

HISTORIC DISTRICT INFORMATION FORM

I. NAME OF DISTRICT: ^{historic} ✓
Monroe Commercial District--named because of the use of the district.

II. LOCATION OF DISTRICT

A. General Location

1. Describe in general terms the location of the district:

District is located in the heart of the city of Monroe. This area is the business and governmental center of the city.

2. Principal streets, highways, and geographic features: *Spring and Broad Sts.*

Spring Street and Broad Street are the major streets in the district. They intersect northwest of the courthouse.

3. City:

Monroe ✓

4. County:

Walton ✓

B. U.S. Congressman and Congressional District:

Doug Barnard--10th District

III. CLASSIFICATION:

Occupied

Little preservation work in progress (other than National Register nominations for the Walton Hotel and the Walton County Courthouse).

Current use: commercial and public

IV. DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT

A. Narrative Description

1. General character, appearance, and historical development:

District is a late 19th century commercial area, with one and two story brick buildings. Buildings exhibit Victorian qualities in many instances. District developed around a courthouse square, in a gridiron street pattern. While a few very fine architectural examples exist in the district (e.g., Walton Hotel, Walton County Courthouse), most of the buildings are rather simple, utilitarian structures typical of the turn-of-the-century. Later buildings feature different styles (e.g., Public Library) and different materials (e.g., poured concrete). This area was the first to develop in the city.

2. Natural terrain, landmarks:

Area is very flat and is densely developed, so no natural landmarks exist.

3. Various parts of the district:

District is relatively small and unified. No distinct areas were identified.

4. Pattern of land subdivision:

Streets are laid out in a gridiron fashion, typical for the era. The courthouse square dominates the district. Commercial buildings surround the courthouse. Terrain is flat, so it does not require a certain type of land subdivision.

5. Arrangement or placement of buildings:

Commercial buildings abut each other. Facades generally are located at the street, with no setback. Sidewalks separate buildings and the street. Very densely developed. Courthouse sits alone, with a lawn surrounding it. On the south edge of the district, a few buildings are also detached.

6. Architectural characteristics:

Most of the buildings are one and two story commercial structures from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Brick is the major building material. Details are typical for

the era, and include brick corbelling, decorative grills, arched windows, iron store-fronts, large display windows, and transoms. Metal gabled roofs are found on at least two buildings. Early and mid-20th century buildings include both classical revival styles (i.e., Public Library) and more utilitarian structures (e.g., garages, gas stations, and warehouses). Poured concrete and stone are also used as building materials in the district.

Public buildings in the district (e.g., Walton County Courthouse, Public Library) tend to be large structures with designs that reflect their public purpose. Their detached nature also draws attention to the buildings.

Design qualities and workmanship appear to be of a high quality nature. Alterations through the years have obscured some of these qualities, however. Most of the alterations involved the covering of the facade with a metal storefront and interior changes, such as lowering the ceiling.

7. Landscape characteristics:

Only major landscaping feature is the courthouse square. Walton County Courthouse sits on one block and is surrounded by a green lawn and large trees. Confederate monument is also located on the square.

8. Archaeological potential:

Unknown

9. Exceptions to the general rule:

There are no major exceptions to the general character of the district, as it is unified by its commercial nature.

B. Condition:

Good

Fair--general condition of the district

Poor/Deteriorated

C. Acreage of district (approximate):

14

D. Number of properties in district (approximate):

48

E. Intrusions and non-historic properties. Intrusions and non-historic properties are marked on the accompanying map.

Intrusions--General Description and Criteria for Inclusion:

The intrusions in the district are generally of one type--historical structures that have been significantly altered after the district's period of significance has passed. This alteration (which could be exterior and/or interior and generally involves a new storefront) is such that the historical features of the building have been destroyed. Criteria used included date of alteration, design of alteration, and degree of alteration. In one or two instances, modern structures which, because of their design, proportions, massing, site, or other features, detract from the significance of the district, have been identified as intrusions.

Non-historic structures--General Description and Criteria for Inclusion:

Most buildings in this category are structures built after the 1930s. While they generally blend into the district in terms of siting, proportion, massing, height, and design, they do not necessarily contribute to the significance of the district. These are usually very non-descript buildings, with few if any design details. Criteria for inclusion included date of construction, design features, and compatibility with district.

Buildings with potential significance--General Description and Criteria for Inclusion:

These are buildings where, because of modern alteration, determination of their significance is difficult. Generally, this alteration is the addition

of a false metal facade. Further investigation would be necessary to determine significance. Criteria for inclusion included date of alteration, extent of alteration, and age of building.

F. Boundaries of district

1. Brief boundary description and justification:

The district boundaries are shown on the accompanying map and generally include the old commercial core of Monroe. This area includes the major historic commercial and public buildings in the city. The boundary was chosen because of the concentration of significant historic resources in the area.

2. Difference of areas outside the district:

Several modern buildings lie directly north of the district, breaking the historic tie between the Monroe Commercial District and the residential area to the north. Modern warehouses, a moved and altered residence, and modern commercial buildings lie to the east of the district. A large modern bank, which breaks up the district on the southern edge because of its proportions, design, and siting, resulted in City Hall being nominated individually. Modern warehouses and open land lie west of the district.

3. Tentative boundaries:

The boundaries are relatively clearcut.

G. Photographs:

Attached (See photographs #20-26)

H. Maps:

Attached (See Map M-32)

I. U.T.M. References:

A Z17 E248920 N3742660
B Z17 E248960 N3742320
C Z17 E248740 N3742300
D Z17 E248700 N3742630

V. HISTORY

A. Summary of historical facts

1. Original owner or developer:

Elisha Betts

2. Subsequent developer:

N/A

3. Original use(s):

Commercial/public/residential

4. Subsequent uses:

same

5. Architects:

Bruce and Morgan (Walton County Courthouse)
Sydney S. Daniell and Russell Beutell (1935
courthouse remodelling)

G. Lloyd Preacher (Monroe Hotel--demolished)

6. Contractors:

James Smith (Walton County Courthouse)
Newton Coal and Lumber Company (1935 courthouse
remodelling)

Mackle Construction Corporation (Monroe Hotel--
demolished)

7. Other artists/craftsmen:

Woodruff Hardware and Manufacturing Company of
Winder (storefront)

8. Dates of development:

1820s to 1930s

B. Historical Narrative:

The first development to take place in Monroe was located in the vicinity of the present-day CBD. An early blacksmith's shop and tannery were soon followed by several log houses and a post office. Elisha Betts, an early land owner in the area, built a combination log house and store in an effort to promote the development of Monroe. After the designation of Monroe as the county seat in 1821, the town center grew, so that by 1827 11 stores and offices existed along with 41 houses and the courthouse, jail, and academy.

Two court-appointed surveyors were responsible for the gridiron street pattern found in the CBD. In 1822, Joseph Camp was appointed as surveyor by the inferior court. His work

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was followed in 1833 by J.Y. Gardner. While no plat remains from their work, the street layout in downtown Monroe is typical of new town development in Georgia during the early 1800s.

Government offices played a major role in shaping the CBD. Although a log courthouse was constructed in 1821 at a cost of \$50, the first real seat of county government was built in 1823. Located on the courthouse square, this building was constructed by Walton contractors William McMichael and John B. Pendleton for \$2,500. The courthouse was a brick, two-story building with plaster walls on the interior. Hardware and windows for the courthouse came from Augusta. The county jail was also a major building in early Monroe. An 1821 log jail, built behind the courthouse, was covered with weatherboard in 1826. By 1833 a new jail was needed, and the county awarded a \$1,554 contract to Richard Plunkett. The new structure was in place by 1834.

In the earliest development of the CBD, government offices, businesses, and residences all clustered together. The commercial buildings tended to locate on the west side of Broad Street, between Spring and Washington streets, facing the courthouse. Homes were then built north and south of this area, primarily along Broad Street. One of the earliest and most architecturally important residences in the CBD was the Stephen Felker House, built by Stephen Felker who moved to Monroe in 1824. Because of his South Carolina heritage, Felker constructed a raised cottage on the southeast corner of North Broad and East Highland streets. The impressive verandah with a double staircase reflected his standing in Monroe's business community. While the house still stands, it was altered first with the addition of a Victorian porch and later by the moving of the house, removal of the raised foundation, further changes to the porch, and alteration of the interior. In recent years it has served as a cotton broker's office.

Shortly after it was built, the first Walton County Courthouse was also altered. From 1826 to 1828, several improvements were made to upgrade the building. In 1836, the courthouse was reroofed and the exterior whitewashed. The following year the interior staircase was altered. However, by 1845 the county decided that a new courthouse was needed. Altharattes Atkinson was the contractor for this two-story, 50' X 40' brick structure. Cost of the building was \$4,984.

Monroe grew steadily but slowly in the 1840s and 1850s. Professional men moved into the area, so that by 1848 the county had 17 doctors and five lawyers. An 1849 inventory of the city listed two hotels, two churches, seven stores, four groceries, two tailors, four blacksmiths, two wagon makers, one tannery,

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one harness maker, two carriage makers, one painter, two boot and shoe makers, five lawyers, five doctors, and two schools. The business buildings in the CBD were all frame structures, as were the houses. Thus, an 1857 fire that swept through Monroe destroyed a majority of the business district and several dwellings. The courthouse was saved, convincing the townspeople of the value of building with brick.

With the coming of the Civil War, development stopped in Monroe. Many of the men in town joined the Confederate Army, and thus left Monroe for a period of several years. Furthermore, troops from William Sherman's army ransacked several stores and homes during their March to the Sea. The devastation brought by the war was especially hard on Monroe, effectively halting growth for 15 years.

In 1880, a railroad connection with Social Circle, linking Monroe to both Atlanta and Augusta, signaled the beginning of a new age of development in the city. One of the first and most important buildings constructed during this period was the Walton Hotel.* Built from 1881 to 1886, this three-story structure served as Monroe's principal hotel from 1886 to 1919. Its heavily ornate Victorian facade also served as a harbinger of future architectural development in the CBD.

A second important building from this era is the Walton County Courthouse.* In the spring of 1882, notices went out asking for bids on a new courthouse. Bruce and Morgan, an important architectural firm from Atlanta, had designed a two-story brick building with Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and Italianate elements. James Smith of Sparta, a contractor who would later count among his work the Windsor Hotel in Americus, built the courthouse at a cost of \$23,865.88. The building was completed in 1884 and immediately became the focal point of downtown Monroe.

Commercial development grew alongside these larger structures, although it remained concentrated on Broad Street across from the courthouse. General stores, a harness shop, grocery stores, and jewelry stores were located downtown in frame and brick structures by 1888. Frame dwellings dominated the block of North Broad between Spring and Highland streets.

The 1890s brought more growth to both Monroe and the CBD. In 1891, the Bank of Monroe was established, with G.C. Selman as president. By 1908, the bank was located on the northeast corner of Spring and Broad streets, in a building* remodelled in 1941, 1948, and 1960. A second, private bank, the Bank of George W. and J.H. Felker, was also established in 1891. In 1894, additional gas lights were added downtown and a night watchman was hired. Telephones also came to Monroe in the 1890s --there were 63 phones by 1900.

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In 1897, the Nunnally Building was constructed on Broad, across from the courthouse. It was adjoined by the B.S. Walker Block and the Monroe Mercantile Company, up to West Spring Street. All of these buildings were brick, with brick and concrete sidewalks and metal awnings. At this time the Felker Block stood on the northwest corner of Broad and Spring streets while the Selman Block was directly across the street on the northeast corner (later site of the bank). Across from the Walton Hotel, G.W. Felker built a business block* in 1897. This three-room, one-story block had recessed glass fronts, iron awnings, and brick pavements. Livery stables, such as Wright Brothers Livery, were on the alley north of the courthouse, while some warehouse development began behind the stores on Broad Street.

By the turn-of-the-century, Monroe had a thriving CBD. A variety of goods were sold in the district at furniture, bicycle, grocery, hardware, building material, buggy and wagon, harness, jewelry, drug, and photography stores. A laundry, barber shops, undertakers, and the Monroe Coca-Cola plant were also located downtown. Two of the earlier residences, including the one* across from the present-day library, were used as boarding houses. For a few years, the Walton Hotel went by the name of the Hotel Ellis.

Entertainment came to the CBD early in the 1900s. B.S. Walker and Robert M. Smith built the two-story, frame Mobley Opera House on Broad Street, but soon moved it to the site of the present-day courthouse annex. The second floor of this building was used for live entertainment until 1912, when motion pictures were shown. It was later torn down for the Cherokee Theatre, which was subsequently demolished for the annex. A Book Lovers Club was organized in 1905, leading to the 1936 development of the Monroe Public Library.

Two new banks were formed in the early 1900s. In 1906, the Farmers' Bank was chartered, followed in 1912 by the Union Banking Company. This latter bank merged with the Bank of Monroe in 1926. Other early 1900 developments in the CBD included the erection of the Confederate Monument, carved in 1907 at a cost of \$2,500 and made of Elbert County granite; and the 1910 installation of the courthouse clock. In 1906, an electric light system was installed in Monroe and a bond referendum for a water works was approved. The following year Monroe's citizens passed a second bond referendum for a new sewage plant.

By 1910, the CBD was growing into areas that were traditionally residential in nature. Commercial establishments claimed half of the block between Spring and Highland streets. Cast iron storefronts could be found in this area, including a surviving one made by Woodruff Hardware and Manufacturing

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Company of Winder, Georgia. Warehouses and livery stables were constructed east of Broad Street along an alleyway behind the stores. Two brick and one stone examples of this development remain. Development also continued down South Broad Street, where the Elite Theatre opened in 1914.

A 1916 Sanborn map of Monroe shows development in the CBD similar to that which remains today. Three blocks of brick commercial buildings lined Broad Street, clustered around the courthouse. The Bank of Monroe* and the Farmers' Bank were on the northeast and southwest corners of Broad and Spring streets respectively. City Hall* stood one block west of Broad on the north side of Spring Street. By this time, Monroe also had its first garage: G.L. Vaughan's on West Highland Street.

The Walton Hotel ceased operation in 1919, but it was soon followed by a new hotel in 1920. The new, three-story brick Monroe Hotel was constructed in 1920 and designed by Atlanta architect G. Lloyd Preacher. Mackle Construction Corporation of Atlanta was the contractor. Hardwood floors and a Spanish tile roof were two of the building's architectural features.

Growth during the 1920s and 1930s continued along the patterns established at the turn-of-the-century. After the moving of the Stephen Felker House* around 1920, only one residential structure faced Broad Street in the CBD, and that house*, across from the library, had long had a commercial use. Filling stations were built, showing the growing popularity of the automobile. In 1930, the Opera House was demolished and replaced by the Cherokee Theatre (which was later destroyed for the courthouse annex). One of Monroe's earliest poured concrete buildings* was constructed across from the present-day library as a large garage, although its brick facade featured decorative elements made of terra cotta.

Two new public buildings were constructed and one was remodelled in the CBD in the 1930s. In 1932, a red brick, classically inspired post office* was constructed on South Broad Street. The marble wainscotting, some furniture, and the entrance lobby remain in this building that now serves as the public library. Cost of the structure was \$46,000. In 1935, the courthouse* was remodelled at a cost of \$24,200. Newton Coal and Lumber Company was the contractor, while Sydney Daniell and Russell Beutell of Atlanta were the architects. These same two men also designed the Monroe City Hall* in 1939. The building, a WPA project, was built by John K. Davis and Son at a cost of \$45,000. Cast stone blocks, made from marble dust, were used on the exterior of this building

which draws on the Art Deco style for its inspiration. (City Hall is nominated as an individual property due to intrusions between the building and the rest of the district.)

After 1940, development slowed in the CBD for several years. When it began again in the late 1950s and 1960s, it was generally of a nature that harmed the historic character of the CBD. Aluminum and stucco storefronts were placed over several buildings. New structures featured modern design with little concern for the historic architecture. Several buildings, including G. Lloyd Preacher's Monroe Hotel and the 1907 Methodist Church, were demolished. Only in recent years, spurred by the nomination of the courthouse and the Walton Hotel to the National Register, have businessmen been interested in sensitive rehabilitation and preservation of their older buildings.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

A. Areas of Significance:

Architecture
Commerce
Community Planning
Politics/Government

B. Statements of Significance:

Architecture: Within the Monroe Commercial District the majority of buildings date from the 1880s to the 1920s and exhibit qualities typical of commercial buildings of that era. However, a few structures remain that either predate or postdate this major period of development. They also contribute to the architectural significance of the district.

The earliest structure in the CBD is probably a mid-nineteenth century survivor from the residential development surrounding the district. Located on the southwest corner of Washington and Broad streets, this house*, long used for commercial purposes, is a frame, rectangular structure with a turn-of-the-century porch. It could be compared with some of the finer residences in town and is representative of the earlier housing of the middle and upper classes.

Other buildings in the district were generally designed for commercial or public use. Those dating from 1880 to 1900 are more ornate. Smaller buildings of this era generally feature brick corbelling, decorative vents, recessed cast-iron or wooden storefronts, and arched windows. These features are more fully developed on larger buildings such as the Walton Hotel* and the Walton County Courthouse*, the latter using

elements from the Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and Italianate styles. In several instances, interiors in these structures have retained their general form with high ceilings and large open rooms; and in one or two cases original materials, such as tongue-and-groove ceilings, remain. Metal gable roofs were used (and remain) in at least two instances.

Buildings constructed from 1900 to 1920 generally tend to maintain the general characteristics of earlier structures, but with less of the ornate detailing. Window surrounds, roof lines, and facades are much plainer, although there is an occasional use of a glass transom to decorate the store. Interiors are also much less ornate, appearing more utilitarian. However, in at least one instance (the Eufalia*) the original form and materials remain in office space on the second floor. Several warehouses from this period remain as representative of the utilitarian buildings found in the district. Hexagonal concrete pavers, found in many sidewalks in the CBD, probably date from this period and are important as decorative elements in the streetscape.

After 1920, the buildings in the CBD exhibited less uniformity, showing the divergence of styles in the period. Utilitarian structures such as garages attempted to present a good face, in one instance by placing a brick facade with terracotta detailing on a poured concrete building. Decorative glass was used to modernize older buildings and tile entrances were employed for several of the stores. The new post office* built in 1932 utilized classical styles and features. Yet, despite their differences, all of these buildings are important as local manifestations of popular and changing national trends in architecture.

The role of certain architects in shaping the CBD (especially Bruce and Morgan) is also significant in Monroe's history. These architects have a regional significance that enhances the importance of their work in Monroe.

Commerce: Since the founding of Monroe, the Monroe Commercial District has been the center of commerce in the county. In the earliest days, the stores primarily served farmers. This activity greatly expanded in the 1890s, with the coming of industry resulting in new stores for Monroe. Nonetheless, the purpose of this section of the city has remained the same through the years. While not a regional trading center, the Monroe Commercial District has still been an important part of the history and development of the city.

Community Planning: It is in the Monroe Commercial District that one can best see the original gridiron street pattern developed for the city. This type of street pattern is typical

of new towns from this era in Georgia. However, the use of a large courthouse square to serve as a focal point for the community breaks the monotony of the design and adds some much needed green space to the CBD. The Confederate monument on the square also serves as a focal point. This development is important as a typical town plan of the era that was adhered to up until the 1890s and early 1900s.

Politics/Government: The Monroe Commercial District served, for many years, as the seat of both city and county government. Walton County has had a courthouse on the site of the present structure since 1823, and the City Hall was located on Spring Street for many years. The lives of the citizens of Monroe are affected daily by their governments, as seen in the buildings which remain in the district as public facilities. This role of government in the lives of the people make politics and government a significant part of the history of the community.

* Denotes building still standing

VII. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

See Overview Statement