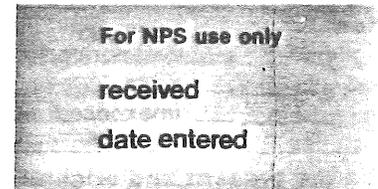


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic White Furniture Company

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Northeast corner of East Center and North Fifth Streets not for publication

city, town Mebane vicinity of congressional district Sixth

state North Carolina code 037 county Alamance code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Attn: Stephen A. White, President  
White Furniture Company

street & number Post Office Drawer 367

city, town Mebane vicinity of state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Alamance County Courthouse

street & number Elm and Main Streets

city, town Graham state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

North Carolina: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (1975) Published  
title by the Hist. American Eng. Record has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

ALSO: Alamance County Architectural Heritage (1980)

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History

city, town 109 East Jones Street Raleigh state North Carolina 27611

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The White Furniture complex occupies a corner lot in a transition area between residential and commercial buildings in the small town of Mebane. The company, established in 1881, is one of the oldest furniture manufacturing plants in the south. A fire in December of 1923 destroyed all buildings except three early twentieth-century structures. These three buildings have been incorporated into the main factory, built in the summer of 1924, which now forms the core of the new White Furniture Plant.

The main factory is an L-shaped, common bond building with the short, two-story section projecting north and the longer elevation facing south. The east portion of the south elevation stands only one story tall while the remaining section of the south elevation is two stories. The most notable feature of the south elevation is large, multi-paned awning windows separating bays across the entire elevation. The present complex consists of this L-shaped factory, annexes constructed between 1926 and 1967 and eight sheds for lumber storage located in the northeast corner of the complex. The additions are concrete or brick rectangular buildings with either concrete or brick foundation. All of the buildings have flat tar and gravel roofs.

The floor plan of the main factory, including its additions, resembles a maze, with numerous passageways, large sliding wooden doors and enclosed metal or wooden stairways connecting every room in the factory. First and second story floors are wood and ceilings are high, in many places as high as twelve feet. Wooden ceiling joists and support posts are visible throughout the factory. Basement rooms have concrete floors and brick support posts.

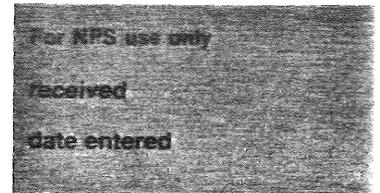
A notable feature of the White Furniture Plant is the absence of noise and dust one associates with furniture-making. Since 1979, White Furniture has been a participant in the Noise Reduction Program administered by North Carolina State University Department of Engineering. As a result of the program, White Furniture has begun building boxes to enclose machinery in an effort (so far, successful) to reduce noise. The program has also assisted the company in developing hoses which vacuum dust produced by cutting and sanding machines.

### Structures (keyed to hand-drawn map)

1. Lumber storage. Lumber storage sheds are rectangular structures varying in size from 1500 to over 9000 square feet. The sheds are located in the northeast section of the plant.
2. Dry Kiln (1905) and Curing Shed (1960). These are two separate but connected single story, concrete block buildings linked to the main factory by a small engine room. The dry kiln is one of the few structures to survive the 1923 fire.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet    Description    Item number    7    Page 1

Divisions of the Main Factory (keyed to hand-drawn map)

3. Machine Rooms (1924, 1946, 1951, 1967). Two large machine rooms and numerous small additions occupy over thirty thousand square feet in the east section of the factory. Much of the machinery (including carts, lathes and saws) was installed in 1924 and is still in operation.

4. Cabinet Room (1924). The cabinet room is two stories high located in the middle section of the factory. On the first floor, the cabinet room is separated from the machine room by a thick, brick wall and a large, wooden sliding door.

5. Finishing Rooms (1924, 1926, 1957). The finishing rooms are located on the second story of the southwest corner of the factory and in two, three-story additions north of the corner. Sanding machinery and large containers of stains, bleach and paint are contained in this section.

6. Warehouse/Shipping (1924, 1967). The finished produce is housed in the same structures in which the finishing rooms are located. Additional warehouse space is contained in an annex at the north end of the plant--connected to the factory by a small passage.

The Process (keyed to hand-drawn map)

1. Lumber is stored in sheds upon its arrival at the plant.

2. A Piece of lumber is selected for use and is brought to the dry kiln or drying shed where it is either kiln or air-dried.

3. Next, the wood is brought into the machine room where the size, shape and thickness of the piece is determined and the piece is cut into a useful dimension.

4. From the machine room, pieces are delivered into the cabinet room where they are glued, nailed, bolted, screwed and fitted together.

5. Fully assembled furniture is brought by a conveyor line into the finishing room where the furniture is bleached (if necessary), then sanded and either stained or painted.

6. Finally, the furniture, ready for sale, is stored in the warehouse where it remains until it is shipped.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1905, 1924 and, later **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The White Furniture Company is located in the Alamance County town of Mebane. Founded in 1881 the firm is the oldest continually operating furniture manufacturing company in North Carolina and one of the oldest in the south. The company was formed when William and David White quit their jobs as railroad telegraphers, pooled their money and purchased a second hand planer and a load of lumber. The company survived the Panic of 1893 and gradually outgrew its modest beginnings. In 1896 a third White brother, Sam, joined the firm. In 1906 the company gained national publicity when it sent sixty carloads of furniture south to Panama to be used by the men building the canal. In late 1923 a major fire destroyed most of the plant. By July of the next year a larger, more modern plant was in operation. White furniture survived the death of David White in 1916, William White in 1935, and Samuel White in 1971. Today the company has an enviable reputation as one of the country's outstanding manufacturers of quality bedroom and dining room furniture. Over 500 people are employed at the Mebane plant and at a much smaller one in Hillsborough. The furniture industry in North Carolina has followed the lead of the Whites and the state is now first in the country in wood household furniture production.

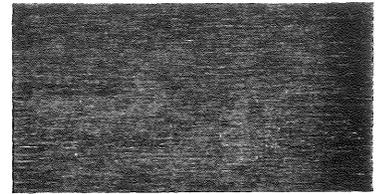
**Criteria Assessment:**

A. The White Furniture Company, founded in 1881 and the oldest continually operating furniture manufacturing company in North Carolina, has been a leader in and an integral part of the growth of the furniture industry in North Carolina which now ranks first in the United States in the production of wood household furniture.

B. White Furniture Company is associated with the lives of the brothers, William E. White (18\_\_-1935 and David White (18\_\_-1916) who founded White Furniture Company in 1881, and their brother, Samuel White (1877-1971) who entered the company in 1896 when it was incorporated. Samuel White's career in the furniture industry from 1896 until his death in 1971 is surely the longest for any individual in that industry in North Carolina. He and his brother William oversaw the rebirth and rebuilding of the plant following the fire in 1923 and as president of the firm from 1935 until 1969, his career was more particularly associated with the physical expansion of the plant in 1946, the 1950s and the 1960s.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet      HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE      Item number 8      Page 1

The White Furniture Company is located in the small Alamance County town of Mebane. It is believed to be the oldest continually operating furniture manufacturer in the state and was one of the first such concerns in the south. The company was started in 1881 by brothers William E. and David A. White. Still operated by members of the White family, the company has entered its second century as one of the country's outstanding names in furniture.

William and David White were members of a distinguished Scotch-Irish family. An earlier David White left Ulster in the 1720s and settled in Pennsylvania. His son Stephanus White settled in the Hawfields region of what was then Orange County around 1760. A shoemaker, Stephanus White prospered in the area. He and his wife the former Ann Ross, had ten children. The seventh of these was Samuel White, who in 1808 married Nancy Mebane, a member of the family for whom the town of Mebane was named. They had eight children, the fourth of whom was Stephen A. White, born in 1826. In 1854 he married Mary Jane Woods, and they had ten children, including William and David.<sup>1</sup> Stephen White was a talented and versatile man who represented Alamance County as a state senator in 1895 and as a representative in 1897. In 1881 he was elected as Mebane's first mayor. White was a druggist, a railroad agent, a postmaster, and an operator of a general store.<sup>2</sup>

Both William and David White were educated at Mebane's Bingham School and both were employed as telegraphers for the Richmond and Danville Railroad in Mebane in 1881 when they decided to pool their resources and start their own company.<sup>3</sup> They "journeyed to Aberdeen to buy an old second hand planer and a carload of lumber from Frank Page."<sup>4</sup> The lumber was used to make a variety of products. The company did not concentrate on furniture until later in the decade.

The small, under-financed company was constantly in debt and almost went bankrupt several times. It survived the Panic of 1893 by only the thinnest of margins.<sup>5</sup> The company was typical of the infant furniture industry in the state which was comprised of only six firms in 1890.<sup>6</sup> The industry "began in small shops, with little capital, producing chiefly for local markets. It prospered because of an increasing demand, proximity to raw materials, and low labor costs."<sup>7</sup>

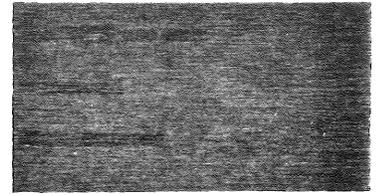
The White Furniture Company was incorporated in 1896. In that same year William and David White were joined by a third brother, James Samuel White. Sam White (1877-1971) graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1896 and began working his way up through the continually expanding company, which employed 32 craftsmen by then.<sup>8</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century White solidified its position as an innovative firm of "quality craftsmen and sound management."<sup>9</sup> In 1906 sixty carloads of furniture went south to the Panama Canal "to furnish the offices and houses of the men who were building the Canal."<sup>10</sup> Much of their business in this period, however, was as a supplier to hotels. In particular a "bedroom suite consisting of a bed, dresser and . . . washstand for \$9 . . . became popular with hotels, hospitals, and other institutions."<sup>11</sup> Asheville's opulent Grove Park Inn, which opened in 1911, was largely supplied with furniture from White. By 1907 the firm had 150 employees.<sup>12</sup>

The company continued to expand into the twentieth century, surviving a number of crises including hard economic times in 1915, the First World War, and the death of co-founder David White in an automobile accident in 1916.<sup>13</sup> White continued its reputation

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Item number 8

Page 2

for innovation in the early 1920s when it became the first user of lacquer in the furniture field. White purchased lacquer from DuPont, establishing a close business relationship that continues to this day.<sup>14</sup> The close relationship with DuPont was useful to the company, when shortly before Christmas of 1923, a sawdust explosion caused a fire which destroyed much of the plant.<sup>15</sup> Within two weeks plans were completed for rebuilding the plant and "Dupont . . . offered its engineering facilities and all possible aid to help rebuild the . . . factory."<sup>16</sup> The new plant reopened in July of 1924 and was hailed as the "most modern furniture plant in the United States." Whereas the old plant employed about 240 men the new plant employed about 350.<sup>17</sup>

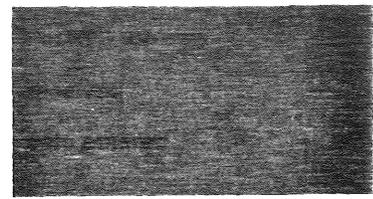
William White died in March of 1935. He had been president of the company since its inception. He was regarded as a "leader in community and civic affairs" at the time of his death. He had been an unsuccessful Republican candidate for Corporation Commissioner in 1912 and was a director of the State Fair.<sup>18</sup> His brother Samuel White took over as president of the firm, which continued to expand. In 1940 a second, smaller factory was opened in Hillsborough. During the Second World War White Furniture "produced 50,000 beds for the Army and a large volume of other furniture for every military use from Liberty ships to nurses' homes." By the end of the war the main Mebane plant was employing around 375 people.<sup>19</sup>

Sam White remained president of the firm until 1969, when he retired and became chairman of the board. A prominent political figure in the state, he was the unsuccessful Republican nominee for Lieutenant Governor in the 1936 election. He also represented the state at the Republican national convention in 1952. White was a director of Winston-Salem's Security Life and Trust Company and was an elder in the Mebane Presbyterian Church for over half century. He died in January of 1971. In 1904 he married Mary Gale Carter (1877-1940) and they had four children. The third of these, Stephen Alexander White, V became president of the firm in 1969, a position that he still holds.<sup>20</sup> White furniture company has maintained its respected position in the furniture business. The Mebane plant currently employs about 500 people. Most of its production is oriented towards individual customers, rather than the institutional orientation it had earlier in the century. In particular formal dining rooms and bedroom suites are the company's best sellers.<sup>21</sup>

As it enters its second century the White Furniture Company has overcome two world wars, the Great Depression, and numerous other economic hard times, and the potentially fatal fire of 1923 to become a thriving business. As the largest employer in Mebane for much of its existence, the company has been instrumental in that town's growth. It has historical importance on a larger scale, however. From modest beginnings North Carolina's furniture industry has turned into a multibillion dollar industry, trailing only textiles, tobacco, food products, and chemicals in statewide dollar value. North Carolina leads the country in production of wood household furniture, producing almost one-third of the industry's output in 1976. The White Furniture Company is one of the firms that has led North Carolina to this position of national dominance in the furniture industry.<sup>22</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Item number 8

Page 3

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>S. W. Stockard, The History of Alamance (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1900), 148-154.

<sup>2</sup>John L. Cheney, Jr. (ed.), North Carolina Government, 1585-1974: A Narrative and Statistical History (Raleigh: Department of the Secretary of State, 1975), 473-475; Walter Whitaker, Centennial History of Alamance County, 1849-1949 (Burlington: Alamance County Historical Association, 1949), 138, hereinafter cited as Whitaker, History of Alamance County; Interview with Samuel White, January 25, 1982, notes in file, hereinafter cited as White interview.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Henry Mason, "Feature of the White Furniture Company of Mebane, North Carolina," unpublished typescript, dated 1932, copy in file, hereinafter cited as Mason, "White Furniture Company"; Greensboro Daily News, March 30, 1935, June 19, 1916; "The White Furniture Company," Ties: The Southern Railway System Magazine, Vol. 15, No. 2 (February, 1961), 10-12. The Richmond and Danville became part of the Southern Railway system in 1894.

<sup>4</sup>Mason, "White Furniture Company."

<sup>5</sup>Mason, "White Furniture Company"; Margaret Holmes, "White Furniture Completes First Century," Mebane Enterprise, January 28, 1981, hereinafter cited as Holmes, "White Furniture."

<sup>6</sup>William Stevens, Anvil of Adversity (New York: Popular Library, 1968), 49-50.

<sup>7</sup>Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, third edition, 1973), 511-512.

<sup>8</sup>Mason, "White Furniture Company"; Mebane Enterprise-Journal, February 4, 1971; Burlington Daily Times-News, April 15, 1954.

<sup>9</sup>Carolyn Knuemann, "Meticulous Craftsmanship: White's Approach to Quality," Furniture Design and Manufacturing, January, 1961, hereinafter cited as Knuemann, "Meticulous Craftsmanship."

<sup>10</sup>Holmes, "White Furniture."

<sup>11</sup>Bill Sharpe, "Alamance Goes Forward," The State, XVII, No. 4, June 25, 1949, 21, hereinafter cited as Sharpe, "Alamance Goes Forward."

<sup>12</sup>White interview.

<sup>13</sup>Greensboro Daily News, June 19, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet    HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE    Item number    8

Page    4

(NOTES--continued)

<sup>14</sup>Knuemann, "Meticulous Craftsmanship."

<sup>15</sup>Greensboro Daily News, December 23, 1923.

<sup>16</sup>Knuemann, "Meticulous Craftsmanship."

<sup>17</sup>Burlington Daily News, July 16, 1924.

<sup>18</sup>Greensboro Daily News, March 30, 1935; News and Observer (Raleigh), March 30, 1935, April 2, 1935.

<sup>19</sup>Sharpe, "Alamance Goes Forward," 11.

<sup>20</sup>Mebane Enterprise-Journal, February 4, 1971; White interview; Greensboro Daily News, August 9, 1981. Stephen Alexander White, V, began working at the company in 1934, following his graduation from the University of North Carolina. His son, Samuel Landis White is the firm's vice-president.

<sup>21</sup>White interview; News and Observer (Raleigh), February 18, 1980.

<sup>22</sup>United States Census Bureau. Department of Commerce, Annual Survey of Manufacturing, 1976, 1978.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 7.5 acres

Quadrangle name Mebane, N. C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A 

1	7	6	5	16	0	4	0	3	9	9	5	7	18	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The property to be nominated consists of Lot 8, Block 797, Alamance County Tax Map #202, on file in the office of the Tax Supervisor, County Office Building, 124 West Elm Street, Graham, N. C. 27253. A copy of the pertinent part of the map is attached.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
-------	-----	------	--------	-----	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Architectural Description by Linda Marquez-Frees (consultant): Historical Research by Jim Sumner (staff)

organization Division of Archives and History date March 30, 1982

street & number 109 East Jones Street telephone (919) 733-6545

city or town Raleigh state N. C.

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *William D. King*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date June 24, 1982

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

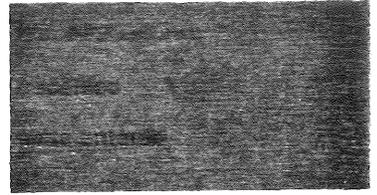
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Item number 9

Page 1

Burlington Daily News. July 16, 1924.

Burlington Daily Times-News. April 15, 1954.

Cheney, John L., Jr. North Carolina Government, 1585-1974: A Narrative and Statistical History. Raleigh: Department of the Secretary of State, 1975.

Greensboro Daily News. June 19, 1916; December 12, 1923; March 30, 1935; August 9, 1981.

Holmes, Margaret. "White Furniture Completes First Century." Mebane Enterprise, January 28, 1981.

Knuemann, Carolyn. "Meticulous Craftsmanship: White's Approach to Quality." Furniture Design and Manufacturing, January, 1961.

Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Newsome, Albert Ray. North Carolina: The History of a Southern State. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, third edition 1973.

Mason, Robert Henry. "Feature of the White Furniture Company of Mebane, North Carolina." Unpublished typescript, dated 1932, copy in file.

Mebane Enterprise-Journal. February 4, 1971. \*

News and Observer (Raleigh). March 30, 1935; April 2, 1935; February 18, 1980.

Sharpe, Bill. "Alamance Goes Forward." The State, Volume XVII, No. 4, June 25, 1949.

Stevens, William. Anvil of Adversity. New York: Popular Library, 1968.

Stockard, S. W. The History of Alamance. Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1900.

Ties: The Southern Railway System Magazine. Vol. 15, No. 2 (February, 1961), 10-12.

United States Census Bureau. Department of Commerce, Annual Survey of Manufacturing, 1976, 1978.

Whitaker, Walter. Centennial History of Alamance County, 1849-1949. Burlington: Alamance County Historical Association, 1949.

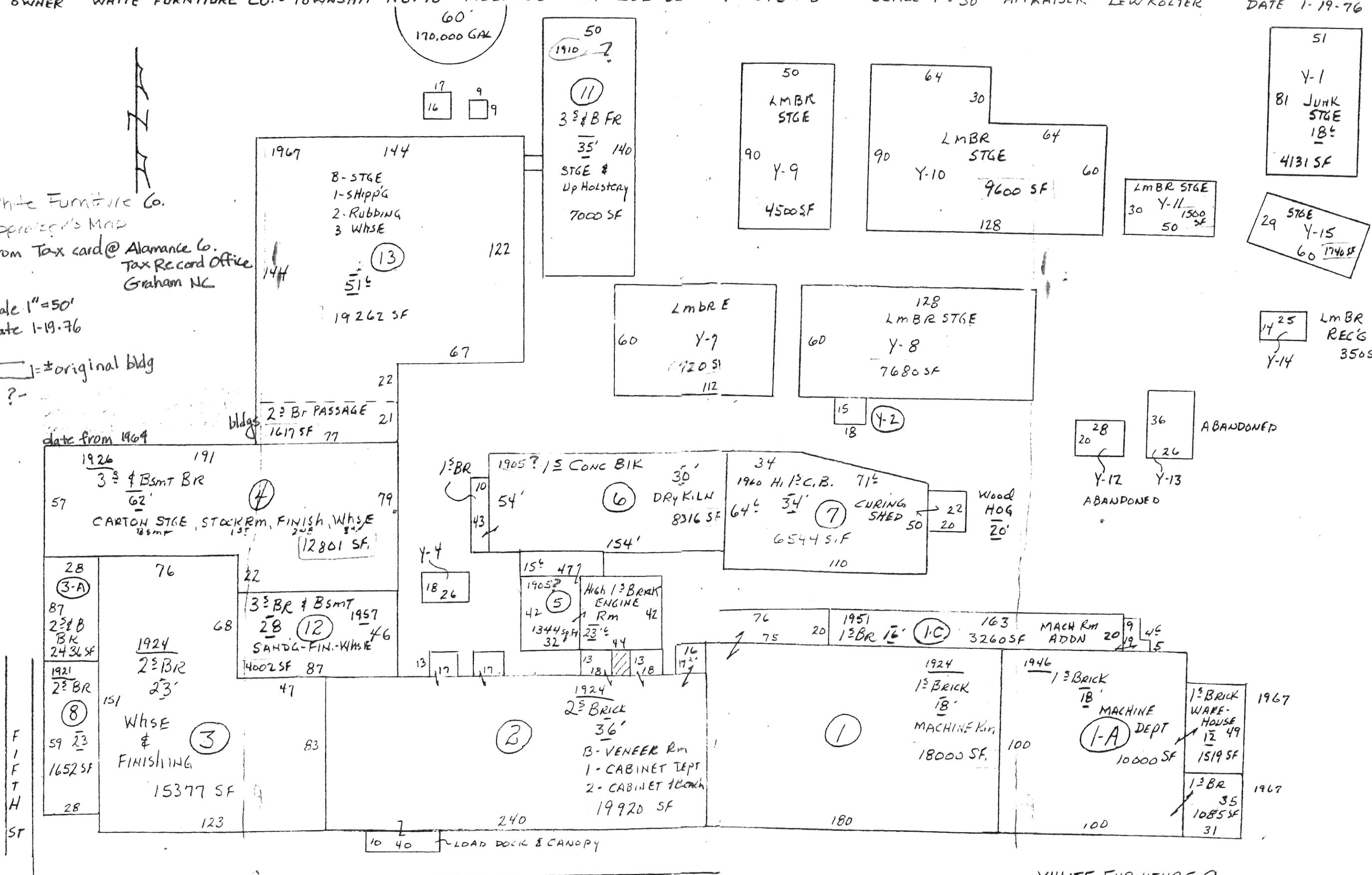
White, Samuel. Interview with. January 25, 1982. Notes in file.

OWNER WHITE FURNITURE CO. - TOWNSHIP NO. 10 - MELVILLE MAP 202 BLOCK 17 LOTS 1-8 SCALE 1"=50' APPRAISER LEW KOLTER DATE 1-19-76

White Furniture Co.  
Appraiser's Map  
from Tax card @ Alamance Co.  
Tax Record Office  
Graham NC

Scale 1"=50'  
date 1-19-76

□ = original bldg  
? -



NOTE:  
BOTH Y-1  
& Y-15 LAY  
APPROX.  
250' NORTH  
OF Y-9 &  
Y-10

ABANDONED

ABANDONED

201 EAST CENTER STREET

WHITE FURNITURE CO.  
MEBANE N.C.

