



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES APPLICATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Vidalia Commercial Historic District
other names/site number Downtown Vidalia

2. Location

street & number McIntosh, Church, Jackson, Main, and Main Streets
city, town Vidalia (n/a) vicinity of
county Toombs code GA 279
state Georgia code GA zip code 30474

(n/a) not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property:

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
buildings	69	22
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	69	22

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Mark R. Edwards

Signature of certifying official

August 19, 1996
Date

Mark R. Edwards
State Historic Preservation Officer,
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

() determined eligible for the National Register

() determined not eligible for the National Register

() removed from the National Register

() other, explain:

() see continuation sheet

Edson H. Beall *9-27-96*

Entered in the
National Register

Signature, Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/business
COMMERCE/professional
COMMERCE/financial institution
COMMERCE/specialty store
COMMERCE/department store
COMMERCE/restaurant
GOVERNMENT/post office
FUNERARY/mortuary
HEALTH CARE/medical business
TRANSPORTATION/rail related
TRANSPORTATION/road related

Current Functions:

COMMERCE/business
COMMERCE/professional
COMMERCE/specialty store
COMMERCE/restaurant
GOVERNMENT/city hall
FUNERARY/mortuary
HEALTH CARE/medical business
TRANSPORTATION/road related

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

OTHER: 20th Century Commercial
OTHER: Commercial Victorian Vernacular
OTHER: Stripped Classical
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival
MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco
MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Moderne

Materials:

foundation brick; concrete
walls brick
roof asphalt
other stone

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Vidalia Commercial Historic District consists of intact commercial buildings which form the historic core of the central business district of Vidalia. The City of Vidalia developed around the railroad with the streets running parallel and perpendicular to the rail lines. The historic commercial area is at the center of the business district at the intersection of Church Street and the railroad tracks.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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The buildings within this commercial area include one- to three-story attached buildings and one- to two-story freestanding buildings. The buildings represent the Commercial Vernacular Victorian style with decorative brickwork, the Neoclassical Revival style, simpler 20th-Century Commercial, Stripped Classical, and Colonial Revival styles, as well as the Art Moderne and Art Deco influences.

The two intact historic bank buildings have the most architectural detailing. The previously National Register-listed Citizens Bank of Vidalia is an elaborate Commercial Vernacular Victorian-style, one-story, brick building with parapet roof, decorative brickwork, and polychromatic glass. The former First National Bank is a Colonial Revival-style, two-story, brick building with a marble cornice, keystones, and pilasters, arched window and door openings, and brick chimneys.

Adjacent to the railroad tracks, Rigdon Printing building is one-story, brick building with a parapet roof and monitor. The printing company, the funeral home with castellated parapet, service stations, and community landmark buildings are the freestanding buildings in the district.

The historic community landmark buildings include the former United States Post Office and the railroad depot (c.1910). Now City Hall, the old post office is a Neoclassical Revival building with a mural, constructed in 1937 by the WPA. This freestanding, single-story building with basement was built in 1937 as the U.S. Post Office and became Vidalia's City Hall in 1975 when a new post office was built. It is a square-shaped Neoclassical Revival style building, constructed of stucco over brick, with a temple front, pedimented portico supported by four Tuscan columns, and a square central one-story monitor crowning a hipped roof. Under the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, Daniel Celentano painted a mural on a wall on the first floor. Two sections of the mural remain today.

Constructed c.1910, and renovated in 1989, the Georgia Central Depot (currently the CSX Railroad offices) is a one-story brick building which is the last surviving structure of several former railroad buildings on the main median. The loading dock, or platform, originally extended around the building to include approximately one-fourth of the length of its southern facade. The structural support bricks for this side of the platform are still clearly visible. The depot's gable roof extends over a large loading dock on the east end, supported by simple posts and supports.

There is no landscaping, only concrete sidewalks and the railroad running through the district with grass on either side of the tracks.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Commerce
Politics and Government
Community Planning and Development
Transportation

Period of Significance:

c.1900-1946

Significant Dates:

c.1900

Significant Person(s):

n/a

Cultural Affiliation:

n/a

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Ivey P. Crutchfield, architect
Daniel Celentano, artist
John T. Ragan Company, builder

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

Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)

The Vidalia Commercial Historic District is the historic commercial center of Vidalia.

The district is significant in architecture for its historic commercial and community landmark buildings constructed from c.1900 to the mid 1940s. The commercial buildings are typical of the types of masonry buildings constructed in Georgia towns for commercial use. The buildings represent the Commercial Vernacular Victorian style with decorative brickwork, Neoclassical Revival style, simpler 20th-Century Commercial, Stripped Classical, and Colonial Revival styles, as well as the Art Moderne and Art Deco influence.

The district is also significant due to the designs of prominent Georgia architect Ivey P. Crutchfield (1878-1952). He designed several of the buildings within the district including the Neoclassical Revival-style First National Bank building.

The district is significant in commerce for its historic central business district that served the commercial needs of Vidalia and the surrounding areas. This commercial activity is represented by the remaining historic commercial buildings. Historically, the commercial buildings housed drug stores, specialty shops, restaurants, automobile dealerships, hardware stores, banks, business offices, as well as other retail and professional businesses.

Vidalia is significant in politics and government for the WPA Post Office (1937) and mural representing the Federal government's attempt to provide employment and economic stimulus during the depression as a part of President Roosevelt's New Deal package. Daniel Celentano, the artist of the mural, was required to ensure his subject was a "permanent record of the aspirations and achievements of the American people." The mural's depiction is derived from social realism and regionalism artistic styles which have passed from view since WWII. The mural is significant politically because it documents social and cultural attitudes of the New Deal philosophy of Depression-era America.

The district is significant in community planning and development for the development of a small railroad community with an intact cross-rail type town plan, a significant type of planned community in Georgia. The town of Vidalia began to develop after the coming of the

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Savannah, Americus & Montgomery (SAM) railroad just before the turn of the century.

The district is significant in transportation for the very important role of the railroad in the town's existence and development. The arrival of the SAM railroad during the 1890s stimulated the development of Vidalia and lead to Vidalia being the commercial center of the region. By 1910 there were four lines running through Vidalia with timber and tobacco being the major products shipped. The remaining rail lines, depot, intact town plan, commercial buildings, and automobile dealerships represent the transportation history of Vidalia.

National Register Criteria

The Vidalia Commercial Historic District is eligible under Criteria A and C for its good and intact examples of early-20th-century commercial and community landmark buildings and its significance in the commercial, governmental, developmental, and transportation history of Vidalia.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

n/a

Period of significance (justification)

The earliest building dates to c.1900 and 1946 marks the end of the historic period.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The contributing buildings were built within the period of significance and retain their historic integrity. The noncontributing buildings were either built outside the period of significance or have lost their integrity due to alterations.

Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)

NOTE: The following historical narrative was written by Gail Whalen and Robin Nail as a part of the "Vidalia Commercial Historic District," Historic District Information Form. On file at the

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Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

Present-day Vidalia/Toombs County was originally part of the land of the Creek Indians and was known as the Wiregrass Section of Georgia. As early as 1784, surveyors set boundaries for "soldier bounties," land grants issued to the state of Georgia which in turn, were granted to former Revolutionary War soldiers. Vidalia and its surrounding area was settled primarily by Scotsmen coming mostly from North Carolina. 1 The earliest known settlement by white men was in 1800, when Malcolm McMillan from North Carolina pitched a camp in what is now Vidalia. 2 The tract of land granted to McMillan came into possession of Roderick McIntosh, who sold the original tract to Daniel McIntyre by a deed dated January 1, 1836. Other early settlers included Wilkes, Thompsons, Petersons and Phillips. In 1850, 101 heads of households were listed in an unofficial census, showing an abundance of Scotch-Irish surnames. This suggests that McMillan was successful in convincing his countrymen to settle this new area of Georgia. Settlers from the early to mid 19th century raised sheep, corn, cotton, and other crops. The area also proved ideal for timber production, with the nearby Altamaha, Ochopee, and Oconee rivers making it possible to move the cut timber. By the turn of the 19th century, gum turpentine and timber became the major agricultural pursuits. As the land was stripped of its trees, cotton, hides, and tallow became major products. 3

Daniel McIntyre owned the bulk of land which evolved into downtown Vidalia. 4 After his death, he left his property to his granddaughters, Elizabeth and Caroline. On December 4, 1889, Thomas and Freeman Thompson (who owned property adjoining the McIntyre estate) and the McIntyre sisters entered into a contract with the Americus Investment Company. They agreed to donate the land for a railroad depot and additional lands for development. On April 3, 1890, the area comprising the downtown station area and early central business district was swapped between the McIntyres/Thompsons and the Americus Investment Company. A year before the swap, in 1889, Warren T. Jenkins, credited as the "founder" of Vidalia, arrived searching for new land to replace that North Carolina timberland which had been stripped of its slow growing long-leaf yellow and slash pine. He met and formed a partnership with Jim McNatt, another large landowner in the area, for the production of gum turpentine used in the manufacture of naval stores. 5 After a depot designation was obtained through the Americus Investment Company's negotiations with the Savannah, Americus & Montgomery Railroad (SAM), Jenkins and McNatt moved their turpentine still close to where the proposed railroad was to be located. 6 It was their request for supplies from

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the railroad that led the SAM to make its first scheduled stop in the area. 7

Although originally called "Jenkins Station," the town is believed to have been named by a daughter of Sam Hawkins, president and owner of the SAM Railroad. She was paid \$5 for every town she named on the line. It is said that in studying railroad maps, she saw the name Vidalia, Louisiana, liked it, and gave it to this community. 8 The town of Vidalia was incorporated in 1893 and changed its municipal standing to "City of Vidalia" in 1907. 9 Montgomery County contained the Vidalia site from 1793 until 1905, when Toombs County was created by an act of the legislature, and Vidalia became a part of it. Lyons, which had been a part of Tattnall County, was selected as the Toombs county seat in 1905 since it was the larger of the two towns and was more centrally located. 10

From the earliest days, the citizens of Vidalia worked together in an effort to bring progress to the city. On numerous occasions, citizen committees met with railroad executives, influencing them to bring their lines to Vidalia rather than a neighboring town. The following excerpts from The Montgomery Monitor newspaper illustrate just how important rail traffic was to the developing area, and the constant competition between the developing towns:

January 24, 1889. The hopes for a railroad are dead. The Monitor asks why Mt. Vernon cannot at least have a telephone.

April 3, 1890. The Savannah, Americus & Montgomery R.R. is running off lots for their newly created town of Vidalia. James McNatt is refurbishing his turpentine still there and Collins Brothers will soon have their blacksmith shop in operation. 11

Railroads continued to be critical to the growth and development of Vidalia and Toombs County during the early 20th century. By 1901, the Seaboard Air Line Railway had the right-of-way along Southeast Main Street. 12 The next year, the Macon, Dublin, and Savannah Railroad extended from Dublin to join the SAM Railroad in Vidalia. 13 Thus, Vidalia had become an important railroad hub by 1910, with at least four lines serving the city: Seaboard Air Line; Macon, Dublin, and Savannah; Millen and Southwestern; and Georgia Coast and Piedmont. With the addition of the Georgia and Florida Line in 1917, the city had five railroads running through it (tracks ran in seven different directions). In 1917, direct lines were available "in busy season" to Savannah, Macon, Augusta, and Florida's cities, with 10 to 14 passenger trains scheduled daily. In addition, some 500 cars of freight were handled each day. 14

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Until the 1970s, two local landmarks rose above the median along Railroad Avenue. The coal chute and water tank that had long supplied fuel and steam power for the many locomotives outlived the advent of diesel and gasoline powered engines. They were the last two structures to be removed from the familiar linear landscape that had included the Union Station passenger depot, two freight depots, and a train car service turntable. Located at the far western edge of Railroad Avenue, facing the bisected block of Leader and Main streets, the brick passenger depot (Union Station) was a fish hook-shaped building dominated by its two-story corner tower with bellcast conical roof. It also featured a Ludowici tile roof, dormer windows, and wide overhanging eaves with brackets. The water tower, which was the tallest structure in the area for nearly forty years, stood almost directly in front of Union Station. The tank's swivelling hoses pivoted almost 360 degrees, enabling trains to be serviced from either side of the structure. East of Union Station along Railroad Avenue was the first freight depot. Rectangular in shape, this one story building had an elevated wooden platform and overhanging roof and ran nearly the length of the block between Church and Leader streets immediately adjacent to the proposed historic district's western boundary. Continuing east, roughly one-third of the way between Durden and Jackson streets, the coal chute stood nearly 70 feet high. Like the water tower, the coal chute had a sluice that pivoted for ease of service. 15 The second freight depot, the only extant historic railroad structure in Vidalia, is located just east of Jackson Street along Railroad Avenue within the proposed historic district. It is a brick building similar in form and layout to the other freight depot, but without the lengthy wooden platforms and wide eaves. Only that portion of the platform which is attached to the structure remains today. The depot has been renovated in recent years for office use by CSX Railroad. (See Exceptions/Anomalies for more complete description.) 16

In the early 1900s, Vidalia was served by "clayed" highways as well as extensive rail lines. Automobile travel was made easy and comfortable, and allowed for some trucking of local manufactured goods. Efforts within the city itself showed that claying a road was a viable alternative to more expensive concrete paving. For example, on May 31, 1911, the city council approved \$200 to clay Church Street.

The true heart of Vidalia, however, was the railroad. The city's commercial area was laid out in a grid pattern, divided by railroad lines running east and west. North and South Main streets, formerly known as Railroad Avenue, run on either side and parallel to the tracks. Meadows Street is one block south of the railroad and also runs parallel to the tracks, while First Street (U.S. 280) is a block

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farther south. The Old City Cemetery is located in the block south of First Street. The major downtown business streets running north and south were, and still are, Jackson on the east and Church Street on the west. Church Street becomes McIntosh as it runs north and crosses the railroad tracks. This pattern of streets was not formally designed by a developer or architect, but rather followed the most logical progression of constructing warehouses, support facility buildings and other commercial structures parallel to the railroad tracks and existing blocks. Zoning to separate commercial, industrial and residential areas was nonexistent in early 20th century Vidalia. There were some private residences in the downtown area early on, but the largest concentrations appear to have been south of First Street, extending as far as Sixth or Seventh Street, and north of the railroad tracks, north of Pine Street. The area south of First Street contained the homes of the city's most prosperous white residents. Many of these structures are now gone, most having been demolished as the downtown area expanded. Banks, offices, and other businesses have replaced them. According to one source, large oak trees once stood along Jackson Street from Third to Main. 17 Conversely, the more modest dwellings located to the north housed many of Vidalia's African-American citizens.

The proposed historic district (bounded generally by Jackson, Meadows, Church/McIntosh, and North Main streets) was the hub of a very busy and thriving community at the turn of the century. With its wide range of goods and services, government offices, and the like, the district was the center of daily life for Vidalia residents. Indeed, the intersection of Railroad Avenue (South Main) and Church Street was the local gathering spot when there was catastrophic news to be announced, a speech by a stumping politician, or a major prize was being awarded through a drawing. (See attached photograph.)

Vidalia's population was 500 in 1900; however, during the next decade it increased by more than 200 percent, reaching 1,800 in 1910. This tremendous growth was the largest percentage increase for any community in Georgia at that time. 18 Contributing to this growth and/or in response to it, Vidalia installed a municipal water system in 1909. 19

At the same time, industry and manufacturing boomed in Vidalia largely due to the accessibility of rail service. Businesses tried to locate near the railroad whenever possible. In 1912, when the town had sufficient development along the central railroad rights-of-way, the city council approved a building code for the business section of Vidalia requiring all construction within the fire zone to be of brick or concrete. The growing success of the turpentine, lumber, and mill industries encouraged other businesses to locate in the Vidalia area.

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Some of the earliest landowners and most successful businessmen of the day became Vidalia's leading citizens. They established the banks, hotels, hospitals and commercial enterprises that enabled Vidalia to prosper. Their legacy is left, in part, through street names such as Thompson, Meadows, Montgomery, Mosley, Leader, Jenkins, Durden and others. Prominent businesses and buildings continue to be named after them, such as Darby Construction, Darby Bank and Trust, and Meadows Memorial Hospital.

Among Vidalia's first commercial buildings of any significance were banks, the three earliest of which were initially located within the proposed historic district. The city's first bank, the Citizens Bank of Vidalia, was established March 15, 1901. It was chartered by W.T. Jenkins, George N. Matthews, J.W. Poe, M. Leader, A.J. Williamson, L.D. Williamson, S.B. Meadows, J.F. Cook, J.M. Meadows, J.E. Schumpert, Dennis Durden, T.G. Poe, W.F. Peacock, and Morgan Howel. 20 Initially it was located at 117 Southeast Main Street in a one-story brick building which was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. In addition to its architectural importance, the structure is significant because it was the first bank chartered between Cordele and Savannah on the Seaboard Air Line. 21 W.T. Jenkins, the first president of Citizens Bank, was responsible for the expansion of his private, small business safe (located in his business' commissary) into the area's first real commercial banking institution. 22 The Citizens Bank moved to the southwest corner of Church and Main in 1913. The building still stands (outside proposed district), but its elaborate Neoclassical facade was destroyed during modernization in the 1940s. The bank remained in that location until 1926, when it sold back its shares to its stockholders, and went out of business.

By 1913, Vidalia had two more banks. The First National Bank of Vidalia, with a capital stock of \$35,000, had W.D. Donovan as its first president, J.B. Manry as vice-president, George S. Rountree as cashier, and T.W. Willets, as assistant cashier. The bank was housed in an impressive, two-story brick building on the northeast corner of McIntosh and Main streets. W.D. Donovan built the structure about 1910 using architect Ivey P. Crutchfield's design. The third bank, the Bank of Vidalia, had George N. Matthews as president, and began with a slightly smaller capital stock of \$25,000. Its principal officers were L.B. Godbee, vice-president and cashier, and A.L. Vann, assistant cashier. It was located at the southeast corner of Church and Main streets (presently Phillips' Pharmacy). Vidalia's three banks cleared \$10,000,000 in 1916. 23 By 1927, J.F. Darby had amassed enough capital to open the Darby Bank. After First National Bank of Vidalia moved, Darby Bank occupied the site at McIntosh and North Main (now used as Lillar's Wave Shop). Then in 1937, Darby Bank

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moved to the three-story brick structure at the northeast corner of Church and Meadows streets (presently Arlene's). 24

The 1913 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Vidalia provides detailed information on the city's early 20th century development. As expected, most of the structures in the proposed historic district and its immediate vicinity were of a commercial nature, with only a small number of residences remaining. Development density varied by block, although fewer vacant lots were located fronting or near the railroad tracks. Nearly the entire block along Railroad Avenue between Jackson and Church streets was developed by this time except for one to two lot(s) at the east end (now Thompson's Farm Supply). A small fire department structure occupied a small portion of the easternmost lot, however. Businesses in this block included the previously mentioned Citizens Bank of Vidalia, two drugstores, two general stores, three dry goods stores, a clothing store, three groceries, a millinery shop, and a restaurant. In addition, one building was identified "Commission." A jewelry store, hardware store, furniture store, and an office were located on the east side of Church Street between Railroad Avenue and Meadows Street, while the corner lot was vacant (site of Arlene's today). Meadows Street between Church and Jackson streets was far less developed by 1913, with approximately one-half of the lots still vacant. Structures in this block served as a post office, carriage repository, garage, blacksmith shop, and for storage, with one building used specifically for coffin storage. Two dwellings were located at the east end of Meadows Street on the northwest and southwest corners with Jackson Street, both of which were oriented toward the latter.

According to the 1913 Sanborn map, a wide variety of businesses were also located adjacent to the proposed historic district. Immediately east of the First National Bank on the north side of Railroad Avenue were a butcher shop, printing shop, two groceries, and a laundry. Additional dry goods, furniture, hardware, jewelry, drug, millinery, and grocery stores served the everyday needs of Vidalia's 1,800 residents and visitors alike, as did two barber shops, another restaurant, a wholesale grocery, and a hay and grain store. A bowling alley and a motion picture hall were available for recreation and entertainment in the block west of the proposed historic district. Vidalia also had two hotels, the New Vidalia and the Colonial, both of which were located north of the railroad tracks.

The year 1917 was a watershed year for Vidalia. Newspapers reported an estimated 3,500 residents. Among the population were a number of professional men, who were said to "rank among the highest in the professions in this section." 25 They included six doctors, one veterinarian, four licensed druggists, two dentists, seven lawyers,

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and one African-American doctor. 26 Vidalia was a major timber and naval stores producer with lumber mills, machine manufacturing and shops, banks, mercantile grocers, and farm supply stores. Cotton and livestock markets did an active business. According to the 1917 City Directory:

The City of Vidalia has the reputation of being the biggest wire fence market in the state of Georgia, and the next to the largest mule market in the state, the National Stock Yards handling many thousand head of mules and horses annually, and has a fine market for cattle and hogs. 27

The major cotton processor was Sea Island Cotton Company, which produced the celebrated Foss Double-Roller Sea Island Cotton Gin, advertised as "the best gin by far, on the market today." 28 Sea Island Cotton had separate facilities for a cotton seed oil mill, a cotton compress (that pressed thousands of bales of cotton during the season), a cotton gin, and a warehouse in Vidalia. Other plants in town included Chero-Cola and Coca-Cola bottling plants, the Vidalia Chemical Company, Altamaha Fertilizer Company, and The Vidalia Canning Company, which canned up to 25,000 cans per day. By 1917, Vidalia had its own municipal light system. 29 New enterprises sprang up based on the transport of goods to new markets made possible by the railroad, as well as hotels and support services built for the growing passenger traffic.

Prosperous and proud, Vidalia was eager to attract new customers to its business district. The following excerpt from the 1917 City Directory illustrates the boosterism of local business leaders:

Vidalia is really a cosmopolitan city--none of the narrow caste distinction being evidenced that is so common to the old middle and north Georgia towns. The citizens have the most implicit confidence in the future of our city, and all work together to make it one of the leading cities of the wiregrass section of Georgia, which we all confidently expect it to be within the next decade.

30

One of the more cosmopolitan influences on the city may have been the New York Cafe, managed by W.D. Kavakos, who also held the job of chief cook. The restaurant, which was located at 214 Railroad Avenue, served dinner and supper to patrons in the busy commercial district. Its advertisement in the City Directory read:

NEW YORK CAFE
THE MOST ECONOMICAL PLACE IN THE CITY TO EAT.
SHORT ORDERS A SPECIALTY.

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214 RAILROAD AVE.

TELEPHONE 96

'THE RESTAURANT THAT IS HERE TO STAY.' 31

Lining both sides of the railroad tracks were retail businesses, commercial warehouses, and three hotels which could accommodate rail passengers. The 1917 City Directory praised the city's accommodations:

Vidalia has three first class Hotels; the New Vidalia, a handsome brick structure with all the modern conveniences, The Colonial and the Dixie; the reputation of these hotels is such that the traveling public come to Vidalia from near-by [sic] towns to spend nights and Sunday, and they claim the service and conveniences second to none in Georgia and in a city the size of Vidalia. 32

Prior to construction of the Hotel Jackson, circa 1920, there were no hotels on the south side of Railroad Avenue. The Colonial, New Vidalia and The Dixie all were built on the north side of Railroad Avenue, and within two blocks of each other. In fact, the Hotel Dixie was located directly behind the New Vidalia Hotel on Thompson Street. All three of these structures were located outside the proposed historic district, but adjacent to it. Although different in design, the three hotels all had extensive porches and offered modern conveniences of the day, such as electricity and heat. The Hotel Dixie burned sometime before 1924. 33 Located outside the proposed historic district, the Hotel Jackson building is the only remaining historic railroad hotel structure in Vidalia. Today it houses several professional offices, including those of Alltell Communication.

There are no maps available of Vidalia for the year 1917, however, a comparison of the 1913 Sanborn map to the 1917 City Directory, suggests that many of the buildings and businesses were present in 1917. A mixture of retail, finance, and service businesses all continued to comprise the city's commercial area. Some of the businesses listed in the City Directory of 1917, which were located within the proposed historic district, include The Vidalia Advance newspaper offices 34 and L. B. Godbee Chevrolet (both on Meadows Street). 35 Also on Meadows Street, E.L. Meadows owned a Ford dealership, which was located in what is believed to have been one of the first brick structures on the south side of the 100 block (built in 1916). 36 Mr. D.C. Harris ran a dry goods store where he specialized in "Gents Furnishings" at 108 Church Street, 37 while Lee Hardware Company was located two doors down at 104 Church. 38 W.E. Walker's combined optometry and jewelry business occupied the adjacent structure at 102 Church Street. 39 Along Railroad Avenue between Jackson and Church streets, one could shop at Mrs. Carter and Mrs.

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Pinholster's store at 116 Railroad Avenue East, which offered "Dry Goods, Notions And Ladies Ready-to-Wear" and "Millinery," respectively. 40

Among Vidalia's major retailers in 1917 were the Hackel Brothers and Leader and Rosansky. The Hackel Brothers had a store on the northwest corner of McIntosh and Main streets (adjacent to the proposed historic district) for a number of years. They advertised in the 1917 City Directory as "the store of small profits," hawking "high art clothing, men's clothing, shoes for men, children, and ladies, and hats." 41

Nahum Rosansky was a Polish-Jewish emigrant to the United States, who first settled in Augusta, Georgia, and then moved to Vidalia in 1894 with his friend and partner, Moses Leader. The two were instrumental in providing general retail merchandise to the area. They remained influential in the commercial growth of the town, encouraging and sponsoring new merchants and commerce in the area. 42 Even so, a full page advertisement was an expensive allocation of resources, and is a good indicator of their prominence in the community. The following appeared in the 1917 City Directory:

The Leader & Rosansky Department Store (Second to None in this Section)

The many thousands of articles carried in their different departments, consisting of Men's Wear, Ladies' Apparel, Eatables of the highest quality, House Furnishings, Wire Fencing for fields, yards, etc., in any quantity desired, mules of the highest type, will satisfy you both in quality and price; in fact it would be an injustice to your money to buy any of these items elsewhere before visiting this establishment.

If any purchase made here is not entirely satisfactory, for any reason, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Mail orders solicited.

Leader & Rosansky
THE SAME GOODS AS ELSEWHERE
FOR LESS MONEY THAN ANYWHERE 43

Leader and Rosansky began to acquire land very early, but were more than generous in giving parcels to the city, and donated land for various causes throughout the years. Between the years 1904 and 1913, they were instrumental in providing land and materials for numerous developments. According to "A Tribute To N.A. Rosansky" in The Vidalia Advance newspaper, following his death in January, 1931, he donated land to be used for a city park, and constructed the first

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brick building on McIntosh Street, "which began the upbuilding of that street." The article went on to explain that "[W]hen Church Street was scarcely more than a swamp, Mr. Rosansky donated the first lot (on which was built the present building now occupied by Vidalia Hardware Company), in order that the town might progress." 44 He was also instrumental in organizing the First National Bank. Rosansky's most significant contribution to the community in his later years was his support of the tobacco industry. 45

Vidalia's tobacco market, which eventually became the leading market in Georgia, dates from 1917. Tobacco cultivation began in the area several years earlier. As there was no local market initially, the first growers had to transport their tobacco to South Carolina for sales. Following Hazlehurst's establishment of a market in 1917, Vidalia grower Silas B. Meadows, brother of Dr. John Meadows who is said to have grown the first tobacco in the area, convinced Hazlehurst's market operators to bring their buyers to Vidalia twice a week. The first sales in Vidalia occurred in 1917 in Meadows' old cotton warehouse, which still operates today, and is known as the Brick Tobacco Warehouse.

The Vidalia tobacco market was inactive during World War I, but began operating full-time in 1921 after Elza Lee Meadows (Silas Meadows' son) arranged for North Carolina tobacco companies to send buyers to Vidalia. Under professional management by 1922, the market grew rapidly. The economic importance of tobacco to the community was realized early, and area farmers were encouraged to increase production. The local Kiwanis Club, which functioned as an unofficial Chamber of Commerce at the time, even provided free tobacco seed to anyone who would pick it up at The Vidalia Advance newspaper office. 46

The prosperity of the Vidalia tobacco market no doubt contributed to the community's growth in the 1920s. Although a population of 5,000 was expected in 1920, 47 the 1924 Sanborn map gives the number of residents as 3,000, thus suggesting a possible decline if the 1917 estimate of 3,500 were correct.

The 1924 Sanborn map of Vidalia indicated that, whatever the city's actual population, considerable development had occurred since 1913 throughout the community. Most of the new development within the proposed historic district appears to have been along the 100 block of Meadows Street. On the north side of Meadows, the earlier blacksmith shop was replaced by an auto repair shop and auto sales room, with an adjacent printing shop (The Vidalia Advance office) and a 20-car garage. The coffin storage and a general storage building remained as did the residences on the northwest and southwest corners of Meadows

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and Jackson streets. Along the remainder of the south side of Meadows Street, an auto repair shop replaced the earlier post office on the corner with Church Street. The post office moved to the middle of the block, where it was adjacent to an auto sales room and two auto repair shops.

Other areas of the proposed historic district appear to have remained largely unchanged from 1913 to 1924, even though the 1924 Sanborn map provides far less detail as to the specific use of structures than did the 1913 version. In the block of Railroad Avenue between Church and Jackson streets, there were 13 stores (one with a telephone exchange in the rear) and a drugstore. An auto repair shop was added during this period, while the southwest corner of Railroad Avenue and Jackson Street remained undeveloped. Five unidentified stores were located on the east side of the 100 block of Church Street, as well as a drugstore and lodge hall in a three-story structure on the formerly vacant northeast corner with Meadows Street (currently Arlene's).

Although a mixture of retail and service businesses continued to be located in downtown Vidalia (within and adjacent to the proposed district) in 1924, the most striking change since 1913 was the emergence of automobile-related businesses. In 1913, there were two garages in downtown Vidalia (one located adjacent to a carriage repository) on opposite sides of Railroad Avenue, but by 1917, at least two local automobile dealerships were advertising in the Vidalia City Directory. L.B. Godbee's Chevrolet Dealership was located on Meadows Street within the proposed historic district, while French and Powell promised "prompt deliveries" of "Willys-Knight, Overland and National Automobiles," complete with a "repairing department" at 108-110 East Railroad Avenue. 48 However, by 1924, there were at least seven auto repair shops in downtown Vidalia. It is recalled that the city's first filling station appeared at the corner of Church and First streets circa 1923, 49 but it is not shown on the 1924 map. According to the 1938 revised Sanborn map, four filling stations were located downtown, including one two-pump, L-shaped station at Church and First. A three-pump station with an attached service bay was on the corner of Jackson Street and Railroad Avenue where Thompson's Farm Supply is currently located (within the proposed historic district). An auto repair shop was conveniently sited on Jackson Street just south of the filling station.

Vidalia's tobacco market continued to prosper throughout the 1930s and 1940s, despite major weather problems and disease during the Depression years. Its favorable geographic location as the northwestern-most market in Georgia contributed to it becoming the largest market in the state. By 1937, there were five substantial tobacco warehouses in Vidalia.

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The tobacco market's economic impact on Vidalia was profound. Local merchants benefitted by selling goods to the tobacco farmers, while service businesses were often "swamped" with customers. The city's hotels could accommodate only a small percentage of the tobacco men and their families and the others who came for the market. To help meet the public lodging shortage, some local residents rented rooms to boarders. As a result of the "social intermingling," there were many so-called "Tobacco Brides" -- local girls who married visiting tobacco men. 50

Vidalia's population reached 3,585 in 1930 and 4,109 by 1940. The 1938 Sanborn map of Vidalia (updated 1924 map) shows that considerable infill development occurred within the potential historic district, primarily along the 100 block of Meadows Street, since 1924. While the residences remained at the east end of the block, new stores were added and some earlier structures were being used for different businesses. In addition to "stores," the block contained a photography studio, bake shop, and a dry cleaners. It is recalled that the structure on the southeast corner of Meadows and Church (Lady K today) contained Kirk Phillip's Butcher Shop with an ice cream plant at the rear, before later housing Elder's Wave Shop (1930s/40s). 51 The two-story yellow brick building at 107 East Meadows was constructed in the early 1930s as a furniture store for Mr. Elza Meadows. 52 Development along the 100 block of Railroad Avenue was complete by 1938, consisting of mostly "stores," with three businesses marked "paints" or "prints," a single drugstore, and the previously mentioned filling station on the southwest corner of Jackson Street and adjacent auto repair. The east side of Church Street (100 block) appears unchanged except the large three-story building on the corner housed a bank (rather than the earlier drugstore), but the lodge hall remained on the third floor. Elsewhere downtown, residences were gradually being replaced by commercial structures. For example, the Pal Theater, located adjacent to the proposed historic district on the former site of a dwelling, opened on Saturday, May 20, 1933. Of note, its first movie was entitled Gay Buckaroo, starring Hoot Gibson and Merna Kennedy. 53

The Vidalia Municipal Building is one of the landmarks in the proposed historic district due to its impressive Neoclassical architecture, as well as its historical significance. Located on Jackson Street at the east end of Meadows Street, the present city hall was built on the original site of the Poe House (moved to First Street) by the Public Works Administration in 1937 as Vidalia's third post office. 54 It is recalled that mule labor was used to construct the post office. 55 Artist Daniel Celentano painted a mural for the then post office, under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, which was installed shortly after the building's completion.

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According to an article in The Vidalia Advance, the Vidalia Post Office was apparently the subject of national attention the year after it was built. It seems that the federal government wanted to replace many of the nation's old wooden and storefront post offices with new structures in one of three uniform designs based on community size. This plan would result in distinctive buildings, but would save taxpayers on architectural plans. Vidalia's stucco Neoclassical post office, which is supposed to have been the first built using the standardized design, was thought to resemble Robert E. Lee's Arlington House except for a rather prominent raised skylight or belvedere. The Postmaster General and other high ranking postal officials attended the post office's dedication; however, Postmaster General Farley is said to have disliked the design, probably due to the presence of the skylight. He ordered that the plans be destroyed, thus the Vidalia Post Office is said to have been unique in its design. 56

In 1975, the Coite Somers Construction Company renovated the structure for the City of Vidalia, which had purchased it from the federal government for use as a municipal building. Exterior renovations were limited to the belvedere, where its small-paned windows were enclosed and made flush with the outer walls. Inside the building, work included the addition of new offices, central heating and air conditioning, lavatory facilities, and lighting.

Another landmark structure originally used for government functions, the former Vidalia City Hall (present-day Ladson Genealogical Library) was built circa 1914 on property at the southwest corner of Church and Meadows streets. A Mrs. Matthews sold the city the land for about \$2,000. Architect Ivey P. Crutchfield is believed to have designed the structure, which cost the City approximately \$8,000 to construct. City Hall was located at the rear of the building on the second floor. The police and fire departments were on the rear of the first floor. 57

Vidalia's first auditorium was also located on the second floor of the building. Equipped with 504 seats at a cost of \$1.50 each, the auditorium proved a great success. It was used for a variety of entertainment, educational, and spiritual purposes, such as gospel sings, Chatauqua programs, concerts, revivals, movies, traveling drama groups, and local plays/musicals. The Vidalia City Council voted on July 1, 1914 to lease the auditorium to A.S. McQueen and W.O. Lumpkin beginning September 1, 1914 for five months at \$40 per month plus utilities and \$25 business fee "for the purpose of offering clean, high class, moral shows." Several local congregations met there regularly while their churches were under construction. In addition, a number of conventions were held in the auditorium. 58 As early as 1917, the City Directory described the municipal facility as:

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... [a] magnificent City Hall valued at \$20,000, where various conventions gather every year. The Local Board of Trade is composed of lively, wide awake citizens, which adds materially to the growth and progress of the city, bringing various enterprises here every year, and is instrumental in securing so many conventions each year. 59

Use of Vidalia's municipal auditorium began to decline in 1934 following completion of the WPA constructed auditorium at Vidalia High School. Four years later, the City removed the balcony and seats and divided the former auditorium space into rental offices.

Georgia Power, H.B. Elijah's Overland Auto Dealership, and Sapp Furniture Store were among the building's first floor tenants through the years. City Hall and the local library were located downstairs in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s, Jack Ladson purchased the building and remodeled it for store rental space on the first floor and a library upstairs. 60 Today the Ladson Genealogical Library attracts researchers from throughout the United States. The first floor is currently vacant retail space, but was used as a sizeable bookstore until late 1994.

Another landmark structure within the proposed Downtown Vidalia historic district at the corner of North Main and McIntosh streets is the former First National Bank of Vidalia, now used as Lillar's Wave Shop (hairstylist). Designed by architect Ivey Crutchfield and built in 1910, the free-standing, two-story brick Neoclassical structure exhibits a number of decorative features. Included among these are marble cornices, pilasters, belt courses, and keystones. J. Frank Darby purchased the building circa 1926, after First National Bank moved, and began his own private Darby Bank. At one time during the Depression, Darby Bank was the only bank operating in Toombs County. Darby later moved his bank to his building on the corner of Church and Meadows streets. Various businesses and professionals occupied the building's second floor during the years, such as Southern Land Investments Company, a real estate firm specializing in farm and timber sales and loans, 61 and Pattillo and Jackson, attorneys. 62 The first floor has served as a beauty shop since approximately 1961, while the second floor is vacant. 63

J. Frank Darby also owned the landmark structure at the northeast corner of Church and Meadows streets, which currently houses Arlene's jewelry store. Built sometime between 1913 and 1917, the three-story brick building has a corbelled brick cornice, prominent keystone voussoirs, and a recessed corner entrance. Like other commercial structures in downtown Vidalia, the building has housed a variety of businesses and offices, including a drugstore (1924 Sanborn map),

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doctor's office (second floor, circa 1920s and 1930s), 64 First National Bank (circa 1926-1931), and Darby Bank (circa 1931-1973). Darby had office space fronting on Meadows Street for his sawmill, livery stable, casket, cotton gin, and farming businesses. 65 The third floor was used as lodge meeting space by various fraternal organizations from the teens until the 1980s. *

A sensational bank robbery occurred at the Darby Bank in late August circa 1934 or 1935. Two or three robbers entered the bank during the busiest time of day during Vidalia's tobacco market. As a result of the market, large amounts of cash were flowing into the bank from farmers, merchants, visitors, and others. The robbers ordered all the customers to lie down on the floor. Everyone complied except for "the Old Maid Darby," who was one of J.F. Darby's (bank owner) daughters. Instead, she made a big fuss and refused to lie down. According to witnesses, the robbers did not want to hurt her, but she would not be quiet. They ended up hitting her on the side of her head with a gun. The robbers escaped with whatever money was on the counter. As to whether they were ever apprehended is not recalled; however, "Old Maid Darby" was hailed a hero and became a local celebrity for a while. 66

The former Darby Bank building's facade was remodeled in the late 1950s. 67 The work included covering the storefront with metal siding and marbleized foundation panels, as well as modernizing the recessed corner entrance. Today, the upper floors are painted (the keystone voussoirs have a three-color paint scheme), while the boarded up third floor windows are painted to match the 2/2 windows on the second floor. Arlene's Jewelry occupies the first floor today, but the top two floors remain vacant.

Several of downtown Vidalia's most impressive buildings architecturally were built as banks and adapted to other uses as the banks grew and moved to larger spaces. In addition to the previously described First National Bank, the original Citizens Bank of Vidalia building, at 117 Southeast Main Street, underwent a similar evolution.

A good example of turn of the century commercial architecture as executed in a small southeast Georgia community, the structure features fine details such as corbelled brickwork, granite courses, pedimented parapet with battlements, and colored glass transoms. Inside the building a decorative pressed metal ceiling and Eastlake mantel complete the distinctive features that set this store apart from its neighbors. Also said to be the first brick building in Vidalia, it was sold to N.A. Rosansky on February 1, 1913 for \$7,000. Rosansky and his partner Leader converted the bank into a store, and subsequently rented it to various tenants throughout the years. 68 This building was individually listed in the National Register in 1992 and was a certified Tax Act rehabilitation.

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One of the major architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in this area of Georgia was Ivey P. Crutchfield. Born in Irwinton, Georgia in 1878, he spent nearly four years in Vidalia designing some of the area's most distinctive structures. 69 Crutchfield is believed to be the architect of several extant buildings within the proposed Downtown Vidalia historic district, including the First National Bank Building (Lillar's Wave Shop), Ladson Library, and the Bank of Vidalia (currently the much altered Phillips Pharmacy). Other commercial, residential, and institutional structures in Vidalia he is known to have designed are the Peterson-Wilbanks House (Andrews, Threlkeld, and Thompson law offices, National Register-listed); Brazell House (Altama Museum of Art and History, National Register-listed); Crescent City Barber Shop; New Vidalia Cafe; Leader and Rosansky's Store (presently heavily altered Estroff's Department Store); The Vidalia Furniture Company (razed); Meadows Buggy Company (razed); and the Vidalia College Institute annex (razed). Crutchfield's buildings are easily recognizable for his use of fine Neoclassical detailing and marble, and their grand scale compared to surrounding buildings. Buildings in the area which he designed include the old Mt. Vernon Bank, presently Cash Finance Company in Mt. Vernon; the Bank of Uvalda; the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Nunez; and the Soperton Bank (now Soperton News). The Garbutt House (Twenty Columns) on Highway 280 in Lyons, is an extant private residence also designed by Crutchfield. 70

Several local builders known to have worked within the proposed historic district in the early 20th century include M.H. Fountain, John Ragan, J.F. Darby, and Coite Somers. The M. H. Fountain Company was headquartered for many years within the proposed district on Railroad Avenue in the stores now occupied by Clarke's Appliances and Pix Photography. Located adjacent to the district, the Pal Theater was built in 1933 by the M.H. Fountain Company. In 1937, following the success of their residential enterprises, the John T. Ragan Company built the new post office on Jackson Street, now used as the city's municipal building. According to Vidalia contractor Elmo Dunham, "Mr. Ragan was severely hurt financially on this project and never was quite able to get his business on a solid footing again." 71

The J.F. Darby Lumber Company, a major competitor of the Ragan Company, was a significant area builder in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, they had contracts with the Seaboard Airline to build facilities on the rail line from Petersburg, Virginia to Indian Town, Florida. Much of the lumber was cut and milled in Vidalia before being shipped to the erection sites. The Darbys' extensive business interests in the greater Vidalia area included milling, millwork, farming, livestock, and banking. Ragan and Darby were quite competitive during these years.

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Another contractor was Coite Somers. The Coite Somers Company operated the Vidalia Hardware Company before becoming a building contractor around 1936 or 1937. In the late summer of 1942, they renovated the Leader and Rosansky building to create Estroff's Department Store, located on the southwest corner of Main and Church streets adjacent to the proposed district. 72 This rather complex project involved combining three structures (retail buildings at 202 and 200 South Main Street, and a former telegraph office at 105 West Church Street) to form one large, unified department store space.

Although people of Scottish and Scot-Irish descent comprise the largest percentage of the population, African-Americans have played major roles, both individually and collectively in Vidalia history. When W.T. Jenkins began to set up his turpentine operations, he had to go back to North Carolina to recruit workers for the new forests in Georgia. Labor was in short supply, and those workers who were available locally had little experience in turpentine. Once Jenkins got started, however, and once the railroad lines made transportation of lumber and pine products possible, other entrepreneurs quickly came to the area. While "[s]lavery in its largest sense and as practiced on the large plantations of the South, was largely unknown in this particular section [of Georgia], " 73 this did not preclude African-American workers from the area. Some of the earliest African-Americans in the Vidalia area worked for turpentine companies. According to an interview with W.T. Jenkins by Amos Teasley, "in the immediate vicinity of Vidalia there were approximately ten Negroes to every white person. The Negroes were employed by turpentine operators and lived in small settlements composed largely of huts. They bought all their goods at the commissary and seldom left their villages." 74

Despite their humble beginnings, African-Americans were to become integral members of society in Vidalia. Professor James D. Dickerson was an African-American educator who came to Vidalia in 1905 and was directly responsible for the early public education of the city's minority youth. 75 He was able to get the City to build a new, two-story school at Third Avenue and McIntosh Street in 1907 at a cost of \$6,000. In 1937, \$40,000 worth of renovations were made to the school, which was by then the accredited Dickerson Training School (for African Americans). 76

The Vidalia Funeral Home is an extant structure, built circa 1930, that has traditionally served the African-American community of Vidalia. The building, located just north of the proposed historic district at 106 Pine Street, has been in continuous use as a funeral home to the present. Its location marks the beginning of the geographic area of the city that has potential for future historic district designation. The 1917 City Directory lists Kellum and Mincey

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as "colored undertakers" with their business address as Pine Street. These two men may have been responsible for building the Vidalia Funeral Home some years later. The name Kellum is also associated with a barber shop, located at 121 Railroad Avenue West. 77 It is possible that the same Mr. Kellum was involved with both businesses, especially since barbers often performed cosmetic work and embalming for deceased persons early in this century. What is certain, however, is that these businesses were important enough to merit entry in the city directory.

Most African-American businesses in Vidalia seemed to be service-related. A cluster of these were located north of Main Street, around Pine, McIntosh and Thompson streets (just north of the proposed historic district). Between 1935 and 1945, Pughley Funeral Home (owner--Mr. "Lygh" Pughley), Loubbertha's Restaurant, and the Silvermoon Cafe (a bar and restaurant, owner--Mr. "Lygh" Pughley), occupied buildings on Pine Street, near the intersection of McIntosh Street. Farther west, a few bars shared space near a grocery and several cafes on Thompson Street. These included the Big Apple (bar), the Hole in the Wall (bar), the Blue Heaven Cafe, the Oxedine Cafe (Winnie Oxedine, operator), and Dave Allen's Grocery. Still farther north, on Third Avenue, were Mitchell's Grocery (owner--Percy Mitchell, Sr.), Easter's Grocery (owner--Mr. Easter, Flossie Hayes' father), and Gussie's Grill (owner--Gussie Dixon). Wright's Shoe Shop (owner--Willie Wright) sat close by on McIntosh Street. A block to the east, Wooten's Barber Shop was located on a dirt road between McIntosh and Morris streets. 78 According to Mr. Grilly Holloway, longtime resident of Vidalia, most restaurants functioned as bars in the evening hours. He called them "Juke Joints." 79

After World War II, in the early Civil Rights era, Flossie Hayes, daughter of Mr. Easter, emerged as another leader in Vidalia's African-American community. Also an educator, Mrs. Hayes led the drive for funds to develop a recreation center in East Park in the early 1960s. Her activism was not limited to youth recreation, however. She and other leaders expressed concern for the lack of black employees in local government, banks, and businesses. Through their efforts, they formed a credit union and organized the first voter registration drive for minorities in the city. Mrs. Hayes' group, the Vidalia Citizens Action Club, Incorporated, even purchased two buses to transport children to school before the Vidalia Board of Education instituted a city-wide busing program. 80

During the years encompassing World War II and immediately afterward, Vidalia was able to attract major new employers, such as the Piggly Wiggly grocery chain (1943) and the Oxford Shirt Company (1945). But the face of Vidalia's traditional downtown commercial area began to

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change as well. The renovation of the old Leader and Rosansky store into Estroff's Department Store in late 1942 may have marked the beginning of changes that would draw development away from the traditional commercial area of Vidalia. During modernization the north and east facades of the Leader and Rosansky building were substantially altered. Half columns with Corinthian capitals were cut off in order to facilitate installation of a contemporary facade. Other stores followed Estroff's lead, replacing older storefronts with aluminum siding or stucco as "quick fix" exterior surface treatments to update the look of their businesses. 81 The last two residential structures within the proposed historic district along Jackson Street were still extant in 1938, according to the revised Sanborn map. However, at least one of the houses was removed within approximately the next ten years. The Brice Bank building (now Town and Country Beauty Shop) at 113 Jackson Street and the adjacent structure at 109-111 Jackson Street which presently houses Mary's Interiors were constructed on the site of one of the residences circa 1948 and 1950, respectively. 82

By 1950, Vidalia's population had reached 5,819, an increase of 1,710 persons or 42 percent since 1940. The population continued to grow throughout the 1950s, although at a somewhat slower pace, reaching 7,569 in 1960 (an increase of 30 percent). In addition to population increases, the city's commercial area expanded beyond downtown. First Street (U.S. 280) became the pathway to the new business district, consisting of linear strip mall development and suburban sprawl. On the south side of First Street between Leader and Church streets, Shawnee Square was one of the first areas to raze residences and construct a mixed shopping and banking plaza. The Vidalia Advance newspaper moved from Meadows Street (within proposed historic district) to its present location at 205 First Street in 1949. 83 By 1970, the Sweet Onion Plaza, on First Street between Durden and Truman streets, had become the proto-typical suburban mini-mall with a grocery store, theater, bank, and small retail shops lining the U-shaped, open parking lot.

Even the railroad, once the heart and soul of Vidalia, began to decline. In 1995, only one major carrier, CSX Railroad, provides reduced freight services on a regular basis. Despite the decline in importance of the railroad, Vidalia has continued to grow. Today, Vidalia is considered a rural growth center, with agriculture, various manufacturing firms, services and retail trades, a vocational technical school, and fuel services supporting its economy. In recent years, it has achieved state and national recognition as the home of the delicious Vidalia Sweet Onion. Vidalia serves as the commercial center for a radius of about 40 miles, an area encompassing some 70,000 people. The city proper had a population of 9,507 in 1970,

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which increased by more than 9 percent to 10,393 in 1980. According to the 1990 Census, Vidalia had 11,078 residents.

The City of Vidalia has demonstrated its formal commitment to downtown revitalization through participation in the Georgia Main Street Program since 1989. Although the Downtown Vidalia Association's (DVA) efforts were hampered by frequent turnover in Main Street Managers the first several years, the program has now stabilized and much progress has been made under the leadership of the current manager. In addition to pursuing National Register and local historic district recognition, the DVA has completed the Meadows Street Park and implemented streetscape improvements, including landscaping and installation of reproduction street lights. The number of vacancies downtown has declined substantially as new businesses open. Three Investment Tax Credit rehabilitation projects have been completed within the proposed National Register historic district thus far. With its downtown largely intact, defined by readily identifiable boundaries, and well suited to serve the public with a scale that is very human, Vidalia's central core is expected to continue to thrive.

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ENDNOTES

1As Sweet As Its Namesake: The Story of Vidalia (Vidalia: The Vidalia Centennial Inc., 1990), p. 1.

2Amos M. Teasley, "A History of Toombs County" (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1940), p. 8.

3As Sweet As Its Namesake, pp. 1-2.

4Ibid., p. 57.

5Katherine Jenkins Lovvorn, "Vidalia, Toombs County, Georgia: My Home Town," (Typewritten Memoir, n.d.), p. 6.

6As Sweet As Its Namesake, p.58, from Montgomery County Superior Clerk's Office, Deed Book Z, p. 76.

7Lovvorn, p. 6.

8As Sweet As Its Namesake, p. 9.

9City of Vidalia.

10Centennial Articles, The Vidalia Advance, October 1990, n.p.

11The Montgomery Monitor (Mt. Vernon, Montgomery County, Georgia), January 24, 1889 and April 3, 1890, n.p. Before Toombs County was created, Lyons, Vidalia and Mt. Vernon, Georgia were parts of old Montgomery County. Much rivalry between the cities ensued during the period 1889-1895 to receive railroad depot designations and thus increase commercial markets. Vidalia and Lyons both had regular freight delivery with railroads almost a full year prior to Mt. Vernon, the county seat.

12Teasley, p. 6.

13As Sweet As Its Namesake, p. 56.

14Ibid.

15Sanborn Insurance Maps of Vidalia, Georgia, 1913 and 1924.

16Telephone interview with Cecil Bowden, General Manager, CSX Railroad, Vidalia, Georgia, 20 April 1995, by Gail Whalen.

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191913 Sanborn Map.

20A.S. McQueen, comp. Official Directory and Statistics of the City of Vidalia, Georgia, (Vidalia: The Vidalia Advance, 1917), p. 9. (hereafter cited as City Directory).

21"Application for A Bank Charter," The Montgomery Monitor, 4 April 1901, p. 2? (from Rose Ledford's Historic Property Information Form on the Citizens Bank of Vidalia, August 1990.

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23City Directory, p. 9.

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25City Directory, p. 11.

26Ibid.

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28Ibid., p. 12.

29Ibid., p. 9.

30Ibid., p. 13.

31Ibid., p. 21.

32Ibid.

331913 and 1924 Sanborn Maps.

34City Directory, p. 45.

35Ibid., p. 31.

36Historic Preservation Certification Application, Part 1--Evaluation of Significance for 115 Meadows Street, Vidalia, Georgia (E.L. Meadows Building, Another Thyme), September 1995.

37City Directory, p. 22.

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38Ibid., p. 25.

39Ibid., p. 27.

40Ibid., p. 41.

41Ibid., p. 37.

42"A Tribute to N. A. Rosansky," The Vidalia Advance, January 1931,
page unknown.

43City Directory, p. 40.

44"A Tribute to N. A. Rosansky."

45Ibid.

46As Sweet As Its Namesake, pp. 19-21.

47Ibid., p. 56.

48City Directory, p. 6.

49Interview with Bill Warthen, The Brick Warehouse, Vidalia, Georgia,
10 May 1995, by Gail Whalen.

50As Sweet As Its Namesake, pp. 19-21.

51Warthen interview.

52Historic Preservation Certification Application, Part 1--Evaluation
of Significance for 107 East Meadows Street, Vidalia, Georgia (Pages
Department Store, Country Lane), December 1993.

53Mary Lea Retif's Initial Notes for HDIF, n.d.

54As Sweet As Its Namesake, p. 47.

55Warthen interview.

56"Vidalia's Municipal Building," The Vidalia Advance, page unknown,
1977.

57Ladson Genealogical Library (former City Hall and Auditorium) photo
caption, prepared for Vidalia Centennial Photograph Exhibit, 1990.

58Ibid.

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59City Directory, pp. 9-10.

60Ladson photo caption.

61Lillar's Wave Shop (former First National Bank) photo caption,
prepared for Vidalia Centennial Photograph Exhibit, 1990.

62City Directory, p. 39.

63Lillar's Wave Shop, Georgia Architectural and Historic Properties
Survey-Inventory Form (Toombs County N-28), 1982 and later undated
revisions.

64Warthen interview.

65Arlene's (former Darby Bank Building) photo caption, prepared for
Vidalia Centennial Photograph Exhibit, 1990.

66Warthen interview.

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68Citizens Bank HPIF.

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74Ibid.

75As Sweet As Its Namesake, p. 15.

76Ibid., p. 13.

77City Directory, p. 33.

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78Interviews with Mr. Grilly Holloway, Mr. Alfred Jackson, and Mrs. Elvera Lockhard, Lyons, Georgia, 19 May 1995, by Siobhan Lupo, Georgia Peach Corps' Oral History Program.

79Interview with Mr. Grilly Holloway, Lyons, Georgia, 19 May 1995, by Siobhan Lupo, Georgia Peach Corps' Oral History Program.

80As Sweet As Its Namesake, p. 26.

81"Construction," pp. 1B-2B.

82Warthen interview.

83Telephone interview with Mr. William Ledford, The Advance-Progress, Vidalia, Georgia, 9 May 1995, by Gail Whalen. The Ledfords had it built specifically for the newspaper.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Whalen, Gail and Robin Nail. "Vidalia Commercial Historic District," Historic District Information Form, 15 December 1995. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, with supplemental information.

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

- (X) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested (115 and 107 East Meadows Street)
- (X) previously listed in the National Register (117 Main Street, SE)
- () 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:

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

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

n/a

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 15 acres

UTM References

A) Zone 17 Easting 366800 Northing 3565630
B) Zone 17 Easting 367180 Northing 3565710
C) Zone 17 Easting 367050 Northing 3565750
D) Zone 17 Easting 366630 Northing 3565360

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is marked on the enclosed tax map with a heavy black line, drawn to scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the historic, intact commercial and community landmark buildings in downtown Vidalia.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Leslie N. Sharp, National Register Coordinator
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
street & number 500 The Healey Building, 57 Forsyth St., NW
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** August 13, 1996

(ONP form version 12-08-93)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

Name of Property: Vidalia Commercial Historic District
City or Vicinity: Vidalia
County: Toombs
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: April 1996

Description of Photograph(s):

- 1 of 17: Railroad tracks, looking down Main Street, NW; Photographer facing north.
- 2 of 17: Church Street; Photographer facing north.
- 3 of 17: Former U.S. Post Office; Photographer facing east.
- 4 of 17: Railroad Depot; Photographer facing north.
- 5 of 17: Funeral Home on Pine Street; Photographer facing southwest.
- 6 of 17: Rigdon Printing Company on SW Main Street; Photographer facing southwest.
- 7 of 17: Church Street; Photographer facing north.
- 8 of 17: Southwest Main Street; Photographer facing west.
- 9 of 17: McIntosh Street; Photographer facing northeast.
- 10 of 17: McIntosh Street; Photographer facing northeast.
- 11 of 17: Pine Street; Photographer facing north.
- 12 of 17: Northwest Main Street; Photographer facing north.
- 13 of 17: Northwest Main Street looking toward McIntosh; Photographer facing east.
- 14 of 17: Southeast Main Street; Photographer facing west.
- 15 of 17: Corner of Jackson and Meadow Streets; Photographer facing southwest.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

16 of 17: Meadow Street; Photographer facing west.

17 of 17: Former First National Bank, McIntosh and Northeast Main
Streets; Photographer facing southeast.