third and Pine Avenue is one of Wake County's oldest surviving tobacco warehouses. Built ca. 1919 and used for tobacco purposes until 1957, the building retains significant original fabric. Its stepped parapet roof, round-arched windows on the north, east, and west walls, numerous skylights which lit the interior, and exposed wood truss framing system are all hallmarks of early-twentieth century tobacco warehouse construction. In the rear section of the interior lines used to mark the locations of piles of tobacco are still visible as are, on the exterior walls, a few of the metal rings used to tie up the horses which hauled the tobacco wagons. Alterations to the interior of the building took place beginning in 1960, when June Perry purchased and renovated (portions of) the property for his hardware business. The exterior has seen alteration of the south (front) facade to create a display window and, on the west corner, an entrance. Some of the loading bays and windows on the east and west facades have been infilled with brick.

Noted local businessman R. B. Whitley was instrumental in founding Wendell's tobacco market soon after 1906, the year he arrived in town from Johnston County. Whitley was also founder of the Bank of Wendell and served as its president for thirty eight years, during which he also served in the North Carolina General Assembly. Mr. Whitley had a general merchandise store beginning in 1881, prior to his coming to Wendell. Once settled in town, he operated the business at various locations and, in 1960, Mr. June Perry bought the business and moved it into Mr. Whitley's

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warehouse. The large brick building, and the commercial enterprise which it houses, are both Wendell landmarks (Lalley).

- C 17. Commercial Building
15 East Third Street
ca. 1935

This simple, one-story brick office building features a recessed entry with wooden doors flanked by sidelights and a narrow projecting cornice. Flanking the entrance are two square windows, one of which is infilled; a hip-roofed cover shelters the doorway. This building was formerly the office of Phillip R. Whitley, son of R.B. Whitley. Like his father, Phillip was a successful businessman and prominent citizen, as well as a noted attorney and state legislator. (Lalley)

- NC 18. Commercial Building
11 East Third Street
ca. 1930; ca. 1960

This two-story brick structure was added to the Campen Livery Stable, which stands behind it, ca. 1930. According to local sources the entire front facade of 11 East Third Street was redone ca. 1960 to produce its current modern appearance (Lalley)

- C 19. Commercial Building
7 East Third Street
ca. 1930

This one-story brick building appears to retain its original storefront configuration, consisting of a recessed double wooden door flanked by wood-framed display windows. The transom area has been infilled with a modern material and above it is a metal cornice. The upper portion of the small structure retains a recessed rectangular panel and a corbelled cornice (Lalley).

North Side 00 Block West Third Street

Office
8 West Third Street
See # 13 above. This two-story office is part of the structure at 5 North Main Street.

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South Side 00 Block East Third Street

- C 20. (former) Esso Service Station
22 East Third Street
ca. 1920

This is a faintly Moderne style, stuccoed service station with (originally) two service bays, one of which has been infilled to create a storefront. The station's single-door entry, with a small metal overhang, is in the vertical tower; a large window illuminates what was the office area. A modern, one-story shingled addition on the east end of the building connects it to the adjacent brick building. The former service station is now a retail business. (Lalley)

- C 21. Commercial Building
20 East Third Street
ca. 1920

This is a typical one-story, brick commercial building with a rectangular panel above an infilled transom. Large display windows flank both sides of the recessed entrance (Lalley).

- C 22. Commercial Building
14-16 East Third Street
ca. 1940

Slight corbelling at the cornice is the only decorative feature of this large, one-story painted masonry building. Each of the two bays contain recessed double entries flanked by show windows. The buildings are currently the home of Wendell Furniture Company (Lalley).

- C 23. Commercial Building
8 East Third Street
ca. 1940

Brick outlines three small rectangular panels above the storefront of this one-story structure. One row of brick corbelling defines the cornice; a modern replacement door is centered in the glassed front (Lalley).

- C 24. Commercial Building
4 East Third Street
ca. 1940

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A narrow rectangular panel spans the area above the two storefronts which comprise this one-story brick commercial building. The nearly-identical storefronts both feature side-entry modern glass doors and two-section plate glass display windows. Both transom areas are covered with metal (Lalley).

South Side 00 Block West Third Street

Commercial Building
3 - 7 West Third Street
ca. 1915

See # 15 above. These storefronts are contained in the two-story structure housing the W.R. Nowell Drugstore at 4 South Main Street.

C 25. Commercial Building
11 West Third Street
ca. 1930s

A simple row of brick corbelling at the parapet and a rectangular panel decorate this simple, one-story brick building whose storefront has been altered with modern display windows and door (Lalley).

C 26. Commercial Building
13-15 West Third Street
ca. 1930s

Two storefronts are contained in this one-story, plain brick building. Each storefront features a recessed door and display windows (Lalley).

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Wendell Commercial HD
Wake County, NC

8. Statement of Significance

Summary

The Wendell Commercial Historic District, a roughly four-block area of North and South Main Street and East and West Third Street, is eligible for the National Register as an intact collection of traditional early-twentieth century commercial architecture and for its associations with the early-twentieth century development of downtown Wendell. One- and two-story, modestly decorated brick commercial buildings comprise the historic streetscapes, though there are several individually distinctive structures. These include the sprawling R. B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House, built ca. 1919; the ca. 1917 (former) Bank of Wendell, the town's most intact commercial structure and the W.R. Nowell Drugstore, built during the 1920s and one of the town's largest intact downtown buildings.

The historic district reflects Wendell's commercial development between ca. 1906 and the mid-1940s. During this period two forces played major roles in shaping the development and appearance of the small commercial area. The coming of the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad in 1906 initiated Wendell's first period of growth. Though the railroad was the impetus for the founding of the town, the primary factor in its growth and economic success into the mid-twentieth century was the bright leaf tobacco industry, in which Wendell was a major player in eastern Wake County. The commercial district reflects the designs, materials, scale and finishes popular in traditional small-town downtowns all over eastern North Carolina in the early twentieth century.

The Wendell Commercial Historic District was identified during a comprehensive survey of Wake County in 1989-1991 by Kelly Lalley; it was put on the Study List as a result of that inventory. Contexts and property types relevant to the historic district are discussed in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (hereafter MPDF) entitled "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)," particularly Property Type 5 - Commercial and Transportation-Related Buildings and Structures; Context 4 - Boom, Bust and Recovery Between World Wars (1919-1941); and Context 3 - Populism to Progressivism (1885-1918). In an era of rapid development and change, this small town commercial district remains remarkably intact.

Historical Background

The Town of Wendell was created by resolution of the North Carolina General Assembly on March 6, 1903; prior to this time the community consisted of a small post office and a school located among the forests and farms of eastern Wake County. The original town was an

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approximately one-mile square. Local school master M.A. Griffin named the town after poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, but it was not until several years later that the now-familiar pronunciation of the town's name, stressing both syllables as "Wen-dell," became popular (Wake County Heritage, p. 56).

Wendell got its first economic boost in 1906 with the opening of the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad (later the Norfolk Southern Railroad), which ran eastward from Raleigh to the Pamlico Sound. The railroad opened up transportation for the products of lumber and cotton mills in eastern Wake County and ensured the existence of the new town. Cotton buyers were established in Wendell in the first few years of the 1900s; it was, however, the bright leaf tobacco industry which largely fueled the town's progress and economic success through the mid-twentieth century. Tobacco farming proliferated in the eastern part of the state in the early twentieth century as farmers from the northern piedmont tobacco belt relocated to escape the destruction of the "Granville Wilt." Opportunities for profitable warehouse businesses arose, and the impact of this phenomenon on the development of eastern North Carolina towns was substantial. Wake County's first tobacco market, the Wendell Leaf Market, was established ca. 1907, and it remains one of only two tobacco markets left in the county (Lalley, p. 234). By 1920 four tobacco warehouses were part of the industrial landscape of Wendell; the ca. 1919 **R. B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House (# 16)** is the only remaining tobacco-related structure in the historic district. Its distinctive parapet gabled roof, segmental-arched windows, original skylights, and massive wood truss framing are typical of tobacco warehouse facilities throughout eastern North Carolina.

Critical to the success of the tobacco market was the chartering of Wendell's first financial institution, the Bank of Wendell, on April 4, 1907. Founded by local leader Rayford Bryant Whitley, who served as bank president until 1944, the bank was originally housed in a small frame building at the intersection of North Main and Wilson Streets. It was moved to its prominent location at the southeast corner of South Main and Third streets ca. 1917, occupying a two-story brick building with a distinctive cutaway corner entrance (**Bank of Wendell # 7**). The entrance shelters a decorative brick tilework floor, where hexagonal tiles spell out "Bank of Wendell" (Survey and Planning Branch files). The Bank of Wendell was the only bank in town until 1919, when the Farmers and Merchants Bank was established. This bank failed during the Depression and was purchased by the Bank of Wendell; the town's original financial institution was the only bank in eastern Wake County to remain open throughout the Depression (Gold Leaf Farmer, Anniversary Edition, p. 4). The bank merged with First Union Bank in 1967; the original bank building has long been used for commercial purposes.

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Growth in Wendell remained steady during the prosperous years of the early-twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1920 the population grew from 759 to 1239; groceries, drugstores, general merchandise stores, among other retail establishments, characterized the growing commercial area around Main Street. An interesting remnant of the town's historic fabric from this period survives along the railroad tracks, just off of South Main Street. The **W.C. Campen Livery Stable (# 1)**, constructed ca. 1915 is a rectangular brick building with a distinctive "double gable" roof. Civic improvements took place as well, with improvements to the town's telephone system, publication of the town's first newspaper (The Wendell Clarion, later known as the Gold Leaf Farmer) in 1911 and passage of a bond issue in 1913 for the installation of electric power (Gold Leaf Farmer Anniversary Edition, p. 12).

As Wendell entered the 1920s it continued to enjoy economic prosperity from the tobacco and, to a smaller extent, the cotton industries. Civic boosterism, continuing civic improvements such as the paving of the town's streets between 1924-1926, and optimism about the town's future brought sustained business expansion. Both sides of South Main Street and portions of Third Street saw construction of one and two-story brick commercial buildings, simply ornamented, and in all ways typical of the downtown areas of early twentieth-century towns all over eastern North Carolina. One of Wendell's largest and most intact commercial structures was built during the decade of the 1920s. The **W. R. Nowell Drugstore (# 15)**, on the southwest corner of South Main and West Third streets, appears in documentary photographs as a two-story brick structure with round-arched window and door openings, a patterned brickwork cornice and cutaway corner entry. A fire in the downtown area in 1925 destroyed roughly half of the east side of South Main Street, north of Third Street. The casualties included the town's downtown theater, which stood on the site of Kannon's Clothing today. The section was rebuilt immediately thereafter with one-story brick storefronts exhibiting simple ornamentation.

The close of the 1920s brought to an end the steady growth of Wendell and other eastern North Carolina towns. Construction and expansion of the commercial district was brought to a virtual standstill by the Depressions, though Wendell was able to weather the economic hard times fairly well. Only a few small brick buildings were constructed before the 1940s, and the upturn brought by a wartime economy. Wendell's tobacco market remained open, absorbing the business of the failed market in nearby Zebulon. The WPA had an impact on the town during the Depression, helping with the laying of sidewalks, curbs and gutters and expanding the sewage system. For a brief time during the Depression the town allowed citizens to work on the new streets for a fifty cent per day credit on their waste bills (Gold Leaf Farmer Anniversary Edition, p. 12).

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Wendell's downtown today is vital, with the majority of stores occupied for retail purposes and revitalization efforts focusing on landscaping, lighting, and the sympathetic rehabilitation of historic resources. Although the town is growing rapidly as a bedroom community to Raleigh, it retains significant small-town charm which plays a large part in its success in attracting business to its historic commercial area.

Commerce and Architecture Contexts

The major influences upon the development of Wendell's commercial district, the railroad and the tobacco industry, are the same forces which influenced the growth of downtown areas all over eastern North Carolina in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The patterns of growth among towns in the region are remarkably similar, as are the physical characteristics of the downtowns which resulted from that growth.

In Wake County, small towns such as Apex, Fuquay Springs, Varina, and Zebulon, along with Wendell, grew as the direct result of railroad and tobacco expansion. At least one tobacco warehouse existed in each of these towns by 1907; two were in each by 1916 (Lalley, MPDF, p. E 51). The majority of these facilities were brick, rectangular in shape and one-story tall with parapet gable roofs. Only three examples of tobacco warehouses survive in Wake County, one each in Apex, Varina, and Wendell. The R.B. Whitley Tobacco Auction House in Wendell is the most intact, retaining significant portions of original fabric. The two in Varina and Apex have been somewhat altered by later commercial use. A fourth brick warehouse in Zebulon appears to have been at least partially destroyed and rebuilt in the 1930s or 1940s (Lalley, MPDF, p. F 158).

As the tobacco industry flourished, the nearby commercial areas grew well into the 1920s. Relatively intact blocks of one-and two-story brick commercial buildings, exhibiting the popular varieties of brick ornamentation (corbelled cornices, arched window and door openings, blind and recessed panels), characterize the commercial areas of a number of small Wake County towns, including Apex, Fuquay-Varina, Wendell and Zebulon. Most of the buildings are rectangular in shape with the primary entrance on the short gable end, which usually faces the street. The buildings originally functioned as general and specialty merchandise stores, banks, offices, and hotels, developed in response to, and to serve, the growing economy of the early twentieth century (Lalley, MPDF p.156). The commercial district retains a high degree of integrity, and continues to function as a small town district of commerce.

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10. Verbal Boundary Description

Boundaries of the Wendell Commercial Historic District are shown by the dashed line on the accompanying map (Wake County GIS PUB 3), drawn at a scale of 1" = 100'.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Wendell Commercial Historic District are drawn to include the largest concentration of surviving intact portions of the early-twentieth century commercial area in Wendell.

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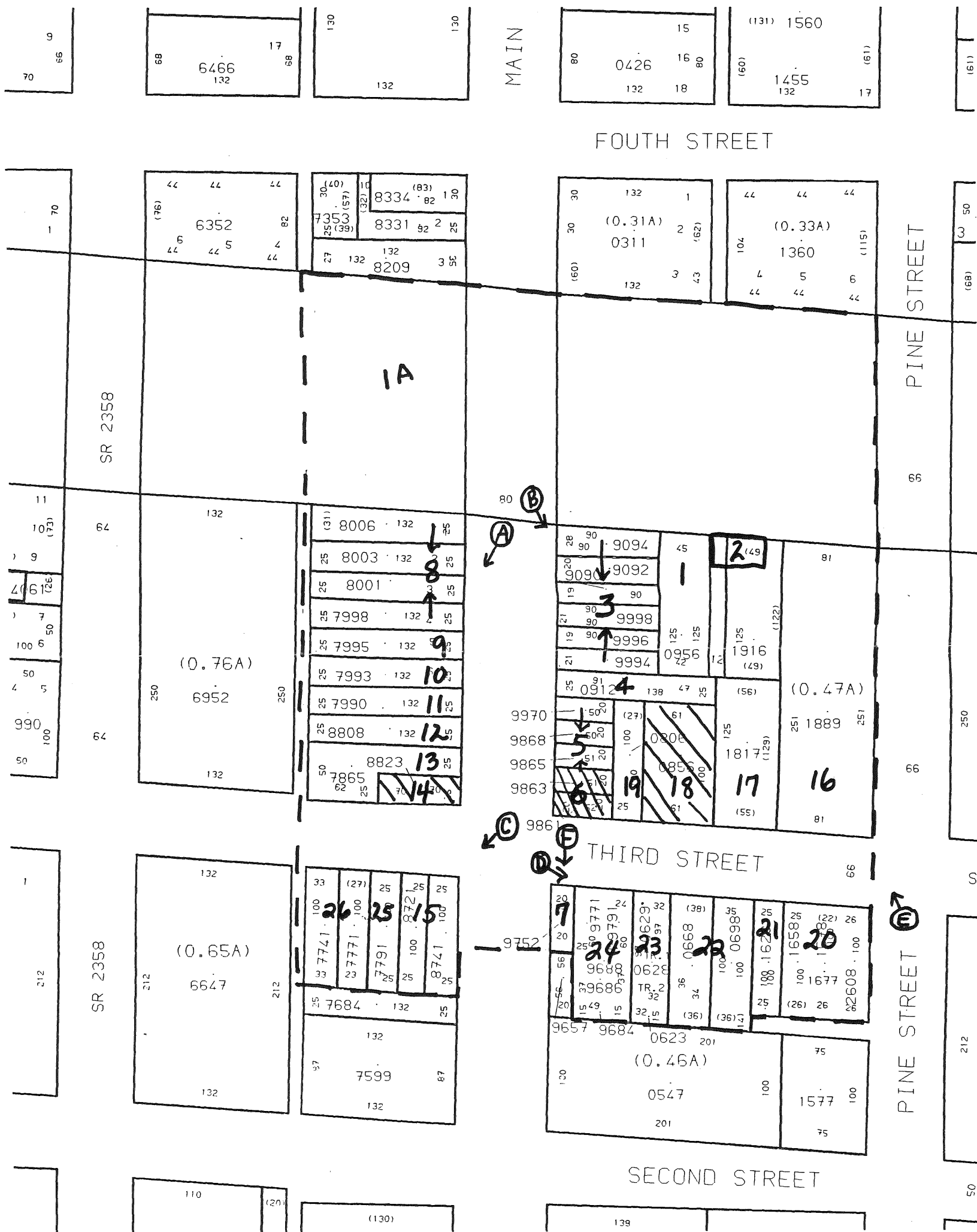
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Photographs

The following information applies to all photographs, which are keyed to the district map.

1. Wendell Commercial Historic District
 2. Wendell, North Carolina
 3. Beth P. Thomas
 4. September, 1997
 5. N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC
-
- A) Streetscape of west side, North Main Street, to the southwest
 - B) Streetscape of east side, North Main Street, to the southeast
 - C) Intersection of Main and Third Streets, showing W.R. Nowell Drugstore on the corner, streetscape of south side, West Third Street, to the southwest
 - D) Streetscape of south side, West Third Street, to the southeast
 - E) R.B. Whitley Tobacco Warehouse, to the north
 - F) Bank of Wendell, to the south



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☐ Contributing
☒ Noncontributing

Information depicted herein is for
reference purposes only, and is
copied from the best available
sources. Wake County assumes no
responsibility for errors arising
from the status of this map.

GIS PUB 3
Sep 26, 1997

Wake County

1"=100'



