

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Hill, W. L. Store

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 3034 York Street N/A not for publication

city or town Sharon N/A vicinity

state South Carolina code SC county York code 091 zip code 29742

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility 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 does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mary W. Edmonds 12/7/94
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Mary W. Edmonds, Deputy SHPO, S.C. Department of Archives & History, Columbia, S.C.
State of Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 1-20-95
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**Entered in the
National Register.**

Hill, W. L., Store

Name of Property

York Co., SC

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Department Store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls brick

roof

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes. C is checked.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A, B, C, D, E, F, G with checkboxes.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

c. 1913-1944

Significant Dates

c. 1913

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Starr, Julian

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, National Register, landmark, survey, engineering record.

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of repository:

Hill, W. L. Store

York Co., SC

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.44 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 469120 38675000
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Beth Gatza, Architectural Historian

organization date 10 July 1994

street & number 428 N. Laurel Ave., #7 telephone (704) 331 9660

city or town Charlotte state NC zip code 28204

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name John A. and Margie F. Carter

street & number 2774 Sawmill Road telephone (803) 925 2643

city or town Hickory Grove state SC zip code 29717

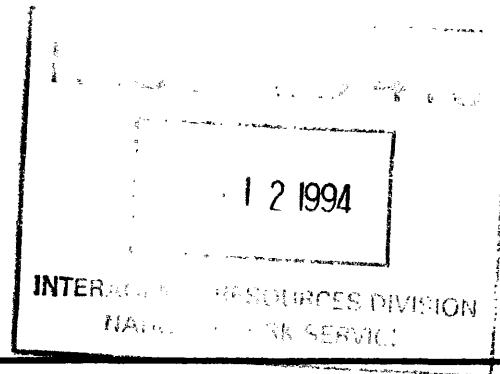
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Narrative Description

The W. L. Hill store (c. 1913) is a three-story brick department store located in the small town of Sharon, South Carolina. Conspicuous for its size and prominent siting, it stands at a bend in State Route 49 as it enters the town from the north. It is by far the largest building in the town, which is in a predominately rural area.

The walls of the building are laid up in common-bond of brick that was handmade on site using local materials.¹ There are three stories and three prominent divisions across the facade. Raised brickwork, resembling pairs of engaged pilasters, mark the divisions between the three sections and also the edges of the facade. Each section has one bay in the first story and three bays on each of the second and third stories. The parapet roof is enhanced by decorative corbelling.

There are two recessed entries on the ground level, located in the two end bays. They are both paired glass doors topped by two-pane transoms. The original plate glass windows are still intact beneath a temporary covering of vertical-board siding applied by the current owner as a security precaution. The windows are one-over-one double-hung sash, many of which are replacements.

The side (east and west) and rear (south) elevations are also laid up in common-bond brick and punctuated by one-over-one double-hung sash windows. There are three small fixed-sash, arched windows along the front half of each side elevation (in lieu of the larger double-hung sashes). The reason for this was that it left the interior walls free for much-valued display space. There is a side door in each of the two side and rear elevations. The lot is sloped to the south, so that the basement is fenestrated only on the rear facade.

The interior is notable for its solid oak floors and the grand cherry staircase which dominates the center of the first floor. It rises about two-thirds the height of the first floor to a landing from which two side stairways split off perpendicularly. The third floor is reached by two smaller, simpler staircases which rise up from either side of the rear of the second story. The second and third floors are O-shaped, leaving the center of the store open to receive light from the clerestory window in the roof. Panelled square columns, some of which are mirrored, support both the second and third floors. The first floor has an ornate pressed tin ceiling.

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An original manually operated freight elevator stands in the rear (southwest) corner, and rises from the basement up to the third floor. There are built-in, walk-in vaults in the center back of both the basement and first floor. The first floor vault secured the cash for the store and "The Planters Bank" (W. L. Hill, President), which was located in the rear of the store. Inside the vault stands a "Cannonball" safe set in concrete. The original teller's cages, made of cherry wood and Florentine glass, are still on the premises (presently in storage). The basement vault served as a repository for records of the store's business.

The only substantial alteration to the building is a partition which partially encloses the other rear (southeast) corner. During the 1950's, the local telephone exchange was located in the building, and the partition was erected in order to create a sound barrier for the switchboard operators.² Otherwise, the fabric of the building is virtually original and the condition is excellent.

The ruins of a cotton warehouse stand on the property near the store. Although the exact date of construction is unknown, it appears to be contemporary with the store. Typical for a structure of its type, the walls and roof were frame while the foundation and fire walls were fabricated of masonry. Only the brick portions remain. It is a non-contributing resource.

¹Interview with Miss Jean Hill, Sharon, S.C., 6 July, 1994.
Interview with Doris Thomas, York, S.C., 8 June, 1994.

²Interview with Miss Jean Hill, Sharon, S.C., 6 July, 1994.
Interview with Doris Thomas, York, S.C., 8 June, 1994.

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Summary

The W. L. Hill Store (c. 1913) in the small community of Sharon, South Carolina is an intact, virtually unaltered example of an early twentieth century rural department store. Built around 1913, it reflects a nationwide trend towards merchandising on a grander scale, which resulted in the virtual extinction of the rural country store in America. Standing three stories tall, it would have been dwarfed by its city cousins, such as Macy's and Marshall Field's, but in rural South Carolina it was perceived to be giant. Designed by locally prominent architect Julian Starr, the W. L. Hill store mimicked the larger urban stores in its grandness, prominent siting, and dramatic interior space. All of these features are extant today and reflect the former glory days of the W. L. Hill Mercantile Company.

Context

Throughout the nineteenth century, general stores predominated across America, especially in rural areas. They were prolific, but small, and stocked the basic necessities without much variety. By the end of the century, however, manufactured goods were on the increase,¹ and consumers were becoming discontented with the high prices and lack of selection found in country stores.²

During the period from 1860 to 1910, several factors combined to create an atmosphere more conducive to marketing goods on a larger scale. General population growth, better transportation systems, more available capital, a higher standard of living, and with it an increased demand for quantity and quality goods were all precursors of a change to come.³ By the early 1890s, the department store genre had evolved and was experiencing a period of tremendous growth throughout America.⁴ Thousands were established during the quarter century lasting from 1905 to 1930.⁵ By definition, a department store is "a large retail shop, centrally located in a city, doing a big volume of business, and offering a wide range of merchandise, including clothing for women and children, small household wares, and usually dry goods and home furnishings."⁶ Naturally, the earliest and largest stores were located in urban areas, but it was not long before smaller merchants in less-populated areas followed the trend.

Inherent in this new system of offering mass quantities of goods for sale was an increased need for creative marketing. Customers were enticed by displays and advertisements, selection and style. The open floor plan in a

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department store was no doubt purposely planned in order to tempt the buyer by encouraging her to become drawn to something over in the next department. Buildings had to be larger and grander. They had to be eye-catching, inviting and appealing. They had to be places that one would want to spend time (and money) in.

It was in this context, during the most prolific period of development for department stores in America, that the W. L. Hill Store opened for business in 1913.

History

William Lawrence Hill (1866-1953), a "well-known Sharon merchant and farmer," was a young man when he first entered retailing around 1888. By the time of his death in 1953, he was regarded as "the dean of merchants in York County."⁷ During a career that spanned six and one-half decades, he built a successful empire which included substantial land holdings, cotton farming and ginning, grain milling, banking, and retailing.

In or around 1913, he erected what remains today the largest building and grandest commercial structure in the tiny town of Sharon, South Carolina (1910 population--374). In order to succeed, Hill had to, and did, draw customers from around the region, and two states. The store attracted customers from as far away as Chester, Gaffney and York in South Carolina and Shelby and Gastonia in North Carolina.⁸

To fulfill his customer's desires, Hill stocked a large inventory of goods, ranging from meat to millinery and from shoes to Chevrolets. Dry goods, groceries, meat and shoes were sold on the first floor. Ladies ascended the grand staircase to reach the millinery department, while gentlemen handled hardware and farm implements on the second floor. Buggies and wagons could be bought on the third floor. Feed and seed were supplied for the farming community. An authorized automobile dealer, Hill sold Chevrolets at one time, and later Fords. He installed a tank and sold gasoline and also dealt in parts for the automobiles as well as the buggies and wagons.⁹

Merchandise was delivered in quantity by rail car and delivered directly to his warehouse. Hill had paid for a rail spur which ran behind a warehouse building he owned across the street from the store. Goods were held there, as well as in the basement of the store. With this arrangement, Hill was able to

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buy goods in quantity, at lower prices, and be assured of always having a full inventory. Undoubtedly, this was appealing to the customers who had traveled considerable distances to shop with him.¹⁰

Hill catered to the needs of an overwhelmingly rural population. He was able to reach this goal by keeping up with fashions, by maintaining a complete inventory of a wide range of goods, and through clever marketing. He had other concerns, all of which were conducted on the premises. He ginned and stored cotton and ground corn on the property, and operated a bank in the back of the store itself. Even the local telephone exchange was located in the building. When a farmer came to town to conduct business with Hill, undoubtedly his wife would be inclined to come along and do a little shopping. She could be assured of finding up-to-date fashions and all of her domestic necessities.

The building directly reflects its function as a fashionable emporium. The exterior was designed to be grand and imposing, and relate to the consumer that fine things could be had inside. The main selling space was elegant, with its grand cherry staircase, pressed tin ceiling, mirrored, panelled columns, and rows upon rows of display cases. The bank teller's cages, once aligned across the back of the store, are ornate, yet rich and sturdy. Even the walk-in vault, which was visible from the selling floor, suggested importance and stability.

As it stands today, the W. L. Hill store is virtually unaltered and completely intact. Even without the display cases overflowing with dress goods or high-topped shoes, one does not need to use much imagination to understand the glamor and excitement of shopping at Hill's.

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Endnotes

¹William R. Leach. Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 16.

²Robert Hendrickson. The Grand Emporiums (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), p. 19.

³Robert Hendrickson. The Grand Emporiums (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), pp. 30-32.

⁴William R. Leach. Land of Desire (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 20.

⁵Robert Hendrickson. The Grand Emporiums (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), p. 58.

⁶Daniel J. Boorstin. The Americans: The Democratic Experience (New York: Random House, Inc., 1973), p. 101.

⁷Evening Herald (Rock Hill, S.C.), 7 October 1953.

⁸Interview with Margie Carter, Sharon, S.C., 20 April 1994.
Interview with Jean Hill, Sharon, S.C., 6 July 1994.
Interview with Doris Thomas, York, S.C., 8 June 1994.

⁹Interview with Margie Carter, Sharon, S.C., 20 April 1994.
Interview with Jean Hill, Sharon, S.C., 6 July 1994.
Interview with Doris Thomas, York, S.C., 8 June 1994.

¹⁰Interview with Jean Hill, Sharon, S.C., 6 July 1994.
Interview with Doris Thomas, York, S.C., 8 June 1994.

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- Boorstin, Daniel J. The Americans: The Democratic Experience. New York: Random House, Inc., 1973.
- Carter, Margie. Sharon, S.C. Interview, 20 April 1994.
- Evening Herald (Rock Hill, S.C.), 11 December 1972.
- Evening Herald (Rock Hill, S.C.), 7 October 1953.
- Gottfried, Herbert[†] and Jennings, Jan. American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940: An Illustrated Glossary. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1985.
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- Hendrickson, Robert. The Grand Emporiums. New York: Stein and Day, 1979.
- The Herald (Rock Hill, S.C.), 16 April 1989.
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- Leach, William R. Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.
- Thomas, Doris. York, S.C. Interview, 8 June 1994.
- Vaughn, Carl. Sharon, S.C. Interview, 29 June 1994.
- York, S.C. York County Courthouse. Clerk's Office.
- York, S.C. York County Courthouse. York County Probate Records

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the pencil line labeled "W.L. Hill Store" on the accompanying York County Tax Map 60-02, Block 2, Parcel 38, drawn at a scale of 1" = 200'.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property includes the store building and the ruins of the cotton warehouse on the parcel, and the entire parcel has historically been associated with the store and warehouse buildings. A portion of the original parcel, which was previously subdivided into another parcel and sold, has been excluded from the boundary of the nominated property.