

# HISTORIC RESOURCES OF GREENSBORO, GREENE COUNTY, GEORGIA

## HISTORIC DISTRICT #5

### I. IDENTIFICATION

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**NAME OF DISTRICT: Mary Leila Cotton Mill and Village**

**LOCATION:** Northwest of downtown Greensboro, in the vicinity of Mill, West Cherry, North Laurel, Sycamore, Spring, West, and Richland Streets

**CITY:** Greensboro

**COUNTY:** Greene (code 133)

**STATE:** Georgia (code 013)

**ZIP CODE:** 30642

**CLASSIFICATION:** District

**CURRENT USES:** Industrial, Residential, Commercial

**ACREAGE:** 47 acres

**U.S.G.S. QUADRANGLE:** Greensboro, Ga.

**U.T.M. REFERENCES:**

- (A) Z17 E297230 N3717800
- (B) Z17 E297520 N3717540
- (C) Z17 E297240 N3717160
- (D) Z17 E296500 N3717440
- (E) Z17 E296610 N3717780

### II. DESCRIPTION

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#### DESCRIPTION

General character, appearance, and historical development: The district is a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mill community with approximately 75 mill worker houses and an industrial complex. Mill worker houses are one-story frame dwellings in a variety of styles and types which include shotgun, Victorian Eclectic, and Bungalow. Richland Street in the northeast corner of the district is lined with several structures which predate the mill development. Richland Street was an early road which led to Athens and was in existence at the time the mill community was constructed. The industrial complex includes a collection of brick buildings. These include the multi-storied manufacturing building, two brick warehouses, a frame warehouse, and a nonhistoric office building.

Natural terrain, natural landmarks, geographic features: The terrain throughout the district is rolling. Sycamore Street is located on a ridge line. Mill Street between Highway 15 (Laurel Street) and Spring Street is the only expanse of flat topography within the district and contains a large ballfield. The grid street pattern has been laid out without regard to the topography. There is a small creek within the district, located slightly north of the industrial complex.

Various parts of the district: Highway 15 (Laurel Street) forms a division within the district. To the west of the highway, the village development is fairly uniform. Most of the structures

are shotgun houses. To the east the pattern of development is more varied. Located in this area are several different types of mill worker houses, the grouping of structures on Richland Street which predates the village, and the industrial complex.

Pattern of land subdivision: The basic mill village layout is a grid pattern with minor modifications. Richland Street, due to its earlier date, follows the topography, and Sycamore Street curves at its northern end to follow the ridge line. The grid design also included alleys between streets. The alley alignment is the most obvious between Mill Street and Cherry Street between Sycamore and Maple. An alley also exists behind the dwellings on Mill Street facing the open ballfield.

Arrangement or placement of buildings: The residential structures are sited in the center of small rectangular lots at similar setbacks to the road. Buildings within the industrial complex are sited in locations with access to the railroad. The main manufacturing building is located in the middle of a large rectangular tract between West Street and Spring Street. This structure faces the railroad, which places the building at an angle to the surrounding roads. The two brick warehouses and office building are in symmetrical arrangements to the streets. The frame warehouse is located on Greene Street at the southern edge of the historic district.

Architectural characteristics: There are three different styles/types of mill worker houses in the district: Shotgun: The shotgun dwellings are long, rectangular, frame structures with the narrow ends facing the street. The dwellings are situated on brick piers with granite stoops and contain interior chimneys. There are two variations of shotguns within the district. The first type, which is more Victorian, is the most numerous and is found in the western section of the district. These dwellings have gabled roofs with the gables facing the street, shed front porches supported by square posts, and rear shed porches. There is a 6/6 window and wooden paneled door on the front facades beneath the entrance porches. The second type of shotgun, found in the eastern section of the district, is more Craftsman-inspired. These shotguns have hipped roofs which extend to create the front porch space and exposed rafter ends. There is no window on the front facade of the Craftsman shotgun; light is provided through an entrance door with one-half glass and three horizontal wooden panels. Victorian: The Victorian-inspired houses within the district are frame dwellings, almost square in plan. Many are duplex residences and contain two front doors and shed front porches with sawtooth detailing. Roofs are hipped or gabled with interior or side chimneys. Windows are 6/6. Craftsman: Craftsman structures are rectangular in plan with gabled and hipped roofs, interior chimneys, and front porches. One Craftsman variation has stucco siding, a hipped roof which extends to create a front porch, a gabled dormer on the front facade with a half circle attic vent, and exposed rafter ends. Porches in this variation are either

located on the side or in the center of the front facade and are enclosed by wooden balustrades and supported with square porch posts. Other Craftsman-inspired dwellings in the district are sheathed in weatherboard. Major alterations to the mill dwellings have been the addition of side rooms, the enclosure of rear porches, the infill of the foundations, the addition of asphalt siding, and reroofing with asphalt shingles over the original metal roofs.

Other building types within the district include residences that predate the village, the industrial complex, and other miscellaneous structures: Pre-village structures: At the northeastern edge of the district along Richland Street and West Street there are several dwellings which predate the mill village. Most of these structures are Victorian Eclectic dwellings. Typical characteristics include weatherboard siding, gabled roofs, side chimneys, and shed front porches with gingerbread detailing. There is one dwelling of brick, the John Godkin Residence, located to the east of the intersection of West Street and Richland Street. This is a one-story brick antebellum structure of Greek Revival design with a hipped roof, two interior chimneys, a front porch with a wooden balustrade and square porch posts, trabeated front entrance door with side lights and transom, and central hall plan. Industrial complex: The major building in the industrial complex is the multi-storied brick manufacturing building. This structure features segmental arched windows (many now covered), brick corbeling, and a square tower. The building as it exists today results from three distinct periods of construction. The original part of the mill, built in 1899, is the two-story brick structure with segmental-arched eight-over-eight-over-eight windows and bracketed eaves. A major historic expansion made in 1912 consists of a two-story brick building with a mixture of segmental and rectangular windows which have been infilled with glass block. In 1957 a one-story brick addition was added to the rear of the mill. There is also a historic water tower and a brick smoke stack within the complex. Other industrial buildings include two brick warehouses, a frame warehouse, and a brick office building. One brick warehouse is located beside the depot. Support buildings: There are other miscellaneous support buildings within the mill and mill village. These include two store buildings, a church, and a number of garages. Both store buildings are modest frame structures. One is located in the center of the village on Highway 15 and the other is located on Sycamore Street. The church is a modest historic wood-framed structure on Highway 15, now sheathed in nonhistoric siding. Most of the garages within the district are frame structures in varying states of disrepair. Of special interest is one double garage structure located on Mill Street which is sheathed in metal shingles.

Landscape characteristics: The landscape character of the village is a rolling grassed and treed terrain. Major trees within the district include oaks and pecans. The most dominant streetscape element within the district is granite curbing. This

curbing is uniform throughout the district, and at the edges of the western section of the district the curbing has been used to delineate the district boundary. Granite curbing at the western end of Mill Street where the topography is the most severe has been used to form low rock walls. Other streetscape elements include concrete sidewalks and a few concrete street signs or posts. There is an open space in the center of the district which has historically been used as a ballfield. To the west of the industrial complex there is another open area, basically a bog with high grasses and moist soils. This area originally contained the mill pond which was used in the utility operations of the mill.

Archaeological potential: unknown

Anomalous Features: The only exception to the general character of the village is the collection of structures in the northeast corner of the district which predate the mill village. The John Godkin House is the only brick dwelling within the district. These structures were "absorbed" into the mill village during its development in the early 20th century.

CONDITION: Good to Fair

CONTRIBUTING/NONCONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES:

Noncontributing properties (including both intrusions and nonhistoric properties) have been noted on the attached map of the district. The criteria for their notation is as follows: Intrusions are generally of one type. They are modern buildings that have been constructed since World War II. Due to their design, proportions, massing, siting, materials, and other features, they distract from the district and are in visual contrast to the surroundings. Nonhistoric structures have been built after the district's period of significance has passed. While these structures tend to blend into the district in terms of their design, proportions, massing, siting, materials, and other features, they do not contribute to the historic significance of the district. The only intrusion in the district is a modern dwelling at the corner of Mill Street and Maple Street. This residence is a one-story frame structure sheathed in wide metal siding with shutters and jalousie windows. These details are in contrast to the common historic elements found throughout the district. The only non-historic property in the district is a brick office building. This is a one-story structure with a hipped roof, industrial sash windows, and recessed entrance door framed with pilasters. (SEE list at end of Section IV.)

BOUNDARIES:

The district boundaries are shown on the accompanying map and generally include the historic Mary Leila Cotton Mill and the mill village that was developed for the operatives of the mill. This boundary encompasses the historic dwellings and industrial

structures associated with this mill as well as earlier historic dwellings in proximity to the mill complex which were "absorbed" into the mill village as it developed during the early 20th century. Nonhistoric development is located to the west and northwest of the proposed district. Open land lies to the southwest. Historic development which is included in other districts and individual nominations borders the district on the east and south. The city cemetery and another individual historic property are located to the northeast.

PHOTOGRAPHS: 71-95

### III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

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DATES OF DEVELOPMENT: 1899-1934

#### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

The City of Greensboro became interested in attracting industry to the community in the late 1800's. A new waterworks system was installed in 1898. The newspaper reported in January 1899 that a group had met to discuss how to induce manufacturers to locate in the area. It was suggested that a society for the development of trade and industry be established, and by April of that year such a group, the Greene County Development Company, had been formed. Almost immediately, subscriptions were solicited for the establishment of a cotton factory at Greensboro. The mill was established by E. A. Copelan and W. R. Jackson and named for the combined names of their wives--Mary and Leila. On May 24, 1899, the stockholders of the Mary Leila Cotton Mill Incorporated held their first meeting at the Greene County Courthouse. There were 68 original stockholders. The newspaper reported that the charter had been granted and five acres of land had been tendered by the Greene County Development Company. Bricks for the plant were being made in Wilkes County on the Little River. The expected cost was \$100,000. By June 1900 the plant was ready to open with jobs for 100 residents. The original product was Class C cotton sheeting. The plant was powered by steam generated by wood- and coal-burning boilers. The management of the mill remained with the founding families for the first 50 years. E. A. Copelan was named president in 1899, followed by W. R. Jackson in 1904. Copelan was president for a second time beginning in 1913. W. R. Jackson, Jr. was president from 1918 until 1946.

The existing mill village developed around the industrial complex. The houses were built by the company as residences for the workforce. The village was bordered on the north by Richland Street, which served as an early transportation route between Athens and Greensboro, and the northeast by the city cemetery, which had been the site of an early school and community chapel. Several residences were in existence in this area at the time the mill community was developed. These included three antebellum dwellings--the Branch House, the Judge James W. Godkin House (now

moved), and the John Godkin House. Several of these earlier structures were acquired by the mill and were used as mill housing. As an example, the Judge Godkin house was bought by Mary Leila Cotton Mill in 1920 and was converted into a boarding house for mill workers. In considering the style and design of the mill dwellings, it appears that the western section of the district and all development on Mill Street may have been a first phase. The Victorian-inspired structures in these areas appear to be older than the Craftsman-style dwellings found in the eastern parts of the district. The only Sanborn fire insurance map reference to this area appears in 1921; the Craftsman residences are in existence at that time. Also shown on this map was a collection of houses (now demolished) slightly north of the industrial complex and beside the small creek which were noted to be "colored dwellings".

Amenities within the village included several store buildings, a church, and a ballfield. According to Carey Williams, Sr., one of Greensboro's eldest citizens, the mill purchased the ballfield property in the early 1900's. The mill had a semi-professional baseball team beginning about 1917. The team played for approximately 10 years and won several championships. The sport appears to have been promoted by a son of the superintendent of the mill at that time.

By the 1930s the mill was employing approximately 300 people with typical salaries in the \$0.30-0.40 per hour range. According to local sources, during the Depression there was resentment by the workers over the perception that the management was prospering at their expense. Organizers from the Textile Workers Union of America came to the mill and set up a local union. The union remained in effect until the workers voluntarily ended it with the purchase of the mill by Wellington Puritan in 1972. Wellington Puritan, a company from Madison, Georgia, with another plant in Athens was considering building a new mill in Lincolnton, Georgia. The offer to buy the existing mill with a trained workforce prompted their acquisition of the property. Prior to their purchase the mill houses had been sold to private individuals between 1954-57 and improvements had been made to the manufacturing building in the late 1960s. These improvements included a \$500,000 one-story addition, replacement of wood supports with steel members, and the addition of concrete floors and new machinery. Wellington Puritan still retains ownership and operation of the mill and today produces cordage material.

#### IV. SIGNIFICANCE

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NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA: A, C

AREA(S) OF SIGNIFICANCE: Industry, Community Planning and Development, Architecture, Landscape Architecture

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1899-1934

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: local

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architecture. The Mary Leila Cotton Mill and Village Historic District is important in architecture for its fine collection of mill and mill village architecture. The most numerous historic buildings include mill houses of shotgun, Victorian, and Craftsman design. Most of these residences are frame dwellings with modest detailing. Front and rear porches are typical features. These buildings are typical of the mill housing built for mill workers throughout Georgia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their stylistic influences reflect the periods in which they were built--late Victorian for the earlier houses built at the turn of the century, Craftsman for the houses built during the early 20th century. The industrial complex includes buildings which are representative of late 19th-century industrial complexes in smaller Georgia towns. Most impressive is the multi-storied manufacturing building, constructed of brick with segmental arched windows. This structure is the largest in the complex and features a square tower. Its size, overall design, and construction materials and techniques are characteristic of the masonry-and-timber mills built throughout Georgia from the late 19th through the early 20th centuries. Other support buildings within the industrial complex include two brick warehouses and a brick smoke stack, also characteristic of their types. Support buildings within the mill village include two frame store structures, a church, and a variety of garages.

Also significant architecturally is a collection of houses which existed in the area of the district prior to the village's construction. These include the antebellum brick John Godkin House as well as several frame dwellings which appear to date from the late 1800's. These dwellings are representative of middle class housing in Greensboro during historic times. The survival of the brick antebellum house is especially noteworthy since the majority of antebellum houses in Greensboro and other smaller Georgia towns are built of wood.

Community Planning. In terms of community planning, the mill and mill village district is important for representing the new industrial towns built in the South in the late nineteenth century. These communities were established for the sole purpose of providing housing and other domestic accommodations for the large numbers of new mill workers, many of whom were recruited from the agricultural hinterland. Almost always, these mill villages were located on the outskirts of the community in which they were established, partly because of the availability of land and partly out of the desire on the part of the mill owners to create a semi-independent mill community. Always, the mill was the focal point of the community. The villages were laid out with grid-iron streets lined with modest mill cottages. The purpose of these complexes was to provide housing for the workforce in proximity to the mill. These communities became in

essence "cities within cities." Amenities within the Mary Leila mill village included several neighborhood stores, churches, and a recreation field; such neighborhood amenities were typical of mill villages in Georgia.

Industry. The establishment of the Mary Leila Cotton Mill at Greensboro was part of the "New South" industrial movement that swept across Georgia and the South from the 1880s into the 20th century. This movement encouraged the location of traditionally Northern industries, especially textiles, in the South. The creation of the Mary Leila Cotton Mill marked a new direction for Greensboro's economy and played its part in the larger industrialization of Georgia. Prior to that time Greensboro had served primarily as the service center for a farming economy. The Mary Leila Cotton Mill also represents the first major diversification of Greensboro's traditional farming economy. In industry, this mill is also unique for its ties to organized labor. There are few mills in the South which have joined national labor organizations and even fewer who have joined and ended those ties approximately 40 years later.

Landscape Architecture. In landscape architecture, the Mary Leila Cotton Mill and Village is important since historic landscape features tie the various elements of the mill village together into one cohesive community. Street trees, open lawns, sidewalks, and curbs are simple yet effective historic landscape features that help create a special sense of historic neighborhood in the district. An important open space within the district is the ballfield. Located at approximately the center of the district, this space has functioned as a neighborhood park. It also reflects the late 19th- and early 20th-century concern for recreation in landscaped parks and playgrounds. This is the major historic "landscaped" recreation ground in Greensboro, and is typical of the historic recreation areas provided in Georgia's mill villages.

#### CONTRIBUTING/NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

97 contributing buildings  
2 contributing sites (landscaping, recreational park)  
3 noncontributing buildings  
102 total resources

#### VII. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

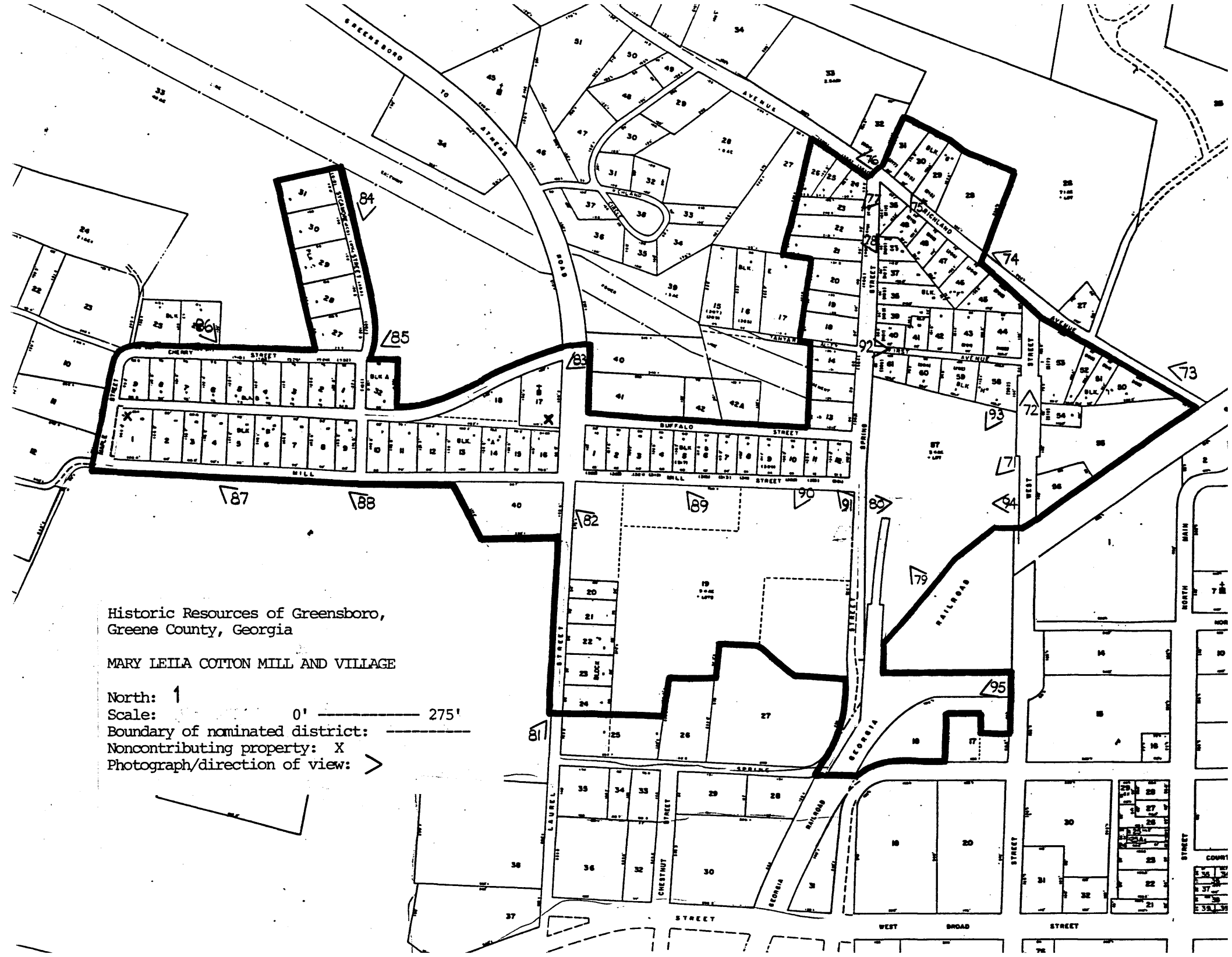
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REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS: Historic Structures Field Survey: Green County, Georgia (state-level survey)

BIBLIOGRAPHY: SEE Bibliography, Section 9, National Register Nomination Form

FORM PREPARED BY: SEE Form Prepared By, Section 11, National Register Nomination Form





Historic Resources of Greensboro,  
Greene County, Georgia

MARY LEILA COTTON MILL AND VILLAGE

North: ↑

Scale: 0' ————— 275'

Boundary of nominated district: ————

Noncontributing property: X

Photograph/direction of view: ➤

