

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

For NPS use only

received JUN 12 1987

date entered JUL 9 1987

1. Name

historic None

and or common Sylvester Commercial Historic District

2. Location

Bounded by East Kelly Street, North Main Street, East  
street & number Front Street, and North Isabella Street N/A not for publication

city, town Sylvester N/A vicinity of

state Georgia code 013 county Worth code 321

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Superior Court

street & number Worth County Courthouse

city, town Sylvester state Georgia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See Continuation Sheet has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Sylvester Commercial Historic District is located in the core of the central business district of a small southwest Georgia county seat town. It is characterized by one-, two-, and three-story commercial structures built between the 1890s and the 1930s.

The commercial district historically began as a narrow strip lining East Front Street and facing the Brunswick and Albany Railroad tracks. It was the station for nearby Isabella, the original county seat for Worth County. Originally called "Isabella Station", Sylvester grew rapidly in economic importance in the 1890s which caused the county seat to be officially moved here in 1904. Development soon spread up North Main Street, then North Isabella Street, and finally filled in along the south side of East Kelly Street, and randomly along Liberty Avenue between Isabella and Main.

The City of Sylvester is laid out in a north-south and east-west gridiron pattern. Each block consists of four lots which are 215 feet square separated by alleys. The central strip of blocks are larger, running the entire length of the town from north to south. These blocks contain six lots each, with the outside lots being 215 feet square, and the center lots being 118 feet wide by 215 feet deep.

This overall pattern of land subdivision in Sylvester is modified within the district by the alignment of the railroad tracks (now Seaboard Coastline) which lead into town from the west at a southeasterly angle, then curve upward again toward the northeast. The southern boundary of the district is East Front Street, which parallels the railroad tracks and conforms to the same angle.

The two state highways that come through the district conform to the regular grid pattern of the city streets. State Route 112, which leads northeast toward Ashburn and southwest toward Camilla, feeds into Isabella Street. State Route 33, which leads north to Cordele and south to Moultrie, leads into Main Street.

Land in the district gently slopes from the northern edge down to the railroad tracks. It contains neither notable natural landmarks, nor unusual geographic features. There are no distinct portions or sub-areas of the district. The natural terrain probably had some effect on the course of the railroad tracks, but not on the layout of the blocks or streets.

The buildings in the district are a dense development of commercial structures which line their respective blocks fronting onto sidewalks. The lots as originally laid out have been subdivided into several smaller parcels. Most buildings are constructed along these lot lines on the front and sides, with varying depths in the rear between buildings and alleys.

Architecturally, the district consists of a collection of late 19th- and early 20th-century commercial structures of one, two, and three stories. They reflect various adaptations of prevailing late 19th- and early 20th-century architectural styles, including Beaux Arts, Neoclassical, and late Victorian Commercial. The buildings can generally be described as brick, with first floor storefronts, double-hung sash windows on the second and third floors, and with cornices of corbeled brick, pressed metal or cast iron. Most roofs are flat, and many buildings have adjacent or party walls with buildings on either side.

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1. Historic Structures Field Survey: Worth County, Georgia

1981

x- State

Depository: Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of  
Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia

2. National Register of Historic Places

August 21, 1980 (for Worth County Local Building)   x- Federal

Depository: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior,  
Washington, D.C.

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Important buildings within the district include:

Sylvester Banking Company (now Sylvester City Hall), 101 North Main Street. (Photo 13). Built in 1910, the two-story granite structure is in the Classical Revival style with Corinthian pilasters.

First National Bank of Sylvester (now WXZE Radio), 102 North Isabella Street. (Photo 8). Built ca. 1915 in the Neoclassical style, it has a metal cornice.

Alford Building, 115-119 North Main Street. (Photo 14). Built ca. 1910 in the Commercial Style, the three-story, red brick building is the largest historic commercial structure in the city. The Masonic lodge once occupied the third floor.

Worth County Local Building, 118 North Isabella Street. (Photo 6) (Listed in the National Register). Built in 1911 to be a newspaper office, it is a vernacular variation of the Beaux-Arts Style. It has a tile roof.

C.W. Hillhouse Building, 125 E. Front Street (Photo 12). Built in 1897 as a hardware store, this is the best local example of a late Victorian commercial building. It has an elaborate metal cornice and hooded second story windows. The original date is in the cornice.

T.C. Jefford Block, 106-108-110-112 East Kelly Street (Photo 2). This block was built between 1911 and 1924 by local developer Dr. T.C. Jefford. The four slightly different facades are fine examples of one story commercial architecture. Two retain original prism glass over the entrance.

Sylvia Theater, 118 East Kelly Street (Photo 1). It was built in 1915 as Sylvester's first movie theater. It has a red brick facade with white marble geometric decorative patterns.

The district contains no significant landscape features, as all the buildings are built directly fronting the sidewalk, and no yards are found in the district. Bradford pear trees have been planted within the past few years along the sidewalks, but historically no trees existed in the district.

Changes to the district or the surrounding buildings include the covering of facades with aluminum, obscuring their historic appearance. A few of these remain in the district and nearby on the east side of North Main Street. Other changes to the district include remodelings, and addition of nonhistoric features such as a mansard roof and stucco.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates**      1881-1930                      **Builder/Architect**      Various

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Statement of Significance

The Sylvester Commercial Historic District is significant at the local level in the areas of architecture, commerce, and community planning. It is significant in architecture due to its fine collection of late 19th- and early 20th-century one-, two-, and three-story commercial buildings reflecting local adaptation of prevailing architectural styles, including Beaux Arts, Neoclassical, and Victorian Commercial. Several buildings are significant for being specially built for unusual functions, including an early motion picture house and a newspaper publishing company building. The district contains many fine embellishments, including pressed metal cornices, marble pilasters, and the use of several different colors of brick. The district is significant in commerce as the historic core of the commercial center of Worth County since the 1890s, reflecting its history as the banking, railroad, and communications center of the county. It is significant in community planning as a planned railroad community. Long after the area's 1820 opening for settlement, this community was founded and developed after the railroad's arrival in 1872. When formally laid out in 1893, the grid pattern of city streets with rows of city blocks was used, providing a planned community superimposed on the natural landscape and incorporating a few earlier structures.

These areas of significance support the property's eligibility under National Register Criteria A and C. It is eligible under A because of its association with the commercial development and settlement history of Sylvester and because it retains the original town plan. It is eligible under C because of the variety and quality of the remaining historic commercial architecture with its representative historic styles, materials, and workmanship.

Contributing/Non-contributing Resources

- 46 Contributing Buildings
- 11 Non-contributing Buildings

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Montgomery, Erick D. "Sylvester Commercial Historic District." Historic Property Information Form, (December, 1985), with additional information. On file at the Historic Preservation Section, Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approx. 6 acres

Quadrangle name Sylvester, GA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	7	2	3	0	5	4	0	3	4	9	1	2	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** The nominated property consists primarily of city block 74 with the addition of three warehouses near the railroad tracks. The railroad makes a distinct southern boundary, below which is a different type of development; the other sides are marked by either non-historic or severely altered construction, mostly with aluminum siding. It is marked on the enclosed tax map.

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

state	N/A	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian

organization Historic Preservation Section  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources date June 1, 1987

street & number 205 Butler Street, Room 1462 telephone (404) 656-2840

city or town Atlanta state Georgia 30334

## 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 Elizabeth A. Lyon  
Elizabeth A. Lyon

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date 6/8/87

### For NPS use only

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

for Sharon Byers Entered in the National Register date 7-9-87  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Historical Narrative

The City of Sylvester, county seat of Worth County, Georgia, is located in the southwestern part of the state in what was historically known in the nineteenth century as the pine barrens. Sylvester is the largest city in the county, with a population in 1980 of 4,226. The area was opened for white settlement in 1820, but the larger counties were later subdivided. Worth County was created by the state legislature in 1853. Shortly after the new county was laid out in 1854, a new county seat was surveyed and streets laid off. Named Isabella, it soon contained a courthouse, jail, several families and businesses before the Civil War began in 1861.

Since 1835 efforts to build a railroad from Brunswick on the coast, west into south Georgia had been dealt continuous setbacks. The Brunswick and Florida Railway was finally completed to Waresboro in 1860, and in the following year became the Brunswick and Albany Railway. With heavy support from business interests in Albany, work was resumed following the Civil War. In 1869 and 1870 the Brunswick to Waresboro tracks were reconstructed, having been dismantled by the Confederate government. Work forged ahead and in 1872 the road was completed all the way to Albany. The tracks were three miles south of Isabella, putting the county seat at a commercial disadvantage.

The Brunswick and Albany Railway was the single most important factor in opening up the interior of south Georgia for development. The population of this region was very sparse in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the only towns of any size were Albany, Newton, and Bainbridge, all of which were along the navigable Flint River. Albany managed to connect with a rail line from the north in 1857, and the Savannah, Florida, and Western reached Thomasville from the east in 1861.

The opening of the Brunswick and Albany Railway in the 1870s provided a much more economical and accessible route for getting agricultural products to market from the Wiregrass region of south Georgia. Many acres of range land were converted to cotton production and other cash crops. Even more importantly, the lumber and naval stores industries quickly developed along the line, exploiting the rich stands of virgin pine timber.

Between Waresboro and Albany, no less than twenty-two stations sprang up along the Brunswick and Albany tracks. (The name of the road again changed in 1892, becoming the Brunswick and Western Railway). Many of these stations became small boom towns, and still exist. In many cases these settlements were spurred by an entrepreneur, usually a lumber man who built a loading platform beside the tracks in order to ship his timber products to market.

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In June, 1881, William H. McPhaul and Josiah S. Westberry purchased the tract of land where Sylvester is now located, and went into the lumber and naval stores business. According to the History of Worth County by Grubbs, McPhaul was "engaged in the naval stores business when there was nothing here but a box car for a depot." That box car depot was originally known as Isabella Station, to serve the county seat, three miles to the north. In 1881 McPhaul married Mamie Adams of Americus and they constructed a house on the present location of the Worth County Courthouse.

Westberry, who served as business manager for W.H. McPhaul, married his sister, Kate McPhaul, in 1883. That same year, J. Howell Westberry, Josiah's brother, came to Isabella Station and worked as McPhaul's clerk. George C. Conoly, McPhaul's nephew, came from North Carolina in the early days of the town's settlement, hauling lumber to build the first house. Later, Conoly brought back his parents and brothers and sisters, and consequently the fourth McPhaul sibling located in Worth County. Thus, the settlement of Isabella Station began in the early 1880s.

The name Sylvester, Latin for "your wood," was being used as early as 1889 when it first appears on a map of Georgia. The Worth County Courthouse, then located in Isabella, burned in 1893, and with it all previously recorded deeds. In the early 1890s the town began to gain momentum. J.S. Westberry and Brother built the first brick storehouse in Sylvester, probably in the early 1890s. As early as 1893 a hotel was located on Main Street. John G. Polhill moved to Sylvester in 1890 and began practicing law. Possibly the earliest contractor there was W.H. Mangham, who built the first school house. He left in 1892. C.W. Hillhouse, another building contractor, came to Sylvester in 1891 and built many of the early business and residential structures. He also established a hardware business, constructing his Front Street store in 1897, within the nominated property.

Dr. M.J. Crockett was Sylvester's first physician, coming in the early 1890s. Dr. Martin A. Jefford was there prior to 1894 as the town dentist, when he was bought out by his brother, Dr. Thomas C. Jefford, newly from medical and dental school in Atlanta.

Institutions soon began to develop or relocate in the new town. The Baptist Church was organized in 1891 and the Methodist Church in 1894. The Presbyterian Church in Sylvester began in 1911. Worth Masonic Lodge No. 194 moved to Sylvester in 1892. In 1893 the only newspaper in the county moved to Sylvester. It had been founded in 1884 by A.J. Alford in Sumner as the Sumner Free-Trader. The name changed to Worth County Local when it moved to Sylvester. It was later renamed the Sylvester Local and is still the county's principal newspaper today.

Sylvester was incorporated by the Georgia legislature in 1898. The first mayor was the town's founder, William H. McPhaul. McPhaul only lived two more years, but can be credited with having had more influence in bringing Sylvester from a "box car depot" to the most significant commercial center in Worth County, and the largest town between Tifton and Albany on the old Brunswick and Albany Rail line.



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Following the death of McPhaul, his widow married Dr. T.C. Jefford and this couple continued in the development of Sylvester. Others also played a significant role in its continued progress. One was C.H. Strangward who moved to Sylvester in 1903 from Cleveland, Ohio and later started the Sylvester Fruit Farm and introduced the commercial production of cantalopes. The town became known by the 1930s as the Cantalope Center of the World. In 1915 Strangward built Sylvester's first movie theater, the Sylvia.

Josiah S. Westberry continued as a business leader in the community until his death in 1927. With his brother, John Howell Westberry, he founded in 1897 what in the next year became the Sylvester Banking Company. The First National Bank of Sylvester founded in 1903, failed in 1924. The Farmers and Merchants Bank organized in 1911, failed in 1926. Both failures are attributed to a regional recession caused by agricultural problems.

Two early warehouses were built to store agricultural commodities prior to 1911 on Front Street, facing the railroad tracks. Pinson and Johnson's general warehouse also housed a bank, a barber shop, and a dry goods and grocery store. The Farmers' Cotton and Hay Warehouse, managed by R.L. Deariso, included a large platform for loading box cars stationed on a sidetrack of the railroad.

By 1904 Sylvester was clearly the center of activity as well as population in Worth County, and the state legislature moved the county seat there from Isabella. A courthouse was built in the following year at the northwest corner of Main and Kelly Streets (out of the district). This helped to stimulate more business, and Sylvester continued to grow.

About 1905, C.A. Alford, a wealthy Worth County resident, conceived the idea of linking various short line railroads, and in the following year organized the Flint River and Gulf Railway. Alford built the tracks from Sylvester to Bridgeboro, and J.S. Betts and Company built the connecting line from Sylvester to Ashburn. On May 1, 1907 service was inaugurated between Hawkinsville and Bridgeboro, giving Sylvester a more direct route to points north and south.

C.A. Alford died in 1908 and plans were never followed through to run the road to Bainbridge, which would have given access to the Gulf of Mexico. By the 1920s the line was proposed for discontinuance by the then owner, Southern Railway, but citizens in the cities of Ashburn, Sylvester, and Camilla provided the purchase price for the road, and the Pidcock Family of Moultrie provided the other half. In 1924 a new charter was obtained under the name of Georgia, Ashburn, Sylvester, and Camilla Railway (G.A.S. & C.) and operation was resumed.

The Town of Sylvester continued to grow and the business district gained more substantial brick buildings. By December, 1911, Front Street was completely lined with one-and two-story brick buildings. Main Street was lined on both sides with substantial two-story brick store houses, and at the southwest corner of Main and Liberty the three-story Alford Building had been constructed. Isabella Street was filled on the west side with two-story brick buildings, but only three had been built on the east side.

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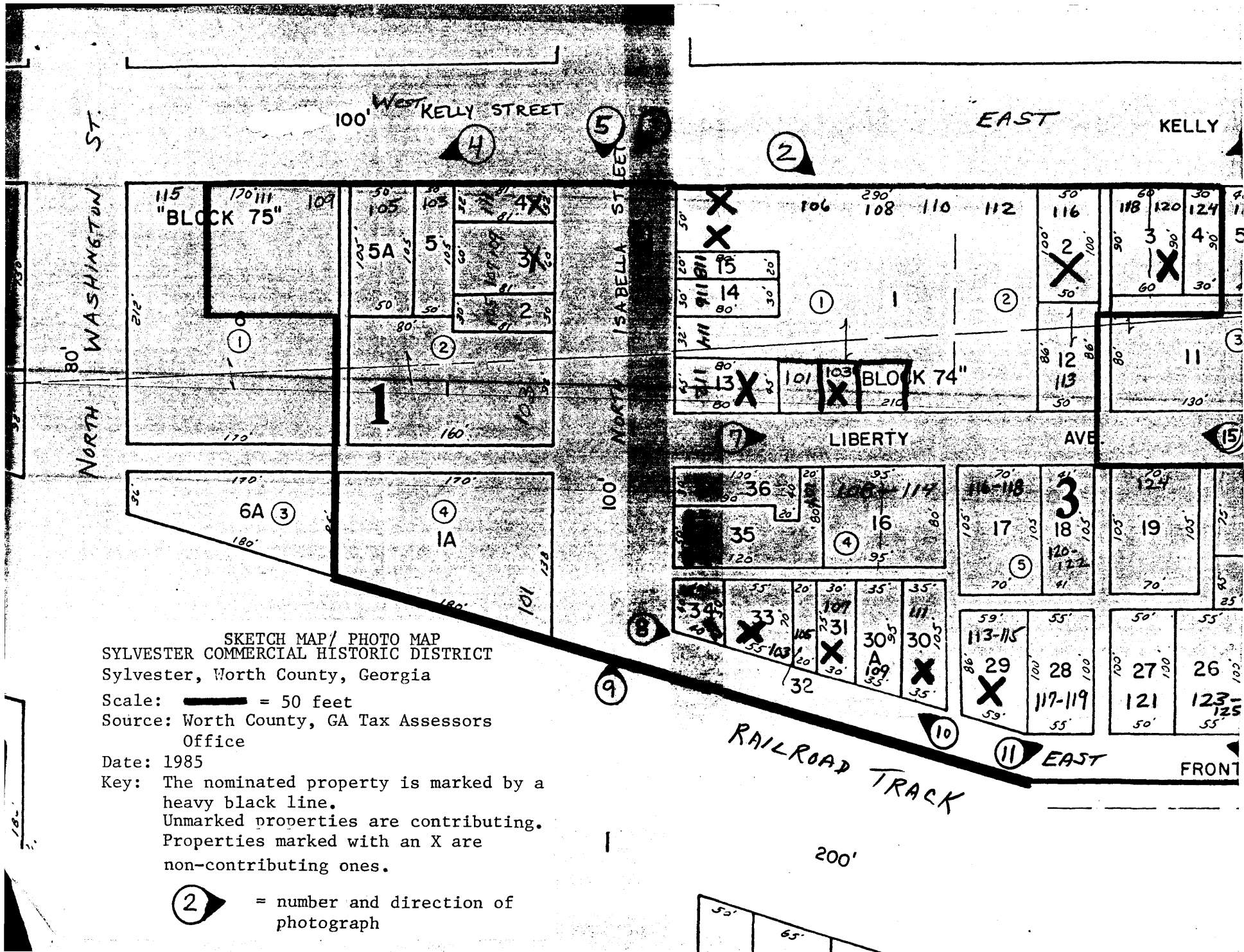
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By April, 1924, brick buildings had completely filled the east side of Isabella Street and a few were beginning to be constructed facing Kelly Street. Later in the 1920s and in the 1930s smaller brick commercial structures began filling in the few gaps on Kelly Street, as well as previously sparsely developed Liberty Avenue. By World War II downtown Sylvester was essentially developed to the point that it presently exists.

Despite the problems that beset many small towns, the advent of the boll weevil and its impact on cotton farming and the subsequent national economic depression, Sylvester was not as affected by these as by other events. Although cotton was an important cash crop, Sylvester had by the 1930s become the center of cantalope production in the United States. When timber resources were depleted in the county by the 1920s and 1930s, the land was converted for use in diversified agriculture.

One architect/builder who should be mentioned in connection with the early twentieth century built environment of Sylvester is John M. Bullard (1867-1936). Bullard settled permanently in Sylvester in 1900, where he became an important building contractor and the proprietor of Bullard Builders Supply.

Downtown Sylvester has managed to maintain much of its commercial importance although the completion of U.S. Highway 84, two blocks to the north along Franklin Street, has encouraged more recent commercial strip development. In an effort to modernize the downtown, a number of merchants were convinced to cover their original facades with aluminum fronts in the 1960s and 1970s. This, however, is now being discouraged and an effort is being made to rehabilitate the historic facades in the downtown.



SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO MAP  
 SYLVESTER COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 Sylvester, Worth County, Georgia

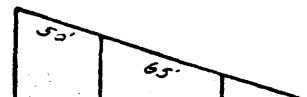
Scale: = 50 feet

Source: Worth County, GA Tax Assessors  
 Office

Date: 1985

Key: The nominated property is marked by a  
 heavy black line.  
 Unmarked properties are contributing.  
 Properties marked with an X are  
 non-contributing ones.

= number and direction of  
 photograph



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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 87001153

Date Listed: 07/09/87

Sylvester Commercial Historic District  
Property Name

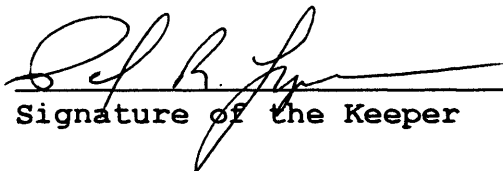
Worth  
County

GA  
State

N/A

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

7/1/90  
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

**Resource Count:**

The building known as 109 North Isabella Street is a contributing resource within the Sylvester Commercial Historic District.  
[The buildings at 107-109 N. Isabella Street were covered by non-historic siding at the time of original nomination and listed as a single noncontributing building. Removal of portions of the siding revealed two separate buildings, a fact that was confirmed by local residents and property owners. The remaining building referred to in the original nomination will continue to be regarded as noncontributing until such time as additional siding is removed to allow adequate assessment of its integrity.]

This information was confirmed by Leslie Sharp of the GA SHPO based on contact with locally knowledgeable residents.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)