

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION 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 Edison Commercial Historic District  
other names/site number N/A

## 2. Location

street & number Hartford Street/ GA State Route 37 and Turner Street/GA State Route 216.  
city, town Edison (N/A) vicinity of  
county Calhoun code GA 037  
state Georgia code GA zip code 31746

(N/A) not for publication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	22	3
sites	0	0
structures	1	0
objects	0	0
total	23	3

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

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.

Richard Clowes  
Signature of certifying official

4-20-00  
Date

W. Ray Luce, Division Director and  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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

Edson A. Beall 5/26/00

( ) determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

( ) determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

( ) removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

( ) other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

( ) see continuation sheet

Jan

Keeper of the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

## 6. Function or Use

---

### Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE  
GOVERNMENT/city hall  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

### Current Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE  
GOVERNMENT/city hall

---

## 7. Description

---

### Architectural Classification:

OTHER: Folk Victorian

### Materials:

<b>foundation</b>	BRICK
<b>walls</b>	BRICK
<b>roof</b>	ASPHALT
<b>other</b>	N/A

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Edison Commercial Historic District is centered on the intersection of Hartford Street/Georgia State Route 37 and Turner Street/Georgia State Route 216. The CSX (formerly Georgia) Railroad line crosses Hartford Street one block east of the intersection. Edison is one of four small incorporated cities in Calhoun County in southwest Georgia. Calhoun County remains a rural area with a 1990 population of 5,013 with 1,182 residing in Edison.

The Edison Commercial Historic District consists of a collection of early 20th-century commercial resources. The district is comprised of two main streets--Hartford Street which runs east-west and Turner Street which runs north-south. A majority of buildings in the district face Hartford Street. The railroad is the eastern boundary of the district (photograph 10).

The historic resources in the district are representative of the types of buildings constructed in small-town commercial areas in Georgia during the early 20th century. The buildings are generally brick, one- or two-stories with first floor storefronts, double-hung sash windows on the second floors, and cornices of corbeled brickwork (photograph 7). Most roofs are flat, and many buildings have adjacent or party walls with buildings on either side. Decorative details include elaborate corbeling, cast-iron columns, transoms, and original storefronts.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 7--Description

---

Good examples of the use of the Folk Victorian style for commercial buildings in the district are the block of three one-story, brick buildings located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Hartford and Turner streets (photographs 5 and 8). The westernmost building features corbeled brickwork and recessed panels. The center building retains its original storefront, colored-block glass transoms, corbeled brickwork, and cornice with dentils and brackets. The easternmost building also was constructed in the Folk Victorian style. Although the metal threshold is imprinted with "Bank of Calhoun County, 1902", the bank is referred to as the Hammack-Rish Bank in the history. The building retains its cast-iron columns, transoms, corbeled brickwork, and cornice with dentils and paired brackets.

From the 1920s to 1971, the Calhoun County News was housed in a building previously used as city hall on the north side of Hartford Street near the railroad (photograph 9). The one-story, brick building is simply detailed with recessed panels and segmental-arched windows and door.

Located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Hartford and Turner streets is a group of three two-story buildings which face Hartford Street (photograph 4). The corner building (non-contributing) is the former Bank of Edison building constructed in 1904 and currently the city hall. The building is non-contributing due to the addition of non-historic brick veneer on the front and side facades. Although the building is non-contributing because of its brick veneer, the building still helps define the corner of the major downtown intersection. The adjacent building retains its corbeled brickwork, transoms, cast-iron columns, storefront, and one-over-one double-hung sash windows with window hoods. The next building to the east is the former Farmers Trading Company building constructed in 1912. This building also retains its cast iron columns and corbeling.

The theater building was constructed in 1951 on a vacant lot that had been traditionally used for city and traveling events next to the Calhoun County News building (photograph 9). The building is concrete block with a stuccoed front facade. It is simple in design with a stepped-parapet, two three-light vertical windows, and recessed entrance with decorative metal doors.

The district contains few significant landscape features as all the buildings in the commercial core are built directly fronting the sidewalk. The terrain of the district slopes down from south to north. The sidewalks on the south side of Hartford are elevated by about three feet and those on the north side (particularly west of Turner) are lower than the street by about the same amount.

---

**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  
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**Period of Significance:**

1902-1951

**Significant Dates:**

1902- Edison incorporated

**Significant Person(s):**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

N/A

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

#### **Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Edison Commercial Historic District is typical of a small crossroads town in Georgia. The historic commercial resources are centered around the crossroads with the railroad running one block east of the intersection.

The Edison Commercial Historic District is significant in architecture for its collection of early 20th-century one- and two-story commercial buildings representing the common types and styles found in small towns throughout Georgia. A majority of the buildings are brick, share party walls, and have uniform setbacks. Decorative elements, often in the Folk Victorian style, found in the district include elaborate corbeling, cast-iron columns, transoms, and original storefronts.

The district is significant in commerce as the center of commerce, banking, and communications for Calhoun County, although it is neither the largest city nor the county seat. Edison became the historic trade center of the county because the city is on an important rail line and is centrally located. Within three years of the construction of the railroad through Edison in 1902, the city had two banks, two hotels, and a department store as well as other businesses. From 1903 until the 1960s, cotton was an important commodity and the city had two gins and several warehouses. In the early 1920s, the Edison Peanut and Cotton Company was the first peanut sheller and oil mill in the area. The remaining intact commercial buildings represent Edison's role as the commercial center for the county.

The district is significant in community planning and development as a good example of a crossroads town with railroad. As defined in Darlene Roth's 1989 study of Georgia Community Development and Morphology of Community Types, the character-defining features of the crossroads town with railroad-type are the railroad frequently post-dating the founding of the community and the primary orientation of the town is not toward the railroad. The community developed around the crossroads of two important early trade routes. Edison began as a post office at the intersection of the Hartford Trail and Cuthbert-Bainbridge Road, two important early trade routes in southwest Georgia. The Hartford Trail was a major east-west route that ran between Albany and Fort Gaines, and the Cuthbert-Bainbridge Road was an important north-south route. The Georgia, Florida, and Alabama Railroad reached Edison in 1902, and the tracks were laid one block east of the intersection perpendicular to Hartford Road. Although the railroad was a major influence on the growth of Edison, the commercial core was developed around the intersection with railroad-related resources (most of which are no longer extant) along the railroad.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

#### National Register Criteria

The Edison Commercial Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance as the center of commerce in Calhoun County and as a good example of an intact cross-rail-type town. The district is eligible under Criterion C for its variety of good and intact examples of architectural styles and types of commercial resources constructed between 1902 and 1951 and as a good example of a crossroads community center.

#### Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

N/A

#### Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins with the incorporation of Edison in 1902 and ends with the construction of the theater in 1951. The theater was constructed on a vacant lot that was historically used for city events and traveling entertainment shows. Previous to the construction of the theater, movies were shown on the side of the Hammack-Rish Bank (located directly west of the theater) and in an existing business. The period 1902-1951 represents the period during which all of the buildings in the downtown crossroads area were built in a relatively uniform pattern.

#### Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The contributing resources within the Edison Commercial Historic District were constructed during the period of significance and retain their historic integrity. The noncontributing resources either have lost their integrity through severe alterations or were constructed after the period of significance. The one contributing structure is the railroad right-of-way with its tracks.

#### Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

**NOTE: The following developmental history was prepared by Paul Forgey, Historic Preservation Planner, Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center. "Edison Commercial Historic District," Historic District Information Form, April 28, 1999. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.**

Calhoun County, located in southwest Georgia, was originally part of Early County. Early was one of three counties formed in 1818 from land taken from the Creek Indians. The Creeks were hostile toward early white inhabitants of the area, commonly raiding their settlements. As a result, the federal government sent troops led by Andrew Jackson into the southwest Georgia area to defeat the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

Indians and open the land for white settlement. On August 9, 1814 the Creeks signed a treaty, giving the state of Georgia the land between the Chattahoochee River, then the western border of Georgia, south to present day Florida and north to Fort Gaines.

The new counties developed slowly. The settlers were unlike those in other parts of Georgia in that they were mostly big planters rather than small farmers. The planters cleared and farmed most of the land. Cotton was the primary and, in some places, the only crop. This was because it would not spoil on the journey to market, was very profitable and much of the land in southwest Georgia was well suited for growing it. In addition to cotton, they grew food crops that were mostly for local consumption. After the War Between the States, the price of cotton fell and prompted the diversification of crops. The region's economy has always centered on agriculture and as a result the land retains its rural character today.

The land of Early County was more desirable than Irwin or Appling because the soils were better suited for cotton production. This resulted in smaller tracts (250 acres as opposed to 490) in the land lottery of 1820. The area to the northwest of the Flint River (including Calhoun County) had the best soils for cotton in the region. However, because of many factors--Indians, isolated, limited transportation--it took two lotteries to distribute the land.

As the population grew, new, smaller counties were formed. Decatur County in extreme southwest Georgia was the first subdivision in 1823. Thomas and Baker counties were formed in 1825, and Lee County was formed in 1826. The population of the area increased in the late 1840s and early 1850s, causing more subdivisions including Dougherty in 1853 and Calhoun in 1854.

In 1848, Thomas E. Dickey and C. M. Davis led a group of settlers from South Carolina to Georgia in search of land. Upon reaching Americus in Sumter County, they were told that southwest Georgia had plenty of land with rich soil. The pioneers settled in what was then Baker, but later became Calhoun County.

Calhoun County was created by an act of the Georgia Legislature on February 20, 1854. It was made up of land from Baker and Early counties and named for John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Calhoun was a graduate of Yale and one of South Carolina's most distinguished sons. He served as Secretary of War, Andrew Jackson's Vice President, and a U.S. Senator for many years.

The first post office in the area of what is now Edison (located a few miles to the east of Edison) was established prior to 1854 and called Pachitla. John W. Rogers was the first postmaster. With the help of his brother T. H. Rogers, John W. Rogers carried mail back and forth from Pachitla to Albany and Fort Gaines by horseback. The post office was located in a store operated by the brothers. The



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

community that developed around the post office was sometimes referred to as Nubbintown. The Pachitla post office was closed for unknown reasons around 1866.

On September 26, 1877, the name and the location of the post office changed to Keyton. George W. Wiggins was postmaster at this time. On April 8, 1886, Wiggins had the name Keyton changed to Edison because of his admiration for the inventor, Thomas A. Edison. He wrote Edison asking for permission to name the town in his honor. Wiggins was also an inventor, having a patent on a device called a "horse detacher" that allowed a horse and buggy to be separated without removing all the gear. His admiration for Edison was so great that he also named two of his sons after him. By 1881, the post office was housed in a store owned by Marion Wiley Watkins at an important crossroads.

The post office, and subsequently Edison, developed at this site because it was at the intersection of the Hartford Trail and the Cuthbert-Bainbridge Road. The town of Fort Gaines, 20 miles to the west of Edison on the Chattahoochee River, was one of the first towns to be developed in the area. It was an important city because of its location on the river. The Hartford Trail was a major east-west route that ran between Albany and Fort Gaines. The Cuthbert-Bainbridge Road linked these two important antebellum towns.

The event that caused Edison's population to increase dramatically was the coming of the railroad. The following information is from a 1905 article in the Edison News:

The country (Calhoun County) has been in the eye of the railroad people for a number of years, which is known by an old railroad survey and even the grading of the same into town of the old Bainbridge, Cuthbert and Columbus road, which was manipulated by Bullock and Kimball, who saw a future even as far back as the seventies for this country and had it not been for a financial strain just at that time, the railroad whistle would have been heard through the then pine forest and ere now this country would have been what it will be in a few more years. One of the main streets in Edison now, Depot Street south, is a part of this old railroad bed which was graded and ready for the iron when the clash came and it was abandoned. Nothing more was done then concerning a railroad through this part of the country until about four years ago when the present road was surveyed from Tallahassee, Fla. to Columbus, Georgia, at which time two surveys were made, one here and one about two miles west. The iron was laid into town July 18th, 1902; in a few days thereafter regular trains were put on even though Edison was the same Cross Roads as far as improvements went. Some business was done here, of course, just like any other little country place does business, but, until the railroad came did the people contract the fever which has put such a double hustle on them."

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

After the Georgia, Florida, and Alabama Railroad came through Edison, the town experienced a major building boom. In anticipation of this, or possibly as a result, Edison was incorporated on December 6, 1902. The original boundary was a mile circle with the center being the intersection of the railroad and Hartford Street. By 1905, there were almost fifty dwellings, four brick commercial buildings with three more under construction, and seven wooden commercial buildings. There was also a large brick merchant mill and gin, two hotels, a large livery stable, two new churches and a new school building.

The Bank of Edison was formed in 1904 by local citizens with capital of \$30,000. The contractor for the building was W. T. Jay of Shellman, Ga. The structure is one of Edison's few two-story buildings, and is now used as city hall. The original city hall was located to the east of the existing movie theater in the building most recently occupied by the Calhoun County News.

Cotton production also experienced a huge increase during this time. L. M. Killingsworth moved to Edison and built a cotton warehouse in 1903. The first season, 8,000 bales of cotton were weighed and sold there. In 1904, a second warehouse was built, and nearly twice as much cotton was sold that year. By the 1910s, there were two cotton gins in Edison. Killingsworth's warehouse was in business at least until the 1960s. The building was located on the southeast corner of the intersection of the railroad and Hartford Street. It has been replaced by a new public library.

The first civic group in Edison was the called the Edison Alliance. This group formed on June 9, 1888 with the purpose of reducing the costs of farming through cooperative efforts. Fertilizer, seed, ginning and storage of farm products were bought cooperatively by the organization resulting in lower prices for the individual members. G. W. Wiggins was the first president of the Alliance, and I. B. Manry was the vice-president.

Another early civic group was the Entre-nous Club. This was a group of young women that met for the card game of Hearts, sometimes gathering outdoors at tables on the hostess' lawn for play and refreshments. In 1941, the Edison Garden Club was chartered.

Henry Turner, an important early citizen of Edison, was instrumental in the formation of the Edison Baptist Church. He served as Edison's first mayor and also was Commissioner of Roads. He operated a mercantile business on the corner of Depot Street and Hartford. During the 1970s, Depot Street was changed to Turner Street, in honor of Henry Turner. Since the depot had been torn down in the 1960s, the name Depot Street had lost its meaning.

The first depot was built as soon as the rail line came through town. It was possibly built before the rails were put down because a church was torn down to accommodate the depot in 1901. The first

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

train was not until the summer of 1902. In any case, this was to be the first of two depots; the second built on the same site in the 1910s.

About 1912, Clarence A. Manry and C. J. Rambo, Sr. started Farmers Trading Company that was located in the building presently occupied by Lane Drugs. They sold hardware, farm supplies, furniture, and coffins. An elevator was installed in the building to get the coffins to the second floor. In 1931, Manry bought out the business and changed the name to Manry Hardware Company.

Also around this time, Rambo started Farmer's Gin Company. This enabled cotton farmers to get a higher return on their crops because it was already ginned. This cotton was then cheaper to transport because no waste materials had to be shipped, and when it arrived to market, it was already processed. With crop diversification in the early 1920s, Rambo changed the business to the Edison Peanut and Cotton Company. This was the first peanut sheller and oil mill in the area.

The Edison Hotel was built to the east of the railroad on Hartford Street in 1906. Hotels were commonly built near the depots to provide lodging for travelers. This building stood at least through 1924 (Sanborn Map), but no longer exists. There was also a hotel operated by Kathleen Roach, called the Roach Hotel. It was noted for its excellent food.

The Hammack and Rish families also made important contributions to Edison. Homer Eugenus Hammack and Ben Rish founded both the Hammack-Rish Bank and the Hammack, Rish & Sons' Department Store in 1902. The department store business had moved to Edison from Coleman, Georgia, and one of the first brick buildings in Edison was constructed to house it. The store advertised as "the store that saves you money" and sold coffins, furniture, plows, clothes, fertilizer, groceries, hardware, and millinery. In the prosperous years of the 1910s, the store would attract customers by throwing money off the roof into the crowd. The Hammack-Rish Bank was located directly to the west of the existing movie theater. The building still stands, but has not been used as a bank for many years. The metal threshold to the building is stamped "Bank of Calhoun County, 1902". It is unclear if the building was ever utilized as the Bank of Calhoun since the Hammack-Rish Bank occupied it almost immediately.

Hundreds of people would come to town on Saturday to do their shopping. The surrounding county residents were primarily farmers, and Saturday was traditionally a time to shop and socialize. Families would drive or walk into town and spend the afternoon buying supplies and visiting with friends. Behind all the stores were hitching posts for customers horses. In the evening, they would possibly see a picture show or attend one of the several traveling shows that would periodically come through town.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

The first movies in Edison were shown on the side of the Hammack-Rish Bank on Saturday nights. Prior to the theater's construction in 1951, the site was vacant and used for community events and traveling shows. The Grand Theater, Edison's first indoor movie house, had moving pictures in 1915. It was located within an existing business on Hartford Street. It advertised "3,000 feet of good celluloid actors."

Mr. Zavelo Israel and family moved to Edison in 1925. He opened Israel's Department Store that year. "Mr. Z", as he was known, was well liked and active in town life. He came up with several successful advertising gimmicks by updating earlier advertising ideas used by Hammack, Rish & Sons'. Once, several hundred people came to his store to catch guineas that had dollar bills attached to their legs. The birds were released outside into the crowd where people scrambled to catch one and get the money. The idea was a success that brought in many new customers that day.

The first newspaper was started by Andy Lane in 1904 and called the Edison News. It was published weekly, and Lane served as both publisher and editor. W. T. Adkins bought out Lane in 1909. Adkins also served as postmaster from 1910 to 1923 and again in 1934 and was the city's first fire chief. The name of the paper was changed to the Calhoun County News circa 1922.

Rosalia "Rod" Adkins, left law school at the University of Georgia to return home and help her father with the paper. After his death, Rod ran the paper singlehandedly doing all the ad sales, reporting, writing, editing, and printing. She was well known for her frustration with the old Linotype machines that created the lines of print. On occasion, the paper would contain blank pages because of difficulty with the machine. Once, an issue was blank except for the masthead and pre-printed ads. To save a step in the process, Rod would write her articles directly on the Linotype. The Calhoun County News and the Arlington paper were bought out by the Early County News and combined into the Calhoun Courier in 1971. Adkins continued to write for the paper, which was published out of Blakely, until her death in 1976. The newspaper office still exists on Hartford Street and the old machines are still there. The city has plans to rehabilitate the building and printing presses as part of a local museum. This building was constructed as city hall and was used as such at least until the mid-1920s.

The Calhoun County News aggressively campaigned for local improvements during the 1930s, especially the paving of Hartford Street. When Hartford and Turner Streets were finally paved in 1940, the city council banned roller skating on the streets out of fear of children injuring themselves.

H. C. Hays was mayor when Edison built its first sewage system in the early 1950s. The project was financed by revenue bonds overwhelmingly approved by the citizenry.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

In the 1940s, Mr. Bill Israel, Mr. Z's son, started a farmers market on the Edison-Morgan highway. He had been inspired by other towns that were known for a specific type of produce -- onions from Vidalia, pickles from Cairo, cantaloupes from Sylvester, etc. He thought that by having a centralized market for local produce, farmers would see better profits. Two local banks participated by offering low interest loans for truck crops, but the project was not successful and closed after a year. Bill Israel was very involved in promoting Edison and was sometimes referred to as "a one man chamber of commerce".

Prior to school consolidation there were many schools in every county. Each community had at least one, and many others were run by churches. In the 1920s, a wood-framed elementary school was located to the north of the Edison Baptist Church. In 1930, there were two schools for African-American children. One was affiliated with the Methodist Church and the other with the Baptist Church.

Farming was the primary source of revenue of most Calhoun County residents. Directly and indirectly, it was essential to the citizens of Edison as well. Cotton and corn were the principal crops; peanuts came later.

Edison's first electrical system was operated by a generator in the 1910s. At this time, power was only offered from dark until 10:30 PM. The initial use for electricity was for lighting. The City Council fixed the monthly electric rate for businesses at .85¢ for one bulb to \$4.70 for ten. Residential service was .70¢ for one bulb and \$2.75 for ten. The entire county received electricity around 1937 with the REA program.

In 1910, the city had a population of 841 residents.

Traveling tent shows would stop through town and provide entertainment and offer lectures. They would use the vacant lot where the theater (existing) would be built in 1951. Around 1910, a vaudeville show brought Mabel Kilian's "Marvelous Iron Jaw Act" to town. Several months later, the bustling town brought a six-day fair that offered Professor Carrescia's Italian Band, an "Electric Theater", hot air balloon ascensions, and the outlaw Jesse James.

In the late 1940s, a traveling circus wintered in Edison. The training and exercising of the animals provided an unusual entertainment for the citizens. The circus stayed at the vacant lot downtown, but residents can remember some of the animals, including the elephants, being walked through town. Because the operation spent several weeks each year in Edison, it gave many the opportunity to view tigers, lions, and elephants up close.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

Edison was surely affected by the Great Depression, but not to the extent that cities elsewhere were. This was because of several reasons. First, the settlement of the town was rather recent. Most of the pioneers were still alive and active in business. Because of this, there existed a "pioneer mentality" that allowed the citizens to get through times of difficulty without dwelling on their misfortune. Second, because Calhoun County's main industry is agriculture, there were food crops available as well as income for those involved in the business. Both yields and prices for crops consistently rose through the period of 1932 to 1940. Although the prices during this period were not great, they were comparatively better than during the 1920s. After World War I, there was an agricultural depression. This combined with the devastation of the boll weevil and caused major problems in farming communities. The county fair was canceled in the early 1920s because of discouraging agricultural prospects. By the time the Depression hit south Georgia in the early 1930s, crop prices were back up, and boll weevil was nearly under control.

Edison was also a center of commerce for the county although it is neither the largest city or the county seat. Edison is on an important rail line (Morgan, the county seat, is not on a rail line and has about a quarter of Edison's population) and is fairly centrally located (Arlington, the largest town in the county is located on the border of Calhoun and Early counties). Because Calhoun County had many productive farms, and prices for their crops were good, Edison fared better than many places. One of the black schools in Edison was closed in 1938, however, due to "the financial condition of the state" according to the school board minutes. Another indicator that the Depression may not have affected Edison as greatly as elsewhere, is that neither the Hammack-Rish Bank nor the Bank of Edison failed.

During the period between the Great Depression and the Second World War, the population of rural areas in the United States declined and the population of cities increased. This was caused in part because of advanced technologies developed for the First World War that made fewer farm workers necessary. It was also due to the continuing industrialization of the country which required a larger urban work force.

This national trend can be seen in the census figures for Calhoun County. From 1930 to 1990, the county's population steadily declined by more than 50 % from 10,567 in 1930 to 5,013 in 1990. Edison's population did not significantly change during that same period. In 1930, it had a population of 1,321 and in 1990 it was 1,182. It is probable that Calhoun County was affected in the same manner as rural areas throughout the nation. In 1924, the average size of Calhoun County's 1,378 farms was 64 acres; in 1987, there were only 127 farms with an average size of 906 acres. Edison lost population in the late 1930s due to the closing of a large sawmill operation.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and was another national trend that had an effect on Edison, although there were no protests or demonstrations. There were some major events

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 8--Statement of Significance

---

associated with the movement in southwest Georgia, but these were centered on Albany, some 40 miles to the east of Edison. The early period of the town, as documented by the local newspaper, contains few articles about the African-American population. The schools for the African-American children were initially operated by the local black churches. During the 1930s, there were 27 black schools operated by the county.

The Calhoun County school board began the process of consolidating the local schools in 1953. This met with considerable protest from the citizens, although the board continued to pursue it. Much of the dissent was caused by the competition between the various towns in Calhoun County. Morgan, the county seat, is the smallest town but the center of county government. Arlington, the largest town, is not centrally located and part of its population is in Early County. Leary has a small population and is also not centrally located. This left Edison as the most sensible location for the consolidated school but caused much objection from other parts of the county. Because of this, the school board was slow to act, and the new school was not built until 1964. The school is located on the east side of Edison, outside of the district. In April of 1965, the school board passed a resolution to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, no action was taken and in 1968 notice was received that federal funding would be cut off unless the county complied with the legislation. In 1969, the school board appointed a biracial committee to study the integration of the school system. The committee reported their findings, and the schools were officially desegregated in 1970.

---

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

---

Calhoun County Historical Society. Against Oblivion: A History of Calhoun County, Georgia. Published 1994 by W. H. Wolfe and Associates, Roswell, Georgia.

City of Edison. Edison, 1886-1896: A Look Into the Past. 1986.

Forgey, Paul. "Edison Commercial Historic District," Historic District Information Form, April 28, 1999. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

Paul, Bobby. An Early History of Calhoun County. Research paper submitted to Georgia Southwestern College 1969, Americus, Georgia.

1924 Sanborn Maps of the City of Edison.

Oral interviews by Paul Forgey conducted on March 17, 1999 with: Mr. Ben Collins, Mrs. Inez Beckham, Mrs. Shirley Blakenship.

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

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued  
date issued:
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

**Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A**



---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

**Acreege of Property**                      Approximately 5 acres.

**UTM References**

A)    Zone 16        Easting 714460        Northing 3493440

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the Edison Commercial Historic District is indicated on the attached tax map with a heavy black line, drawn to scale.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary encompasses the concentration of historic resources associated with the commercial area of downtown Edison. The area north of the district is industrial and residential. To the west and south of the district are residential resources, and to the east is a mixture of residential and non-historic commercial developments.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

**State Historic Preservation Office**

**name/title** Gretchen Kinnard/National Register Coordinator  
**organization** Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**street & number** 500 The Healey Building, 57 Forsyth Street  
**city or town** Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303  
**telephone** (404) 656-2840 **date** April 17, 2000

**Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable)**                      ( ) not applicable

**name/title** Paul Forgey/Preservation Planner  
**organization** Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center  
**street and number** P.O. Box 346  
**city or town** Camilla **state** Georgia **zip code** 31730  
**telephone** (912) 522-3552

( ) **consultant**  
(X) **regional development center preservation planner**  
( ) **other:**

(HPD form version 02-24-97)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

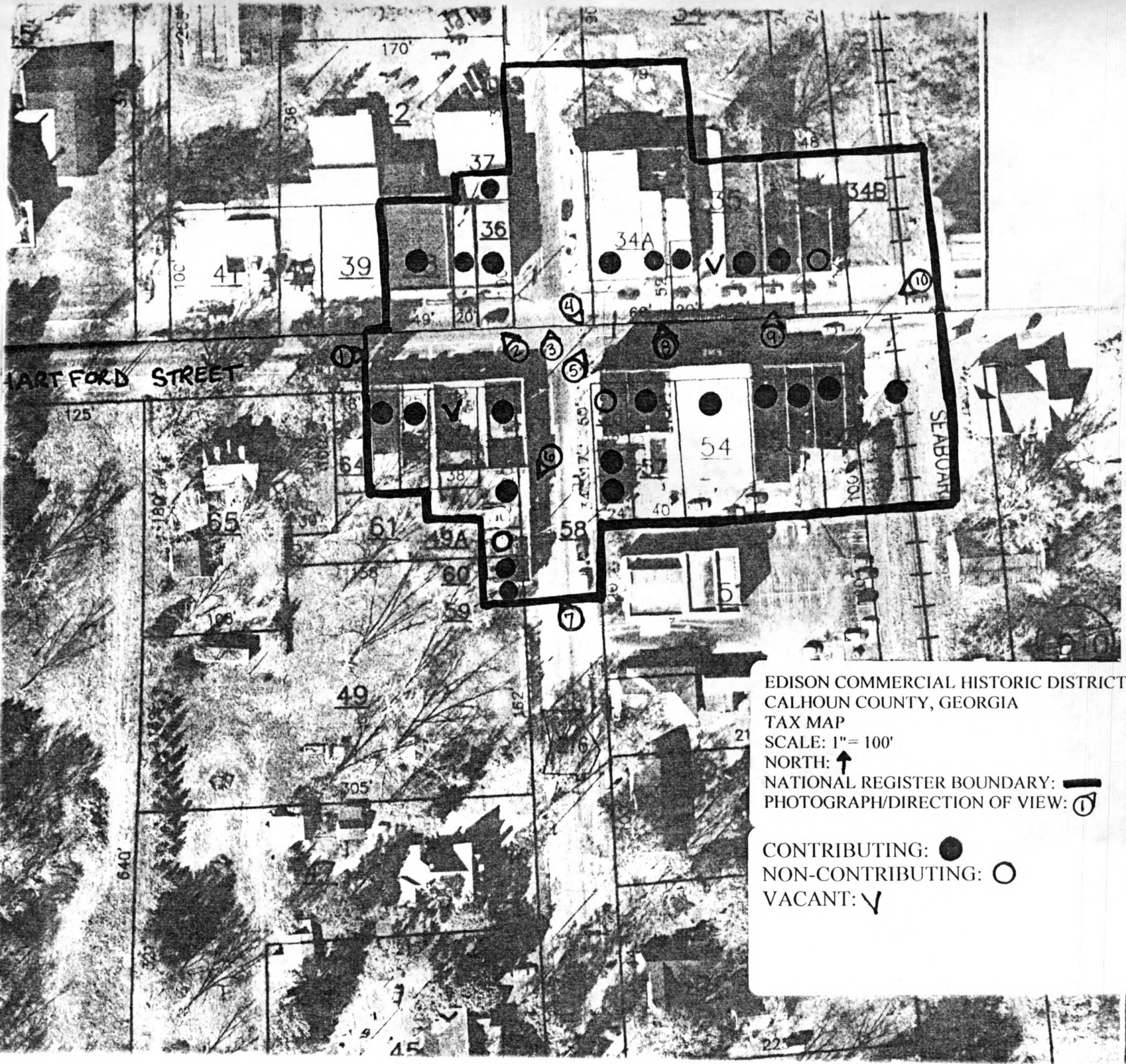
**Photographs**



---

**Name of Property:** Edison Commercial Historic District  
**City or Vicinity:** Edison  
**County:** Calhoun  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** August 1999

**Description of Photograph(s):**

- 1 of 10: Hartford Street; photographer facing east.
- 2 of 10: North side of Hartford Street; photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 10: Intersection of Hartford and Turner streets; photographer facing north.
- 4 of 10: Southeast corner of intersection of Hartford and Turner streets; photographer facing southeast.
- 5 of 10: Northeast corner of intersection of Hartford and Turner streets; photographer facing northeast.
- 6 of 10: West side of Turner Street; photographer facing southwest.
- 7 of 10: West side of Turner Street; photographer facing northwest.
- 8 of 10: North side of Hartford Street; photographer facing north.
- 9 of 10: North side of Hartford Street; photographer facing north.
- 10 of 10: South side of Hartford Street; photographer facing southwest.



EDISON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 CALHOUN COUNTY, GEORGIA  
 TAX MAP  
 SCALE: 1" = 100'  
 NORTH: ↑  
 NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY:   
 PHOTOGRAPH/DIRECTION OF VIEW: 

CONTRIBUTING: ●  
 NON-CONTRIBUTING: ○  
 VACANT: √