

State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

LAP 12-31-84

Wilkes COUNTY

Wilkesboro QUAD

# INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

Historic Resources of Wilkesboro (Partial Inventory: ~~Historic~~ and Architectural Properties)

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR  THEMATIC NOMINATION

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC  
Brown-Cowles House and Cowles Law Office

AND/OR COMMON  
Paul Osborne House and Law and Bride Cottage

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
200 & 106 E. Main Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN  
Wilkesboro

VICINITY OF

STATE  
N. C.

CODE

COUNTY  
Wilkes

CODE

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Paul Osborne

STREET & NUMBER  
200 E. Main Street

CITY, TOWN  
Wilkesboro

VICINITY OF

STATE  
N. C.

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC  
Wilkes County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER  
Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN  
Wilkesboro

STATE  
N. C.

## 6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE  
Laura A. W. Phillips, Consultant

ORGANIZATION  
for Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission

DATE  
May 1980

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY, TOWN  
Wilkesboro

STATE  
N. C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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

The Brown-Cowles House and Cowles Law Office are situated on a large town lot in the center of Wilkesboro.

The Cowles Law Office, probably built shortly after W. H. H. Cowles purchased the property in 1871, is located at the southwest corner of the lot next to the street, where it was easily accessible to clients and potential clients. This diminutive one-story frame building with gable roof and single-shoulder end chimney originally consisted of only the two front rooms. The rear wing was added between 1920 and 1926 by Pressley E. Brown. Exterior decorative treatment is confined to the simple Tudor style labels above the front door and windows. The projecting drip mold which caps these labels and the weathered nature of the facade siding strongly suggest that the porch which now wraps around the front and right side of the building is not original. However, the Sanborn Maps reveal that the porch had been built by at least 1920. Other features of interest are the two-panel front door and the six-over-six sash windows flanking the door. While the interior has been remodeled with plywood paneling, the unusual mantel remains intact. The mantel is composed of the bold, plain pilasters and plain architrave typical of simple mantels built during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the tripartite-blocked mantel shelf is indicative of the earlier Federal style. The shelf, in fact, is too large for the rest of the mantel and may well have been used originally in the main house. The former law office is now being used as a needlework and gift shop.

East of the law office and set far back from the street toward the rear of the lot is the Brown-Cowles House. A long curved drive leads to the house from the street, adding to its visual distinction. While the general construction sequence appears fairly certain, the actual dates of construction of the different parts of the house remain unclear. The central core of the house is believed locally to have been built shortly after 1834 when Hamilton Brown purchased the property from John T. Finley. This original portion of the house was a two-story frame structure, four bays wide, with gable roof and exterior end chimneys, one of which has been rebuilt. The interior consisted of a center hall plan with two-over-two rooms. While the first story of this section has been completely remodeled, the second story rooms remain relatively intact with Federal style detailing, including a mantel frequently seen in Piedmont North Carolina during the 1830s, a six-panel door, and beaded-edged door surrounds. A porch ran across the front and a shed room across the rear. At some point before 1885, a two-story wing -- two bays wide and two deep -- was added to the southwest corner of the house. This section has a gable roof of lower pitch than that of the main roof of the house and nine-over-six sash windows. This wing is generally believed to have been built by W. H. H. Cowles after he purchased the property in 1871, but stylistic traits suggest that it could have been built earlier. Between 1920 and 1926 other rooms were added to the rear of this wing. An 1885 photograph of the house shows that the two-story wing had been built by that time, but that a one-story addition on the east side of the house had not yet been built. This photo also shows that the porch at that point had simple posts and a latticework balustrade, unlike the present porch, which features a plain balustrade, latticework posts, and curvilinear sawnwork brackets. It is likely that the one-story addition was built and the porch remodeled at the same time, around the turn of the century, after the Wilkesboro Manufacturing Company -- a sash and blind factory -- was established in North Wilkesboro in 1896, (This firm created much of the late Victorian detailing found on houses of the period in both Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro.)

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100-21-0018  
12/3/77

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
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DESCRIPTION

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The porte-cochere and other rooms on the rear were probably added during the first half of the twentieth century.

Several frame outbuildings line the rear of the lot behind the house. Of particular note are the curing house and the kitchen. The curing house, which probably dates from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, is a small weatherboarded structure with a wide overhang over the front gable end. A conglomeration of sheds have been added to the one-story kitchen, part weatherboard and part board and batten siding, which also appears to date from the nineteenth century, with an early board and batten addition on the west side. The kitchen chimney has partially collapsed.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL

\_\_\_\_ STATE

LOCAL

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

SPECIFIC DATES

Unknown

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Brown-Cowles House has always been the home of prominent Wilkesboro citizens. Of particular note were Hamilton Brown (1786-1870), who served variously as Wilkes County Sheriff and as a county justice during the first third of the 19th century, and William H. H. Cowles (1840-1901), a lawyer and four-term Congressman during the 1880s and 1890s. The central core of the Brown-Cowles House is the oldest known building remaining in Wilkesboro, dating from the 1830s, and while somewhat altered, it still reflects its Federal period origins. Subsequent nineteenth and early twentieth century alterations provide a typical example of the evolution of a house to meet the changing needs and stylistic preferences of its owners. The kitchen and curing house are among the very few 19th century outbuildings remaining in Wilkesboro, giving a more complete picture of a homestead of the period.

The Cowles Law Office, ca. 1871, is one of only two remaining examples of the 19th century law offices which were once common in this county seat town.

## CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

prominent

B. The Brown-Cowles House is associated with the lives of several prominent Wilkesboro citizens during the 19th and 20th centuries, especially Hamilton Brown (early Wilkes County sheriff and justice), and William H. H. Cowles (lawyer and four-term Congressman).

C. The Brown-Cowles House embodies distinctive characteristics of the Federal style as often found in Piedmont North Carolina, as well as mid and late Victorian stylistic elements. The kitchen and curing house are rare examples of such outbuildings in Wilkesboro, and are typical of those built in Piedmont North Carolina during the mid to late nineteenth century. The Cowles Law Office is a representative example of small frame offices built during the second half of the 19th century in the Piedmont and is one of only two remaining in the county seat town of Wilkesboro.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The property on which the Brown-Cowles House and Cowles Law Office stand originally consisted of two one-acre lots which were deeded to John Finley by the state legislature in 1803.<sup>1</sup>

In 1834 Hamilton Brown purchased the property from Finley, except for a 72-foot-wide strip across the west end which Finley retained.<sup>2</sup> Local tradition relates that Brown built the main core of the house, consisting of the four-bay-wide, two-story section with exterior end chimneys.

Hamilton Brown was born in 1786 and was one of the eleven children of John and Jane McDowell Brown.<sup>3</sup> From 1816 to 1818 Brown served as Sheriff of Wilkes County, and in 1820 he was named a justice of the county.<sup>4</sup> In 1831 he was again listed as a county justice.<sup>5</sup> Later Brown served in the Mexican War.<sup>6</sup> During at least the 1830s he was a slave owner, sending some of his slaves to Georgia to be hired out to various relatives and acquaintances there.<sup>7</sup> In 1830 Hamilton Brown married Sarah Gwynn Gordon, widow of Nathaniel Gordon. She came to Brown with her four children, aged two to nine, and then she and Brown had two of their own in 1835 and 1837.<sup>8</sup> Although Brown owned the property for 40 years, he and his family apparently did not live there continuously. The headings of some letters written between 1830 and 1853 suggest that the family was living at least part of the time at the George Gordon home north of the Yadkin and west of the Reddies River.<sup>9</sup> Hamilton Brown died in 1870, and on March 18, 1871 his widow and other heirs sold the property to William H. H. Cowles.<sup>10</sup>

William H. H. Cowles (1840-1901) served in the Confederate cavalry from 1861 to 1865, rising from the rank of private to lieutenant-colonel. In 1866 he studied law under Chief Justice Pearson at Richmond Hill and in 1867 obtained a license to practice in the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. The following year he was licensed to practice in the Superior Court. In 1872 Cowles was elected Reading Clerk of the State Senate and in 1874 was elected Solicitor of the tenth Judicial District. In 1884 he was elected to Congress from the Eighth Congressional District and served four terms of office, after which he returned to the Wilkesboro area.<sup>11</sup> W. H. H. Cowles was first married to Roaamond Corinna Worth from June 1, 1870 until her death on July 17, 1877. That union produced three children. On October 16, 1883 he married for a second time-- this time to Mary Lura Bost -- and they had seven children.<sup>12</sup>

According to local tradition, Cowles added the two-story wing on the west side of the house as well as the one-story wing on the east side. An 1885 photograph of the house shows that the two-story wing had been built by that time, while the one-story wing had not. While the two-story west wing may, indeed, have been built after Cowles' purchase of the property in 1871, its features also suggest that it may instead have been built at an earlier date -- perhaps during the 1850s. Cowles was apparently also

(continued)

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

"Brown House One of Oldest in Wilkes County." The Journal-Patriot (North Wilkesboro). Bicentennial Edition, 1976.

Crouch, John. "Col. W. H. H. Cowles." Historical Sketches of Wilkes County. Wilkesboro: The Chronicle Job Office, 1902.

(continued)

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 1.3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	48,647,0	4,000,3,0,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property consists of Parcel 3 of Block 2, Tax Map 103, Town of Wilkesboro, measuring approximately 225 x 264.2 feet on the north side of E. Main St. east of Broad St. The property includes the house, outbuildings and former law office and the lot on which they stand.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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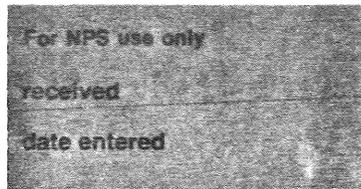
responsible for the erection of the law office in the southwest corner of the lot.

W.H.H. Cowles died in 1901, and in 1912 the property was purchased by Presley E. Brown, who owned it until around 1950. Presley Brown was responsible for the remodeling of the first story of the interior of the house as well as for various other changes.<sup>13</sup> He also added the rear wing to the Law Office,<sup>14</sup> which then became rental property often used as a first home for local newlyweds.

Presley E. Brown was prominent in political and civic life in Wilkes County, serving as sheriff from 1906-1914. He represented the county in the N.C. House between 1925 and 1927, where he was minority leader. Brown was also a manufacturer and wholesale dealer in lumber, one of the largest concerns of its type in the northwestern part of the state.<sup>15</sup> Brown's lumber business was later managed by his nephew, Paul Osborne, who is the present owner of the Brown-Cowles House.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



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<sup>1</sup>"Brown House One of Oldest in Wilkes County," The Journal-Patriot (North Wilkesboro), Bicentennial Edition, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>Sarah Brown and Hamilton A. Brown and wife Amelia S. Brown to William H.H. Cowles, March 18, 1871, Wilkes County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Wilkes County Courthouse, Wilkesboro, Book A-2, 448-449; "Brown House One of Oldest in Wilkes County."

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Felix Hickerson, Happy Valley (Chapel Hill: Thomas Felix Hickerson, 1940), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson J. Hayes, The Land of Wilkes (Wilkesboro: Wilkes Co. Historical Society, 1962), pp. 80, 88.

<sup>5</sup>Hickerson, Happy Valley, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 10

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Felix Hickerson, Echoes of Happy Valley (Durham: Thomas Felix Hickerson, 1962), pp. 22, 26.

<sup>8</sup>Hickerson, Happy Valley, p. 194.

<sup>9</sup>Paul Osborne and Elizabeth Finley, Typescript notes on Brown-Cowles House.

<sup>10</sup>Deed Book A-2, PP. 448-449.

<sup>11</sup>John Crouch, "Col. W.H.H. Cowles," Historical Sketches of Wilkes County (Wilkesboro: The Chronicle Job Office, 1902).

<sup>12</sup>Hayes, p. 171.

<sup>13</sup>Typescript material for the Old Wilkes Walking Tour.

<sup>14</sup>Sanborn Insurance Maps, Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, North Carolina (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1920, 1926).

<sup>15</sup>The Happy State of Wilkes (North Wilkesboro: The Hournal-Patriot, 1940s, a special pictorial supplement to the newspaper; pp. 80, 87.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Hickerson, Thomas Felix. Echoes of Happy Valley. Durham: Thomas Felix Hickerson, 1962.

Hickerson, Thomas Felix. Happy Valley. Chapel Hill: Thomas Felix Hickerson, 1940.

Old Wilkes Walking Tour (typescript material).

Osborne, Paul and Finley, Elizabeth. Typescript notes on Brown-Cowles House.

Sanborn Insurance Maps, Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, North Carolina. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1920, 1926.

The Happy State of Wilkes. North Wilkesboro: The Journal-Patriot, 1940s.

Wilkes County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Wilkes County Courthouse, Wilkesboro, NC.

NORTH WILKESBORO

Wilkesboro MRN  
Wilkesboro, N. C. Quadrangle  
Zone 17 Scale 1:24000

Thomas B. Finley Law Office  
17 486400/4000280

Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel  
17 486405/4000240

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
17 486050/4000310

Brown-Cowles House and Cowles Law Office  
17 486470/4000300

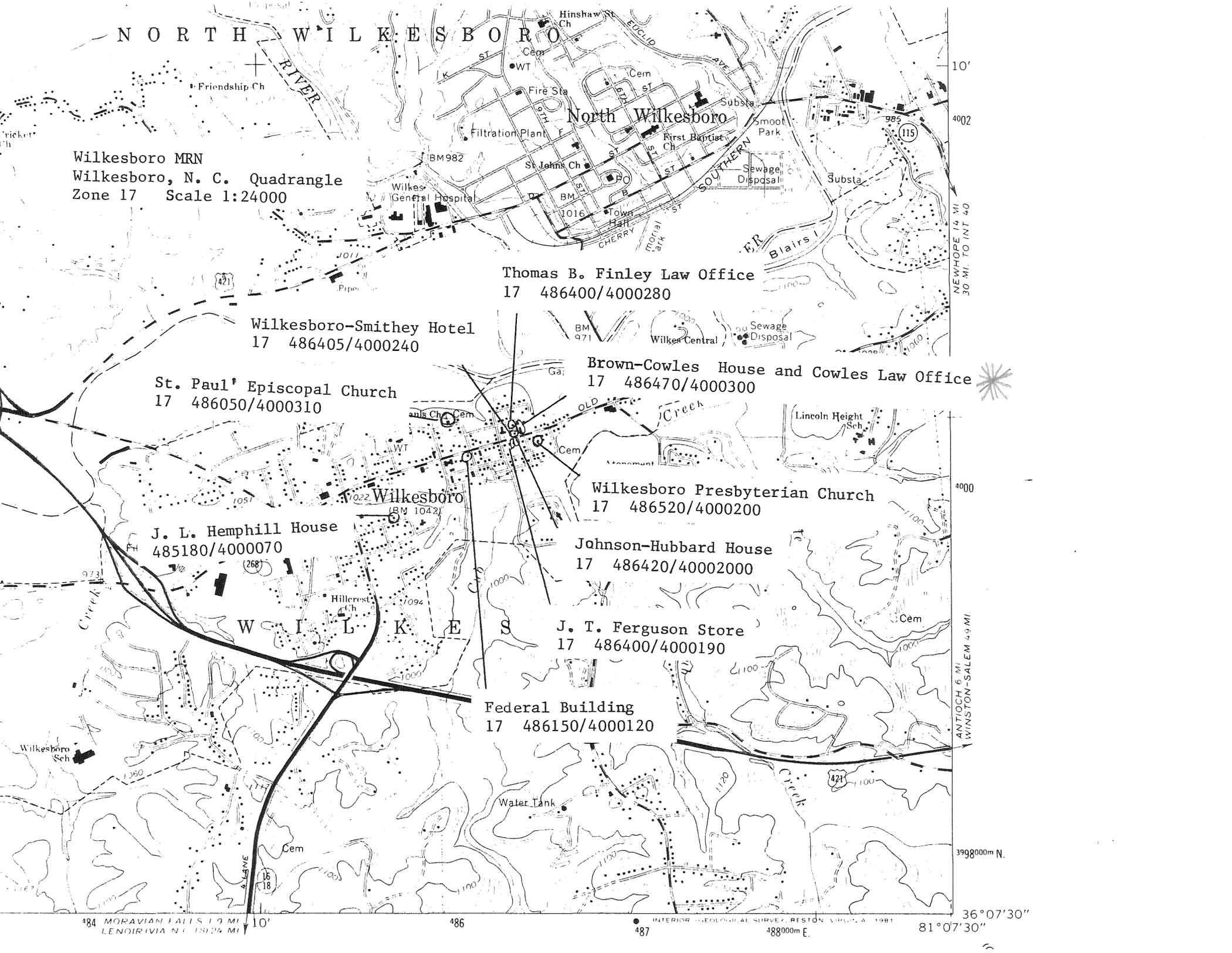
J. L. Hemphill House  
485180/4000070

Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church  
17 486520/4000200

Johnson-Hubbard House  
17 486420/4000200

J. T. Ferguson Store  
17 486400/4000190

Federal Building  
17 486150/4000120







The  
LAUNDRY BRIDE  
COVERS

NEEDLEWORK

GIFTS