NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

637

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property

historic name Whisnant Hosiery Mills

other names/site number Moretz Mills

2. Location

street & number 74 Eighth Street SE not for publication N/A

city or town Hickory vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Catawba code 035 zip code 28602

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Kevin Cherry, SHPO 7/8/2013
Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
____ determined eligible for the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
____ determined not eligible for the National Register
____ removed from the National Register
____ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper for

Date of Action 8/27/2013

Whisnant Hosiery Mills
Name of Property

Catawba County, North Carolina
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

_x_ private
___ public-local
___ public-State
___ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

_x_ building(s)
___ district
___ site
___ structure
___ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
Cat: INDUSTRY Sub: manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub:

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
foundation Not visible
roof Rubber
walls BRICK
other CONCRETE
BRICK

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Whisnant Hosiery Mills
Name of Property

Catawba County, North Carolina
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

_x_ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

____ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

____ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

____ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

____ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

____ B removed from its original location.

____ C a birthplace or a grave.

____ D a cemetery.

____ E a reconstructed building, object,or structure.

____ F a commemorative property.

____ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)
Industry

Period of Significance
1929 – 1966

Significant Dates
1929
1937
1966

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Abee, D. Carroll, Architect, 1966 addition

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)
___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data
_x_ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository: _____

Whisnant Hosiery Mills
Name of Property

Catawba County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.35

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	470400	3954160
2			
3			
4			

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date March 12, 2013

street & number 637 North Spring Street telephone 336-727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

12. Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name LaMoe, LLC (John Moretz, Managing Director)

street & number P. O. Box 580 telephone 828-850-4330

city or town Newton state NC zip code 28658

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

DESCRIPTION

Materials

Other: STUCCO
METAL

Summary and Setting

The Whisnant Hosiery Mills is located at 74 Eighth Street (originally named Fourth Street) SE just west of the main thoroughfare of Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard in Hickory's southeast quadrant. The mill building, which faces northeast, occupies the southeastern half of the city block bounded by Eighth Street SE, E Avenue SE, Seventh Street SE, and Highland Avenue SE. The mill's linear, asphalt parking lot stretches from Eighth Street to Seventh Street along the northwest side of the building, separating the property from those along Highland Avenue. A strip of grass borders the mill along its southeast (E Avenue SE) and southwest (Seventh Street SE) sides. The mill stands in an historically industrialized mixed-use area with a few small houses across Eighth Street, a parking lot across E Avenue, and light industrial and a few commercial buildings across Seventh Street and along Highland Avenue.

The mill, itself, fills a trapezoidal shape that follows the street lines on three sides and consists of contiguous sections built in 1929, 1937, the 1940s, the 1950s, and 1966. Most of the brick mill is one-story, but the 1937 section has two levels. The upper level is the main floor and the lower level is the basement that, due to the slope of the land from northwest to southeast, is partially above grade, especially at the east corner.

Exterior

The exterior of the mill will be described in a clockwise sequence, beginning at the north corner. The northeast, primary, façade displays several of the mill's stages of building, from the original mill at the center to the last addition at the north end. The 1966, most recent, section of the mill stretches from the north corner across nearly half of the façade. Set back several feet from the rest of the façade, it is bordered by low, manicured shrubbery. The one-story modernist addition designed by Hickory architect D. Carroll Abee has tan brick walls and a flat roof. At the center of the five-bay section of the 1966 façade is a tall, glass-paneled entry bordered by projecting concrete walls on either side and sheltered by an even more projecting boxed canopy. On each side of the entry are two tall, single-pane glass windows with, like the entry, projecting concrete surrounds. At the east end of the 1966 section is a recessed loading dock with a concrete

base, three roll-up loading doors, and a metal stair at the north end that rises to a glass-and-metal pedestrian door.

East of the 1966 section, at the center of the northeast façade, is the original, 1929, frame section of the mill. In 1966 its later brick façade, with its doors and windows and stepped-parapet gable end, along with two bays of the side walls were remodeled to conform to both the 1966 section on one side and the 1937 section on the other side. Blocking out all fenestration, these areas were sheathed with the same tan brick used with the 1966 addition, and the facade parapet was refigured to match that of the 1937 addition. Like the 1937 section, the remodeled parapet is lined with a band of soldier-course bricks.

Originally the 1929 and 1937 sections of the mill were detached, but according to the Sanborn maps, between 1948 and 1961 – probably in the 1950s – the space between the two was enclosed with a brick connector. Set back from the façade line, the space is open the depth of two bays and is fronted by a red brick wall with a double-leaf metal and glass door accessed by a metal stair on the north side and a metal platform with iron railing. Above the door is a large vent and beneath the platform are two low, metal doors. A frame shed roof, sloping downward from east to north, shelters the stair and platform. The east, 1937, wall of the setback retains its fenestration pattern, with windows covered, but the north, 1929, wall carries the tan brick veneer of the 1966 section with only a double-leaf metal door near the front. Between the concrete base of the setback and the brick wall of the 1937 section is a deep open drain that runs from within the building to the edge of the 1937 façade and then continues along most of that façade.

The eastern portion of the façade dates from 1937. Like the rest of the 1937 section of the mill, it is faced with running-bond red brick. Although an industrial building, it is designed in a simple version of the Commercial Style. Patterned brickwork takes the form of soldier-course bands along the cornice, as lintels to the main floor windows and entrance, and as a string course between the main and basement levels. The north half of the 1937 section of the façade, marking the manufacturing space within, has an angular shaped parapet that hides its gable roof, while east half, which is the office portion, has a flat roof. Both rooflines have a plain cast-stone cornice, now covered with metal. Beneath the shaped parapet is a rectangular name panel with a brick border and contrasting cast-stone corner blocks. Some of the original letters spelling "Whisnant Hosiery Mills" can be seen beneath the current stuccoed surface of the panel. The name panel is partly covered by a 1990s plastic sign for Moretz Mills, Inc., the owner of the mill at that time. Large industrial windows are in groups of two and three and have cast-stone sills. As with the windows on the rest of the 1937 (and the 1940s) section of the mill, which survive intact, the façade windows have been covered with vertical-board plywood panels, believed to have been added in the 1970s during the ownership of the Adams-Millis Corporation. At the center of the 1937 façade, single replacement metal doors open to the main and basement levels. The upper door is reached by a metal stair with metal pole supports and a metal-pipe handrail

that rises from east to north. Originally the stair rose from both sides and had concrete steps and supports. When the original stair was replaced is not known. Above the main-level entrance is a suspended, flat, metal canopy. It probably dates from the same time as the replacement stair.

The southeast side of the mill, dating from 1937 except for the southernmost ten bays, which were added in the 1940s, is composed of three sections. The first, at the east corner, houses the 1937 offices and, on the exterior, continues the treatment of the office portion of the northeast façade in terms of the flat roof, windows, and patterned brickwork. However, what initially was a double-leaf door at the corner is now a roll-up vehicular door, probably installed in the last quarter of the twentieth century. At the south end of the office section, the wall angles back toward the west one bay's width. At the angle is a metal smokestack for the boiler housed in the lower level within a one-story room that projects from the façade. Its walls have curved corners, and it has a flat roof.

At this point, including the angled section of the office, the wall recedes in a series of steps toward the west to accommodate the various functions that lie within and to follow the edge of E Avenue SE. The one-story front section, which houses the compression room, has a flat roof and a vertical-board wall. The upper-level brick wall behind it gives evidence that this area was originally taller and had a shed roof. The set-back upper level has three windows and a side-gable roof as part of the manufacturing area of the mill. At the south end of the compression room, the upper level, which housed the machine fixer's room, is brick and has parapeted northeast and southwest walls that rise above a shed roof. Two small windows are on the northeast side, and two large windows are on the southwest side. To the west is the last angled section. Behind it is the manufacturing part of the 1937 section of the mill. Its basement level has three bricked-up windows and a replacement double-leaf metal door. Of the five windows on the main level, one is bricked-up. At the center of the wall, above the main level windows, is a brick horizontal panel surrounded by a brick band. Above the panel are four small windows. At the base of this wall is an exterior transformer surrounded by a chain link fence.

At the south end of the stepped portion of the southeast elevation, the wall abruptly changes direction, angling westward and paralleling E Avenue SE. One of the most distinctive parts of the mill exterior, this section of the southeast elevation extends twenty-three bays to Seventh Street SE. Although no exterior seam is visible denoting the two different periods of building, only the first thirteen bays date from 1937. The westernmost ten bays date from the 1940s. Each bay has a large window at each level on the first thirteen bays, but the windows are only on the main level on the last ten bays, because that section has no basement. Plain brick pilasters separate the bays, and a brick spandrel runs horizontally between the two levels of windows. A drain bordered by a pipe railing on a concrete base runs along this long wing. At the tenth bay from the Seventh Street SE end of the wing, concrete steps lead downward from south to east to a door where the 1937 and 1940s sections of the wing join.

With its angular shaped parapet hiding the gable roof, rectangular stuccoed name panel, and decorative brickwork, the 1940s southwest façade is much like that of the 1937 facade on the northeast. However, here the brickwork bordering the parapet and the name panel, on the string course above the windows, and around the center-bay window, is raised, rather than being flat with the plane of the wall. At each corner of the 1940s façade, alternate brick courses project, giving a quoin-like appearance. The 1940s façade is seven bays wide with a metal replacement double-leaf entrance and surmounting window at the center flanked by tall windows. The west-end window has been infilled with brick and a metal vent.

Adjacent to the 1940s portion of the southwest façade and set at a slight angle to it so that it follows Seventh Street SE is the large, one-story, 1966 section of the mill. It is faced with tan brick and has a flat roof from which multiple ventilators rise. The southwest elevation is plain with no fenestration.

From the west corner of the mill, the 1966 northwest elevation stretches to the north corner of the mill at Eighth Street SE. The west end of the northwest elevation has a double-leaf metal door and a pair of concrete vats or tanks with wood steps and platform rising above each. A chain link fence encloses this corner of the mill. Adjacent to it on the north is a boiler room that projects from the main wall. It is slightly taller than the rest of the 1966 section. On its southwest wall is a pedestrian door and a tall roll-up door. In the corner with the main body of the building is a steep metal stair to the roof. A metal stack rises from the roof. Projecting outward from the boiler room is a large, metal, vertical tank surrounded by a concrete wall. Immediately north of the boiler room, in the corner formed by it and the main wall of the 1966 section, is some mechanical equipment that projects from the building. From there to the office portion of the 1966 addition at the north corner of the building, the remainder of the northwest elevation is largely plain, but with metal downspouts recessed into channels in the brick wall. At the center of this stretch of wall, a long, suspended, flat canopy projects into the parking area. Adjacent to it on the north is a double-leaf metal door sheltered by a boxed canopy that projects from the roof edge. Near the north end of the northwest elevation, the wall, which forms the side of the 1966 offices, is treated like the main, northeast office façade. This four-bay section has three tall windows with projecting concrete surrounds. A single recessed glass door and transom in the second bay from the corner has the same concrete-boxed panel surmounting it as is found over the three windows.

Interior

Refer to the 1966 floor plans of the mill, with dates added to the different sections, as an aid to understanding the layout of the mill at that time. Alterations since then have been minor.

The interior of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills reflects the different periods of the mill's construction. Behind the center of the mill's northeast façade is the original 1929 frame section of the mill. Although none of the original frame walls can be seen from the exterior, the front and southeast walls are still clearly visible on the interior, along with their door and window openings. The original southeast exterior wall – as seen from within the 1950s link to the 1937 addition – has German siding, large window openings – glass removed and infilled with wood panels – and four-light clerestory tilt windows along the upper wall. The door and window surrounds are plain wood. The interior of the 1929 mill exhibits beaded-board walls and hardwood floors. Some of the original roof structure, with wood rafters supporting wood decking, is visible, but most of it has been covered by a sheet-rocked ceiling and multiple exposed pipes. The 1948 Sanborn map shows that the front and rear walls of the frame mill had been brick veneered. This veneering likely happened before or at the same time as the construction of the 1937 addition. In 1966, the façade was again veneered to match the tan brick of that year's major addition to the mill. At the same time, the first two bays of the southeast wall and the entire northwest wall adjoining the 1966 addition were veneered with the same tan brick. Despite the brick veneering, the original double- and single-leaf wood-panel-and six-light doors and six-over-six sash windows of the 1929 façade and office suite remain exposed to view. The brick veneer can be seen through the window glass. In the north corner of the 1929 building, just within the 1929 main entrance, a single-leaf, glass-and-wood-paneled door opens to the office suite, which contains three rooms and a narrow bathroom. The office rooms have either beaded-board or plaster-board walls.

Within the 1929 mill, more recent partition walls have been built to create break rooms and a nurse's station, and doors now open to the 1966 addition on the northwest. Near the front of the 1929 mill, an opening has been cut in the floor, through which a conveyor belt runs to the basement of the 1937 addition. Northeast of the conveyor belt, the area near the front of the 1929 building has been partitioned off with slatted walls for storage aisles. The Sanborn maps show that in 1948, most of the 1929 mill was used as the gray goods department, and that in 1961 this section of the mill housed the finished product warehouse and store room.

The 1937 mill addition is southeast of the 1929 mill and has two main parts – the offices in the east corner of the main level with corresponding mechanical rooms below and the vast manufacturing space on the main and basement levels. Over the years, the office section has had partitions added and subtracted, and many of the walls have been sheathed with modern plywood paneling. However, some original plaster walls and glass-and-wood-paneled doors with transoms and plain surrounds remain intact. At the end of a narrow hall on the southeast wall is a built-in Herring-Hall-Marvin safe (company established in 1896), which is probably original. The seller was the Kale-Lawing Company, an office supply business founded in Charlotte in 1925. The office section also includes two tiles bathrooms and a stair leading to the basement. Beneath the

offices on the basement level are three bathrooms, the boiler room and, in the east corner, open floor space.

The manufacturing section of the main floor of the 1937 addition has maple flooring, brick walls with window placement still visible, and a dropped, acoustical-tile ceiling, from which hang duct work and lighting. Above the dropped ceiling, steel trusses support the gable roof. The manufacturing floor on the main level is totally open with no vertical supports. On the southeast side of the main floor, single doors lead to the offices and to the machine fixer's room. On the northwest side, single doors open to ceramic-tiled bathrooms and larger fire doors open to other sections of the mill. Close to halfway back from the front of the mill, the manufacturing space angles westward, as the building does on the exterior to align with the street. Both the 1948 and the 1961 Sanborn maps show that the main-level manufacturing floor back to the angled section held the knitting and finishing processes, while the floor in the angled section held the looping and boarding operations.

Toward the rear of the angled section of the manufacturing space, a vertical-board partition wall with a large doorway in the center opens to the 1940s addition, which is only on the main level. The 1940s addition has a wood floor, except for the three-and-a-half bays at the southwest end, where there is a concrete floor. The walls are brick, punctuated on the southeast side by massive industrial windows. Set between brick pilasters, each steel-frame window consists of two vertical sections, each with eighteen lights (thirty-six for the whole window) and two tilt sections of six lights each, one at the top and other near the bottom. The southwest end of the 1940s addition has a central door and more narrow windows, now covered with plywood. On the northwest side, the windows have been infilled with brick because they abut the 1966 section of the mill. On that side, one fire door and one open doorway provide access to the 1966 section. Unlike the 1937 manufacturing floor, the 1940s addition has exposed metal trusses that support the wood planking of the gable roof.

The basement level of the 1937 section of the mill follows the configuration of the main floor, except that it ends at the point where, on the main floor, the 1940s addition begins. This rear wall retains its window openings, now boarded over. The basement has a concrete floor and brick walls with the windows boarded up. Projecting from the walls in the angled section of the basement are low projecting wood platforms and vertical divider panels that have been added in more recent years. Two rows of round steel support posts run the length of the space. Steel beams support the narrow board ceiling and the multi-layer main floor above it. In a couple of places where the ceiling boards have broken away, the boards laid on edge that make up one of the floor layers can been seen. Mechanical systems and lighting hang exposed from the ceiling. Approximately where the angled rear section of the basement meets the front section, a partition wall has been built and enclosed storage rooms have been attached to it. Northeast of the partition, the industrial windows of the basement remain exposed.

To the rear of the 1929 section of the mill and north of the 1937 and 1940s wing is a trapezoidal area with brick walls that was the dye house prior to 1966. It appears on the 1948 Sanborn map. It may have been built as part of the 1937 addition and then enlarged in the 1940s with the expansion of the looping and boarding wing. Most recently it housed bathrooms, the maintenance office, storage space, and the maintenance shop and chiller.

The last addition to the mill was built in 1966. The front, northeast, end contains offices, a reception area, a conference room, a safe, tile bathrooms, and an added break room. The floors are covered with linoleum, the walls are a combination of tan brick and handsome wood paneling, and the ceilings have acoustical tiles with recessed lighting. Southwest of the office area, the bulk of the 1966 addition was used initially for manufacturing processes and later for finishing and distribution functions. Currently it serves as miscellaneous storage. This section has a concrete floor, brick and concrete-block walls, and string trusses supporting a corrugated metal ceiling. Lighting and ductwork hang from the ceiling. Near the southwest end of the 1966 addition, a concrete-block wall separates the main room from what served after 1966 as the dye house. The ceiling in the dye house has concrete joists. At the southeast end of the divider wall are rooms for an office and a laboratory.

Integrity

The physical integrity of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills is good. It retains its original location and setting. Except for the 1966 remodeling of the façade of the 1929 section of the mill with a blank, tan brick-veneer facing devoid of doors and windows and a revised parapet to match that of the 1937 addition, the design and materials of the different stages of the mill's development remain largely intact. Although the 1937 and 1940s industrial windows have been covered on the exterior with board panels, the original windows remain, for the most part, intact beneath the wood. The 1966 addition to the mill doubled its size and added a modern component representative of its period to the overall design.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The history of Whisnant Hosiery Mills reflects the development and expansion of the hosiery industry in Hickory, North Carolina, during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century. The hosiery industry in this piedmont city began in 1906 and grew slowly at first, but by the third quarter of the twentieth century, it had become the largest industry and the primary economic force in Hickory. Only four mills were in operation by 1925, but by 1953, the number had increased to fifty-five, with 4,000 workers, and by 1962, at the peak of hosiery manufacturing in Hickory, there were eighty-nine mills. Like the hosiery industry in Hickory as a whole, the Whisnant Hosiery Mills started out modestly, with a small mill erected in 1929. From then on, however, the company enlarged its plant and workforce and updated its machinery almost continuously, with major additions built in 1937, the 1940s, and 1966. The physical appearance of the mill today tells the story of each period of its growth. By 1938, Whisnant Hosiery Mills, which manufactured, dyed, and finished men's half hose, employed 525 workers and had the capacity to produce 3,500 dozen pair of men's hose per day, far out-pacing the employment and production figures for all but one of the other mills at that time. [That mill, the Elliot Hosiery Mills, does not survive.] The Whisnant Hosiery Mills' important status within the local hosiery industry continued throughout its history. In 1966, the company constructed its last addition, doubling the size of the mill. Replacing the warehouses that had stood on part of the site, the addition substantially expanded the mill's manufacturing space for dyeing and finishing processes and provided a new and larger office suite for the management. Designed by Hickory architect D. Carroll Abee, the modernist brick, concrete, and glass exterior served to update the company's image. The 1966 addition not only signified the high level of success the company still enjoyed, but coincided with the hosiery industry's peak, as a whole, in Hickory.

The Whisnant Hosiery Mills meets National Register Criterion A for its local industrial significance within the context of Hickory's historic hosiery industry because, during most of its history, it eclipsed nearly all of Hickory's hosiery mills in its large-scale operation, physical size, number of employees, and longevity, with a single family ownership during its period of significance. The mill's period of significance spans the years from 1929, when the original mill was constructed, to 1966, when the last addition was built, signifying Whisnant Hosiery Mills' continued success.

Historical Background and Industry Context

By 1965, North Carolina had become the nation's leader in hosiery manufacturing, with approximately 400 hosiery mills. Although these mills operated in seventy of the state's 100 counties, more than half were located in only two counties – Alamance and Catawba, where Hickory was the largest city (McGregor, 3, 9). The history of Whisnant Hosiery Mills is woven into that of Hickory's hosiery industry during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century.

According to Mattson and Alexander in the National Register nomination for the Hollar Hosiery Mills-Knit-Sox Knitting Mills (NR, 2012):

> During the early twentieth century, textile mills played an increasingly vital role in Hickory's industrial success. Although some of these mills produced the cotton cloth and coarse yarns typical of Piedmont mills, Hickory also became one of the region's major producers of knit hosiery. The production of knit products emerged as a particularly important sector of the state's textile industry following World War I. After years of accelerated wartime demand, cotton cloth production slumped during the 1920s. Seeking to diversify the industry, textile manufacturers began to specialize in the production of knit hosiery as a means of surviving the reduced demand for cloth and meeting the new market for women's full-fashioned, or form-fitting, hose. Excellent rail connections in the Piedmont and a ready source of the mercerized cotton used to produce hosiery made this specialized form of production feasible.

In Hickory and its vicinity, the hosiery industry was made up primarily of numerous small mills, many of which were of short duration. J. A. Cline and the Reverend W. P. Cline (unrelated) established the town's first hosiery mill, the Hickory Hosiery Mill, in 1906, and Elliott Knitting (Hosiery) Mills, the second mill of significance, began in 1910. These two remained Hickory's dominant hosiery mills until the late 1920s. According to the Winter-Spring 1953 quarterly publication of North Carolina's Employment Security Commission, by 1925 there were only four hosiery mills operating in Hickory. Soon thereafter, however, that number grew exponentially. During the second quarter of the twentieth century, hosiery mills seemed to spring up on every vacant lot and in every vacant building, especially in the Highland industrial subdivision on eastern edge of Hickory. As a result, by 1953 Hickory could boast approximately fifty-five hosiery mills with a capacity for producing an estimated 150,000,000 pairs of hose (or socks) a year. Approximately 4,000 workers were engaged in hosiery manufacturing in Hickory at the time, which was as many as were employed in the furniture and other textile industries

combined (*The E. S. C. Quarterly*, 25; Clinard, 267-269; Montgomery, 8: 5). It was into this milieu that the Whisnant Hosiery Mills at 74 Eighth Street S.E. (prior to 1950 the address was listed at 943 Fourth Street) was established and evolved into one of the most prominent hosiery mills in this piedmont North Carolina city.

The Whisnant Hosiery Mills was a family affair, with two Whisnant brothers, two sisters, and one Whisnant wife involved with its operation. However, Ernest Elmore Whisnant (1905-1981), an especially enterprising young man, was at the center of the mill's development. He grew up on a large farm in the county and was educated in Hickory. At the age of twelve, he began working after school and on Saturdays at a small hosiery mill in West Hickory, thus beginning his education in the operation of a hosiery mill. While in high school, Whisnant worked odd jobs at the Elliott Hosiery Mill. Following high school, he attended Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, and at the conclusion of two years there, Whisnant began work as a mechanic at the Hollar Hosiery Mill. Upon graduation, at age twenty-one, he was promoted to plant superintendent at Hollar, a position he held for several years, even while he was beginning his own business (*North Carolina: The Old North State and the New*, 501; Hickory City Directories, 1961-1962, 1928-1929; *Hickory Daily Record*, February 2, 1981).

According to a 1938 newspaper article, in 1927 E. E. Whisnant and his brother, Clarence L, started their own hosiery business in the old Cloninger Mill (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 26 1938). This was likely the tiny mill labeled, "Knitting Mill, not in operation." shown on the 1925 Sanborn map on Lawrence Street (later Fourth Street and now Eighth Street) northwest of the present site of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills. It appears that the Whisnant mill initially may have been called the Highland Hosiery Mill. Before the Whisnant Hosiery Mills began to be listed in the city directories at 943 Fourth Street, the Highland Hosiery Mill was listed at 941 Fourth Street, with E. E. Whisnant as manager and C. L. Whisnant as secretary-treasurer (Hickory City Directories, 1930-1931, 1937-1938). In addition, the first deed for part of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills property, in 1929 – they must have been leasing the land until they could buy it – was to C. L. and E. E. Whisnant, "trading as Highland Hosiery Mill" (Deed Book 218, p. 348). The 1931 Sanborn map shows a long, rectangular mill that is larger and to the southeast of where the "Knitting Mill" stood in 1925. It is labeled "Whisnant Hosiery Mills," and the smaller mill is no longer shown (Sanborn Map, 1925 and 1931).

Having asserted that the Whisnant brothers started a business in the old Cloninger Mill in 1927, the 1938 newspaper article continued that six months later a new mill was erected on Fourth Street (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 26 1938). Written in 1981, E. E. Whisnant's obituary claims that he opened Hickory's fourth hosiery mill in 1928 (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 2, 1981). Perhaps somewhat more accurate than an obituary written a half century after the fact, a biographical sketch of Whisnant published in 1941 states that in August 1928, E. E. and Clarence Whisnant established a little mill that employed around twelve people, but that "in

1929 they built the present mill" (*North Carolina: The Old North State and the New*, 501-502). That "present mill" was the earliest core of the mill that stands today. According to Whisnant's daughter, the mill whistle blew to announce her birth on October 4, 1929 (Mary Jo Williams Interview).

In addition to the initial 1929 purchase of land for the Whisnant Hosiery Mills, additional parcels that make up the current site were amassed in 1932, 1938, and 1939 (Deed Books 218, p. 348; 242, p. 120; 360, p. 32). Interestingly, the company did not incorporate until 1945. C. L. Whisnant, his wife, Elsie E., E. E. Whisnant, and E. E.'s wife, Louella P., each held 1,500 shares of stock in the company with a total value of $600,000. However, the certificate of incorporation authorized the selling of as many as 10,000 shares at $100 with a total value of $1,000,000 (Records of Corporations, Book 4, p. 439). Immediately after the incorporation of Whisnant Hosiery Mills, the two Whisnant couples conveyed all of the mill property they had purchased between 1929 and 1939 to the new corporation (Deed Book 360, p. 32). In 1948, mill president Ernest Whisnant acquired his brother's, Clarence's, interest in the mill, continuing to operate it alone for another twenty-two years (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 2, 1981).

The physical appearance of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills tells the story of each period of its growth, reflecting the mill's long-term success. From the beginning, Whisnant Hosiery Mills enlarged its plant and workforce and updated its machinery almost continuously (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 26 1938). The depiction of the mill on the 1931 and 1948 Sanborn maps and in a 1938 photograph, along with the surviving elements of the original mill, indicate that the first enlargement doubled the width of the original frame building. Oddly, the front and rear portions of the mill were brick veneered, possibly at the same time that the width was doubled. In any event, the veneering probably occurred prior to the construction of a major new addition – originally separate – in 1937. A 1938 photograph shows that the veneered façade of the original mill had a multi-stepped brick parapet, and it seems likely that had the veneering been added at the same time as the new building, the parapets of the two buildings would have matched, which they do not (Sanborn Maps, 1931 and 1948; 1938 Photograph).

The *Hickory Daily Record* reported in 1938 on the recent growth of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills and provided a context for understanding its place within Hickory's hosiery industry at that time by also discussing fifteen other mills in the city. In 1937, Whisnant Hosiery Mills built a major addition southeast of the original mill all the way to E Avenue SE. With this addition, the square footage of Whisnant Hosiery Mills stood at approximately 30,000, more than tripling the manufacturing capacity of the original mill. The addition's main floor accommodated a suite of offices in the east corner and approximately 500 knitting machines in the manufacturing space. However, even before the 1937 addition, new dye and boarding equipment, new knitting machines for the manufacture of English ribbed fine hose, and a finishing plant had been installed at the mill. In 1938, the mill employed 525 workers and had the capacity to

produce 3,500 dozen pairs of men's hose (socks) per day, far out-pacing the production and employment figures for fourteen of the fifteen other hosiery mills discussed. Among those other mills were the Hollar Hosiery Mills, with 300 employees and 2,500 dozen pairs of hose daily, and the Lyerly Full-Fashioned Mill (NR, 2007), with 300 employees and 400 pairs of hose a day. Only the Elliott Hosiery Mills, known at the time as the largest hosiery manufacturing plant in Hickory with 800 employees surpassed Whisnant Hosiery Mills. However, Elliott's production of 800,000 dozen pairs of hose a year – or approximately 2,500 a day – was less than the production level stated for Whisnant. The Elliott Hosiery Mills no longer stands (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 26, 1938).

Whisnant Hosiery Mills continued to expand, and the 1948 Sanborn map shows the changes and how different parts of the mill were used at that time. The front half of the 1937 addition was used as the knitting and finishing floor (except for the office suite), while the rear, angled wing (following the line of E Street) was used for looping and boarding. By this time, probably soon after World War II, the rear wing had been extended all the way to Seventh (then Fifth) Street. A roughly triangular dye house is shown attached to the northwest side of the looping and boarding wing and the rear of the original mill. It may have been part of the 1937 addition, but the 1948 map shows that, like the looping and boarding wing, it had been lengthened. At that time, the original mill, still detached from the front half of the 1937 addition, was used as the gray goods department. A two-part warehouse, of unknown date, stood northwest of the original mill and attached to it by an enclosed walkway (Sanborn Map, 1948).

The Winter-Spring 1953 edition of the *E. S. C. Quarterly*, published by the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina, provides information on forty-nine hosiery mills in Hickory at that time, including updated information on Whisnant Hosiery Mills. Based only on a comparison of the mills' capital stock, it appears that Whisnant Hosiery Mills was still one of the largest hosiery manufacturers in the city. At that time, Ernest E. Whisnant was president and manager, and although Whisnant's brother, Clarence, was no longer with the company, his son-in-law, Harry J. Williams, was vice-president, and his wife, Louella Whisnant, was treasurer. The company boasted capital stock of $600,000, had opened a branch mill in Maiden, and operated 612 circular knitting machines. It manufactured, dyed, and finished men's half hose and slacks, Komets, and wraps. Slacks were the cheapest socks and had an elastic or rubber band around the top to hold them up. Komets, named after the automatic double-cylinder machine of that name produced in England, had a ribbed top to help hold up the sock and a plainly knit foot. Wraps were slack socks with a pattern – usually a solid or stripe – in color. Whisnant's selling agency at that time was Hanes Hosiery, Inc., located in the Empire State Building in New York, and the company's products were sold to jobbers, chain stores, and department stores (*E. S. C. Quarterly*, 26-28; Robert Merritt Interview).

The 1961 Sanborn map shows that several changes to the physical plant of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills had occurred since the previous map of 1948. Northwest of the mill, the warehouse building, with a frame interior and a masonry exterior, had expanded by one third and was attached to the mill by two, instead of one, enclosed walkways. Used at that time as the gray goods department, this building no longer stands. The 1961 map also shows that the original mill building was then being used as the finished product warehouse and stock room. Between 1948 and 1961, the open space between the 1929 building and the 1937 addition had been enclosed, except for a small area at the northeast end (Sanborn Map, 1948 and 1961).

In 1962, the Hickory Chamber of Commerce could list eighty-nine hosiery mills in the city (*Hickory Daily Record*, Spring 1962, p. 11). By that time, the hosiery industry had become the greatest of Hickory's diversified manufacturers, including furniture. Beyond the considerable economic impact of the hosiery industry on Hickory, it was an asset to the local economy in another way. A host of other businesses and industries were established to serve the needs of the hosiery industry. Among these were printers, lithographers, makers of transfers, box makers, makers of both textile and rubber yarns, machine shops, and dye makers (Clinard, 271).

The hosiery industry reached its peak in the mid-1960s, but began to decline in the following decades. While there had been eighty-nine hosiery mills in Hickory in 1962, by 1980 the number had dropped to fifty-two (*Hickory Daily Record*, November 30, 1983).

Perhaps more than any of the other hosiery mills in Hickory, the Whisnant Hosiery Mills illustrates the industry's high point during the mid-1960s. In 1966, a modern addition, designed by Hickory architect D. Carroll Abee, was built to the northwest side of the mill, replacing the warehouse/gray goods building that had occupied part of the site (Abee, Architectural Plans). This last addition doubled the size of the mill and signified the high level of success it still enjoyed. The 1966 addition housed a variety of functions. The front (northeast) end held a suite of offices and a loading dock, while the rear (southwest) end held the new dye house. In between, the bulk of the space housed the finishing room, with its assorting, labeling, and boxing functions. Two conveyor belts wound from the rear to the front of the space through the various finishing processes. Starting at the rear and moving forward, there were the pre-boarding, boarding, pairing, assorting, transfers, riders, and folding operations, ending with the shipping area at the front. In addition, in the front half of the space, the northwest side had areas for long fold storage and paper box storage, while general storage was on the southeast side.

In 1971, Whisnant Hosiery Mills, Inc. merged into the large Adams-Millis Corporation of High Point (Corporation Book 17, p. 282), ending more than forty years of the mill's association with the Whisnant family. In 1993, the Adams-Millis Corporation conveyed the Whisnant Hosiery Mills property to Moretz Mills, Inc. (Deed Book 1832, p. 1480). Moretz Mills, which also had plants in the Catawba County towns of Newton and Conover, used the mill in Hickory for dyeing, finishing, and packaging (John Moretz Interview). In 2003, Moretz, Inc. conveyed

the property to LaMoe, LLC, the present owner, consisting of members of the Moretz family (Deed Book 2534, p. 1563). The mill closed in 2011 and now stands, largely vacant, awaiting rehabilitation for a new use (John Moretz Interview).

Today, with only a handful of hosiery mills surviving from among the many established during the first half of the twentieth century in Hickory, those that do are all the more significant. In addition to the Whisnant Hosiery Mills are the Lyerly Full Fashioned Mill (NR, 2007), the Hollar Hosiery Mills-Knit-Sox Knitting Mills (NR, 2012), the Hickory Hosiery Mills, and the Sigmon-Terry Hosiery Mill. The Whisnant Hosiery Mills surpassed these other surviving mills, as well as all but one of the mills historically associated with Hickory's hosiery industry, in terms of scale of operation, physical size, number of employees, and longevity.

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Robert Merritt (retired hosiery industrialist), September 9, 2012.
John Moretz (owner of former Whisnant Hosiery Mills), September 4, 5, 7, and 10, 2012.
Jim Williams (grandson of Ernest E. Whisnant), September 9, 2012.
Mary Jo Williams (daughter of Ernest E. Whisnant), September 9, 2012.

Photograph of Whisnant Hosiery Mills and its employees, September 1938. Original in the Patrick Beaver Memorial Library, Hickory, North Carolina. Copy in the survey file, North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance maps for Hickory, North Carolina, 1925, 1931, 1948, 1961.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is identified as Catawba County tax parcel 370208994831.

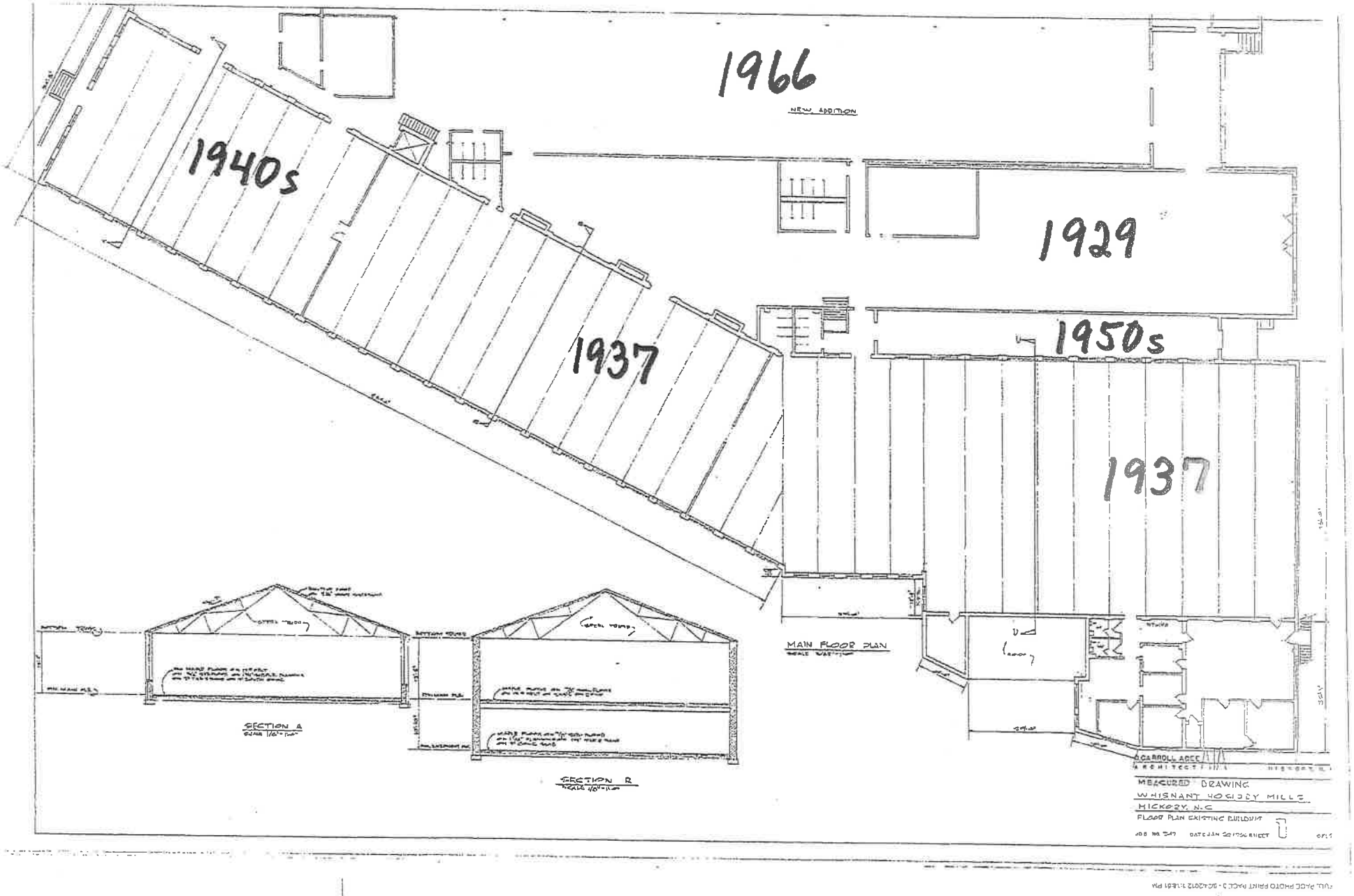
Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property includes the entirety of the Whisnant Hosiery Mills building complex and the 2.35- acre setting historically and currently associated with it.

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information for 1), 2), and 5) applies to all nomination photographs:

1) Whisnant Hosiery Mills
2) Hickory, Catawba County, North Carolina
3-4) Laura A. W. Phillips, October 25, 2012, Photos #1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 15
Heather Fearnbach, July 17, 2012, Photos # 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
5) CD: NCHPO, Raleigh, NC
6-7) 1: Northeast façade with 1937 addition in foreground, view to northwest
2: Northeast façade with 1966 addition in foreground, view to southeast
3: Overall view, to west
4: 1937 addition, southeast elevation, view to northeast
5: Southwest and southeast elevations with 1940s addition in foreground, view to northeast
6: Southwest elevation with 1966 addition in foreground, view to southeast
7: 1966 addition, northwest elevation, view to southeast
8: 1966 addition, northwest elevation, view to east
9: 1929 mill, southeast side taken from within 1950s link to 1937 addition, view to northeast
10: 1937 addition, main floor, view to northeast
11: 1940s addition, view to southwest
12: 1937 addition, basement, view to north
13: 1937 addition, basement, view to northeast
14: 1966 addition, office suite, view to west
15: 1966 addition, dye house, view to northwest



Whisnant Hosiery Mills
74 Eighth Street SE
Hickory, Catawba Co., NC
Floor Plan (drawn 1966)

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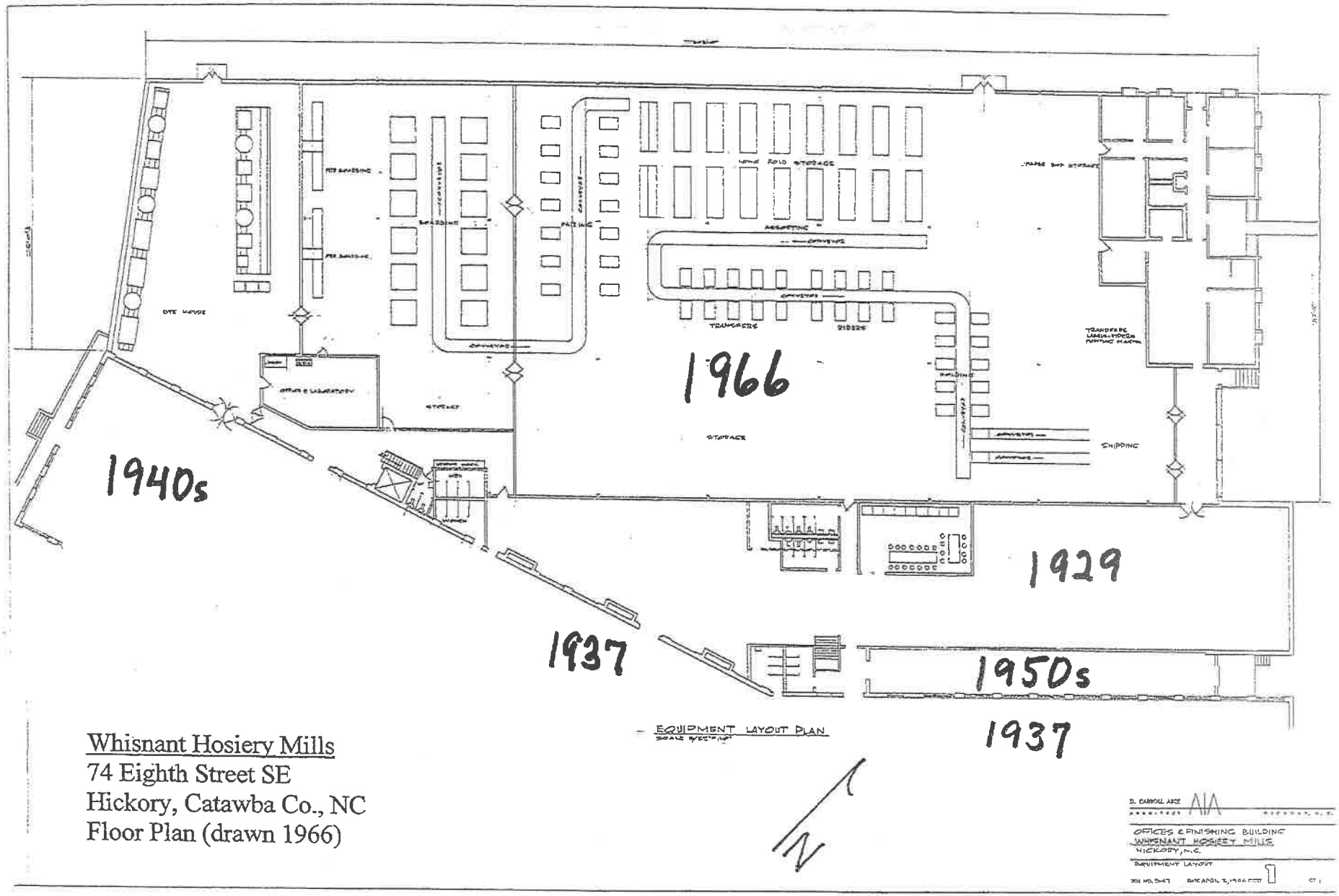
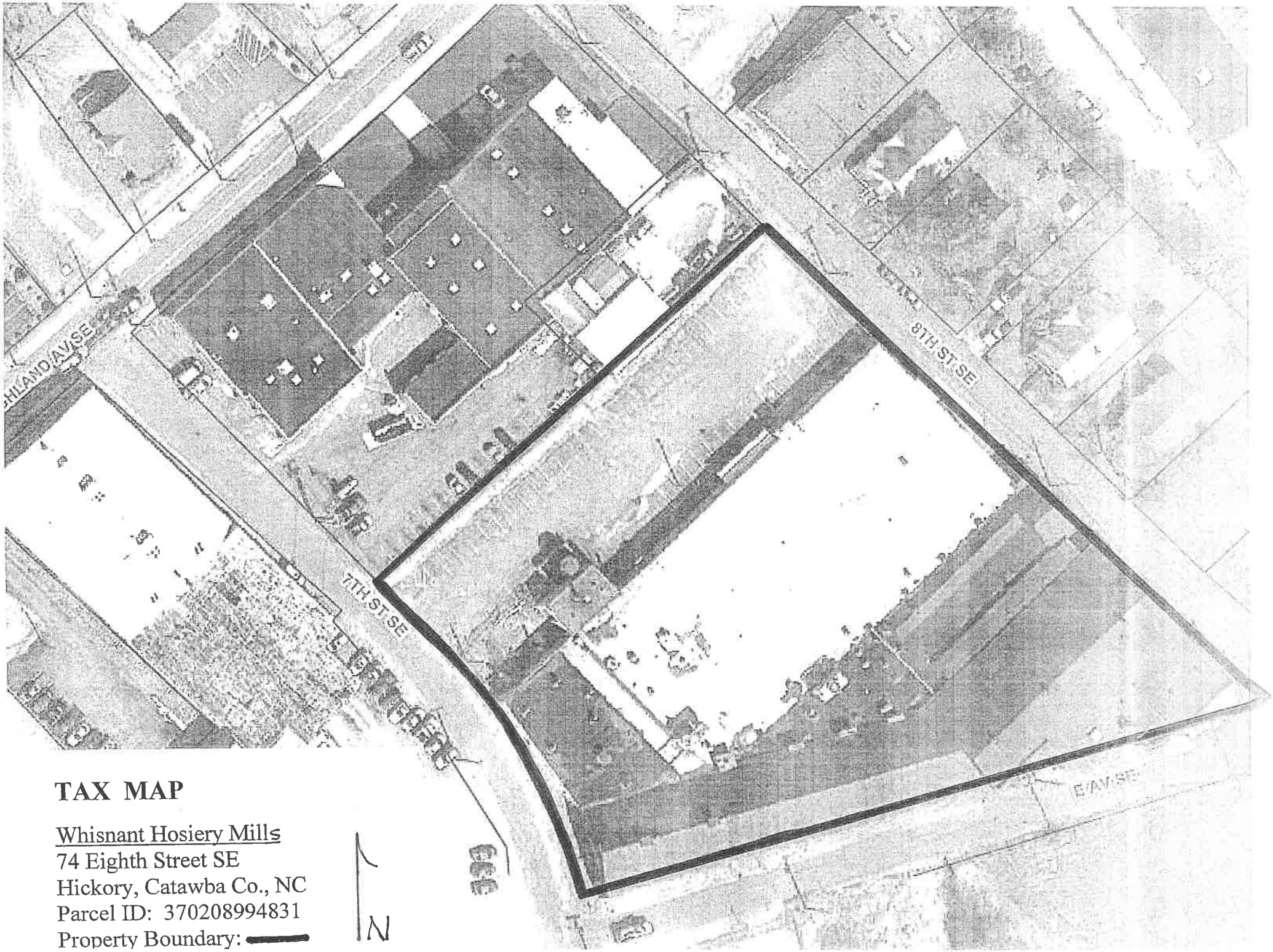


Whisnant Hosiery Mills
74 Eighth Street SE
Hickory, Catawba Co., NC
Floor Plan (drawn 1966)



TAX MAP

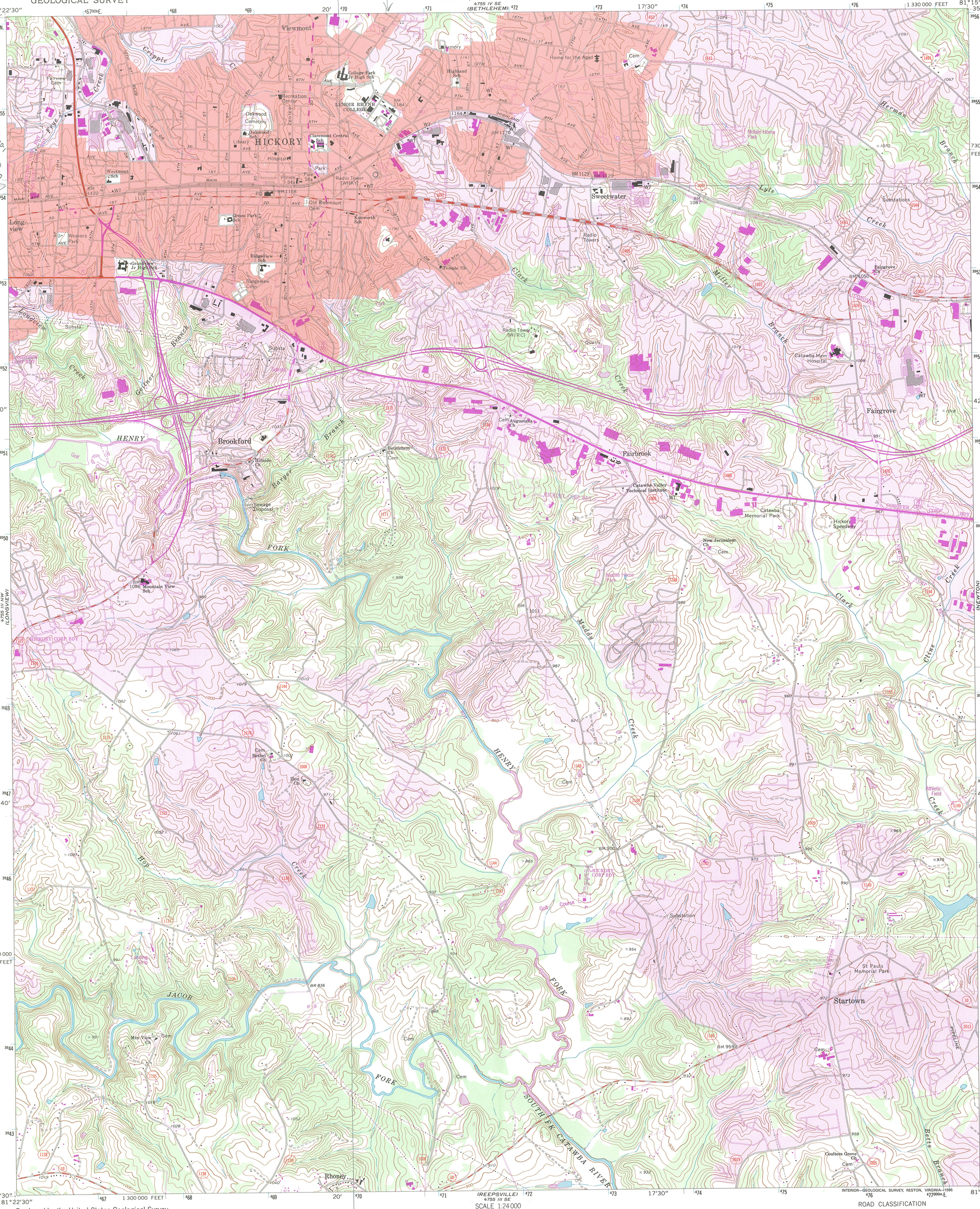
Whisnant Hosiery Mills
74 Eighth Street SE
Hickory, Catawba Co., NC
Parcel ID: 370208994831
Property Boundary:

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH
AND NATURAL RESOURCES
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

HICKORY QUADRANGLE
NORTH CAROLINA–CATAWBA CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

WHISNANT
HOSIERY MILLS
Hickory, Catawba Co, NC
Hickory, NC Quad
17/470400/3954160



INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1996

Produced by the United States Geological Survey

Compiled by photogrammetric methods from imagery dated 1966
Field checked 1970

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10 000-foot ticks: North Carolina coordinate system (Lambert conformal conic)
Blue 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator ticks, zone 17

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software

MN
GN
6° 107 MILS
0°11' 3 MILS
UTM GRID AND 1995 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24 000

1 ½ 0 1 MILE
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 .5 0 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
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DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

N. C.
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources from imagery dated 1993 and other sources
Map edited 1995

Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U. S. Route
State Route

HICKORY, NC
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