

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

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

received APR 11

date entered MAY 8 1986

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

1. Name

historic Alabama Builders' Hardware Manufacturing Co.

and or common W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill

2. Location

street & number 204 8th Street N.E. NA not for publication

city, town Fort Payne NA vicinity of congressional district 4

state Alabama code 01 county DeKalb code 049

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Ida Goza

street & number P. O. Box 173

city, town Fort Payne NA vicinity of state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. DeKalb County Courthouse

street & number 300 Grand Avenue South

city, town Fort Payne state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1970-present federal state county local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill building is a good representation of the local manifestation of Colonial Revival design in industrial building. The structure features classical elements characteristic of the late 19th century revival of Colonial period architecture.

Originally constructed as the main shop building of a builders' manufacturing company established in 1889, this three-story, rectangular-shaped brick building with its 85' smoke stack was one of the four original foundry buildings situated on this lot by 1897 (Photo #1; Illust. 1). The building features several Colonial Revival details including stone lintels surmounting 12/12 sash windows. Symmetrically grouped and separated by brick pilasters, there are six windows per floor across the front and 21 windows per floor along the sides. The brick gable end which contains a centered bull's eye window (now enclosed), shows evidence of the existence of a complete boxed pediment; however, only the brackets which supported the lower boxing of the pediment remain.

The 85' columnar smoke stack (Photo 7) with its flared top features corbeled brick belt coursing directly below the top of the stack which subdivides the shaft into an imitation entablature. Obviously inspired by the shape of Doric columns, the smoke stack is one of the structure's most interesting features.

The 1909 Sanborn of the property shows only the main shop building which had been converted to a hosiery mill and a pattern vault building originally attached to the iron foundry building (Illust. 2). There is no indication, however, of what this vault building was used for during this period. The map does show that two of the floors in the main shop building were utilized in 1909. The first floor was used as the knitting department and the second floor was used for storage. The third floor is listed as vacant. The map also notes that the steam boiler capacity had been reduced from 150 H.P. to 50 H.P. with only one boiler shown.

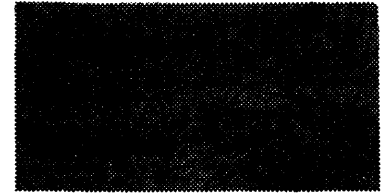
In 1927, several years after W. B. Davis took over the mill, substantial building appears (Illust. 3) providing evidence of the company's early 20th century expansion (1915-27). In the main building the boiler capacity was obviously increased as the engine room appears enlarged to contain two boilers, and a small flat top addition at the rear of the building appears with arched windows on the 1st and 2nd levels and stone lintel treatment at the 3rd level (Photo 3). The Sanborn references this area as the office.

During this period several additional wings and buildings, all with connecting, covered passageways were constructed. Abutting the rear northeast side of the original 1889 building is a two-story brick, rectangular-shaped wing with a series of evenly spaced "flip-out" windows at the second level (Photo 4). The first level windows are grouped in pairs, and even though they are presently boarded up, their proportions generally match those on the 2nd floor indicating that they may have had the same or similar multi-light treatment as those above. A one-story section completes this wing, but presently appears to have retained only a part of the original section (Photo 5). Additional buildings from this period include:

1. A set of stock rooms (Photo 8) running parallel to the rear section of the two-story wing connected by a tin roof passageway.

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2. A 1½ story brick storage building with a gable roof and gabled roof shed facing northwest (Photo 1) and occupying the area directly between the boiler room annex of the main factory building and the building labeled box factory in Illustration #3.
3. A two-story structure (Photo 6) with stepped parapet walls and brick pilasters separating the multi-light sash windows surmounted by brick arches and labeled the box factory in Illustration #3.
4. Two small brick storage buildings (Photo 6) apparently replacing the structure labeled bleach room (Illust. #3).
5. Two water towers (Photos 6 & 8): one which is approximately 85' high and situated directly behind the smoke stack; and another which is approximately 40' high and situated at the extreme north corner of the property.

Presently, the mill building layout remains primarily as is outlined in Illustration #3 (1927) excluding the dismantling of end sections of the original stock rooms shown in Photo 8 and the original one-story end section of the northeast rear wing shown in photo 5. Additionally, the twin brick storage buildings shown in photo 6 are speculated to be replacements for the bleach room building shown in Illustration #3. This mill is situated on a two-acre lot in downtown Fort Payne, and is presently Bonnie Mills, Inc. The original 1889 factory building is vacant.

Total Contributing Properties: 7

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1889 (1889-1893)
 (c. 1915-1936) **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion A - Industry

The W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill building is significant as the only remaining industrial building surviving Fort Payne's late 19th century boom period. Constructed in 1889 as the Alabama Builders' Hardware Manufacturing Company, it was one of over seven major foundries and factories associated with the three-year boom period spurred by the success of the Fort Payne Coal and Iron Company (1888). After 1890 it became evident that the town's mineral claims had been greatly exaggerated and the boom turned bust in 1892 as a final merger project to revive several failing companies (including A.B.H.M.C.) went bankrupt.

The W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill building is also significant for its associations with the growth and revival of industrial development in Fort Payne during the early 20th century. Locally recognized as the primary training facility for many of the local hosiery and sock manufacturers, the W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill served as a major impetus for the local expansion of this industry which has earned Fort Payne the title of the "Sock Capitol of the World." Acquired by W. B. Davis, a successful hosiery manufacturer from Chattanooga in the early 1900s, the building served as a sock milling factory (1909-74), and between 1920 and 1940 a principal workplace of Fort Payne's population. Between 1915 and 1926 the mill corporation established a Mill Complex consisting of a large number of residences either relocated to or built in the complex, a swimming pool, clubhouse and an interdenominational church constituting much of the building activity in the town during the period.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2 acres approx.

Quadrangle name Fort Payne

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	6	1	8	0	6	0	3	8	1	2	3	7	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

1	6	6	1	8	0	9	0	3	8	1	2	3	4	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

1	6	6	1	8	1	0	0	3	8	1	2	2	8	0
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D

1	6	6	1	8	0	2	0	3	8	1	2	1	9	0
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E

1	6	6	1	7	6	9	0	3	8	1	2	2	4	0
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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Shirley Qualls, Cultural Resources Coordinator

organization Alabama Historical Commission date October 2, 1985

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 205 261-3184

city or town Montgomery state Alabama

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 10/2/85

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 5/8/86

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

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Historical Summary

Built in 1884 as the Alabama Builders' Hardware Manufacturing Company, the W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill is the only industrial building surviving Fort Payne's three-year industrial boom. Inspired by the successful industrial growth of the Birmingham - Bessemer area, only 100 miles from Fort Payne, New England investors assumed that this small mountain village situated in the state's Mineral Belt was also surrounded by rich mineral deposits.

Fort Payne's short lived period of rapid expansion and development was spurred by the success of the Fort Payne Coal and Iron Company (1888) and resulted in the establishment of over seven major foundries and factories in less than two years. Surveys speculated a high quality of iron ore contained on Iron Mountain, the western ridge closest to the center of Fort Payne. The capacity of the red ore mines here was given as 300 tons a day. The capacity of the mine located on the eastern slope was said to be 200 tons of good ore per day. The western side of Iron Mountain was thought to be rich in red hematite, and large fields of ore containing manganese had been supposedly located on Sand Mountain, along with smaller deposits of red and brown ore on Lookout Mountain. The coke used to convert the ores into pig iron was made from coal mined on Lookout Mountain.

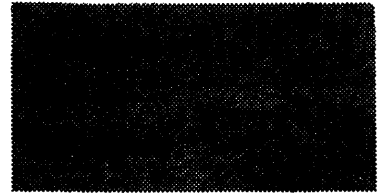
By 1890 Fort Payne had amassed an impressive directory of businesses and factories, all appearing to be promising industries, including The Fort Payne and the Bay State Furnaces, The Fort Payne Rolling Mill and Steel Company, a stove foundry for The Fort Payne Stove Works, The Fort Payne Basket and Package Factory, The Fort Payne Fire Clay Works and the Alabama Builders' Hardware Manufacturing Company (A.B.H.M.C.). In addition, to facilitate the movement of ores and fuel the Fort Payne Coal and Iron Co. built and equipped a railroad. Completed January 1890, the Mineral Railroad ran from the Alabama Great Southern Railroad northeast in the valley to Beeson Gap and eastward to its terminal at the Lookout Mountain Coal Mine.

The A.B.H.M.C. was one of the most extensive hardware manufacturing companies in the south at the time of its inception. The company manufactured an extensive line of all grades of builders' hardware, ranging from the most elaborate designs in bronze metal to the cheaper grades of iron.

During the latter half of 1890 it became apparent that quality and quantity of Fort Payne's mineral resources had been greatly exaggerated. The Fort Payne Coal and Iron Company, the town's leading manufacturer, was operating at a loss. By December 1891 total collapse of the boom was eminent. In a final attempt to avoid financial ruin, the eight largest industries in town voted to merge into one giant company (The English Limited Liability Co.) in order to secure a loan from English investors. The merger project failed and went bankrupt. Property values plunged and the New Englanders who almost exclusively controlled and managed the boom began selling off and abandoning businesses and homes. Many of the large boom houses were sold for the lumber used to build them or scavenged for fuel. The 32,000 acres of land purchased by the Fort Payne Coal and Iron Company was taken over by the city and sold for the city taxes as the local government was faced with indebtedness and warrants. As the panic of 1893 rocked the nation, its full force was not felt in Fort Payne where people had already suffered

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the full effects of depression for over a year. The small village of about 1700 that a few years earlier was 3500 strong realized that it's future depended upon small industries and the surrounding agricultural area.

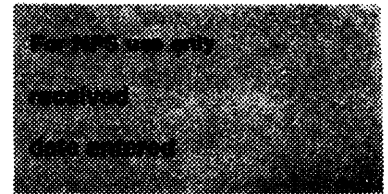
After the turn of the century the Alabama Builders' Hardware Manufacturing Company main building was purchased for the Florence Hosiery Mill (c. 1909). W. B. Davis, half owner of United Hosiery Mills in Chattanooga, bought the building to establish the second Buster Brown Mill. James H. Witherspoon, Davis' brother-in-law, began operation in 1913 of the Fort Payne mill, which provided ribbing, knitting and looping services. Shortly thereafter, Davis traded in his stock in Buster Brown Mills for complete ownership of the Fort Payne mill and moved to the town in 1915. He changed the name of the mill to W. B. Davis and Son Hosiery Mill and began operation of Fort Payne's largest industrial company during the early decades of the 20th century. Davis expanded the mill operation to include dyeing, shaping and finishing (labeling, pairing and boxing), and patented the Davis 4D sock which was the first elastic topsock for men and manufactured it in this building. The success of the Davis mill stimulated the economy of Fort Payne by serving as the town's primary employer.

The mill company acquired much of the town's central property and embarked on building a mill complex. Between 1915 and 1926 the company relocated and built a large number of residences, a clubhouse, swimming pool and interdenominational church for its employees. The building activity within the mill complex constituted the primary building in Fort Payne during the period. Twentieth century Fort Payne had found a new focus for its industrial climate in the hosiery industry.

After Davis' death in the late 1920's, his son Robert gained control of the business. Already the impact of the industry was apparent with many of the company's former superintendents establishing other hosiery mills and related businesses in the area. During World War II Robert Davis perfected the Cushion Sole Sox. The mill produced and delivered military issue Cushion Soxs and was in 1944 awarded the Army and Navy "E" (excellent) award for their efforts during the war. Davis was cited as providing the greatest contribution to the progress of the hosiery manufacturing business within 10 years than any other American, and the mill was commended for its high rate of efficiency in its operation.

In 1948, Davis sold the company to a holding company which in turn sold it to R. R. McLarty. In 1974, the milling works was moved to a new building constructed adjacent to the original mill building. Presently owned by Mrs. Ida Goza, the business still maintains local ownership and is now known as Bonnie Mills. The original building is presently unoccupied.

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Fort Payne Coal and Iron Company. Fort Payne, Alabama Illustrated, Elizabeth, New Jersey: Journal Printing House 1890.

Young, Annie K. Early History of Fort Payne and DeKalb County, 1972.

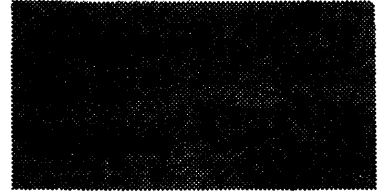
Landmarks of DeKalb County, Inc. Landmarks: A Pictorial History of DeKalb County, AL, Collegedale, Tenn.: The College Press, c. 1971.

Sanborn Insurance Maps: 1897, 1909, 1927

Factory Insurance Association Map: March, 1961.

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L. N. Christenson survey of Fort Payne, part of Block 90, beginning at the southeast corner of said block, then northwesterly, 240 feet, thence northeasterly 423.06 feet. Thence southeasterly 94.8 feet, thence south westerly 102 feet, thence southeasterly 145.3 feet, thence southwesterly 337 feet to point of beginning. Containing 2 acres. Fort Payne, Section 8, Township 7, Range 9. (See redline on attached sketch maps.)

JAN. 1897
FT. PAYNE
 ALA.

3

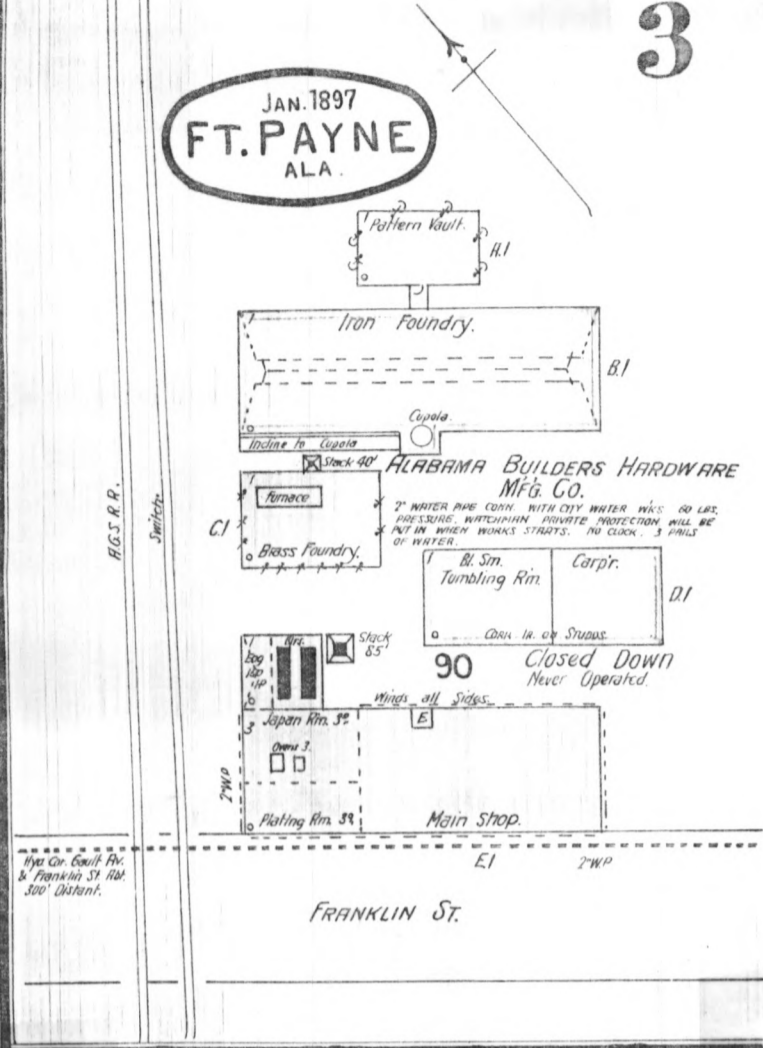


Illustration 1
 Alabama Builders Hardware Manufacturing Company
 (1897)

Sanborn Map Rendering of
 W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill
 Fort Payne
 DeKalb County
 Alabama

Illustration 2
 Florence Hosiery Mill
 (1909)

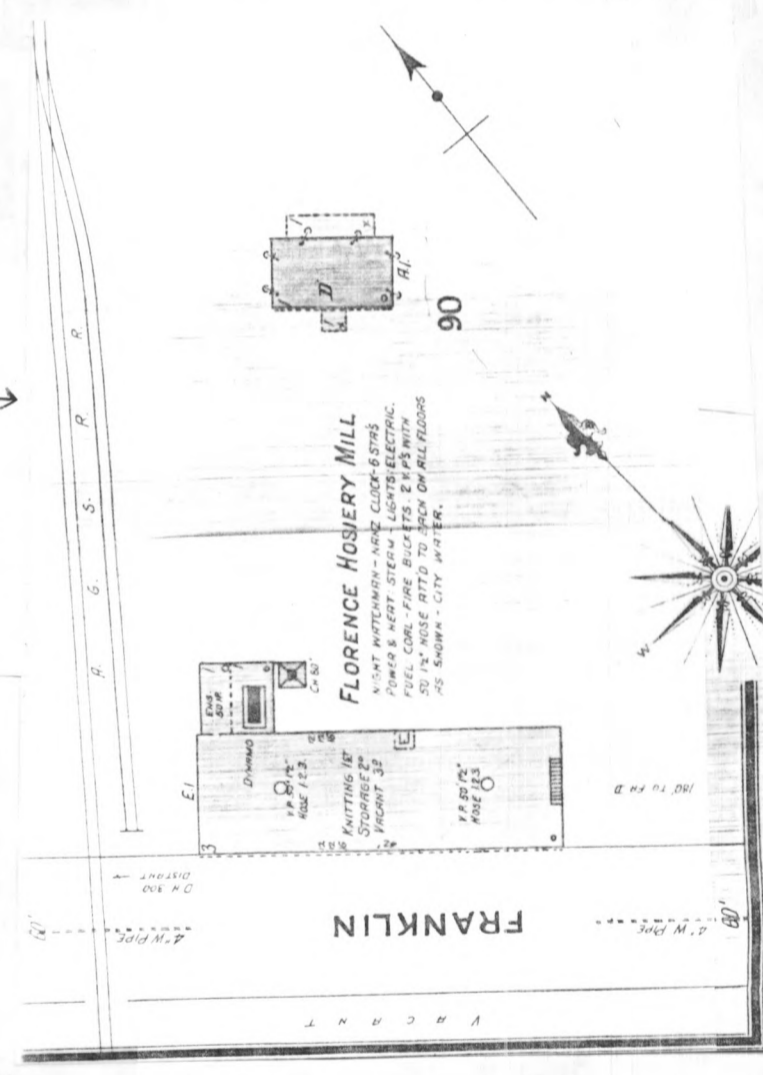
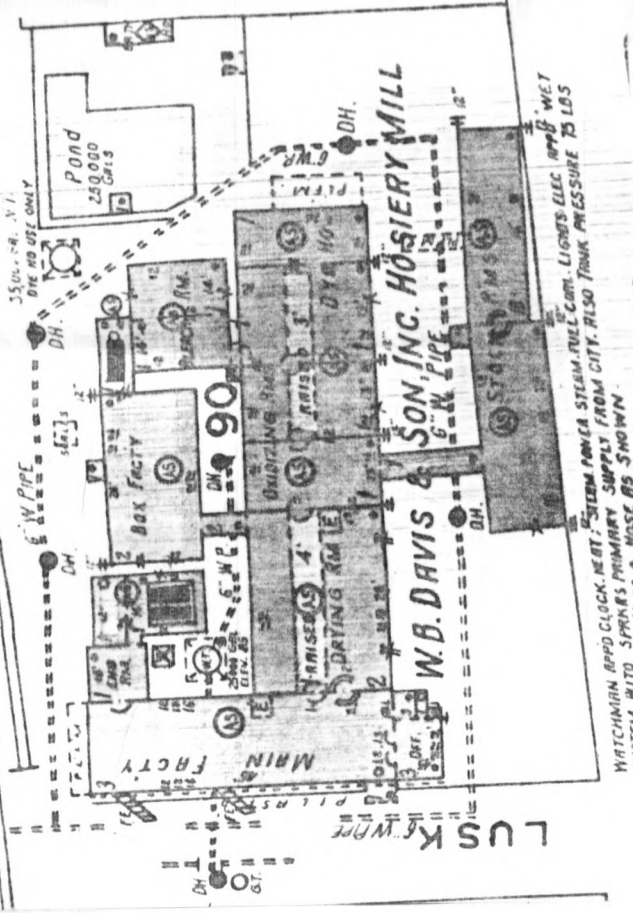


Illustration 3
 W. B. Davis & Son, Inc.
 Hosiery Mill
 (1927)



W. B. DAVIS Hosiery Mill, Inc., FORT PAYNE, ALA.

SCALE 1 INCH=50 FEET

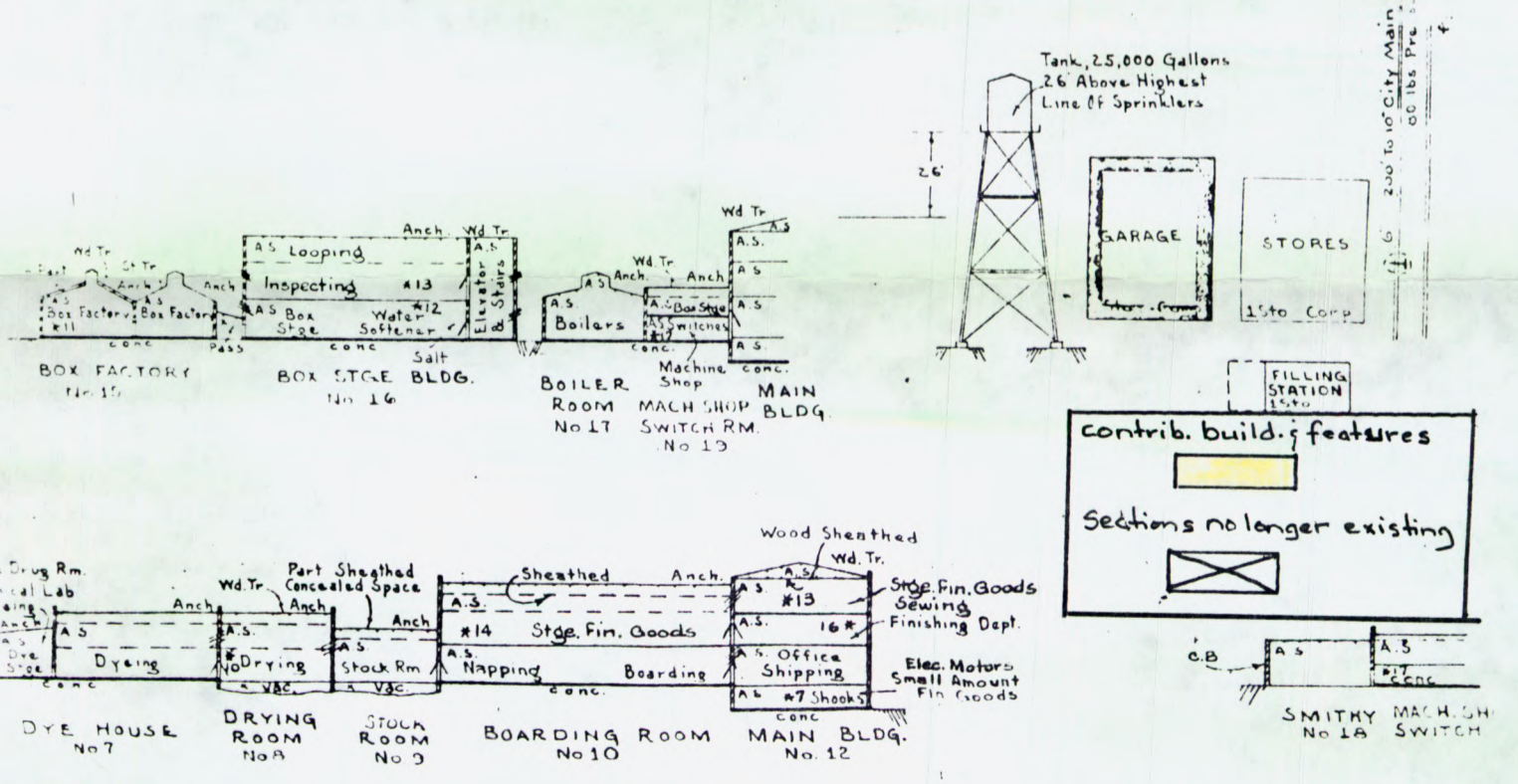
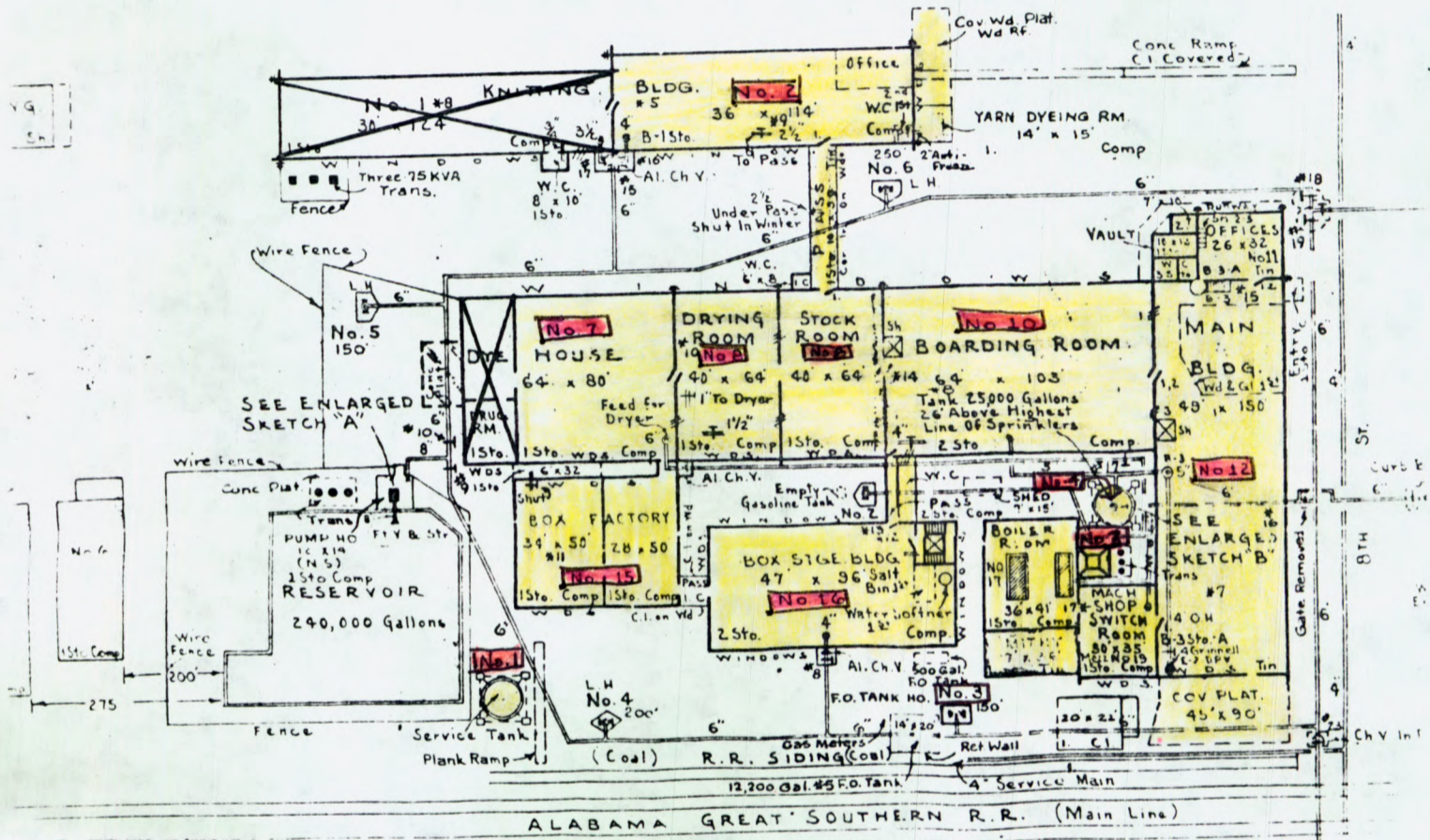
FACTORY INSURANCE ASSOCIATION

EASTERN REGIONAL OFFICE
HARTFORD, CONN.
MARCH 28, 1981

1. Main Building Complex - (#12) Includes Machine Shop, Smithy, Boiler Room and the c. 1927 wing addition which includes #10, #8 and #7.
2. Columnar Smoke Stack (#3)
3. Water Tower (#4)
4. Box Storage Building (#16)
5. Box Factory Buildings (#15)
6. Water Tower (#1)
7. Knitting Building (#2)

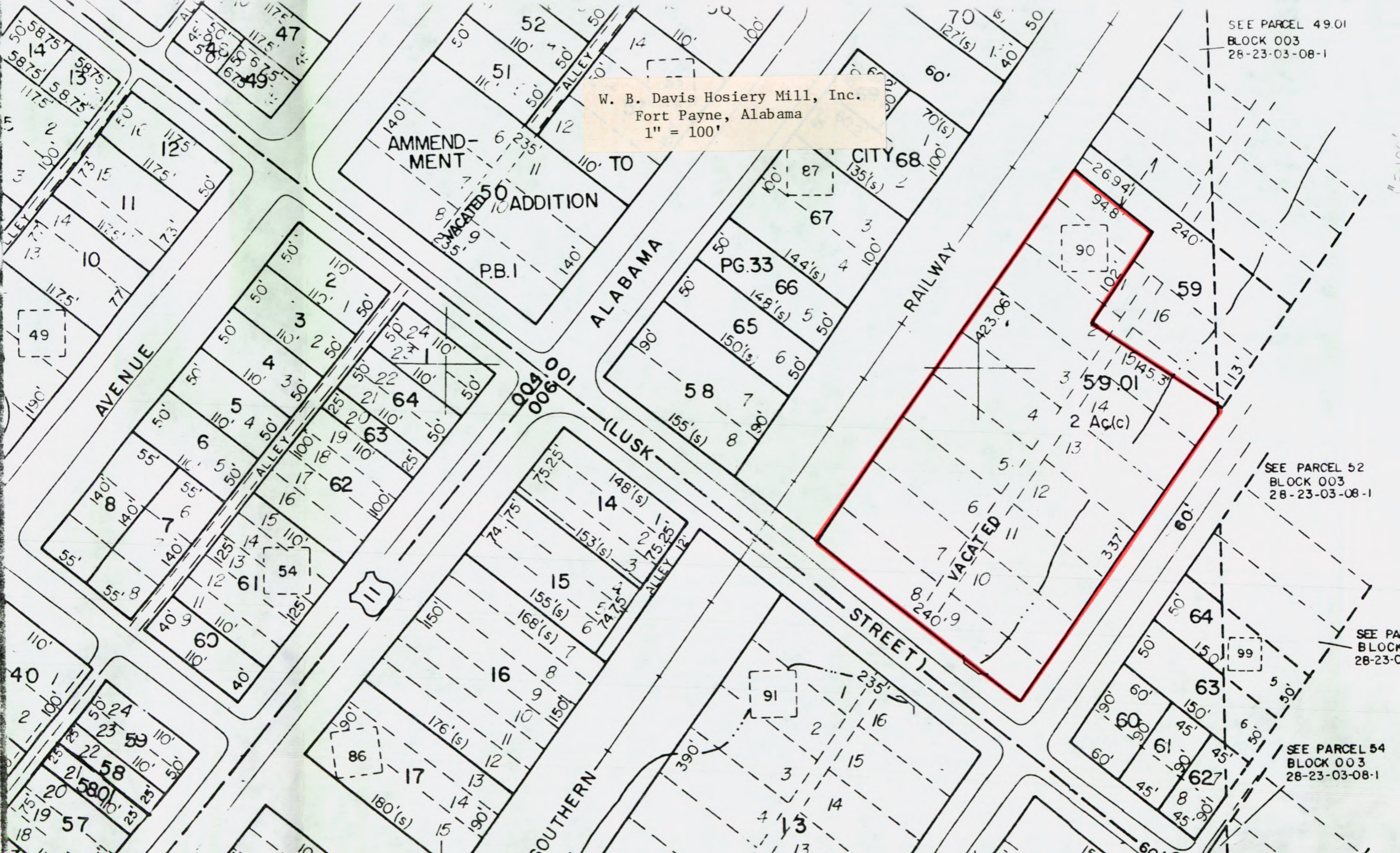


DWG.
15to 5h



SEE PARCEL 49.01
BLOCK 003
28-23-03-08-1

W. B. Davis Hosiery Mill, Inc.
Fort Payne, Alabama
1" = 100'

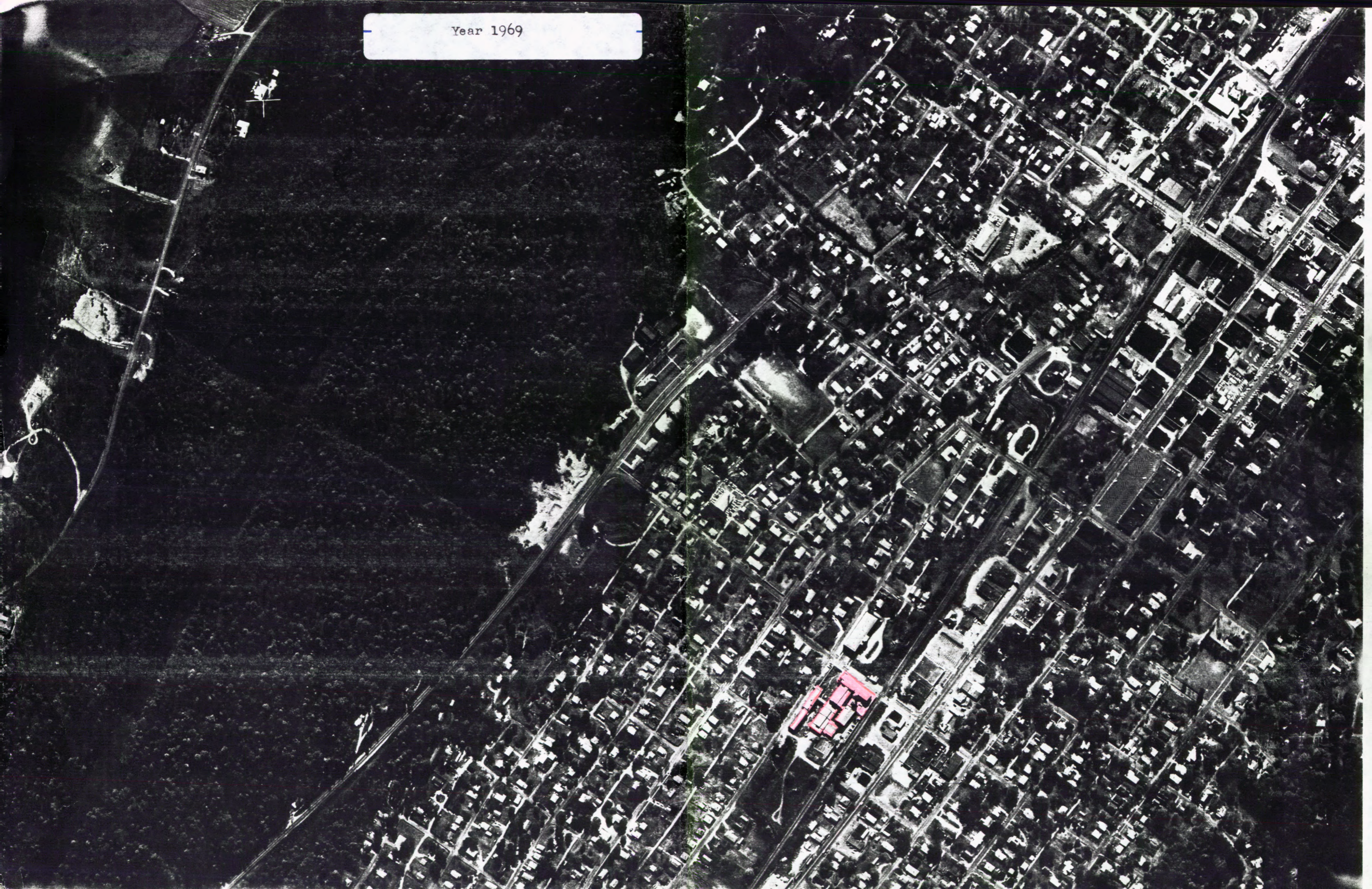


SEE PARCEL 52
BLOCK 003
28-23-03-08-1

SEE PARCEL
BLOCK 003
28-23-03-08-1

SEE PARCEL 54
BLOCK 003
28-23-03-08-1

Year 1969



1969

RECEIVED

MAR 31 1986

ALABAMA
HISTORICAL COMMISSION