

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

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

☒ MULTIPLE RESOURCE

OR ☐ THEMATIC NOMINATION

1 NAME

HISTORIC

J. T. Ferguson Store

AND/OR COMMON

Ferguson Store or Parker Electric Co.

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

111 E. Main Street

☐ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Wilkesboro

☐ VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

N. C.

Wilkes

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

☐ STRUCTURE

☐ SITE

☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS

☐ BEING CONSIDERED

N/a

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

☐ UNOCCUPIED

☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED

☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED

☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE

☒ COMMERCIAL

☐ EDUCATIONAL

☐ ENTERTAINMENT

☐ GOVERNMENT

☐ INDUSTRIAL

☐ MILITARY

☐ MUSEUM

☐ PARK

☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☐ RELIGIOUS

☐ SCIENTIFIC

☐ TRANSPORTATION

☐ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Robert Parker

&

Jay Parker

STREET & NUMBER

Route 4, Box 25

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 OR TOWN

Wilkesboro

STATE

N. C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The former J. T. Ferguson Store building is sited at a prime location in the center of Wilkesboro -- on Main Street at its intersection with Broad, just across from the Wilkes County Courthouse. The building takes up the width of its lot, and although originally it was a free-standing structure, another two-story commercial building has since been attached to its west side.

The Ferguson Store is a two-story brick building with a highly decorative cast iron and pressed metal facade manufactured by Mesker Brothers Front Builders of St. Louis in 1887. A comparison of the present facade with a documentary photograph probably made shortly after the structure was built reveals that the second story and cornice remain intact, while the first story has been altered. Then, as now, the richly detailed metal front is interrupted by four plain two-over-two sash windows on the second story. A combination of classical and late Victorian details typical of the designs of the Mesker Brothers firm abound in the paired Corinthian colonettes with blossom medallion plinths, bands of bulls' eyes, anthemion brackets and projecting modillioned cornice. The centerpiece of the cornice is boldly labeled "J. T. Ferguson" and is crowned by a decorative parapet.

A rather simple projecting cornice separates the second story from the first. Originally the first story facade consisted of a central recessed entrance, glass shop windows with paneled dado beneath, and iron pilasters separating the windows and defining each corner of the building. The corner pilasters remain intact, while those which once separated the windows have been removed. A narrow enclosed stairway leading to the second story has been created next to the right corner pilaster, and although the remainder of the first story facade has also been altered, the overall visual effect of the large shop windows and recessed central entrance is rather similar to that of the original.

The east side of the building is laid in five-to-one common bond and the roofline recedes from front to rear in a series of shallow steps with two plain chimneys projecting from the edge. Although there are presently no openings on the east side, originally there were two arched openings toward the rear of the building which have since been infilled with brick. The west side of the building is attached to another two-story brick structure of slightly later vintage. The doors and windows (now twelve-over-twelve sash) of the rear of the building have been somewhat modified, as evidenced by some replacement brickwork, but are not incompatible with the general character of the structure.

The interior of the Ferguson Store has undergone moderate alterations and is not particularly notable.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

____ NATIONAL

STATE

X

LOCAL

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

SPECIFIC DATES

1887

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Mesker Bros. Front Builders, St. Louis

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Prominently located in the center of Wilkesboro, the J. T. Ferguson Store is a lavish example of the popular late nineteenth century use of cast iron and pressed metal to create decorative facades. Produced by the Mesker Brothers firm of St. Louis in 1887, the metal front turns what is otherwise a simple brick commercial building into an eye-catching and exuberant collection of classical and late Victorian details which make it one of the most impressive structures on Main Street. Although Mesker Brothers sold well over 5,000 fronts during a twenty-three year period beginning in the mid 1880s, examples in this area of North Carolina are rare. The metal front of the Ferguson Store provides it with a much more urban appearance than one might expect in a town the size of Wilkesboro.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- C. The J. T. Ferguson Store is an excellent example of the highly decorative cast iron and pressed metal facades popularized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the catalogues of such manufacturing firms as Mesker Brothers Front Builders of St. Louis. The well-preserved Ferguson Store front is an impressive representative of this building technique, rarely found in this area of North Carolina.

The site of the J. T. Ferguson Store has been used for a store since at least the mid nineteenth century when Stephen Johnson operated a store just west of his newly built house on Main Street.¹ After Stephen Johnson's death, his niece, Lula C. Hubbard, purchased the property on April 7, 1885.² Her husband, Julius Cicero Hubbard I, and Jesse T. Ferguson,³ another uncle who with his wife had reared Lula Hubbard, then operated the store.³ Apparently Ferguson soon became the dominant partner, for it is his name which is emblazoned across the building cornice.⁴

Jesse T. Ferguson was born in 1836 and died in 1907 at the age of 71.⁴ Records reveal that he was active in other affairs of his community and region as well as being a prominent merchant. A veteran of the Civil War, Ferguson later served as sheriff of Wilkes County between 1870 and 1874.⁵ Like J. C. Hubbard, he was one of the original stockholders of the Wilkesboro Hotel Company, which in 1891 built the fine three-story brick structure across the corner from the store which later became known as the Smithey Hotel.⁶ Between May 7, 1892 and May 12, 1893, Jesse T. Ferguson served as mayor of Wilkesboro.⁷

Just when the present store was erected is unclear. However, sometime after 1887--most probably around 1890--the elaborate cast iron and pressed metal store front took its place on Main Street. This front may have been added to an existing building, or the building itself may have been erected at this time. While the Mesker Brothers label on the store front indicates that the patent date was October 4, 1887, this same label is found on the iron pilasters of the Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel which was not built until 1891. It is possible that the two buildings may have received their Mesker Brothers work at the same time.

The (Ben and Frank) Mesker Brothers Front Builders firm began operation in St. Louis in 1881. Another brother, George L. Mesker, ran a similar business in Evansville, Indiana. The two firms became the leading producers of galvanized iron fronts in America. From the mid-1880s on, the St. Louis Mesker Brothers firm printed and distributed half a million catalogues annually. In a twenty-three year period they sold 5,264 fronts. Sold by catalogue, the factory-produced elements offered both small and large town merchants an opportunity to order complete store fronts for their buildings. Any local carpenter could assemble the parts, so that even without a local architect the latest in eclectic and lavish ornament could be added to any kind of building, of any age and of any material. Mass production, catalogue marketing and free design service kept costs to the buyer lower than any comparable form of building. Needless to say, the metal fronts became very popular across America.⁸

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 48,640,0 4,000,019,0
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property, located at 111 E. Main St. (south side of E. Main St. at its intersection with Broad St.), consists of Parcel 5 of Block 3, Tax Map 103, Town of Wilkesboro, measuring 25 x 100 feet. The property includes the J. T. Ferguson Store building and the less-than-one-acre lot on which it stands.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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In 1920 the Ferguson Store building was still being used as a dry goods store, but in 1926 the Sanborn Map lists it as "Printing."⁹ An old printing press remains in the basement of the building, and local residents relate that for a time the Wilkes Patriot was printed here. In recent years the building has served as the shop of the Parker Electric Company.

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
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¹Mary Hubbard Hemphill, interview by Laura A. W. Phillips, Wilkesboro, December 1979.

²S.J. Ginnings and J.T. Ferguson, commissioners for the estate of Stephen Johnson, to Lula C. Hubbard, April 7, 1885, Wilkes County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Wilkes County Courthouse, Wilkesboro, Book 8, 353.

³Hemphill interview.

⁴Johnson J. Hayes, The Land of Wilkes (Wilkesboro: Wilkes County Historical Society, 1962), p. 290.

⁵Ibid., pp. 290, 90.

⁶Ibid., p. 321.

⁷Ibid., p. 373.

⁸Lee H. Nelson, ed., "The 1905 Catalogue of Iron Store Fronts, Designed and Manufactured by Geo. L. Mesker and Company, Architectural Iron Works, Evansville, Indiana," APT, Vol. IX No.4 (1977), 3.

⁹Sanborn Insurance Maps, Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, North Carolina (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1920, 1926).

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Hayes, Johnson J. The Land of Wilkes. Wilkesboro: Wilkes County Historical Society, 1962.

Hemphill, Mary Hubbard. Interview by Laura A.W. Phillips. Wilkesboro, December 1979.

Nelson, Lee H., ed. "The 1905 Catalogue of Iron Store Fronts, Designed and Manufactured by George L. Mesker and Company, Architectural Iron Works, Evansville, Indiana." APT, Vol. IX No. 4 (1977), 3.

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

Wilkes County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Wilkes County Courthouse, Wilkesboro, N.C.

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' 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 486420/40002000

J. T. Ferguson Store
17 486400/4000190

Federal Building
17 486150/4000120

