

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received AUG 8 1983

date entered SEP 22 1983

## 1. Name

historic

~~Historic Resources of~~ Rockingham MRA

and/or common

## 2. Location

1 dist. + 5

street &amp; number

See individual nominations

\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town

Rockingham

\_\_\_ vicinity of

state

North Carolina

code

037

county

Richmond

code

153

## 3. Classification

## Category

\_\_\_ district

\_\_\_ building(s)

\_\_\_ structure

\_\_\_ site

\_\_\_ object

MRN

## Ownership

☒ public☒ private

\_\_\_ both

## Public Acquisition

\_\_\_ in process

\_\_\_ being considered

N/A

## Status

☒ occupied☒ unoccupied☒ work in progress

## Accessible

☒ yes: restricted☒ yes: unrestricted☒ no

## Present Use

\_\_\_ agriculture

☒ commercial☒ educational

\_\_\_ entertainment

☒ government

\_\_\_ industrial

\_\_\_ military

\_\_\_ museum

\_\_\_ park

☒ private residence☒ religious

\_\_\_ scientific

\_\_\_ transportation

☒ other: storage, parki

and vacant lot

## 4. Owner of Property

name

See individual nominations

street &amp; number

city, town

\_\_\_ vicinity of

state

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

Richmond County Courthouse

street &amp; number

114 E. Franklin

city, town

Rockingham

state

N. C. 28379

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title

Rockingham Inventory

has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes ☒ no

date

1980-81

\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county ☒ local

depository for survey records

Division of Archives and History, Survey and Planning Branch

city, town

Raleigh

state

N. C.

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☒ good  
☒ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☒ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☒ moved date see individual nominations

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### Survey Methodology

This inventory was the result of an effort jointly funded by the city of Rockingham and the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources. Its purpose was to conduct an intensive and comprehensive survey of all historically and architecturally significant buildings located within the city and its one mile planning jurisdiction.

The survey area includes a concentration of residential, commercial and industrial architecture, both formal and vernacular. Over 300 buildings and street-scapes were photographed and thoroughly described on information data sheets. Close attention was paid to site, architectural style, construction, dimension, detail, and historic background. Furthermore, over 600 mill houses were recorded by use of a code system.

At the end of a six month survey, boundaries were determined for a large residential district as part of a multiple resource nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, the nation's official list of cultural sites worthy of preservation. The nomination expanded upon the previously established boundaries of the local Rockingham Historic Zoning District approved November 20, 1979. In addition, five non-contiguous sites outside the district were included within the nomination for their architectural or historic merit. These are the H. C. Watson House, the former Bank of Pee Dee, the former U. S. Post Office and Federal Building, Hannah Pickett No. 1 Mill, and the Roberdel No. 1 Mill Company Store.

The reference material employed in this survey originated from various sources: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps dating from 1885 to 1938, and A History of Richmond County by James E. and Ida C. Huneycutt were referred to regularly. Old city directories, promotional literature, and documentary photographs were consulted and information gained from personal interviews was incorporated. A wealth of knowledge was gleaned from the unpublished notes of Isaac S. London (1885-1964), past editor of the Rockingham Post-Dispatch. Located in three separate collections housed at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, the Rockingham-Richmond County Library, and the Richmond County Office of the Superior Court, the papers contain a myriad of randomly collected facts, figures, and anecdotes concerning the history of Rockingham and Richmond County. Many of these notes are based upon information previously collected or handed down by former county historian, Captain W. I. Everett (1835-1911), C. E. D. Edgerton (1881-1941), Henry Clay Wall (1841-1899), and Mrs. LeGrand Everett (1870-1947).

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

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

For NPS use only  
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Continuation sheet      Description      Item number 7      Page 1

THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF ROCKINGHAM

Topograhpy and Climate<sup>1</sup>

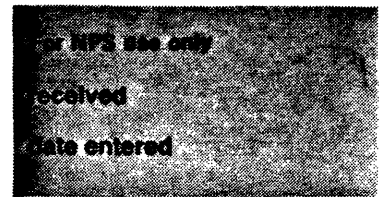
Rockingham, the county seat of Richmond County, was surveyed and platted in 1784 on a plateau between two swiftly flowing streams: Hitchcock Creek on the north and west, and Falling Creek on the south and east. Downstream, Falling Creek empties into Hitchcock Creek, which in turn flows six miles southwest to the Pee Dee River.

The Pee Dee River begins as the Yadkin near Blowing Rock, and becomes the Pee Dee as it joins the Uwharrie River near Morrow Mountain State Park northwest of Richmond County. The Pee Dee, named by the Catawba tribe of Indians that once inhabited this region, forms the western border of Richmond County, separating it from Anson County, Montgomery County borders on the north, Moore and Scotland counties on the east, with the North Carolina-South Carolina state line providing the southern boundary.

Potential water transportation routes and settings for saw and grist mills were given high priority in the selection of the site of the town of Rockingham.<sup>2</sup> Since water was the primary means of transportation until the coming of railroads to Richmond County in the 1860s, various navigational projects were promoted in the early years. In 1795 for instance, the town of Sneedsborough was established one mile west of the Pee Dee River and some fifteen miles southwest of Rockingham. A canal one mile long was dug widening Huckleberry Creek from Sneedsborough to the river. Boats attempted to reach Sneedsborough by coming from Georgetown to Cheraw up the river to the canal, but were stopped from travelling further north by Buchanan Falls and hazardous rocky conditions. Sneedsborough failed to become the commercial center as anticipated and its population was reduced in the typhoid and diptheria epidemics of 1817 and 1830. The town was eventually abandoned, though a post office operated until 1883 and the inn, Knox Tavern, stood until 1929.<sup>3</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth century these same water resources would provide power to operate and drive the textile mills, the future economic backbone of the county.

A drive through the 477 square miles that comprise Richmond County reveals a highly varied topography. The landscape is not entirely flat, nor is it completely given over to sandhills and pine trees. Located in the south-central portion of North Carolina on the fall line which separates the coastal plain from the piedmont, Richmond County embraces all three of the state's regional physiographic characteristics. In the west are the remnants of the Uwharrie Mountains, which diminish into a series of gently rolling hills known as the piedmont. The clay soil of this area is fertile and encompasses approximately one third of the cultivated land in the county.

By contrast, the sandhills section of the piedmont farther east, has poor soils which erode easily. This section supports little more than large stands of long leaf pine. Over 57,000 of these acres are now protected within the state-maintained Sandhills Wildlife and Game Management Area. In easternmost Richomd County is the edge of the coastal plain, another of North Carolina's geo graphic regions, and an

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet	Description	Item number	7	Page	2
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area known in the county for its agricultural productivity.

Over the years the topographical makeup of Richmond County has created a diversified economy. Today textile and paper product industries utilize water resources created by the Uwharrie drainage system. Lumber production is economically feasible in the sandhills and steep slope areas. The poultry industry thrives, and the peach harvests are bountiful in the piedmont. Tobacco fields in the coastal plains and piedmont regions further add to the productive use of the county's diverse soils.

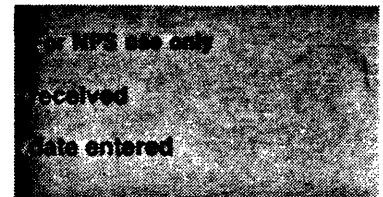
Richmond County's topographic elevations range from 100 feet above sea level in the southern creek and river bottoms to 211 feet at Rockingham, to over 600 feet in the northwest. The county's average temperature is 61.6° and the weather is typically mild without extremes of heat or cold. Of the 50.4 inch average yearly precipitation, only 3.4 inches is snow. The growing season is long, ranging between 210 days in the northern half of the county and 220 in the south, and helps to generate an annual county agricultural income of over sixteen million dollars.

#### Antebellum Architecture

Existing structures in the City of Rockingham illustrate a broad and gradual evolution of architectural development from the 1830s to the present. There is no single period of outstanding significance dominating the area, but rather several fine examples of the transitional and eclectic evolution of nineteenth century architecture, which can be used to trace the historic and architectural development of the town.

The Steele-Johnson-Cole House is stylistically and chronologically the oldest extant structure in the present bounds of Rockingham. Robert Johnson Steele, Jr. (1791-1866) is said to have built the house in 1838 to entice the widow of his brother Thomas, Judith Mosely Leak Steele, into marriage. The scheme was apparently successful for the two were married in 1840. The formal arrangement of its flat elevations and the classical detail of the house display elements of both the Federal and Greek Revival styles. The square mass of the two story brick construction and the beautifully scaled and articulated window and door openings are indicative of the Federal style, whereas the trabeated door transom and side gable roof with returns are characteristic of Greek Revival. A one story brick Italianate addition was built on the east elevation in ca. 1870. It is suggested that the cornice brackets were added to update the main portion of the house at that time. Two bays separate two fireplaces at the gable ends of the house, yet their flues converge into single chimneys which rise through the ridgeline of the roof.

Although there was an awareness of fashionable architectural design as is evident in the Dockery and Steele houses, builders were more apt to adopt familiar, traditional housetypes. The two story, three bay farmhouse, one room deep with a central hall, was lifted from its county environment and placed in an urban setting. The Steele-Fisher House is representative of this type. Built by Dr. Robert Johnson Steele ca. 1845, the house form characterized by its tall narrow profile and broad front facade now features a triple-A roof configuration. The original full width front porch has subsequently been removed. The simple classically styled mantels and wide pine flooring of the interior two front rooms attest to its original one room depth and simple design.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      3

Dr. Steele's cousin, Colonel Walter L. Steele (1823-1891) constructed a similar house on a neighboring lot east of Dr. Steele's residence. Built ca. 1846, the companion house was originally, in all probability, only one room deep. Its bracketed cornice and paneled frieze, slender paired windows, and recessed entry with rounded transom and sidelights maintain a strong identification with the mid-Victorian period. Radical renovations in the 1970s included the addition of aluminum siding and the removal of the front porch. Despite these serious modifications, the home retains remnants of its romantic character.

The Greek Revival Style, popular in the architecture of the antebellum South, made its appearance in Rockingham residential construction during the 1850s. The inspiration for the style came from a renewed interest in ancient Greek architecture and culture fostered by the democratic ideals of the republic. Columns and pilasters, pedimented porch fronts, and other features were lifted from the ancient Greek structures and applied to residential and commercial buildings.

The Robert L. Steele, Sr. House (ca. 1850) is regarded as the finest and most impressive of the Greek Revival houses in Rockingham, a handsome residence befitting the man considered the true engineer and promoter of the textile industry in Richmond County. The rectangular two story frame house is broad in proportion and is fronted by an unusually handsome one-story porch. Its fluted Doric columns and frieze of triglyphs and metopes add rich distinction to the classical image of the structure. The double doors of the entry are framed by plain colonnettes which support a massive entablature, further enriched by a transom of beveled leaded glass and sidelights. Two story paneled pilasters act as corner molds. The bracketed and paneled cornice of the low hipped roof of the Italianate style enrich the severity of the Greek Revival elements. The crowning feature of the structure is its belvedere, a small room projecting above the roof which affords an excellent view of the surrounding cityscape and provides additional ventilation. The rooms of the double-pile house are symmetrically placed on either side of a central stair hall. Single, paneled pocket doors slide into the walls and thus when opened provide large entertaining areas. Their surrounds are in the form of pilasters which rise to support massive shelf entablatures, lending a strong rectilinear formality to the interior.

Architects and builders of the mid-nineteenth century often modeled costly commercial structures and homes after recently excavated and rediscovered Greek ruins such as the Parthenon (5th century B. C.). Locally, the temple fronts of these ancient monuments were loosely interpreted as two-tiered pedimented porches as illustrated by the Leak-Wall (ca. 1854) and the Leak-Aycock-Covington (ca. 1855) houses. Generally, the supports of these projecting porches utilized a simplified form of the Greek orders. Later in the century owners might replace these simple Doric or Ionic supports with richer and more elaborate Corinthian columns. The fluted Corinthian columns and balustrades from the upper and lower tiers of the Leak-Aycock-Covington House are probably twentieth century substitutions for an earlier yet similar arrangement. Mantels in the rear portions of this symmetrically planned house are simple and classically derived. The front rooms have been embellished with an exuberance of plasterwork including medallions, also from a later period.

The Leak-Wall House, several hundred yards southwest of the Leak-Aycock-Covington

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      4

House, is fronted by a similar porch but of more severe design. The porch supports in this case have simple, vernacular Doric capitals; the spindles of the upper and lower balustrades are not turned, but are upright and plain. The principal entrance is framed by colonnettes and surrounded by a trabeated transom and sidelights, features of the Greek Revival Style. Also representative of the style are the pilastered, two story corner boards and the front windows which feature molded surrounds, with corner blocks, and paneled aprons beneath their sills. The principal front rooms feature marble mantels and the stairs of the central hall are adorned with curvilinear stair scrolls. The parquet floors of the first floor rooms and second story hall, and the magnificent marble parlor mantels, unique to Rockingham, were probably installed in this century.

Following a rural North Carolina tradition associated with the division of family lands, family members tended to establish homes close to each other in Rockingham. Such is the case of the Leak-Wall and Leak-Aycock-Covington houses built by the brothers, John Wall Leak and William Cole Leak. This practice is especially evident as the Steele family had eight houses on Fayetteville Road, the Leak family had eight houses on Leak Street and Rockingham Road, and the Everett family had six houses on or near Randolph Street.

Residential Construction: 1865-1900

Little residential construction is recorded between the years of 1865 and 1870. The modest economic resources were used to recover from the Civil War devastation and to expand the infant textile industry.

Local building practices in the Rockingham area from the mid to late nineteenth century utilized frame construction almost exclusively. Long leaf yellow pine was indigenous to the area and was a much less costly building material. According to one source, the lumber was sawn at local mills and hauled to a site green and undressed. Hand hewn joists and rafters, sawn clapboard siding, and split roof shingles were prepared and seasoned at the site.<sup>4</sup> Hand made brick, as found in the General Alfred Dockery and Steele-Johnson-Cole houses was rare: its use was generally reserved for chimneys and foundation piers. Builders excluded the use of stone masonry in local construction.

The traditional two-story house remained common after the war. No longer plain, the exterior was enriched with a flourish of applied Italianate ornament. Cornices were bracketed and porches and interior mantels received a vigorous curvilinear treatment. Such houses were a transition from the simple vernacular farmhouse to the exuberance and asymmetry found in the later Victorian and Queen Anne styles, and were also the curvilinear romantic opposite of the formal linear Greek Revival Style. The W. T. Covington, Frank McNeill, and John Cole houses are representative of this transitional architecture. These single pile houses have been expanded by the construction of a rear ell, while the central front bay projects slightly, disrupting the formerly flat surface characteristic of the Greek Revival Style. Windows are longer and more narrow, and the single leaf arched panel door features splayed side surrounds with rounded rather than rectangular transoms and sidelights. Porch posts are square with paneled bases and porch and roof cornices are supported by imaginative scrolled Italianate brackets. The cornices and porches of earlier houses also received brackets

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet	Description	Item number	Page
--------------------	-------------	-------------	------

during this era in remodeling efforts.

The Leak-Scales House also dates from this transitional period, but is a bit more asymmetrical in organization. The exterior of the L-shaped house is sheathed in beaded weatherboard, a siding popular in Rockingham in the latter half of the nineteenth century. More typical of late Victorian Style, the low gabled roof features decorative chimney caps, a bracketed cornice with paneled frieze, and returns at the gable ends. The paired, narrow, double-hung windows have decorative surrounds, and the angular front bay window is enriched with a bracketed and denticulated cornice. Although the present porch placement is similar to that of the original, the classical Doric columns, dentil cornice, and balustrade were added in the 1950s.

A sidelight to the history of the house comments on the engineering abilities of the time. In 1897 upon the death of its builder, Walter F. Leak (1799-1879), the house was left to his daughter Mary, the wife of John Morehead Scales. In 1899, their son, Walter Leak Scales, moved the entire house from its original location in the vicinity of East Washington Street to Fayetteville Road. A newspaper account from a May 1899 issue of the Anglo-Saxon records the event: "Mr. Scales having tired of the country life is moving his residence from some one hundred yards off the road right into town. It has resulted in quite an improvement of the street and opens up several very valuable city lots."<sup>5</sup> An 1899 photograph shows the windlass and mules that were employed in the moving process. Several other Rockingham houses have been moved from their original locations, nine of them recorded, but the Leak-Scales House is by far the largest and most significant.

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by a great diversity and richness of architectural styles. The Reconstruction Era spurred enormous economic growth in building trades. Balloon framing allowed faster and cheaper construction, and steam powered scroll saws produced ornate and complicated architectural details associated with Victorian architecture. Irregular silhouettes, turned and gouged components, varying textures, and colors were combined in intense, inventive visual displays. Victorian builders ceased to adopt details and motives solely from one particular source, but rather liberally borrowed elements from two or more styles and creatively applied them together in often eclectic combinations. Such creations were indicative of the inventive and industrious late nineteenth century.

Some residences were more distinctive than others as much depended on the whim and fancy of the owner or designer. The culmination of this eclecticism, known as the Queen Anne Style, is found locally in the W. C. Leak House (1895). Its builder took full advantage of the individual expression encouraged by the style in a liberal use of decorative elements. The front porch, corner balcony, and three story tower are embellished with a lively display of turned posts, brackets, ornamental panels, bosses and medallions. Fish-scale slate shingles and metal finials add to the textural richness and picturesque silhouette of the roofline. The interesting play of form, detail, and material is also carried into the interior of the house. The front rooms are enhanced with oak paneled wainscoting, symmetrically molded door and window surrounds, and an elaborate overmantel.

The W. C. Leak House is the only Rockingham example of elaborate Queen Anne architecture. Early Sanborn maps show at least two other residences with three story

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      6

towers near the Leak House; these were perhaps Queen Anne as well.<sup>6</sup>

Typically, however, the decorative treatment on houses of this era is restricted to porch and roof trim. The original porch of the former W. L. Parsons House (ca. 1890), as seen in documentary photographs, was embellished with upper and lower balustrades, spindle friezes and elaborately scrolled brackets. Similar brackets with hanging pendants still trim the cornice of the multi-gabled roof. The roof configuration, its decorative shinglework, and louvered attic vents are almost identical to those found on the Steele-Fowlkes House (ca. 1892). Interior rooms of both houses are highlighted with beaded tongue-in-groove wainscoting, molded door and transom surrounds, and imaginative vernacular mantels. The impact of the machine age on late nineteenth century interiors is clearly seen on the central staircases of both structures. Spindles are turned and fitted to create a lattice work pattern, stair scrolls are sawn into curvilinear shapes, and newel posts are fitted with sunburst panel inserts. Other houses of note from the late Victorian period include the Ledbetter-Leath House (1888) with a particularly fine bracketed cornice and polygonal paneled frieze, and the John Armistead House (1899) with elaborate interior detail.

Although there are few blueprints and little information on the building traditions in Rockingham, upon close survey it is noted that particular types of brackets or door panels are often duplicated. Mail order catalogues, increased mechanization, and standardization of details made this possible. Architectural craftsmanship previously available only to the wealthy was now accessible to the middle class. The porch of the Victorian cottage of Calvin Cole Covington (ca. 1885) is enhanced by a jigsawn balustrade in a tear drop design, as is the porch of the John McNeill House (ca. 1885) in Roberdel. Jigsawn cutwork is sometimes used to adorn the upper gables of houses as on the Dr. Lyons House (ca. 1890), and fish-scale shingle work as on the George Warburton House (ca. 1890). Decorative attic vents seen on the Henry Dockery House (ca. 1875) were a common applied motif, as were doors displaying large sunburst panels and rows of beaded woodwork.

The outstanding later nineteenth century residences in Rockingham were still, however, built primarily by wealthy mill owners and industrialists. As is noted in the documentary photographs of the era, these owners did not restrict their interests to exterior and interior structural impressions, but also concerned themselves with the entire pictorial effect of their house and its surrounding landscape. Effective landscape design became increasingly important with the arrival of the twentieth century.

Landscape and Site Surroundings

Much of the beauty of Rockingham's neighborhoods is derived from the site placement and landscaping of the houses. The space between structures is a factor which contributes to the charm of a neighborhood. A certain rhythm of solids and voids developed over the years. This has been well maintained in Rockingham with few incompatible intrusions of infill structures. Generally, dwellings are set back over thirty feet from the street and sit on ample lots with full front and back yards. The major residential thoroughfares are generously lined with tall willow oaks, which contribute to the harmony of the streetscape.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Description

Item number      7

Page 7

Gardens in Rockingham during the 1800s and early 1900s were representative of typical landscapes found in the South during that period. They were intense, attractive, and necessarily functional. Wealthy homeowners such as Colonel Walter L. Steele, Robert L. Steele, Sr., and John Wall Leak may have indulged in the formal garden plan with a central axis and the utilization of garden structures and statuary to create a classic garden setting with French or Italian influence; however, the simple theme of space delineation and the functional kitchen garden was the predominant type utilized by most.

Front lawns were often open areas devoid of turfgrass, with a few shade trees planted symmetrically in relation to the house or carriage path. These sandy areas were swept with dogwood brush brooms to keep them free of debris. A low fence or hedge would frame the domestic area to keep out wandering livestock and to delineate property boundaries. Very few of these fences, as documented in photographs, have survived subsequent sidewalk construction and street widening.

The dooryard was a functional area adjacent to the kitchen in the rear of the house. Most dooryards had a culinary garden that was cultivated for herbs and flowers. Herbs were grown for cooking and medicinal purposes, while flowers were cut for home decoration.

A large vegetable garden was planted further away from the house in an open, sunlit area. Many types of vegetables were grown to be eaten fresh or preserved for the winter. Fruit trees were found near this garden.

Many plant varieties were seen in the landscape through the help of a local nursery industry. The Sunnyside Nursery and Pomological Garden, located one-half mile northwest of Rockingham, was begun in 1859 by Peter W. Stansill, John Wall Leak, Colonel Walter L. Steele, and Louis H. Webb.<sup>7</sup> The nursery provided its clientele with many varieties of fruit trees, roses, and other ornamental shrubs. It became quite fashionable to own and collect a great number of various species that were planted in random manner. This can be exemplified in the interesting collection of plant material found today around the old homesites.

Foundation plantings became popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as house foundations became taller. Shrubs in various colors and trimmed into various forms, from round to conical, were planted in rows along the front of the house. Ornate plantings reflected and complimented the ornate Victorian architecture.

In the early 1900s homeowners enlisted the advice of professional landscapists such as E. S. Draper (1894- ) of Charlotte. The Henry Clay Wall Garden, one of Draper's first commissions in North Carolina in the early 1920s, displays balanced placement of garden structures, statuary, and plant material along a central axis to create an elegant space enclosed by fencing and other architectural elements.

Commercial and Industrial Construction: 1865-1900

Rockingham's first commercial structures, dating from the early to mid-nineteenth century, were of wood. These structures were concentrated around Washington Square, the remainder of downtown being primarily residential. As the fire resistant qualities and economic feasibility of brick construction were more widely advertised, these frame

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormFor NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 8

structures were eventually replaced with more substantial one and two story brick buildings. A local fire code prohibited frame construction in downtown Rockingham after a devastating fire in 1888.<sup>8</sup>

By the early 1880s brick building establishments lined both sides of East Washington Street. As described from documentary photographs, their three-bay storefronts featured recessed entries flanked by large display windows and surmounted by overhead transoms. Metal cornices often separated the first and second floors. The series of second floor window openings were segmentally arched with decorative hood molds. Most structures were crowned by recessed name plates and brick corbelled cornices. Certain architectural features were used consistently in commercial design from the 1880s throughout the early 1900s. Even as late as 1922, there was little deviation from the conventional use of corbelled brick cornices and arch headed windows as is exemplified on the Morse Building.

Only a few of these buildings have been left untouched by subsequent remodeling efforts. The best surviving examples of this early commercial type include the former Everett Store (ca. 1885) and McRae's Grocery (ca. 1912). Typical of late Victorian commercial styles, these two structures are not architecturally outstanding, but they have achieved a prominence today as unaltered vestiges of a former era.

The upper facade of the two story Manufacturers Building is unparalleled in Rockingham commercial construction. A frieze band features the name of the structure in raised block letters. It is surmounted by a blind railing and a high hipped roof sheathed in rectangular and scalloped slate shingles. A pair of metal finials completes the atypical roof configuration.

The gable front of the two story Bank of Pee Dee building is unique to the Rockingham commercial district. The first story elevation of this red brick structure features rusticated pier work supporting a Doric entablature. Richly detailed, the second story is described by brick quoins and a quartet of windows. A tripartite window surmounted by a fanlight is set on the pedimented attic gable.

The former Farmer's Bank and Trust, a handsome two story limestone veneered structure was built in 1924. The front entrance of the Greek Revival structure is recessed behind fluted Doric columns set in antis. The five east bays are distinguished by flat pilasters with garlands in the frieze above.

Many of the industrial complexes that made up the mill industry in Richmond County were constructed before the turn of the century. The main mill structures generally housed the picking, carding, and weaving processes. They were two to three stories in height, of brick construction, with heavy, slow-combustion structural timbers, and thick floors. The architecture was practical and functional, utilizing maximum space and light at minimum cost. Years later the giant windows, which at one time were the workers' only source of light and ventilation, were bricked in--their original function displaced by electric lights and air-conditioning.

Structural ornamentation was thought superfluous, and was restricted to cornices and windows. The most prominent feature of the main building was the central stair tower, modeled after a campanile or bell tower in the Italianate or Romanesque Revival

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormFor NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 9

style, which somewhat softened the otherwise stark lines. The large, central tower divided the principal facade into two multi-bay expanses. The primary entrance to the mill was located at its base with bells or alarms to indicate shift changes. The towers at Roberdel and Hannah Pickett No. 1 also enclosed elevated water holding tanks providing pressure for the sprinkler systems.

The stair tower which dominates the mill complex at Hannah Pickett No. 1 is outstanding. Its handsome design is unsurpassed in the area. The base of the tower is constructed in rusticated molded stone, one bay wide and one bay deep. A four-story brick shaft rises from the base accented at two levels with narrow, lancet arch windows and continuous corner pilasters. The tower culminates in a magnificent corbelled cornice and running band of ocular windows. A pyramidal roof cap with wide projecting eaves terminates the structure.

The detached houses of the mill workers were situated on one-half acre lots within walking distance of the mill. The majority of the earliest dwellings were one-story, three-room structures with central chimneys and interior plaster or pine finished walls. Any architectural detail was reserved for the front porch area. The porches of the New Street houses (ca. 1885) of Pee Dee No. 1 are embellished with chamfered posts and simple, jig-sawn brackets. Backyards served as garden areas and each had an outdoor privy. Community wells were spaced at intervals throughout the mill villages supplying water until pumps and bathroom facilities were eventually installed on the back porches. Open fireplaces and wood burning stoves warmed the principal rooms. During the 1920s and 1930s these backyards were filled in with newer mill housing, eliminating much of the village greenspace.

Houses rented for about fifty cents a room during the 1920s and 1930s and were painted and maintained by the mills. Originally the mills provided free electricity into the houses, but only during the evening or non-operating hours. Later, meters were installed, with the renters absorbing energy costs. During the 1940s and 1950s most of the mill houses were offered for sale on the open market, with their present occupants given first option. Individual home ownership subsequently reduced the uniform appearance of these mill villages. Many houses have been sided with aluminum, windows changed, porches have been enclosed, and additions constructed.

Some attempt at landscaping the mill streets in East Rockingham was made during the 1920s. E. S. Draper, who headed a notable landscape firm in Charlotte, remembers planting many of the thoroughfares with water oak trees, a species admired for its hardiness and longevity.<sup>9</sup> The trees have since matured, providing pleasant shaded streetscapes.

Mill superintendents and supervisors lived in more substantial houses on the fringe of the mill districts. Workers purchased basic necessities at the company store from the shelves stocked with food, clothing, hardware and other sundry items. Purchase prices were either docked automatically from the take home pay, or the workers were issued coupon books in order to draw needed provisions.<sup>10</sup> Company stores were typically one story brick structures containing a single, deep room with display shelves and counters. Excellent examples of this building type stand in the Pee Dee No. 2 and Roberdel No. 1 villages. The store at Pee Dee No. 2 is entered through double

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 10

doors set within a segmentally arched opening in the center of the building. Identical segmentally arched windows flank on either side. A parapet with a corbelled brick cornice blocks the rear gabled roof from view. The company store at Roberdel No. 1 features a similar three-bay division of the front facade. A brick denticulated course follows the raking cornice of the broadly pitched gable roof.

Residential Construction: 1900-1925

In the early 1900s fortunes were being made in the textile industry and the newly acquired wealth was manifested in a burst of residential construction in the Fayetteville Road and Randolph Street areas. Rockingham's elite, who regarded the houses as a visual symbol of prosperity, were drawn to the theatrical and grandiose expression of the Classical Revival Style. First displayed in the palatial constructions at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, the style is highlighted with sculptural porch pavillions, giant, paired free-standing columns, pronounced cornices, and the use of Classical and Renaissance architectural detail.

W. M. Covington (1855-1934), gentleman farmer and board member of the Pee Dee and Entwistle mills, moved from his house on Old Ellerbe Road to Ann Street in 1911. Having commissioned Wheeler and Stearn of Charlotte to design a fashionable residence, the firm provided him with a textbook example of the style. The grand, two story frame house is fronted by a portico with paired, fluted Ionic columns. A wrap-around porch and balcony further enhance the exterior. Hardwood oak flooring, impressive classical mantels, and a large Palladian window enrich the open, grand interior spaces.

In order to keep pace with the impact of this classical resurgence, owners often "modernized" the interior and exterior of their homes in lieu of rebuilding. Such was the case of the T. C. Leak, Jr. House. Built in a late Victorian or Queen Anne style, the house was extensively remodeled into the Classical Revival Style in 1915. T. C. Leak, Jr. (1872-1923), a principal promoter of the local textile mill industry, was specifically influenced by his friend's house; however, it is not known whether the firm of Wheeler and Stearn was responsible for the renovation. The most memorable of the extensive alterations was the addition of a truly monumental two story front porch and flanking side porches of a similar order. The palatial structure which resulted from the remodeling was regrettably demolished in 1956, only forty years after its creation. A dependency once used as Mr. Leak's cotton office, was moved to 503 Leak Street, converted to a residence, and fronted with the fluted Ionic columns from the side porch of the demolished mansion.

Most of the houses constructed during this boom period were built in the Colonial Revival Style. The locally popular design is characterized by its two story rectangular box-like form, hipped roof, and restrained classical detail. The W. B. Cole House (1907) and the LeGrand Everett House (ca. 1905) are excellent examples of the style. The truncated hipped roofs of both houses are enriched with dormer windows and balustraded upper decks or widow's walks, also regular features of the style. A. D. Dumas, a local contractor, was responsible for the construction of many of the Colonial Revival houses in Rockingham. The Robert L. Steele, Jr. House (1909), the James M. Ledbetter House (1910), and the John Dockery House (1912) were among his commissions. These three houses are of brick construction--the first brick residences in Rocking-

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number 7      Page 11

ham since the 1838 Steele-Johnson-Cole House.

Very popular in Rockingham during the early 1900s was a vernacular cottage style which is a transition between the earlier Victorian and the emerging Colonial Revival styles. Easily identified by a compact, three bay, one story mass with a pyramidal roof, the houses utilized detail from both styles. The John F. Hamer House (ca. 1900) features decorative scrolled porch brackets, two over two window sashes, irregular floor plan, fancy gable vents, and decorative side bay windows of Victorian design. The B. T. Stephenson (1900) and Jim Moss (1912) houses have projecting bay windows, but are otherwise more restrained than the Hamer House. The Hinson-Porter House (ca. 1905) is more symmetrical. The front parlor slightly projects from the facade, but without a bay window. A decorative false gable is located opposite the projecting parlor gable for an added sense of symmetry. This type of structure culminates with the Minnie Dockery House (ca. 1911). Beautifully proportioned with a symmetrical three-bay facade, classical entrance, and veranda on three sides, this house is a fine one story example of the Colonial Revival Style cottage in Rockingham.

South Randolph and Leak streets boast an unusually outstanding collection of Bungalow houses, a style which dominated the more modest residential building in Rockingham from 1912 to 1925. So concentrated is the collection that for many years this area of town was referred to locally as Bungalow Street. The Bungalow is easily recognized by its squat proportions and its low pitched, broadly gabled roof. Essentially lacking surface ornament, the style instead emphasizes structural form and the natural and textural qualities of materials: cobblestone, stained wood, stucco, and wood shingles were liberally applied. The typical one and one-half story Bungalow has projecting eaves with exposed roof rafters and an open porch supported by tapering wood piers or stunted columns on brick or stone piers. The upper sashes of the windows are decorated with tracery, or multi-pane, above a single batten sash. The floorplan of the interior is irregular and many of the living and dining rooms feature beamed ceilings, stained woodwork and wainscot, and built-in cabinets. The Mial Leak House (ca. 1915) with its highly distinctive dormer windows and the W. F. Long House (ca. 1915) with its unique cobblestone foundation and chimney, are among Rockingham's finest representations of the style. The Bungalow Style as originally conceived in California was sided with wood shingles. Rockingham illustrations of this treatment include the F. B. Garrett (ca. 1916) and the T. T. Cole (ca. 1920) houses.

Residential Construction: 1925-1945

Rockingham houses built from the 1920s to World War II display a wide diversity of styles. Magazines featuring homes and gardens, and construction trade journals were becoming popular, providing small town residents with a continued awareness of architectural innovations and new trends.

The more formal William H. Entwistle House (ca. 1938) is designed in the Georgian Revival Style, a descendant of the Colonial Revival Style. The house is finely proportioned on a grand scale with enriched ornament and exhibits a nicely detailed cornice and pedimented entry (the entry copied from the eighteenth century Hammond-Harwood House in Annapolis, Maryland). Its beautifully executed interior and sweeping

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

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

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      12

front staircase were designed by Otto Zenke of Greensboro in his first commission in Rockingham. The Georgian Revival Style became increasingly popular with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.

The Henry Rancke House (ca. 1925) and the Henry D. Ledbetter House (ca. 1927) illustrate the continued popularity of the Colonial Revival Style in residential architecture. Similar in many respects, both houses exhibit symmetrical facades, brick construction, tile roofs, and exuberant window treatment. Multi-paned french doors, paired and tripartite windows abound in each. The distinctive pedimented dormers of the Rancke House are duplicated in a more simple form on a companion garage at the rear of the lot.

The Tudor Revival Style is exemplified by the William F. Seago House (1933). Portions of the second floor of this graceful structure are half-timbered, and the vermiculated brickwork is unique in Rockingham.

In addition, two vernacular colonial cottages were constructed within a block of each other at the end of the 1930s. The A. A. Webb House (1937) features semi-circular brick steps leading up to a six panel door with fluted side surrounds, and a central chimney. The Edward Kennedy House (ca. 1940) has a similar classic entrance and displays a denticulated cornice.

Finally, Rockingham has a solitary example of International Style architecture, the Leo Page House (ca. 1939). This severely cubic structure features a glass brick wall leading to the front entrance, windows set into corners, and second floor balconies. The ornamental foundation plantings were originally highly sculptured.

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

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

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received
date entered

Continuation sheet    Footnotes

Item number    7

Page    1

- <sup>1</sup>Information on topography and climate gathered from unpublished "Comprehensive Land Use Element, prepared by: Rockingham-Richmond County Planning Department April, 1978. On file at the Rockingham City Planning Office, City Hall, Rockingham N. C.
- <sup>2</sup>James E. and Ida C. Huneycutt, A History of Richmond County (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Company), 1976, p. 26, hereinafter cited as Huneycutt, A History.
- <sup>3</sup>Huneycutt, A History, p. 26.
- <sup>4</sup>"The Paul Whitlock Recollections," Installment no. 12, Post-Dispatch (Rockingham), May 10, 1956.
- <sup>5</sup>Anglo-Saxon (Rockingham), May 1899. Short account and photograph are in the possession of the present owner.
- <sup>6</sup>Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sanborn Map Company, New York, 1911, Map 4.
- <sup>7</sup>Isaac S. London Papers, Richmond County Courthouse.
- <sup>8</sup>Town of Rockingham Board of Commissioners, City Ordinances, No. 80, "Fire Protection," adopted February 4, 1896, Minute Book Vol. I, Rockingham City Hall.
- <sup>9</sup>Joe Morris, City Horticulturalist, telephone interview with E. S. Draper, Landscape Architect, February 3, 1981.
- <sup>10</sup>Author's interview with Lester Adcock, Manager of Hannah Pickett No. 1 Mill property, November 14, 1980.

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

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received 12/1/86
date entered

Continuation sheet Rockingham Historic District Item number 7

Page

ADDENDUM

The Rockingham Historic District was nominated to the National Register in 1983. A number of modest homes, in keeping with the character and nature of the district, were excluded from contributing status in the district. The Athos Cockman House (#109) at 1119 Fayetteville Street, built in 1934, was listed as fill in the original nomination. It has since attained the age of fifty (50) years, and should now be listed as a contributing structure within the Rockingham Historic District. The one-story bungalow is simply finished with modest eaves brackets and exposed porch roof rafters. The interior, which includes a living room, dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, three bedrooms, and two baths, is unaltered. The exterior has been resided with aluminum, as have a number of other houses in the district, but this does not detract substantially from the overall integrity of the dwelling. The contractor who built the house states that the front porch was constructed as it appears today, with the exception of the wrought iron railing. (See letter from the owner.)

Photographs are enclosed which show the house from each side (obliquely) and from the rear. In addition a streetscape showing the house in context with other (contributing) structures is also enclosed.



## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates various

Builder/Architect various

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### Early Settlers of the Pee Dee

It is generally accepted that there were settlers in the Pee Dee Basin by the year 1730.<sup>1</sup> In 1749 their numbers were substantial enough to justify the separation of Anson from Bladen County. Thirty years later, in 1779, Richmond County was formed out of Anson County.

Very little of the heavily forested land in the river basin was cleared. Game was plentiful, as the woods were full of beaver, deer, and turkey. In 1733 a law provided a bounty of ten shillings for every wolf or panther killed within ten miles of a working family settlement.<sup>2</sup> Early settlement was restricted to a four or five mill strip adjacent to the rich clay banks of the Pee Dee River.<sup>3</sup> These earliest settlers raised simple one and two room log homes along the river. Because of their primitive construction, and unseasoned wood, none of these houses are known to exist today.

For the most part, the early settlers were subsistence farmers, who gradually expanded to tobacco and indigo as money crops. These commodities, along with other farm products, were taken down river to Georgetown and exchanged for other needed goods. As early as 1762 a road was constructed east of the Pee Dee River from Grassy Islands to Cross Creek (now Fayetteville) to provide a new transportation route for the shipment of indigo and tobacco. It was used primarily to avoid a tariff issued by South Carolina on the shipment of products through their colony.<sup>4</sup> (State-imposed duties were not an unusual practice at the time.)

Some of these early settlers were of English descent, who had travelled southwest from the Tidewater area of Virginia via the northeastern section of North Carolina. Others included the Germans and Scotch-Irish who came down the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road into the Pee Dee Basin. Another prominent group were Scottish Highlanders, who came up from Wilmington to the Cape Fear Valley to seek grazing and farm land and settled in the south and east portions of the county. Though there were some Quakers and Baptists, many of the early settlers were Presbyterians.

Among those who came early and acquired large tracts of land were John Cole, Sr., who arrived with his wife Jane Bounds in 1755, William Blewett (1719–1813), William Leak (1720–1776), and Henry William Harrington (1747–1809).<sup>5</sup>

#### Formation of Richmond County

One of the oldest known settlements in the area was on the Anson side of the Pee Dee at the courthouse near Grassy Islands.<sup>6</sup> Transportation across the Pee Dee River was difficult; the ford at the islands was not dependable at high water, and the few ferries ran infrequently.

On November 10, 1779, by an Act of the North Carolina Assembly meeting at Halifax, Richmond County was formed from Anson County land east of the river.<sup>7</sup> This eliminated the hardship of crossing the Pee Dee River to attend court sessions. The new county was named in honor of Charles Lennox, Duke of Richmond (1735–1806), a staunch supporter of the colonists during the American Revolution. Lacking an established village, the

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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date entered

Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number      8      Page      1

new county held its first court session at the Presbyterian Meeting House, which stood in the Zion community three and one-half miles west of present day Rockingham. There were not significant changes in the county's boundaries until 1899 when Scotland County was created from the southwestern portion of Richmond, thereby costing the county some of its finest farmlands.<sup>8</sup>

New County Seat of Rockingham

The town of Rockingham was created by an act of the North Carolina Assembly which met at Hillsborough on June 2, 1784.<sup>9</sup> The town was named for the Marquis of Rockingham, Charles Watson-Wentworth (1730-1782), a strong friend of the American colonies. As prime minister of England in 1766, he supported the repeal of the Stamp Act. A commission headed by General Henry William Harrington, Robert Webb, and John Cole had the duty of laying out the town as close to the center of the county as feasible. The Ledbetter community is actually closer to the geographical center of Richmond County but it is thought that the Rockingham site was chosen because it is at the junction of Hitchcock and Falling creeks.<sup>10</sup> The original town of Rockingham comprised fifty acres. Eighteen acres were purchased from John James, Sr. for the equivalent of thirty dollars, and thirty-two acres from John Cole, Sr. for fifty dollars.<sup>11</sup>

According to the original town plat recorded at the Richmond County Courthouse on July 16, 1788, the fifty acre tract was divided into seventy-six half acre lots to be sold for commercial and residential development. The sale of these lots provided the necessary funds to build the courthouse, stocks, and jail on the full acre lot reserved for the public square. The central main thoroughfare was to be sixty-five feet wide, with the other streets fifty feet in width. The western boundary was located near Farmers Bank (1924 and now Southern National Bank), with the eastern edge near the First United Methodist Church (1899).

The early structures in Rockingham and Richmond County utilized simple, vernacular building styles. The first recorded frame dwelling in the vicinity was built by John Cole, Sr., close to the site which was later to be Rockingham. Although its exact location has not been firmly established, the house is said to have been built before 1775.<sup>12</sup> Material from The Geographical Dictionary of the United States of North America published in the local newspaper, The Rocket on January 22, 1891, provided a descriptive account of early dwellings.

In 1797 there was not one finished brick or stone house in the county. And very few framed with brick or stone chimneys. Each house has a loom for the women, who weave their own clothing and a trough for the men who tan their own leather. . . . The county seat as laid out in 1785 is known as Rockingham. It stands on a handsome eminence about six miles east of the great Pee Dee River, and contains besides the courthouse and the jail, about twenty-six dwellings.<sup>13</sup>

The town's founding fathers named the original rough road, which ran from the mountains to Cross Creek (now Fayetteville), Washington Street. It became the major thoroughfare leading up to the courthouse. Patriotic sentiment remained so strong in Rockingham that all the principal streets were named in honor of prominent Revolutionary War figures: Nathaniel Greene, John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, Peyton Randolph, and James Lawrence.<sup>14</sup>

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormFor NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number      8      Page      2

Agriculture, Industry, and Growth: 1780-1860

The period from the close of the 1780s to the beginning of the Civil War was an era of slow but steady growth. The economy was almost entirely agrarian, with the exception of some naval store industries and a small amount of private textile manufacturing.

According to the 1790 census, Richmond County had a population of 5,885--of which 583 were slaves.<sup>15</sup> The majority of the settlers were small farmers, although some individuals were known to hold thousands of acres. There were relatively few plantations in Richmond County despite a small plantation society that developed in the northwest section of the county in present Steele's Township. Even in later years when cotton overcame tobacco and indigo as the principal crop and the slave population grew, the number of plantations remained small.

Two plantation houses still existing in the vicinity are the two-story frame house (1850) of John Wall Covington, three miles southeast of Rockingham, and the aforementioned two-story brick house (1830) of General Alfred Dockery, six miles northwest. Census records reveal that Covington's plantation included nearly 2,000 acres in 1850, about one-third of which was cultivated. The Italianate villa was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.<sup>16</sup>

The elegant Greek Revival house of General Dockery remains the finest example of early brick construction in the county and the region. General Dockery (1797-1875), one of the county's noted political figures, served in the House of Commons in 1822 and was a delegate to the 1835 Constitutional Convention. He served six non-consecutive terms in the State Senate and two non-consecutive terms in Congress. General Dockery was a Whig candidate for governor in 1854 and lost by barely more than 2,000 votes. Local historian Paul Whitlock recalled the following anecdote about his brick residence and illustrious political career:

Once during General Dockery's campaign for Congress, his political enemies tried to prejudice the voters against him by referring to him as a rich man living in a brick house. In a campaign speech he referred to that. "They say I live in a brick house," he shouted. "Yes, I do live in a brick house," and holding up his hands which were large and rugged, "and these are the hands that made the brick." This put an end to the opposition's reference to his brick house.<sup>17</sup>

Henry William Harrington (1747-1809) maintained large plantation houses, now lost, in both Richmond and Anson counties.<sup>18</sup> A significant historic figure, Harrington was a brigadier general in the militia during the Revolution, a commissioner responsible for the laying out of Rockingham, a state senator in the 1780s and 1790s, and one of the commissioners appointed to select a site for the permanent state capital. The general is listed as owning sixty slaves in the 1790 census, making him the largest slave owner in the county. He is also unofficially credited with pioneering the cultivation of cotton in the state and shipping the first bales to England.<sup>19</sup> It is recorded that he adopted an unusual method of planting this cotton by growing it in

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National Park Service**

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

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date entered

Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number 8      Page 3

little hills "four feet equi-distant."<sup>20</sup> The justification of this eccentric practice was that the hills could be plowed in either direction, eliminating the need to hoe.

Beginning in 1850, the naval industries in Richmond County were greatly advanced and expanded. Many of the long leaf yellow pines that once covered the sandhills were "boxed and worked" for turpentine, resin and tar.<sup>21</sup> Toward 1875, the manufacture of lumber for shipment would grow into a thriving industry and strip the hills bare. Later, in the early 1900s, groves of peach trees were introduced to the barren land and another industry began to thrive. Most of the pine seen today is second growth.

The first cotton mill to be established in Richmond County, and the fifth in the state, was the Richmond Manufacturing Company. Incorporated in 1833, the company built its mill just outside Rockingham's city limits. Significant as one of the first attempts at local manufacturing in the county's agrarian society, the mill was the first seed of the textile industry which in later years would revolutionize the local economy. Powered by the substantial drop at the Great Falls on Falling Creek, the mill produced good quality yarn, osnaberg, and cotton bagging, which were placed in high demand by the local population for both home use and for re-sale. Osnaberg, a lower quality cloth, was generally used for sheets while the bagging was used for baling cotton. The mill continued operations, even providing clothing for the soldiers in the Civil War, until it was burned by Sherman's troops in March of 1865. The mill was rebuilt in 1869 under the name of the Great Falls Manufacturing Company near the original site.<sup>22</sup> The Great Falls Mill operated continuously until the 1930s depression. On September 9, 1972, just as local citizens were discussing tentative plans for the adaptive re-use of the mill as a textile museum, it burned. Its partial shell on the south side of U. S. 74 is a daily reminder of the tragic loss.

The growth of the newly established town of Rockingham was slow prior to the Civil War, in part because many of the influential county leaders lived on large farms outside of town. In 1843, according to the former county historian W. I. Everett (1835-1911), only sixteen dwellings were within the original town limits and some twenty dwellings on the outside. The population at that time was less than 200 people.<sup>23</sup> Today, none of the original sixteen houses stand. The Steele-Johnson-Cole House (1838) is the only documented structure of that vintage near the original city boundaries.

By 1860 the local population had doubled to 400 and the town was incorporated in 1861. The corporate limits extended 400 yards north and south of the courthouse, 550 yards west, and one-half mile east.<sup>24</sup>

The Civil War

In May of 1861, the Pee Dee Guards, the first of several companies in the county, was formed to furnish eighty-two men to the Confederate cause.<sup>25</sup> There were 960 soldiers in the Confederate Army from Richmond County by the end of the war.<sup>26</sup> Although no major battles were fought on Richmond soil, the county was not left unscarred by the war.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Historical Significance    Item number    8    Page    4

On March 7, 1865 foragers from the Federal Army skirmished with the Confederate troops under General Joseph Wheeler on the outskirts of Rockingham, while another similar outbreak occurred within the town limits. General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick's advanced guard of Union cavalry arrived later in the morning and forced the Confederate soldiers to retreat. General Kilpatrick, on his way from Cheraw to Fayetteville, occupied Rockingham several days before moving on and maintained headquarters at the Steele-Fisher House (ca. 1845), on Fayetteville Road.<sup>27</sup>

Although orders had been given upon crossing the North Carolina-South Carolina state line to discourage pillaging, the practice was by no means stopped. Livestock was killed, gin houses and barns burned, and food, silver, and other valuables seized. Other malicious acts included the plundering of the ca. 1832 Richmond County Courthouse, the partial destruction of its records, and the burning of the 1835 Richmond Mill.

Several houses east of the Union headquarters in the Robert Johnson Steele House lived Dr. Steele's cousin, Colonel Walter Leak Steele. The colorful story is often told that, knowing the Union soldiers were after him, the colonel hid up to his neck in the cold waters of Falling Creek until a slave revealed his hiding place. He was then forced to walk to Fayetteville, sixty miles away, "clad only in his shirt, drawers and shoes," where he was kept hostage several days and then released.<sup>28</sup>

The war not only wiped out the "twin cotton economy" in Richmond County, destroying both the "farm and factory," but also decimated the naval stores production. En route to Fayetteville it is said that the Federal soldiers took pleasure in watching the surrounding pine forests consumed in a spectacular display of flame and smoke.<sup>29</sup>

Post War Years: 1865-1900

The period after the Civil War was a time for rebirth and new growth in Rockingham. Interest in expensive and grandiose navigational projects ceased with the extension of the Wilmington, Charlotte and Rutherford Railroad in the late 1860s. Several years earlier, Captain W. I. Everett (1835-1911) had surveyed an extension from Old Hundred in western Scotland County through Rockingham and on toward Charlotte. The later route generally followed his survey line. By 1874 the railroad was complete, and the new, powerful "iron horse" expedited shipping and rejuvenated the textile industry. Business profited as well. As local merchants were able to compete with the river port towns of Fayetteville and Cheraw, Rockingham expanded as a trading center.

According to one source, the Augusta Airline Railroad (subsequently the Atlantic Coastline, then Seaboard Airline, now Seaboard Coastline) approached Rockingham with the proposition of building a large switching station and yards in the town, but the potential fumes and soot were considered too menacing for some good-minded citizens.<sup>30</sup> Instead, in 1900 the railroad yard was located several miles southeast in the village of Hamlet, and became a vital part of its economy and life. About 1905 a small passenger depot and warehouse were built in Rockingham on Caroline Street. The structures are still standing.

The period after the Civil War was also a time of economic change. The restoration of naval stores industries in the 1860s proved difficult because of the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number      8      Page      5

growth of the turpentine industry and the emergence of steel built ships. Agriculture became more diversified statewide and tobacco began to rival cotton as the chief crop. Due to the effects of the Civil War, a revival of a purely agrarian economy proved impractical. The end of slavery reduced the agricultural labor force after the war, and resulted in the breaking up of many of the larger estates. More and more of the county aristocracy were drawn to the growing town of Rockingham. As an alternative to farming, landowners turned to industry and the professions. Taking advantage of the potential water power provided by Hitchcock and Falling creeks, many invested in textile mills.

The first such venture was the reconstruction of the 1835 Richmond Mill. Having suffered the torch of Sherman's troops in March of 1865, it was reorganized in 1869 as the Great Falls Manufacturing Company. The charter members of the company were Walter F. Leak (1779-1879), his son-in-law Colonel John Wall Leak (1816-1876) and Robert L. Steele, Sr. (1821-1895).<sup>31</sup>

Steele has been called the main entrepreneur and engineer behind the textile industry in Richmond County. Son of Thomas and Judith Mosely Leak Steele of Steele's Township near Little River, he married Hannah Pickett Leak (1824-1893) and had moved to Rockingham by 1850. He was not only a promoter of the Great Falls Mill, but also the driving force behind the founding of Pee Dee No. 1 in 1876, Roberdel No. 1 in 1882, and Steele's Mill in 1895. These mills were strategically placed along Hitchcock Creek in order to take best advantage of the available hydraulic power. Two other mills were also founded in the late 1800s: Ledbetter Mill, founded by Thomas B. Ledbetter in 1881, and Lewarae Mill in 1883 (promoted by T. C. Leak, H. C. Wall, and O. C. McRae, the name being a derivative of these three surnames).<sup>32</sup>

By the late 1800s, the people of the South had become less dependent on home industries, and were beginning to rely more heavily on the use of manufactured goods. Suddenly able to expand their market beyond the local area, textile mills began exporting in earnest and they prospered. The mills built villages, and the combined attraction of available housing with a steady but small income, induced a sizeable portion of the struggling rural population to factory life. Mill towns such as Rockingham grew in importance as educational, cultural, political, and social centers in their rural areas, and population counts rose. The population of Rockingham township alone increased from 1,455 in 1877 to 2,750 in 1896.<sup>33</sup>

By 1896 the cotton mill industry had a firm grasp on the local economy. Its success was reflected downtown by new construction and an increased number of business houses. The Branson's Business Directory of that year records that the local population supported three boarding houses, one hotel, six mills, thirty-five merchants and tradesmen, two newspapers, six doctors and dentists, and an equal number of lawyers.<sup>34</sup> Many of these retail and service establishments were located between Hancock Street and the Courthouse Square on the north side (now 123-133 East Washington Street). This is the oldest block of commercial architecture remaining today.

Despite the physical expansion of Rockingham, the town was plagued with problems typical of rural North Carolina. The main thoroughfare was often a quagmire of red mud, and little was done to improve its condition throughout the late

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Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number      8      Page      6

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Freight wagons from the mills mired to their axles were common sights, and pedestrians had to navigate their way between the ruts and patches of soft mud. Sanitary sewage treatment was not available, nor was there any electricity until 1901. Instead, homes were dependent on kerosene lighting and the mills ran only in daylight hours. Banking facilities were scarce. Even though the Bank of Pee Dee was founded in 1891, one was just as likely to find "money hidden in old butter churns or buried in the ground."<sup>35</sup>

Boom Period: 1900-1925

During the early 1900s increasingly progressive strides were made in Rockingham's growth and development. In 1901 a steam power generator was built by the city off Caroline Street near the railroad depot, providing electricity for Rockingham each day until midnight. Later a dam was built at Blewett Falls on the Pee Dee River: its turbines began generating power on June 12, 1912. Hugh McRae was the main promoter behind the project.

The local textile industry continued to thrive and five additional mills were constructed: Pee Dee No. 2 in 1900, Roberdel No. 2 in 1902, Hannah Pickett No. 1 in 1906, Entwistle in 1910, and Leak Mill in the early 1920s. Plans for the construction of Pee Dee No. 2 had been made as early as 1895, but the untimely death of Robert L. Steele, Sr. that year delayed construction. Hannah Pickett No. 1 was chartered by Mr. Steele's grandson W. B. Cole (1872-1954). He christened the mill Hannah Pickett in honor of his great-grandmother, Hannah Pickett Leak (1766-1808). William Entwistle (1845-1932) came from England to Rockingham as a young man and rose to prominence in the textile industry. In 1929 he added both Roberdel mills to his ownership. Leak Manufacturing Company, chartered by Thomas C. Leak (1872-1923) in 1923 was the last of the great mills to be constructed in East Rockingham.<sup>36</sup>

The textile business, while located at outlying mill sites, asserted momentous impact on local economy. Much of their intown activity was centered around the W. T. Covington Cotton Exchange (1888) on the corner of West Washington and North Lee streets. It was torn down in the urban renewal project of the late 1960s. Originally a grocer, W. T. Covington expanded his services to include the selling of cotton from a platform behind the building and the grading of cotton in a classing room added to the rear. Lights were turned on and shades pulled down to avoid irregularities in stapling. The exchange kept up with the New York prices by telegram and was able to offer competitive rates. The mills acknowledged the services of this new "Cotton Arbitration Bureau" by pooling their interests and buying most of their cotton from this central exchange. Previous to this practice, cotton agents and farmers set prices by taking samples from merchant to merchant and then to the mills.

According to local historian Judge Don Phillips:

Cotton was once      big business here with 26,000 bales raised  
in one year. Wagons came to town loaded with cotton every  
Saturday. They would line up from the Methodist Church east,  
south from the depot and north from Hitchcock Creek headed for  
the cotton office. Sometimes they waited all day.<sup>37</sup>

East of the original commercial center was the Manufacturers Building (ca. 1900),



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National Park Service**

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

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet      Historical Significance      Item number      8      Page      7

the central administrative office for the mills. In this building major decisions on the overall operation of the mills were made, including investments and wages. The Pee Dee Manufacturing Company, Roberdel, Hannah Pickett, Lewarae, and Steele's mills had offices on the first floor of the two story, buff brick building. The two large second floor rooms were reserved for board meetings and social activities. The Manufacturers Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.<sup>38</sup> The exterior of the building has been restored to its original appearance, while the interior has been adapted for contemporary office space without compromising its structural or decorative fabric.

The mills reduced operating expenses with the founding of the Rockingham Railroad in 1910. Supported by local financing, the nineteen mile track with spurs to all the mills ran from Rockingham to Gibson, tapped the Atlantic Coastline, and gave competition to the already existing Augusta- Raleigh Railroad. The Rockingham Railroad was later sold to the Atlantic Coastline which merged with the Seaboard in 1968. The local depot was situated on the northeast corner of North Lee and Greene streets but has since been torn down.

Other transportation improvements made during this boom period included the paving of Washington and a few side streets for use by the twenty-five to thirty locally owned cars by 1915. London records some of these early vehicles and their owners;

Settle Dockery had a "Jewell" and W. N. Everett, T. C. Leak, W. C. Leak and Dr. W. P. Webb all owned "Maxwells." Henry Wall sported a "Reo" and John L. Everett and Hal S. Ledbetter "Chalmers." H. C. Dockery owned a "Studebaker," and R. L. Steele a "Lion 40." L. G. Fox, Dan Morrison and J. A. McAuley had one cylinder "Brushes." The biggest concern for the owners of those noisy "horseless carriages" was not to terrorize the streets by spooking the buggy horses, then still the primary mode of transportation.<sup>39</sup>

Not all of the activity in the Rockingham community was restricted to textile matters and commerce. The two-story Opera House (1908) downtown offered occasional theatricals, and for a dime, movies could be enjoyed at the Star (1912); both buildings have subsequently been razed. A bagful of peanuts, roasted in carts on street corners and purchased for a nickel, made the afternoon complete. Sunday afternoon walks down North Randolph to Pee Dee Mill Pond were a welcome retreat as were the civic and social events at Everett Park, a natural amphitheater surrounded by oaks with a spring at its bottom. Baseball games were the principal amusement at the mill villages; the mill teams were competitive and spirits ran high at the ball parks. Rockingham's wealthy travelled ten miles northwest to Ellerbe Springs, a fashionable resort center developed about 1900 by T. C. Leak, Sr. The mineral springs, hotel, cottages, pavillion, and lake promised rest and renewed health to the many who frequented the premises during the summer months.<sup>40</sup>

Between 1900 and 1925 church and school development was at an all time high. Construction of the frame Gothic Revival Style Episcopal Church began in 1899 and



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Historical Significance    Item number    8    Page    8

was completed in 1900. The building was brick veneered in 1925. The present First United Methodist Church was also begun in 1899, and the Presbyterian congregation moved into a new brick church on the southeast corner of Washington and South Randolph in 1900. The First Baptist congregation replaced their first frame church building (1881) with a brick Romanesque Revival structure in 1909.<sup>41</sup> The Presbyterian and First Baptist congregations have since relocated to newer structures.

Education has played an important role in the Rockingham community since the chartering of its first Richmond Academy in 1788. It was said to have been first located in the former Night's Chapel, a community hall in the present 700 block of Fayetteville Road.<sup>42</sup> The Academy operated schools more or less successfully in various structures, and in 1889 it occupied a two-story Italianate structure in the present 300 block of West Washington Street. In 1901 four rooms were added to this school and a central tower removed. The 1901 structure, later known as the Rockingham Graded School, was fronted by unusual stepped gables reminiscent of Flemish architecture. These gables, however, were eliminated in 1911 with the addition of four more rooms and an upstairs auditorium. The school site was abandoned in 1952 and the building torn down.

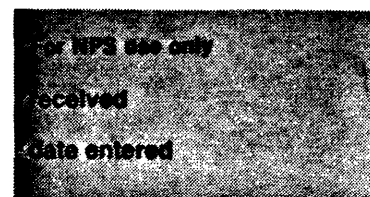
By 1925 it was clear that Rockingham had grown as a county center for education, business, and culture. All of the activity of this heyday period is aptly summed up in the promotional booklet published by the Push Rockingham Forward Club in 1910. The spirit of the time was reflected in the club's motto: Rockingham is "The Best Town At All," and home of "The Best People At All."

A Time of Change: 1925-1945

In the 1920s two of Rockingham's most distinguished citizens, Cameron Morrison (1869-1953) and W. N. Everett (1864-1928), emerged as prominent political figures. In the course of his distinguished political career, Cameron Morrison was elected mayor of Rockingham in 1893, state senator in 1900, Governor from 1920-1924, appointed to the U. S. Senate in 1930 to succeed the late Lee S. Overman, and elected to the U. S. Congress in 1942. While governor, Morrison appointed W. N. Everett Secretary of State for North Carolina in 1923 to replace J. Bryan Grimes who died in office. Everett was elected to the office in his own right in 1924 and served until his death in 1928. Everett had been elected mayor of Rockingham (1896-1901) and served again in that position from 1903-1913.

Rockingham suffered through the 1930s depression with the rest of the nation. Banks foreclosed on the holdings of many of the citizens in Rockingham, and the bottom dropped out of the cotton market, with prices plummeting from 18.49 cents per pound in 1921 to 6.7 cents per pound in 1931.<sup>43</sup>

The Great Depression also caused the temporary closing of Great Falls, Lewarae, and Leak mills, though subsequent mergers kept them alive. Labor unrest during the depression and in the 1940s added to the difficulty of maintaining the mills under family ownership as in the past. With the introduction of nylon after World War II, most of the mills converted into synthetics: cotton was no longer king in

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Historical Significance Item number 8

Page 9

Richmond County. Like most small mill towns, local operations could not compete with the textile giants centered in larger urban areas. Slowly the mills were sold off to national conglomerates such as Burlington Industries and J. P. Stevens and Company. By 1946 all but Ledbetter Mill had been absorbed by larger corporations.<sup>44</sup>

The original Town of Rockingham comprised fifty acres. By 1980, almost 200 years after its founding, Rockingham has grown to a little over 1,900 acres, with a population of 8,300 citizens.<sup>45</sup> The textile mills and mill villages that surround Rockingham are unincorporated, and add approximately 7,000 persons to the area population.

Annexation and growth areas have been northeast and southeast of the central city, along and near U. S. Highways 1 North and 74 East. The rugged topography has discouraged growth to the west.

The entire original fifty acres is now the commercial, financial, and governmental center of Richmond County. Only fourteen of the initial seventy-six town lots are used for residences.

Three U. S. Highways pass through Rockingham, providing easy access to larger metropolitan areas. Charlotte, Greensboro, Fayetteville, Raleigh, and Columbia, South Carolina are less than two hours from the Richmond County Courthouse. Shopping centers and strip commercial development have occurred along these highways, especially U. S. 74 east of Rockingham.

The Rockingham area economy is still dominated by textile mills. Some industrial diversity has occurred with a poultry processing plant inside the city limits, and a few plants manufacturing durable goods on the outskirts of town. The county agriculture base is still strong with thousands of acres of timber forests, numerous peach orchards, and poultry farms.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet Footnotes

Item number 8

Page 10

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EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

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Continuation sheet Footnotes

Item number 8

Page 11

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EXP. 12/31/84

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

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

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received

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Continuation sheet    Footnotes

Item number 8

Page 12

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_ see individual nominations  
Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_ Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

### UTM References

A	Zone	Easting	Northing	B	Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

### Verbal boundary description and justification

see individual nominations

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

state	code	county	code
N/A		N/A	

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Heather Hallenberg, Consultant  
organization Division of Archives and History date May 1981  
street & number 109 E. Jones St. telephone 919-733-6545  
city or town Raleigh state North Carolina

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_ national \_\_\_\_ state ☒ local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date June 1982

For NPS use only

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

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 1 of 1

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Rockingham Multiple Resource Area

State North Carolina

Coun 9/22/83

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Hannah Pickett Mill No. 1  
Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper Melvyn Byrum 9/22/83

Attest

2. Roberdel Mill No. 1  
Company Store  
Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper Melvyn Byrum 9/22/83

Attest

3. Bank of Pee Dee Building  
Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper Melvyn Byrum 9/22/83

Attest

4. Watson, H. C., House  
Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper Melvyn Byrum 9/22/83

Attest

5. U.S. Post Office and  
Federal Building

Substantive Review

for Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 9/22/83

Attest

6. Rockingham Historic District

Substantive Review

for Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 11/24/83

Attest

7.

Keeper

Attest

8.

Keeper

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest