

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 Downtown Main Street Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Roughly the 800 & 900 blocks of Main Street N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town North Wilkesboro N/A ☐ vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Wilkes code 193 Zip code 28659

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.)

Jeffrey J. Crow SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/14/03
Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
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:

☐ 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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**

29	6	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
29	6	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

COMMERCE/department store

COMMERCE/financial institution

COMMERCE/business

COMMERCE/professional

COMMERCE/restaurant

GOVERNMENT/city hall

GOVERNMENT/post office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

COMMERCE/business

COMMERCE/professional

COMMERCE/financial institution

COMMERCE/restaurant

GOVERNMENT/city hall

GOVERNMENT/correctional facility

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Classical Revival

Romanesque Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

STUCCO

roof ASPHALT

other BRICK

TERRA COTTA

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):

- ☐ 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

1891-1952

Significant Dates

1891

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Benton and Benton Architects (Charles C. and Frank W.)

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Downtown Main Street Historic District

Name of Property

Wilkes Co., NC

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____ **Approx.** 3 _____

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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

3															
	Zone		Easting			Northing									
4															

☐ 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 _____ Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian _____

organization _____ Consultant to Historic Downtown North Wilkesboro _____ date _____ February 20, 2002 _____

street & number _____ 637 N. Spring Street _____ telephone _____ 336/727-1968 _____

City or town _____ Winston-Salem _____ state _____ NC _____ Zip code _____ 27101 _____

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 _____ Multiple owners _____

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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FUNCTION OR USE

Historic Functions, cont'd.

GOVERNMENT/fire station
GOVERNMENT/correctional facility
DOMESTIC/hotel
SOCIAL/meeting hall
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions, cont'd.

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater
LANDSCAPE/parking lot
LANDSCAPE/park

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Downtown Main Street Historic District
Wilkes County, North Carolina

DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification, cont'd.

Moderne

Materials, cont'd.

Walls: STONE
METAL

Narrative Description

North Wilkesboro is a town of just over 4,000 people located on the north side of the Yadkin River in central Wilkes County, North Carolina. The Downtown Main Street Historic District constitutes the largest, most cohesive collection of commercial buildings in North Wilkesboro's commercial core. Situated primarily along Main Street (formerly B Street) between Eighth and Tenth streets, the district is composed of thirty-five resources, all of which are buildings. All but the former Town Hall at 801 Main Street and the current Town Hall at 832 Main Street are commercial buildings; the current Town Hall was originally a bank. There are no outbuildings; there is one parking lot. Of the thirty-five resources, eighty-three percent contribute to the historic character of the district. Of the six non-contributing buildings, four are post 1970 one-story buildings grouped together at the northwest corner of Main and Ninth streets where they replaced buildings demolished during North Wilkesboro's urban renewal. Another non-contributing resource, at 919 Main Street, is the shell of what had been an early-twentieth-century commercial building. Even though not enough remains of the building to be able to call it a contributing resource, most of the richly decorative second-story brickwork survives to continue providing continuity to the streetscape. The sixth non-contributing resource, at 923 Main Street, is a 1920s building whose facade was covered after mid-century with metal sheathing. Its original facade is believed to remain intact beneath the metal. This building is the only one in the district with a post-1950 metal facade. Three other metal facades, which were in place when the architectural survey of North Wilkesboro was conducted in 1980, have since been removed, exposing the original facades.

The streets of North Wilkesboro are arranged in a grid pattern. The streets running parallel to the

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perpendicular to the railroad are named numerically from east to west. The intersection of Main (formerly B) Street and Ninth Street, just a block uphill from the depot, forms the center point of North Wilkesboro's commercial downtown. Service alleys run east-west down the center of each block.

Located at the center of North Wilkesboro's commercial core, the Downtown Main Street Historic District is a tightly-knit group of historic buildings that is distinguished from its surroundings. East of the district are a parking lot, remodeled or more recent commercial buildings, a park, vacant land, and small industrial and warehouse buildings. South of the district, the historic commercial buildings that once stood along A Street were demolished during the 1970s as part of urban renewal and replaced with a large parking deck, a large surface parking lot, and the southern arm of the Central Business Loop. West of the district, a vacant lot and parking lots separate it from Tenth Street, where there is a row of old, remodeled, and new commercial buildings and the 1999 public library in the 200 block. (The 300 block of Tenth Street has another, smaller group of historic commercial buildings, but their location is too detached from the Main Street district to be included in it.) West of Tenth Street runs the western arm of the Central Business Loop. North of the district are a collection of parking lots, vacant lots, remodeled and modern commercial buildings, and a few historic commercial buildings that are too removed from the Main Street district to be included. Facing north and away from the district on C Street is the 1934 post office, which stands alone and is probably eligible, individually, for the National Register.

All the buildings in the district are of brick construction, although the Wilkes Hotel and the former Bank of North Wilkesboro, at 830 and 832 Main Street, respectively, make strong use of stone for exterior decorative features. Several buildings have stuccoed facades, and 823 Main Street has a decorative pressed metal facade. Seventy-four percent (26) of the buildings are two stories in height. Seventeen percent (6) are one story; half of these are modern buildings. Of the remaining buildings, two are three stories, and one—the Hotel Wilkes—is five. Consistent with downtown commercial centers, the buildings in the Downtown Main Street Historic District abut the sidewalk and are contiguous to other buildings. Only one parking lot is located within the district, between 801 and 807 Main Street, and it is lower than street level (entered from the rear alley) and is landscaped with trees and shrubs along Main Street to minimize its impact. Additional natural materials in the district consist only of trees planted intermittently along either side of the streets and the pocket park with trees and shrubs located behind the facade of 919 Main Street.

Although the district's buildings exhibit, for the most part, good design and workmanship, little is known about the builders who constructed them. The firm of Benton and Benton, architects Charles C. Benton and Frank W. Benton of Wilson, probably the only architects whose work is represented in the district, designed the 1923 former Bank of North Wilkesboro II at 832 Main Street, the 1926 Hotel Wilkes at 830 Main Street, and the 1939 former Town Hall at 801 Main Street.

Stylistically, most of the buildings in the district fall into the category of late-nineteenth and early-

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twentieth-century standard commercial design, some with echoes of the Romanesque Revival. Since many of the first stories have been remodeled (to the standard commercial design of the third quarter of the twentieth century), the style is commonly exhibited at second- and third-story levels of the facade. Various features tend to be repeated on multiple buildings in the district. Particularly characteristic is the use of segmental or round-arched windows outlined with brick hood molds, and decorative corbeled cornices, often in several layers. Frequently, the upper level of the facade—between the windows and the cornice—features a long, rectangular panel; some facades are further defined by plain brick pilasters on either end and dividing the window bays. Among the good examples of this standard commercial design are the buildings at 809, 819, 825-827, 829, 833, 903, 910, 911, 912, and 928 Main Street and 214 Ninth Street.

Two buildings venture beyond the norm of standard commercial design in their ornamentation. The former Bank of North Wilkesboro at 901 Main Street is a diminutive 1892 building that makes up for its small size with lush exterior decoration, including a multi-layered brick corbeled cornice, bands of floriated terra cotta tiles, decorative terra cotta corner fans, and terra cotta scrolls. The two-story building at 823 Main Street, built by 1904, is unique in North Wilkesboro for having a decorative pressed metal facade with a combination of late Victorian and classical motifs, including Corinthian colonettes and pilasters, an elaborate multi-layer frieze and cornice, and corner finials.

In the 1920s, two architect-designed buildings proclaimed the strength and sophistication possible through the use of classicism. The former Bank of North Wilkesboro (now the Town Hall) at 832 Main Street was built in 1923 in the stately Neo-Classical Revival style. The building is dominated by a distyle-in-antis facade with two Roman Doric columns of heroic scale set between corner pilasters. The pilasters continue down the west (Ninth Street) elevation, and the whole is crowned by a classical cornice and paneled parapet. Just east of the former bank is the Hotel Wilkes (now Wilkes Towers) at 830 Main Street, built in 1926. It reflects the Classical Revival style. The first story and mezzanine, forming the base of the building, are faced with ashlar stone and feature an anthemion band and a classical round-arched main entrance with flanking windows. The next three floors are austere plain, but the fifth floor is defined by a string course, brickwork panels between the windows, and a projecting dentiled cornice topped by a parapet. Benton and Benton designed both buildings.

Two buildings in the district reflect the streamlined modernism popular in the late 1930s and 1940s. The former Town Hall at 801 Main Street was designed by Benton and Benton and built in 1939. The buff-colored brick and stone work of the facade emphasize, in an abstracted way, the tension between the vertical and horizontal lines of the building. Simple modernistic detailing is focused on the entrance. Across the street at 816 Main Street, the Liberty Theatre, built shortly after World War II, is characterized by a combination of large panels and streamlined vertical pilasters, all stuccoed. In addition to the original marquee, the form and modernistic lines of the building identify it as a stylish 1940s movie

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theater.

North Wilkesboro was incorporated in 1891, and during that first year small investors purchased lots and began to build commercial establishments. Initially, many of these were of frame construction, yet from the beginning, some brick stores were erected. The first of the brick stores, built in 1891, was the two-story building at the southeast corner of Main and Ninth streets that soon became the Brame Drug Store. At the southwest corner of Main and Ninth streets, the former Bank of North Wilkesboro was built in 1892. Sanborn maps beginning in 1904, as well as early photographs, show that the area encompassed by the Downtown Main Street Historic District developed within a relatively short period, resulting in a rather homogeneous physical character. Of the thirty-five buildings that make up today's district, twenty-nine percent had been erected by 1904. By 1910, nearly half (forty-six percent) of today's buildings had been constructed, and by ca. 1930, eighty-one percent were in place. Between then and 1952 several more buildings were erected. Today, with eighty-nine percent of buildings constructed during its period of significance (1891-1952), the district still conveys a strong image of its architectural appearance during those years.

Buildings in the Downtown Main Street Historic District are in good to excellent condition. Changes that have taken place over time are typical of those found in many historic downtowns. The most common change is that many of the stores have remodeled first-story shop fronts reflecting the standard commercial aesthetic of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Thus, it is generally the upper levels of buildings that consistently reflect their age. Window sash have been changed on some buildings, but usually this has occurred within the original window openings. During the 1970s, a mis-guided effort to remove paint resulted in the sandblasting of several buildings. Even with these changes, eighty-three percent of all buildings in the district contribute to its historic architectural character. A very positive change in the district since it was originally surveyed in 1980 is that three of the buildings have had their metal fronts, which were added during the mid-to-late twentieth century, removed, revealing once again the original appearance of their facades. Only one post-1950 metal front remains, and discussions are underway for its removal. Thus, while changes have taken place in the district over time, it still possesses, overall, historic integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Today, Historic Downtown North Wilkesboro, Inc. is actively working to promote the continued preservation of the town's historic commercial buildings.

Inventory List

The following inventory list provides basic information on all properties in the Downtown Main Street Historic District, including each property's name, location, date of construction, contributing or non-contributing status, and summary of its physical character and known history. Information is based

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primarily on a combination of on-site inspection and research with Sanborn Insurance Maps, *North Wilkesboro: The First Hundred Years, 1890-1990*, old photographs, *Views of North Wilkesboro* (1906), the Trogdon Map of North Wilkesboro (1907), and information in the files of the architectural survey of North Wilkesboro conducted by the author in 1980. Many building dates are given as a range between two dates, e.g. 1904-1910 or 1907-1910. In the first example, the building is not shown on the 1904 Sanborn map, but is on the 1910 Sanborn map, meaning that it was built between those years. In the second example, the date is more closely defined, because the building does not appear on the 1907 Trogdon Map but it does appear on the 1910 Sanborn map.

The inventory is organized by street. On the east-west streets, the entries move from east to west by block; on the north-south streets, the entries move from south to north. The inventory begins with the south side of the 800 block of Main Street, then covers the north side of that block; then moves to the 900 block of Main Street, covering the south side and then the north side; then moves to the 200 block of Ninth Street, covering the west side of the block and then the east side; and ends with the 200 block of Gordon Avenue (210 Gordon Avenue). Within each block, the buildings are listed by their street addresses, which are keyed to the district map.

South side 800 block Main Street

801 **(former) Town Hall**
1939

Contributing building

Two-to-three-story, buff-colored brick building with limestone trim on the facade. The Moderne design contrasts the vertical and horizontal lines of the building while exhibiting a decorative emphasis around the central entrance. A WPA project built at a total cost of about \$36,900, the town hall was designed by architects Benton and Benton of Wilson and built by contractors Abee & Eckard of Icard. It was occupied on August 31, 1939. The lower floor, facing the rear alley, contained storage space for city supplies and also served as headquarters for the street and water departments. The street floor housed the fire department (on the west side, according to the 1945 Sanborn map), offices of the city clerk and treasurer, and a room at the rear for the Wilkes County Public Library. On the top floor were the assembly hall with seating for 300, conference rooms, and offices for the police and highway patrol. Although no longer used as the town hall, the building serves as headquarters for the town's police department.

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Parking Lot

Between 801 and 807 Main Street is a parking lot. It is below street level, is shielded from Main Street by a row of trees and shrubs, and opens to the rear alley. Sanborn maps show that there was never a building on this site.

807	City Cafe ca. 1935	Contributing building
-----	------------------------------	-----------------------

Small, one-story brick building with round-arched door and window openings across the facade and a corbeled cornice. Although its stylistic features suggest the building was erected at an earlier date, Sanborn maps show that it was built sometime between 1926 and 1945. In 1935 W. Q. and Q. B. Blankenship, along with their wives, purchased the property and obtained permission to connect their building to the east wall of Tomlinson's Department Store next door. This suggests that they probably constructed the City Cafe at that time. From then until the early 1970s, the Blankenships operated the City Cafe, also known as Blankenship's Cafe, at street level. The lower level was used at various times as a photography shop and a shoe shop. In the late 1970s, a twenty-foot extension was added to the rear of the building.

809	Tomlinson Department Store 1927	Contributing building
-----	---	-----------------------

Large two-story, five-bay-wide, brick building with paired windows, corbeled cornice, and simple decorative detailing created by a combination of brick pilasters and panels. Entrance to stair leading to second floor is located at west end of facade. Although tradition relates that the building was originally occupied by the Acorn Store, it housed the Tomlinson Department Store for fifty years, from 1929 to 1979. From then until 1994, it housed Roger Wright Clothiers, which had bought out the Tomlinson business. Tomlinson's had departments for men's, women's, and children's clothing, as well as for household goods. The store operated on the street and basement levels, while the second floor was used for storage. Later the second floor was used for various offices, with the tenant of longest duration being Woods Photography, which leased the space from shortly after World War II until 1979. The building is currently being renovated.

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813-817 **Commercial Building**
1910-1920

Contributing building

Three-story, six-bay-wide, brick building with a simple dentiled cornice and paired one-over-one sash windows beneath low segmental brick arches. The third-floor windows of the easternmost three bays were filled-in with brick in the mid-1980s. In the late 1950s, a rear addition extended the building to the rear alley. The building has served a variety of functions. When first shown as a three-story building on the 1920 Sanborn map, its first floor was used at the Western Union office, a doctor's office, and the office to the Bluemont Hotel, part of which occupied the upper floor(s). In 1926, it was shown as an office, a store, and the post office, with a lodge on the second floor. In 1945 the lodge still occupied the second floor, but the first floor housed two stores and a restaurant. Other occupants have included a florist, a photographer, a beauty shop, and an insurance company.

819 **Horton Drug Store #2**
1904-1910

Contributing building

Two-story brick building decorated with a sawtooth corbeled cornice and bands of ornamental terra cotta tiles. Although metal casement windows dating from ca. 1950 have replaced the originals on the primary three bays of the facade, the original segmental brick arches above the windows remain. An original two-over-two sash window does survive on the second floor of the narrow, west-end stair bay. Known to many as the Horton Drug Store because of its occupancy of the building for several decades prior to 1981, this building served in the early 1920s, and perhaps before, as the post office (first floor) and as part of the Bluemont Hotel (second floor). Since 1981 it has housed a variety of businesses.

821 **Horton Drug Store #1**
by 1904

Contributing building

Two-story brick building with three recessed window panels. By ca. 1950, the original windows had been replaced by metal casements, but the original segmental-arched window heads remain intact. The facade is decorated with a row of dentils at the top of each window panel, a corbeled cornice, and ornamental terra cotta tiles at the upper corners of each window panel and forming a continuous band above the window panels. Sanborn maps from 1904 to 1920 label this building as a drugstore. It was the Horton Drug Store until ca. 1950, when the business moved next door

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to 819 Main Street. Sanborn maps show that in 1920 the second floor was used as part of the Bluemont Hotel; in 1926 and 1945 it was a lodge hall.

823 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
by 1904

Two-story brick building with highly decorative pressed metal facade which utilizes a combination of late Victorian and classical features including Corinthian colonettes and pilasters, an elaborate multi-layer frieze and cornice, and corner finials. A pressed metal ceiling survives on the interior. The building's earliest known use was as a grocery and meat market. In 1920 it was the Chero-Cola Bottling Company, but by 1945 it had become a restaurant. A tile entrance floor which says "cafe" and has a geometric border and a corresponding tile first floor date from this period of use.

825-827 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
by 1904

Two-story, six-bay-wide, brick building whose well-preserved second story is nearly identical to that of 821 Main Street. Two-over-two sash segmental-arched windows are set within slightly recessed panels divided by plain pilasters and headed by a dentil course. A double band of sawtooth bricks runs across the westernmost three bays beneath the windows. A corbeled cornice carries across the entire six bays. Between 1926 and 1945, an addition was built to the rear of #827. Sanborn maps show that although the facade presented a unified whole, the building was always used as two separate stores. In 1904 the first floor housed a dry goods and notions store and a dry goods and millinery store. In 1910 it was a restaurant and pool hall. In 1920 it was a creamery and a barber shop, and by 1926 it was a paint store and an unidentified store. During these years, second-floor uses included a telephone exchange, a photography shop, and an armory.

829 **Amuzu Theatre** Contributing building
1907-1910

Two-story brick commercial building with a corbeled cornice like that found on #821 and #825-827. The three bays have two-over-two sash windows—paired in the center—with segmental-arched heads. The 1910 Sanborn map identifies the building as a garage, but by 1920 it had become a movie theater. The Amuzu Theatre was established by Gus Mitchell. Jesse Miller later

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purchased the theater and changed its name to the Strand.

831 **Grocery** Contributing building
1907-1910

Two-story, two-bay-wide, brick building with a simple design that includes plain pilasters separating two-over-two sash windows with segmental-arched heads and a plain stepped cornice. During its early years, the building was used as a grocery and meat market.

833 **Brame Drug Store** Contributing building
1891

Two-story brick building with deeply corbeled cornice, corner pilasters, and segmental-arched two-over-two sash windows. Arched windows on the west side have been in-filled. Built by L. A. Jarvis and initially used as a wholesale grocery, dry goods, and boot and shoe business, this was the first brick store erected in North Wilkesboro. Since 1903 it has been the home of Brame Drugs, the oldest drug store in Wilkes County. According to local tradition, it was the first place in town to sell gasoline out of a front tank, and it wholesaled the first carload of paint in the county.

North side 800 block Main Street

816 **Liberty Theatre** Contributing building
ca. 1947

Two-story brick building with stuccoed facade of modernistic design which emphasizes the building's verticality. Original marquee survives, although the vertical sign saying "Liberty" has been removed. Sanborn maps show that a theater was erected at this site between 1920 and 1926. However, it later burned, and shortly after the close of World War II the present fireproof building was constructed. Photographs show that originally the theater was not stuccoed, but that by the mid-1950s, the stucco had been added.

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818-820 **North Wilkesboro Drug Company**
1920-1926

Contributing building

Two-story brick building with two store fronts and narrow center-bay stair. Simply designed, the facade is composed of five bays, plain pilasters at each edge and flanking the center stair, sash windows with a rectangular vent above each, and a shallow corbeled cornice. Flat-headed windows line the west side along Gordon Avenue. During its early years, the building's primary occupant was the North Wilkesboro Drug Company, operated by J. Johnson. Before a separate building was erected at 801 Main Street for the town hall, the west side of the second floor of this building served that purpose.

830 **Hotel Wilkes**
1926

Contributing building

Five-story brick building of Classical Revival design with a base, shaft, and cornice. The first floor and mezzanine are faced with ashlar sandstone with an anthemion band across the top. The hotel entrance, at the west end of the facade, is composed of three classical round arches—a central entrance flanked by windows—with a metal canopy over the doorway that is attached by chains to decorative stonework oval fans. Three storefronts at the east end of the facade have been converted to windows to serve the present-day apartments of the Wilkes Towers. The next three stories are plain, with runner bond brick and one-over-one sash windows. A stone course separates these floors from the fifth floor, whose windows alternate with decorative brick panels with a stone diamond at the center of each. The building is topped by a dentiled cornice and plain parapet. The Hotel Wilkes replaced the Gordon Hotel, which had stood on the site since 1891. (Between 1910 and 1920, the earlier hotel was moved one block east, where it became the Kensington Hotel. It was destroyed between 1926 and 1945.) Architects Benton and Benton of Wilson designed the Wilkes Hotel. It cost around \$165,000 and was financed almost entirely by local capital. The hotel was constructed of fireproof concrete and steel and contained sixty-three rooms, a lobby, main and private dining rooms, a banquet hall, and a ballroom. It opened to the public on January 1, 1927. In 1982 the hotel was converted to housing for the elderly (Wilkes Towers), at which time a six-story rear wing with a smooth-finished stucco exterior was added to the building.

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832 **(Former) Bank of North Wilkesboro** Contributing building
1923

Two-story, buff-colored brick and stone building. Well-detailed in the Neo-Classical Revival style, it features a three-bay facade recessed behind a pair of Roman Doric columns and corner pilasters. Matching but more narrow pilasters line the west (Ninth Street) elevation, and a full classical entablature headed by a paneled parapet crowns the building. The front entrance has been remodeled, but remains within its stone round-arched surround. Windows have been modernized, but retain their original form and size. At the center of the seven-bay west elevation is a secondary classical entrance which leads to a stairway. Offices are located at the rear of the building. The bank was designed by Wilson architects Benton and Benton and constructed by Foster and Allen Construction Company. The bank moved to this location when it outgrew its building at the southwest corner of Main and Ninth streets. The building has recently been converted to use as the Town Hall.

South side 900 block Main Street

901 **(Former) Bank of North Wilkesboro** Contributing building
1892

Highly ornamental one-story brick building with corner entrance. (Originally the entrance was on the corner. It was later moved to the Main Street elevation, but since 1980 has returned to its original position.) The diminutive building features a multi-layered brick corbeled cornice, bands of floriated terra cotta tiles, terra cotta corner fan designs, and terra cotta scrolls. The door and windows are round-arched with hood molds, and the windows are connected by a decorative string course. The large front window has been replaced with a pair of round-arched windows. The other windows retain their original form, although the original sash have been replaced. A matching rear addition was added between 1910 and 1920. Begun in 1892 with J. E. Finley as president, the Bank of North Wilkesboro was the county's oldest bank. It remained at this location until 1923, when a large new building was erected at the northeast corner of Main and Ninth streets.

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903 **Jenkins Hardware Company** Contributing building
1921

Two-story, painted brick building with a three-bay facade, three-part windows with multi-paned transoms, solid panels above the windows, a corbeled course across the facade, and a stepped parapet cornice with a diamond plate in the center bearing the inscription "J. H. Co. 1921." Beginning in 1905, E. L. Hart operated a hardware business in a pair of one-story buildings at this site. C. E. Jenkins purchased the company in 1912 and changed the name to Jenkins Hardware Company. In 1921 he added a second story and remodeled the building to its present appearance, although the original Flemish bond brickwork has since been painted. Since 1976 the building has operated as J. R. Priester's clothing store.

907-909 **Spainhour-Sydnor Dry Goods Company** Contributing building
ca. 1904; 1910-1920

In January, 2002, the mid-twentieth-century metal facade was removed from this building, revealing its early appearance and showing, with the help of Sanborn maps, that it originally constituted two-thirds of a larger two-story brick building that included 911 Main Street. According to Sanborn maps, 909 had been built by 1904. At that time, 907 was only a one-story building, but between 1910 and 1920 it became a two-story structure. Based on an early-twentieth-century photograph and on the present appearance of 911, the 907-909 section has lost its original corbeled cornice, sawtooth course, and window hood molds. However, what survives is a well-preserved, seven-bay-wide, stuccoed facade with original two-over-two sash windows with round-arched fanlight transoms and horizontal bands and vertical pilasters that create a series of shallow panels. At the west end of 909 is the narrow stair bay with its original second-story window. From 1905 this was the Spainhour-Sydnor Dry Goods Company. Later, until recent years, the store was known simply as Spainhour's.

911 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
ca. 1904

Originally a dry goods and notions store with offices on the second floor, this two-story brick building was probably part of the Spainhour-Sydnor Dry Goods Company. An early-twentieth-century photograph shows it as the west half of a building that included present-day 909, with the stair bay now associated with 909 serving as the center point. Judging from that photograph, the

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second story of present 911 appears intact, with a row of three two-over-two sash windows with round-arched fanlight transoms, brick hood molds connected by a horizontal band of bricks, a band of sawtooth bricks above the windows, a facade-length recessed panel above that, and a crowning corbeled cornice. The original facade was uncovered when a mid-twentieth-century facade was removed subsequent to the 1980 architectural survey of North Wilkesboro.

913 **Commercial building** Contributing building
1920-1926

Simple two-story brick building with broad, segmental-arched window openings surmounted by two slightly projecting brick string courses. The windows have been boarded-up for at least twenty years. Sanborn maps list the building simply as a store.

915-917 **Belk Department Store** Contributing building
1927

Two-story, six-bay-wide, brick building with flat-headed windows (single pane replacements of original one-over-one sash) recessed within two shallow brick panels. Above the windows, a matching recessed panel spans the facade, topped by a simple corbeled cornice. This building was erected for the Belk Department Store in 1927. From 1929 to 1963 W. G. Gabriel managed the store. Belk moved to Wilkes Mall in 1982.

919 **Commercial Building** Non-contributing building
1904-1910

All that survives of this two-story brick building erected between 1904 and 1910 is a portion of its facade. The space behind the facade has been turned into a pocket park. The second story facade remains largely intact, except for the closure of the window openings and the removal of the uppermost portion of the cornice. What remains of the facade shows that the building, a wholesale dry goods and notions store in its early years, was once one of the most architecturally fanciful of the buildings on Main Street. Using design features typical of several other commercial buildings of its period in North Wilkesboro, it has three round-arched windows with round-arched hood molds linked by a brick string course and two layers of sawtooth and dentiled corbeling.

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- 921 **Vaughn-Hemphill/Harris Building** Contributing building
By 1904; 1948

From 1904 through 1920, Sanborn maps show this building as a two-story wholesale grocery. After that, it was listed simply as a store. It is shown in the 1906 *Views of North Wilkesboro*, but with taller, segmental-arched windows. The first owner of the building is not certain; however, in 1905 Vaughn-Hemphill & Co. was established, serving as a wholesale grocery until 1931. At that time, the building was sold to D. A. and L. E. Harris, who moved their Harris Brothers Department Store to this location. In 1962, D. A. Harris left the business, and L. E. Harris continued it as Harris Department Store, under which name it operated until closing in 1992. The building today, with its three two-over-two sash windows set within a slightly recessed panel, its upper facade panel, and its simple corbeled cornice, is stylistically very similar to 809 Main Street and 915-917 Main Street, both of which were built in 1927. However, apparently the building took on its present appearance in 1948, for an article in the May 27, 1948, edition of the *Journal-Patriot* praises the "complete remodeling and modernizing of the building," adding that "The store has a new and modern front which is highly attractive."

- 923 **Wholesale Grocery Store** Non-contributing building
1920-1926

Currently, with its metal facade and metal canopy which were probably added in the 1970s, this two-story brick building does not contribute to the historic character of the district. Mid-twentieth-century photographs illustrate the original appearance of the building as having a four-bay facade with paired sash windows with segmental-arched transoms, a paneled frieze, and a simple corbeled cornice, all of which almost certainly remains intact beneath the added metal sheathing. Sanborn maps show that the building was erected between 1920 and 1926 and that it was first used as a wholesale grocery on the first floor and as storage for bark on the second floor. By mid century the building had become the J. C. Penney Store, which it remained for some years.

North side 900 block Main Street

- 900-902 **Commercial Building** Non-contributing building
1970s

One-story, modern, brick and stucco-panel building with two shop fronts. During the urban

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renewal of the 1970s, it replaced the Call Hotel, which was built between 1922 and 1926.

906 **Office Building** Non-contributing building
Post 1980

Two-story, stucco-covered office building which has been extended westward to include one bay of 908-910. Its design, with round arches above the second-story windows, reflects in an abstract fashion the facade of 908-910 Main Street. A movie theater had stood earlier on the site.

910 **Absher, Hayes, Blackburn Store** Contributing building
by 1904

Although the east bay of what was until recently 908 Main Street has been stuccoed and incorporated into the design of 906, the building as a whole (now with a single address of 910 instead of 908-910) still retains a strong image of its original appearance. The two-story, painted-brick building has five bays—two per store front with a narrow center bay for the stair. Plain pilasters dividing the bays terminate in sawtooth-edged collars that are connected by a corbeled cornice. Paired one-over-one sash windows (now boarded up) with round-arched fanlight transoms are headed by round-arched brick hood molds connected by a brick string course. The rear of the building retains its segmental-arched doors and windows. An early-twentieth-century photograph shows the unpainted double storefront that was the home of Absher, Hayes, Blackburn & Co. (painted on the upper facade in an arch above each storefront). It was for many years a clothing, furniture, and dry goods store with offices on the second floor.

912 **Shoe Store** Contributing building
ca. 1908

Judging from the 1904 and 1910 Sanborn maps and from photographs taken in 1905 or 1906 and 1909, it appears that this building was erected around 1908. The building was initially used as a shoe store and continued in that use for at least a decade. It is a two-story brick structure whose second story facade is nearly identical to 911 Main Street and 928 Main Street, both of which date from the same period. Three two-over-two sash windows with round-arched fanlight transoms, round-arched brick hood molds over the windows connected by a string course, an upper facade band of sawtooth bricks, and a corbeled cornice define the facade of 912.

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928 **Trogon-McGee Block** Contributing building
1904

Three-story, three-bay-wide brick commercial building with round-arched sash windows with brick hood molds forming continuous bands across the facade, and a corbeled cornice. This is the only surviving section of the Trogon-McGee Block, shown in the 1906 *Views of North Wilkesboro* as one of the largest and most important building projects in the early years of the town. Early photographs also show that the present cornice is an early remodeling of the original. Between 1904 and 1920, the building was used variously as a general merchandise, hardware, and furniture store. The rear of the building retains its original segmental-arched doors and windows. (Although the facade of another portion of the Trogon-McGee Block has been covered by the modern front of First Union Bank, its rear elevation also survives in original form, except that the openings have been in-filled. In its altered state, this building is not included in the district.)

West side 200 block Ninth Street

211 **Commercial Building** Non-contributing building
1970s

Small one-story office with Tudor Revival facade details including a three-part window with diamond muntins and a steeply pitched gable roof with stucco and wood timbers over the recessed front entrance.

213 **Commercial Building** Non-contributing building
1970s

Modern one-story brick office with narrow vertical windows, a plain frieze, and a flat roof.

East side 200 block Ninth Street

214 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
1907-1910

Two-story brick building with round-arched doors and windows (sash replaced with single panes) on west facade and south and east elevations, round-arched brick hood molds connected by

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slightly raised string courses, and a corbeled cornice. The building is not shown on the 1907 Trogon Map, but it is on the 1910 Sanborn map. For years the building was used as the dental office of a Dr. Taylor and later by his daughter, Carolyn Taylor Williams, also a dentist.

- 216 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
1910-1920

Two-story brick building nearly identical to 214 with round-arched one-over-one sash windows, brick hood molds connected by a string course, and a decorative corbeled cornice. Between 1926 and 1945, a rear addition was built. The building was originally used as an electrical supply business.

- 218 **Commercial Building** Contributing building
1926-1945

Two-story brick building with paired, one-over-one sash windows set within a slightly recessed panel, above which is a horizontal brick panel on the upper facade and a simple corbeled cornice. Side entrance with small stair deck on north side. According to the 1945 Sanborn map, the building was being used at that time by a printing business.

East side 200 block Gordon Avenue

- 210 **Jail and Auto Repair Shop** Contributing building
1920-1926

Small one-story brick building with flat roof, recessed entrance at south end and corner entrance set at an angle to Gordon Avenue and the intersecting alley. The corner bricks appear to be "hinged" to the brick walls on either side. The south portion of the building, with its recessed entrance and second entrance to the rear of 820 Main Street, was initially used as the town jail when the town hall was located on the second floor of 820 Main Street. The corner portion of the building, extending eastward to the middle of the block, was an auto repair business.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Summary

North Wilkesboro, a town of approximately four thousand residents located on the north side of the Yadkin River in Wilkes County, owes its existence to the arrival of the railroad in 1890. Incorporated in 1891, the town was established specifically to serve as the western terminus of the Northwestern North Carolina Railroad from Winston, from which position it could tap the vast timber and agricultural resources of the upper Yadkin River valley. The town rapidly developed as the region's principal shipping point for timber, fruit, chickens, eggs, furs, and wild herbs and roots. To serve the burgeoning community, commercial buildings were erected in rapid succession just uphill from the railroad depot, especially along Main Street (originally known as B Street) on either side of Ninth Street. While the older town of Wilkesboro on the south side of the river continued to function as the county seat, downtown North Wilkesboro soon became the area's commercial center. It maintained that position until well after the mid-twentieth century, and even today downtown North Wilkesboro remains considerably more active than many of North Carolina's historic downtowns. Comprising the densest collection of historic buildings in the town's commercial core, the Downtown Main Street Historic District is the strongest commercial reflection of the impact of the arrival of the railroad on Wilkes County. Because of its central role in the development of commerce in North Wilkesboro from the last decade of the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the district fulfills Criterion A for listing in the National Register.

The Downtown Main Street Historic District also fulfills National Register Criterion C for its architectural significance. Its large, cohesive collection of commercial buildings is representative of the standard commercial design typically found in North Carolina towns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because eighty-one percent of the buildings were erected between 1891 and ca. 1930, the district exhibits a remarkably homogeneous physical character. The district also contains several buildings of individual distinction. Among these are the 1892 former Bank of North Wilkesboro, a diminutive building with lush exterior ornamentation; the 1904 building at 823 Main Street with its decorative pressed metal facade unique in North Wilkesboro; and three buildings designed by the prominent Wilson architectural firm of Benton and Benton—the 1923 Neo-Classical Revival style former Bank of North Wilkesboro at 832 Main Street, the Classical Revival style former Hotel Wilkes built at 830 Main Street in 1926, and the 1939 former Town Hall at 801 Main Street, whose design exhibits streamlined modernism.

The Downtown Main Street Historic District is significant at the local level. Its period of significance spans the years from 1891—the date of North Wilkesboro's incorporation and the year in which the oldest building in the district, the Brame Drug Store at 833 Main Street, was erected—to

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1952, when businesses in the district continued to thrive. In 1952 the district was still significant as North Wilkesboro's commercial center, a distinction it retained until the late twentieth century, when outlying shopping centers began to erode downtown's commercial preeminence.

Historical Background and Commerce Context

The town of North Wilkesboro owes its very existence to the arrival of the Northwestern North Carolina Railroad in 1890. Because of this, it demonstrates even more clearly than many other towns, such as Elkin and Mount Airy that received rail service in the late nineteenth century, just how crucial the arrival of the railroad was to urban development in North Carolina during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

When, in the 1880s, the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railway Company extended its line from Greensboro to Mount Airy in order to tap the natural resources of that area, Winston-Salem business leaders feared that their town would lose its opportunity to become a major manufacturing center. Consequently, entrepreneur George W. Hinshaw approached the vice-president of North Western North Carolina Railroad (later Southern Railway) and persuaded him to counter the rival railroad's move by extending a line from Winston-Salem seventy-five miles west along the Yadkin River to the center of Wilkes County (Phillips, 5). On October 10, 1888, the Wilkes County commissioners entered into a contract with the North Western North Carolina Railroad, agreeing to subscribe \$100,000 toward the building of the railroad on condition that it come to within one mile of the Wilkes County Courthouse. The railroad reached its terminus in August, 1890 (Anderson, 4, 8).

As the railroad approached its Wilkes County terminus on the north side of the Yadkin River—across from the county seat of Wilkesboro—the Finley family, who owned the farmlands on the north side of the river initiated plans for the development of a town to be named Gordon. Soon, however, they sold out to the Winston Land and Improvement Company, which had been created for the purpose of developing a new town. The directors of the company consisted principally of prominent Winston-Salem men. G. W. Hinshaw was named president, and Willard Franklin Trogdon became secretary-treasurer. Trogdon was placed in charge of developing the town (Anderson, 5-9).

During 1891 the land purchased for the new town was surveyed, and part of it was laid out into streets, avenues, alleys, blocks, and lots. Ten miles of streets were graded; bridges, trestles, stone culverts, a school building, an opera house, and several other buildings were constructed; and a map of the town was made and distributed to prospective residents and merchants. The Winston Land and Improvement Company sold its first lot on January 10, 1891; the first large auction was held was December 4. In 1894 the company laid out more land into lots, blocks, streets, and alleys. The Town of

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North Wilkesboro was incorporated on March 4, 1891 (Anderson, 10; Phillips, 6).

The speculative development of the town of North Wilkesboro was a phenomenal success. From only around fifteen inhabitants when the town began in 1891, the population grew to 918 by 1900. By 1904 the population had jumped to 1,500. Continued growth brought the number of inhabitants to 2,750 in 1910, and to nearly 4,000 in 1920. Thereafter it began to level off (Phillips, 6-7).

The physical accomplishments of North Wilkesboro during its first fifteen years, as listed in *Views of North Wilkesboro* (1906), add to the population figures and expansion of town boundaries to give an impressive picture of the town's early development. By 1906 the town boasted two banks and a multitude of stores, many of which were housed in twenty-six large brick buildings. Among the commercial establishments were thirty-five general stores, three clothing stores, ten dry goods stores, three drug stores, two wholesale dry goods houses, three wholesale grocery houses, two wholesale hardware stores, one shoe store, seven wholesale produce houses, two jewelry stores, and two furniture stores. In 1906 the town had five churches, two livery stables, three hotels, and two graded schools as well as private schools. At that time, a local and long distance telephone system, a Western Union telegraph office, and an electric light system served North Wilkesboro. Industry flourished, with a steam tannery; two large furniture factories; two sash, door, and blind factories and planing mills; a coffin factory; two roller mills; a foundry and machine shop; two harness manufacturing establishments; a ladies' hat factory; twenty wholesale lumber dealers carrying a combined stock of more than five million feet of lumber; and a branch of the Golden Belt Bag Manufacturing Company. North Wilkesboro had freight and express shipments of over 150 million pounds that year, and more than 300 wagons came to town daily with loads of tan bark, lumber, and all kinds of produce. Additional boasting of a less verifiable nature claimed that North Wilkesboro had the largest produce market in North Carolina and shipped more oak and poplar lumber, roots and herbs, green apples, chickens, eggs, dried fruit, country bacon, and leather than any other town in the state (Phillips, 7-8).

North Wilkesboro rapidly took its place as the primary commercial center of the area. The Downtown Main Street Historic District represents the surviving focal point of the town's developing commerce. Approximately thirty percent of the buildings in the district date from the first fifteen years of the town's history. Growth continued at a fast pace, so that by ca. 1930, eighty-one percent of the district's present buildings had been erected (Sanborn maps, 1904, 1910, 1920, 1926, 1945). All along the way, local commerce organizations helped boost North Wilkesboro's commercial vitality. By 1900, a Chamber of Commerce had been organized. In the 1910s, the Board of Trade and the Commercial Club were formed. In 1939 the Commerce Bureau was incorporated, and in 1946 the Wilkes County Chamber of Commerce was organized (Anderson, 49, 74, 77, 130, 147).

The slowest period of building in downtown North Wilkesboro came in the 1910s, when only six percent of the district's structures were erected. This was probably due, in large part, to the effects of

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World War I (Sanborn maps, 1910, 1920).

On April 27, 1922, *Carter's Weekly*, a local newspaper, noted that the greatest building boom in years was in full swing in North Wilkesboro. Indeed, Sanborn maps reflect that the 1920s were the busiest years of construction in downtown North Wilkesboro since the town's first fifteen years (Anderson, 99; Sanborn maps). It was during the 1920s that two of the district's most prominent buildings were erected—the Bank of North Wilkesboro at the northeast corner of Main and Ninth streets in 1923 and the Hotel Wilkes in 1926.

Construction in the district slowed after 1930, doubtless due in part to the effects of the Depression, but also because most of the lots on Main Street were already occupied by good brick buildings. The most significant buildings erected after the Depression were the Town Hall in 1939 and the Liberty Theatre shortly after World War II. Both were modernistic in design.

Although building activity slowed, downtown North Wilkesboro continued as the area's center of commerce until well after mid-century. In 1963, the first of several small shopping centers outside the downtown commercial area was constructed (Anderson, 183). In the early 1970s, North Wilkesboro began a program of urban renewal. According to a brochure prepared by the Redevelopment Commission, "North Wilkesboro. . . enjoys the unique advantage of having a true downtown retail area without competition from outlying shopping centers. It is to preserve this unique advantage and to foster the healthy growth and prosperity of its downtown, that this plan has been formulated." It continued, "Downtown North Wilkesboro is the No. 1 shopping center for this area covering a twenty-mile radius" (Anderson, 197). And yet, in attempting to strengthen downtown's vitality, the town demolished the commercial buildings along A Street, built a parking deck and a surface parking lot in their place, and constructed the Central Business Loop along the south and west edges of downtown. Although some of downtown was destroyed in the process of "improving" it, what was left was the central core along B Street, whose name was changed after redevelopment to Main Street.

Today, despite the fact that several small shopping centers have been built on the outskirts of town, downtown North Wilkesboro remains more active commercially than do many towns in the Piedmont. To promote downtown's economic viability while preserving its historic character, Historic Downtown North Wilkesboro was incorporated in 2000 and became an official North Carolina Main Street community. Listing of the Downtown Main Street Historic District in the National Register is seen as a primary tool for encouraging the long-term preservation of downtown's historic character.

Architecture Context

The large and tightly knit group of commercial buildings in the Downtown Main Street Historic District is a testament to the impact of the railroad on the development of towns in North Carolina during

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the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the arrival of the railroad in 1890, North Wilkesboro rapidly developed as the commercial center of the area, leaving the older town of Wilkesboro, across the river, as a small county seat community. The effect of the railroad can be seen similarly, if not as dramatically, in neighboring Surry County. There, Elkin developed and surpassed in size and activity its older across-the-river neighbor, Jonesville, after the railroad reached Elkin on the north side of the Yadkin and bypassed Jonesville. Mount Airy, in the northeast part of Surry County, developed commercially and industrially as a bustling town because it acquired rail service in the late nineteenth century, while the county seat of Dobson, removed from rail transportation in the center of the county, languished as a commercial center.

As the center of North Wilkesboro's commercial activity from the town's incorporation in 1891 though the mid-twentieth century, the Downtown Main Street Historic District contains an architecturally strong collection of commercial buildings representative of the styles popular during those years. With nearly half of the buildings in the district (46%) erected between 1891 and 1910, and eighty-one percent built by 1930, the district exhibits a remarkably homogeneous physical appearance.

Most of the buildings in the district reflect standard commercial design of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The earliest buildings exhibit many repetitive stylistic features, and buildings that followed ten to fifteen years later generally continued the same architectural trends, though often with a greater measure of simplicity. Particularly characteristic, and suggesting a late vernacular example of the Romanesque Revival style, are segmental or round-arched windows outlined with brick hood holds, and decorative corbeled cornices, often in several layers. The uppermost level of facades—that part between the upper story windows and the cornice—frequently has a long, rectangular panel, while some facades have plain brick pilasters defining the window bays and at either side of the facade. The usage of exaggerated sawtooth cornices in a number of the first generation commercial buildings suggests a single builder whose identity is unknown.

Some buildings, especially the 1892 former Bank of North Wilkesboro at 901 Main Street and the pre-1904 building at 823 Main Street, ventured beyond the mold of the standard commercial design of the period. The former bank is a one-story corner building that is visually striking because of its wealth of exterior decoration in brick and terra cotta. In the next block, the building at 823 Main Street boasts a pressed metal facade with a multitude of late Victorian and classical decorative details. While common in some places, metal facades were used sparingly in the towns of western North Carolina. This is the only example in North Wilkesboro; Wilkesboro and Elkin also have one example each.

While buildings of standard commercial design continued to be built in the district during the 1920s, classicism was introduced through two buildings designed by the Wilson architectural firm of Benton and Benton. The 1923 former Bank of North Wilkesboro at 832 Main Street is a stately Neo-Classical Revival style building whose facade is dominated by two heroic-scale Roman Doric columns set

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between corner pilasters. Adjacent to the bank building, the former Hotel Wilkes at 830 Main Street was erected in 1926. At five stories, it is the tallest building in the district. Expressing the Classical Revival style, it is organized with a base, a three-story shaft, and a cornice.

Although most buildings in the district had been erected by ca. 1930, several date from the 1930s and 1940s. Of these, the two most prominent are the modernistic former Town Hall and the Liberty Theatre. Located at 801 Main Street, the former Town Hall is the third building in the district designed by the architectural firm of Benton and Benton. It was erected in 1939. Typical of small-town movie theaters built during the 1940s, the Liberty Theatre at 816 Main Street attains its streamlined modernism through an emphasis on vertical lines in its design.

Together, these buildings form the best collection of commercial structures from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century in Wilkes County. North Wilkesboro's historic downtown is also among the most cohesive and best preserved of those found in towns of comparable size in piedmont North Carolina.

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- Views of North Wilkesboro, North Carolina*. Moravian Falls, N. C.: The Yellow Jacket Press, 1906.
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Downtown Main Street Historic District
Wilkes County, North Carolina

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the Downtown Main Street Historic District is shown by the heavy black line on the accompanying Wilkes County Tax Map 3868.15, drawn to a scale of 1" = 100'.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the Downtown Main Street Historic District is drawn to include the most cohesive group of historic commercial buildings erected in downtown North Wilkesboro during the district's period of significance—1891-1952—that contribute to the historic and architectural character of the district and form an entity distinguishable from its surroundings.

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Downtown Main Street Historic District
Wilkes County, North Carolina

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information for #1-5 applies to all nomination photographs, except "I," which was photographed February 2002.

- 1) Downtown Main Street Historic District
- 2) North Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) September 2001 ("I" photographed February 2002)
- 5) State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina
- 6-7) A: S side 800 block Main St., view to E
- B: 801 Main St., view to SE
- C: S side 800 block Main St., view to SW
- D: 823 Main St., view to S
- E: Alley, S side 800 & 900 blocks Main St., view to W
- F: N side 800 block Main St., view to W
- G: 832-830 Main St., view to NE
- H: 901 Main St., view to S
- I: S side 900 block Main St., view to SW
- J: N side 900 block Main St., view to NE
- K: 928 Main St., view to NW
- L: E side 200 block Ninth St., view to N
- M: 210 Gordon Ave., view to E

DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

NORTH WILKESBORO, WILKES CO., NC

832 - STREET ADDRESS

C - CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE

N - NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE

A> - PHOTO ID + VANTAGE POINT

— DISTRICT BOUNDARY

SCALE: 1"=100'



