

OMB NO. 1081-0113
EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ~~Historic Resources of Wilkesboro~~ *multiple resource area* (Partial Inventory: Historic Architectural Properties

and/or common

2. Location

street & number The incorporation limits of Wilkesboro not for publication

city, town Wilkesboro vicinity of congressional district Fifth

state North Carolina code 037 county Wilkes code 193

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple ownership (see individual property forms)

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wilkes County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Wilkesboro state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wilkesboro Historic Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1980 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☒ local

Survey and Planning Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, N. C. Dept. of Cultural Resources.

city, town Raleigh state North Carolina

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" 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
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

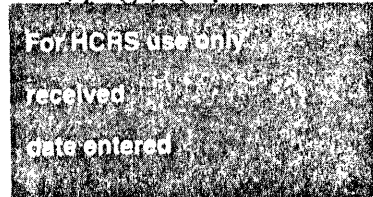
Wilkesboro is located in the central part of Wilkes County in the Yadkin River Valley. The majority of the present town lies within the area bounded by the Yadkin River on the north, Moravian Creek on the west, U. S. 421 Bypass on the south and Little Cub Creek (or Mill Creek) on the east. However, mid-twentieth century development in the southwest portion of town has pushed the present-day boundaries in places southward of U. S. 421 Bypass and westward of Moravian Creek. In addition to the waterways already mentioned, Cub Creek runs through town, roughly paralleling the south side of Main Street and then the east side of N. C. 16/18. The flood plains of these waterways interrupt the hills of Wilkesboro. The primary road in Wilkesboro is now and has always been Main Street, which runs northeast/southwest, roughly paralleling the Yadkin River. West of Cherry Street, the road becomes known as River St., and it is along this roadway (Main/River St.) that the heaviest development -- commercial, governmental, residential and industrial-- occurs. It is primarily residential development that has expanded outward from Main/River St. The core of Wilkesboro is located on the hill above the Yadkin River, and the center of town -- psychologically if not physically -- remains the Courthouse Square bounded by Main, Bridge, North and Broad streets. The Wilkesboro Historic Inventory reveals that dwellings make up by far the majority of historic resources within the town, although prominent roles are also played by several religious, commercial and governmental structures of historic and architectural importance.

Wilkesboro grew up around the site of the Mulberry Fields Meeting House, an eighteenth century Baptist meeting house on the south side of the Yadkin River. When Wilkes County was created in 1777, this site was chosen as the location for public buildings, and from the first courthouse which was built in 1778 until the present courthouse (built in 1902) this has been not only the seat of Wilkes County government but also the center of the town of Wilkesboro. Gradually houses, law offices and commercial buildings were erected around Courthouse Square, and as these spaces were taken up, development spread eastward and westward, primarily along Main Street but also along a few side streets within a block or two north and south of Main Street. The heaviest development was thus located on the high ground above the flood plains of the Yadkin River on the north and Cub Creek on the south. Surrounding the central core of town were farms which took advantage not only of the hills but also of the rich earth of the lowlands along the banks of these waterways. Unfortunately, no buildings from the eighteenth century remain in Wilkesboro, and precious few remain from the first half of the nineteenth century. Included in this group are three or four houses, two churches and the old Wilkes County Jail. On the other hand, numerous buildings from the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century can be found in Wilkesboro. Most of these are located in the area bounded roughly by Woodland Blvd./Cowles St. on the north, Cherry St. on the west, College St./Henderson St. on the south and Corporation St. on the east. Other examples from this period are found scattered beyond this core area, and a particularly intact group of late nineteenth-early twentieth century dwellings is located on Main Street east of Wilkesboro Blvd. Lowlands unsuitable for building purposes separate this clump. of houses from the main body of town west of Corporation St.

EXP 12-31-84

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

In terms of the architecture of historic interest in the Multiple Resource Area, by far the majority of buildings reflect the Victorian stylistic tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, good examples of other styles and periods of architecture are also present. The following is a discussion of these styles as interpreted in the buildings of Wilkesboro.

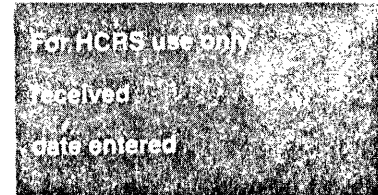
Although the settlement of Wilkesboro dates from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, no buildings remain from that period. Precious few buildings, in fact, remain from the first half of the nineteenth century. The earliest style in evidence in Wilkesboro--the Federal style -- appears on two of these buildings, the Brown-Cowles House and the Wallace House. Although the Brown-Cowles House (200 E. Main St.) has been added to and otherwise modified through the years, its original early nineteenth century form -- two-story frame structure, four bays wide with gable roof and exterior end chimneys -- is still evident. The second story rooms of this portion of the house retain tell-tale signs of the Federal style, including the relatively simple but delicate mantel with its blocked mantel shelf and the moulded door casing with beaded edge. The Wallace House (101 South St.) has also undergone some modifications, but the interior of the original portion of the house retains simple Federal style and transitional Federal/Greek Revival style features which suggest a possible date of construction during the 1830s. These features include the hall-and-parlor plan; the simple mantel with plain pilasters, delicate moulding and blocked mantel shelf; the enclosed corner stairway; the simple but refined balustrade at the top of the stairs; and the batten door in the upper story with its H-and-L iron hinges and beaded-edged casing.

Several examples of the Greek Revival style can be found in Wilkesboro in buildings which date from the mid-nineteenth century. By far the most prominent of these is the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church (205 E. Main St.), built in 1849-1850. Its chaste design with tetrastyle Doric portico and pedimented entablature epitomizes the style, providing the feeling of a small Classical temple. While the Greek Revival features of the 1855-1857 Johnson-Hubbard House (113 E. Main St.) are not as salient as are those of the Presbyterian Church, still the house exhibits some of the finest features of the period. Especially noteworthy are the marbled mantels of simple Greek Revival design, the marbled ceilings, baseboards and stair risers, the two-panel doors and the double-leaf entrance with multi-paned sidelights and transom and fluted surround. The hip-roofed entrance porch with lattice-work posts and sheaf-of-wheat balustrade is typical of the period and the chimneys which have been stuccoed and pencilled to resemble cut stone add another touch of classical elegance to the house. Other houses in Wilkesboro, such as the Lassiter-Green House (101 S. West St.) and the Call House (end of dirt lane east of end of Corporation St.), display the most basic of Greek Revival features, such as simple post-and-lintel mantels, two-panel doors and double leaf doors with moulded surrounds and square corner blocks.

EXP 12-31-84

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

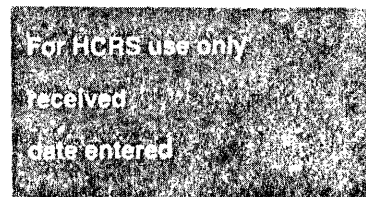
Page 2

The Gothic Revival style closely paralleled in time the Greek Revival style in Wilkesboro. The foremost example is the 1848-1849 St. Paul's Episcopal Church (N. side Cowles St. between Woodland Blvd. and West St.). This small brick structure with steep gable roof, lancet-arched windows and doors, corner buttresses, side entrance portal and a wealth of intact Gothic detailing on the interior is strongly reminiscent of English medieval country parish churches. It is typical of many small Episcopal churches built in America during the mid-nineteenth century. A later ecclesiastical example of the style is the Wilkesboro Methodist Church (S. side W. Main St. bet. Woodland Blvd. & Pine St.). Although this 1896 structure has undergone some alterations and additions, it retains its steep gable roof, lancet-arched doors and windows, corner buttresses and corner tower with spire, typical of the Gothic Revival. Several other buildings in Wilkesboro exhibit evidence of the style, but to a lesser degree than the Episcopal and Methodist churches. An example of this is the diminutive Thomas B. Finley Law Office, built ca. 1885 at the southeast corner of Broad and North Streets. Although the interior features some Greek Revival detailing, the exterior is notable for its tear drop-patterned bargeboards and sawnwork finials which provide it with the appearance of what is often referred to as "Carpenter Gothic." Other buildings which provide small reflections of the style include the W. H. H. Cowles Law Office (106 E. Main St.) with its Tudor-arched labels over facade windows and door, and the Johnson-Hubbard House with its pointed-arched panels of the entrance surround and diamond-shaped panels of the front door and corner panels of the door surround.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, late Victorian stylistic tendencies swept into Wilkesboro, leaving their mark on numerous buildings and providing the town with much of its present-day architectural character. This was probably due in part to the establishment in North Wilkesboro in 1896 of the Wilkesboro Manufacturing Company, a sash and blind factory which produced, among other things, sawnwork decorative detailing. Some of the finer examples of the late Victorian Queen Anne style in Wilkesboro have disappeared through the years, but the J. L. Hemphill House at 203 N. Brook St. remains to tell the story of this exuberant style in Wilkesboro. With its irregular massing; corner tower; use of a combination of weatherboarding, wood shingles, diagonal board sheathing, stained glass and tin shingles; and wrap-around porch with turned balustrade, spindle frieze and applied sawnwork ornamentation, the Hemphill House embodies the salient characteristics of the Queen Anne style as often interpreted in frame houses of the turn-of-the-century period in North Carolina. Numerous other houses in Wilkesboro reflect their late Victorian origins, although they are not full-blown examples of the Queen Anne style. Typical features are decorative front or wrap-around porches, bay windows, wood shingle work, stained glass trim in attic windows, eaves brackets, and wither irregular massing or a plan which incorporates a center hall with room on wither side and a three-gabled, or "triple-A", roof. Among these late Victorian houses are the Dr. Erwin House (500 E. Main St.), the Barber House (406 E. Main St.), the Dr. James Calloway House (211 E. Main St.), the W. C. Winkler House (100 S. Bridge St.), the Joseph M. Prevett House (106 W. Main St.), the Jesse T. Ferguson House (108 W. Main St.), the Episcopal Rectory (204 W. Main St.), and the Parlier-Edwards House (206 W. Main St.). Many other examples remain as well. In addition, houses of an earlier period, such as the Brown-Cowles House, were updated by the addition of decorative porch detailing.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 3

Commercial buildings of this period in Wilkesboro also display typical stylistic characteristics of the late nineteenth century. One of the most prominent examples is the Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel, built in 1891 at the N. E. corner of Broad and E. Main Streets. This three story brick structure is decorated with segmental-arched windows with hood moulds and a deep corbeled cornice across the facade. Decorative cast iron pilasters across the first story facade and a two-tiered porch wrapping around three sides of the building add to its late nineteenth century character. The most exuberant expression of late nineteenth century commercial architecture in Wilkesboro is located across the street from the Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel. The ca. 1890 J. T. Ferguson Store (111 E. Main St.) displays an impressive cast iron and pressed metal facade replete with late Victorian and classical decorative motifs. Produced by Mesker Brothers Front Builders of St. Louis, the Ferguson Store front serves as an excellent example of a building technique which gained wide popularity across America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely due to the extensive catalogues of firms such as Meskers Brothers which made it easy to view the wide range of metal details available and to order them.

During the early years of the twentieth century, two government buildings were erected in Wilkesboro which are impressive examples of classical architectural trends popular in America at that time. Both buildings make significant contributions to the quality of architecture in this county seat town. The first is the Wilkes County Courthouse, built in 1902 in the Beaux-Arts/Neo-Classical Revival style as designed by the Charlotte architectural firm of Wheeler and Runge. This large brick structure with tetrastyle Ionic portico and Second Empire cupola dominates the Courthouse Square and its surroundings and serves as a major landmark in the town as well as in Wilkes County. Built in 1915, the former Federal Building at 201 W. Main St. is a veritable essay in refined classical elegance. Its Palladian-inspired plan, its rich and delicate detailing of Roman influence, and its skilled use of terra cotta, brick, wood, marble and plaster make the building an excellent example of the Neo-Classical-influenced Federal Revival style, a part of the larger Colonial Revival movement popular during the early twentieth century.

Buildings constructed in Wilkesboro since the first quarter of the twentieth century have varied in type and quality. Although some of the older buildings in the center of town were replaced by new structures during the mid-twentieth century, more of the new construction has taken place on the outer fringes of town, especially as new housing developments have been created.

Some buildings in Wilkesboro do not fall within particular stylistic categories, but are nevertheless of great interest to the historic fabric of the town. One example is the 1858-1859 Jail (203 N. Bridge St.), a two-story brick structure, three bays wide and two deep, with low hipped roof and interior end chimneys. It is one of the best preserved examples of nineteenth century penal architecture in North Carolina. In addition, the few domestic outbuildings which remain help in presenting a more complete

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 4

picture of nineteenth and early twentieth century life in Wilkesboro. Notable examples are the frame kitchen and frame curing house of the Brown-Cowles House and the frame curing house behind the Johnson-Hubbard House. The Call House, which retains more than any other house in Wilkesboro its farmhouse character, largely because of the acreage which surrounds it, has an amazingly intact collection of outbuildings. Along with a series of barns and sheds, a frame granary, frame well house and log kitchen (now sheathed in weatherboards) with stone chimney are closely arranged around the rear of the house. The granary, well house and kitchen may date from the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when the house and its addition appear to have been built.

Although the architecture of Wilkesboro represents a century of building, the visual character of at least the older, central portion of town presents a fairly coherent, unified picture. This feeling of coherence overcomes even the more intrusive mid-twentieth century elements, and exists largely because almost all of the buildings are either of one or two stories (with only a few that are three stories), and because there is a consistency in the materials used, with most of the houses being frame, and the government buildings, commercial buildings and churches being almost exclusively brick. The majority of buildings, though of good or excellent quality of design and workmanship, are of a rather simple, vernacular character, although some -- such as the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the Wilkes County Courthouse, the former Federal Building, the Johnson-Hubbard House and the J. T. Ferguson Store -- attain relatively high degrees of sophistication.

The oldest area of Wilkesboro appears to have been encompassed within a rectangle bounded by Cowles St., Woodland Blvd., Henderson St. and Corporation St. Although not an actual grid plan, the streets are nevertheless arranged in a pattern with Main St. running through the center and the other streets running in straight lines either parallel or perpendicular to Main. Beyond this basic rectangle of the oldest area of town, the pattern of the streets takes on more variety, ranging from some areas of a near grid-like nature to others of diagonal and curved streets. Facade lines are rather irregular, ranging from buildings, especially commercial buildings, located adjacent to the sidewalk to other buildings set far back from the street, such as the Brown-Cowles House, the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church and the Wilkes County Courthouse. It appears, however, that when several buildings in a row or in the same immediate area were built at approximately the same time, that they utilized the same facade line. The large lawn which surrounds the Courthouse on Courthouse Square provides a focal point for the town and an attractive green space surrounded by buildings and parking areas. Structural density is greatest toward the center of town and along the higher elevations, and diminishes near the lowlands associated with the waterways. Advantage has been taken of one of these lowland areas in the creation of Cub Creek Park, a recreational area for the town, along Cub Creek just south of the center of Wilkesboro.

By far the largest number of buildings in Wilkesboro are residential, perhaps approximately 80-90%, with commercial, religious, governmental, educational and miscellaneous buildings making up the remaining percentage.

EXP 12-31-84

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 5

The Wilkesboro Multiple Resource Nomination was based on the Wilkesboro Historic Inventory, conducted in 1980 by architectural historian Laura A. W. Phillips, serving as consultant to the Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission. The inventory surveyed all properties of historic and/or architectural significance within the town boundaries of Wilkesboro, but did not include properties of archaeological significance. In conducting the inventory, all roads were traveled and all structures inspected. Those which were considered to be of some architectural and historic significance or interest, according to the professional judgment of the consultant, were included in the inventory, as were other properties identified by local residents as being of some historic significance. Each property included in the inventory was photographed, mapped and described, and historical data was compiled to the extent that time would allow. Interviews with property owners were held whenever possible. The nine properties included in the Multiple Resource Nomination were selected by the consultant in coordination with the Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission and the N. C. Division of Archives and History, from the overall list of 54 inventories properties, by applying the National Register criteria.

To further clarify the ownership classification as listed in Item #3, eight out of the nine properties being nominated are privately owned, the exception being the former Federal Building which is now owned by the Wilkes County Board of Education. All properties except the Thomas B. Finley Law Office are owner-occupied. The law office, however, has been rented by the same tenant for nearly 60 years.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input checked="" 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/		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

Specific dates N/A

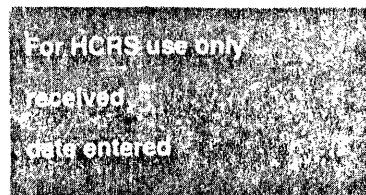
Builder/Architect N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Wilkesboro is a courthouse community containing a variety of properties of historical and architectural significance that collectively demonstrate the character of a small county seat town in western North Carolina which developed primarily during the nineteenth century. While no structures remain from the late eighteenth century beginnings of Wilkesboro, and while few reflect the town's development during the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous properties remain from the latter half of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century. These provide a relatively coherent view of a small county seat town and trade center which served as the focal point of the county for over a century. The most historically and architecturally significant of the properties remaining from the 1800–1925 period -- including three dwellings with outbuildings, two churches, two commercial buildings, two law offices and a former federal building -- are being nominated to the National Register. The 1902 Wilkes County Courthouse and the 1858–1859 Old Wilkes County Jail are already listed. Together these properties reflect the wide range and quality of historic resources which still provide Wilkesboro with its primary visual character.

Criteria Assessment --

- The nine properties included in the Multiple Resource Nomination are associated with the nineteenth and early twentieth century development of Wilkesboro as a small county seat town and trade center. Individually and collectively they make significant contribution to the present-day visual and historical character of the town.
- The properties included in the Multiple Resource Nomination are associated with the lives of prominent lawyers, politicians, merchants and religious leaders who played significant roles in the history of Wilkesboro, and in some cases, the county and state.
- The properties included in the Multiple Resource Nomination individually embody the distinctive characteristics of various architectural styles popular from the early nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, including the Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Carpenter Gothic, late Victorian, Queen Anne and Federal Revival styles. In addition, the outbuildings of the Brown-Cowles House and the Johnson-Hubbard House represent typical outbuilding forms of the nineteenth century; the Johnson-Hubbard House demonstrates the popular nineteenth century technique of marbling wood; and the J. T. Ferguson Store is representative of the nineteenth century technological innovation in the building industry which resulted in the mass production, catalog sales and wide popularity across America of decorative metal architectural elements and entire building fronts.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

The historic resources of Wilkesboro collectively demonstrate the character of a small county seat town and trade center in western North Carolina which developed primarily during the nineteenth century and served as the focal point of the county for over a century. The properties included in the Multiple Resource Nomination -- three dwellings with out-buildings, two churches, two commercial buildings, two law offices and a former federal building (the 1902 Courthouse and the 1858-1859 Jail are already listed) -- are the most historically and architecturally significant of those remaining from the 1800-1925 period.

Wilkesboro is the county seat of Wilkes County. The early history of the town and county are so closely interrelated that to understand the development of the town requires some knowledge of the creation and development of the county as a whole.

Prior to its establishment, Wilkes County was a part of Surry County which had been created from Rowan County in 1771.¹ In the midst of the Revolutionary War, the North Carolina Assembly met in 1777 and passed an act creating Wilked County, to become effective February 15, 1778.² At that time the boundaries began 26 miles west of Surry Courthouse and extended north to the Virginia line, then westward with this line to the ridge between Holston and New Rivers along the crest of that ridge to the boundary of Burke, and then eastward to the Rowan County line then along that line to a point due south of beginning.³ Subsequently land was subtracted from Wilkes and added to Surry; Ashe County was created from Wilkes in 1799, in 1841 Caldwell County was created from Burke and Wilkes, in 1849 Watauga was carved from Wilkes, Ashe, Caldwell and Yancey counties, and thereafter some additional land was added to Watauga from Wilkes.⁴

Wilkes County was named for Englishman John Wilkes, Member of Parliament, Lord Mayor of London, critic of the Tory Party and the monarchical system, and a promoter of parliamentary reform.⁵

When Wilkes County was created, the area where Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro are located was known as Mulberry Fields. A Baptist Meeting House which had existed from at least the late 1760s was located on the south side of the Yadkin River and was sometimes called the Mulberry Fields Meeting House. The first session of court in Wilkes County was held in March 1778 at John Brown's house above the Yadkin River about four miles from present-day Wilkesboro. At this time the county government was formed. The court again convened at Brown's house on June 1, 1778, but on June 2, 1778 the court met in the Mulberry Fields Meeting House. The next day the Commissioners unofficially designated this site as the place to locate public buildings. Apparently some sort of building was erected almost immediately, for court was held in it in September 1778. In 1825 the North Carolina General Assembly ordered a new courthouse to be built in the public square.⁶

The name for the county seat obviously came from the name of the county. The town name was originally spelled Wilkesborough, although by 1807 the "ugh" had been dropped and an apostrophe was often placed after the final "o". However, the name was not officially changed by the post office department until 1893.⁷

OMB 1024-0018

EXP 12-31-84

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

Although some lots were being sold in Wilkesboro in 1800, it was not until 1801 that the town was officially laid out, and it was not actually incorporated until 1847.⁸ During most of the nineteenth century Wilkesboro apparently grew in a slow but steady manner. It served not only as the county center for law and government but also as a trading center for the area. Other government buildings, law offices, stores, a hotel and dwellings sprang up around the courthouse square, and as the town grew, houses, churches and some other buildings were erected along Main Street running east and west from the square as well as on a few secondary streets.

In 1820, when the population of the whole county equalled 9963; businesses in Wilkesboro included three blacksmiths, three house carpenters, two saddlers, two cabinet makers, one tailor, one painter, a tanner and a hatter.⁹ When Elisha Mitchell, geologist for the State of North Carolina, visited Wilkes County in 1828, he described the county seat in this way: "Wilkesboro lies near the Yadkin. The river makes something of a bend and approaches the town. From the water's edge a steep hill rises suddenly and it is on the south side of this hill (sloping gradually) that the town is built. It contains 19 dwelling houses; a new Courthouse and gaol."¹⁰

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century religious services for small groups of people were held in various homes and on occasion at the courthouse. Elisha Mitchell, in fact, preached twice at the courthouse on Sunday, July 27, 1828.¹¹ During the 1830s, congregations for both the Episcopalians and Presbyterians were established and brick churches were erected for both groups in the late 1840s.¹²

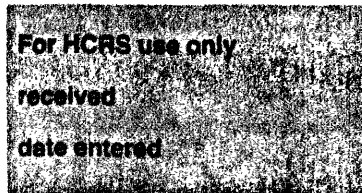
By 1807 a grammar school, called Philomathia, was located in Wilkesboro.¹³ In 1810 its charter was changed to Wilkesborough Academy, and in 1837 it became known as the Wilkesboro Seminary with a male and female department. The school continued to operate until the Civil War.¹⁴

Sympathies during the Civil War were quite mixed in Wilkes County and Wilkesboro. The area escaped without heavy physical damage to property. According to Calvin J. Cowles' diary: "March 29, 1865 Stoneman's entrance into Wilkesboro. Saw him and made appeal for protection of public and private property which were heeded."¹⁵

A major reason for the slow growth and lack of industrialization in Wilkesboro and the county was probably the fact that transportation within the county was rather poor. For years efforts had been made toward securing railroad service for the county, but without much success. Ironically, when the North Western North Carolina Railroad (later Southern Railway) finally came in 1890, it was a mixed blessing for Wilkesboro. The railroad ran on the north side of the Yadkin, stopping across the river from Wilkesboro. But instead of the county seat town reaping full benefit of this new transportation system, an entirely new town, North Wilkesboro, was developed by speculators around the depot. North Wilkesboro grew rapidly with a multitude of houses, stores, industries and other buildings erected within the first two or three decades of its existence. The new town overshadowed the old, not without some hard feelings, and even today the towns, though so close geographically, are miles apart in attitude on certain issues. While North Wilkesboro became the primary commercial and industrial center of

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

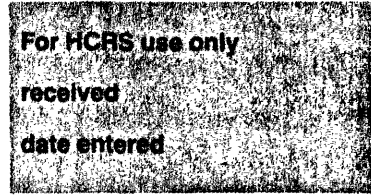
Page 3

the county, Wilkesboro retained its character as a county seat town. North Wilkesboro seems to have had some other effects on the physical character of Wilkesboro. The rash of building activity which took place around the turn of the century in Wilkesboro was likely due, at least in part, to the prosperity brought by the new town across the river. Certainly much of the decorative woodwork which embellishes many of the buildings appears to have been a direct result of the establishment in North Wilkesboro in 1896 of the Wilkesboro Manufacturing Company, a sash and blind factory.

Until after World War II, Wilkesboro continued in its pattern of slow growth, centered along one primary street -- Main Street. Even during the mid-twentieth century, business and industry has remained close to Main Street, although residential development has spread out south, southeast, west and southwest of Main Street.¹⁶ While Wilkesboro remains a center of government, it has become a center in other ways, with Wilkes Community College located here, and with some industries of great economic importance to the region -- most particularly Holly Farms Poultry Company -- based here. Yet even with the heavier growth of the mid-twentieth century, Wilkesboro's population in 1970 was less than 2,000, and the visual character of the older center of town has remained remarkably well-preserved.

The major periods of historic significance in Wilkesboro appear to have been the late eighteenth century when the county and consequently the county seat were formed; the mid-nineteenth century when some substantial buildings were erected; and again around the turn of the century when some overflow prosperity from the arrival of the railroad and the creation of North Wilkesboro were being felt in Wilkesboro. No buildings remain from the earliest years of Wilkesboro's history. However, one of the earliest buildings in town (if not the earliest) is included in the Multiple Resource Nomination. The Brown-Cowles House, believed to have been built in the early 1830s, retains some of its original Federal style detailing, although the house also reflects later nineteenth and twentieth century alterations.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church and the Johnson-Hubbard House were all built in the late 1840s and 1850s and are some of the finest buildings of any period in the town's history. (The Old Wilkes County Jail, also built during the 1850s, is already listed in the National Register.) The brick Episcopal and Presbyterian churches are excellent examples of the Gothic Revival and Greek Revival styles, respectively, while the frame Johnson-Hubbard House shows some influence of both styles (though primarily Greek) and is particularly noted for such interior details as its marbled mantels, baseboards, stair risers and ceilings.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 4

Local commerce and the important role of the legal profession are represented in the nomination by several buildings dating from the late nineteenth century. The Thomas B. Finley Law Office and the W. H. H. Cowles Law Office -- both small frame structures with influence from both Gothic and classical styles -- are the last remaining examples of this building type in Wilkesboro. The 1891 three-story brick Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel and the ca. 1890 two-story brick J. T. Ferguson Store with its elaborate cast iron and pressed metal front attest to the importance of commerce in Wilkesboro around the turn of the century. The majestic J. L. Hemphill House of 1899 is the finest remaining reflection of the Queen Anne style, popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The original purpose of Wilkesboro's existence -- to serve as a government town for the county -- is again asserted by two significant buildings of the early twentieth century. The 1902 Beaux Arts Neo-Classical Wilkes County Courthouse which dominates the center of town is already listed in the National Register. Another government building, the 1915 former Federal Building, is an impressive example of the Federal Revival style and, while in use as the Federal Building, served to point out the importance of government. It now provides an architecturally worthy home for the Wilkes County Board of Education.

The people associated with Wilkesboro's history were generally not of great historic significance, but rather tended to be important in a strictly local sense, in the way that community leaders are important in towns all over the country.

Several figures from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were significant in a broader sense, but these figures -- Daniel Boone, Benjamin Cleveland, William Lenoir and Governor Montford Stokes -- were associated with the history of Wilkes County rather than Wilkesboro as such. A rather infamous figure briefly associated with Wilkesboro was Tom Dula, who was briefly incarcerated in the Wilkes County Jail (NR) in 1866 for the death of Laura Foster, until a change of venue caused his removal to Statesville.¹⁷

Two local figures of some significance beyond the Wilkesboro area were W. H. H. Cowles and N. B. Smithey. Cowles, whose house and law office are included in the Multiple Resource Nomination, was a four-term Congressman during the 1880s and 1890s. Nike Smithey was a local merchant whose combination hotel-department store business was parlayed into a multi-million-dollar chain of seventeen stores in North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee during the first half of the twentieth century. The Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel is included in the nomination.¹⁸

No events of major significance beyond the local level are associated with the history of Wilkesboro. Events which did take place in this county seat town were typical of events associated with general development of small towns everywhere.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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received
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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 5

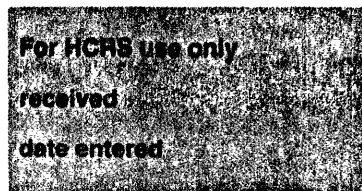
Architecture -- Wilkesboro exhibits some good-to-excellent examples of a variety of architectural styles popular in America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examples include the Federal style -- Brown-Cowles House; the Greek Revival style -- Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church and Johnson-Hubbard House; the Gothic Revival style -- St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Thomas B. Finley Law Office; examples of late Victorian period -- Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel, J. T. Ferguson Store and J. L. Hemphill House (Queen Anne), and the Federal Revival style -- former Federal Building.

Commerce -- Wilkesboro was not only the center of government for Wilkes County but also served as a trade center for the county. While commercial buildings from Wilkesboro's early history no longer exist, two buildings from the late nineteenth century demonstrate the status of commerce in the area. The three-story brick Wilkesboro Hotel was built in 1891 and served both then and after its purchase by N. B. Smithey in 1906 as the most prominent hotel in a town where there were of travelers, particularly when court was in session. Functioning also as a department store, it was the first in a multi-million-dollar chain of department stores created by N. B. Smithey. The ca. 1890 J. T. Ferguson Store asserted its prominence in the community with its lavishly ornamented cast iron and pressed metal store front. Both of these important structures are located next to Courthouse Square.

Law -- As a county seat town, Wilkesboro was the legal center for Wilkes County. Numerous lawyers practiced here, contributing not only to the legal profession but frequently to other aspects of community life as well. The Thomas B. Finley Law Office and the W. H. H. Cowles Law Office served as the offices not only for these lawyers, but also for other prominent lawyers in Wilkesboro's history.

Politics/Government -- Wilkesboro was first and foremost the county seat of Wilkes County, and as such was the location of the primary government buildings in the county. Of particular note are the 1902 Wilkes County Courthouse (NR), the 1858-1859 Old Wilkes County Jail (NR), and the 1915 former Federal Building. Aside from their importance because of their use, these buildings also make special architectural contributions to the townscape.

Religion -- With congregations established in the 1830s, St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church are among the oldest congregations of their respective denominations in Western North Carolina, and as such, played a role in the spread of organized religion in this part of North Carolina during the early nineteenth century. The church buildings themselves, built between 1848 and 1850, are among the finest and oldest buildings in Wilkesboro and are excellent examples of the Gothic Revival (Episcopal) and Greek Revival (Presbyterian) styles.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 6

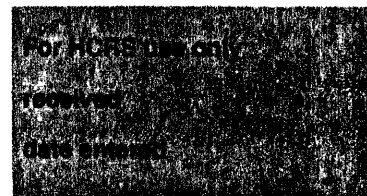
The majority of buildings of historical significance or interest in Wilkesboro have been well-maintained through the years so that actual "restoration" efforts have not been necessary. For the most part private individuals have been good stewards of their historic properties. Two larger-scale efforts in recent years should be mentioned. These are the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church, whose small but faithful congregation has undertaken a program of restoration and preservation maintenance since the early 1960s, and the Old Wilkes County Jail (NR) which was restored in 1971 with financial assistance from the State of North Carolina. It now houses a museum and library. In addition to physical preservation efforts in Wilkesboro, in the mid 1970s the Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission was established by means of state enabling legislation. It has been the local sponsor for the Wilkesboro Historic Inventory and the Wilkesboro Multiple Resource Nomination.

Nine individual properties of historic and/or architectural significance were chosen for inclusion in the Multiple Resource Nomination, because individually they meet the National Register criteria and because collectively they provide a relatively comprehensive view of the various aspects of a county seat town which developed primarily during the nineteenth century. Although some of the properties are located close together, a district was not created because there are enough properties of a non-contributing or intrusive character to sufficiently detract from the visual continuity of the area that would likely have composed the district.

Although St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Cemetery and the Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church are religious structures, and as such are generally exempt from listing in the National Register, they are included in the Wilkesboro Multiple Resource Nomination because, in addition to their significance in connection with the religious history of western North Carolina, they are both of considerable architectural importance in Wilkesboro. The 1848-1849 Episcopal church is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style and the Presbyterian church (1849-1850) is a fine example of the Greek Revival style. (For additional information, refer to the individual property materials for these buildings.)

It is expected that the compilation of materials on the 54 properties included in the Wilkesboro Historic Inventory will be utilized by the Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission and the Town of Wilkesboro, both for the promotion of the preservation of Wilkesboro's historic resources and as part of general town planning processes, where appropriate.

At the state level, the information gathered on the inventory computer forms will form the data base of the architectural portion of the Cultural Resources Evaluation Programs (CREP). CREP will allow a full range of data management capabilities including the sorting, selecting, reporting, analyzing and graphical mapping of these resources so that they can more easily be considered in state-wide planning processes of various types.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

7

FOOTNOTES --

¹Jay Anderson, Wilkes County Sketches, Wilkes County Bicentennial Edition; Wilkesboro: By the Author, 1978, p. 1.

²Johnson J. Hayes, The Land of Wilkes, Wilkesboro: Wilkes Co. Historical Society, 1962, p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 2.

⁴Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁵Anderson, p. 3.

⁶Hayes, pp. 12-13.

⁷Anderson, p. 27.

⁸Ibid., pp. 28, 30.

⁹Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹²Refer to individual property MRN materials on St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church for further information.

¹³Anderson, p. 31.

¹⁴Hayes, p. 198.

¹⁵Anderson, p. 52.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁷Hayes, pp. 176-177.

¹⁸For additional information on Cowles and Smithey, refer to the individual MRN materials.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Anderson, J. Jay. Wilkes County Sketches. Wilkes County Bicentennial Edition.
Wilkesboro: By the Author, 1978.
Hayes, Johnson J. The Land of Wilkes. Wilkesboro: Wilkes Co. Historical
Society, 1962.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property (see individual property forms)

Quadrangle name Wilkesboro, N. C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References (see individual property forms)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A			B		
C			D		
E			F		
G			H		

Verbal boundary description and justification The Multiple Resource Area is located within the incorporation limits of Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, North Carolina, as outlines in red on the accompanying map labeled "Wilkesboro Multiple Resource Area." Refer to individual property forms for the verbal boundary descriptions of the individual properties included within this nomination.

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

state	code	county	code
N/A		N/A	

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Consultant for Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission

organization

date

May 1981

street & number 637 N. Spring Street telephone 919/727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem

state

North Carolina 27101

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

William S. Phillips

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date

July 13, 1982

For NPS use only

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

Barbara A. Phillips
Keeper of the National Register

date 2-24-82

Attest: *Carma Jane Saxe*
Chief of Registration

date 8-24-82

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

1 of 1

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Wilkesboro Multiple Resource Area
State North Carolina

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

2. Brown-Cowles House and Cowles
Law Office
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

3. Federal Building
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

4. Ferguson, J. T., Store
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

5. St. Paul's Episcopal Church
and Cemetery
Substantive Review

Keeper

Anna Lee Boyd 10/19/82

Attest

Patricia Andrews 10/6/82

6. Finley, Thomas B., Law Office
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

7. Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

8. Hemphill, J. L., House
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

9. Johnson-Hubbard House
Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Delores Byers 8/24/82

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest