

## HISTORIC RESOURCES OF GREENSBORO, GREENE COUNTY, GEORGIA

## HISTORIC DISTRICT #1

I. IDENTIFICATIONNAME OF DISTRICT: **Greensboro Commercial Historic District**

LOCATION: Broad and Main Streets

CITY: Greensboro

COUNTY: Greene (code 133)

STATE: Georgia (code 013)

ZIP CODE: 30642

CLASSIFICATION: district

CURRENT USE: commercial, government, park

ACREAGE: 9 acres

U.S.G.S. QUADRANGLE: Greensboro, Ga.

U.T.M. REFERENCES: (A) Z17 E297560 N3717190  
 (B) Z17 E297540 N3716930  
 (C) Z17 E297330 N3716950  
 (D) Z17 E297360 N3717210

II. DESCRIPTION

## DESCRIPTION

General character, appearance, and historical development: The district is a mid- to late 19th-century commercial area with one- and two-story brick buildings, primarily of Victorian design. The district is comprised of buildings lining Broad and Main streets, which intersect in the center of the community. There is a courthouse square north of this intersection on Main Street. The square contains a three-story, brick, Greek Revival-style courthouse and two jails. The commercial district was the first area to develop in the community.

Natural terrain, natural landmarks, geographic features: The district terrain is fairly flat. There is a moderate slope on Broad Street east of the intersection with Main Street.

Various parts of the district: The district is a relatively small area of unified design.

Pattern of land subdivision: The district is divided into small rectangular lots of fairly uniform size. There are several large lots within the district which include the "Big Store" lot, Copelan's block, and the courthouse square. There is one alley in the district located behind the buildings on the east side of Main Street.

Arrangement or placement of buildings: Buildings are primarily placed fronting the sidewalks and property lines with no setbacks. Most of the structures throughout the central business district are attached. There are a few detached structures at the edges of the district including the courthouse and two jails

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situated in the courthouse square, two service stations on Broad Street, and several structures on the south end of Main Street.

Architectural characteristics: Most of the buildings are one- and two-story commercial structures built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Brick is the dominant material. Typical characteristics include brick corbeling, brick pilasters, recessed doorways, decorative grills, windows in a variety of shapes--round arched, segmental arched, and trabeated, pressed metal columns and cornices, wooden kickplates, large display windows, and transoms. Changes to the original structures have included the modernization of first floor facades with cararra glass and metal and the replacement of windows. In the 1930s through 1950s many of these structures were changed with the addition of new plate-glass window storefronts. Renovation efforts in more recent times have resulted in the addition of metal fronts and awnings.

The downtown contains two historic buildings which encompass entire blocks at the corners of Main and Broad. One of these buildings is the McCommons Store, known historically as the "Big Store." This is a two-story structure of brick with several additions. Its interior includes wooden floors and plaster walls. An outline of a former opening for a skylight is still visible in the ceiling. The other building is Copelan's block, characterized by one-story attached brick storefronts with metal columns, intricate brick detailing in the cornice, and a finely detailed metal cornice on the corner.

Another detached structure is the 1937 United States Post Office. This one-story brick building of simple detailing has 8/12 rectangular windows with granite molding. On the interior there are terrazzo floors, Georgia marble wainscoting, plaster walls, wood trim around the original post office boxes, and two WPA paintings. There is a one-story, frame, Victorian-style office across the street from the post office.

Other public buildings in the district include the Greene County Courthouse, Old Greene County Jail, Greene County Jail, and the former city hall/fire station. The Greene County Courthouse is a three-story brick building of Greek Revival design with oversized Tuscan columns. The interior contains a staircase at the entrance on each side of the door which leads to the second floor courthouse space and the third floor lodge. Interior detailing includes wooden floors, plaster walls, and wood paneled doors. Probate Judge and Clerk of Superior Court offices are literally vaults. Entrance doors to these offices resemble doors on a bank safe. The courtroom has a pedimented entrance door of monumental scale, two fluted Doric columns, and wooden benches. The only change to this structure has been the addition of paneled wainscoting to the third floor. The Old Greene County Jail, ca. 1807, known as the "Old Gaol," is a two-story structure of granite with battlements around the top of the structure. It is of extremely primitive design, resembling a small-scale medieval

fortress, and is the oldest structure in the district. The later jail, dating from 1895, is a two-story brick structure of Romanque design. The turn-of-the-century municipal building is a simple, one-story, brick structure with a semi-circular parapet highlighting its main facade.

Landscape characteristics: Dominant materials in the town center include asphalt streets, concrete sidewalks, and granite curbing. In many cases, sidewalks are comprised of hexagonal concrete pavers, which are multi-colored in front of Copelan's block. In one instance a long rectangular piece of granite has been used as a crosswalk, and along the alley beside the courthouse, granite has been used to create a retaining wall. Landscape elements are primarily located within the courthouse square. Large oaks and elm trees are informally placed in the grassed lawn of the square. The oaks form street trees around the square and on both sides of Greene Street. There is a low concrete wall within the square which has large granite blocks at the rear. The statue to the Confederate dead is situated beside the courthouse.

Archaeological potential: unknown

Anomalous features: There is a small, one-story, frame house at the southern edge of the district, which is the only frame structure within the district. It is not only an anomaly due to its contrasting material, but also for its resemblance to a residence. It appears that its historical use as always been for office and commercial purposes, however, making it an unusual surviving example of wood-framed commercial architecture.

CONDITION: Good

CONTRIBUTING/NONCONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES:

Noncontributing properties (including both intrusions and non-historic properties) have been noted on the attached map of the district. The criteria for their notation is as follows: Intrusions are generally of one type. They are modern buildings that have been constructed since World War II. Due to their design, proportions, massing, siting, materials, and other features, they distract from the district and are in visual contrast to their surroundings. Nonhistoric structures have been built after the district's period of significance has passed. While these structures tend to blend into the district in terms of their design, proportions, massing, siting, materials, and other features, they do not contribute to the historic significance of the district. There is one nonhistoric gas station in the district and two detached intrusions. One intrusion is a brick structure to the rear of the jails. The other is a building sheathed in metal at a contrasting setback in the southern edge of the district. (See list at end of Section IV.)

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**BOUNDARIES:**

The district includes the historic commercial core of the city of Greensboro. The area includes the major historic commercial and public buildings in the community. The boundary was chosen due to the concentration of resources. Areas outside the district include nonhistoric commercial development on the south, east, and north. The district abuts the Main-Broad-Laurel-South Street Residential Historic District on the west.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** 1-9

**III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**DATES OF DEVELOPMENT:** 1786-1937

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:**

The town of Greensboro was laid out in February 1786 by William Greer as the county seat of Greene County. An additional purpose of the town was to be the site for the University of Georgia. According to T. B. Rice, author of the county history, in the original plat for the town "the University grounds were located in the center of the survey, bounded by East, West, South, and North Streets and no buildings were erected in that area." Dr. Rice's conclusion is that "all business houses and residences bordered on the University grounds." This plat also showed a small house in the center of the intersection of Broad and Main. Dr. Rice assumed that this structure was a fort. According to local tradition there were three forts within the town limits. The forts and early courthouse, residences, and businesses were all lost to fire in the summer of 1787. This event was reported in the Augusta Chronicle which stated that the town was burned by Indians and approximately 30 of the town's residents were massacred. It appears from later General Presentments of the Superior Court that few lots were sold in the early history of the town and that many sold for credit and no interest was paid. By the fall of 1797 plans for the University at Greensboro had been abandoned and the Trustees began selling off the lots within the grounds set aside for the proposed campus. In the update of the original town plat in 1812, a notation stated that there were four alleys 25 feet wide passing through the old town center (which included the present central business district) from north to south in the original plans, but that these alleys had been sold, apparently to the private lots they attached.

Greene County acquired the lot on which the present courthouse stands and built a courthouse of wood. The rock jail (Old Gaol) was built around 1807. The existing Court Street was laid off after Greene County acquired the courthouse square. Other structures within the courthouse square have included a wooden market building and a two-story brick calaboose. The existing courthouse was built in 1849. Originally it was to be a two-story structure but, according to local tradition, after the

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contract had been let the Masonic Lodge requested a space for meetings. An agreement was reached between the county and lodge and a third floor was added with the Masons paying the extra cost. The Masons continue to use this structure as their meeting place today.

Business lots began to be sold along Broad and Main Streets. The first structures in the town center were in all probability modest wood storehouses. Some of the earliest brick structures were built about 1818 at the corner of Broad and Greene Streets (demolished 1984). These two brick buildings, originally three stories high, were used for general mercantile purposes on the ground floor and offices in the upper stories. It appears that early development was situated near the courthouse square. Development across Main Street from the courthouse square in addition to the three-story brick stores included the Norton Building and the Doherty Hotel, both of wood (now demolished). Another early structure in the town center at the opposite end of the business district was a combination dwelling and bank building. This two-story building stood at the corner of Main and South Streets and was headquarters for a branch bank of the State of Georgia which was operating in Greensboro by the mid 1830's. Adiel Sherwood's 1827 Gazetteer describes Greensboro in this period with a courthouse, jail, clerk's office of brick, 10 stores, 6 law offices, 8 mechanics' shops, 4 doctors' offices, and a branch of the state bank.

The Georgia Railroad brought rail access to Greensboro in the 1830s and apparently created a market for additional hotels. The 1850s newspapers note that the Willis Hotel and City Hotel, run by Mrs. M.T. Statham, were in operation. There was a call for street improvements in the 1850s. There was also a call for the removal of wooden store buildings. The newspaper reported that the "weather-beaten, wooden houses on Main Street will be removed and brick buildings erected in their stead." The desire to see brick storehouses was probably prompted by the threat of fire. In 1860 there was a small fire in the town center. It was noted that fires had also been reported in other communities-- Warrenton, Danbury, Augusta, Cotton Factory, Social Circle, and Elberton. The newspaper that same year noted that several fireproof buildings were under construction.

Major brick buildings were added to the town center in the mid-1800's by two brothers, William S. and Charles A. Davis. Together they had formerly owned and operated a business known as Davis Brothers. This enterprise was dissolved and they both established separate businesses in separate stores on opposite corners. The present Hunter Drugs building at the northwest corner of Broad and Main was constructed in 1858 by William S. Davis for general merchandise purposes. Charles Alfred Davis began building the "Big Store" on the opposite corner at the same time. It was reported to be the largest store between Augusta and Atlanta. At its construction it measured 105' in depth and 65' across the front. C. A. Davis took in several partners and

the business became known as Davis, Wood, and Johnson. Later he obtained sole ownership, but again he sold it. In its history the "Big Store" housed the enterprises of Davis Brothers and Seals; Armor Brothers; J. B. Williams; McCommons, Thompson and Boswell; and currently, McCommons. An announcement in the paper in 1889 of the opening of Davis Brothers and Seals noted that the building, which had been enlarged by this time, had "three stories running back 205' x 90' and they sold general merchandise ranging from clothing to coffins."

According to Dr. Rice, during the War Between the States all business houses in the town center were closed and along with all public buildings were taken over by the Confederate government and used as hospitals for the wounded soldiers. Farming appears to have remained the primary industry in the community following the war and the town center continued to function as the market for the produce. It was reported in the 1883 Gazetteer that exports from the town totalled 5,000 bales of cotton and 10,000 bushels of oats. A listing of residents included a separate listing for the farmers, which totalled 56. The Georgia Railroad schedule printed in 1889 noted a fast line between Greensboro and Augusta and Atlanta for the farmers to distribute eggs, butter, and chickens. The war had altered the plantation economies. Time-merchants, as they were called, began to advance supplies to the tenants and sharecroppers on credit. There were reported to be six such merchants in Greensboro.

In the 1870s Greensboro with a population of nearly 1,000 inhabitants had several lawyers, four physicians, and a dentist. In 1874 kerosene street lamps were placed throughout the town, possibly motivated by Mr. Markwalter, who in 1867 had erected a street lamp in front of his jewelry store at his own expense as an example to other merchants. The town apparently needed more improvements than streetlights. Grand jury minutes in this period call attention to the cattle and loose stock running at large in the streets and noted that a fence which "reflected credit upon the builders" now surrounded the town square. The town center as shown on Sanborn fire insurance maps in 1885 showed that brick buildings lined most of Main Street between Broad and Greene. Grand Jury presentments in that year called for the painting of a fence around the court house square, which according to Sanborn maps at that time was smaller than its present size. The map shows the square with the old rock jail and the calaboose (demolished) at its lower end with a large open space between the rear of the lot and East Street. Grand Jury presentments also recommended the removal of all wooden buildings from the square.

Another major brick structure was added to the town center in the late 1880s. E. A. Copelan acquired the entire block at the southeast corner of Broad and Main. He built a warehouse where he ran a general supply store, noted on Sanborn Maps as Copelan's Cotton Yard and Planters' Supply. This was the major building in that block. In 1889, he demolished the old Statham Hotel, which

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stood on this corner, and built a private bank. This was the first unit in what became Copelan block. Also in this period there was a livery stable to the rear of the buildings on Main Street between Broad and Court Street. A Fire Department building, which appears to be the same structure that later served as City Hall, was built on Court Street across from the courthouse square.

In 1890 there was a discussion in the local paper of tearing down and replacing the current jail which "squats on the public square." The old jail was described as "being built of rock, cold, wet, inhuman, impossible to heat." Fortunately, the "Old Gaol" was preserved and a new jail built at the lower end of the courthouse square facing East Street. In the building of the new jail which took place before 1901 the courthouse square was enlarged to its present size. It was also noted in the paper that the courthouse would last a half century more if permanent repairs as recommended by the grand jury were made. The 1901 Sanborn map shows that the earlier Commercial Hotel, which stood beside the courthouse, had been replaced with the Richland Hotel. This hotel, according to the map, was a large asymmetrically massed wooden building.

In 1898 a new structure was added to the town center by Mr. L. C. Torbert. The building was described in the local paper as having "large plate glass windows on the front, handsome iron columns, woodwork inside painted white, and the ceilings extra high." This appears to be the structure located on the northeast corner of Broad and Main. The building was acclaimed as marking a new era in store-building in Greensboro. The farming economy began to decline in the late 1800s and a desire to diversify prompted the establishment of a local cotton mill. The town center remained the governmental, service, and retail center of the community.

In the early 1900s the town center existed much as it does today. Copelan's block was completed and almost all wooden storehouses had been replaced by brick structures. The only additions to the downtown in the early 1900s included two service stations to the rear of the "Big Store" on Broad Street. One was a local enterprise; the other, a "Sinclair" chain franchise facility, was built after 1939 and is just outside the district. Dr. C. M. Baber owned a brick lodge in the town center which was located on Broad Street to the rear of the commercial structure. This structure, which was demolished in the 1950s, housed a variety of black businesses. In 1937 the existing post office was built on the site of a former residence. New construction in the downtown area primarily has occurred outside the historic town center. New buildings such as banks and grocery stores have been constructed on Broad Street immediately outside the proposed district. Greensboro's oldest brick structures were demolished in 1984 for the construction of additional retail space.

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IV. SIGNIFICANCE

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA: A, C

AREA(S) OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Commerce, Community Planning, Landscape Architecture, Politics/Government

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1786-1937

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: local

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architecture. The district is important in architecture since it contains Greensboro's largest intact collection of historic public and commercial buildings. These buildings represent over a century of architectural development. Most of the public buildings within the district are centered on the courthouse square. The Greene County Courthouse of Greek Revival design is one of the most important. In the recent book, Courthouses in Georgia, the Greene County Courthouse was called one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the state of Georgia. The former rock jail, known as the "Old Gaol," is equally as significant. This structure is the oldest structure in the town center and represents primitive building design. This jail may be the oldest jail structure in the state. The later jail of Romanesque design illustrates the change in jail design. Whereas the first jail resembled a fortress, the later jail was designed to look like a residence. The post office structure, dating from 1937, represents public or "government" design in the 1930s and is the last historic building built in the downtown district. The district is also important for its fine collection of commercial buildings. Several of these structures, such as the "Big Store," are unusual surviving antebellum buildings which were "Victorianized" through later additions. A majority of the commercial structures within the district date from the late 1800s and share common design features such as metal columns and brick corbeling. An exceptional architectural feature of the district is that historic commercial buildings front on all four corners of the principal downtown intersection.

Community Planning. In the area of community planning, the district is important for its intact town plan. This gridiron street system forms the core for the entire community plan, with the intersection of Broad and Main streets at the exact center. The courthouse square, although not originally planned, is also an important community planning feature and a characteristic of county seats. It developed through the acquisition of an entire block within the original plan, and it evolved to look like other courthouse squares of the period with the building of Court Street and the expansion of the square to include the entire block with the construction of the second jail. The existing street system also includes traces of the alleys from the

original town plan. These were planned throughout the community and the town center contains the only remaining evidence of these spaces. Few county courthouse towns have survived with such a high degree of integrity that their gridiron plans can be encompassed in their entirety in historic districts; therefore, the surviving portions of such plans, where they exist, especially in downtown areas which were the focal points for such community plans, are an important part of the historic built environment.

Landscape Architecture. In landscape architecture, the district is important because it contains the principal historic landscaped space in the multiple resource area: the courthouse square. Typically a level expanse of lawn informally landscaped with trees, shrubbery, paved walks, and commemorative markers and statues, the landscaped courthouse square is a characteristic landmark feature in virtually every Georgia county seat. Although Greensboro's courthouse square is unusual in that it does not occupy the center of the town plan (due to Greensboro's peculiar history and its conception as an educational as well as political and commercial town), by the early 20th century it had come to possess all the characteristic features of courthouse squares elsewhere in Georgia. Other historic landscape features in the district included granite curbing along the downtown streets and sidewalks paved with early 20th-century hexagonal pavers.

Commerce. In the area of commerce, the district is important as the center of Greensboro's business district from the community's founding through the 1930s and on up to the present time. The district has served as a marketing center for the farm crops which were abundant in the mid- to late nineteenth century. It also has served as the center of retail, wholesale, and service business in the community and the county, and it has been the focus of banking, finance, real estate, and other professional, office-related businesses. These various businesses were housed for the most part in the commercial buildings which make up the downtown historic district. This kind of commercial activity is characteristic of most historic county seats in Georgia, and it illustrates how and where business was transacted in rural Georgia during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Politics and Government. The district is important in politics and government since it has served as the seat of government for the county and the city. There are a number of buildings within the district which document the governmental use of the town center. Chief among them are the county courthouse and the two historic county jails. County government during the nineteenth century in Georgia was the most important form of local government; county government buildings like courthouses and jails are among the largest and finest historic buildings in these communities and stand not only as landmarks but also as symbols to a form of rural government that predominated for nearly two centuries. Also important to the political and

governmental role of this district are the old municipal building and the 1937 post office. There are relatively few historic municipal government buildings in Georgia's small towns; this one provides visible evidence to the role played by local government throughout Greensboro's history. The post office represents the increased role in daily life played by the federal government during the lean years of the Great Depression. Many smaller Georgia towns received their first federal buildings--usually post offices--as a result of the public works programs of the 1930s.

The district may also be significant in the area of art history because it contains in its 1937 post office two paintings that were done as part of the Depression-era WPA program by artist, Carson Davenport of Tennessee. The Greensboro post office is believed locally to be only one of two post offices which contain two WPA murals. One painting depicts cotton pickers and shows black and white citizens standing beside one another harvesting the cotton. The other painting illustrates the burning of Greensboro by the Indians and includes a picture of the original fort, the Indians burning the town, and the eventual capture of the Indians. Additional research into the history of murals in 1930s post offices in Georgia is needed to support National Register eligibility in terms of this area of significance, however.

#### CONTRIBUTING/NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

29 contributing buildings  
 5 noncontributing buildings  
 1 contributing structure (courthouse square/plan)  
 35 total resources

#### VII. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS: Historic Structures Field Survey: Greene County, Georgia (state-level survey)

BIBLIOGRAPHY: SEE Bibliography, Section 9, National Register Nomination Form

FORM PREPARED BY: SEE Form Prepared By, Section 11, National Register Nomination Form

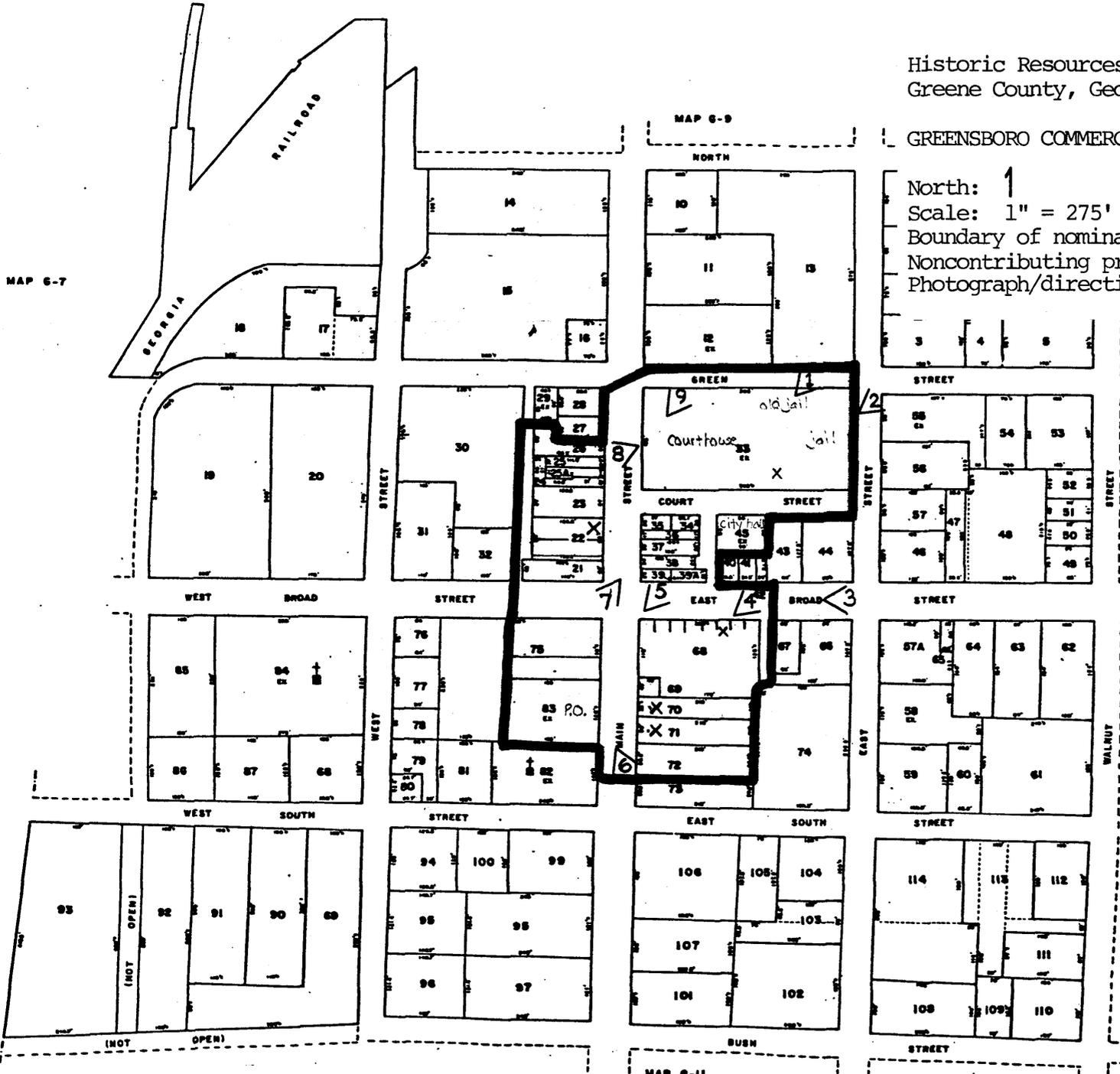
Historic Resources of Greensboro,  
Greene County, Georgia

GREENSBORO COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

North: ↑  
 Scale: 1" = 275' 0' ----- 275'  
 Boundary of nominated district: **—————**  
 Noncontributing property: X  
 Photograph/direction of view: >

MAP 6-7

MAP 6-9



MAP 6-10

MAP 6-11

BOHNICUTT & ASSOCIATES, INC. VALMORON DESIGNERS & CONSULTANTS 17 NEWBURN, ALBANY, GA.	TAB VALMORON MAP	LAND LOT	SHEET NO.
	GREENE COUNTY GEORGIA	DISTRICT	G 10
DATE: _____	SCALE: 1" = 100'	PHOTO NO. 841-04, 05, 841-06	841-08

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