

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Erwin Commercial Historic District**

Erwin, Harnett County, HT1169, Listed 4/27/2015  
Nomination by Jennifer Martin  
Photographs by Jennifer Martin, December 2013



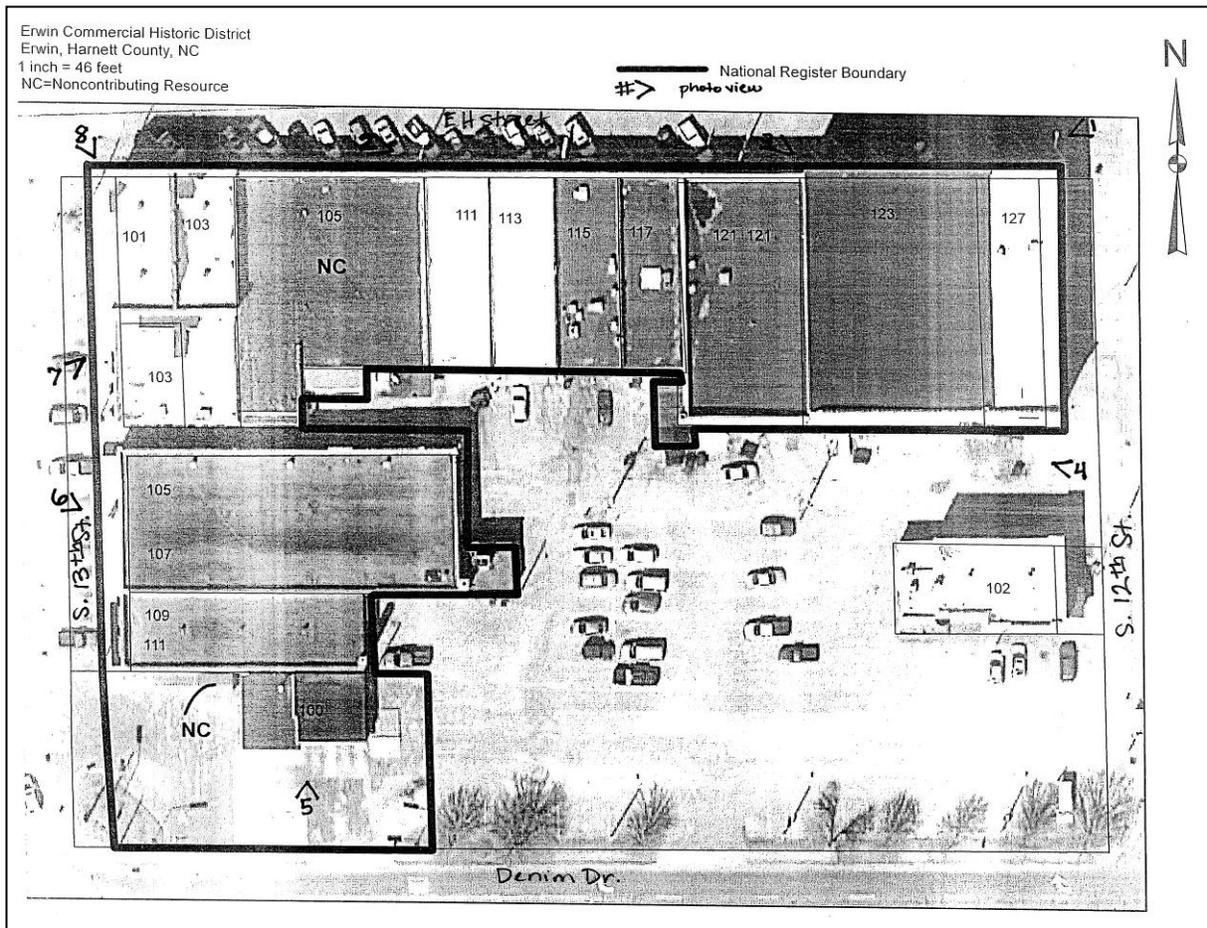
East H Street, looking southwest



Corner of East H and South Thirteenth streets, looking south



South Thirteenth Street, looking east



Historic District Map

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 Erwin Commercial Historic District  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 100 Denim Drive, 101-127 E. H Street, and 103-111 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street n/a  not for publication  
city or town Erwin n/a  vicinity  
state North Carolina code NC county Harnett code 085 zip code 28339

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

|  |                         |                |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| I hereby certify that the property is:   | Signature of the Keeper | Date of Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register.<br><input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet              | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register.<br><input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.  | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.   | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, explain:)  | _____                   | _____          |
| _____  | _____                   | _____          |
| _____  | _____                   | _____          |

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 11           | 2               | buildings  |
| 0            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 0            | 0               | objects    |
| 11           | 2               | 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)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/department store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution
- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional
- COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant
- GOVERNMENT/government office
- SOCIAL/meeting hall

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/department store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant
- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Modern Movement
- Italianate

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Brick
- walls Brick
- roof Asphalt
- other

**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 n/a**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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  
 Architecture  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1906-1965  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1903-1906  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

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:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Erwin Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Harnett County, North Carolina

County and State

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** Approximately 2 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 711340 3911840  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

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

### Boundary Justification

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

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Jennifer Martin

organization MdM Historical Consultants Inc. date December 21, 2014

street & number Post Office Box 1399 telephone 919/368-1602

city or town Durham state NC zip code 27702

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### Additional Documentation

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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.)

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### Property Owner

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

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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**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 listing. 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Erwin Commercial Historic District  
Harnett County, North Carolina

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## *Description*

The Erwin Commercial Historic District is a compact collection of historic retail and service-related buildings in the town of Erwin. Known as Duke until its name changed in 1926, the town of Erwin lies near the southeast corner of Harnett County and was established in the Sandhills of North Carolina in 1855. The Cape Fear River intersects the county from southeast to northwest and runs just west of Erwin. NC 82 runs north to south through the center of town, while US 421 is just to the north.

The district encompasses two street fronts and one property on Denim Drive. It lies immediately south of a former Durham and Southern Railway right-of-way, which the Town of Erwin converted to a greenway after the tracks were removed in 2000. The district's west border is South 13<sup>th</sup> Street, which is also North Carolina Highway 82. The east border is South 12<sup>th</sup> Street, while the south border is Denim Drive, a reference to the fabric produced in Erwin for decades. Erwin follows a grid plan, an intentional layout executed by Erwin Cotton Mills, which created the community as a company town in 1903.

The Erwin Commercial Historic District consists of eleven contributing commercial buildings, one noncontributing commercial building, and one noncontributing storage building. The dates of construction range from 1903-1906 to ca. 1962. In general, buildings are typical of commercial types and forms built in small eastern North Carolina towns from the first decades of the twentieth century into the early 1960s. Parking spaces are immediately in front of the sidewalks that extend along the fronts of buildings on East H Street and South 13<sup>th</sup> Street. The Wade Service Station is set back about fifty feet from Denim Drive and approximately eighty feet from South 13<sup>th</sup> Street and the space between the buildings and those streets is paved with a combination of asphalt and concrete. Gas pumps have been removed from the raised concrete island situated between Denim Drive and the building.

Modern commercial buildings are south of the district, while the former Erwin Mills is to the west. Residential areas are to the north and east. Immediately southeast of the district is a paved parking lot and the 1948 Federal Building, which stands at the northwest corner of Denim Drive and South 12<sup>th</sup> Street, but has been too altered to be included in the district boundaries.

The district's buildings represent Erwin's founding as a mill town and its greatest period of growth. The most ornate building in the district stands at the west end of East H Street. Built from 1903 to 1906, the prominent Italianate-influenced Bank of Harnett/Edward R. Thomas Drug Store has its main entrance in a cutaway corner topped by a denticulated projecting brick hood. Narrow decorative semi-circular projecting arches crown upper-level round-arched windows, while projecting window hoods with dentils top lower rectangular windows. At the east end of the East H Street block, the 1903-1906 Hassell-Johnson Building, also known as the "Big Store," is an imposing two-

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story, eleven-bay brick building with a high, tile-topped parapet. A row of one-story, brick buildings, all constructed around 1920, face north and extend between East H Street's two-story corner anchors. Nearly identical in form and features, they display corbelled brick cornices and flat parapets. Two buildings date to the post-World War II period and reflect the pared down styling typical of that era. Efird's Department Store at 105 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street dates to ca. 1948 and is a large, two-story, modernist brick building with alternatively projecting horizontal brick courses on its upper center façade. The single automobile-related building in the district is the Wade Service Station at 100 Denim Drive. Built around 1962, the one-story, concrete block modernist service station displays large expanses of glass on its façade. The glass front wraps around to the west elevation. A slanted roof anchored on its corner by a round vertical pole tops the retail section.

The following inventory is arranged alphabetically by street name followed by numbered streets, and in numerical order within each street. Information for each building comes from several sources, including local informants, city directories (noted as CD in the entries), the 1925 Sanborn map, and historic photographs in possession of the Erwin Historical Society.

All buildings are categorized as contributing if they were constructed prior to 1965 and retain sufficient integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to contribute to the historic character of the district. Any building built after the end of the period of significance or built before 1965 that have lost their architectural integrity because of substantial additions and/or alterations incompatible with their historic character are categorized as noncontributing. Pate's Grocer at 105 East H Street is noncontributing due to the addition of stucco to the historically brick storefront and the flat metal awning supported by brick posts spanning the storefront. The ca. 1980 storage building at 100 Denim Drive is noncontributing due to its age. All other resources in the district are contributing.

## Inventory

### *Denim Drive*

Wade Service Station  
100 Denim Drive  
ca. 1962  
Contributing Building

The one-story, concrete block, modernist service station displays large expanses of glass on its façade. The façade and west elevation are sheathed in enamel panels, a typical exterior treatment for service stations of the period. The

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larger service bay section is fronted by a pair of divided-light roll-up multi-light garage doors. This section is topped by a flat roof with a parapet. The retail section to the west is fronted by plate glass windows trimmed in metal framing. The original single-leaf, metal door is topped by a single-light transom. The glass front wraps around to the west elevation. A slanted roof anchored on its corner by a round vertical metal pole tops the retail section and extends across the east section as an awning. The building's exterior panels are painted in wide, horizontal blue and white stripes, with the exposed painted concrete block east wall, with two large metal-frame industrial windows, being the exception. Leon Wade was the original owner and operator.

Storage building  
Ca. 1980  
Noncontributing Building

A small, side-gabled two-bay storage building sheathed in synthetic siding stands to the west of the station. A door is on the south elevation and there are windows on the south and west elevations.

## *East H Street*

Bank of Harnett/Edward R. Thomas Drug Store  
101-103 East H Street (at intersection with North 13<sup>th</sup> Street)  
1903-1906  
Contributing Building

The prominent two-story, Italianate-influenced painted-brick building occupies the commercial district's northwest corner. It is six bays wide and seven bays deep. A flat parapet and stepped brick cornice crown the north elevation and the northwest corner, while a bracketed cornice extends along the west elevation. A raised flat parapet is located on the south end of the building. Upper-level round-arched windows are crowned by narrow decorative semi-circular projecting arches, while lower rectangular windows are topped by projecting window hoods with dentils. Concrete steps lead to each entrance. The main entrance is at the cutaway corner and features a replacement door and surround, and a covered transom topped by a projecting brick hood with dentils. Secondary entrances with uncovered transoms are on the west and north elevations; doors at those entrances are replacements as well. Windows on the second story have arched upper sash. Two-over-two windows throughout the building are original. A small, frame, shed-roofed addition is centered on the second floor of the rear (south) elevation. The original occupant, the Bank of Harnett, which was owned by Erwin Cotton Mills, later became Durham Bank and Trust. Edward R. Thomas Drug occupied the east side of the first floor for several decades. Dr. DeWitt C. Woodall had his dental office above the bank in the

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1940s and 1950s. During the same period, a civil defense office was also on the upper floor. A fraternal lodge occupied the upper floor in the mid-twentieth century.

Pate's Grocery  
105 East H Street  
ca. 1920; ca. 2000  
Noncontributing Building

The one-story, brick building displays a corbelled brick cornice and flat, concrete-topped parapet. Brick pilasters divide the three-part façade and the lower storefront is stuccoed. Opaque transoms remain above the storefront, but large plate-glass windows are replacements and are framed in metal. A flat aluminum-clad awning supported by brick posts spans the storefront. The rear elevation features two flat or shed-roofed additions sheathed in aluminum siding. A double-leaf, fully-glazed aluminum door is on the east end of the rear elevation. According to local residents, the Pate family operated this store and a café, also on East H Street in the 1920s. By 1948, Carl's Grocery and Market was located here.

Steinberg's Clothing Store  
111 East H Street  
ca. 1920; ca. 2000  
Contributing Building

The one-story, one-bay brick building displays a corbelled brick cornice and flat, concrete-topped parapet. The storefront is altered with synthetic sheathing, large replacement plate glass windows and doors, and a flat metal awning. While the windows are replacements, their size is appropriate for a commercial building. The original multi-prism transom remains above the awning and is topped by a soldier-course lintel. A pair of modern turned posts on brick plinths frame the storefront. The rear elevation features boarded-up windows and a single-leaf door sheltered by an aluminum awning. Steinberg's was here in 1959, according to the city directory. Prior to Steinberg's long occupation, a clothing store run by Mr. and Mrs. Joyce was located here in the mid-1920s.

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Pope's Variety Store  
113 East H Street  
ca. 1920; ca. 1990  
Contributing Building

The one-story, one-bay, brick building displays a corbelled brick cornice and flat, concrete-topped parapet. The storefront consists of large, plate-glass display windows on a low vinyl-sheathed bulkhead, an original half-glazed, double-leaf door with a transom, and a flat metal awning. The transom above the awning has been covered, but the soldier-course lintel remains visible. The rear elevation features boarded up rectangular windows and a central replacement door under an aluminum awning. Following Pope's, the 3-Star Grocery, operated by Jim Fann, Marvin West, and Floyd Glover, was located here in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Drug Store  
115 East H Street  
ca. 1920  
Contributing Building

The one-story, one-bay brick building displays a corbelled brick cornice and a flat, concrete-topped parapet. The storefront consists of large, plate-glass display windows over brick bulkheads, a double-leaf, fully-glazed aluminum door with a transom, and a hooded metal awning. The transom above the awning has been covered, but the soldier-course lintel above the transom remains uncovered. The rear elevation features two covered windows and a center, single-leaf door topped by a shed-roofed hood with brackets. The 1925 Sanborn Map labels this building as a drug store. According to locals, the drug store contained a popular soda fountain. Later, this building served as a bus station. In the 1950s, the station was moved to South 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

Pate's Cafe  
117 East H Street  
ca. 1920  
Contributing Building

The one-story, one-bay, brick building features a corbelled brick cornice and a flat, concrete-topped parapet. The storefront consists of large, plate-glass display windows over brick bulkheads, a recessed double-leaf, fully-glazed aluminum door with a transom. The full-width upper transom has been covered, but the soldier-course lintel above transom remains. The rear elevation features rectangular windows that have been infilled with wood and a single-leaf door. Leonard Pate and Robert Pate, relationship unknown, were operating a café here by 1930.

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Post Office

121 East H Street

ca. 1920; ca. 2000

Contributing Building

The one-story, two-part, partially-painted brick building features a corbelled brick cornice and a flat, concrete-topped parapet. The storefront to the west displays a three-bay façade, ramp with metal railing, replacement plate-glass windows over tile bulkheads and a recessed replacement half-glazed, divided-light door. Three transoms over the storefront have been covered with wood, but the soldier-course lintel over each remains visible. The storefront to the east features a replacement storefront of tinted glass display windows and two recessed, tinted glass doors with transoms. It has a ramp with metal railing and steps on the west end. The rear elevation features covered windows within segmental arches. Two small single-leaf doors within large openings are on this side of the building. A concrete loading dock is forward of the west door. Two small appendages, one with a front-gabled roof and one with a shed roof, are at the southwest corner. The 1925 Sanborn labels the west half of this building as the post office. In the late 1950s, a cafe and barbershop were here (1959 CD).

Hassell-Johnson Dry Goods (also known as the "Big Store")

123 and 127 East H Street

1903-1906; ca. 1990

Contributing Building

The two-story, eleven-bay brick building features a high, parapet with terra cotta coping. Each upper bay is topped by a sawtooth brick course and brick corbelling. Windows on the upper level are arched and outlined with lintels comprising three layers of header course bricks. These windows have been infilled with wood, although three contain small metal, awning-style windows. The street level is painted. The original tall openings are retained except for the replacement storefront on the east end of the façade. Here there are three windows where transoms should be and plate glass and metal storefronts on a brick bulkhead. Two double-leaf doors with transoms pierce the west storefront, while a single-leaf, fully-glazed door is on the east end. The lower bays originally displayed divided-light transoms, but are covered with plywood. All window and doors are replacements. The east storefront wraps around to the east elevation to include a display window and is sheltered by a flat, aluminum awning supported by brick posts. The eleven-bay east and west elevations feature exposed molded rafters and windows with segmental arches; these windows have been covered with wood. On the east elevation, four windows have been fitted with small metal awning windows. The bay at the center of the second story originally contained a door, but has been filled with wood. Five irregularly-spaced windows with brick segmental arches span the lower level. A wood, double-leaf door is at street level near the south end of the east elevation. A parapet identical to the one on the façade is at the rear of the

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building. The rear elevation features arched bays on both levels and a metal fire escape near the center of the elevation. The upper bays display segmental arches. Some wood six-over-six sashes remain uncovered, but most bays are covered in wood. This building originally housed Erwin Mills' company store, locally known as the "Big Store." Eugene L. Hassell and a Mr. Johnson operated the Big Store. As retail businesses operated on the first floor, a series of occupants used the second level. After Erwin Mill sold the Big Store in the 1940s, Erwin Furniture Company, operated by Ty Thomas and Hassie Johnson, was located on the street level. The Peerless Theater, owned by Richard Sterling Kelly, who was a cotton buyer for Erwin Mills, occupied the upstairs and downstairs of the eastern portion very early in its history. Fletcher Jernigan operated the theater from the mid-1920s until the mid-1960s. A school auditorium also occupied the upper level soon after the building's completion. A long narrow room west of the auditorium served as the meeting place for several organizations, including the American Legion, Washington Duke Lodge of the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows, Sons and Daughters of Liberty, Woodmen of the World, and Young Matrons Club.

### *South 13<sup>th</sup> Street*

Nationwide Insurance  
103 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street  
ca. 1920; ca. 1948  
Contributing Building

The one-story, brick building has wide brick pilasters separating the facade's five bays that rest atop brick bulkheads. Terra cotta coping tops the flat parapet. Original multi-prism transoms crowned by soldier-course lintels top the four southern bays. The two southernmost bays have display windows, while the middle bay contains a replacement door. The second northernmost bay was a display window, but now contains a door and window. Windows rest on cast stone sills and thresholds. A raised wood panel is above each window or door and below the transom. The painted southern elevation faces an alley and features bricked in windows with projecting cast stone sills. Originally, this building was two stories. A 1948 photo in the collection of the Erwin History Room shows the building in its original form. Sometime after 1948, the building was lowered to one story after a fire damaged the upper floor. The building served as a doctor's office, then in the 1950s as a bus station. By 1963, an insurance business was here (1959, 1963 CD).

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Efird's Department Store  
105 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street  
ca. 1948  
Contributing Building

The large, two-story, brick, Art Moderne-influenced building features alternating projecting horizontal brick courses on its upper center façade. A flat metal awning with a fabric skirting and supported by metal poles shelters the fully-glazed storefront composed of large, plate-glass windows over stone-veneered bulkheads. Two recessed double-leaf fully-glazed wood doors are at either end of the façade. The first level is sheathed in dark stone panels. The façade bricks above are light gold, while the north elevation is red brick and topped by a parapet with terra cotta coping. Metal windows pierce the rear and side elevations. A tall brick chimney stack with concrete coping and a one-story parapet-roofed ell occupy the rear elevation. Efird's Department Store was the original occupant. Joseph's Department Store has occupied the building since at least 1959. A vertical metal bracket with two horizontal metal arms holds a historic sign made of translucent plastic letter squares that spell "Joseph's." (1959 CD).

Colonial Grocery Store  
109 and 111 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street  
ca. 1948  
Contributing Building

The one-story, brick, two-bay building displays a flat concrete-topped parapet. A fabric awning tops the storefronts consisting of a pair of fully-glazed wooden doors and flanking angled plate-glass display windows over brick bulkheads. Façade bricks are buff-colored, while the south elevation is red brick and topped by a stepped parapet with terra cotta coping. Small, high windows on this elevation have metal bars. A tall brick chimney stack with concrete coping is on the rear. Colonial Grocery Store was the first occupant. Marvin West later opened a hardware store here managed by a Mr. Brandon. It also served as storage space for Rosemond Godwin's furniture store. Charter Communications occupied the building in the 1970s or 1980s.

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## *Summary of Significance*

The Erwin Commercial Historic District in Erwin, Harnett County, North Carolina, contains eleven contributing and two noncontributing buildings and meets National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of commerce and architecture. Early to mid-twentieth-century brick commercial buildings chronicle the mill town's founding in 1903 for Erwin Cotton Mills, a textile company owned by the Duke family of Durham. Originally known as the village of Duke, its location near the Cape Fear River and surrounded by abundant fields of cotton assured the growth and development of this mill town. With its service-related and retail establishments, the commercial district served workers at the mill, other townspeople, and farmers in the surrounding area. William A. Erwin, who later became the company's president, proved so instrumental in establishing the village where the company's 1903 Mill Number 2 was located that the town became known as Erwin in 1926. The architecturally significant collection of buildings in the district comprises brick commercial buildings constructed in the predominant architectural types and forms executed in small railroad towns in the Sandhills of North Carolina beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century through the 1960s. The early twentieth-century one- and two-story buildings display round-arched windows, corbelled cornices, and semi-circular projecting arches, whereas the post-World War II buildings display the more streamlined detailing of modernist architecture. The period of significance of the locally significant Erwin Commercial Historic District begins in 1906, when construction of the Bank of Harnett and the Hassell-Johnson Dry Goods, also known as the Big Store, was completed, and ends in 1965, the fifty-year cut-off date for the National Register. Although Erwin's businesses continued to operate, the period after 1965 does not possess exceptional significance.

## **Historical Background and Commerce Context**

The town of Erwin, originally known as Duke, owes its existence to the Duke family of Durham who established a cotton mill not far from the banks of the Cape Fear River in the early twentieth century. In 1903, Erwin Cotton Mills Company, owned by the Dukes and managed by William A. Erwin, began construction of this mill at the site because of its proximity to the cotton fields and access to cheap and plentiful labor.<sup>1</sup>

Before becoming involved in the textile industry, the Dukes were well known for their tobacco empire. In 1878, Washington Duke (1820-1905), along with his sons, Brodie Leonidus Duke, Benjamin Newton Duke, and James Buchanan Duke, built a thriving tobacco company, W. Duke, Sons and Company. Success in tobacco allowed the family to pursue investments in other industries in the late nineteenth century, such as textiles and electrical power.

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<sup>1</sup> Colie E. Rock, *Beyond the East Gate: A History of First Baptist Church, Erwin, North Carolina, 1903-1983* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1984), 1; "Small Mill Town Progressed to Full Service Community," (Dunn) *Daily Record*, July 2, 1987.

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In 1892, a group of financiers, including Washington Duke and his sons, founded a textile manufacturing business in Durham that would later become Erwin Cotton Mills Company.<sup>2</sup>

William A. Erwin (1856-1932) joined the Dukes' company in 1893 after working in mercantile and textile businesses across the state. Born on a plantation outside Morganton in Burke County, he attended Finley High School in Lenoir and the University of Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> Erwin's great uncle was E. M. Holt, a pioneer in the southern textile industry and father of North Carolina governor, Thomas M. Holt Sr. It was through this family connection that William Erwin was involved in the cotton milling industry, eventually becoming the secretary-general manager of E. M. Holt Plaid Mills in Alamance County under L. Banks Holt and Lawrence E. Holt, two of E. M. Holt's sons.<sup>4</sup>

The venture headed by the Dukes and Erwin built its first textile plant in Durham and initially produced tobacco bag cloth before expanding into other textiles. It was under Erwin's direction that the company's second operation, Mill No. 2, was built on the banks of the Cape Fear River in what would become the community of Duke and later, Erwin.<sup>5</sup>

On August 6, 1902, the *Democratic Banner*, a newspaper based in nearby Dunn, announced the company's plans:

It has been ascertained that the Erwin Cotton Mills Company will, in a few months, erect near Smiley's Falls on the Cape Fear River about four miles from the city, a mammoth cotton mill. The mill will manufacture denim and will have about 70,000 spindles and 2,000 looms. It will give employment to about 2,000 hands. Engineers have begun to lay off streets and arrange for water supply, electric lights and everything necessary to make an ideal town. The houses will be better than any yet constructed in the State for operations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Dean Carver, "The Unionization of Erwin's Mill: A History of TWUA Local 250, in Erwin, North Carolina: 1938-1952," Master's Thesis, North Carolina State University, 2004, page 12; Robert F. Durden, "Washington Duke," Dictionary of North Carolina Biography (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 117-118.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1860 slave census, William Erwin's father, Joseph J. Erwin, owned thirty-four slaves. United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860.

<sup>4</sup> Tom E. Terrill, "William Allen Erwin," Dictionary of North Carolina Biography (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 165.

<sup>5</sup> Terrill, 165.

<sup>6</sup> (Dunn) *Democratic Banner*, August 6, 1902.

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The Cape Fear and Northern Railroad, renamed the Durham and Southern Railway in 1906, which ran from Dunn to Durham, was completed to Erwin in 1903.<sup>7</sup> Construction of the mill began in 1903 and by 1905 the mill at Duke was producing tobacco sheeting on 35,000 spindles and 1,024 looms. By 1906, the mill produced blue denim.

William Erwin had an interest in creating a community to accompany the plant and, like industrialists of his time, a desire to control that community and the workers and their families who lived there. As the mill was going up, Erwin Cotton Mills Company built 300 houses and two commercial buildings and other infrastructure to support the workers. Erwin also built Good Hope Hospital in 1913 in Erwin. The company owned all of the community's buildings and residents and merchants paid rent to Erwin Mills.<sup>8</sup> The commercial district served not only mill workers and townspeople, but was also a vital commercial hub for farmers from the surrounding rural areas.

The core of the commercial area in Duke was East H Street, which was due east of the mill. One of the first two commercial buildings in town constructed in 1903-1906, the Bank of Harnett, stood at the west end of the block. Erwin Cotton Mill Company owned the bank and B. N. Duke served as its first president with William Erwin as vice-president. Later, in the 1920s, Erwin took over as president, a position he held until his death in 1932.<sup>9</sup> The two-story, brick building housed multiple tenants in addition to the bank, including the Edward R. Thomas Drug Store.

Also in 1904, the mill's company store went up at the east end of the East H Street block. Eugene L. Hassell and a Mr. Johnson operated the "Big Store," as it was commonly called. In addition to the company store, the building contained the town's post office. Later, the mill established a school auditorium on the upper level of the company store.<sup>10</sup>

In 1910, census workers counted 291 households in the village of Duke. Not surprisingly, most people's place of occupation is listed as the cotton mill, although the returns indicate others worked in stores, the post office, as teachers or ministers, and other jobs that supported the mill workers and their families. Some professionals lived in

<sup>7</sup> History, [www.durhamsouthern.com/history.html](http://www.durhamsouthern.com/history.html), accessed June 27, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Quaintance and Warren Jack Wicker, "Erwin, North Carolina: A Special Report on Incorporation," Institute of Government, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, November 1966, 2; "William A. Erwin Succumbs Quietly at Home in City," *Durham Morning Herald*, February 29, 1932.

<sup>9</sup> "Report on the Condition of Bank of Harnett at the Close of Business November 10th, 1915," and "Condensed Statement of the Condition of the Bank of Harnett, Erwin, N. C. at the close of Business, December 31, 1927," The Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

<sup>10</sup> *Beyond the East Gate*, 2; Sion Harrington III, "A Brief History of Early Erwin, N.C." in *The Heritage of Harnett County* (The Heritage of Harnett County Book Committee, 1993), 73.

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Duke, including Clarence Smith, an attorney, insurance agent W. D. Hawley, and Aug Bayles, the village's only physician. W. J. Glover was a carpenter and homebuilder, and several men worked for the railroad.<sup>11</sup>

By the time of the 1920 census, Duke consisted of 344 households, an indication that the mill had added houses to the village in the ten years since the previous census. As before, the majority of residents worked at the cotton mill with barbers, retail salespeople, bank workers, hotel workers, and drug store employees also living in Duke. Edward Thomas remained the town pharmacist and Eugene L. Hassell continued to manage the company store. Charles Hicks served as the bank's vice-president. Joe Jackson worked as one of four barbers in Duke.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime in the first half of the 1920s, the mill built eight single-story brick commercial buildings between the bank and the company store facing H Street. The easternmost of these was divided into two storefronts with the post office occupying the west side. The buildings housed a variety of businesses including a variety store, Pate's Café, a dry cleaners and barber shop, Pate's Grocery, and Steinberg's Clothing Store.

By the mid-1920s, Duke was a thriving community with a small commercial center surrounded by hundreds of small, frame mill houses and the cotton mill to the west. The 1925 Sanborn map for Duke shows the Durham and Southern Railroad extending down the center of East H Street in front of the commercial block and ending at the cotton mill. The combination freight and passenger depot stood on the north side of H Street at the corner of North 12<sup>th</sup> Street and due north of the company store. A small frame jail was just west of the depot. The commercial row was limited to the block of H Street between South 12<sup>th</sup> and South 13<sup>th</sup> streets and all the buildings were brick and one or two stories in height. A one-story frame gym stood at the northwest corner of East G Street (now Denim Drive) and South 12<sup>th</sup> Street, which is outside the district boundaries. All dwellings in Duke were frame, except for the brick-veneered parsonage for the Episcopal Church at the southeast corner of S. 12<sup>th</sup> and East G streets.<sup>13</sup>

In 1925, Erwin Cotton Mills constructed Mill No. 5 next to Mill No. 2. From 1926 to 1928, the company made additional investments in Erwin and built more mill houses. The company also constructed water and sewer lines. In 1926, when Trinity College in Durham changed its name to Duke University, the town became Erwin in honor of William A. Erwin.<sup>14</sup> In 1927, Erwin succeeded B. N. Duke as the company's president.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1910, 1900, and 1890* (U. S. Government Printing Office, 1912), 367; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, Duke Township, Harnett County, North Carolina*, accessed on ancestry.com, June 27, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population, Duke Township, Harnett County, North Carolina*, accessed on ancestry.com, June 27, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Sanborn Map Company, Map of Duke, North Carolina, 1925, original map at the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>14</sup> (Dunn) *Daily Record*, July 2, 1987.

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As company president, William Erwin remained involved with the business at Erwin. In January 1928 in a letter to William Holt, the town's physician and a close friend, Erwin remarked, "We have put, Doctor, a whole lot of our life into the building of the village of Erwin, and everything that is of a material interest to the place and people...."<sup>16</sup> The next month, Erwin's son, William Erwin Jr., reported to his father on his recent visit to the town and his visit with Preston Holt, a surgeon in the town and son of William Holt. "I returned from Erwin yesterday evening, and found things there running in good shape."<sup>17</sup>

In addition to owning most of the town, Erwin Cotton Mills held several farms in Harnett County where they grew cotton and other crops. In a letter dated August 31, 1928, addressed to "My Dear Best Friend," William Erwin reported that "in Harnett and Davie Counties our company has some twelve hundred acres planted in cotton."<sup>18</sup>

In the late 1920s, William Erwin gave much thought of the hospital that Erwin Mills was building in the town. In a letter to William Holt, Erwin's doctor, dated May 30, 1928, Erwin states "Byrd Bros. & Shaw were awarded the contract today for the hospital, and I just want you to know that this new hospital was inspired and built by my Company especially as a token of appreciation for you and your work there."<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Benjamin N. Duke on September 7, 1928, William Erwin described "the little fireproof hospital that you favored our company's building" that was then under construction. Erwin noted that the building would hold thirty beds, twenty-two for whites and eight for blacks, and that it would be "a gem of convenience, and modern in construction and equipment to the last degree."<sup>20</sup> The hospital remains standing several blocks east of the commercial historic district.

Nothing was constructed in the commercial area in the 1930s and early 1940s, but several buildings went up in the post-World War II period. The federal building containing the post office (located outside of the commercial historic district) was built in 1948 and replaced the frame gym at the northwest corner of Denim Drive and South 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Efir's Department Store and the Colonial Grocery Store opened on South 13<sup>th</sup> Street at approximately the same time.

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<sup>15</sup> Historical Note, Records of Erwin Mills, Durham, N. C., David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, [www.library.duke.edu/Rubenstein/findingaids/erwin](http://www.library.duke.edu/Rubenstein/findingaids/erwin), accessed June 27, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from William Erwin to William Holt, dated, dated January 12, 1928, in the Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from William Erwin Jr. to William Erwin Sr., dated February 23, 1928, in the Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to unidentified recipient from William Erwin Sr., dated August 31, 1928, in the Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from William Erwin to William P. Holt, dated May 30, 1928, in the Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Benjamin N. Duke from William Erwin Sr., dated September 7, 1928, in the Records of Erwin Mills, Durham N. C., William A. Erwin Series, Rubenstein Rare Book Collection, Duke University.

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Meanwhile, Erwin Cotton Mills evolved in the mid-twentieth century. In 1950, the company changed its name to Erwin Mills. On June 6, 1953, Abney Mills of Greenwood, South Carolina, bought the majority of the Duke stock in Erwin Mills. Abney employed 7,500 textile workers in South Carolina.<sup>21</sup>

In 1950, the population in Erwin was 3,344. Ten years later the census recorded 3,183 residents, a decrease of 4.8 percent.<sup>22</sup> The census also recorded that of the 1,383 residents employed, 873 worked in the manufacturing of non-durable goods. Mill operatives were nearly split evenly between women and men, 304 and 299, respectively, however, the overwhelming majority of managers and foremen were male. The next most common occupation was in wholesale and retail trades, which employed 192. Ninety-four residents worked as professionals and in related services. The median income for families was \$4,533.<sup>23</sup>

Burlington Industries, which formed in 1923 in Burlington, North Carolina, bought the company in 1962 and Erwin Mills became the fabric and denim manufacturing division of Burlington.<sup>24</sup> In 1962, Burlington Industries became the first textile firm to exceed \$1 billion in revenue and was the largest textile company in the world.<sup>25</sup> By 1963, the mill at Erwin employed approximately 1,800 workers.<sup>26</sup> Burlington Industries sold the company store to private interests, sold the company-owned houses to the workers, and allowed the town to incorporate in 1967.<sup>27</sup> By this time, the population was about 3,800.<sup>28</sup>

The 1967 U. S. Census of Business recorded thirty-one business establishments in Erwin. Fourteen of the businesses were categorized as personal services, one was a hotel, ten were auto repair businesses, and three were miscellaneous repair businesses. No motion picture theaters operated Erwin but one business was categorized as “other amusement, recreational services.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Erwin Chatter*, June 1, 1953, DigitalNC, [www.library.digital.org](http://www.library.digital.org), accessed June 27, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 1-88.

<sup>23</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary*, 35-235.

<sup>24</sup> “President is Named by Erwin Mills, Inc.,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1964.

<sup>25</sup> “Burlington Industries, Burlington and Greensboro, N.C.,” [www.textilehistory.org](http://www.textilehistory.org), accessed July 21, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> *Hill's Dunn-Erwin City Directory, 1963* (Richmond, Virginia: Hill Directory Company, 1963), 17.

<sup>27</sup> “As Burlington Goes, So Goes Erwin,” (Raleigh) *New and Observer*, June 28, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Reese Cleghorn, “The Mill: A Giant Step for the Southern Negro,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 1969, page 144.

<sup>29</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Business, 1967, Vol. V, Selected Services—Area Statistics, Part 2, Iowa to North Carolina* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 35-9.

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Swift Denim of Columbus, Georgia, which was founded in 1906, bought Burlington Industries in 1987. Erwin Cotton Mills closed for good on December 31, 2000.<sup>30</sup>

## Architecture Context

The Erwin Commercial Historic District derives its architectural significance as a collection of intact commercial buildings constructed in the commercial vernacular idiom, the modernist mode, and influenced by the Italianate style. The one- and two-part commercial buildings are typical of the building traditions of eastern North Carolina communities in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Erwin Commercial Historic District is a compact collection of historic brick commercial buildings associated with the establishment of Erwin Cotton Mills Mill No. 2. The two earliest buildings anchor the ends of the main commercial street in town, East H Street, and were begun in 1903 when the company started building its mill just to the west. The prominent Italianate-influenced Bank of Harnett/Edward R. Thomas Drug Store at the corner of East H Street and South 13<sup>th</sup> Street has its main entrance in a cutaway corner topped by a denticulated projecting brick hood. Narrow decorative semi-circular projecting arches crown upper-level round-arched windows, while projecting window hoods with dentils top lower rectangular windows. A bracketed cornice extends along the west elevation. The Italianate style was common in commercial areas across the country beginning in the 1870s. While residential Italianate architecture faded in popularity in the 1880s, it remained popular for retail concerns, offices, and institutional buildings into the early twentieth century. The style came from England and was part of the Picturesque Movement that served as a reaction to formal classicism. These flat-roofed buildings with projecting cornices graced by decorative brackets and window moldings stood two or more stories tall and often featured tall storefront windows. The Italianate style appeared in rail towns in North Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when trains could deliver ready-made building materials such as doors, arched windows, and moldings.

The majority of buildings in the Erwin Commercial Historic District were built in the vernacular commercial form common in towns across North Carolina. Buildings in this idiom typically featured parapets instead of projecting cornices and simple brick corbels or inset designs that decorate the upper facade. Commercial vernacular buildings display single or grouped windows. Brick is red or buff colored and sometimes glazed. Concrete is often used as trim.

At the east end of the East H Street block, the Hassell-Johnson Building, also known as the Big Store, is an imposing two-story, eleven-bay brick building, with a high, tile-topped parapet and a vernacular commercial form. A sawtooth brick course and brick corbelling top the arched upper façade. Soldier-course arches outline the upper-level arched

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<sup>30</sup> "Swift Denim Closing," (Dunn) Daily Record, September 21, 2000; "The Mill: Erwin's Denim Heritage," (Dunn) Daily Record, September 21, 2000.

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windows. Around 1920, the two two-story buildings on each end of the East H Street block were linked by a row of modest, one-story brick vernacular commercial buildings constructed along the south side of East H Street. Nearly identical in form and features, they display corbelled brick cornices and flat parapets above their storefronts.

The next and last phase of construction in the district occurred after World War II when two buildings went up. Both were constructed in the modernist idiom, but reflect different expressions of that mode. Efir's Department Store at 105 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street dates to ca. 1948 and is a large, two-story, Art Moderne-influenced brick building with alternating projecting horizontal brick courses on its upper center façade. Efir's somewhat stark appearance was not unusual for commercial buildings from the post-war period. These typically feature a flat roof, blank masonry sidewalls, and an all-glass or nearly all-glass commercial display front. The tendency for some horizontality in Art Moderne commercial buildings is seen in the brick courses that grace the center of the upper façade of Efir's. Sometimes the area between the end of the glass shop front and the sidewalk is sheathed with brick or metal panels. Post-war modernist buildings often featured distinctive illuminated signs such as the "Josephs" sign on Efir's.

The single automobile-related building in the district is the Wade Service Station on Denim Drive. Built around 1962, the one-story, concrete block, modernist service station displays large expanses of glass on its façade, including canted upper windows in the retail area. A slanted roof anchored on its corner by a round vertical metal pole tops the retail section and extends across the east section as an awning. Enamel panels, a typical exterior treatment for service stations of the period, sheathe the façade and west elevation. Plate glass windows trimmed in metal framing front the retail section to the west. The design of the Wade Service Station followed post-World War II trends in service station design by combining a rectangular box form built of concrete block that was distinguished by incorporating contemporary design elements. Display windows were often canted at an angle reflective of the tail fins on the era's automobiles. The canopy on the Wade Service Station followed the pattern of incorporating raking profiles and boomerang-like shapes to reflect the popularity of aeronautics and high technology.

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## Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Erwin Commercial Historic District is shown by the heavy black line on the accompanying district map drawn at a scale of 1" = 46'.

## Boundary Justification

The Erwin Commercial Historic District boundary is drawn to include the densest collection of contributing historic commercial resources and excludes modern construction, residential areas, and the mill to the west due to its loss of historic integrity.