

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number:** 93001469

**Date Listed:** 1/13/94

**Louisville Commercial H. D.  
Property Name**

**Jefferson  
County**

**GEORGIA  
State**

**Multiple Name**

-----  
**This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.**

*for* Mal M. Ryan  
**Signature of the Keeper**

1/14/94  
**Date of Action**

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to delete 1786 as a significant date; it predates the stated period of significance and no resources survive from that period.

This change was confirmed by phone with the Georgia SHPO (1/12/94).

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**



**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

Elizabeth A. Lyon  
Signature of certifying official

11/24/93  
Date

Elizabeth A. Lyon  
State Historic Preservation Officer,  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency or bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  
W. G. M. [Signature] 1/13/94

( ) determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_

( ) determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_

( ) removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

( ) see continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, Keeper of the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

## 6. Function or Use

---

### Historic Functions:

GOVERNMENT/capital  
GOVERNMENT/courthouse  
GOVERNMENT/city hall  
GOVERNMENT/correctional facility  
GOVERNMENT/post office  
COMMERCE/TRADE/business  
COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution  
COMMERCE/TRADE/professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store  
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store  
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant  
DOMESTIC/hotel

### Current Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE/business  
COMMERCE/TRADE/professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution  
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store  
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store  
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant  
GOVERNMENT/courthouse  
GOVERNMENT/post office  
GOVERNMENT/correctional facility

---

## 7. Description

---

### Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Beaux Arts Classicism  
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style  
LATE VICTORIAN/Romanesque  
LATE VICTORIAN/ITALIANATE

### Materials:

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>foundation</b> | BRICK<br>CONCRETE       |
| <b>walls</b>      | BRICK<br>METAL/Aluminum |
| <b>roof</b>       | ASPHALT                 |
| <b>other</b>      | STONE                   |

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Louisville Commercial Historic District is located in the central business district of the county-seat town of Louisville at the crossroads of two major streets. It extends approximately four blocks from northwest to southeast along Broad Street. Its character is that of a small town commercial area, as the district is small in size and the majority of its buildings are one story in height. Nearly all of these buildings are brick and date from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Although the majority of the historic structures

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

---

in the district are typical of downtown buildings from this period, there are several very distinctive buildings in this district.

The primary commercial area in Louisville has always been confined to Broad Street and has never extended beyond this four-block district, so all of the historic commercial development has occurred within this small area.

The terrain of the district is virtually flat and there are no distinguishing natural landmarks within it.

The proposed commercial historic district takes in virtually all of the southwest side of Broad Street and portions of the northeast side. Broad Street is also U.S. Highway 1, which comes into Louisville from Wrens to the north and Wadley to the south. The northwestern boundary of the commercial area is formed in part by Peachtree Street, which is also Georgia State Route 24; this road comes into Louisville from Waynesboro to the east and Sandersville to the west, both of which are county seats of nearby counties. The commercial district is today situated in the western one-third of Louisville; residential development in Louisville has been largely to the north and east of the district primarily a result of the wet, marsh-like conditions to the west of downtown, between Rocky Comfort Creek and the Ogeechee River further west.

Today relatively little about Louisville recalls its alleged roots as a "Washington" -type city, but a close inspection gives some clues as to its original appearance. For one, all of the blocks in the commercial and original residential areas are of equal size -- square in shape and four acres in area. The city was originally laid out on 40 acres with a governmental square sited on a rise, and it was apparently intended that this square be at or very near the center of the town. The uniformity present among city blocks and the fact that the governmental square was apparently intended to be at the center of the town would suggest that the Louisville plan may indeed have been modeled after Washington, Georgia, laid out only a few years before Louisville.

Today the commercial district in Louisville retains its historic gridiron street pattern. Nearly all of the lots facing Broad Street are rather long and narrow and of various sizes, typical of a small-town commercial area. Due to the fact that the district is virtually flat, the natural terrain was not a consideration in the layout of the commercial area or in land subdivision.

Most buildings in the district are situated on their lots in typical downtown fashion -- nearly all are located at the front of their lots next to the sidewalk with no setback. A few buildings, however,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

---

exhibit siting more typical of residential areas. These include the Post Office (photo 18), the County Jail, the telephone exchange, the old Baptist Church Sunday School building (photo 4) and the Jefferson Hotel (photo 15), all of which are somewhat set back from the sidewalk.

The majority of the buildings in the district are one-story in height, constructed of brick, lack distinctive elaboration, exhibit similar detailing primarily limited to the cornice and date from the same forty-year period (1890-1930). There are, however, several structures that do not conform to this description.

One of Louisville's earliest structures still stands today near the center of the commercial district. Known as the Market House (listed on the National Register as "Old Market", photo 10), this structure originally functioned as a general trading site. The Market House rests on a 24'-square foundation and features twelve heavy wooden piers supporting a pyramidal roof, which is shingled. A small cupola with pointed-arch vent openings rests atop the roof.

The Abbot and Stone Building (photo 9) was constructed in 1890 at the northeast corner of Broad and Mulberry Streets and stands today as the oldest commercial building in downtown Louisville, originally housing the Abbot and Stone General Store. A two story brick building, it is one of the most prominent in the commercial district, both a result of its highly visible corner location and its distinctive turret. The Abbot and Stone Building also features round-arched windows on the second level.

The second-oldest building is one known as the 1893 Building (photos 12 and 13) for it was constructed in that year to house the Louisville News and Farmer. A very small one-story structure, the 1893 Building exhibits a rusticated Romanesque Revival appearance and is one of the more unusual buildings in downtown Louisville.

A very noncommercial-appearing late nineteenth-century structure is the County Jail. Two stories in height, the building features a hipped roof, segmental arched windows, a central attic dormer, distinctive tall chimneys and decorative brick cornice detailing. Its residential appearance is due to its original function not only as a jail (with inmates housed in an extension to the rear) but also as the sheriff's residence. A new jail has since been constructed.

Also dating from the 1890s is the Planter's Cotton Warehouse (photo 4), a large one-story brick warehouse that is the only such building actually located within the commercial district. The only decorative elements on this sizeable rectangular structure are the stepped parapets on its gable ends.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

---

Native Louisville architect Willis F. Denny (1874-1905) was responsible for the design of three important buildings now standing in the commercial district. Two of the district's most prominent buildings are a pair of two-story brick commercial structures standing next to each other on the southwest side of Broad Street between Mulberry and Green Streets. These substantial turn-of-the-century buildings (photo 11) both feature Victorian-era commercial detailing. Also designed by Denny is the Jefferson County Courthouse (photo 14), completed in 1904 on the site of the old statehouse. A fine example of Beaux Arts Classicism styling, the courthouse was built by contractor F. P. Heifner at a cost of \$37,615.

Downtown Louisville also exhibits two outstanding bank buildings exhibiting temple-front motifs, both located on the southwest side of Broad Street within a block of each other. The older of the two is the First National Bank Building (photo 7), constructed ca. 1900, a relatively small, one-story building featuring engaged Greek Doric columns. The Bank of Louisville (photo 13), constructed ca. 1915, is a larger building, two stories in height with engaged Ionic columns flanking the central entrance and corner pilasters to either side.

Between the years 1921-1923 the Jefferson Hotel (photo 15) was constructed on the east side of Broad Street across from the Courthouse, and it remains the only historic hotel building still standing in Louisville's commercial district. This large two-story brick building is now stucco-faced and features large arched openings, paired 1-over-1 and casement windows and a hipped roof. A small one-story flat-roofed addition is located at the front left corner of the old hotel.

Two other important buildings are the gas stations both dating from ca. 1920 (photos 1 and 17). They are one story, brick structures which retain much of their commercial design relative to the chains they represented. There is also the Pal Theater, ca. 1935, the only downtown movie theater where motion pictures were shown (photo 3).

Another building in the commercial district with an entirely residential appearance is the old telephone exchange, built ca. 1925 solely for that purpose. The building features Craftsman details such as three-over-one double hung sash windows and battered porch supports resting on brick piers.

In 1939 the present United States Post Office (photo 18) was completed at the southeast corner of Broad and Walnut Streets. The one-story post office building is constructed of tan-colored brick and features a hipped roof, stone lintels over four eight-over-eight double hung sash windows on the front facade and a plain stone frieze. It was

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7

---

designed by Louis A. Simon, U.S. Supervising Architect and built by Ray M. Lee of Atlanta.

Taken as a whole, the Louisville Commercial Historic District is a very intact historic precinct. Although there is only one structure remaining from the city's period as the capital of Georgia, and none from the first nine decades of the nineteenth century, the historic buildings that are present in the district go a considerable way toward conveying the history of Louisville. An examination of this small commercial area leaves no doubt that Louisville enjoyed significant prosperity in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; one may also correctly conclude that the community struggled through the 1920s and 1930s and that the downtown commercial district has yet to return to the economic strength it enjoyed at the turn-of-the-century. None of the district's historic buildings have suffered significant losses of historic integrity.

The proposed district consists primarily of "contributing" properties. Determinations of "contributing" and "noncontributing" status were made primarily based on levels of physical integrity, and the boundaries of the district were able to be drawn to exclude almost all noncontributing properties. All contributing buildings also date prior to 1941. Several "noncontributing" buildings border the district, and these consist primarily of ca. 1940-1950 one-story brick commercial buildings.



---

**8. Statement of Significance**

---

**Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:**

nationally     statewide     locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A     B     C     D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**     N/A

A     B     C     D     E     F     G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE  
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

**Period of Significance:**

1794-1943

**Significant Dates:**

1786 (Georgia Legislature appoints commissioners to select a permanent capital site, to be named "Louisville")  
1794 (Town of Louisville laid out; uncertain when actually drawn)  
1795 (Constitutional Convention held in Louisville)  
1796 (First Louisville Legislative session)  
1798 (State Gazette and Louisville Journal founded)  
1804 (Milledgeville selected to replace Louisville as capital)  
1807 (End of Louisville's period as capital of Georgia)  
1864 (Union troops enter Louisville and burn several businesses)  
1875 (Louisville and Wadley Railroad established)  
1904 (Present Jefferson County Courthouse completed)

**Significant Person(s):**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 8

---

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

Willis F. Denny (architect)  
F. P. Heifner (builder)  
Louis A. Simon (supervising architect)

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

**Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:**

**Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Louisville Commercial historic District is significant as the intact historic downtown of Louisville, a former state capital and later the county seat and trading center for Jefferson County. It features the original town plan, late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings and several government or public structures.

The Louisville commercial district is significant in the area of politics/government. Louisville is the governmental seat of Jefferson County and the former Capital of the State of Georgia (1796-1807), having been created expressly to serve as the permanent capital site. The city's significance in the area of politics/government is therefore outstanding. The present Jefferson County Courthouse is situated on the original site of the Georgia Statehouse, giving double significance to this particular site as being both the location of the original permanent Capital of Georgia and subsequently of the seat of government of Jefferson County. As the seat of government, it is the only place in the county where the Superior Court met and conducted trials, the only place where the county commission met, and where the sheriff and the county jail was headquartered. The courthouse was always a place of information sharing and meeting. The existing 1939 United States Post Office (1939) is a good example of a building built during the Depression by the Federal government through one of the many work programs of that era that got the nation back on its feet. The post office represents the continued role of the Federal government in the area of communication and the building remains a central meeting place for the community.

The Louisville commercial district is also significant in the area of architecture. The district contains a variety of historic commercial and institutional buildings representative of their dates of construction. The district is highly intact and retains a considerable degree of its historic integrity. By far the majority of the buildings in the district are typical brick "storefront" commercial structures of one or two stories in height. Nearly all of these building date from the period 1890-1930, and as a result the district is very representative of that period in terms of the types of small-town commercial architecture it produced. In addition to this large number of rather ordinary, typical small-town commercial structures, the Louisville commercial district contains several distinctive landmark buildings. For example, the presence of three buildings designed by prominent Georgia architect and Louisville native Willis F. Denny adds considerably to the architectural significance of the district.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

Unfortunately, no research has been done to determine other architects, if any, who may have designed buildings in the district. It is believed locally that, in most cases, the commercial buildings in Louisville were not in fact designed by architects but by the contractors who constructed them. Other significant architect-designed buildings are the Jefferson County Courthouse, the Jefferson County Jail, and the U. S. Post Office. The district also includes the Market House, a unique surviving wooden structure from the earliest days of the city and the district.

The Louisville commercial district is also significant in the area of commerce. From its beginnings Louisville grew to be the primary town in Jefferson County, and once the railroad arrived in 1875 the commercial district and the entire community experienced an extended period of growth and prosperity. It was during this period that many of the existing commercial buildings were constructed. The majority of the buildings in the district today have always housed commercial establishments and thus the majority of district's buildings are significant in the area of commerce. Although not every period of historic commercial development is represented today by these extant buildings, the downtown area remains quite compact and the extent of present commercial development is not significantly greater than that of Louisville's earliest period. The Market House, the oldest building in the district, is the sole surviving monument to the district's role as the county market town in the early 19th century.

Finally, the Louisville commercial district is also significant in the area of community planning and development. Although the exact roots of the Louisville town plan remain uncertain, Louisville is significant in the area of community planning and development for the fact that it was a planned town. The State of Georgia created Louisville in the wilderness of frontier Georgia to be the State Capital and to house its capitol building. The plan thus included several large public squares, the one for the statehouse (now the courthouse) is the only one remaining in use. Major portions of the late 18th-century town plan are found within this historic district. This includes the median, a historic divided avenue, although its current landscaping is of non-historic origins. This median is a major surviving feature of the original plan.

**National Register Criteria**

The Louisville commercial district is significant under National Register Criteria A as the commercial and governmental center of the City of Louisville, as the governmental seat of Jefferson County and as the former Capital of the State of Georgia. It meets the "broad patterns of American history" because it has served throughout most of

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

its history as the county seat, center of local government and law enforcement, the representation of law and order. The people most responsible for the operation and growth of the county would for the most part have always lived within Louisville and many would have had offices and businesses within this historic district.

The Louisville commercial district is significant under National Register Criteria C as a commercial area exhibiting architectural styles typical of a small county seat town that experienced considerable economic growth in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Several buildings designed by prominent Georgia architect and Louisville native Willis Denny are located in the district. His work has been regionally recognized by his inclusion in the Dictionary of Georgia Biography (1983) as one of the few architects included. The majority of the commercial storefronts retain their detailing, window and door treatments, and size and massing. The district includes several monumental buildings such as the county courthouse, the U.S. Post Office and the Jefferson Hotel, each of which exemplify a style prevalent during the era of its construction. The district also includes the Market House, a rare surviving example of such an important community structure around which the early commercial district would have focused. It is the oldest such building in Georgia.

**Criteria Considerations (if applicable)**

N/A

**Period of significance (justification, if applicable)**

The period of significance for the Louisville commercial district is 1794-1943. In 1786 the Georgia Legislature determined that a permanent location for the state capital should be found, that this site should be within twenty miles of Galphin's Old Town and that the new town would be named Louisville. The period of significance begins in 1794, the year that the town was actually laid out. The oldest structure in the town is the Market House, believed to have been constructed around 1795. It is significant that the original town plan, created in the 18th century, is still intact and that the present district incorporates part of it.

**Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)**

Overview

Louisville, Georgia, named after King Louis XVI (1754-1793) of France, was created to be the permanent capital of the state of Georgia; as it

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

turned out, however, the city served in that capacity for only eleven years, from 1796 through 1806. After its brief state capital period Louisville declined considerably, in both importance and population. Following an extended period of stagnation, Louisville began evolving into a regional service center before Jefferson County's strong plantation economy was shattered with the advent of the Civil War in 1861. Louisville suffered economically and otherwise during the immediate post-war years, but the arrival of the railroad in 1875 brought a return to prosperity. Thus, during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries Louisville experienced considerable growth and change, and the commercial district was largely re-built during this period. The failure of cotton in the early 1920s due to the boll weevil, followed in the 1930s by the Depression, caused a long-term lull in Louisville's economy, from which it did not begin to rebound until the 1940s. This extended period of inactivity allowed for little alteration to downtown Louisville until mid-century, and today the commercial district still retains much of its turn-of-the-century appearance.

Historic Context

The vicinity of Louisville, Georgia was originally occupied by Indians, primarily Creeks and Yuchi, an offshoot of the Creek tribe. When the province of Georgia was divided into three parishes in 1758, the lands that now comprise Jefferson County (created from Burke and Warren Counties in 1796 and named for Thomas Jefferson) were contained in St. George Parish. The 1763 Treaty of Augusta transferred ownership of the Creek lands "...above Augusta to the Little River and south to the Ogeechee River..." to the Georgia Colony, thus opening these lands to white settlement. The first such settlement, and certainly the most significant, was known as Old Town, located approximately eight miles southeast of present-day Louisville. This trading post originated as the Yuchi village "Ogeechee Old Town", but had been abandoned by the 1730s. George Galphin, a native of Ireland who became a major land owner, trader and mediator between whites and Indians, revived Old Town in the 1760s; situated on an important Yuchi trail leading from his Silver Bluff Plantation (on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River) through the Georgia Colony into Indian territory, Old Town became the primary trading outpost in the region and was a factor in the founding of Louisville.

As for the actual site that became Louisville, a certain amount of uncertainty still exists as to what, if anything, was present there prior to the 1790s. This doubt centers around a structure known as the Market House, which is still standing today in the center of the commercial district. The date of construction of this pavilion has been a matter of considerable debate, as has the purpose for which it was built. Although some contend that the structure dates from as

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

early as the 1750s and was built as a slave market, it is now generally accepted that the Market House was constructed around 1795. This conclusion rests primarily on the reasoning that, before Louisville was founded, the site was approximately six miles from the nearest settlement (Queensborough, a small community of poor Irish farmers that died out prior to 1800), and thus there would have been little reason for locating a marketing point there until after Louisville had been founded. It is also known that the Market House was never utilized expressly for the buying and selling of slaves, though this activity was carried out at the site along with numerous other commercial dealings. The Market House was publicly-owned and housed sales directed by public officials. The bell in the Market House was cast in France in 1772 by Francois Gourbillion and originally intended to be used by a New Orleans convent. It is believed that pirates captured a ship transporting the bell across the Atlantic and that the bell was subsequently disposed of in Savannah, eventually to be brought to Louisville. Those contending that Market House was actually constructed in the mid-1700s claim that the bell would not have ended up in Louisville had the structure been built as late as the 1790s.

It was in 1786 that the Georgia Legislature determined the need for a permanent inland capital site, a decision made primarily due to the increased importance and population of the Georgia upcountry to the west of Augusta. Both Savannah and Augusta had alternated as the capital city prior to this time, and it was therefore reasoned that the permanent site should be nearly centrally positioned between these cities. An act of the General Assembly dated 26 January 1786 directed that a suitable site be found "...within twenty miles of Galphin's Old Town." The fact that the Legislature specified that the chosen capital site be near Old Town confirms the importance of this early 18th century outpost; had Old Town been situated elsewhere there is little doubt that Louisville would not be where it is today. The three men appointed to locate the future capital site, Nathan Brownson, William Few and Hugh Lawson, were instructed to purchase 1,000 acres of land and thereupon lay out a portion of the property for the new town, "...which should be known by the name of Louisville."

Although the location selected for the permanent Georgia capital proved to be a poor one, at the time it no doubt appeared ideal. The site was just east of the confluence of the Ogeechee River and Rocky Comfort Creek, at the furthest navigable point on the Ogeechee. The new town was laid out in 1794 and its grid plan of broad streets running northwest-southeast and northeast-southwest was supposedly modeled after that of Philadelphia; there is nothing, however, that confirms this supposition. In fact, it would seem more likely that the plan was based on that of the Wilkes County, Georgia town of

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

Washington, founded in 1783. The Washington plan served as a prototype for several other early Georgia towns and a few early observers commented on Louisville as having a governmental square near the center of the town, surrounded by streets and town blocks; this description is basically that of the Washington plan. Regardless of its original plan, however, Louisville's present lay-out recalls only a few hints of its appearance while serving as the Capital of Georgia.

State Capital Period, 1796-1806

During its eleven year state capital period, Louisville was an active, growing community. In May of 1795 the new town was the site of a Constitutional Convention, believed to have been held in one of perhaps several dozen private residences that stood in Louisville by that time. The first legislative session to be held in Louisville opened on 12 January 1796 in the just-completed State House building, which was a two-story brick structure approximately fifty feet square; Jared Irwin was elected as the new Governor of Georgia on the second day of the session. Three general merchandise stores were in operation in the commercial district in that year, and by the first year of the new century six more general stores had opened along with several specialty shops (a clock and watchmaker's business, a confectionery store and a tailor's shop). On 27 November 1798 Louisville's first newspaper, the State Gazette and Louisville Journal, began publication. The 20 August 1799 issue of this paper contained a notice advertising a "coffee house in Louisville" offering "accommodations for gentlemen during the sitting of the legislature and through the winter season." Within a few months of this issue, however, the State Gazette and Louisville Journal had been put out of business by a second Louisville paper, the Louisville Gazette, which had been founded on 22 January 1799 and proved to be one of the pioneer newspapers in Georgia. In April of 1800 publisher Ambrose Day and his new partner James Hely changed the name of the Louisville Gazette to the Louisville Gazette and Republican Trumpet. Briefly during the following year yet another paper, the Independent Register, was published in Louisville before it too went out of business after failing to provide sufficient competition for the Louisville Gazette and Republican Trumpet.

The most important and well-known legislative action during Louisville's state capital period was that involving the Yazoo land fraud. The issue at question was whether a 1795 Act authorizing the sale of between 35 and 50 million acres of western Georgia Territory lands had been constitutional. Prominent American leaders such as Patrick Henry and George Washington took sides on the issue; Henry contended that the sale was vital to the prompt payment of debts incurred during the American Revolution, while Washington opposed the action due to the fact that Spain still claimed some of the property



National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

in question. This matter was taken up for discussion by the General Assembly in January of 1796, the first Louisville session, and the Yazoo Act was declared unconstitutional. A public burning of the Yazoo Act is reputed to have been held on the statehouse grounds in Louisville on 13 February 1796, witnessed by a large crowd.

The selection of Louisville as the permanent capital of Georgia was not a universally accepted decision, and from its very first years as the capital site Louisville was an unpopular city with quite a few important Georgians. Leaders from Augusta and Savannah still believed their respective cities deserved to house the State's governmental operations, while many in Louisville complained that the new statehouse was a poorly constructed, inadequate building or that the Louisville vicinity was unhealthy. This last contention appears to have been a valid one, as there was apparently an increasing incidence of malaria and various illnesses among residents (and the first contractor for the statehouse apparently died of malaria while the building was under construction); the explanation for this situation was the town's close proximity to both the Ogeechee River and Rocky Comfort Creek. It is unclear which, if any, of these circumstances may have influenced the Legislature's decision to find a new capital site, but yet another factor -- and the one generally believed to have been of the most consequence -- was that the majority of the state's population was no longer concentrated along the Georgia coast; with further redistribution and population gains expected, it was determined that Louisville would soon become a rather inconvenient location for the state government.

In 1802 the Georgia Legislature determined that a new state capital site was to be found and that this location would replace Louisville as the permanent seat of government of the State of Georgia. In 1803 the Legislature commissioned the development of a new central Georgia city, to be named Milledgeville after current Governor John Milledge. The chosen site was announced a year later when on 12 December 1804 an act naming Milledgeville as the future permanent Georgia capital was passed. Louisville continued to serve as the capital beyond that date, however, as it would not be until 1807 that the first legislative session opened in Milledgeville. That year the State's public records were transported from Louisville to Milledgeville in 15 horse-drawn wagons. The former statehouse building was briefly utilized as a public arsenal and was then sold to St. Patrick's Lodge before finally being purchased by Jefferson County on December 1, 1824 for use as the county courthouse.

Antebellum Period, Civil War and Reconstruction, 1807-1875

Once the state capital had been re-located at Milledgeville there was a marked decline in Louisville. The population fell by over 50%, from

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

approximately 600 in 1806 to perhaps as few as 100 in 1850. The 1829 Gazetteer of the State of Georgia included a very brief entry for Louisville, underlining that fact that the town was in a continued state of decline:

...contains C. H. [courthouse], jail, the old state house, now occupied as a Masonic hall, academy and M. H. [meeting house] for all denominations, 60 houses and 20 stores, offices, &c....

(The entry is apparently in error concerning the status of the old statehouse, which by 1829 had been purchased by Jefferson County. The former county courthouse was subsequently sold to a local church for \$100.)

A town with 60 houses might be expected to contain anywhere from 200 to 300 residents, though 20 business establishments seems like a great deal for such a small community. The Gazetteer entry continues by discussing on-going work on the Ogeechee Canal, which in fact amounted to the clearing of the Ogeechee River to enable its navigation by cotton boats. The undertaking was expected to "infuse new life into the section of country about Louisville" (according to the Gazetteer), which it did to a certain degree, but Louisville itself was slow to rebound from its decline and certainly did not prosper as early as the surrounding region. Confirming this prolonged stagnation is George White's 1849 Statistics of the State of Georgia, which gives a very bleak picture of Louisville in that year, noting that

Louisville, once the capital, has now deteriorated. It has now a Courthouse, built of the materials which formerly composed the statehouse, a jail, church, academy, one Tavern, five stores. Population 100....The county has 8 saw mills; 13 grist mills; 2 flour mills.

By this time Jefferson County had developed a significant agricultural base, supported primarily by the cotton industry and the resulting plantation economy. The utilization of slave labor resulted in a marked increase in the black population, and in 1850 blacks accounted for nearly two-thirds of the county's residents (5,637 blacks of a total population of 9,354). Considering that at this time Louisville contained only about one percent of the total Jefferson County population, there is little doubt that the Jefferson County seat of government continued to stagnate. Further confirmation is the fact that only a handful of residential buildings standing in Louisville today, and not a single commercial building, date from the Antebellum years.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

Due the loss of some Jefferson County records and most newspapers dating from the antebellum and Civil War periods it is difficult to get a completely accurate picture of life in Louisville during those years. It is known that conditions became increasingly difficult as the war progressed, with food and news of the battles in short supply. On 28 November 1864 Union troops led by General Slocum entered Louisville and began burning the commercial district, apparently after becoming angered at the sight of a Confederate flag flying out front of a store. Several wooden buildings dating to the state capital period were destroyed, and as the fire spread townspeople and the Union soldiers began to realize that the entire downtown could be lost. The troops finally made the decision to tear down a warehouse building with the hope that doing so would allow them to contain the fire and prevent it from continuing its destructive path down Broad Street. This action proved successful, but Louisville's commercial district had received considerable damage and the downtown area would not fully recover for many years.

During the decade that followed the Civil War Louisville suffered from the economic and physical beating it had experienced. Jefferson County's cotton-based economy had been severely damaged, and in 1865 the county treasury showed a balance of only \$165.00; as the county seat Louisville could not help but feel the impact of this disaster.

Return to Prosperity, 1875-1920

Louisville's Reconstruction period might be thought of as effectively ending in 1875, the year that the Louisville and Wadley Railroad (also known as the Louisville Branch Railroad) was established. This line linked Louisville with the Central Railroad at Wadley and thus served as a vital transportation resource. By 1882 Louisville's population had, according to the 1881-1882 Georgia State Gazetteer, reached approximately 750, up considerably from its pre-Civil War total. The railroad had brought prosperity to the town, as it boasted daily mail service, express and telegraph offices and a thriving commercial district. The cotton industry had rebounded in Jefferson County, and according to the Gazetteer, "cotton and farm produce" constituted the "principal shipment" out of Louisville.

The rail line entered Louisville from the southeast and a passenger depot was located on the west side of East 4th Street, about three blocks southwest of the Jefferson County Courthouse. (The depot is no longer extant, having burned in the late 1960s.) This section of Louisville contained several cotton warehouses and a large lumber company but was separated from the commercial district by a small residential area. A spur of the Louisville and Wadley Railroad extended beyond the depot and the warehouse area approximately as far north as Walnut street, coming in to the commercial district behind

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

the businesses on the northwest side of Broad Street. This track configuration allowed business owners to receive shipments directly at their stores, and many of the surviving historic buildings in downtown Louisville can be attributed to the period of growth and development which was greatly influenced by the arrival of the railroad.

The businesses and professionals located in Louisville's commercial district in the early 1880s were quite various, including six general stores, five attorney's offices, four physician's offices, two drug stores, two grocery stores, two hotels, two watchmaker's shops, one barber shop, one dry goods store and one harness maker's shop. During the 1880s Louisville's commercial district was quite compact, basically contained between Green Street on the southeast and Walnut Street on the northwest, and most businesses were located on the southwest side of Broad Street; the block between Walnut and Peachtree was primarily residential at this time and would remain so until the late 1910s, when several businesses were established on the southwest side Broad Street between Walnut and Peachtree. There were no banks in Louisville in the early 1880s, but two would be established by the turn-of-the-century.

Signs of Louisville's economic strength during the first decade of the twentieth century are many. In 1900, for example, the region's cotton was so outstanding that farmers ended up with far short of the necessary storage space and resorted to temporarily lining Broad Street with cotton. Two years later, downtown Louisville and a portion of the nearby residential area received electric lighting. A number of new brick buildings had been constructed on Broad Street by 1900 and several industries were in operation just outside the commercial district, contributing to the diversification of Louisville's economy. The Louisville Manufacturing Company (a producer of cotton seed products and guano) and Perfection Ginning Company were both located south of downtown Louisville along the Louisville and Wadley Railroad. Also in this vicinity was the Louisville Electric Light and Water Works. A new Jefferson County Courthouse was completed in 1904 as designed by prominent Georgia architect Willis F. Denny, a native of Louisville. Denny is also credited with the design of several commercial and residential buildings in Louisville. The city's population reached 1,009 in 1900 and continued a slow but steady increase. The commercial district expanded as well, though also quite gradually. By 1920 a few businesses had been established between Walnut and Peachtree Streets, though this block retained some of its residential character even into the 1930s.

Economic Decline and Depression, 1920-1941

Once the boll weevil entered northeast Georgia it was only a matter of time before Louisville's economy would be affected. Although the

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

city's economy did not depend as heavily on the cotton industry as it had fifty years earlier, the devastation suffered throughout Georgia as a result of the boll weevil was certainly felt in Louisville. This situation was compounded by the advent of the Depression in the 1930s, and even though Louisville's population rose by about nine per cent between 1930 and 1940 (from 1,650 to 1,803) the commercial area languished. Jefferson County suffered considerably, losing nearly 3,000 residents between 1920 and 1940. As a result of the difficult economic times, Louisville's downtown went basically unchanged during the two decades between 1920 and the late 1930s.

A new U. S. Post Office building was constructed by the United States government at the corner of Broad and Walnut Streets in 1939. It was designed by U. S. Supervising Architect Louis A. Simon and constructed by Ray M. Lee Co. of Atlanta. Funding for the building came from the Federal Works Administration (FWA), one of the many federal building agencies during the New Deal. A mural entitled "Plantation, Education, Transportation" painted by Abraham Harrison, a Hungarian native, was added to the building in 1941. In recent years it was removed and stored. Several one-story brick buildings were also constructed in the mid-1940s.

Beginning in the early 1930s a small black commercial area began to be established northwest of downtown Louisville on West Broad Street. Although it never consisted of more than a few cafes, pool halls and funeral homes, the area briefly flourished but has long since died out as an active commercial area; today there are no signs of former commercial establishments in this still primarily black residential area.

Since the mid-1940s very little new construction has occurred in Louisville's commercial district. Growth of the community has continued, however, as Louisville's 1980 population stood at 2,823. The downtown area remains the primary commercial center for Louisville and Jefferson County.

---

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

---

Augusta Chronicle, 28 July 1936.

Cobb, Thomas R. R. A Digest of the Statute Laws of the State of Georgia. Athens, Georgia: Christy, Kelsea and Burke, 1851.

Coleman, Kenneth, ed. A History of Georgia. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1977.

Denny, Philippa. Interviews April 1990 and May 1991.

Durden, Marion Little. A History of Saint George Parish, Colony of Georgia, Jefferson County, State of Georgia. Swainsboro, Georgia: Magnolia Press, 1983.

Holmes, Y. Lynn. "Louisville, the Capital of Georgia." Unpublished paper, October 1981.

Georgia State Gazetteer, Business and Planters Directory. Nashville: Standard Directory Company, 1881-1882.

Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Louisville Structural Survey (Prepared by Sue Smith), 1977.

Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Old Market House National Register Nomination (prepared by Martha F. Norwood and Beth L. Reiter), 1977.

Jaeger/Pyburn, Inc. Historic Context Statement, Louisville, Georgia. Prepared for the City of Louisville with a grant from the Historic Preservation Section, 1990.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (City of Louisville, Georgia). New York City: Sanborn Insurance Company, 1904, 1909, 1921, 1930.

Sears, Joan Niles. The First One Hundred Years of Town Planning in Georgia. Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1979.

Sherwood, Adiel. Gazetteer of the State of Georgia, 2nd edition. Charleston: W. Riley, 1829.

White, George. Statistics of the State of Georgia. Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1849.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): ( ) N/A

- ( ) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- (x) previously listed in the National Register (Jefferson County Courthouse-including the entire courthouse square, and the Old Market [House] only)
- ( ) previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ( ) designated a National Historic Landmark
- (x) recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #GA-14-2 Slave Market (the Old Market House), 1934.
- ( ) recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- (x) State historic preservation office
- ( ) Other State Agency
- ( ) Federal agency
- ( ) Local government
- ( ) University
- ( ) Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

**Acreage of Property** approximately 18 acres

**UTM References**

A) Zone 17 Easting 368500 Northing 3651750

B) Zone 17 E368320 N3651760

C) Zone 17 E368200 N3651980

D) Zone 17 E368140 N3652050

E) Zone 17 E368200 N3652140

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries of the proposed Louisville Commercial District are indicated by a solid black line on the accompanying Louisville Tax Map, Contributing Buildings Map and Photographs Map.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the Louisville Commercial District being nominated to the National Register were delineated following both historical and visual analyses of the entire commercial area in Louisville. Properties included are those with some identifiable and either direct or close historic association with the commercial and governmental activities in Louisville. Thus, patterns of historical development were the determining factor in selecting the boundaries of this district. No concern was given to the character of the district as influenced by different architectural styles, types and periods; it was felt that these factors were not of great importance since the goal was to delineate a contiguous district boundary encompassing the majority or all of the historic commercial area in Louisville. Noncontributing properties were thus excluded to the degree that doing so would not result in a lack of continuity in the district.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

**name/title** (a) Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian; (b) John A. Kissane, Jaeger/Pyburn, Inc., author of draft submission, dated June, 1991.

**organization** (a) Office of Historic Preservation, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (b)

**street & number** (a) 205 Butler Street, S.E., Suite 1462  
(b)

**city or town** (a) Atlanta (b) Gainesville **state** Georgia

**zip code** (a) 30334

**telephone** 404-656-2840 **date** October 17, 1993

(HPS form version 3-30-90)



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Photographs**

---

**Name of Property:** Louisville Commercial District  
**City or Vicinity:** Louisville  
**County:** Jefferson  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** July, 1992

**Description of Photograph(s):**

1 of 18: North Broad Street, at northeastern edge of the district. Photographer facing northeast.

2 of 18: North Broad Street, at northwestern edge of the district. Photographer facing southwest.

3 of 18: West side of Broad Street at Walnut, looking toward the Pal Theater. Photographer facing southwest.

4 of 18: North side of Walnut Street, looking toward church educational building on far right. Photographer facing northeast.

5 of 18: Median in middle of Broad St., with commemorative highway marker from 1931 in foreground. Photographer facing northwest.

6 of 18: West side of Broad Street, just south of intersection with Walnut. Photographer facing southwest.

7 of 18: West side of Broad Street, with bank in foreground. Photographer facing west.

8 of 18: East side of Broad Street, just north of Mulberry intersection. Photographer facing northeast.

9 of 18: Intersection of Broad Street and Mulberry, with Market House and median in foreground. This is the Abbot and Stone Building. Photographer facing northeast.

10 of 18: Market House and Median in middle of intersection of Mulberry and Broad Streets. Photographer facing west.

11 of 18: West side of Broad, just south of Mulberry intersection. Photographer facing northwest.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Photographs**

---

12 of 18: West side of Broad, with Bank of Louisville in foreground. Photographer facing southwest.

13 of 18: West side of Broad, with Bank of Louisville in foreground and 1893 Building (News and Farmer Building) to the left. Photographer facing west.

14 of 18: Jefferson County Courthouse and courthouse square. Photographer facing southwest.

15 of 18: Jefferson Hotel and restaurant. Photographer facing northeast.

16 of 18: Broad Street as viewed from intersection with Green St., Bank of Louisville on the left (west side). Photographer facing north.

17 of 18: East side of Broad Street at Mulberry, view of original gas station. Photographer facing northeast.

18 of 18: Southeast corner of Broad and Walnut Sts., U. S. Post Office. Photographer facing southeast.

