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# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

## A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic and Architectural Resources in Downtown Marion, NC

## B. Associated Historic Contexts

1. Pre-Railroad Marion, 1843-1870
2. Marion After the Arrival of the Railroad, 1870-1937

## C. Geographical Data

Downtown Marion, North Carolina, roughly bounded by N. Main St. on the north, Crawford St. on the south, Garden St. on the east, and Burgin St. on the west. (see Exhibit A)

See continuation sheet

## D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

William S. King  
Signature of certifying official

2-4-91  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Way Federman  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

3/28/91  
Date

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**E. Statement of Historic Contexts**

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic and Architectural Resources in Downtown Marion, NC

Section number E Page 1

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### OUTLINE OF HISTORIC CONTEXTS

#### Introduction

1. Pre-Railroad Marion, 1843-1870
2. Marion After the Arrival of the Railroad, 1870-1937

#### INTRODUCTION TO DOWNTOWN MARION'S HISTORIC CONTEXTS

Marion, North Carolina, the McDowell County seat, named for Revolutionary War leader General Francis Marion,<sup>1</sup> currently boasts a population of approximately 4,166 people.<sup>2</sup> Like so many other western North Carolina towns, Marion developed rapidly after the coming of the railroad from points east. McDowell County, and Marion as well, remained relatively rural up until the train arrived in 1870. From the time the county was formed in 1842, and Marion laid out in 1843, up until the coming of the railroad, building was simple, of native materials and construction techniques that had predominated since the 1700s. Simple log structures accounted for nearly all building, with even more elaborate dwellings often beginning as log structures.<sup>3</sup> Commercial development in Marion was slow until the railroad arrived, consisting mainly of buildings of simple wood frame construction that housed businesses such as general stores, doctors', and lawyers' offices.<sup>4</sup> After the railroad, businesses expanded, hotels were built, and homes were constructed utilizing designs, materials, and building techniques more readily available due to the link the railroad provided with the outside world. Marion did not build much out of brick, however, until a devastating fire in 1894 nearly wiped out the entire commercial district. Even after the fire, however, grand homes along Main Street and adjoining it on the east and west were built primarily of wood.

Churches, too, were affected by the railroad. Marion's long history of church building, and of being a gathering place for many denominations, was boosted even further by the railroad. The railroad's link to the "outside world" encouraged congregations to build grand, elaborately designed structures, as well as the simple rural Carpenter Gothic St. John's Episcopal Church, likely taken from Upjohn's plan book Upjohn's Rural Architecture.<sup>5</sup> The railroad and its attendant growth and expansion in Marion of transportation, commercial, civic, residential, and

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religious structures, brought people to the area, which spurred even further development. Industry, too, an area not explored in depth in this multiple property documentation form, also expanded by the turn of the century.

Marion's development, then, can be broken into two distinct periods, the first of which is pre-railroad (1843-1870), and the second which is post-railroad (1870-1937). This overview focuses primarily upon the post-railroad era, but touches upon Marion's commercial, residential, and religious development from pre-railroad times as well. Marion's history is a rich and varied one, made even stronger due to Marion's continual struggle for survival against enormous losses sustained at the end of the 19th century, but growing and recovering to be the commercial, religious, residential, and industrial center of McDowell County.

### **PRE-RAILROAD MARION, 1843-1870**

McDowell County was founded in 1842, and Marion was laid out as a planned town in 1843.<sup>6</sup> John L. Carson gave 50 acres for the town, and deeded another 13 acres to the county commissioners on May 17, 1843.<sup>7</sup> Colonel Carson is said to have come to the Pleasant Gardens section of McDowell County about 1769, where he married Rachel McDowell. Together they built the Carson House about 1810. Colonel Carson served as a state legislator and was also very active in county government. He was a major landholder in the county, owning at one time over 80,000 acres of land.<sup>8</sup>

All of the major streets in town were laid out in 1843 including Main Street, Cross Street (later Court Street), Fort Street on the north, Logan Street on the west, Garden Street on the east, and Henderson Street on the south. (The present boundaries for the Main Street Historic District in this listing approximate these original town boundaries). The first courthouse, built in 1845, was located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Main and Cross (Court) Streets, in the same place as the present day courthouse. It was constructed of brick, while most early commercial buildings were of simple frame construction. Basic services provided in the town, as the county seat, included schools, lawyers, a few merchants, doctors, and churches.<sup>9</sup> These early commercial buildings were built

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primarily along Main Street, along with a few scattered dwellings.

Residential development in the town proper of Marion, like many other western North Carolina communities, was slow before the train arrived. Building before the founding of McDowell County in 1842 was primarily of log, such as the Henry Gillespie House in Turkey Cove built before 1800.<sup>10</sup> Log building continued on into the mid-1800s, often surrounded by more elaborate frame construction as wealth and time permitted. Examples of this are the Joseph McDowell House and the John Carson House, located in the Pleasant Gardens vicinity of McDowell County.<sup>11</sup> As slave labor became more readily available, more substantial brick structures were often built. The Greek Revival style came into popularity in the mid-1800s, and public buildings as well as residences were built in this style.<sup>12</sup>

The development of religious congregations and the resulting buildings to house them in Marion dates back to very soon after the town was formed in 1843. Major denominations in the town at this time were the Methodists, Baptists, and the Presbyterians. The Methodist and Presbyterian congregations were both formed by 1845, and the Baptists by 1862.<sup>13</sup> Churches for the Methodists and Presbyterians were constructed in Marion soon after this, by 1847-1850. The early development of these three major denominations was not an unusual pattern for western North Carolina, except perhaps for Asheville where the Catholics actually had a church in town sooner than the Baptists.<sup>14</sup> It wasn't until the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th century that the Episcopalians, the Catholics, and the Lutherans formally organized congregations in Marion.

John L. Carson gave the land not only for a large portion of Marion,<sup>15</sup> but also for the building of both the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches.<sup>16</sup> The first building constructed by the Methodists was at the corner of N. Madison and E. Court Streets in Marion. It was thought by many, when constructed in the mid-1800s, to be "in the country",<sup>17</sup> since not many people lived in this section of town. This was a brick building, later condemned due to a crack in the foundation. The First Presbyterian Church was organized about the same time as the Methodist Church, and built its first structure in 1847 on the same site as the

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present church building, on Fort Street. This was the first church to be constructed in Marion. Greek Revival was a common architectural style in that time period, and this building, like the 1845 courthouse, was an excellent local example. It was constructed of locally made brick, and was built by Ephraim Clayton, the same individual who built the courthouse.<sup>18</sup>

MARION AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROAD, 1870-1937  
Commercial development in Marion, like in so many other western North Carolina communities, was slow until the railroad arrived in 1870 and opened the area to expansion and growth. When the Western North Carolina (W.N.C.) Railroad (later Southern) finally reached Marion, the town began to experience substantial growth. The population increased, and as a result, additional commercial enterprises were begun.

Industrial expansion was great in Marion at the turn of the century, as was a growth in the tourism and resort development in the entire county. The first industry in Marion, a cotton mill, was the Marion Manufacturing Company, established in 1906. Located approximately one and one-half miles southeast of the courthouse, the plant and office-store were built in 1906, and operations began in 1910. A mill village was constructed around the mill. In 1914, another cotton mill with its attendant village was founded, known as Clinchfield Manufacturing Company. It was located in East Marion. Then, in 1916, yet another cotton mill was developed by the Eugene Cross, Sr. family. Located southwest of downtown, it was known as Cross Mill and also was surrounded by a mill village.<sup>19</sup>

The railroad reached Old Fort, another town in McDowell County located approximately 10 miles west of Marion, in 1873, and with it grew the commercial establishments there as well. In 1885, a hotel, the Round Knob Hotel, was built near there which could accommodate up to 100 people. Marion and Old Fort were literally gateways to the mountainous areas further west, opened up to visitors by the railroad. Marion was a popular stopover point for those on their way to Asheville in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Southern Railway promoted the area in its literature as a tourist haven. Marion, by 1910, had its own "hotel district" on North Main Street which included the Eagle Hotel (Hotel

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McDowell), the Fleming Hotel, and the Hotel Marianna. Many of these hotels provided special dray services to meet passengers at the depot.<sup>20</sup> Other hotels in town included the Dellinger Hotel, the Elliott Hotel, and the Piedmont Hotel. By the time the Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railway (CC&O, later Clinchfield) reached Marion in about 1908, there were many passenger trains per day that stopped in town.<sup>21</sup> With the CC&O running north-south and the Southern running east-west, Marion had become a crossroads for travelers.

Related to the tourism boom in the 1880s and early 1890s, Marion experienced its first real speculative land boom. Around 1890 a man by the name of William Henry Roberts arrived in Marion from Atlanta. He started the first bank in Marion, the Marion Banking and Industrial Company, and also set up the W.H. Roberts and Co. development firm.<sup>22</sup> According to Mr. Robin Hood, this company, along with the CC&O Railroad, were involved in developing plans for a large resort community on Mt. Ida, located about one mile east of the courthouse.<sup>23</sup> Central to this planned development was the construction of an enormous hotel, much on the scale of the old Battery Park Hotel in Asheville. It was known as the Catawba Hotel.<sup>24</sup> During the construction phase of these plans, street car lines were laid to Mt. Ida and the hotel was begun, but all other plans failed to reach completion due to the recession of the 1890s and the failure of the Marion Banking and Industrial Company bank.<sup>25</sup> The hotel was left unfinished for years, but by 1902 it had been taken over and completed as the Elhanan Training Institute.<sup>26</sup> This building was destroyed by fire in 1928.<sup>27</sup>

Despite these speculative failures, Marion's downtown and depot area continued to grow and expand from 1870 up until the early 1890s. By 1892, commercial business in Marion included a telegraph office; insurance agencies; livery stables; bars; billiard halls; bakeries; barber shops; hotels; real estate agencies; restaurants; a cabinet shop; dentists', doctors', and lawyers' offices; drug stores; shoe and millinery shops; and a blacksmith shop.<sup>28</sup> Marion had become a bustling community. Then disaster struck one Sunday morning, November 25, 1894. A fire which began just east of the courthouse spread south, and then north along the east and west sides of Main Street, destroying

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everything in its path. Very little was left of what had formerly been an economically viable downtown commercial area. Damages were assessed at over \$100,000.00, and the town at the time carried only \$12,000.00 in fire insurance.<sup>29</sup> The people were devastated, yet determined to rebuild their town.

In 1896, as a response to the need to help rebuild the town, Marion's first successful bank, the Commercial Bank of Marion, was founded. In 1902, this became the First National Bank, and in the 1960s became part of First Union Bank of North Carolina. In 1931, the Merchants and Farmers Bank, which was founded in the 1920s, merged with First National. On November 12, 1929, when most banks in other towns were failing, a third bank in Marion, the Marion Industrial Bank, was chartered. It began operations on January 6, 1930, and continued to operate as such until it merged with North Carolina National Bank (NCNB) in the late 1960s. According to Ms. Doris Hill, a Marion resident, there was never a major bank failure in Marion, unusual in the late 1920s to early 1930s Depression years.

Marion continued to grow in the early 1900s, and essentially rebuilt the town from scratch. Commercial buildings which survived the 1894 fire include the brick Hotel McDowell, and one of the warehouse buildings by the depot, a portion of which was built by 1894. Every building on Main Street which was built after 1894 was of brick. Only residences on either side of the commercial area continued to use wood as their main construction material. Development in downtown Marion and the area around the depot continued into the late 1920s and 1930s. By 1928, Marion's Main Street included a new courthouse, several hotels and banks, two movie theaters, print shops, drug stores, hardware stores, plumbing, auto repair shops, feed stores, and numerous specialty shops.<sup>30</sup> The depot area had developed its own commercial structures and businesses, including a hosiery mill, a wholesale grocery, a planing mill, and other specialty shops along Railroad Street. By 1936, a Chamber of Commerce publication listed "railroad lines into Marion from five directions,"<sup>31</sup> hotels, restaurants, boarding houses, auto dealers, two newspapers, one ice cream plant, two bottling plants, one roller mill, and two woodworking plants among Marion's many attributes.



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Passenger rail service was discontinued in the 1960s,<sup>32</sup> but freight trains continue to stop in Marion daily. The commercial centers in Marion today, Main Street and the Depot area, are extant reminders of the struggle the town has gone through in its developmental history, from being a small village before 1870, to the site of a land boom in the 1880s and 1890s, to its virtual destruction by fire in 1894, to a rebuilding that brought the town back as the viable, bustling commercial and governmental center of McDowell County, which it remains today.

As mentioned earlier, the Western North Carolina Railroad running east-west reached Marion in 1870 and the Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railway running north-south arrived in 1908. Impressive building booms were sparked by the completion of both lines, their presence felt through the new availability of materials, a broader range of designs as people were able to travel from Marion to other places, and through the growth of businesses and industry which naturally spawned residential development. Many of the finest homes lining Main Street on either side of the business district, as well as on those streets immediately adjacent to downtown such as Madison, Garden, New, Court, Fort, Logan, and Morgan, were built for wealthy industrialists, professionals, and businessmen who had come to Marion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as a result of the consecutive booms. Madison Avenue, Garden Street, New Street, Court Street, Fort Street, and Logan Street boasted beautiful two-story ca. 1900 Neoclassical Revival and Queen Anne homes, as well as the later 1920s one- to one-and-one-half story Craftsman bungalows. On Morgan Street were homes of J.L. Morgan, entrepreneur and one of the founders of First National Bank of Marion; G.W. Crawford; W.C. McCall (later McCall's Funeral Home owner); A.T. Ledbetter, who ran a grocery on East Henderson Street; Fred Washington, an attorney; J.E. Decker, who ran Payne & Decker Lumber Company on Railroad Street; and W.R. Chambers, another prominent attorney in town.<sup>33</sup> Homes along Morgan Street were built primarily in the late 1800s to the early 1900s and included examples of the Queen Anne, Neoclassical, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman styles. Along Main Street were the homes of Dr. J.G. Reid, a prominent dentist; J.E. Neal; Edgar McCall (also part of the McCall's Funeral Home business); C.S. Cowan, a retailer; D.F. Giles, an attorney; A.E. Neal, overseer of Clinchfield Manufacturing's store

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operations; the Little house (owner associated with Clinchfield Manufacturing); Eugene Cross (founder and owner of Cross Cotton Mills); R.H. Bennett; W.K.M. Gilkey (hosiery mill on Railroad Street); Sam Yancey; Dr. J.F. Miller; and Dr. Guy S. Kirby.<sup>34</sup> J.Q. Gilkey and D.E. Hudgins, an attorney and bank director respectively, also built homes on or near Main Street, as did physician B.L. Ashworth.<sup>35</sup> Although not fully documented, the index of drawings by Richard Sharp Smith, prominent Asheville architect of the early 20th century, lists a home built for A. Blanton in Marion in 1915, very possibly the Neoclassical Revival house built by the Blantons on Main Street. The fact that architects such as Smith were being commissioned by Marion residents is indicative of the development in Marion of more refined building styles and clearly shows its prosperity in the early 20th century.

Many of the homes originally built along Main Street in Marion were lost to the 1894 fire and to recent commercial development. The Bobbitt-Bennett and Cross houses are two of the few extant, relatively intact buildings. Other buildings have been considerably altered or moved off of Main Street. Surrounding neighborhoods, especially along Madison, Logan, Fort, New, and Garden Streets, retain much of their original architecture and integrity, and merit additional study. The 1930s witnessed a slowing of the building boom that had taken place in Marion over the previous decades. A few examples of 1930s Bungalow style houses, such as the Blanton House on W. Henderson Street, are scattered through town, but active residential building did not appear to pick up again until 1950s and 1960s subdivisions. Fortunately, even though many grand homes along Main Street have been lost, a great deal of the historic residential character of Marion does remain today, depicting a period of prosperity which has perhaps as yet to be seen again.

Marion's growth also manifested itself in church building in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Baptist Church in Marion was organized in 1862,<sup>36</sup> but did not have a permanent church structure in town until 1878.<sup>37</sup> This was a small wood frame structure, built where the present 1949 addition to the existing church building now stands. In keeping with the times and the growth of Marion in the early 1900s, this structure was torn down when construction on the

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present building began in 1912.<sup>38</sup> It was completed in 1914, a remarkable example of the Late Gothic Revival style depicting a large, prosperous congregation. Marion's other historic Gothic Revival church is a more modest frame building but no less finely crafted. The Episcopal congregation in Marion was founded in 1881, and in 1883 the present St. John's Episcopal Church began to be a reality. Today, it remains as the oldest church building in Marion, even though the church was organized as a congregation much later than the other predominant denominations mentioned above. Although the congregation was very small when the church was begun, the craftsmanship and materials used were of the finest quality. Surely the railroad, through the travel to new places it made available and the materials that could be had for the first time, had an impact on this church as well. Railroads made it possible for small towns such as Marion to be able to obtain plan books such as Upjohn's Rural Architecture, thought to be the basis for the design of this particular church.<sup>39</sup>

The second building for the Methodists, built sometime after 1896<sup>40</sup> on the corner of N. Logan and W. Court Streets, was a wood frame structure which burned in 1907 when a livery stable across the street caught fire.<sup>41</sup> Church records were lost at this time. Services were held in the courthouse until the third building was completed in 1908 at the corner of N. Logan and W. Fort Street (behind the present First Baptist Church). This late Gothic Revival brick building served the congregation until they built a new church outside of town in the late 1950s. The First Baptist Church used the 1908 building as a storage facility until it burned in 1975.<sup>42</sup> This building, were it still standing, would certainly have completed the portrait of Marion's historic church structures and religious development.

With a rapid rise in membership during the 1910s, the Presbyterians quickly outgrew their original 1847 building. In 1923 the congregation replaced the frame building with the present imposing architect-designed Neoclassical Revival style brick building. In contrast, while far from being as richly detailed as St. John's, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church is a fine example of what could be built with minimal resources due to excellent local craftsmanship. Completed in 1935 of river rock from the Catawba River, this church

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building utilized a Late Gothic Revival design, but tailored it to a vernacular form that was affordable and easy to construct. This congregation was not formally organized until 1932,<sup>43</sup> even though attempts had been made as early as 1905.<sup>44</sup>

Other churches were built in or near Marion in the early twentieth century, many of which were associated with the booming mill industries of the time. Examples of these include the 1919 Clinchfield Baptist Church (Clinchfield Manufacturing), the 1919 Cross Mill Baptist Church, and the 1927 Cross Mill Methodist Church. Other churches, not related to the mills, also were built in this time period, but they have been replaced by more modern structures.

Today, many of the same congregations that began with Marion's early years are still in existence. With their historic church buildings they serve as reminders of a vital part of Marion's history, both from a religious as well as an architectural viewpoint.

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### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William S. Powell, North Carolina Gazetteer, UNC Press: Chapel Hill, NC, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>Marion Chamber of Commerce figures, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>Ted Alexander. "Reconnaissance Survey of McDowell County," 1985.

<sup>4</sup>North Carolina Business Directory, 1867-68.

<sup>5</sup>"St. John's Episcopal Church," McDowell News, 12th of August, 1981.

<sup>6</sup>Mildred B. Fossett, History of McDowell County, Seeman Printery, Durham, NC, 1976, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>"Marion-McDowell Quasquicentennial: 1843-1968," Historical Program.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>North Carolina Business Directory, 1867-68.

<sup>10</sup>Ted Alexander. "Reconnaissance Survey of McDowell County," 1985.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>History of McDowell County, pp. 168-177.

<sup>14</sup>Douglas Swaim. Cabins and Castles: The History and Architecture of Buncombe County. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1981.

<sup>15</sup>History of McDowell County.

<sup>16</sup>"First Presbyterian Church 1845-1970," booklet, undated.

<sup>17</sup>"Methodists Organized in 1845," McDowell News, undated (from Robin Hood Collection, McDowell County Library.)

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- 18 "First Presbyterian Church, 1845-1970".
- 19 "Marion-McDowell Quasquicentennial 1843-1968"  
Historical Program.
- 20 Interview with Ermine C. Neal, 14th of November,  
1987.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 History of McDowell County, p. 144.
- 23 Interview with C. Walter Morgan, 14th of December,  
1987. Mr. Morgan is a long-time resident of Marion who grew  
up in the neighborhood located across from the depot area.  
He is quite knowledgeable about Marion history and remembers  
quite clearly many of the houses in his and other  
neighborhoods.
- 24 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1894.
- 25 Interview with Robin Hood, 19th of November, 1987.  
Mr. Hood came to Marion in the 1950s and began to gather  
pertinent information over the years on church histories,  
town history, and most specifically bank and business  
history of Marion. His collection includes newspaper  
clippings, historical photographs and postcards, and bank  
and church records. He was recorded along with his  
collection on videotape as part of this project.
- 26 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1902.
- 27 History of McDowell County, p. 107.
- 28 "First Ordinances of Town of Marion, NC," July  
1, 1892.
- 29 Interview with Robin Hood.
- 30 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1928.
- 31 "57 Facts About the Lake City of the Mountains,"  
1937, distributed by Marion Chamber of Commerce, Marion, NC.
- 32 Interview with Charles Presnell, former railway  
employee, 23rd of November, 1987.

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33 Interview with C. Walter Morgan, 14th of December, 1987.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 "Supplement to History of First Baptist Church", Minutes of the Blue Ridge Baptist Association, NC, 1959, pp. 39-40.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 "St. John's Episcopal Church", McDowell News, 12th of August, 1981.

40 "Marion-McDowell Quasquicentennial 1843-1968."

41 "Methodist Church Played Role in Marion's History," McDowell News, 15th of January, 1975.

42 "Early Morning Fire Destroys Old Church," McDowell News, 15th of January, 1975..

43 "Lutherans Formed Organization in 1932", McDowell News, undated (from Robin Hood Collection, McDowell County Library.)

44 Ibid.

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**F. Associated Property Types**

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I. Name of Property Type \_\_\_\_\_

II. Description

III. Significance

IV. Registration Requirements

See continuation sheet

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See continuation sheet for additional property types



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**G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

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Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

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**H. Major Bibliographical References**

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See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State historic preservation office | <input type="checkbox"/> Local government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency                            | <input type="checkbox"/> University       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |

Specify repository: Western Office, Div. of Archives & History, Asheville, NC

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**I. Form Prepared By**

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name/title	<u>Sybil Argintar Bowers, Preservation Planning Consultant</u>				
organization	<u>Bowers Southeastern Preservation</u>	date	<u>August 31, 1990</u>		
street & number	<u>P.O. Box 15722</u>	telephone	<u>704/253-1392</u>		
city or town	<u>Asheville</u>	state	<u>NC</u>	zip code	<u>28813</u>

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### OUTLINE OF PROPERTY TYPES

1. Commercial, Civic, Transportation Structures (1870-1937)
2. Religious Structures (1883-1937)
3. Residential Structures (1870-1937)

### COMMERCIAL, CIVIC, TRANSPORTATION STRUCTURES (1870-1937)

#### Description

The commercial structures in Marion are primarily two-story buildings dating primarily from ca. 1900-1920, with notable exceptions being the ca. 1894 former Hotel McDowell, and the 1932 Blanton Building. Almost all buildings are of a simple early 20th century commercial style, but several exhibit Neoclassical influences such as the Streetman Building, the First National Bank, and the Hotel McDowell. Most of the buildings exhibit their decorative detailing such as brick corbelling or drip moldings in window surrounds in evidence in the upper stories. Exceptions to this general description are the one to one-and-one-half-story structures such as the ca. 1920 Family Barber Shop and the three story Blanton Building. Almost without exception, commercial buildings are brick with one-over-one double hung windows in the upper facade. In the downtown area there are twenty-nine contributing commercial properties which include those buildings with intact storefronts and facades or those with intact facades and moderate changes to storefronts such as the replacement of wood display window framing with aluminum. There are twenty-one non-contributing commercial properties which include those buildings classified as "new," meaning they date after 1937, or those older buildings with substantial alterations to the entire facade.

Civic structures, including buildings such as the Community Building, City Hall, the courthouse, and the former post office building, range from one to three stories in height and represent a broad range of stylistic influences including elaborately detailed 1920s Neoclassical to late 1930s Art Deco, Classical Revival, and vernacular. All are built of brick or stone and figure prominently in the streetscape.

The brick depot is the only representative of the transportation property type in Marion, due to its obvious association with the railroad. The depot exhibits a basic design so prominent to western North Carolina of a one-

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story, long linear form which incorporates a loading or passenger platform and Craftsman detailing.

### Significance

The commercial, civic, and transportation structures are all significant as representatives of commercial and related civic and transportation development of Marion from 1870 until the 1930s. The impact of the railroad's arrival in 1870 was pivotal to Marion's development and is reflected in these property types. Marion was very isolated during its first decades, but the railroad connected the town to the "outside world" and many of the goods and services it had to offer, as well as an enormous population of potential tourists. Construction of hotels to house the influx of tourists began in the late 1800s, as did further development of more substantial brick commercial structures to accommodate the businesses established to meet the demands of growing local markets. As the town grew, a larger courthouse was needed, as was a more modern city hall and community building. The arrival of the railroad made it necessary to construct warehouse and commercial buildings near the depot to store goods brought in and out by the railroad, and to house businesses such as planing mills, a wholesale grocery, and a hosiery mill, which depended upon the railroad for their supplies.

These buildings clearly are eligible for listing in the National Register based upon Criteria A and C for reflecting important patterns in Marion's commercial and civic development and as examples of a variety of styles of the period, exhibiting excellent design and craftsmanship.

### Registration Requirements

The boundaries for both the Main Street and the Depot Historic Districts were drawn based upon concentrations of Contributing properties, meaning those buildings that were 50 years old or older and still retained their architectural integrity. Integrity of form in all cases pertained to minimal exterior alterations. In the case of commercial buildings, modernization of storefronts and alterations to the second story such as modern signs, painting of original unpainted brick, or boarding up of windows did not render the building non-contributing as long as the form, fenestration, and primary decorative elements remained intact. Small additions to the side or rear of the property

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which did not detract from the front facade also were considered minimal changes. However, where an entire facade was covered with aluminum panels or significantly altered, the building, even if pre-1937, was classified as non-contributing. Examples of this include 25 S. Main Street [#27 in the Main Street Historic District Inventory list], and the B.C. Moore and Sons buildings on S. Main Street [#30-31 in the Main Street Historic District Inventory list]. The clustered concentration of adjoining buildings on Main Street forms a tight district, broken on either side by individually sited modern buildings.

All of Marion's downtown civic buildings, such as the courthouse, the post office, City Hall, and the Community Building, have retained a high degree of integrity as well, especially from the street. While most of these have additions to the side or rear, they do not detract from the main facade. Important elements such as original windows, materials, and roofline have remained intact.

The depot has remained intact as a transportation structure in terms of its important setting, and despite a 1952 addition on the east end, has remained intact in terms of original form, detailing, doorways, and roofline.

### RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES (1883-1937)

#### Description

The church properties within this property type exhibit a wide range of stylistic influences, but all of them are clear representatives of the variety of religious groups that have existed in McDowell County and specifically in Marion, since 1845. All of them are representatives of their styles and times, including 19th century Carpenter Gothic (St. John's Episcopal Church), early 20th century Late Gothic Revival/Romanesque Revival (First Baptist Church), Neoclassical Revival (First Presbyterian Church), and late 1930s Gothic-inspired vernacular (St. Matthew's Lutheran Church). All are tall one-story buildings with lofty, open interior spaces, and all are constructed of fire-retardant materials such as stone or brick, except for the wood frame St. John's Episcopal Church, which is one of the finest examples of a vernacular Carpenter Gothic style church anywhere in western North Carolina. Simple and rectilinear in form, it is a one story structure with a steeply pitched gable roof, lancet windows, and an elaborate

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bell tower. Exterior walls of the church are board and batten, with beaded board walls on the interior. Large stained glass windows punctuate the nave on the east and west walls. First Baptist Church is an eclectic example of the Gothic and Romanesque Revival styles. Some of these elements include irregular roof massing, a large bell tower with a turret at each corner, use of tracery in windows, and corner buttresses. First Presbyterian Church is an excellent example of a Neo-Classical Revival style structure. Sited high on a knoll overlooking W. Fort Street, it is basically rectilinear in form with a monumental Ionic tetrastyle pedimented portico. Windows are classic examples of the Roman arch combined with the three-part Palladian window, many adorned with radiating brick voussoirs and keystones. St. Matthew's Lutheran Church displays woodworking, gothic arch insets in the windows, small buttresses, and lancet windows in the front of the building and at the altar, all of which, though executed through local design and craftsmanship, allude to the more formal Late Gothic Revival style. The diversity of building styles is inherent within this property type as a reflection of changing times and people influencing Marion's religious history.

**Significance**

The religious structures noted here are all significant as representatives of the religious development that occurred in Marion from 1845 to the late 1930s which, in turn, is indicative of the town's overall socio-economic development. As early as 1845, the Methodist and Presbyterian congregations had organized, followed soon thereafter by the Baptists in 1862. Small churches were built in the mid-1800s, but as the population grew, so did the need for larger, more elaborate buildings. When the railroad arrived in 1870, new ideas, materials, and craftsmanship became much more readily available in late 19th to early 20th century Marion, and the Neoclassical, Late Gothic Revival, Carpenter Gothic, and vernacular styles of the churches documented here attest to this change and the incumbent growth and sophistication of the congregations. The four historic churches in downtown Marion clearly meet Criteria A and C for the patterns of religious history, as well as developmental history they represent, and for being intact examples of some of Marion's more stylish structures, exhibiting refined design and craftsmanship.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
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Section number F Page 5**Registration Requirements**

All of the religious structures surveyed in downtown Marion are eligible for listing in the National Register individually or as contributing properties in districts due to the fact that they retain a significantly high degree of architectural integrity, both in the interior and the exterior. While representative of various styles, from high style Late Gothic Revival to vernacular Gothic Revival to Neoclassical Revival, the buildings are united by their minimal alterations such as the addition of a handicapped ramp, placement of low partition walls inside or cosmetic changes such as carpeting or painting of woodwork. Interior spaces and details and exterior detailing and materials have, for the most part, remained intact so that the buildings all appear today much as they did when first built. One exception to this is the enlargement of the nave of St. John's Episcopal Church which extended the building by seventeen feet. While this certainly changed the original proportions of the building, changes were made in a very compatible way through use of similar materials and construction techniques and retention of the basic form. Another exception is the Late Gothic Revival/Romanesque Revival First Baptist Church which has a ca. 1950 education wing on the north side designed by noted Asheville architect Henry Gaines. However, this addition is done so sympathetically in picking up the height, materials, window forms and setback of the original structure that it does not detract from the historic building's overall form and architectural detailing.

**RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES (1870-1937)****Description**

The residential structures in downtown Marion represent some of the town's most popular building styles in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, including late Second Empire, Queen Anne, Neoclassical Revival, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman. In particular, the Cross and Kirby houses reflect the trend in the 1910s and 1920s towards the Bungalow style, with the ca. 1910 Kirby House exhibiting many Colonial Revival details as well. Other styles sometimes seen in Marion in the 1920s included the ca. 1924 Bungalow/Prairie style A.L. Finley House, and the ca. 1928 Spanish Revival home of Thomas Henderson. (Ted Alexander, "Reconnaissance Survey of McDowell County.") Most structures are one or two stories, usually with a porch, and are wood frame with either siding

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or brick veneer. Bungalow styles typically utilize more native materials such as stone, brick, and wood for exaggerated effects. Details on some of the buildings include battered porch piers, composite columns, [Eugene Cross House, #2 and Bobbitt-Bennett House, #6 in the Main Street Historic District inventory list], and river rock retaining walls in the landscaping [Blanton House, #51 in the Main Street Historic District inventory list]. Typical of urban development through the 1930s, fashionable residences abutted the heart of the central business district, built along Main Street or immediately adjacent to it for ease of access into town.

**Significance**

The residential structures noted here are all important representatives of the tremendous growth in population and residential development that took place in Marion after the arrival of the railroad in 1870. They reflect a period of wealth and experimentation with new materials and architectural styles. Main Street, as well as the streets immediately adjacent to or within the downtown area such as Madison, Garden, New, Court, Fort, and Logan, all displayed examples of grand late nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture in styles such as Queen Anne, Neoclassical Revival, and Craftsman. Morgan Street, adjacent to the depot area of town, also included examples of Queen Anne and Neoclassical buildings. These buildings also are indicative of the growth in industry, commerce, and related professional support services taking place in Marion at the turn of the century. Eugene Cross was associated with Cross Cotton Mills, and R.H. Bennett ran a wholesale liquor sales and rectifying business at the depot. The historic residential structures in downtown Marion meet Criteria A and C as reflections of the contributions they made to Marion's overall development through the late 1930s and, if they are relatively intact, as representatives of building types and stylistic influences prevalent after 1870.

**Registration Requirements**

In downtown Marion, houses built prior to 1938 that have retained a high degree of architectural integrity qualify as contributing properties within districts. Exceptionally intact and architecturally distinctive houses would be individually eligible for National Register listing; in the

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downtown area, however, the only house that is potentially eligible individually is the Eugene Cross House, a large, exuberantly styled stone and brick bungalow, presently included in the Main Street Historic District. Those residential structures dating from the 1930s must have retained an especially high degree of integrity in terms of form, materials, and craftsmanship as compared to those buildings dating from the late 19th to early 20th centuries in order to be considered contributing elements of a district due to the fact that there are so many more buildings dating from the later time period. Since there are more of the 1930s buildings, a close evaluation is necessary to determine that they are clear, unaltered representatives of building trends of this period. Major alterations which would diminish a building's integrity significantly, rendering it a non-contributing property, include enclosure of primary porches, replacement of original windows, and additions which severely alter the building's front facade. In addition, if a building has been covered unsympathetically with artificial siding so as to obliterate detailing of the original facade, it was considered to be non-contributing.

Very few houses along Main Street have retained sufficient integrity, as their appearances from the street have been significantly altered when the buildings have been converted to new uses. If major additions made for an adaptive re-use are to the rear and do not overwhelm the original house, the building retains its contributing status, especially if it is one of Marion's relatively early buildings and is a rare example of its style. An example of this situation is the Bobbitt-Bennett House [#6 in the Main Street Historic District Inventory list]. Despite the large rear addition, the original portion of this building is clearly separated by a walkway from a modern addition, and the building retains an exceptional degree of integrity in its interior spaces and Queen Anne and Neoclassical detailing. Due to these reasons, as well as the fact that it is the oldest (ca. 1898) remaining residence on Main Street, the only representative of an eclectic Second Empire style in Marion, and visually enhances Main Street's streetscape, it is considered contributing.



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### SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

A reconnaissance survey of McDowell County, conducted by Ted Alexander, was completed in 1985. Mr. Alexander holds a B.A. degree in political science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and a M.A. degree in preservation planning from Cornell University. His experience in historic preservation is extensive, including directing the Bedford, Virginia Main Street program and architectural survey work for the North Carolina Division of Archives and History in McDowell, Mitchell, and Polk Counties. He is currently Executive Director of the Uptown Shelby Association, Inc. in Shelby, North Carolina. Mr. Alexander's survey identified all of the structures included in this nomination except for the Marion Post Office and the depot and related commercial structures. However, due to the abbreviated nature of a reconnaissance survey, it was a lack of time and resources rather than ineligibility of the structures which omitted them. These properties have since been placed on North Carolina's National Register Study List, as of January, 1988. (The Study List is a requirement of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. It is a list of eligible properties presented to the State Professional Review Committee on a quarterly basis. These properties, once approved by the Committee, can then be nominated to the National Register.) A minimal amount of historic research was compiled in this survey, but the survey report is a lengthy and solid analysis of major architectural resources in Marion and the county, and is filed in the State Historic Preservation Office. This multiple property listing builds on this beginning.

In the summer of 1987, the Downtown Development Office in the City of Marion hired Sybil A. Bowers, a preservation planning consultant, to prepare National Register forms for the eligible properties in downtown Marion: two historic districts, Main Street and the depot area, as well as several individually eligible properties. Ms. Bowers holds a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture and a masters degree in historic preservation, both from the University of Georgia. She has worked extensively in the preservation field, including work in the Georgia Main Street program, and has served as regional preservation planner for thirteen northeast Georgia counties. More recently, Ms. Bowers has

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worked as Executive Director of the Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County before beginning her own consulting firm, Bowers Southeastern Preservation, in 1986.

As Ms. Bowers began her initial work in Marion, it was determined to be most efficient, for now and for future nominations, to prepare a multiple property listing for an area restricted to the downtown area, roughly defined by the boundaries currently utilized by the Downtown Association as their tax district (see Exhibit A). This decision was made due to limited project funding and because development pressure on the central business district where the majority of Marion's commercial and religious buildings are located is a more imminent concern of the community. Several areas outside the downtown are potentially eligible for listing in the National Register. It is hoped that at a future time, the boundaries of the multiple property area can be expanded to include the entire city limits of Marion so that additional residential structures, religious structures, and perhaps industrial buildings and mill villages can be nominated to the National Register. Additional research will be needed at that time in order to amend this multiple property documentation form to address industrial and residential development in greater detail.

Ms. Bowers organized the nomination's contexts and property types based upon extensive field work, consultation with Martha Fullington, Preservation Specialist at the Western Office of the Department of Archives and History, and historical background research through local history books such as Mildred Fossett's History of McDowell County, and A Pictorial History of McDowell County, newspapers, oral history, Sanborn maps, and county deed books. Most of this work occurred in 1987, and as a result historic buildings were defined as those erected prior to 1938. Especially helpful was the Robin Hood Historical Collection at the McDowell County Library which included numerous historic photos, newspaper clippings, and data about local banks, churches, and industries. Mr. Hood has spent approximately 30 years compiling historic information about Marion and McDowell County. Specific time periods in Marion's history emerged through this research, as did contexts and property types as outlined here.

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Included in this multiple property listing are nominations  
for:

1. Main Street Historic District
2. Depot Historic District
3. St. John's Episcopal Church
4. First Presbyterian Church
5. St. Matthew's Lutheran Church

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