

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



228

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 Bessemer City Downtown Historic District

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by Thirteenth Street on the west, East and West Virginia Avenue on the north, 205 East Alabama Street on the east, and East Alabama Avenue and West Pennsylvania Avenue on the south

not for publication N/A

city or town Bessemer City vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Gaston code 071 zip code 28016

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.)

Peter Cherry _____ Date 3/28/2014
Signature of certifying official

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

Edson H. Beall

Date of Action

5-19-14

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
23	5	buildings
0	0	sites
10	6	structures
0	1	objects
33	12	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: <u>COMMERCE</u> | Sub: <u>department store</u> |
| <u>COMMERCE</u> | <u>specialty store</u> |
| <u>COMMERCE</u> | <u>financial institution</u> |
| <u>COMMERCE</u> | <u>restaurant</u> |
| <u>INDUSTRY</u> | <u>manufacturing facility</u> |
| <u>SOCIAL</u> | <u>meeting hall</u> |
| <u>TRANSPORTATION</u> | <u>rail-related</u> |
| <u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u> | <u>theater</u> |

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cat: <u>COMMERCE</u> | Sub: <u>specialty store</u> |
| <u>COMMERCE</u> | <u>restaurant</u> |
| <u>INDUSTRY</u> | <u>manufacturing facility</u> |
| <u>GOVERNMENT</u> | <u>city hall</u> |
| <u>SOCIAL</u> | <u>meeting hall</u> |
| <u>TRANSPORTATION</u> | <u>rail-related</u> |
| <u>LANDSCAPE</u> | <u>park</u> |
| <u>VACANT/NOT IN USE</u> | |

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

- Commercial Style
- No Style
- Other: Heavy Timber Mill Construction

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation BRICK
- roof SYNTHETICS
- walls BRICK
- CONCRETE
- other METAL
- GLASS

Narrative Description

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

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)

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)

Commerce

Industry

Period of Significance

1895-1964

Significant Dates

1896

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Bessemer City Downtown Historic District
Name of Property

Gaston County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 23

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

Zone Easting Northing
1 17 473810 3904500
2 17 474160 3904590

Zone Easting Northing
3 17 474520 3904360
4 17 474480 3904160
 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 Consultant to City of Bessemer City date December 21, 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 _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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.

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Bessemer City Downtown Historic District
Gaston County, North Carolina

FUNCTION OR USE

Historic Functions

GOVERNMENT/post office

DESCRIPTION

Materials

Roof: METAL

Other: CLOTH

Summary

The Bessemer City Downtown Historic District is a mixed-use area of commercial buildings, two textile mills, railroad resources, and City Hall. The historic district is located in the center of Bessemer City, a small city (2010 population – 5,340) in the western part of Gaston County in North Carolina's southwestern Piedmont. Its forty-five resources include twenty-eight buildings, sixteen structures, and one object. There is only one vacant lot, at 116 West Virginia Avenue, and since 1992 it has served as Centennial Park.

Bessemer City is laid out in a grid plan with the streets running northwest-southeast and northeast-southwest. The Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks run roughly through the center of town, following a straight northwest-southeast line between Eleventh and Thirteenth streets and a curving path east and west of that section.

The historic district covers approximately twenty-three acres on parts of six city blocks. Its linear layout runs northwest-southeast with commercial streets running parallel to the Norfolk Southern Railroad right-of-way. The intersection of Twelfth Street and the railroad is the center point, and addresses are East and West and North and South from that point.

Virginia and Pennsylvania avenues are the main commercial streets, with the largest concentration of commercial buildings located in contiguous rows along the north side of East and West Virginia Avenue. The 1992 City Hall is located on West Virginia Avenue in the midst of that row of commercial buildings. A single commercial property is located at the southwest corner of West Virginia Avenue and Thirteenth Street, and the three remaining commercial buildings stand on the south side of West Pennsylvania Avenue near its intersection with Twelfth Street. Pennsylvania Avenue west of those buildings is not included in the historic district because its buildings are either completely remodeled or are of more recent construction.

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Almost all the commercial lots measure 25 feet wide and 140 feet deep, although some of the lots are doubled in width to 50 feet.

In contrast to the tight arrangement of the district's relatively small one-and two-story commercial buildings, the two textile mill complexes are large and sprawling, each filling most of a city block east of Twelfth Street and south of the railroad right-of-way. The larger of the two, Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company, is bounded by South Twelfth Street, South Eleventh Street, the railroad right-of-way, and East Alabama Avenue. The Whetstone Cotton Mills-Huss Manufacturing Company-Algodon Manufacturing Division of Pyramid Mills (hereafter referred as Whetstone Cotton Mills) is located at the northeast corner of East Alabama Avenue and South Eleventh Street and consumes the majority of the block bounded by those streets, the railroad right-of-way and South Tenth Street. The district's remaining historic resources include the railroad right-of-way and the railroad underpasses at Eleventh and Thirteenth streets.

The district's topography is largely flat, with a slight hill rising from both East Virginia Avenue and West Virginia Avenue toward North Twelfth Street. However, in contrast to the natural topography, much the railroad right-of-way has been built up to form a raised bed on which the tracks run, with the land on either side sloping – in some places steeply – down to the natural land elevations. Between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets, the right-of-way is an open lawn. On the south side, a line of young trees has been planted along the south edge of the lawn. A linear paved parking lot runs two thirds of the block between the trees and West Pennsylvania Avenue. The north side, along West Virginia Avenue, is a park with a variety of mature trees, including oaks, cedars, dogwoods, hemlocks, and maples. Other areas of the right-of-way west of Thirteenth Street and around and east of Eleventh Street within the district are largely wooded. Vegetation along the commercial Virginia Avenue is urban in character, with several concrete-bordered areas planted with trees, shrubbery, and flowering plants that divide up the diagonal parking strips. The district's streets are two-lane, and all have sidewalks.

The district's buildings follow construction patterns typical of urban areas during their times of construction. The mills are located along the railroad and are sprawling one-and-two-story brick buildings with multiple additions built over time in response to the increasing needs of the individual industries. Typical of automobile service stations, the Kincaid Service Station and Pontiac Dealership at 201-203 West Virginia Avenue is located on a corner lot and consumes a larger space than the other commercial buildings. The rest of the commercial buildings, along East and West Virginia avenues and West Pennsylvania Avenue, follow the pattern of historic commercial areas by having lots that are narrow but deep (25 by 140 feet, but sometimes doubled in width by the joining of two lots) and contiguous buildings that fill the width of the lots while varying in depth. Within the district's rows of buildings, seventeen are one-story in height, while only seven are two stories. Most are brick or brick veneered, although

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four have concrete-block construction that has been brick-veneered, and one, at 102 West Virginia Avenue, has rusticated concrete-block facing.

The building at 102 West Virginia Avenue is both one of the oldest commercial buildings (ca. 1905) in the district and one of the most decorative with three types of rusticated concrete blocks covering its façade and east wall. The rest of the commercial buildings are more modest in design. Some one- and two-story buildings from the 1920s to ca. 1950 have plain brick facades except for soldier-course bricks used as window lintels or to define the top edge of the storefront. The buildings at 101 (ca. 1945), 103 (ca. 1920), and 105 (ca. 1950) East Virginia Avenue exemplify this. Plain brick façade parapets are most common, with side parapets, where they can be seen, of descending steps. Second-story windows tend to be multi-paned metal-frame windows that are either casements or have a central section that can tilt open. Some buildings, such as those at 106-108 (ca. 1945) and 120 (ca. 1926) West Virginia Avenue, have a slightly recessed, plain brick panel with a brick border in the upper façade. Other buildings, such as those at 113 East Virginia Avenue (ca. 1935) and 104 (ca. 1920) and 124 (ca. 1927) West Virginia Avenue exhibit upper-façade panels of basket-weave laid bricks. A surprising number of original storefronts – that area most commonly altered on commercial buildings – remain largely intact regardless of their period of construction. Some have deeply recessed entrances with single or double-leaf doors and flanking glass store windows set on brick or tile bases. Good examples of this include the buildings at 102 (ca. 1905), 104 (ca. 1920), and 134 (ca. 1935) West Virginia Avenue. The one-story building at 120 West Virginia Avenue (ca. 1926) does not have a recessed entrance, yet its flush storefront is remarkably intact with a pair of central, mirror-image, wood-framed glass doors with transoms, flanking plate-glass windows set on a brick base, and a prism-glass transom that runs the width of the storefront. Some storefronts are completely recessed, while others are completely flush with the facade. A more modern storefront (ca. 1960) is seen on the building at 105 West Pennsylvania Avenue. The recess of its storefront is on an angle, with the metal-framed glass door at the east end the most inset and the adjacent windows running westward and forward at an angle to the western edge of the façade. The most typical changes to a few of the district's commercial buildings are heavily altered storefronts largely infilled with out-of-character materials – such as wood, brick, and stone – and inappropriately small windows. Examples of this are the storefronts at 110 (last quarter twentieth century) and 114 (ca. 1980) West Virginia Avenue.

The Kincaid Service Station (1932) at 201 West Virginia Avenue is different from the other commercial buildings in the district. Not only was it built as a free-standing structure, but with its brick walls, metal Spanish-tile pent eave and crenellated brick parapet, it represents Esso service stations built in the early 1930s. The ca. 1960 concrete-block service bays added to the south side of the original building are characteristic of those found on mid-twentieth-century automobile service stations.

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The district's two mills follow the patterns established for textile-mill architecture of the early twentieth century with their heavy-timber mill construction and use of round- and segmental-arched windows and monitor roofs. The mills also include later brick additions with rectangular windows, as well as some sections from the mid-twentieth century that are totally brick-veneered or of concrete block construction.

The Bessemer City Downtown Historic District is distinguishable from its surroundings due largely to changes in land use, the presence of more recent development outside the district, and to substantial alterations to some older commercial buildings just outside the district. North of the district on North Twelfth Street are several attached, one-story commercial buildings dating to the period of significance. The fenestration of these buildings has been enclosed or otherwise altered, and they do not retain enough physical integrity for inclusion in the district. The next street to the north, Washington Avenue, is filled with dwellings and churches. East of the district on East Virginia Avenue are modern construction, vacant land, and houses. South of the district are houses and other residential buildings, churches, a modern post office, and vacant land. The remainder of the West Pennsylvania Avenue block consists of commercial buildings west of the historic district that were either built after the district's period of significance or have been completely modernized. West of the district along West Virginia Avenue are modern commercial buildings and dwellings.

Integrity

As a tightly knit group of historic commercial and industrial buildings that flank the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the Bessemer City Downtown Historic District has a high degree of integrity in terms of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association from its period of significance, 1895-1964. Surrounding buildings that post-date 1964 or that have been heavily altered were not included in the district. No resources within the district have been moved. The district retains its commercial, industrial, and railroad setting. Few buildings have been lost. Most of those were late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century frame buildings on West Virginia Avenue that were replaced with brick buildings by the mid-twentieth century or buildings that burned along East Virginia Avenue in 1944 and were rebuilt by ca. 1950. However, three historically significant buildings – the 1900 Southern Railway Depot, the 1922 City Hall on West Virginia Avenue and the early-twentieth-century Hotel Carroll on East Virginia Avenue have been lost. The depot was dismantled in 1961. The 1922 City Hall suffered a serious fire in the late 1940s, was renovated soon thereafter, enlarged in 1977, and replaced by the present City Hall on the same site in 1992. The Hotel Carroll burned in 1944, but its surviving walls were reused in the construction of the present two-story brick building at 105 East Virginia Avenue erected ca. 1950. Despite these losses, the district retains its strong

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historic association with Bessemer City's commercial and industrial center. Taken together, through their design, materials, and workmanship, the district's buildings continue to convey the feeling of an historic downtown with close industrial ties. Few buildings in the district have been altered post-1964 to the point of losing their historic character. Overall, the buildings are in good condition. Of the district's forty-five resources, thirty-three (seventy-three percent) contribute to its historic character, and twelve (twenty-seven percent) are noncontributing.

Inventory List

The following inventory list provides basic information on all properties in the Bessemer City Downtown Historic District. Each entry includes the property's name, address, approximate date of construction, contributing or noncontributing status, and a summary of the property's physical appearance and known history. Property addresses and the contributing or noncontributing status of the district's primary resources are keyed to the accompanying district map.

Inventory entries are based on on-site recording and research conducted by Laura A. W. Phillips during the spring of 2013. A chronology of the district's buildings and structures is tentative, because although the dates of construction for some of the resources are certain, the dates for many of the commercial buildings are not and can only be approximated. A variety of tools for dating the commercial buildings was used. Sanborn maps for Bessemer City from 1922, 1930, and 1939 allowed for close approximations of some building dates. The *Bessemer City Centennial 1893-1993* book provided other historical information and photographs that were helpful, and a series of photographs taken by photographer Ben Shahn in 1946 provided additional clues to building dates. Oral history was of assistance and, finally, an understanding of the architectural history of commercial buildings in North Carolina was key understanding the building chronology.

Buildings, structures, or objects that add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the district is significant, were present during the district's period of significance, relate to the documented significance of the district, and possess historic integrity are contributing resources. Buildings, structures, or objects that do not add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the district is significant, were not present during the district's period of significance, or do not possess sufficient historic integrity are noncontributing resources. Loss of historic integrity occurs when alterations, additions, or the loss of historic materials hinder a building from conveying a strong sense of its appearance during the period when it contributed to the district's history. Vacant lots are listed in the inventory but are not counted as either contributing or noncontributing resources.

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Survey files containing photo proofs, survey data entry forms, maps, and other physical or historical information on the district's resources are maintained in Raleigh by the State Historic Preservation Office.

In the following inventory, the railroad-related resources are listed first. The remaining resources are arranged alphabetically by street name. Within each street, property addresses are listed in ascending order.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, roofs on commercial buildings are of built-up composition and slope slightly from the front to the rear with a standard commercial parapet across the front and stepped parapets down the sides (when visible). Building foundations are not visible.

RAILROAD-RELATED PROPERTIES

Railroad Right-of-Way

Contributing structure

Railroad track and land to the north and south of it between Virginia and Pennsylvania avenues extending from just west of 201-203 West Virginia Avenue and to just east of 205 East Alabama Avenue
1872

In 1872 the Richmond and Danville Railroad, which became part of the Southern Railway in 1894 and is now part of the Norfolk Southern line, ran a single track through the area that would become Bessemer City. Initially the stop was known as Wooten Station. When the town boundaries were described in the 1893 charter establishing Bessemer City, the small frame building that served as the depot was used as the center point from which boundary measurements were defined. A ca. 1914 photograph shows the track on a rise of land through town with land sloping downward on each side. In 1900, the first depot was replaced by a larger, more attractive one that followed one of the stock plans for depots used by Southern Railway. That one-story, frame, combination passenger and freight depot stood on the west side of Twelfth Street between West Virginia Avenue and West Pennsylvania Avenue immediately north of the tracks. It had a gable-on-hip roof with decorative stick work in the gable ends and widely overhanging braced eaves. During World War I, a second track was laid through town, but it was removed after World War II. Today there is only one track. The 1900 depot served for more than half a century until 1961, when it was dismantled and replaced by a small concrete-block station. By that time passenger service had ceased, and the rail line carried only freight. After 100 years of serving the community, Southern Railway discontinued scheduled

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stops in Bessemer City in 1972 and turned the concrete-block freight building over to the city, which moved it to another location to be used as storage.¹

The railroad track runs on a raised track bed that slopes downward on either side. The modern track is attached to wood cross-ties set on a bed of coarse gravel. West of the Thirteenth Street Underpass, the right-of-way is wooded land. On the south side of the track between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets, the right-of-way is a lawn with a line of young trees planted along the south edge, between the sloping right-of-way and a city parking lot. On the north side of the track between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets the right-of-way has been developed as a park, a center-city green space. The area is primarily a grassy lawn with a variety of mature trees scattered about. There is also shrubbery, a flagpole, a landscaped heart – the city's symbol – a low brick retaining wall with plantings along one stretch, a bike rack, a marker for a time capsule, several park benches, a picnic table, and several trash receptacles. At the southeast corner of Twelfth Street and East Virginia Avenue is a small parking lot. For the remainder of the block between Twelfth and Eleventh streets, the railroad right-of-way on the north side of the track is made up of a grassy lawn and a wooded area. South of the track between Twelfth and Eleventh streets is a linear parking lot for the Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company complex. East of Eleventh Street, a wooded area forms the right-of-way.

Commemorative Marker 2008

Noncontributing object

Near the center of the park on the north side of the track is a large, rugged rock, presumably whetstone, with a bronze marker that reads, "In honor of John and Sarah Kiser. Bessemer City Image Committee. Dedicated 2008." The rock is surrounded by white gravel within a circle of two layers of scalloped, aggregate-concrete blocks. Shrubby surrounds the circle.

Gazebo 2004

Noncontributing structure

Near the east end of the park on the north side of the track is a small, octagonal, white-painted, frame gazebo. It has a wood floor, benches around the inner perimeter, wood posts with carved brackets, a plain balustrade and frieze, and a metal roof with overhanging boxed eaves. Rising from the center of the primary roof is a small, oblong roof like the main roof, with a wood frieze that serves as a ventilator.

¹ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 2, 6-7, 10, 21, 67; *Bessemer City Record*, August 18, 1966 and January 14, 1981.

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City Bulletin Board
2008

Noncontributing structure

At the southeast corner of East Virginia Avenue and North Twelfth Street within the railroad right-of-way is Bessemer City's electronic bulletin board. The metal bulletin board is set on a river rock base with tapered brick posts at either end.

Eleventh Street Railroad Underpass
Eleventh Street beneath railroad tracks
1913

Contributing structure

According to Bessemer City Town Commission minutes of August 21, 1912, Southern Railway had proposed to build an underpass beneath the track at Eleventh Street if the town would provide drainage and construct a sidewalk. The commission agreed to this. The minutes of the April 1913 commissioners' meeting relate that the underpass at Eleventh Street was nearing completion.² The underpass is constructed of reinforced concrete with battered sides that slope outward to the north and south from the top. The narrow underpass has room for only one traffic lane, and the passage is only nine feet four inches tall.

Thirteenth Street Railroad Underpass
Thirteenth Street beneath railroad tracks
Ca. 1918

Contributing structure

The minutes of the August 2, 1917, meeting of the Bessemer City Town Commission note that the board had agreed that Southern Railway would build a thirty-nine-foot-wide underpass at Thirteenth Street.³ Considerably larger than the one at Eleventh Street, this underpass is wide enough for two lanes of traffic as well as a poured concrete sidewalk and is fourteen feet one inch tall. Like the Eleventh Street underpass, it is constructed of reinforced concrete and has battered side walls that slope outward to the north and south from the railroad bed. However, because of the width of the track bed supported by the underpass, there are also arched supports separating the sidewalk from the lower road bed. The sidewalk, which has a metal-pipe guardrail, runs between the supports and wall on the east side of the underpass and continues onward to West Virginia Avenue on the north and West Pennsylvania Avenue on the

² *Bessemer City Centennial*, 56, 74.

³ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 74.

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south. Across the top of the underpass, a metal pipe railing forms a guard rail along the either side of the track bed.

EAST ALABAMA AVENUE

Whetstone Cotton Mills-Huss Manufacturing Company-Algodon Manufacturing Division of Pyramid Mills Contributing building

205 East Alabama Avenue
1903, 1909, ca. 1960

On June 23, 1903, Whetstone Cotton Mills was incorporated, becoming the third textile mill established in Bessemer City. Stonewall Jackson Durham, son-in-law of Concord industrialist John M. Odell and a Bessemer City attorney, became its first president. At the time, Durham was also an officer of Southern Cotton Mills. Capital stock was authorized at \$100,000, but at the time of incorporation, the company had only around \$30,000. A one-story mill was erected just east of South Eleventh Street and Southern Cotton Mills. With forty-eight broad looms powered by steam and twenty-eight employees, the mill produced cotton damasks. Spinning equipment was not necessary, because the company purchased its yarn from other manufacturers. Like Southern Cotton Mills, Whetstone Cotton Mills was inadequately financed and operated, and with the national panic of 1907 and the ensuing depression the following year, it suffered. When Southern Cotton Mills failed in 1908, with some of the same financial backers Whetstone Cotton Mills also failed.⁴

Soon, C. Judson Huss, Averitt A. McLean, and their Gastonia associates purchased Whetstone Cotton Mills, and on March 9, 1909, they incorporated as Huss Manufacturing Company. The authorized capital was \$100,000, though initially only a quarter of that was subscribed. Labe Jenkins, who was president of Gastonia's First National Bank, was elected president of the new company, and Judson Huss was made secretary and treasurer. In 1909, the new company built an addition to the mill measuring 42 by 140 feet. In a change of direction, the company installed 2,500 spindles and seven cards for the production of carded yarn to be used on the forty-eight looms already in operation. After the addition was built, seventy-five employees produced table damask and duck cloth. In 1915, the mill's equipment increased to 6,000 spindles and 166 broad looms. A. A. McLean, who had become the major stockholder, became president of the company, and A. A. McLean Jr. became secretary, treasurer, and manager. In 1918, the company's capital stock was raised to \$175,000 with authority to increase to \$250,000 and to issue \$75,000 in preferred stock. As a result, the mill's machinery increased

⁴ Ragan, 114-115.

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dramatically to 10,000 spindles and 136 looms for making mercerized and plain damask table cloth. On March 1, 1920, McLean Manufacturing Company was incorporated and took over the assets and business of Huss Manufacturing Company. After five years of operation as McLean Manufacturing Company, business declined and the mill was sold to Robert, Frank, and Max Goldberg, immigrants from Russian Latvia who arrived in Bessemer City in 1914. In 1925, the Goldberg brothers incorporated American Cotton Mills, Inc. No. 2 and, with Frank Goldberg as president, acquired the mill, equipment, and other assets of McLean Manufacturing Company. The authorized capital remained at \$250,000. In 1925, the mill was reported to have 117 employees, and its estimated yearly output was \$1.2 million. Nevertheless, with the Depression several years later, troubles came. Despite drastic cost cuts, including cutting wages by thirty percent, American Cotton Mills did not survive the Depression and foreclosed in 1935. On April 15, 1936, Algodon Manufacturing Company was incorporated, with Frank Goldberg, C. Clyde Armstrong, and Robert Goldberg as incorporators. Under a court-approved reorganization, the new corporation purchased American Cotton Mills No. 1 and No. 2. In 1937, Mill No. 2 of the Algodon Manufacturing Company was liquidated. It then operated as a plant of Pyramid Mills, Algodon Manufacturing Division for nearly thirty years until that company was liquidated in 1963. Henry P. Moore, the current owner, purchased the property in 1977 and operates Dawn Processing Company there. It produces decorative tassels for use with fabrics.⁵

A comparison of Sanborn maps with a recent aerial photograph shows that the basic form of the mill remains intact from at least 1922 (the first Sanborn map for Bessemer City), although there have been several small additions, some built between 1922 and 1930 and others built after 1939. According to textile mill historian Robert Ragan, an addition measuring 42 by 140 feet was built in 1909, but the architectural features of the various wings appear identical and this writer was unable to determine which part of the mill was added at that time.⁶

The mill is a one-story-with-basement, common-bond brick structure with a long east-west section (referred to as the main mill) and two north-south wings – the east wing that runs southward from the center of the main mill (referred to as the east wing) and the west wing that runs southward from the west end of the main mill (referred to as the west wing). The main mill was used for weaving. Carding was in the basement of the east wing and spinning on the first floor. Slashing was in the west wing. Twisting took place in a narrow addition to the east side of the west wing, but that wing does not survive. The machine shop was located in a narrow extension along the north half of the east side of the east wing. In 1922 the picker room was attached to the west side of the south end of the east wing, but by 1930 it had moved to an addition built between 1922 and 1930 to the south end of the west wing. The power house was

⁵ Ragan, 115-116; Department of Labor and Printing, Annual Reports, 1910 and 1925-1926; Deed Book 1220, p. 501.

⁶ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Ragan, 115.

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located at the west end of the main mill. A small reservoir, a 10,000-gallon water tank, an opener room, and a cotton warehouse, all west of the mill, are shown on the 1930 Sanborn map but are no longer extant.⁷

A photograph in a 1919 publication shows that originally the mill had red brick walls and contrasting white trim consisting of string courses and window lintels.⁸ However, the entire mill has been painted white, date unknown, making the details and changes more difficult to observe. The main mill and the two wings all have a nearly flat gable roof with exposed, heavy-timber rafter ends. A monitor roof rises above the west half of the main mill.

Most of the mill's windows were filled in with concrete blocks, probably ca. 1960. This change was consistent with the treatment of mills, largely during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when air conditioning was introduced. However, the outlines of the windows are still visible along with the string courses and lintels. The 1919 photograph fills in the details of the original appearance of the windows. The basement-level windows – where there was enough exposed wall above ground for them – consisted of fifteen-over-fifteen sash windows with a segmental-arched brick lintel. Because of the topography, in many areas the basement windows are reduced to a metal-grilled opening beneath a segmental-arch lintel. A string course carries across the walls at the base of the windows. A second string course is at the base of the first-floor windows. These windows were multi-paned, but with an outward tilting upper sash and a multi-paned, round-arched transom. A slightly projecting brick string course runs between the windows at the base of the round-arched lintels around the window transoms. Some window transoms remain intact on the west side of the west wing above an attached brick shed, and several windows remain intact on the east side of the north end of the east wing. Several original doors remain. They consist of paneled double leaves with a round-arched, multi-pane transom.

Several additions have been made to the mill since 1939, and most probably occurred by the mid-1960s. They are described in order from east to west along the south side of the main mill. There are no additions to the north side.

A concrete ramp at the east end of the main mill leads to an opening that has been roughly cut into the south wall. An exterior area at the southeast junction of the main mill and the east wing has been covered by a one-story flat roof supported by metal posts. Immediately southwest of the east wing is a small, one-story, common-bond brick structure that is missing its roof. A hole punched in the south side shows a below-grade, concrete bordered basin. On the 1930 and 1939 Sanborn maps, the structure is labeled "Dust," but its former function is not understood. Attached to the west side of this structure and the south end of the picker room – shown on the Sanborn maps as early as 1922 – is a one-story infill addition of

⁷ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939.

⁸ *Southern Textile Bulletin*, 168.

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concrete-block construction. At the north end of the former picker room, which had been enlarged by 1930, is a taller but not nearly as wide metal and frame addition with a vehicular opening. A concrete-block loading dock runs along a portion of the south side of the main mill between the two wings. Large loading entrances open from the dock to the main mill and the east wing. The second picker room, built between 1922 and 1930, is attached to the south end of the west wing and extends to the west beyond the west wing. It is brick and has a gable roof whose west slope is much longer than the east slope. Near the north end of the west side of the west wing is a concrete-block addition with a shed roof. North of it is a taller addition of concrete-block construction but no roof.⁹

Only a small area of the interior of the mill was accessible to this writer. A section of the basement floor at the center of the main mill has a concrete floor, brick walls, and heavy-timber beams.

Hydrant Houses
Ca. 1909

Three noncontributing structures

Around the perimeter of the mill are three small, brick, hydrant houses located north of the main mill, west of the west wing, and west of the east wing. Originally there was a fourth, located east of the east wing, but it no longer stands. Each of the little buildings, constructed solely to protect the mill's fire hydrants, had three brick sides and a wood door on the fourth side. Both the doors and the roofs are missing from each, and all are overgrown with vines.

WEST PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

Commercial Building
101-103 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Ca. 1906; ca. 1970

Noncontributing building

According to local tradition, the Southern Cotton Mills constructed this building to serve as their company store. Ernest Froneberger operated the store for the mill. As more stores were built in Bessemer City, the need for a company store diminished, so Ernest and John Froneberger purchased the building and continued to operate it as a private store. The 1922 Sanborn map shows that there were two halves to the building and that a hardware store occupied the east half, while a grocery was in the west half. In later years, the building housed a grocery and a shoe

⁹ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939.

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shop. Today, Wise Insurance occupies the east half and Edward Jones Investments occupies the west half.¹⁰

The one-story brick building has no historic integrity. Its modernization has replaced or covered the historic fabric on both the façade and the east wall, leaving only the corbelled east edge of the façade parapet, low-pitched gable roof, and exposed rafter ends along the east side to suggest its age. Now the building has modern tan and brown brick-veneer walls, a six-bay façade, and a flat-roofed metal canopy. The façade is broken into two identical storefronts, each with a central glass-and-aluminum entrance flanked by large aluminum-framed glass windows. A concrete-block rear addition with a shed roof doubles the length of the building.

Commercial Building

Contributing building

105 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Ca. 1920; ca. 1960

Sanborn maps indicate that in 1922, this plain, one-bay wide, one-story brick building was a furniture store. Throughout the 1930s, it housed a cleaning and pressing business. It later housed other commercial establishments, and today stands vacant.¹¹ Around 1960, the façade was modernized in a manner popular at that time by the installation of an asymmetrical storefront with plate-glass windows and door that follow a plane that angles inward from west to east. At the east end is an aluminum-framed glass entrance. From the east side of the entrance to the front plane of the building is a wall sheathed in ribbed aluminum panels. West of the entrance are three large aluminum-framed plate-glass windows with a skirt sheathed with ribbed aluminum panels.

The plain brick upper façade, now painted to achieve visual unity, suggests two phases of construction. Although the dates of construction are not certain, the top half of the upper façade may date from the ca. 1960 remodeling of the storefront, while the lower half may date from the original ca. 1920 construction of the building. The top half of the upper façade is sheathed with stretcher-bond brickwork, capped by a brick soldier course at the cornice line. The lower half has six-to-one common bond brickwork. Regularly-spaced holes in the brickwork indicate that the façade at one time had either a wide, attached, name plate or an awning.

Whetstone Masonic Lodge

Contributing building

107 West Pennsylvania Avenue
1906-1907, ca. 1930, 1990

¹⁰ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 47; 1922 Sanborn Map; Bill Kincaid Interview.

¹¹ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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Although most of the façade of the Whetstone Masonic Lodge appears to date from ca. 1930, likely the result of a remodeling, and the first-story shop front dates from a 1990 remodeling, it is among the oldest commercial buildings in the downtown area. Chartered in 1901, the Masons first met in a rented room in a frame hotel located at the southeast corner of Twelfth Street and Virginia Avenue, but in 1906-1907, they built their own two-story building on West Pennsylvania Avenue. Rufus M. Kiser was the contractor. John Dameron of Bessemer City helped manufacture the concrete blocks for the building's construction at his job in Shelby. Bricks for the façade were made at a brick yard on East Alabama Avenue south of the Southern Cotton Mills. The Masons met in rooms on the second floor. The second floor also housed the office of Dr. W. S. Matthews and the telephone exchange. During the building's early years, the front section of the first floor was home to the Bessemer City Bank, and later the post office was located there. Over time, other occupants of the building included a salvage store, a cloth store, the Boy Scouts, a florist, and printer W. A. Westmoreland, who published the *Bessemer City Journal*. In 1990, the Masons installed new doors and windows, and perhaps the central brick pier, on the building's façade.¹²

The concrete-block sides and rear of the building are stuccoed. The four-bay façade has a veneer of stretcher-bond brick. A central brick pilaster separates plate-glass windows on the first story. A plate-glass door in an asymmetrical setting of glass panels and anodized metal framing fills each outer bay. The second story features twenty-four-light windows that appear to have center sections that tilt outward. The brickwork beneath the windows suggests that they may originally have been longer. The name of the lodge – Whetstone Masonic Lodge 515 AF & AM Eastern Star Chapter 263 – is attached in white letters to the upper portion of the façade.

SOUTH TWELFTH STREET

Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company
201 South Twelfth Street
1895, 1896, ca. 1905, ca. 1935, ca. 1960

Contributing building

In 1895, John A. Smith and his partner, J. A. Pinchback, began the construction of a cotton mill in Bessemer City where foundry shops had stood previously. They completed the card and spinning rooms, but before they could finish the weave room and build the power plant, much less equip the mill with the necessary machinery, they ran out of money. As a result, the proposed mill was sold at a public bankruptcy auction in late 1895. A newly organized company

¹² *Bessemer City Centennial*, 26, 181; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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was chartered on December 10, 1895, by J. M. Odell, W. R. Odell, W. H. Branson, and D. B. Coltrane of Concord, North Carolina. They completed construction of the mill in 1896 and equipped it with 8,000 spindles and 362 looms. Southern Cotton Mills, as it was called, took its place as the first of several textile mills established in Bessemer City and the eighteenth in textile-rich Gaston County. John M. Odell was the company's first president and his son-in-law, Stonewall Jackson Durham, was secretary, treasurer, and manager. The initial capital stock was \$125,000, but in 1905, it was increased to \$275,000. With its expanded capital, the company enlarged the mill, increasing its capacity to 16,272 spindles and 400 looms and employing more than 400 workers. Nevertheless, when the Odell manufacturing interests in Concord failed as a result of the national panic of 1907 and the ensuing depression, like a domino, Southern Cotton Mills followed in 1908. The next year the property was again sold at public auction.¹³

On February 8, 1909, Slater Manufacturing Company was established for the purpose of purchasing the Southern Cotton Mills property. The officers and directors were experienced cotton manufacturers from across North Carolina. D. B. Coltrane of Concord was elected president and manager. With capital stock of \$300,000, 15,216 spindles, 401 looms, and 200 employees, the company manufactured yarn and madras cloth. The corporate name changed to Osage Manufacturing Company on August 19, 1909, but the incorporators remained the same. Although in the following years there were changes in ownership, the Osage name remained with the mill for the next eighty-six years. In 1913, C. Judson Huss, an officer of another Bessemer City mill, the Huss Manufacturing Company (formerly the Whetstone Cotton Mills), purchased the Osage mill. At that time the mill was producing cotton drills and jeans fabric. In 1925-1926, with \$350,000 in capital stock, 16,272 spindles, 388 looms, and 286 employees, the mill produced \$800,000 in sheeting cloth. In 1928, Huss and his associates sold the mill to Reeves Brothers, Inc., a New York textile firm whose founders, John M. and M. R. Reeves, had North Carolina connections. The mill was operated as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reeves Brothers, Inc. until 1955, when it was fully absorbed into the company. For sixty-seven years, Reeves Brothers successfully operated the Osage Manufacturing Company, later known as the Osage Plant. During its ownership, Reeves Brothers continued to upgrade and expand the Bessemer City facility. However, in 1995, after a century of providing employment to residents of Bessemer City and the surrounding area, the mill closed. Today, part of the mill complex – approximately 26,000 out of 80,000 square feet – is used by DreamCrafters Custom Cabinetry.¹⁴

The Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company takes up an entire block bounded by South Twelfth Street, the Norfolk-Southern Railroad right-of-way, South Eleventh Street, and East Alabama Avenue. The L-shaped complex consists of one major east-west linear

¹³ Ragan, 72-73.

¹⁴ Ragan, 73-74; Department of Labor and Printing, Annual Reports, 1910 and 1925-1926.

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block with large additions extending southward from the west end of the mill. Sanborn maps show that the first of these, attached to the south wall of the original mill, was built between 1930 and 1939. Two cotton warehouses, one possibly dating from between 1922 and 1930, extend eastward along East Alabama Avenue from the southwest corner of the mill. There are also many, mostly smaller, additions built to all sides of the mill since 1939. No dates are available for these additions, but judging by appearance, it is likely that most were constructed during the third quarter of the twentieth century.

Photographs of the mill taken in the mid-1940s as well as an earlier photograph, perhaps dating from the 1920s, give an image of the mill's appearance during those decades. The mill faced north toward the railroad. The north façade of the two-story section of the brick mill (1895-1896) was approximately twenty-three bays long. Attached to its east end was a somewhat longer one-story-with-basement section (1905). Roofs were nearly flat with exposed, heavy-timber rafter ends. The tall, multi-paned windows had segment-arched lintels. At the center of each of these two primary sections of the mill was a projecting entrance tower – three-and-a-half stories for the two-story section of the mill and two-and-a-half stories for the one-story section of the mill. The towers were one of the most distinctive features of the mill, but they did not survive multiple expansions of the mill over time. Each tower had segmental-arched doors and windows and was capped by a steeply pitched bell-cast roof with a truncated peak and a gabled dormer on each of the four sides. The top level of the taller tower held a 9,500-gallon water tank.¹⁵

Sanborn maps show that the two-story western section of the mill was used for carding and ropeing (sic) on the first floor and spinning, spooling, and slubbers on the second floor. The west end of the two-story section had pickers on the first floor and carding on the second. Attached to the south side of the west end were the opening room and the office. The one-story east section of the mill was dedicated to weaving. A two-story rear ell, shown on the 1922 Sanborn map, extended from the south side of the mill near its center and housed the warping operation. At the south end of this ell was a one-story boiler room with round-arched openings. Adjacent to it on the west was the ninety-foot smoke stack – with the loss of the mill's towers, the most distinctive surviving feature.

The stack is square in section. Its massive base consists of a battered concrete foot, pilastered walls, and a concrete band at the top that slopes outward. Above the base, the stack's shaft tapers as it rises. Beneath the concrete cap, additional brick courses have been added to create a larger area for decorative treatment. Ornamentation that includes a band of three

¹⁵ Shahn photographs; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1939.

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recessed squares per side and brick corbelling that forms a large V on each side results in an unexpected level of refinement for such a utilitarian structure.

Numerous additions have been built to all sides of the mill, indicating the mill's continued growth and success during the last two thirds of the twentieth century. The first addition was built ca. 1935 to the south side of the mill from its western edge to the west side of the central south ell. Its windows, some of which have not been bricked up, are rectangular, twenty-four-light windows with a four-light tilt section in the bottom half. At the time of this addition, a monitor roof was added above the joining of the ca. 1935 addition and the original 1895-1896 mill. Dates of construction for later additions are not known, although most were probably built during the 1950s and 1960s. A two-story addition was built to the north side of the mill from the west end eastward to about halfway along the original two-story section of the mill. Since its square windows are bricked up, it was probably built in the 1950s prior to the introduction of air conditioning at the mill. In the late 1950s, the west end of the mill was brick-veneered from the northwest corner southward to, but not including, the ca. 1935 addition, and a modern stair tower with the Osage name and two concrete bands near the top was added to the west side. Several small one- and two-story additions, some of which appear to have housed air-conditioning equipment, project along the original north side of the mill. An electrical power station surrounded by a chain link is also located on the north side of the mill near the east end of the two-story section.

One-story-with-basement additions with rectangular windows (now bricked in), exposed heavy rafter ends and a molded wood cornice were built along the south side of the 1905 mill addition, eastward from the south center ell, and along the north side eastward eight bays from the end of the 1905 addition. These additions probably date from the late 1940s or early 1950s. Buttresses (or half pilasters) were built along the lower walls on both the south and north sides. Brick parapets mark the east end of the south addition and the east end wall of the north addition. A rectangular, one-story-with-basement, brick addition with several small windows and a loading dock on the south side fills the space between the east end of the just-described south addition and east end of the just-described north addition. It may date from the late 1960s or early 1970s.

A metal-roofed open ramp runs along part of the south side of the mill. A one-story, flat-roofed, fourteen-bay addition with twelve-light metal rectangular windows with central tilt sections runs from the west end of the covered ramp to the east side of the boiler room. A shed-roofed addition with a brick lower level and a synthetic-sided upper level is attached to the south side of the ca. 1935 addition. The dates of these additions are not known.

At the southwest corner of the property is a large, one-story, brick-veneered addition with a flat roof that projects slightly westward from the west plane of the original mill. Attached to its north side is another one-story brick addition that continues northward to the ca. 1935 addition.

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It has a flat roof, is ten bays long, has rectangular, boarded-up windows, and a metal canopy that runs its length. This section of the mill may incorporate the frame cotton warehouse and opener room shown on the 1922, 1930, and 1939 Sanborn maps. Heading eastward from this addition is a large, roughly T-shaped, concrete-block addition with a flat roof that may date from the 1950s or 1960s.

Running eastward from the southwest corner addition is a building that likely incorporates the large cotton warehouse shown on the 1930s Sanborn maps. It has board-and-batten siding and a shed roof that, with the addition of more warehouse space on its north side, is now a low, asymmetrical gable. A brick fire wall at the east end of the cotton warehouse divides it from its added double to the east. It, too, has board-and-batten siding, except for a northeast added section that is sheathed with ribbed metal.

With the numerous additions to all sides of the mill, many built within the period of significance, there are no areas where an entire side of the original 1895-1896 mill can be seen. However, there are several places on both the north and south sides where sections of the original mill, with its brickwork, arched windows, and heavy-timber rafter ends can be seen. There is also the interior of the mill. This writer was able to access the two floors of the west end of the original mill and the ca. 1935 addition, and these areas remain largely intact. They make use of standard mill construction of the period. The floors are hardwood. The first floor of the original mill has round wood posts, heavy-timber beams, and wood ceiling boards above the beams. The original brick walls with segmental-arched doors and windows (mostly bricked up) separate the original section of the mill from the ca. 1935 section. The ca. 1935 section has heavy-timber posts and what may be concrete beams. The second floor has round posts and heavy-timber beams in the original mill and square posts and timber beams in the ca. 1935 section. The doors in the brick walls between the two sections are open and the segmental-arched windows are half open. Between the original and ca. 1935 sections, the roof has been raised to create a monitor roof.

Sanborn maps reveal that up through at least 1939, there were other, smaller, buildings and structures on the site with the mill. All were one-story, but they varied in materials from frame to iron-clad frame to concrete block depending on their use. In addition to the cotton warehouse-opener room at the west end of the property and the larger cotton warehouse on the south edge of the property – both previously discussed – which may be incorporated into the present mill complex, there were other support buildings which have not survived. At the southwest corner of the property was a small office. At the approximate location of the present water tower was a three-bay garage. Northeast of it was a waste house. Immediately northeast of the waste house was a cotton shed with an open northwest side. A railroad spur ran southwestward from the main track across the Whetstone Cotton Mills property and onto the property of the Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company running alongside the

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cotton shed and on to the cotton warehouse. The last portion of the track also had a coal trestle, because it was located just south of the boiler room and smoke stack. Between the track and the 1905 eastern section of the mill was a machine shop. Immediately northwest of the machine shop was a small well and pump. In the southeast corner formed by the joining of the 1905 section and the south ell was a reservoir with a 125,000-gallon capacity. Although exact dates are not known, it is likely that at least some of these secondary structures were demolished prior to the 1964 end of the period of significance.

Other secondary structures essential to the functioning of the mill do survive. These include a group of hydrant houses, a water tower, a water reservoir, and two small buildings of unknown use.

Hydrant Houses Ca. 1905

Four contributing structures

Around the perimeter of the mill are five of the eight original hydrant houses that that held both a fire hydrant and a hose. All are small brick structures, and four have the same square form. Three of these are located on the north side of the mill, and the fourth is on the south side of the 1905 section of the mill. Each has a low pyramidal roof and, with the exception of the hydrant house on the north side of the mill near its west end, each has a double-leaf wood door that consumes nearly all of one side. The doors on the altered hydrant house have been removed and an open shed extends eastward from it for the storage of cut wood.

Hydrant House Ca. 1905

Contributing structure

The fifth hydrant house, located along South Twelfth Street at the west end of the mill, differs from the others in that it is somewhat smaller than the other four and is in the form of a rectangle rather than a square. Rather than a pyramidal roof, it has a combined hipped and gable roof with the gable on the west façade and the remainder of the roof hipped. It retains its double-leaf entrance on the west side.

Neither the water tower nor the water reservoir is shown on the 1939 Sanborn map, and the water tower cannot be seen in photographs taken in 1946. Both probably date from the 1950s, and both are located within the east half of the property near its southern edge.

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Water Tower
1950s

Contributing structure

A metal label on the bottom of the elevated metal water tower indicates that it was built during the Reeves ownership of the mill, which began in 1928 and continued until the mill closed in 1995. The water tower has a large central pipe that rises from a concrete pad on the ground to the bulbous base of the tank. Four steel support columns set in concrete surround the base of the vertical pipe and rise at an angle to the outer edge of the tank base. Three sets of four horizontal beams connect the four vertical columns at different heights. Wires criss-cross between multiple points along the vertical columns for added support. A steel ladder rises with the northwest column to a metal-railed walkway at the bottom of the metal tank cylinder, and from there, a ladder rises up the side of the tank to the top. The steel cylinder is covered by a metal conical roof with a metal ball at the top.¹⁶

Water Reservoir
1950s

Contributing structure

East of the water tower at the southeast corner of the mill property is an open-air water reservoir. The rectangular poured concrete structure has a cap at the top that flares outward, concrete buttresses on the north and south sides, and an inner lining of rubber sheeting. Because of the sloping topography, the walls rise from around four feet to around eight feet above ground. The depth of the reservoir is not known. Attached to the northeast corner of the reservoir is a small, one-story concrete building with a concrete foundation, brick walls, a flat roof with overhanging eaves, a door on the north side and a four-light window on the west side.

Outbuilding
1950s

Contributing structure

Along the south edge of the property west of the water tower is a small, one-story structure that houses a large tank. The rectangular structure has a concrete-block lower

¹⁶ Sanborn Map, 1939; Shahn photographs.

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half, a screened upper half with wood corner posts, and an east-west gable roof. A metal pipe extends from the tank to the outside of the structure and from there to the ground.

Outbuilding

Noncontributing building

Date unknown, possibly third quarter of twentieth century

Neither the date nor use of this small, one-story building is known. Because a fire hydrant stands just west of it, it may replace an earlier hydrant house and be used to store a fire hose. The structure has vertical board or metal siding, a narrow double-leaf door on the west side, and a nearly flat gable roof of standing-seam metal.

EAST VIRGINIA AVENUE

Gamble Hardware

Contributing building

101 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1945

A 1946 photograph shows that this plain, two-story, brick-veneered building has changed little since that time. The stretcher-bond walls have brick soldier courses used as the second-story window lintels and the header across the storefront. Terra cotta coping caps the walls, which step downward from front to rear on the sides. Originally, a vertical sign was attached to the center of the façade. Other than the storefront, the façade has only two sash windows, originally vertical casements, illuminating the second floor. They have cloth canopies. The focal point of the building is the storefront, which consists of a stone base, originally brick, large plate-glass windows divided by vertical wood strips into three sections on either side of the central entrance, and a recessed entrance with a pair of replacement faux-Victorian doors. A multi-section glass transom carries across the entire storefront. Separated only by a brick corner post, the storefront continues one bay's depth down the west side of the building. The first-floor interior is one large space supported by metal columns down the center. Decorative features include a pressed-metal ceiling in a coffered pattern and a classically inspired pressed-metal coved cornice. Attached to the rear of the building is one-story, corrugated-metal, flat-roofed warehouse with loading doors on the side and rear. It was probably added during the third quarter of the twentieth century.

Gamble Hardware occupied the building starting in 1952 and continued for more than forty years. It replaced a two-story concrete-block Froneberger and Company Building that had

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burned. That building had a dry goods and grocery business on the first floor and the town's civic center, with a stage where a variety of events were held, on the second floor.¹⁷

Commercial Building

103 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1945

Contributing building

The 1922 Sanborn map shows that a miniscule one-story, one-bay wide building was located in the narrow space between 101 and 105 East Virginia Avenue. In 1922 the building was used as a pressing business; in later years it housed a variety of small businesses. Presumably, like the buildings on either side of it (101, 105, and 113 East Virginia Avenue), this building suffered significant damage in a ca. 1944 fire and was then rebuilt soon thereafter. The present one-story brick structure has a stretcher-bond brick façade with a small plate-glass window and a recessed metal-framed glass door. Photographs dating from 1946 show that the door was not recessed at that time and that there was a sign hanging from near the top of the façade. Today a sign hangs from lower on the façade.¹⁸

Commercial Building

105 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1950

Contributing building

The Hotel Carroll was the first building at this location. Dating from the first decade of the twentieth century, it catered primarily to mill employees, drummers, and families needing temporary housing. The two-story brick hotel burned in 1944, but its walls remained partially standing and were reused in the construction of the present two-story brick building, which has had a variety of commercial uses.¹⁹

The two-story building's façade is very plain, with stretcher-bond brickwork. The storefront is recessed behind two round metal poles near the center. At the center of the façade is a double-leaf aluminum-framed glass entrance flanked by plate-glass windows resting on a skirt of lighter brick than the overall façade. A false transom runs across the top of the storefront, and it is headed by a brick soldier course. The second floor has two symmetrically positioned, twenty-light metal-framed windows, each with a six-light tilting section in the center. Small fabric canopies shade the windows. Though now bricked up, the shapes of window openings from the Hotel Carroll can be seen running along the second floor on each side of the building.

¹⁷ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 45, 135; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview.

¹⁸ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Shahn photographs.

¹⁹ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 45-46; Shahn photographs.

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Commercial Building

Contributing building

113 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1925; ca. 1950

Sanborn maps show that a one-story brick building was erected at this site between 1922 and 1930. It was Matthews Grocery. When the building suffered damage from the same fire that severely damaged the buildings to its west, it was rebuilt within several years, utilizing the original fabric that remained, by Walt Heatherington, who operated a Western Auto store there.

Judging from 1946 photographs, the façade of the present building looks much as it did then, except that the storefront has been recessed, probably the depth of the original shop windows. The façade's original stretcher-bond brickwork remains, along with a basketweave-brick panel in the upper façade and a slightly stepped parapet. However, the storefront has lost its original prism-glass transom. Two sets of aluminum-framed, double-leaf doors provide access to the building, and the remainder of the storefront is consumed by plate-glass windows set on black tile skirts. A red-tile floor fills the space between the present recessed façade and the plane of the former shop windows.²⁰

Commercial Building

Contributing building

115 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1935

Sanborn maps reveal that this one-story brick building was erected between 1930 and 1939. The façade is sheathed with stretcher-bond brickwork, and the storefront is positioned between two slightly projecting pilasters at the east and west ends of the building. A recessed, metal-framed entrance is at the center of the façade, and – like the adjacent 113 East Virginia Avenue – a black-tile skirt runs beneath the flanking plate-glass windows. A fabric canopy shelters the entrance and windows.²¹

Commercial Building

Contributing building

117 East Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1950

This one-story brick building is very deep and extends back to the rear alley. The façade has stretcher-bond brickwork, and terra cotta coping caps the façade and continues down the

²⁰ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Shahn photographs; Bill Kincaid Interview.

²¹ Sanborn Maps, 1930, 1939; Shahn photograph.

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length of the east elevation's stepped parapet. The storefront has a central, recessed, aluminum-framed glass, single-leaf entrance with sidelights. The flanking shop windows are each divided into six large panes by an aluminum frame whose center stile is wider than the other dividers. They are probably replacements of the original large shop windows. A fabric awning carries across the entrance and flanking windows. In the 1960s, the building was occupied by Helen's Restaurant, a popular eatery that drew customers not only from Bessemer City, but from surrounding communities.²²

WEST VIRGINIA AVENUE

Curtis Pharmacy

102 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1905

Contributing building

The one-story concrete-block building at the corner of West Virginia Avenue and North Twelfth Street is one of the oldest commercial buildings in Bessemer City. According to local history, it was built by Caleb J. Robbins, a native of New York state who was Bessemer City's first policeman. His use of the building is not known, but by 1922 a drug store occupied the building, according to the Sanborn map for that year. In 1932, druggist Richard Curtis and his wife, Nelle, moved to Bessemer City. He opened the Curtis Pharmacy in the building, and it is by this name that the building is best known. Curtis retired in 1965, and the pharmacy presumably closed at that time. Still, he continued to work part time in several other area drug stores until his death at age eighty-two.²³

The building makes excellent use of decorative concrete-block construction, which came into use and rapidly gained popularity immediately after the turn of the twentieth century. The majority of the exterior is covered in rusticated, or rock-faced, blocks, but smooth ashlar-formed blocks create corner quoins, and several courses of vermiculated blocks form a horizontal band that runs along the top of the east elevation. Also on that side of the building, smooth-cut blocks form a water table at the base and a belt course near the top. Three small windows, now boarded up, are evenly spaced on the upper portion of the east elevation, and a secondary door is located near the north end of the east elevation. The storefront is typical of its early-twentieth-century construction date. At the center is a recessed, glass-and-wood-paneled, double-leaf entrance. Shop windows angle outward on either side of the entrance and then follow the plane of the

²² Bill Kincaid Interview.

²³ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 45, 90; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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façade. A glass transom may have originally carried across the top of the storefront, but this space is now paneled with vertical boards. A metal canopy shelters the storefront.

Commercial Building

Contributing building

104 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1920, ca. 1940

The 1922 Sanborn map shows a one-story brick grocery at this location. According to his son, Ira Kincaid purchased the building around 1940 and remodeled it with a new brick façade. Kincaid used the building for more than a decade for his dry cleaning business, Kincaid Cleaners. Later it was used as a barber shop.²⁴

The painted façade features stretcher-bond brickwork with a basketweave brick band between the storefront and the cornice. A sheet-metal band at the top of the façade may have been the location of store signage. The wood-bordered glass door with narrow sidelights is deeply recessed. It is flanked by plate-glass windows that angle slightly outward from the door to the front edge of the building. From there, plate-glass windows set on a brick base follow the front plane of the building. A glass transom may once have headed the storefront, but it is now filled in with vertical wood boards. A metal canopy carries across the entrance and flanking shop windows.

Commercial Building

Contributing building

106-108 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1945

Up through 1939, Sanborn maps show that only a small, one-story frame building occupied part of this location. The rest of the land was vacant. The one-story brick building that now comprises 106 and 108 West Virginia Avenue may have started as separate buildings, but now a seamless brick façade, probably dating from ca. 1945, unites the two. It is composed of stretcher-bond bricks with a long, slightly recessed brick panel above each storefront. The two storefronts are different. Number 106 has a broad, angled recess to the central, single-leaf entrance. Both the glass door and the large windows are aluminum-framed. The storefront of 108 is set back at right angles from the front plane of the building. Its double-leaf glass entrance and flanking plate-glass windows are framed in aluminum. Each side of the building has its own metal canopy. According to nonagenarian resident Bill Kincaid, 106 was the R. J. Bullard Café

²⁴ Sanborn Map, 1922; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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and later the Bullard Appliance Store. Number 108, which replaced a small frame building on the site, was initially a five and dime store and had a variety of subsequent uses.²⁵

Rex Theatre Contributing building
110 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1950, last quarter twentieth century

For many years, this was the Rex Theatre, one of Bessemer City's several movie houses. The two-story brick building has a stretcher-bond brick façade. Three rectangular brick blocks – one at the center and one at each end – rise from the roofline. Immediately above the storefront is a pair of sixteen-light, side-casement, metal-frame, second-floor windows. During the time that the building was used as a theater, a marquee projected from the façade. Now a fabric canopy shelters the shop front, which has been largely enclosed. Sheathed with stained-wood vertical boards, it has a left-of-center glass door with two small, square windows on either side. A second glass door at the east edge of the storefront opens to stairs to the second floor.²⁶

Central Drug Store Contributing building
112 West Virginia Avenue
1927, 1960s

One of the best-known downtown buildings is Central Drug Store, which has been a pharmacy for eighty-six years. O. R. Black, a chemist and pharmacist, built the two-story brick building to serve a variety of uses. A drug store has always occupied the first floor, but professional offices were on the second floor, including those of dentist Dan Froneberger and physicians Ed Pruett, George Patrick, Dr. Tuttle, and Dr. Weitters. A barber shop was in the basement. During his ownership, Mr. Black developed an orangeade drink that remains popular with Bessemer City residents. Ambrose Cloninger purchased the drug store from Mr. Black in 1939 and operated it until 1947, when he sold it to pharmacist Cossie Williams. In 1960 pharmacist Jessie V. Putnam bought Central Drug, and his family has operated it for more than half a century.²⁷

The building is constructed of common-bond brickwork but has tan, rather than red, face bricks. On the second story, three one-over-one sash (replacement) windows each have a soldier-course brick lintel and a projecting brick sill. A metal canopy shelters the storefront, and above the canopy is a hanging store sign. The storefront, which is a replacement probably dating

²⁵ Bill Kincaid Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939.

²⁶ Bill Kincaid Interview.

²⁷ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 87; Bill Kincaid Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939.

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from the 1960s, consists of aluminum-framed plate-glass windows and a central glass door. At the east end of the facade, a glass door opens to the stair to the second floor. The interior has been remodeled, but original wood and glass pharmacy cabinets remain.

Bullard's Dry Goods Store
114 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1920, ca. 1980

Noncontributing building

The exposed west side of this one-story building and Sanborn maps reveal that originally it was a concrete-block structure. The side of the building also suggests that fairly early on it was enlarged in height and to the front and rear with bricks. The facade was heavily remodeled, probably during the last quarter of the twentieth century, with wood shakes, replacement windows, a brick panel across the bottom, a replacement door, and a flush wood panel across the top. Part of the simulated-stone facade of the demolished building that stood at 116 West Virginia Avenue is attached to the west end of the building. Only the upper brick facade with its slightly recessed name panel and the plain brick pilasters at either end of the facade remain intact from the building's original appearance. For many years, this was Bullard's Dry Goods Store. Remains of the painted store signage can still be seen on the upper facade name panel.²⁸

Vacant Lot (Centennial Park)
Formerly 116 West Virginia Avenue
1992

Centennial Park opened in 1992 as part of Bessemer City's centennial celebration. It was created in the space left vacant by the demolition (date unknown) of the small department store that stood at 116 West Virginia Avenue. The pocket park runs from West Virginia Avenue to the alley between Virginia and Washington avenues. It features a small, grassy lawn, a concrete walk that encircles a concrete planter, two park benches, two trash receptacles, and a few planted shrubs.

Roxie Theatre
118 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1920, 1960s

Noncontributing building

²⁸ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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As early as 1922, according to the Sanborn map for that year, this one-story brick building was being used for "moving pictures." A 1946 photograph shows it as the Roxie Theatre, one of several movie houses in Bessemer City. It had a brick façade that was continuous with the adjacent building to the east (116), at that time the Home Store. In the photograph, the theater appears to have a broad, deeply recessed entry area, except for the enclosed ticket booth by the sidewalk. A flat metal canopy studded with lights along the bottom edge extended across the ticket booth and entrance, and above it was a sign with the name of the theater painted directly on the brick. Probably in the late 1960s, when the building ceased to be used as a theater, the brick façade was covered with simulated stone, which also covered the façade of the adjacent Home Store (116), now demolished. The storefront remains recessed, but a double-leaf entrance and plate-glass windows have been installed.²⁹

Winn-Dixie Grocery
120 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1926

Contributing building

According to nonagenarian resident Bill Kincaid, this one-story brick building was initially the Winn-Dixie grocery. It remained that for a number of years, after which others operated grocery stores here. Except for a metal canopy that has replaced an earlier cloth canopy, the exterior of the building remains largely intact.³⁰

The storefront has a pair of wood-framed glass doors, each with a glass transom. On either side of the pair of doors are large, single-pane glass shop windows. An intact prism-glass transom carries across the entire storefront above the doors and windows. The upper façade has a narrow, recessed panel near the base of the dark-red, stretcher-bond brick wall surface.

Lewis Grocery Store
122 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1920, third quarter twentieth century

Contributing building

Like several other commercial buildings along West Virginia Avenue, this one was built with side and rear concrete block walls and a brick façade. In its early years, it was used as the Lewis Grocery Store. Its storefront was modernized, likely during the third quarter of the twentieth century, with modern aluminum-framed plate-glass windows, a recessed entrance of the same materials at the east end, and solid panels above where there was probably a glass

²⁹ Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Shahn photograph.

³⁰ Bill Kincaid Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Shahn photograph.

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transom. A soldier-course brick band borders the top of the storefront, and a cloth canopy shelters it. The painted brick upper façade has a projecting brick string course about halfway up, beneath which is a slightly recessed brick name panel.

First State Bank and Trust Company
124 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1927, last quarter twentieth century

Noncontributing building

For most of its existence, this one-story, painted-brick building was a bank. Initially, the eastern two bays of the three-bay building were used as the First State Bank and Trust Company, which after the mid-twentieth century became part of First Union Bank. The eastern two bays are defined by full-height brick pilasters, and the upper half of each bay is decorated with slightly recessed panels of basketweave bricks. The west-end bay was originally a shorter, separate building that was used in the 1930s as the Western Union office and at other times as a barber shop. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, its height was raised to the cornice level of the eastern two bays, its upper façade was remodeled with a basketweave brick panel to match the detailing of the eastern two bays, and the once-separate building became part of the bank. Painting the brick helped unify the appearance of the three bays. Probably at the same time the buildings were combined, their storefronts were completely remodeled. Originally, the east two bays had a tall doorway in one bay and a tall window in the other. These have been replaced with a shorter modern door and a modern, horizontal replacement window. The entrance to the west bay has been removed and replaced by a long horizontal window like that in the east bay.³¹

Commercial Building
128-130 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1930, ca. 1960

Contributing building

Although this building contains two businesses, it reads as one building due to its unifying façade of yellow, stretcher-bond bricks. The eastern half of the building served as the post office during the 1930s. At other times it was a men's clothing store and a restaurant. Its storefront, which is flush to the façade, has two bays, with an aluminum-framed glass entrance in the east bay and a large, plate-glass window framed in aluminum in the west bay. A fabric canopy carries across the whole. The west half of the building was a restaurant and later was the office of Duke Power Company. Based on photographs from 1946 and 1974, its storefront was modernized between those years, probably ca. 1960, with a flat metal canopy, an inset, angled

³¹ Bill Kincaid Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930, 1939; Shahn photograph; *Gastonia Gazette*, April 27, 1974.

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façade with a glass-and-aluminum framed entrance at the most deeply inset west end and aluminum-framed plate-glass windows across the rest of the storefront. Red Roman bricks form a skirt beneath the windows and a wall at the west end of the recess. The storefront floor is laid with broken red tiles.³²

City Hall

Noncontributing building

132 West Virginia Avenue
1992

In 1922, Bessemer City built the most architecturally impressive building in its downtown – the City Hall. The building, which housed the police and fire departments, the commissioners' room, and the recorder's court, was a two-story brick structure with tripartite windows – two with balconies, a classical entrance with a round-arched window above it on the second floor, and a two-part modillioned cornice with a parapet above. The most striking feature, however, was the Baroque cupola with its surrounding, balustraded walkway that rose from the roof. The building suffered a fire in the late 1940s that caused extensive damage, but it was renovated thereafter and then enlarged in 1977.³³

In 1992, the present City Hall was built to replace the earlier one. The large, two-story brick building has a glass and brick façade that is set back from a two-level brick arcade and a mock standing-seam metal roof. The primary entrance is at the southeast corner of the building.

Froneberger Hardware Store

Contributing building

134 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1935

Sanborn maps show that this building was erected between 1930 and 1939. During its early years, it was the Froneberger Hardware Store.³⁴

The façade of the two-story brick building appears to be remarkably unaltered from its appearance when built. The front of the building is faced with multi-colored tapestry brick and is three bays wide, bordered on each end by a plain brick pilaster. The storefront has a center-bay recessed entrance composed of a single wood-framed glass door with a narrow glass transom. Metal-framed plate-glass windows angle outward from the door and then follow the plane of the façade to the outer edges of the building. Square red tiles form a base to the windows and a floor in front of the entrance. A three-part transom runs across the façade above

³² Bill Kincaid Interview; Sanborn Maps, 1930, 1939; Shahn photographs; *Gastonia Gazette*, April 27, 1974.

³³ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 86, 180; Sanborn Maps, 1922, 1930; Shahn photograph.

³⁴ Sanborn Maps, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview.

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the entrance and windows, and a fabric canopy shelters the whole. The interior of the first floor has a hardwood floor and a decorative pressed-metal ceiling and cornice. The façade's second story is illuminated by three casement windows, each with a projecting brick sill and a soldier-course lintel. All three windows have casements with two leaves of eight lights each. A four-light transom tops the side windows, while the larger center window has an extra column of four lights on the east and west sides of the casement and a six-light transom.

Shulman's Department Store
136 West Virginia Avenue
Ca. 1920; ca. 1940; ca. 1960

Contributing building

During the 1920s and 1930s, this building was an auto repair shop operated by Henry Holden. The front and rear had openings large enough for a vehicle to drive through. Around 1940 the Shulman family converted the building for use as Shulman's Department Store, a well-known fixture in downtown Bessemer for many years. The present storefront appears to be a ca. 1960 remodeling.

The one-story building is constructed of brick-faced concrete blocks. A flat metal canopy shades the recessed storefront with its central glass entrance, plate-glass windows, and brick base. Above the canopy is a glass transom, which is partially covered with corrugated metal and is headed by a band of soldier-course bricks. The building's upper façade is sheathed with stretcher-bond bricks except for three evenly spaced blocks composed of three soldier-laid bricks each. Above the storefront, the name of the department store was painted directly on the bricks. Although painted over, it can still be read.

Kincaid Service Station and Pontiac Dealership
201-203 West Virginia Avenue
1932, ca. 1937, ca. 1960

Two contributing buildings

In 1922, A. F. Briggs Sr. built a frame gas station, the Mountain View Station, on the southwest corner of Virginia Avenue and Thirteenth Street. He had to obtain a lease from Southern Railway, since the property was downhill from the tracks within the railroad right-of-way. Sanborn maps show that Briggs's station stood diagonally to face the corner. In 1932, Ira Kincaid and Grady Patterson purchased the business and replaced the frame building with a brick one – the current building – that faced Thirteenth Street. The new station (one contributing building) sold Esso gasoline and other products. Two open work bays were attached to the south side of the service station, and a small, detached garage (one contributing building) was built immediately behind (west of) the station. Later, the narrow gap between the two was infilled

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with bricks. In 1937, Ira Kincaid became a Pontiac dealer and built a showroom and service center behind and attached to the station's garage on West Virginia Avenue. When the Pontiac dealership moved to the north side of West Virginia Avenue around 1950, the former showroom became the dealership's parts department. In 1955, Ira Kincaid retired and his son, Bob, took over the service station. He replaced the two open work bays on the south side of the station with two modern brick-faced service bays between 1955 and 1967. No longer owned by the Kincaid family, the service station is now an auto repair business called Virginia Ave. Auto. The former dealership and garage behind the service station now make up the Bessemer City Motorcycle Shop.³⁵

All sections of the building are one-story in height. Set back from Thirteenth Street, the 1932 service station is a painted- brick building with stretcher-bond walls. Doors are glass-and-wood paneled or just wood paneled, and windows are four-over-one sash. Windows have a soldier-course brick lintel and a projecting brick sill. Those on the front have metal awnings. The most distinguishing feature of the building is its metal Spanish-tile-covered pent eave, above which rises a parapeted cornice which is crenelated on the north side. Originally, Esso gas tanks stood in an island in front of the service station, sheltered by a metal Spanish-tile-covered hipped roof supported by a brick post at either end. The island does not survive. The ca. 1960 service bays on the south side of the original building are concrete block, faced with white-painted brick, and "Happy Motoring!" is painted on the brick across the top. The sections of the complex behind the service station face West Virginia Avenue and are all faced in dark reddish-brown brick. The first, and smallest, section, originally used as a garage, is lower in height than the other sections. It has three windows. One has been boarded up, but the other two are twelve-light metal windows. Exposed rafter ends project across the top from the sloped roof. The 1937 Pontiac showroom and service center is constructed of concrete blocks and sheets of vertically-set standing-seam metal over a frame structural system. The roof slopes gradually from front to rear. The plain brick facade has a parapeted cornice with a small rectangular rise at either end. The east half of this section of the complex, the service center, has a large vehicular opening in the center. Immediately east of the opening is a glass-and-wood-paneled door with a transom (now covered). West of the vehicular opening is a one-over-one sash window. The former showroom at the west end of the complex has two bays. The east bay has a door with window attached to its west side, the whole now enclosed with plywood. The west bay has a large window, the right half of which is enclosed with plywood.

³⁵ Sanborn Maps, 1930, 1939; Bill Kincaid Interview; *Bessemer City Centennial*, 102-103.

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Summary

In 1872, the Atlanta and Charlotte Division of the Richmond and Danville Railroad completed a track through the area of Gaston County, North Carolina, that would become the town of Bessemer City. The area was rich in Bessemer-grade iron ore and timber, which had been exploited for some time, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that entrepreneurs organized to take advantage of the opportunities for improved industry and commerce that rail service afforded. In 1891, the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company was incorporated by a group of investors who had purchased nearly 2,000 acres and had an ambitious plan for developing the area. Not all of their efforts succeeded, but their work did lead to the establishment of a new town. On March 6, 1893, the North Carolina General Assembly ratified an act to incorporate the town of Bessemer City. The layout of the town was two-and-a-half miles long and one-and-a-quarter miles wide, with the railroad running lengthwise through the center and the depot serving as the center point.

Begun in 1895 and completed the following year, Southern Cotton Mills took its place as the first textile mill established in Bessemer City. In 1909, the ownership and corporate name changed to Osage Manufacturing Company. When Reeves Brothers, Inc., a New York textile firm, purchased the mill in 1928, it retained the Osage name and continued to operate the mill for the next sixty-seven years. After a century of supporting the local economy by providing employment to many residents of Bessemer City and the surrounding area, the mill closed in 1995. Across Eleventh Street from the first mill, Whetstone Cotton Mills was established in 1903 to produce cotton damask cloth. It was a smaller operation than the Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company, but under various names and ownerships, the mill continued to operate until 1963. The Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company and the Whetstone Cotton Mills are both significant for their role in driving Bessemer City's economy over a period of many years. They are two of only three surviving mill complexes in the town, which once was home to five mills of some duration. The establishment of Bessemer City's textile mills brought about an increase in the town's population as the need for a larger workforce grew.

With the development of the town's textile industry, Bessemer City's commercial center began to take shape as the establishment of retail stores, a bank, and a post office became necessary to help provide for the needs of the town's inhabitants. Despite being only six miles from the bustling county seat, Gastonia, which had numerous mills and a much larger downtown, Bessemer City developed as and remained an independent community with its own commercial center. A wide variety of commercial establishments were built along East and West Virginia Avenue and West Pennsylvania Avenue facing directly onto the railroad. The buildings erected during the first half of the twentieth century in Bessemer City's downtown and that survive are

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primarily of brick construction, but several were built with concrete blocks, a building material that became highly popular right after the turn of the twentieth century. All the commercial buildings are either one or two stories, and most are of simple design. Of the twenty-five commercial buildings in the historic district, ten date from the first quarter of the twentieth century and fifteen from the second quarter. Only the 1992 City Hall post-dates the end of the period of significance. The mostly well-preserved and compact character of the contiguous commercial buildings forms a cohesive whole that reflects the district's period of significance.

For a century after the railroad's 1872 arrival in the area that was to become Bessemer City, it played an important role in the development and continued life of the community. As the twentieth century progressed, both rail and automobile traffic in Bessemer City increased, necessitating the creation of safer ways for automobiles to cross the railroad tracks. The crossing remained at grade on Twelfth Street because the depot was at that location, but underpasses were added at Eleventh Street in 1913 and Thirteenth Street around 1918, providing for improved access between Bessemer City's two areas of downtown commercial development on either side of the tracks. Both concrete underpasses remain in use.

The Bessemer City Downtown Historic District is a mixed-use area of forty-five resources, seventy-three percent of which contribute to the historic character of the district. The district's resources include twenty-five commercial buildings, two textile mills, three railroad resources, and fifteen secondary resources – mostly small buildings and structures and mostly associated with the mills. The district meets National Register Criterion A, and it is locally significant in the areas of commerce and industry. The district's period of significance extends from 1895, when the first textile mill was begun, to 1964, fifty years ago when the commercial downtown was still thriving and the Osage mill was still going strong.

Historical Background and Commerce and Industry Contexts

As with many towns established in North Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bessemer City's story is one of economic opportunities afforded by the coming of rail service and of entrepreneurs who took advantage of those opportunities by establishing a town and developing local industry and commerce.

Well before Bessemer City was established, the area was a center for the mining of high quality Bessemer-grade iron ore and, to a lesser extent, gold during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Iron ore that had been extracted from the mines was converted to pig iron in furnaces such as the local Ormand Furnace. In addition, the area's virgin forests of pine, oak, maple, and hickory had attracted timber companies interested in logging.³⁶

³⁶ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 2-3, 21; Ragan, 72.

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In 1872, the Atlanta and Charlotte Division of the Richmond and Danville Railroad laid a single track through the area that would become Bessemer City. To do so, they had to cut through a hill located southwest of today's downtown Bessemer City that they discovered was composed largely of whetstone, a hard, fine-grained stone used for sharpening tools. Making the cut took a year and was considered an engineering feat because of its difficulty. Thereafter, the hill was known as Whetstone Mountain, a name that became closely associated with Bessemer City. The train stop at the place was first known as Wooten Station, named for the engineer in charge of cutting through the rock, John Francis Wooten.³⁷

The community at Wooten Station developed slowly until the early 1890s, when a group of entrepreneurial investors joined together to take advantage of the railroad and the local mining opportunities. As it turned out, their mining efforts did not succeed, because their undertaking began at the very time the area's iron ore was becoming rapidly depleted. Nevertheless, their endeavors led to the formal establishment of a new town, Bessemer City.

In 1891, the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company was incorporated with authorized capital stock of \$5,000,000, subscribed stock of \$650,000, and paid-in stock totaling \$457,000. The elected officers and directors brought professional knowledge from various fields intended to provide the necessary skills for accomplishing a range of undertakings. Edwin Mickleby, an iron manufacturer from Pennsylvania and Alabama, was president of the new company. Julian S. Carr, a tobacco manufacturer and banker from Durham, was vice-president. John Askew Smith, a tobacco manufacturer and specialist in minerals from Reidsville then living in Bessemer City, was secretary and treasurer. Serving with these three as directors were J. A. Carroll, a banker and cotton manufacturer from Gaffney City, South Carolina; Dr. B. F. Dixon, president of Greensboro Female College in Greensboro; J. A. Pinchback of Bessemer City, Smith's brother-in-law and a specialist in real estate and minerals; and William D. Rice of Insurance and Loan Association, Richmond, Virginia. Of these, only Smith and Pinchback lived in Bessemer City, and it was they who oversaw the on-site planning and operations of the company.³⁸

The company's prospectus laid out a bold, if over-glorified, plan for developing and profiting from the nearly 2,000 acres in its ownership. Central to the plan was to mine and ship Bessemer iron ore and to build iron and steel works to manufacture the ore into finished products. The company also planned to build a 200-room hotel at a cost of \$150,000, a cotton mill capitalized at \$100,000, two saw and planing mills, a sash, door, and blind factory, a shoe factory, several other manufactories, and a bank. The hotel was under construction at the time the prospectus was released and was situated 125 feet above the railroad track at the top of

³⁷ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 6-7.

³⁸ Prospectus of the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company.

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Whetstone Mountain. With these endeavors promised, the company planned to have a sale in November 1891 of 9,600 business and residential lots. Most residential lots measured 50 by 140 feet and the business lots measured 25 by 140 feet. All lots were to have a twenty-foot alley at the rear. The town-lot property of 1,778 acres ran two-and-a-quarter miles long, with the railroad running the long way through the center of the property. Avenues named for states ran east and west, while numbered streets starting at the east end of town ran north and south. W. R. Richardson, a civil engineer from Greensboro, surveyed and laid out the proposed town.³⁹

On March 6, 1893, the North Carolina General Assembly ratified an act to incorporate the town of Bessemer City. Following the plan of the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company, the corporate limits were defined as two-and-a-half miles long and one-and-a-quarter miles wide with the passenger depot of the Atlanta and Charlotte division of the Richmond and Danville Railroad serving as the center point. Until the next regular election was held, J. A. Pinchback was named mayor and John A. Smith was one of five commissioners.⁴⁰

The other plans of the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company were not as successful as the establishment of the new town. The iron ore business did not prosper as expected. When John A. Smith, the company's principal operator, completed the Mountain Park Hotel atop Whetstone Mountain in 1892, it had sixty-five rooms instead of the projected 200. It remained in operation through the first decade of the twentieth century, and although it failed to attract the tourists Smith had hoped for, it provided many entertainments for the local people. In 1912, C. B. Armstrong of Gastonia foreclosed on a mortgage he held from a loan Smith had taken to finance his Bessemer City Cotton Mills, and the hotel was soon dismantled and hauled away for the materials.⁴¹

The company's textile endeavors did not fare much better. In 1895, John A. Smith and J. A. Pinchback began construction on a cotton mill where foundry shops had stood previously. They completed the card and spinning rooms, but before they could finish the weave room and build the power plant, much less equip the mill with the necessary machinery, they ran out of money. As a result, the proposed mill was sold at a public bankruptcy auction in late 1895. A newly-organized company was chartered as Southern Cotton Mills on December 10, 1895, by J. M. Odell, W. R. Odell, W. H. Branson, and D. B. Coltrane of Concord, North Carolina. They completed construction of the mill in 1896, equipped it with 8,000 spindles and 362 looms, and began operation. Southern Cotton Mills took its place as the first textile mill established in Bessemer City and the eighteenth in textile-rich Gaston County. John M. Odell was the company's first president and his son-in-law, Stonewall Jackson Durham, was secretary, treasurer, and manager. The initial capital stock was \$125,000, but in 1905, it was increased to

³⁹ Prospectus of the Bessemer City Mining and Manufacturing Company; *Bessemer City Centennial*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Private Laws of the State of North Carolina*, 577-578.

⁴¹ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 2, 7, 45, 54.

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\$275,000. With its expanded capital, the company enlarged the mill, increasing its capacity to 16,272 spindles and 400 looms and employing more than 400 workers. Nevertheless, when the Odell textile manufacturing interests in Concord failed as a result of the national economic panic of 1907 and the ensuing depression, like a domino, Southern Cotton Mills followed in 1908. The next year the property was again sold at public auction.⁴²

On February 8, 1909, Slater Manufacturing Company was established for the purpose of purchasing the Southern Cotton Mills property. The officers and directors were experienced cotton manufacturers from across North Carolina. D. B. Coltrane of Concord, who had been one of the organizers of Southern Cotton Mills, was elected president and manager. With capital stock of \$300,000, 15, 216 spindles, 401 looms, and 200 employees, the new company manufactured yarn and madras cloth.⁴³ The corporate name changed to Osage Manufacturing Company on August 19, 1909, but the incorporators remained the same. Although in subsequent years the mill ownership changed several times, the Osage name remained intact for the next eighty-six years. In 1913, C. Judson Huss, an officer of the Huss Manufacturing Company, another Bessemer City textile mill, purchased the Osage mill. At that time the mill was producing cotton drills – a sturdy fabric used for uniforms and work clothes – and jeans fabric. In 1925-1926, with \$350,000 in capital stock, 16, 272 spindles (back to the number in 1905), 388 looms, and 286 employees, the mill produced \$800,000 worth of sheeting cloth. In 1928, Huss and his associates sold the mill to Reeves Brothers, Inc., a New York textile firm whose founders, John M. and M. R. Reeves, had North Carolina connections. The mill was operated as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reeves Brothers, Inc. until 1955, when it was fully absorbed into the company. For sixty-seven years, Reeves Brothers successfully operated the Osage Manufacturing Company, later known as the Osage Plant. During its ownership, Reeves Brothers continued to upgrade and expand the Bessemer City facility. However, in 1995, after a century of supporting the local economy by providing employment to residents of Bessemer City and the surrounding area, the mill closed.⁴⁴

With the Southern Cotton Mills established in 1895, other mills followed. Across Eleventh Street from that first mill, Whetstone Cotton Mills, a smaller, one-story brick structure, was erected in 1903. It was incorporated on June 23, 1903, with Bessemer City attorney Stonewall Jackson Durham serving as its first president. At the time, Durham was also an officer of Southern Cotton Mills. Capital stock for Whetstone Cotton Mills was authorized at \$100,000, but at the time of incorporation, the company had only around \$30,000. With forty-eight broad looms and twenty-eight employees, the mill produced cotton damasks. Spinning equipment was

⁴² Ragan, 72-73; *Bessemer City Centennial*, 8.

⁴³ Why the reported number of spindles was more than 1,000 less than the number in 1905, and the number of employees was only half the number in 1905 is not known.

⁴⁴ Ragan, 73-74; Department of Labor and Printing, Annual Reports, 1910 and 1925-1926.

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not necessary, because the company purchased its yarn from other manufacturers. Like Southern Cotton Mills, Whetstone Cotton Mills was inadequately financed and operated, and with the panic of 1907 and the depression that followed, it suffered. When Southern Cotton Mills failed in 1908, Whetstone Cotton Mills, with some of the same financial backers as the earlier mill, also failed.⁴⁵

However, C. Judson Huss, Averitt A. McLean, and their Gastonia associates soon purchased Whetstone Cotton Mills and on March 9, 1909, they incorporated as Huss Manufacturing Company. The authorized capital was \$100,000, though initially only a quarter of that was subscribed. Labe Jenkins, who was president of Gastonia's First National Bank, was elected president of the new company, and Judson Huss was made secretary and treasurer. In 1909, the new company built an addition to the mill measuring 42 by 140 feet. In a change of direction, the company installed 2,500 spindles and seven cards for the production of carded yarn to be used on the forty-eight looms already in operation. After the addition was built, seventy-five employees produced table damask and duck cloth. In 1915, the mill's equipment increased to 6,000 spindles and 166 broad looms. A. A. McLean, who had become the major stockholder, then became president of the company, and A. A. McLean Jr. became secretary, treasurer, and manager. In 1918, the company's capital stock was raised to \$175,000 with authority to increase to \$250,000 and to issue \$75,000 in preferred stock. As a result, the mill's machinery increased dramatically to 10,000 spindles and 136 looms for making both mercerized and plain damask table cloth. On March 1, 1920, McLean Manufacturing Company was incorporated and took over the assets and business of Huss Manufacturing Company. After five years of operation as McLean Manufacturing Company, business declined and the mill was sold to Robert, Frank, and Max Goldberg, immigrants from Russian Latvia who arrived in Bessemer City in 1914. In 1925, the Goldberg brothers incorporated American Cotton Mills, Inc. No. 2 and, with Frank Goldberg as president, acquired the mill, equipment, and other assets of the McLean Manufacturing Company. That year, the mill reported having 117 employees, and its estimated yearly output of tire fabric and sheeting was valued at an impressive \$1.2 million. Nevertheless, with the arrival of the Great Depression several years later, troubles beset the mill. Despite drastic cost cuts, including cutting wages by thirty percent, American Cotton Mills No. 2 did not survive the Depression and foreclosed in 1935. On April 15, 1936, Algodon Manufacturing Company was incorporated, with Frank Goldberg, C. Clyde Armstrong, and Robert Goldberg as incorporators. Under a court-approved reorganization, the new corporation purchased American Cotton Mills No. 2, but in 1937, the mill's assets were liquidated. The mill then became the Algodon Manufacturing Division of Pyramid Mills and operated as such for nearly thirty years until that

⁴⁵ Ragan, 114-115.

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company was liquidated in 1963. In 1977, current owner Henry P. Moore purchased the mill for his Dawn Processing Company. It produces decorative tassels for use with fabrics.⁴⁶

As both of these mills, and especially Osage, expanded over the years, changes were made to their physical plants. These changes – some of which are historic, dating prior to 1964 – covered some of the earlier sections of the mills. At both mills, most of the windows were bricked or blocked up during the late 1950s or early 1960s when air conditioning was installed. All these changes were consistent with those typically made at successful textile mills that continued operating throughout the twentieth century. At both mills, the early periods of construction and the later changes that came with expansion are apparent.

The Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company and the Whetstone Cotton Mills-Huss Manufacturing Company-Algodon Manufacturing Division of Pyramid Mills are both significant for their role in Bessemer City's economy over a period of many years. The other mills established in Bessemer City, including three of some duration – experienced many of the same financial problems as did these two. According to Gaston County textile historian Robert Ragan, all of Bessemer City's mills, at least in their early years, suffered both from undercapitalization and from having principals who lacked familiarity with the technical aspects of manufacturing and with the financial and marketing knowledge needed to successfully operate a textile mill.⁴⁷

The Bessemer City Cotton Mills was incorporated in 1897, but the mill was not built or put into operation until 1901-1902. It constituted the second try at textile manufacturing undertaken by J. A. Smith and J. A. Pinchback, whose previous attempt with the mill that became Southern Cotton Mills had so quickly ended in bankruptcy. The mill produced madras, other cloth weaves, yarn, and wide sheeting. The Bessemer Cotton Mills failed in 1908, but by 1914, the Gambrill and Melville Mills Company had purchased the mill and operated it until 1963. It eventually had 200-225 workers. Located on the south side of East Virginia Avenue between Ninth and Tenth Streets, the 125,000 square-foot mill was a two-story brick building with an impressive four-story tower. It was demolished in recent years.⁴⁸

Chartered in 1905, Vermont Mills, Inc. was the fourth textile mill built in Bessemer City. For many of its years, the mill's ownership followed a parallel history with that of Whetstone Cotton Mills. With related ownership, when Southern Cotton Mills and Whetstone Cotton Mills failed in 1908, so did Vermont Mills. The mill changed both ownership and names multiple times. Later incarnations included the Akron Manufacturing Company, the Atlas Manufacturing Company, American Cotton Mills, Inc. (No. 1), and the Algodon Manufacturing Company. As

⁴⁶ Ragan, 115-116; Department of Labor and Printing, Annual Reports, 1910 and 1925-1926; Deed Book 1220, p. 501.

⁴⁷ Ragan, 134.

⁴⁸ Ragan, 108-109.

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the Atlas Manufacturing Company, the mill produced coarse cotton yarns for the manufacture of gas masks and cartridge belts for the military. At one time the mill had as many as 300 workers. The one-story-with-basement brick building of 153,000 square feet has had many alterations, but it remains standing on East Alabama Avenue, several blocks east of the Whetstone Cotton Mills.⁴⁹

In 1906, J. A. Smith and J. A. Pinchback made their third and final attempt at establishing a successful textile mill in Bessemer City when they incorporated the Smith Cotton Mills Company. Located next to the Bessemer City Cotton Mills on East Virginia Avenue, the one-story brick mill began operations in 1907. Unfortunately, like its predecessors, Smith Cotton Mills was undercapitalized, and soon Smith and Pinchback were in financial trouble. The mill changed ownership twice before being bought, along with Bessemer City Cotton Mills, by Gambrill and Melville Mills Company in 1914. Thereafter, the two mills shared a common history, including being demolished in recent years.⁵⁰

Other attempts at textile manufacturing in Bessemer City included: Crescent Mills, incorporated in 1906 but never built; George Cotton Mills, incorporated in 1919 but liquidated before it could start operating; and the Brison Manufacturing Company, organized in 1919 but sold in 1921, becoming the Buffalo Mills. Nothing else is known of this mill, including where it was located and how long it remained in operation.⁵¹

Bessemer City's population increased as the town's textile mills required more and more workers. Local tradition claims that when the town was incorporated in 1893, there were only six families living in the community. By 1900, however, that number had grown dramatically to nearly 600 residents. By 1912, population had nearly doubled, to 1,100.⁵² With the growing population, houses, churches, and schools were built. For many years, at least five boarding houses were located in the 100 block of East Virginia Avenue, where they were in walking distance of the mills.⁵³ A ca. 1914 photograph shows a rather barren landscape with the railroad track on raised land, plain one- and two-story frame houses on the north side of the track, West School on the hillside, and the long Mountain View Hotel with its two-tier porches still standing at the top of Whetstone Mountain and dominating the landscape.⁵⁴

As the early years of the twentieth century progressed, both rail and automobile traffic increased, necessitating improved vehicular access between the areas of development on either side of the tracks. Twelfth Street continued to cross the track at grade, because the depot was

⁴⁹ Ragan, 123.

⁵⁰ Ragan, 134-135.

⁵¹ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 49; Ragan, 167-177, 422.

⁵² *Bessemer City Centennial*, 22, 56.

⁵³ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 26.

⁵⁴ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 21.

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there, but underpasses at Eleventh Street – between the Osage and Whetstone mills – and at Thirteenth Street were built in 1913 and ca. 1918, respectively.⁵⁵ From 1872 to around 1918, only one railroad track ran through Bessemer City, but at that point, Southern Railway laid a second, parallel track. This was part of a much larger project undertaken by the railroad from 1901 to 1919 to lay double tracks all the way from Washington, D.C. to Atlanta. The double tracks remained until after World War II, when one was taken up, leaving the single track that remains today.⁵⁶

With the development of the town's textile industry, even with its fits and starts, Bessemer City's commercial center began to take shape as the establishment of commercial enterprises, a bank, a post office, and, eventually, a city hall became necessary to provide for the needs of the town's inhabitants. Despite being only six miles from the bustling county seat, Gastonia, which had numerous mills and a much larger downtown, Bessemer City developed as and remained a separate community with its own commercial center.

The development of Bessemer City's infrastructure encouraged the growth of the town as a whole, but particularly its commercial center. Telephone lines were laid in 1904. When electric lines came in 1909, street lights were installed that same year. Between 1912 and 1914, water and sewer lines were laid and ten blocks of sidewalks on multiple avenues and streets were poured. Paved streets followed a decade later, in 1924.⁵⁷

Still, business directories for 1903 and 1915 and Sanborn maps for 1922, 1930, and 1939 – when compared with Bessemer City's downtown today – suggest that the growth of the town's commercial center was relatively slow. In 1903, there were three doctors, one lawyer, one newspaper, two sales and livery stables, and six general merchants. More than a decade later, in 1915, there was still one lawyer and one newspaper, but only two doctors. The town had one additional livery stable, and there were several general merchants. In addition, one druggist, one bank, and four hotels and boarding houses had been added to the mix.⁵⁸ Sanborn maps provide more visual clues to the development of the town's commercial center, but only during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s when the maps were made for Bessemer City. In 1922, downtown Bessemer City had nineteen commercial buildings on East and West Virginia Avenue and West Pennsylvania Avenue. Four of those were frame, and there were still numerous vacant lots and several one- and two-story frame houses. In 1930, several dwellings still stood on the commercial streets, but ten additional commercial buildings had filled in many of the vacant lots,

⁵⁵ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 56, 74.

⁵⁶ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 74; Andrew Thomas email.

⁵⁷ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 25, 45, 52.

⁵⁸ *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory*, 1903, 1915.

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especially on West Virginia Avenue. By 1939, probably due to the Depression, only two commercial buildings had been added to the local streetscape.⁵⁹

A wide variety of commercial establishments took their place along the streets that faced the railroad right-of-way – East and West Virginia Avenue and West Pennsylvania Avenue. Among these were Gamble Hardware at 101 East Virginia Avenue beginning in 1952 and Froneberger Hardware (built ca. 1935) at 134 West Virginia Avenue; Central Drug Store (built 1927) at 112 West Virginia Avenue and Curtis Pharmacy at 102 West Virginia Avenue beginning in 1932; grocery stores at 113 East Virginia Avenue in late 1920s, and at 104 (built ca. 1920), 120 (built ca. 1926), and 122 (built ca. 1920) West Virginia Avenue; cafes and restaurants at 117 East Virginia Avenue (built ca. 1950) and at 106 (built ca. 1945) and 130 (built ca. 1930) West Virginia Avenue; as well as numerous dry goods, clothing, and department stores. The Bessemer City Bank, beginning in 1912 at 107 West Pennsylvania Avenue and the First State Bank and Trust Company (later First Union Bank) beginning ca. 1927 at 124 West Virginia Avenue attended to the banking needs of local residents. The Roxie Theatre at 118 West Virginia Avenue (built ca. 1920) and the Rex Theatre at 110 West Virginia Avenue (built ca. 1950) provided entertainment. As automobiles took on a more important role in the lives of many Americans, Henry Holden operated an auto repair shop in the 1920s and 1930s at 136 West Virginia Avenue, Ira Kincaid built an Esso service station at 201 West Virginia Avenue in 1932 and a Pontiac dealership in 1937 at 203 West Virginia Avenue, and a Western Auto store was built at 113 East Virginia Avenue around 1950. The buildings that housed these businesses all survive in the historic district, and they, along with other businesses, provided residents of Bessemer City with most of their commercial needs for many years.

Initially, the commercial buildings were primarily of frame construction, but as the years passed and prosperity grew, more permanent masonry buildings were constructed.⁶⁰ Southern Cotton Mills built one of the earliest brick stores in town for its employees. Located across from the mill at the southwest corner of West Pennsylvania Avenue and South Twelfth Street, the one-story brick building remains standing but has been completely modernized.⁶¹

Two lots west of the mill store, the Whetstone Masons constructed a two-story masonry building for their lodge in 1906-1907 that was an early example of concrete block construction. While the Masons met on the second floor, they leased other rooms to a variety of businesses and professionals. Among the many occupants of the building at one time or another were Dr. W. S. Matthews, the telephone exchange – lines had been laid in 1904 – and the printer W. A. Westmoreland, who published the *Bessemer City Journal*. During the building's early years, the front section of the first floor was occupied by the Bessemer City Bank, which had been

⁵⁹ Sanborn Map, 1922, 1930, 1939.

⁶⁰ Sanborn Map, 1922, 1930, 1939.

⁶¹ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 47; Sanborn Map, 1922; Kincaid Interview.

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chartered by 1912, and later the town's post office was housed in the building for a time. Other occupants included a cloth store, a salvage store, a florist, and the Boy Scouts.⁶² By 1930, other commercial buildings lined West Pennsylvania Avenue between the Whetstone Masonic Lodge and Thirteenth Street. However, most of those either were constructed after 1964 or were greatly modernized from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s.⁶³ Thus, that portion of the street is not included in the historic district.

Of the twenty-five commercial buildings in Bessemer City's Downtown Historic District, ten date from the first quarter of the twentieth century and fifteen from the second quarter. The oldest commercial buildings were erected during the first decade of the twentieth century. They include the buildings at 102 West Virginia Avenue (ca. 1905), 101 West Pennsylvania Avenue (1906) and 107 West Pennsylvania Avenue (1907), although the latter two were remodeled in later years. The 1910s saw the construction of the two railroad underpasses – the one at Eleventh Street in 1913 and the one at Thirteenth Street ca. 1918. Some commercial buildings may also have been erected during this decade. However, without knowing for sure, they are dated ca. 1920. They all appear on the 1922 Sanborn map. These include the buildings at 105 West Pennsylvania Avenue, which was remodeled ca. 1960, and 104, 114, 118, 122, and 136 West Virginia Avenue, some of which were later remodeled. Judging from a comparison of the 1922 and 1930 Sanborn maps, 113 East Virginia Avenue and 112, 120, and 124 West Virginia Avenue were all built in the 1920s. Likewise, using the 1930 and 1939 Sanborn maps, it appears that 115 East Virginia Avenue and 128-130, 134, and 201-203 West Virginia Avenue were constructed during the 1930s. Only 101 East Virginia Avenue and 106-108 West Virginia Avenue are thought to date from the 1940s, the decade when construction was limited due to the lack of materials during World War II. The buildings at 105 and 117 East Virginia Avenue and 110 and 138 West Virginia Avenue appear to have been built around 1950. Remodeling of some of the buildings was undertaken from the 1960s through the 1980s, and the Whetstone Masonic Lodge (107 West Pennsylvania Avenue) was remodeled in 1990. The last building constructed in the district is City Hall (132 West Virginia Avenue), which was built in 1992 to replace an earlier City Hall on the same site. The year 1992 also saw the creation of Centennial Park at 116 West Virginia Avenue. An analysis of these dates suggests that the development of the district progressed at a fairly even pace during the first half of the twentieth century.

The overall well-preserved and compact character of the commercial buildings forms a cohesive whole that reflects well the district's 1895-1964 period of significance in an economy governed in large part by the successes and failures of the town's textile mills over a period of more than half a century.

⁶² *Bessemer City Centennial*, 25-26, 181; Sanborn Map, 1922, 1930; Kincaid Interview; *The Dispatch*, March 8, 1912.

⁶³ Sanborn Map, 1922, 1930; *Bessemer City Centennial*, 117.

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For nearly a century after 1872, when the railroad first arrived in the area that was to become Bessemer City, it played an important role in the development and continued life of the community. While freight service supported local industry and commerce, passenger service provided the town's residents with easy access to other places, both for work and pleasure. However, the train's role in Bessemer City life began to change after the mid-twentieth century. In 1961, the depot that had been built in 1900 was dismantled and replaced with a small, concrete-block freight station. A decade later, in 1972, Southern Railway discontinued scheduled train stops in Bessemer City and turned the depot over to the city. The following year, the city dismantled the concrete-block depot and moved it from its site on Twelfth Street between Virginia and Pennsylvania Avenues to the city's maintenance headquarters. Knowing the importance of the Twelfth Street location as the historic heart of Bessemer City, the City Council extended the downtown park to include the site.⁶⁴ Today, although trains no longer stop in Bessemer City, they still fly through town several times a day, and the downtown park that extends along the north side of the railroad right-of-way between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets serves as a central gathering place for Bessemer City residents.

⁶⁴ *Bessemer City Centennial*, 10, 167.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References

5) 17 474080 3904250

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Bessemer City Downtown Historic District is shown by the heavy black line on the accompanying district map, drawn to a scale of 1" = 200'.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the Bessemer City Downtown Historic District is drawn to include the intact historic downtown commercial buildings, the two surviving historic textile mills adjacent to the commercial downtown, and the Norfolk Southern Railroad right-of-way with its tracks and two underpasses . The built environment within the historic district is distinguished from that which lies outside the district due to changes in land use, the presence of more recent development, and/or the condition of or alterations to buildings in the surrounding area.

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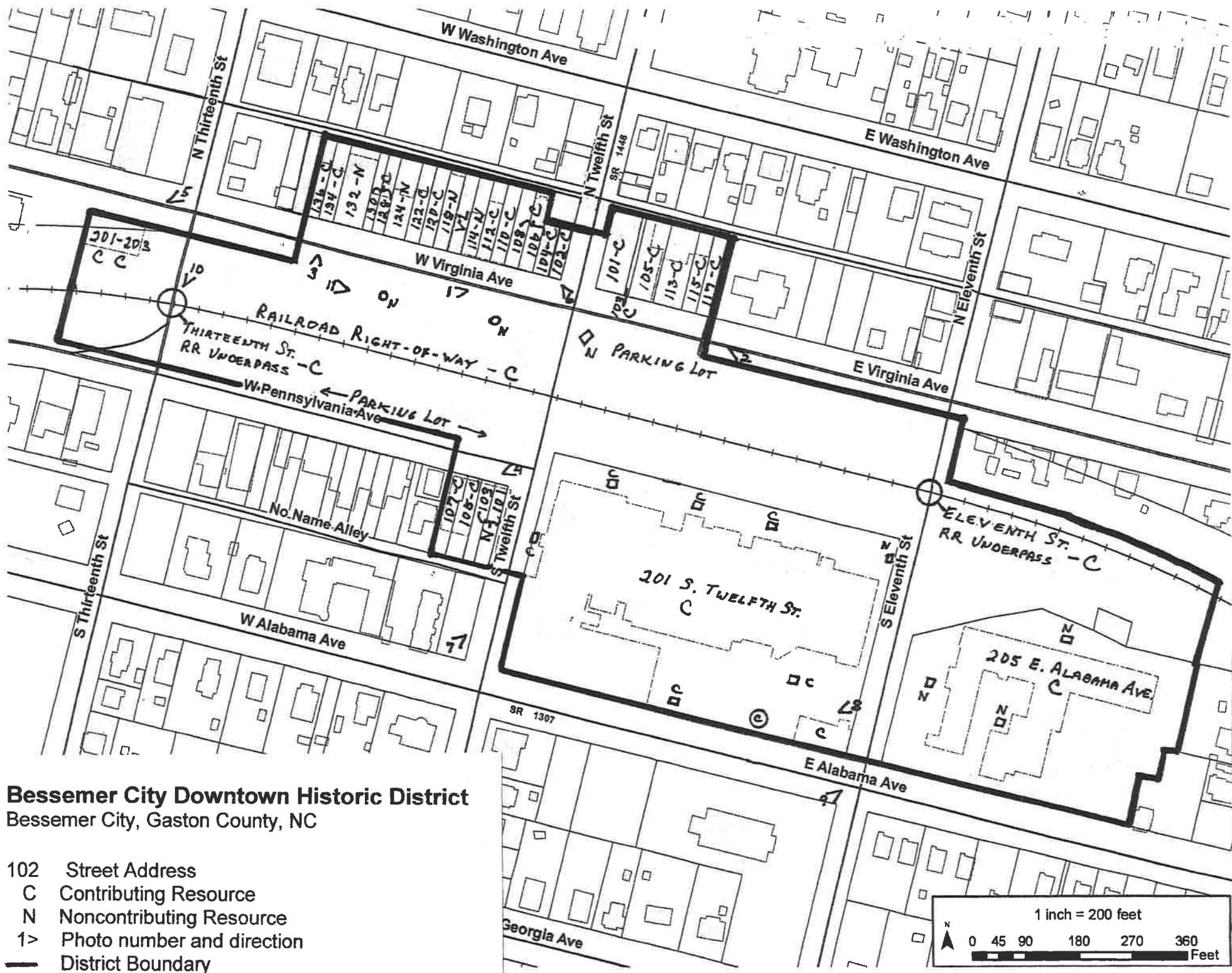
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Gaston County, North Carolina

PHOTOGRAPHS

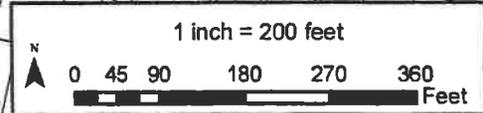
The following information for #1-5 applies to all nomination photographs:

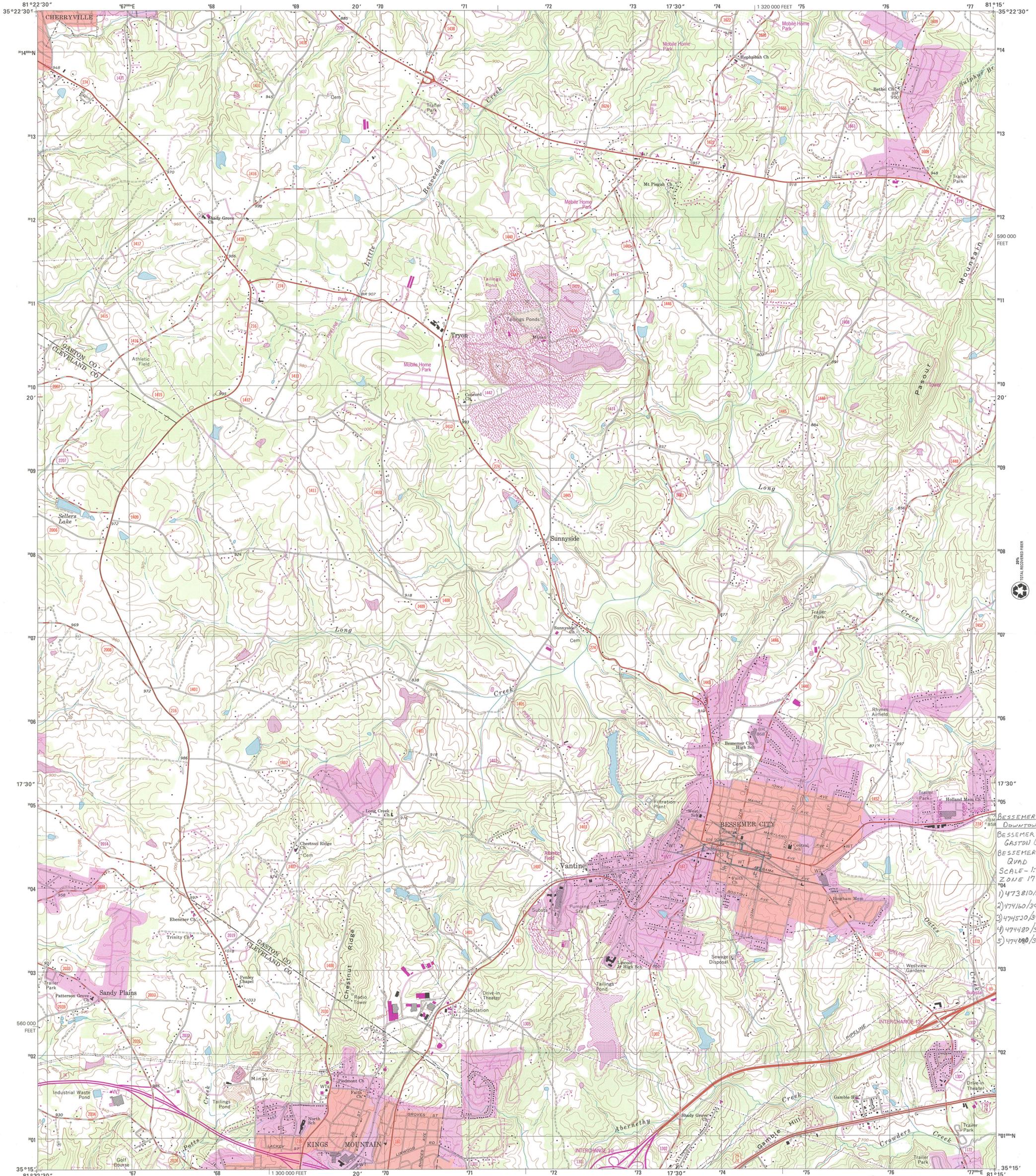
- 1) Bessemer City Downtown Historic District
- 2) Bessemer City, Gaston County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) April 2013
- 5) CD: NCHPO, Raleigh, North Carolina
- 6-7)
 - 1: Streetscape, 100 block West Virginia Avenue, view to northeast
 - 2: Streetscape, 100 block East Virginia Avenue, view to northwest
 - 3: Streetscape, 132-136 West Virginia Avenue, view to north
 - 4: Streetscape, 101-107 West Pennsylvania Avenue, view to southwest
 - 5: Kincaid Service Station and Pontiac Dealership, 201-203 West Virginia Avenue, view to southwest
 - 6: Curtis Pharmacy, 102 West Virginia Avenue, view to northwest
 - 7: Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company, 201 South Twelfth Street, view to northeast
 - 8: Southern Cotton Mills-Osage Manufacturing Company, 201 South Twelfth Street, water reservoir with water tower and cotton warehouse in background, view to west
 - 9: Whetstone Cotton Mills-Huss Manufacturing Company-Algodon Manufacturing Division of Pyramid Mills, 205 East Alabama Avenue, view to northeast
 - 10: Thirteenth Street Railroad Underpass, view to southwest
 - 11: North side, railroad right-of-way between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets, view to east



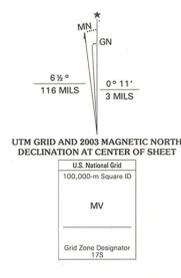
Bessemer City Downtown Historic District
 Bessemer City, Gaston County, NC

- 102 Street Address
- C Contributing Resource
- N Noncontributing Resource
- 1> Photo number and direction
- District Boundary





Produced by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Topography compiled 1973. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1993 and other sources. Photosinspected using imagery dated 2002; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1973. Boundaries, other than corporate, verified 2003 North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10 000-foot ticks: North Carolina coordinate system (Lambert conformal conic) 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 17S 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 Geographic Survey NADCON software. Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours.



SCALE 1:24 000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
(TO CONVERT ELEVATIONS TO THE NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1988, SUBTRACT 1 FOOT)
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
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A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway: solid line with red dashes
Hard surface: solid line with black dashes
Secondary highway: solid line with red dashes
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface: solid line with black dashes
Unimproved road: solid line with red dashes
Interstate Route: red shield
U.S. Route: white shield with red border
State Route: white shield with black border

QUADRANGLE LOCATION: Map of North Carolina showing the location of the Bessemer City quadrangle.

1	2	3	1 Cherryville
4	5	6	2 Lincolnton West
7	8	9	3 Lincolnton East
10	11	12	4 Waco
13	14	15	5 Gastonia North
16	17	18	6 Grover
19	20	21	7 Kings Mountain
22	23	24	8 Gastonia South

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLES

BESSEMER CITY, NC 2002
NIMA 4754 IV SE-SERIES V842

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