



## NHL Executive Summary



**Name of Property:** F. W. Woolworth Company Building

**City, State:** Greensboro, NC

**Period of Significance:** February 1, 1960 – July 25, 1960

**NHL Criteria:** 1

**NHL Theme:**

- II. Creating Social Institutions and Movement
  - 2. Reform movements
- VII. Shaping the Political Landscape
  - 3. Parties, Protests, and Movements

**Previous Recognition:** National Register of Historic Places, 1984 (Downtown Greensboro Historic District)

**National Historic Context:** *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations*



### **Significance:**

- On February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College (N.C. A&T) began sit-ins at the lunch counter at the F. W. Woolworth Company Building in Greensboro to defy and protest racial segregation. The Greensboro sit-ins are nationally significant because they sparked direct-action protests which by the end of the year had attracted participation by more than 70,000 people across the United States demanding racial equality in public accommodations.
- The lunch counter sit-ins by the four students—who came to be known as the Greensboro Four—reinvigorated the modern civil rights movement by shifting strategy away from voter registration drives and boycotts and towards nonviolent direct-action protests as such sit-ins.
- The Greensboro sit-ins on February 1, 1960, introduced a new youthful leadership in the civil rights movement that led to the formation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which challenged older leaders from the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Henceforth the youth set the course of civil rights protest over the next five years.
- The defiance of the Greensboro Four characterized and inspired the aggressive insistence by young people of the 1960s that the United States fulfill its ideals of freedom and equality, inspiring protest movements by other oppressed groups such as women and Native Americans and sparking the student-led Free Speech movement and protests against the Vietnam War.
- By targeting public accommodations, the Greensboro sit-ins initiated a constitutional debate over the government’s role in ensuring equal access to all aspects of American life for all persons and played a key role in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Prior to the Greensboro sit-ins, the courts had taken the lead in race reform in America, but with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress took the lead in race reform for the first time since Reconstruction.

### **Integrity:**

- The F. W. Woolworth Company Building is in its original and historic location, and its setting in a downtown commercial shopping district is remarkably intact. Many of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century storefronts appear as they did during the NHL period of significance.
- The building’s distinctive Woolworth signs and awning convey the feeling of the well-known five-and-dime store, which was the backdrop for picketing by African American students in 1960. Most of the building’s historic exterior design, materials, and workmanship have been preserved through restoration and replacement in kind. Modern elements are confined to the southeast corner storefronts that were not part of the Woolworth department store.
- The interior’s most significant feature—the lunch counter—has been preserved and restored to its historic appearance and layout, and retains a high degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The lunch counter is situated its historic location within the building in an area where historic wall and ceiling finishes and flooring are retained. For many visitors, standing in front of the lunch counter is an emotional experience, indicating it retains integrity of feeling.
- On the interior, integrity of design and feeling is diminished by the removal of the partition wall separating the historic Woolworth store from the stores in the corner storefronts and by the subdivision of the historically open department store space into exhibits. Nonpermanent exhibit walls and a non-historic escalator form the perimeter of the lunch counter area.
- The Greensboro Woolworth is the single building most closely associated with the Greensboro sit-ins that began on February 1, 1960. Compared to other sit-in locations of the same era, the Greensboro Woolworth retains a high degree of integrity. Other identified sit-in locations have undergone more



extensive alterations, and none possesses a comparably high degree of integrity of association with the sit-in movement as the Woolworth in Greensboro.

**Owner of Property:** Sit-in Movement, Inc. (dba International Civil Rights Center & Museum)

**Acreage of Property:** 0.37 acre

**Origins of Nomination:**

The citizens who organized the Sit-In Movement, Inc., to save the F. W. Woolworth Company Building from demolition began inquiring about National Historic Landmark designation after Woolworth closed the lunch counter in 1993, but the effort stalled. In 2017, scholars and preservationists assisting the Georgia State University (GSU) World Heritage Initiative identified the Greensboro Woolworth as a potential component of UNESCO World Heritage serial nomination for U.S. Civil Rights Movement Sites. Since World Heritage program requirements specify that a site must have achieved the highest federal designation possible, the Sit-In Movement, Inc., in consultation with the GSU World Heritage Initiative, resumed the effort to seek NHL designation. In October 2021, the National Historic Landmarks Committee completed a preliminary review of the proposed designation to address concerns about integrity and recommended preparation of the nomination that is under consideration here.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

Acknowledged as the point of origin for a watershed moment in American history, the Woolworth is the source of great pride not just for the people of Greensboro and North Carolina but the region and nation as a whole. The property owner and the local community are supportive of designation of the property as a National Historic Landmark. NHL designation would also support the U.S. Civil Rights Movement Sites serial nomination to the World Heritage List.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

None known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of March 26, 2024):**

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**