

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received FEB 28 1983  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic John H. Norton and Company Store / ~~Norton-Morgan Commercial Company~~  
and/or common Willcox Commercial Company

2. Location

street & number 180 North Railroad Avenue N/A not for publication  
city, town Willcox N/A vicinity of  
state Arizona code 04 county Cochise code 003

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Richard Seidel  
street & number 232 N. El Paso  
city, town Willcox N/A vicinity of state Arizona

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cochise County  
street & number Quality Hill  
city, town Bisbee state Arizona

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Railroad Avenue Preview, Willcox, Arizona <sup>i<sup>2</sup></sup> Environmental Consultants, Tempe, Arizona  
A Definition of Historic Restoration Potentials has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date May 1974  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records Arizona State Historic Preservation Office  
city, town Phoenix state Arizona

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### SUMMARY/CONTEXT:

The Willcox Commercial Company building, built c. 1880, is a large (84'x100') single story adobe commercial structure with a two story dwelling (20'x60') incorporated into the rear. It is sited facing southeast on Railroad Avenue in Willcox, a small railroad city in Cochise County in southeastern Arizona. Railroad Avenue is parallel with the Southern Pacific Railroad track alignment and historically was the focus of commercial life in Willcox. That focus has since shifted, but the Willcox Commercial Company is one of the major resources of the locally designated Railroad Avenue Historic District.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The present configuration of the Willcox Commercial Company is the result of an early evolutionary adaptive process. The 20'x100' center section was constructed first, c. 1880. The north 40'x100' section was then added sometime before 1900, and the south 24'x80' section was built last, c. 1920. The original ornate pressed metal storefront above the display windows was removed in the early 1920's and replaced with the existing rusticated metal panels. The awning was also lowered at that time.

The main section of the facade features a continuous commercial storefront with three bay wide display windows and transoms flanking a recessed central entry bay. Continuing to the south, two additional storefronts extend the facade to its full width. A stepped parapet wall finished with rusticated pressed metal rises above the display windows, and a flat awning supported by struts and posts projects from this surface. A vestige of the original boomtown facade remains forming the appearance of the second story.

The north elevation has five windows situated below the eave line and a water table extends the full length of the building. Quoins articulate the northeast corner.

The west (rear) elevation features a two story residential section approximately 20'x60' surmounted by a gable roof. Openings include paired entry doors and flanking windows below and large paired one-over-one double hung windows above. The remainder of this elevation is one story with typical openings for rear access. The south elevation is hidden by an adjacent commercial building.

The gable roof is finished with corrugated tin panels. The ridge is situated over the center of the north section and slopes over the center and south sections of the building. Skylights, now covered over, were originally found near the rear of the center section, north section, and on the two story living area to the rear.

The interior of the Willcox Commercial Company reflects both its evolutionary additive character and its commercial use. The large volume is divided into two bays with the dividing wall exhibiting an early smaller opening and one larger opening made in 1972. The floors are finished throughout with hardwood, and the ceiling in each of the three sections is finished with pressed metal in different patterns. The ceiling of the north bay is insulated with a thick layer of dirt, a method not uncommon to early construction in Arizona.

(See Continuation Sheet)

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The rear of the north bay features an office balcony which retains its original spaces, materials, and some furnishings, including a large safe. The balustrade leading to the office features square, boxed newel posts capped with marble. A living area is connected to the office balcony and most of the original floor plan is intact.

The building has been well maintained and is in sound structural condition.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1880, 1900, 1920 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### SUMMARY:

The Willcox Commercial Company is historically significant for the pivotal role it has played in the economic development of Willcox and the surrounding region. This historic significance is enhanced by its association with John H. Norton, a prominent Arizona merchant, and Henry A. Morgan, a local business and civic leader. Architecturally, the Willcox Commercial Company is significant as one of the oldest commercial structures in Willcox and for its adobe construction.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The town of Willcox is located in Sulphur Springs Valley in southeastern Arizona. The valley is nearly 100 miles long and approximately 15 miles wide and extends from Sonora, Mexico to the Gila River in Arizona. This area was the primary focus of the United States military campaign against the Chiricahua Apaches in the second half of the 19th century. As part of this campaign, Fort Bowie was established in 1862, approximately 25 miles southeast of present day Willcox. This was the only outpost of civilization in the area until Fort Grant was established 35 miles to the north in 1872. Later, Fort Thomas was established 60 miles to the north in 1833.

A second major influence in the development of the region was the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Grading for the alignment was underway in Sulphur Springs Valley in 1877, and a temporary camp was set up at the present site of Willcox by 1878. By 1880 the railroad reached Willcox and the settlement was well on its way to becoming a permanent town in the Arizona Territory. An article in the Arizona Daily Star on October 28, 1880 reported that a building boom was underway with tents being replaced by permanent stone and adobe structures. At that time the town was named in honor of General O. B. Willcox, commander of the Department of Arizona.

A third major factor in the historical development of Willcox was the cattle ranching industry. At that time Sulphur Springs Valley was one of the finest stock ranges in the west. Willcox, A.T. developed into a supply point for ranchers throughout the region due to the presence of the railroad and quickly grew to importance as a cattle shipping center.

#### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The Willcox Commercial Company originated through the efforts of John H. Norton, and M. W. Stewart, two of the earliest businessmen in the community. Norton was a post trader at Fort Grant in 1876 and recognized the larger regional opportunities of the mercantile business. He joined forces with Stewart, and in 1880 they set up the John H. Norton and Company in Willcox. The first portion of the present building was erected at this time along with a large warehouse.

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less/acre

Quadrangle name Willcox, AZ

Quadrangle scale 1:62,500

### UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Nely 2'  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of lot 18 and all lot 19 blk 31.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard Seidel, owner, Willcox Commercial Company; Dale Seidel, Department Manager; and by SHPO staff

organization Willcox Commercial Company date October 1980

street & number 180 North Railroad Avenue telephone (602) 384-2448

city or town Willcox state Arizona 85643

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Michael M. Romnes*

title ALTERNATE SHPO date 17 FEB 83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register Entered in the National Register

date 3/31/83

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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By 1884 they had

"a large warehouse, corral and feedyard, beside a large commodious store which is well stocked with a well-selected class of goods including agricultural implements, and machinery. They also own a very fine store and hotel at Fort Grant, and do the heaviest business of any firm outside of Tucson or Tombstone." <sup>1</sup>

In addition to providing the local ranchers and cowboys with needed supplies, the store served the military posts at Fort Bowie, Fort Grant, and Fort Thomas throughout their existence. Norton and Stewart also ran a six horse stage coach line to all three installations.

The John H. Norton and Company store continued to serve the area while Willcox enjoyed a steady growth over the next 25 years. Around the turn of the century, Stewart sold his interest to Henry A. Morgan, who had been the bookkeeper for the store at Fort Grant. The Norton-Morgan Commercial Company expanded its Willcox facilities by building an addition to the north on the corner of Railroad Avenue and Stewart Street. Both wholesale and retail business was carried, and c. 1920 a new addition was built on the south. To serve the region better, other general stores were constructed throughout southeastern Arizona.

A post World War I recession resulted in the sale of the business in 1923 to Guy and Hazel Holt, who changed the name to the Willcox Commercial Company. The Holts owned and operated the business until 1937 when it was sold to Holt's sister and brother-in-law, Edith and Lynn Camp. The Camps operated the business until 1974 when it was sold to the present owners, Richard and Leona Seidel.

As a major supplier of commercial goods from its inception in 1880 to the present, the Willcox Commercial Company has consistently played a large role in the economic life of Willcox and southeastern Arizona.

The significance of the Willcox Commercial Company building is also derived from its association with locally prominent individuals, John H. Norton and Henry A. Morgan. Norton was born near Boston in 1847 and emigrated west to Colorado where, by 1869, he owned a general merchandise store. In 1876 he operated the commissary at Fort Grant and quickly became one of the region's major entrepreneurs. He eventually owned half a dozen stores in northern Cochise County. In addition to those at Fort Grant and Willcox, he owned mercantile establishments in Pearce, Cochise, and Johnson. Henry A. Morgan was associated with the Norton-Morgan Commercial Company during the first two decades of the 20th century. He was a local community leader for 40 years and had the distinction of serving as the first mayor of Willcox.

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, H.N. (Comp.) History of Arizona Territory. San Francisco: Wallace W. Elliott and Company Publishers, 1884.

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ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Architecturally, the Willcox Commercial Company is significant for the use of adobe in a large commercial structure. All of the exterior walls and interior bearing walls are adobe. Contextually, only a small number of buildings of this age and type are extant in Arizona.

The three periods of the building, which was physically expanded along with the business, are evidenced on the interior. Each of the commercial bays has pressed metal ceilings of different designs, providing visual evidence of the expansion of the building. The use of pressed metal is significant due to its recent introduction as an interior finishing material during the late 19th century.

The storefront of the 1900 portion of the Willcox Commercial Company reinforces the building's architectural significance. Characteristic of turn-of-the-century commercial design, the storefront has remained unaltered. The large plate-glass display windows are enframed by molded wooden frames and have transom windows above with inset wood panels at the sidewalk level. This design is characteristic of the period and adds to the architectural authenticity of the building.

When constructed in 1900, this section of the building featured a boomtown facade, another characteristic trait of turn-of-the-century commercial architecture. Boomtown facades were intended to convey an image of grandeur and prosperity and were common in the late 19th century. Often the upper portion was ornamented by pressed metal sheathing and decorative projecting cornices. Historic photographs illustrate this to be the original appearance of the building until the facade was altered in the 1920's. The lower portion of the boomtown facade is the only remaining physical evidence, but it is sufficient to enable the building to retain a sense of its appearance, especially in conjunction with the intact storefront.

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Barry, Laura and Roberts, Bill, editors. Willcox: The First 100 Years, Willcox: The Arizona Range News, 1979.

Schultz, Vernon B. Southwestern Town. The Story of Willcox, Arizona, Tucson: The Board of Regents of the Universities and State College of Arizona, 1964.

Willson, Roscoe G. "John Norton, Pioneer Merchant". Arizona Republic, undated.

Written correspondence with Darlis A. Miller, Associate Professor, Department of History, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.