

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

OCT 10 2000  
NATIONAL REGISTER, HISTORY  
& EDUCATION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1353

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 Watertown Commercial Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number roughly along Main Street, Depot Avenue, and Public Square N/A not for publication

city or town Watertown N/A vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Wilson code 189 zip code 37184

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 for 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.)

Herbert L. Hays 10/2/00  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or 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

Edson H. Beall

11/8/00

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private      | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s)         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State            | <input type="checkbox"/> site                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal          | <input type="checkbox"/> structure           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> object              |

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 22           | 2               | buildings  |
|              |                 | sites      |
|              | 1               | structures |
|              |                 | objects    |
| 22           | 3               |            |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
N/A

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institution
- COMMERCE/TRADE: Department Store
- GOVERNMENT: City Hall
- GOVERNMENT: Post Office
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institution
- COMMERCE/TRADE: Business
- EDUCATION: Library
- GOVERNMENT: City Hall
- SOCIAL: Meeting Hall

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Commercial Vernacular

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK, CONCRETE

walls BRICK, WOOD

roof ASPHALT, METAL, WOOD

other WOOD

**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.)

N/A

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C moved from its original location.
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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

c. 1890-1947

Significant Dates

1903

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown; multiple

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): N/A

- 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 #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Name of Property

Wilson County, TN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Approximately 4.5 acres

318 SW, WATERTOWN, TN

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 477880 3995200  
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 Anne-Leslie Owens  
organization NA date 1 June 2000  
street & number 2516 Sharondale Drive telephone 615.385.1679  
city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37215

**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 See continuation sheets  
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 listing. 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 20303.

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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

## VII. DESCRIPTION

The Watertown Commercial Historic District in Watertown, Wilson County, Tennessee, consists of the buildings surrounding the public square. From the square, the district extends one block on the north sides of both East and West Main Streets and one block south on the east side of Depot Street.

The district makes up the core of the central business area of Watertown and includes retail businesses, offices, financial institutions, and a city government office around the public square. Although some of the storefronts have been altered, the buildings in the district retain many of their original architectural features. The district retains the 1903 street configuration which includes a public square with Main Street (the old Lebanon-Sparta Pike and later the U.S. Highway 70) as its southern boundary. This view does not differ markedly from photographs in Traywick and Bogle's *In a Place Called Watertown*.

The square, developed in 1903 after a disastrous fire, contains a mix of early twentieth century commercial buildings. None of the buildings on the square pre-date the 1903 fire. Most of the buildings are the original one-story brick structures which first lined the square. This uniformity of elevation is maintained on all four sides. Several two-story buildings provide variety in elevation and serve to anchor the corners of the square. These buildings, the Pioneer Building (#18), the Griffin Building (#14), the Watertown City Hall (#10), the Melton Block (#9), and the Bank of Watertown Building (#19) are the most architecturally imposing buildings on the square.

Surrounding the square is a mix of early twentieth century buildings. The block west of the square on East Main Street contains one-story brick commercial buildings. Extending from the square to the east on East Main Street are a mix of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. The American Hardware Building (#3) is a two-story frame building with a pressed metal facade. The rest of the buildings on this block are one-story brick buildings.

The majority of the buildings within the district are vernacular commercial buildings typical of early twentieth century construction in small towns with one-part and two-part commercial blocks. Detailing in most buildings is limited to the corbelling and dentil detailing at the cornice and the recessed panels on the frieze.

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Many of the buildings in the district have awnings to cover sidewalk entrances. Most are sheet metal while others are canvas, synthetic, and wood shingle. In several buildings, the center section of the windowed storefront is deeply recessed providing glass enclosed display areas to either side of the entrance.

The buildings in the district were built between c. 1900 and 1947. The majority are the one-story brick buildings constructed as a result of the 1903 fire. All of the two-story brick buildings were constructed after the fire and their dates can be determined from written sources. Two buildings stand in contrast to the typical one-story brick on and around the square: the American Hardware Building at 116 East Main Street and the one-story brick building at 118 East Main Street. The two-story American Hardware Building is a frame building, making it unlikely that it would have pre-dated the 1903 fire that consumed the square. Its construction date can be estimated to be c. 1905. The one-story brick building at 118 East Main Street possibly pre-dates the 1903 fire. Its long, Italianate-style windows with segmental arches and prominent cornice make a c. 1900 construction date possible. Stylistically, 118 East Main Street would appear to be an earlier building than the other one-story buildings in the commercial district.

Within the district, there are twenty-two (22) contributing buildings (designated by a "C" in the inventory) and three (3) non-contributing buildings (designated by a "NC" in the inventory). The current name of the business is included in parentheses in the nomination; historic names, if known, appear first. The two non-contributing buildings have inappropriate siding materials. Once occupied and restored, these buildings could be determined contributing buildings to the Watertown Commercial Historic District. The gazebo (#25) is considered non-contributing simply because it is non-historic (1976). #7 and #12 are considered non-contributing due to alterations. Contributing buildings retain their original, character-defining features with minimal exterior alterations.

In this nomination, the term "commercial vernacular" is used to identify property types in a commercial setting that are either devoid of stylistic architectural elements that can be associated with a recognized architectural style, or that do not fit into the building type configuration first developed by Richard Longstreth in the field guide for the National Trust, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*. This term applies to the buildings in Watertown's commercial district. Lacking ornamentation or other elements of a definable style, these buildings were clearly constructed for commercial use and are best termed "commercial vernacular."

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## INVENTORY

### DEPOT AVENUE

1. 108 Depot Avenue. 1903. (Depot Junction Café). One-story brick building. 106 Depot Avenue is enclosed by windows with wood panels above and below. 108 Depot Avenue has a recessed double-door entrance between windows with wood siding above and below. The cornice has prominent corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)
2. 110 and 112 Depot Avenue. 1903. (110 was Cedar Forest Log Homes and 112 is Bush Whacker's Hair Design) One story brick building. 110 Depot Avenue is a three-bay storefront with door in center. Flat metal awning with wood siding above. 112 Depot Avenue has a three-bay metal and glass storefront with door in center. Wood shingles on either side of storefront. The cornice has prominent corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)

### MAIN STREET, EAST

3. 116 East Main Street. American Hardware Building, c. 1905. Two-story frame building with pressed metal false-front facade. First floor has a continuous windowed storefront with double doors on either end. Second floor has three four-light windows. A metal shed roof awning supported by wood posts extends over the sidewalk. Gable roof. (C)
4. 118 East Main Street. c. 1900. One-story four-bay brick building. Prominent brick dentils. Wood doors in both center bays are topped by an arched transom. To either side are one-over-one windows with arched transoms. Facade has a heavy, horizontal quality created by single rows of recessed bricks between sections of four rows of brick. Flat roof. (C)
5. 120 East Main Street. c. 1900. One-story five bay brick building. Door in center is topped by a fabric shed roof awning. To either side are two single pane windows with single pane transoms above. Brickwork is not as detailed as in other storefront facades. Recessed panels in frieze have rows of soldier course brick. For every six rows of common bond brick there is a single row of brick headers. Flat roof. (C)

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6. 122 East Main Street. Princess Theater, c. 1946. (Comer Lodge, 1969 to present). One-story brick building with asphalt-shingled, hipped roof awning. Four-bay windowed storefront with door in second bay from west. Flat roof. (C)

## MAIN STREET, WEST

7. 101 West Main Street. c. 1923. One-story brick building. Storefront area covered in plywood with a wood paneled door, air conditioner mounted in wall, and twenty-four light window. Detailing in the corbelling and dentils at the cornice and the recessed panels of the frieze. Red metal shed roof awning. Flat roof. (NC, due to alterations)

8. 103 and 105 West Main Street. c. 1903. Cola-Cola Bottling Company, from 1916-1927. One-story brick building. 103 West Main Street is a three bay storefront with a door in the center bay; transom windows are covered in metal and have a small louvered ventilation window at each end. 105 West Main Street is a five-bay storefront with metal replacement windows and a door in bottom half of the center bay. Detailing in the corbelling and dentils at the cornice and recessed panels of the frieze. Metal awning extends over sidewalk. Flat roof. (C)

## PUBLIC SQUARE

9. 100, 102, 104, and 106 Public Square. Melton Block, 1914. This two-story brick building faces southwest toward the square and anchors the southeast corner of the square. Its main entrance is set at an angle on the southwest corner of the building. At the top of this corner elevation is the stone, which reads: "Melton Block, 1914." The south elevation has a continuous windowed storefront. From the west there are two windows, a single door, a window, a double door, and a single window. Above the windows and doors are eight plate glass transoms. On the second floor are a single two-over-two window amongst double two-over-two windows. Corbelling and dentils in the cornice above recessed frieze panels. The west elevation has several storefronts. The northernmost section is a storefront consisting of a double door entrance between two plate glass windows; above are four transoms. Continuing to the south is a single door topped by a plywood covered transom and three two-bay windowed storefronts with a door in the northernmost of these three storefronts. Corbelling and dentils in the cornice top the recessed frieze panels. On the second floor are four double windows. The northernmost one is one-over-one while the others are two-over-two windows. Flat roof. (C)



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10. 108 Public Square. Watertown City Hall, 1947. Two-story yellow brick building with dark-red brick cornice. Large center bay with metal door for ambulance. On north is glass door with transom and single pane picture window. On south is double window with glass door on either side with a white metal awning above. On second floor are five one-over-one windows. (C)
11. 200 and 204 Public Square. 1903. (200 is Quibby's Cajun Café). One-story brick building. 200 Public Square has transom above two recessed storefront entrances. 204 Public Square has a three-bay storefront with recessed center door and a metal shed roof awning extending over sidewalk. Upper portion of storefront covered in wood panels. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)
12. 206 Public Square. 1903 (Watertown-Wilson County Public Library, 1983 to present) One-story brick building. Original storefront windows replaced during 1983 renovation. Synthetic awning extends over sidewalk. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (NC, due to alterations)
13. 208 and 210 Public Square. 1903. One-story brick building. 208 Public Square is a five-bay storefront with door in the center bay. Metal awning extends over sidewalk. 210 Public Square is a three-bay storefront covered with barnboard. Wood door with single light centered between two single pane windows. At 210 the transom is visible; at 208 it is boarded up. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)
14. 214 Public Square. Griffin Building, 1924. Two-story yellow brick building. Three-bay storefront with door in the center. Additional door on the east end of the building. Metal awning extends over sidewalk. First floor windows above the metal awning are covered in wood. Recessed panels in brick below the three casement windows on the second story. In the top corner of both the east and west side is a stylized ornamental design, similar to an acanthus. Prominent cornice with dentils and recessed panels along top of the building. Flat roof. (C)
15. 216 Public Square. 1903. One-story brick building. Three-bay storefront, both upper and lower, covered in wood. Detailing in the corbelling of the cornice. Flat roof. (C)

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16. 300 and 302 Public Square. 1903. (300 is the Watertown Video Center). One-story brick building. 300 Public Square has a five-bay storefront with a door in bottom half of the center bay. The original storefront configuration of 302 Public Square has been replaced with single glass door with transom on south and double single pane window on north. Cornice has corbelling and dentil details. Flat roof. (C)
17. 304 and 306 Public Square. 1903. (304 is the Whistle Stop and 306 is Barrett's Barber Shop and) One-story brick building. 304 and 306 Public Square share an arched opening to a small vestibule. The vestibule is triangular in plan, with two wood paneled doors with single lights in the upper half, placed side by side, each set at an angle. Arched one-over-one window beside shared entrance. On the north side is a brick chimney. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details. Flat roof. (C)
18. 308 Public Square. Pioneer Building, 1923. (Antiques / Aabacus Mortgage Inc.) This two-story brick building faces east toward the square and anchors the southwest corner of the square. The south elevation has two windows, a wall-mounted air conditioner, and a door on the first floor. The west window is a long segmental arched one-over one window. The east window is a display window with a glass block transom. Five segmental arched one-over-one windows are on the second floor. The east elevation has a double wood door entrance with transom, centered between two large storefronts. Each storefront has a single recessed wood door between storefront windows capped with a block glass transom. The second floor of the west elevation has five double one-over-one windows. Detailing is evident in the corbelling and dentils of the cornice. Flat roof. (C)
19. 400 Public Square. Bank of Watertown, 1903. (Wilson Bank & Trust, Watertown Office). This two-story brick building faces north toward the square and anchors the southwest corner of the square. The north elevation has a five-bay storefront with door in the second section from the west. Red canvas shed roof awning covers the sidewalk. Second story has three one-over-one segmental arched windows. The cornice has prominent corbelling and dentil details. The stepped-roof east elevation is divided into four parts with pilasters between each section. On first floor there is a door in both the north and two southernmost sections. Two southernmost doors covered with a hooded red canvas awning. On second story are single arched one-over-one windows in each of the sections. Shed roof sloping to rear. (C)

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20. 402 and 404 Public Square. 1903. (402 is the Wilson Bank & Trust, Watertown Office). One-story brick building. 402 is a five-bay storefront with door in the center. Red canvas shed roof awning covers the sidewalk. 404 is a three-bay storefront with recessed center door. Upper portion of storefront covered in wood panels. Transoms covered in wood panels. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)

21. 406 Public Square. 1903. One-story brick building. Three-bay storefront with recessed center door and air conditioner above. Transoms covered in wood panels. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Flat roof. (C)

22. 408, 410, and 412 Public Square. 1903. One-story brick building. 408 and 410 are two-bay storefronts with a window on the east side, door on the west side, and three-light transom above. 408 has a wood door with three horizontal panels topped by three horizontal lights and air conditioner. 412 is a three-bay storefront with recessed center door. Upper portion of storefront covered in wood panels with air conditioner above door. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above two rows of recessed panels in the frieze accented with yellow, red, and dark red brick. Flat roof. (C)

23. 414 Public Square. 1903. One-story brick building. Five-bay storefront with recessed center door. Upper portion of storefront covered in wood panels. The cornice has corbelling and dentil details above the recessed panels of the frieze. Rows of alternating yellow and red soldier course brick in frieze panels. Flat roof. (C)

24. 416 Public Square. c. 1920. One-story brick building. Three-bay storefront with recessed center door. Wood nine-light door has transom above. (C)

25. Gazebo, 1976. This octagonal wood gazebo has eight wood posts, open sides, and a wood shingle roof with a small spire at the center of the gazebo roof. (NC, due to construction date)

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## VIII. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Watertown Commercial District is nominated under Criterion A in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in the development of commerce in Watertown, a small railroad town. It is also a locally significant example of early twentieth century commercial architecture and is eligible under Criterion C. Wilson County, established in 1799, made Lebanon the county seat in 1801. Watertown, located to the east, developed in the mid-1880s because of its connection with the Nashville & Knoxville and Tennessee Central railroads and was incorporated in 1905.

Watertown is located in a flat valley in eastern Wilson County. This area was once a wilderness where Native Americans roamed and camped by the three small streams that converged to form Round Lick Creek. Captain Thomas Thompson from North Carolina built a small fort here in 1780, providing protection for his party and others who traveled along the old Holstein Trail.

Watertown, originally called Three Forks, was settled during the population explosion into Tennessee following statehood in 1796. Among the first permanent settlers of the Watertown area were John and Benjamin Phillips of Pennsylvania, James Wrather and Samuel King of Virginia, William McSpadden and William Harris of North Carolina, and Shelah and Nancy Turner Waters from Maryland by way of Virginia.

Watertown's early development can be attributed to one man: Wilson Lawrence Waters (1818-1903), grandson to pioneer settlers Shelah and Nancy Waters. For nearly forty years after its settlement, Three Forks was no more than a post office and a few struggling farmers. The post office, established on February 26, 1831, was moved to Wilson L. Waters' general store and in 1858 Waters was appointed the first Watertown postmaster. Self-trained as a construction engineer, Wilson led the formation of the Lebanon and Sparta Turnpike Company during the mid-1830s and served as its president until his death. While the Lebanon-Sparta Pike improved travel, stage, and mail routes to the east, Watertown's growth remained slow. By 1885, Watertown only included the store, grist mill, saw mill, blacksmith shop, house, and farm buildings on Waters 400-acre farm and a few small neighboring houses across the creek.

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Watertown's growth and prosperity began in the late 1880s with the construction of the railroad. According to a historical account in the *Lebanon Democrat* of September 24, 1928:

Watertown had only seven residences until the year 1885 when the most important event in the commercial history of Watertown took place. For several years, plans had been discussed for the building of the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad. Mr. W.L. Waters was an untiring worker for the success of the movement. Plans were begun in 1885; and in 1887, before a large audience of citizens, Mr. Waters shoveled the first shovel of dirt on the new railroad, near where the depot now stands [depot demolished in 1972]. On December 12, 1889, the first trip was made. The train carried nine passengers.<sup>1</sup>

Along with his son-in-law, Dr. R.H. Baker, Waters brought the route of the new Nashville & Knoxville Railroad, and eventually the Tennessee Central Railroad, through Watertown. Watertown's subsequent commercial development was a result of this railroad connection.

In the mid-1880s the Nashville & Knoxville Railroad secured Watertown's connection west to Nashville and east as far as Monterey in Putnam County. Alexander L. Crawford, a wealthy Pennsylvania iron manufacturer, created this line with visions of connecting Nashville to the rich timber and coal resources of Cumberland, Fentress, Overton, and Morgan counties. Crawford reached an agreement with the Nashville, Chattanooga, & St. Louis Railroad to use its spur line from Nashville to Lebanon. From Lebanon, Crawford built a wholly new line headed toward Cookeville, which resulted in many new towns along the line. From Lebanon to the eastern boundary of Wilson County, the Nashville & Knoxville established the new towns of Greenwood, Shop Springs, Cherry Valley, and Watertown. Only Watertown grew to any size. In the ten years following the completion of the railroad, Watertown's population doubled and it was incorporated in 1905. Initial survey of the route took place in the fall of 1886 and grading began in the fall of 1887. Railroad tracks reached Watertown in 1888 and immediately a new town began to develop.

Nashville capitalist Jere Baxter organized the Tennessee Central Railway in 1893, challenging the success of the Nashville, Chattanooga, & St. Louis and the Nashville &

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<sup>1</sup> *Lebanon Democrat* 16 September 1928.

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Knoxville. Over the next five years, Baxter accumulated the partners and capital to acquire control of the line between Nashville and Knoxville, including Watertown. After a successful battle with the Louisville & Nashville over terminal facilities in Nashville, the Tennessee Central's future seemed promising. Baxter died in 1904 and the Tennessee Central immediately suffered from the loss of Baxter's leadership. In 1905 the Tennessee Central leased its eastern branch, including the line to Watertown, to the Southern Railway. The Southern improved the facilities along the line but due to the strong opposition of the Louisville & Nashville, the Southern withdrew from the Tennessee Central in 1908. By 1912 the line was in bankruptcy court. Revived in 1922, the line remained in business, largely as a freight line, until it folded in 1968.

According to Watertown resident Lowell Afton Bogle:

the railroad experienced its most active decade at the time of World War I. There were four regular freights daily. For a while there were six regular passenger trains-three each way. One was called "The Shopper" and ran only between Watertown and Nashville. The engine had to be turned around here on a turntable.<sup>2</sup>

While Watertown's population grew during the period of settlement associated with the Nashville & Knoxville, most of its commercial and industrial growth dates to the years when the Tennessee Central controlled the railroad corridor. Though the success of the Tennessee Central in Watertown was limited to the years 1898 to 1912, it provided the impetus to Watertown's significant turn-of-the-century growth and development. Watertown's greatest period of prosperity occurred from 1900 to 1930. Watertown was incorporated in 1905. In 1921 a brick schoolhouse replaced a wood structure and in 1929 a new high school was erected. By 1939 the WPA Guide to Tennessee showed that Watertown's population had grown to 928; the 1998 U.S. Census Bureau estimate is 1263.

Watertown became a minor industrial center with such important businesses as the Watertown Milling Company (burned in 1923), W.E. Stephens Manufacturing Company, the Wilson County Garment Company, Moer's Hosiery Mill (where the library is now), Williams Pin Mill Manufacturing Company, and a Carnation Company Milk Plant.

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<sup>2</sup> Lowell Bogle, *Watertown History*, (1973 rewritten 1984, typescript), 86.

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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

The Watertown public square, an important element of the development of the community, was created in a 1903 after a fire destroyed the existing central business district. Prior to 1903 the commercial district included Main Street from Creek to Central Avenue, Depot Avenue, and Pearl Street. At the time, Main Street was the route of U.S. Highway 70 (the old Lebanon-Sparta Pike) through town. These buildings, oriented to the road, were one and two-stories in height and constructed of wood. They included hotels, merchants, offices, barber shops, cabinet shops, produce buyers, post office, print shop, and livery. The disastrous 1903 fire leveled most of these businesses. At a town meeting, \$800 in subscriptions was raised to buy the lots made vacant by the fire. Town fathers, businessmen, and citizens realized an opportunity to update and improve Watertown's appearance. A large public square was developed with rows of largely one-story brick buildings.

The character and use of the public square was enhanced by the addition of trees, hitching posts, and a well and well house. Maple trees planted on the north, east, and west sides of the square provided shade to shoppers. Hitching posts allowed farmers and townspeople to secure their horses, buggies, and wagons, while they attended to business on the square. The construction of a well and well house provided a focal point to the square and a much-needed watering source for horses and people. About 1915 John Tatum dug a well in the center of the square and a circular shaped shingle-topped well house was constructed in 1916. Use of the well was discontinued and the well house removed in 1944 when the square was paved. An octagonal gazebo (#25), reminiscent of the old well house, was constructed in 1976 in the center of the square.

In 1923 Watertown again lost sections of its commercial district to fire. Several fires, thought to be the result of depression-era arson, destroyed many of the buildings constructed as a result of the 1903 fire. These fires created space for the Pioneer Building (#18) on the southwest corner and the Griffin Building (#14) on the northwest corner of the square.

The Watertown square and its surrounding streets were indeed the heart of the commercial district. As Ben T. Traywick recalls:

Saturday was a big day in Watertown. At that time we had a feed and produce store, two hardwares, a men's clothing store, two dry goods stores, a drug store, a pool room, three service stations, three restaurants, three grocery stores, two

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barber shops, two beauty shops, a shoe shop, a jewelry store, a blacksmith shop, and a bank. I remembered some of them by name; Oakley's Barber Shop; Sullins Barber Shop; Smith's Grocery; Midgett's Market; Bogle's Grocery; R.L. Olds Dry Goods (later bought by Fred Johnson and Vernon Malone); Bill Birch Discount; George Bradley's Shoe Shop; U.L. Jennings Jewelry; Sam DeLay's Photos; American Hardware; Compton's Hardware; Cooksey's Restaurant; Ed Bryant's Cafe...People came to town in wagons, buggies, on horseback, by automobile and many walked. The streets around the square were crowded with people all thru the day and late into the night. The farmers and their families from all around were in town to spend their money. To accommodate them, the merchants provided entertainment, and held a drawing, giving away cash, groceries, and other prizes. Every store, even the barber shop, stayed open until 10:00 p.m.<sup>3</sup>

The buildings in Watertown's commercial district have each had many businesses over their nearly one hundred year history. Several of the more prominent buildings have long been associated with a particular business or type of business, and their history has been well documented. Such buildings include the Pioneer Building (#18), the Melton Block (#9), the American Hardware (#3), the Princess Theater (#6), and the Bank of Watertown (#19).

The Pioneer Building (#18), a two-story building on the southwest corner of the square, was built in 1923. This site was previously occupied by the Smith Block, a two-story brick building housing the Bell Telephone Office on the second floor and the post office on the first floor. When the Smith Block burned in 1923 the Pioneer Building was built in its place by Bob Scott with Reverend McAdoo of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church as carpenter. The Lebanon Bank and Trust opened a branch in the Pioneer Building in 1931 where they remained for about a year until moving to the old Bank of Watertown building.

The Melton Block (#9), a two-story brick building on the southeast corner of the square, is identified by its date stone, "Melton Block 1914." It was one of three bank buildings operating between 1914 and 1917. The bank was owned by the Meltons of Gassaway (in adjacent Cannon County) and Doak Young of Watertown served as its cashier. The bank closed not because a shortage of funds but a shortage of business. The telephone office and the post office moved to the Melton Block after the 1923 fire in the Smith Block.

<sup>3</sup> Ben T. Traywick and Lowell A. Bogle, *In a Place Called Watertown* (NP: Red Marie's, 1992) 36



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The American Hardware Building (#3) is a large frame building on the north side of Main Street built by Will A. Vick. He operated a hardware store in the building until 1908 when he sold the building to E.P. Jennings and George Davis, who organized American Hardware. With the advertising slogan, "Everything from a tack to a Traction Engine," the store sold guns, harnesses, plows, harrows, tillers, seeders, mowers, rakes, wagons, buggies, cutlery, paint, tools, and later automobiles. American Hardware acquired the first Ford agency in town. In 1913 Elby Jennings relinquished it when the Ford Motor Company required that its dealers accept and sell thirty-five Ford cars. The next year he acquired the Overland Automobile Agency franchise. The American Hardware Store even went into the funeral business. With an elaborate black hearse pulled by two white horses, it was the last funeral business to use horses.

The Princess Theater (#6), on the northwest corner of Main and Pearl Streets, was built c. 1946 by Paul Flexer. The theater closed in 1961, unable to compete with the growing popularity of television. Since 1969 the building has been owned by the Comer Lodge No. 417 F & AM. The Princess had been preceded by a silent movie theater. The silent movie theater operated in the annex at the northwest corner of the square from 1915 until 1932 when it was closed for financial reasons. Roland Vantreuse reopened this theatre in the annex and called it the "Rex." The Rex showed the first talking movie in 1935 and was sold to Paul Flexer in 1945.

The Bank of Watertown (#19) (operated until 1928 in the two-story brick building on the southwest corner of the square. In 1928 the Bank of Watertown combined with the Citizen's Bank under the name Citizen's Bank. They operated in the old Bank of Watertown building for a few days until being placed in receivership and closing forever. The Lebanon Bank and Trust Company opened a branch bank here when the receivers for the Citizen's Bank released the building. Called the Watertown Bank, it remained in business until 1972. The First National Bank of Lebanon bought the building in 1977. It is currently the Wilson Bank and Trust, Watertown Office.

The Watertown public square was also a center for politics and government. Hundreds of people came to hear gubernatorial candidate Robert L. "Bob" Taylor during his 1910 race against Republican candidate Ben Walter Hooper. Since 1947, the two-story Watertown City Hall (#10) has occupied the northeast corner of the square.

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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

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Despite the construction of the newer route of U.S. Highway 70, built in the 1970s to bypass the square, and the closing of industrial factories, Watertown has successfully sustained the economic vitality of its downtown commercial core. Many of these uses have continued (hardware store, barber shop, beauty shops, bank) with the addition of newer institutions and businesses such as the Watertown-Wilson County Public Library (#12) (opened in 1983) and several antique shops.

The buildings in the Watertown Commercial Historic District record in physical terms the commercial and architectural heritage of this small railroad town. The buildings in the district retain a high degree of architectural integrity and are excellent examples of vernacular commercial architecture from the early twentieth century. The majority of them date to 1903 or later, built as a result of the fire that leveled most of the downtown central core. At this time the Tennessee Central controlled the rails and the buildings further serve to document the railroad's heyday in eastern Wilson County and the prosperity it brought to Watertown.

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## X. VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Watertown Commercial Historic District consists of the 100, 200, 300, and 400 block buildings on the Public Square, and the 100 blocks of East Main Street, West Main Street, and Depot Avenue. The gazebo, 101 West Main Street, and 206 Public Square, though non-contributing, were included because they stand between contributing buildings. 118 and 120 West Main Street were not included as they were at the end of a block and were non-contributing. See sketch map.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries for the Watertown Commercial Historic District include the buildings that comprise the public square and the surrounding commercial properties on East and West Main streets and Depot Avenue. The boundaries include sufficient contributing properties to reflect the architectural and historical significance of the Watertown Commercial District.

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Wilson County, TN

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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
roughly bounded by Main Street and Depot Avenue  
Watertown, Wilson County, Tennessee

Photos by:    Carroll Van West  
                  MTSU Center for Historic Preservation  
Date:           February 1996, September 1998, and May 2000  
Negatives:    Tennessee Historical Commission  
                  2941 Lebanon Road  
                  Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Public Square (east side), facing northeast  
#1 of 18

Main Street, West, facing northwest  
#2 of 18

Main Street, West, facing northwest  
#3 of 18

Public Square (west side), facing northwest  
#4 of 18

Griffin Building, Public Square (north side), facing north  
#5 of 18

Public Square (north side), facing north  
#6 of 18

Public Square (north side), facing northwest  
#7 of 18

Public Square (north side), facing north  
#8 of 18

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Public Square (east side), facing northeast  
#9 of 18

Public square (east side) and Main Street, West, facing east  
#10 of 18

Main Street, East, facing northeast  
#11 of 18

Public Square (south side), facing southwest  
#12 of 18

Public Square (south side), facing southeast  
#13 of 18

Depot Avenue, facing southeast  
#14 of 18

Overview of Public Square, from Melton Block, facing northwest  
#15 of 18

Depot Avenue, facing southeast  
#16 of 18

Public Square, facing southwest  
#17 of 18

Main Street, East, facing northeast  
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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

| <b>Building</b>                                     | <b>Owner</b>              | <b>Owner Address</b>  |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| 108 Depot Avenue                                    | James and Debbie Stephens | 108 Depot Avenue<br>Watertown, 37184                                  |
| 110 Depot Avenue                                    | James and Debbie Stephens | 108 Depot Avenue<br>Watertown, 37184                                  |
| 112 Depot Avenue                                    | Aundrennia Enoch          | 321 Brush Creek Circle<br>Alexandria, 37012                           |
| 116 Main Street, East                               | Bruce Mott                | PO Box 91000<br>101 41 <sup>st</sup> Avenue North<br>Nashville, 37209 |
| 118 Main Street, East                               | Joel James                | 350 West Main Street<br>Watertown, 37184                              |
| 120 Main Street, East                               | Ron Frizzell              | 120 East Main Street<br>Watertown, 37184                              |
| 122 Main Street, East                               | Lodge<br>c/o Mike Hunter  | 208 West Main Street<br>Watertown, 37184                              |
| 101 Main Street, West                               | Margie Carpenter          | 313 Elm Street<br>Watertown, 37184                                    |
| 103 Main Street, West                               | Bernie and Nell Kane      | 15 Neal Road<br>Watertown, 37184                                      |
| 105 Main Street, West                               | Douglas Cramner           | 1127 Harpeth Bridge<br>Franklin 37069                                 |
| Melton Block<br>100, 102, 104, 106<br>Public Square | Harry Macomber            | 104 Public Square<br>Watertown, 37184                                 |



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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

|                   |                                    |  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 108 Public Square | City of Watertown                  | City Hall, Public Square<br>Watertown, 37184 |
| 200 Public Square | Ray and Susan Quibodeaux           | PO Box 221<br>Watertown, 37184               |
| 204 Public Square | Perry Martin                       | 1625 Franklin Road<br>Lebanon, 37087         |
| 206 Public Square | Wilson County                      | c/o Courthouse<br>Lebanon, 37087             |
| 208 Public Square | Wilson County                      | c/o Courthouse<br>Lebanon, 37087             |
| 210 Public Square | Dr. John Taylor                    | 4200 Harding Rd, #204<br>Nashville, 37205    |
| 214 Public Square | Perry Martin                       | 1625 Franklin Road<br>Lebanon, 37087         |
| 216 Public Square | Dick Curl<br>c/o Technical Plating | 102 Woodland Street<br>Watertown, 37184      |
| 300 Public Square | John Cassity                       | 242 Dickson Spring Hwy<br>Carthage, 37030    |
| 302 Public Square | Ron and Mary Wells                 | 355 Holmes Gap Road<br>Watertown, 37184      |
| 304 Public Square | Kelei and Diane Lamb               | 132 Luna Drive<br>Watertown, 37184           |
| 306 Public Square | Bratton Barrett                    | 240 Neal Road<br>Watertown, 37184            |

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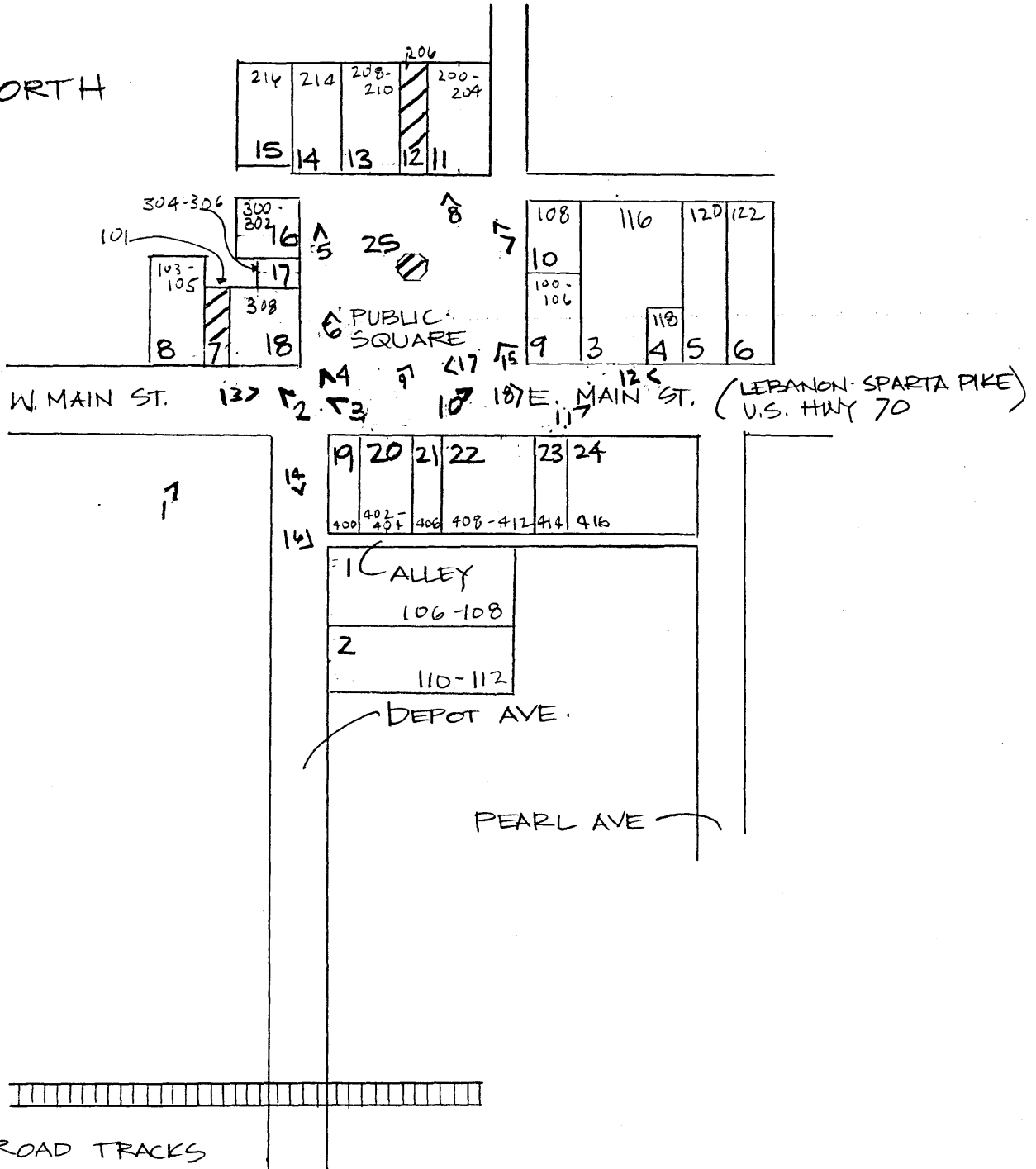
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Watertown Commercial Historic District  
Wilson County, TN

|                         |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| 308 Public Square       | Bill Shults / Michael Summers               | 7297 Sparta Pike<br>Watertown, 37184      |
| 400 Public Square       | Wilson Bank<br>Attn: Clark Oakley           | 400 Public Square<br>Watertown, 37184     |
| 402 Public Square       | Wilson Bank<br>Attn: Clark Oakley           | 400 Public Square<br>Watertown, 37184     |
| 404 Public Square       | Jolene Funk                                 | 422 Public Square<br>Watertown, 37184     |
| 406 Public Square       | Kathy Keith<br>Watertown Realty             | PO Box 222<br>Watertown, 37184            |
| 408 & 410 Public Square | Kalei and Diane Lamb                        | 132 Luna Drive<br>Nashville, 37211        |
| 412 Public Square       | Pat Jackson / Donna Delmas                  | 104 Goodner Lane<br>Alexandria, 37012     |
| 414 Public Square       | William and Becky Taylor                    | 100 South Commerce Rd<br>Watertown, 37184 |
| 416 Public Square       | Historic Watertown<br>Bob McComb, President | 116 Depot Avenue<br>Watertown, 37184      |
| Gazebo                  | Center of Public Square                     | City of Watertown<br>c/o Mayor            |

↑ NORTH



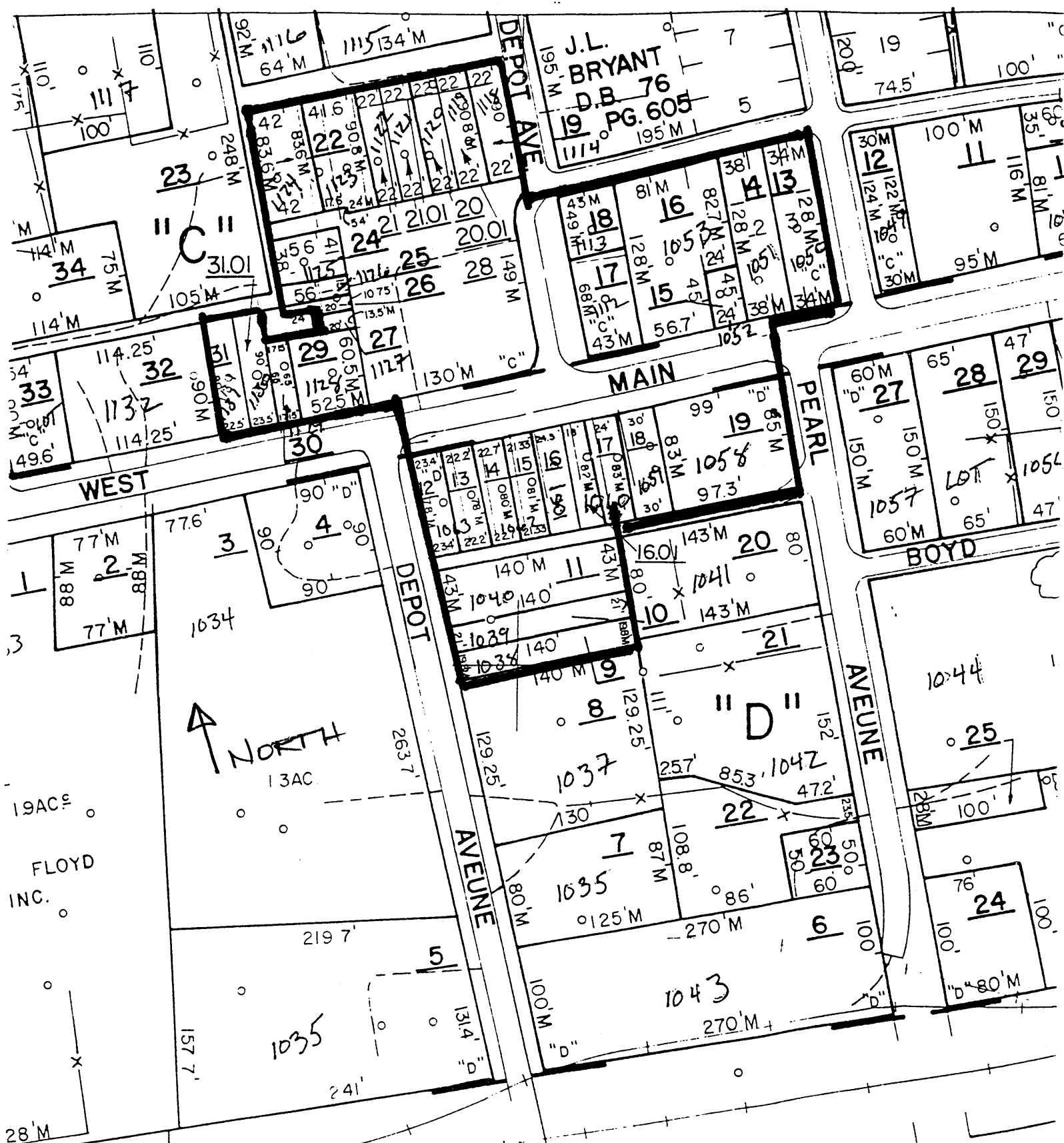
WATERTOWN COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
NOT TO SCALE

SEPTEMBER 1998 - UPDATED JULY 2000

□ - CONTRIBUTING (22 BUILDINGS)

▨ - NON-CONTRIBUTING (3)

WILSON COUNTY



1" = 100'

TAX MAP  
 WATERTOWN COMMERCIAL  
 HISTORIC DISTRICT

(WILSON CO.)