

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 Renfro Mill

other names/site number R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House

2. Location

street & number NE cor Willow & Oak Sts. N/A not for publication

city or town Mount Airy N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Surry code 171 Zip code 27030

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 forth 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.)

Jeffrey J. Crow SHPO 8/28/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of 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. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <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:)	_____	_____

Renfro Mill
Name of Property

Surry Co., NC
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

STONE

roof ASPHALT

other CERAMIC TILE

RUBBER

Narrative Description

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

Renfro Mill
Name of Property

Surry Co., NC
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark 'x' in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

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.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Industry

Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1893-1947

Significant Dates

ca. 1893

1921

1946-47

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Renfro Mill
Name of Property

Surry Co., NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	5 3 4 9 3 0	4 0 3 9 4 2 0
	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.)

11. Form Prepared By

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

organization N/A date November 29, 1999

street & number 637 N. Spring St. telephone 336/727-1968

City or town Winston-Salem state NC Zip code 27101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Attn: Barbara Summerlin, Director

street & number P. O. Box 6308 telephone 336/786-4478

City or town Mount Airy state NC Zip code 27030

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including 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 20503.

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Renfro Mill
Surry County, North Carolina

DESCRIPTION:

Renfro Mill is located at the northeast corner of Willow and Oak streets, part of a small group of industrial buildings at this intersection just west of the Main Street commercial center of Mount Airy. Renfro Mill consumes more than one-third of its city block, and consistent with its urban location abuts the sidewalk on three sides (Oak, Willow, and Virginia streets). Built in the early 1890s, Renfro Mill, with its additions, is a large industrial building of approximately 100,000 square feet that ranges from one to four-and-a-half stories in height. Constructed of a combination of brick, concrete, steel, wood, and granite, the outer shell of the building is primarily brick, whose differences in appearance help to differentiate between the various chronological sections of the mill. Renfro Mill is in good condition, although it has stood vacant for several years. It remains at its original location, visually reflecting its first use as a late-nineteenth-century tobacco industry building. Additions and modifications are consistent with the industrial processes and growth of the apparel industry which it served for three-quarters of a century. Renfro Mill therefore retains a high degree of historic integrity in terms of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

To facilitate the description of this property, a copy of the 1948 Sanborn Insurance Map, annotated by the author, has been included with the nomination for reference. Different parts of the overall mill have been numbered and include: 1) the original early 1890s R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House; 2) the largest addition, built in 1946-47 to expand the primary manufacturing floors of Renfro Mill; 3) the monitor-roofed section, also believed to have been built in 1946-47, which added space specifically designed for the winding and boarding processes necessary for manufacturing socks; 4) the boiler room, which may also have been built in 1946-47; 5) the dye house, which initially was a separate commercial building not associated with the mill, and which was almost certainly attached to the building at the time of the other 1940s additions; 6) a brick and stone section of unknown use, originally a separate building unrelated to the mill which served as an auto repair facility before burning in 1944 and being rebuilt; it was attached to the Renfro Mill dye house by a small brick connector by 1948; and 7) two comparatively small additions built after 1948.

The original portion of Renfro Mill (#1) was built in the early 1890s as a tobacco leaf house. As such, it exhibits the characteristics typical of late-nineteenth-century tobacco industry buildings. It is a four-and-a-half-story brick structure, bricks laid in common bond, with segmental-arched windows (now covered with plywood) and stepped-parapet gable ends. The facade is embellished with brickwork panels, corbeling, and decorative labels over the windows. The primary entrance and stair tower are on the west side of the building. On the interior, the majority of the first four floors consists of wide open spaces interrupted only by wooden support posts arranged in rows. These spaces are unfinished, so that what is seen, in addition to the support posts, are the brick exterior walls, wood floors, and ceiling joists.

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Renfro Mill
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The southwest corner of the first floor is enclosed for the mill offices, which are located on either side of a wide hall. The office area is finished with plaster walls; molded baseboards, chair rails, and door casings; and five-panel doors. On the second floor, an area on the west side of the building just off the main stair is enclosed for an employee break room. It has a chair rail and a dropped ceiling. On the third and fourth floors, several rooms are partitioned off on the west side of the building. From the northwest corner of the northwest room on the fourth floor, a steep, narrow, enclosed stair leads to the attic. The attic is an unfinished space with wood floors, wood support posts, and exposed rafters and ceiling joists. Open storage lines the east and west sides. The six-over-six sash windows of the original building can be seen best on the brick gable ends of the attic.

In 1946-47 the original building was more than doubled on the east side by a four-story brick addition (#2). Here there is a flat roof, and the yellowish brick walls are opened up by rows of large, multi-pane, metal-frame windows. The majority of the interior of this section simply continues the open factory floors of the original building. The 1940s section can be distinguished easily from the 1890s section because in the newer section the support posts and beams are steel (rather than wood), the wood flooring is laid perpendicular to that of the original building, the ceiling is composed of contiguous boards laid on edge, and the window openings are much larger than are those of the sash in the 1890s building. In the northeast corner of the first floor, several rooms are enclosed from the main floor. These rooms have multiple shelves, cabinets, and smaller work spaces suggesting that the area may have been used as a parts and repair shop for the knitting machines. Several brick-walled rooms are found along the east side, and an enclosed stair is positioned at the southeast corner.

Projecting northward from the 1890s building is a two-story addition (#3) believed to have been built in 1946-47 when all functions of the manufacturing process were reunited at the Willow Street facility. The brick of the exterior walls of this section are the same (or nearly so) as the brick of the large east addition. The primary purpose of this addition was to provide appropriate space for the winding and boarding processes in sock manufacturing. The winding process lubricated the yarn before knitting and moved from one cone to another. Boarding consisted of stretching the socks on rows of foot-shaped forms where they were steam-pressed into a neat, saleable appearance. The first floor, possibly where the winding took place, has a concrete floor and ceiling and consists of a long brick hall with windows on the east side and two rooms partitioned off on the west side. The second floor was where the hot boarding process took place. This unusual space has brick walls with large outward-swinging metal windows on the west side for ventilation. Underneath the windows is a row of small rectangular openings (now bricked up) that originally held fans that sucked in air from the outside. This helped force the hot, steamy air upward, where it was released through the windows of the monitor roof. The monitor roof is supported by thin metal trusses and the two levels of the ceiling are wood. The narrow top ceiling of the monitor roof intentionally slants slightly inward to allow rain water a channel to pass to one end and then

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Renfro Mill
Surry County, North Carolina

down.

The one-story brick boiler room (#4), dating from the late 1940s, is located north of the original building and 1946-47 east addition and southeast of the winding and boarding wing. A huge boiler still occupies this space.

North of the winding and boarding wing is a one-story-with-basement, trapezoidal brick wing (#5) which originally was totally separate from the mill. In the late 1940s it was attached to the mill and modified for use as the dye house, an area always located near the winding and boarding rooms. The exterior of this section features a flat roof, a row of enclosed first-story windows along the Virginia Street (north) elevation, and a row of small basement windows below the bricked-up windows. The basement level has one large room with support posts down the center and exposed steel joists. The first floor has one large room with brick walls.

East of the dye house and attached to it by a small brick connector is a one-story rectangular section (#6), originally a separate building, with painted granite for the lower walls and painted brick for the upper walls. All windows have been enclosed. At the east end are three loading doors.

After 1948 two small additions (#7) were made to the building. Both are brick. At the southeast corner of the 1946-47 east addition, a three-story-with-basement addition filled in the corner. Likewise, the area surrounded by the boiler room on the south, the winding and boarding wing on the east, and the dye house on the north was also enclosed.

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Renfro Mill
Surry County, North Carolina

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Summary -

Renfro Mill in Mount Airy, North Carolina is locally significant in the areas of architecture and industry and thereby fulfills Criteria C and A, respectively, for listing in the National Register. Renfro Mill—initially the R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House—is an excellent surviving example of the form of building typically used by the tobacco industry in Piedmont North Carolina for both factories and leaf houses during the late nineteenth century. These buildings, becoming increasingly rare, tend to be three-to-five story rectangular brick structures with stepped parapet gable ends, segmental-arched windows, and often decorative brickwork on the facade. Renfro Mill is also a prime example of the adaptation of a building from one industrial use to another. When small tobacco companies failed during the first two decades of the twentieth century because they could not compete with the big tobacco conglomerates, many of their buildings were taken over by other burgeoning industries. These buildings offered both good space and quality construction. In 1921 Renfro Mill, a new sock-making company, took over the former tobacco leaf house whose large open spaces served well the manufacturing needs of the company. Shortly after World War II, Renfro's success demanded that it greatly expand its space. The additions to the original factory, still intact, specifically addressed the needs of the manufacturing processes used in the apparel industry. Renfro occupied its Willow Street plant until 1997.

The Renfro company has been significant in the local economy for much of the twentieth century. When Renfro began manufacturing socks in 1921, it was the first real hosiery operation in Mount Airy. By the late 1990s, Renfro had become the nation's largest sock manufacturer. Today, Mount Airy is a sock manufacturing center and the apparel industry as a whole is the largest branch of industry in town.

Renfro Mill's period of significance extends from ca. 1893 to 1947. It encompasses the building's ca. 1893 date of construction as a tobacco leaf house, the date (1921) when the Renfro company, a sock manufacturer, purchased the building, and the date (1946-47) when the building was more than doubled in size so that all the company's sock manufacturing processes could be consolidated in one location.

Historical Background and Industry Context -

As in many other areas of North Carolina's Piedmont region during the second half of the nineteenth century, tobacco cultivation and manufacturing became important to the economy of Surry County. In this primarily rural county of the state's northwestern Piedmont, small tobacco factories began to spring up in the midst of the tobacco cultivation areas (Phillips, *Simple Treasures*, 28).

In 1888 the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad arrived in Mount Airy, thereby linking the

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Renfro Mill
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Blue Ridge with the Atlantic Ocean and providing the long sought after guarantee of speedy transportation to middle and eastern North Carolina and from there to the world beyond. This pivotal event made large-scale manufacturing feasible by providing the means for transporting manufactured goods to markets elsewhere (Phillips, *Simple Treasures*, 5 & 41). As a result, tobacco manufacturing began to move from the country to town.

The most productive period of the tobacco industry in Mount Airy was in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1890 Branson's *North Carolina Business Directory* listed nine tobacco factories in the town. Success was relatively short-lived, however. Some of the tobacco businesses were hurt by the financial panic of 1893-94, but the real demise of the industry in Mount Airy resulted from the effects of the Tobacco Trust. James B. Duke's multi-million dollar American Tobacco Company expanded so rapidly at the end of the century that by 1904 it controlled an estimated three-quarters of the tobacco industry in the United States. The small-scale factories simply could not compete and were either bought up by American Tobacco or forced out of business. Even after the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1911 dissolved many of the large trusts, the successor companies controlled an equally large proportion of the total business. As a result, the small factories of the Bright Leaf tobacco area, of which Surry County was a part, continued to decline in number. In 1912 the *North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* recorded for the last time a tobacco factory in Mount Airy (Phillips, *Simple Treasures*, 41; Taylor, N.R. nomination). Eventually, some of the tobacco buildings were converted to new use as textile or apparel mills.

Sanborn Insurance Maps reveal that Renfro Mill followed this pattern. The original building was first shown on the 1896 map, where it was labeled the R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House. Tobacco leaf houses served a variety of functions, including stemming (removing the tobacco leaves from the stem), re-drying (removing the excess moisture remaining in the leaf after the farmers' curing processes), packing the tobacco in hogsheads, and storing it for a year or more for future sale (Taylor, N. R. nomination; Merritt Interview, November 29, 1999). By 1900 the R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House had become the Eastern Building and Loan Association Leaf House, and by 1905 it was the leaf house of William N. Reynolds with R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company leasing it. The building remained in Reynolds ownership during the early 1910s, but by 1916 it had become the Haynes, Brown & Co. Leaf House. The 1916 Sanborn Map was the last one on which the building was shown to have a tobacco-related use (Sanborn Maps, 1891, 1896, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1916).

In the nineteenth century, several small textile mills had operated in and around Mount Airy. Among these were the mid-nineteenth-century cotton and woolen mills owned by members of the Brower family and the Greenhill Mill of the late 1860s and 1870s just north of Mount Airy. However, these mills did not last long, and the textile industry lay largely dormant until around 1920, when it was revived through the apparel industry. Renfro Mill was a leader in this revival, helping apparel manufacturing become Mount Airy's largest industry (Phillips, *Simple Treasures*, 41; Merritt Interview, November 29,

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1999).

For several years after the close of the tobacco leaf house, the building was used by Mayo Mills, a small manufacturer of underwear. T. C. Barber, who was fresh out of textile school at North Carolina State University, came to Mount Airy to manage Mayo Mills. By 1921, that plant had closed, consolidating with another plant elsewhere. In response to the closure of Mayo Mills, four prominent civic leaders in Mount Airy—W. E. Merritt, W. G. Sydnor, John Banner, Sr., and W. W. Burke—decided to start a new manufacturing plant not only with the hope of turning a profit but also in order to provide employment for the townspeople—their customers in their other businesses—who had lost their jobs when Mayo Mills closed. Pooling equal amounts of their own money, they purchased the former Mayo Mills building and incorporated the Renfro Hosiery Mills Company on July 23, 1921. Business began on August 1 of that year. The origin of the name "Renfro" is not clear; some claim that it was the name of a Native American tribe, but more likely it was named for Renfro Hill, where the post office stands, or for an eighteenth-century settler by that name. Since none of the four Renfro organizers knew how to operate a mill, they hired T. C. Barber, formerly of Mayo Mills, to manage the new company. Through Renfro Hosiery Mills, Barber introduced sock manufacturing to Mount Airy, which eventually became a sock manufacturing center. In its first year of operation, Renfro Mill employed twenty-five workers and produced around 30,000 dozen pairs of socks (Merritt Interview, November 9, 1999; Berrier; "1,500 Tour New Renfro Mills Plant;" Stitt).

The 1922 Sanborn Insurance Map provides the first listing for Renfro at the former tobacco leaf house at the northeast corner of Willow and Oak streets. The map indicates that the first floor contained the bleaching, boarding, packing and shipping functions with offices located in the southwest corner of the building. The second floor was vacant, the third floor contained stock, knitting was on the fourth floor, and the attic was used for storage.

By 1930 Renfro's business had grown to the point that it became necessary to institute a second shift—twelve hours with a one-hour break for lunch. It was not long, however, before the company began to feel the effects of the Depression. While Renfro managed to stay afloat, times became increasingly difficult throughout most of the 1930s. In 1932, Renfro's sales dropped by two-thirds, from more than \$600,000 to \$212,000 (Berrier).

In 1937 the company posted a loss of \$43,000 but at the same time took over Argonne Mills (which owed a large debt to Renfro) and the Piedmont Manufacturing Company, both located nearby on Willow Street. During the same year Renfro reorganized. First, T. C. Barber, who had served from the beginning as president, was relieved of his duties. (He continued his involvement with several other mills in Mount Airy.) Then Hugh L. Merritt and Frank Sydnor, both sons of Renfro's co-founders, joined W. E. Merritt, Jr. (who had joined the business in 1925) to form Renfro's new management team (Berrier; Merritt Interview, November 9, 1999; Stitt). (From the initial organization of Renfro Mill to the present

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day, members of the Merritt family have always held key positions in the company and have been in large part responsible for its success).

By 1938 Renfro could no longer handle all the sock manufacturing processes in the Willow Street building. Thus, the company expanded to a second plant—the old Globe Tobacco Warehouse—at the south end of town. While the Willow Street building continued to house the knitting process, the dyeing, finishing, and packaging steps were transferred to Plant No. 2. Although the company's sales passed the \$1 million mark, Renfro sustained a loss of \$22,000 for the year. However, 1938 was also the last year in which Renfro showed a loss until 1979, when a major flood destroyed \$2 million worth of socks at the company's Riverside plant (Merritt Interview, November 29, 1999; Merritt Notes, June 24, 1988; Berrier).

The post-war years of the mid-to-late 1940s brought major changes to Renfro. In 1944, the old Planters Tobacco Warehouse, located just east of the Willow Street building, burned. This provided the opportunity for Renfro to expand its original building and consolidate all its manufacturing functions back under one roof. Consequently, in 1946-1947 Renfro more than doubled the size of its Willow Street plant by expanding to the east and to the north (Merritt Interview, November 9, 1999; Merritt Interview, November 29, 1999). The 1948 Sanborn Map graphically depicts these changes. In addition to the original building with its corner offices, the mill now had a greatly expanded knitting area to the east, a coal shed and a boiler room to the north of this addition, a wing to the north of the original building for the winding and boarding processes, and a dye house (originally a separate commercial building) north of that on the corner of Willow and Virginia streets. In 1948, the company's sales hit \$4 million, with a profit of \$230,000 (Stitt).

Renfro Hosiery Mills continued to prosper after mid-century. During every decade the company acquired or merged with other hosiery mills and/or built additional facilities such as the 141,000 square foot Riverside plant built in Mount Airy in 1969 (Stitt). In 1973, Renfro Hosiery Mills was renamed the Renfro Corporation. A change in the dominance of the original mill was signaled in 1977, when the company's main office moved from Willow Street to Riverside Drive (Merritt, Further Historical Notes, May 20, 1991). At the end of 1996, Renfro purchased Fruit of the Loom Inc.'s sock division, making Renfro the nation's largest sock manufacturer (Leonard, "Top Sock Maker"). On March 21, 1997, the Willow Street plant closed, ending seventy-six years of Renfro's active use of the property for sock making. The knitting and seaming functions that had been handled on Willow Street were transferred to a new facility in Pulaski, Virginia. By that time, apparel manufacturers had little use for four-and-a-half-story buildings. Instead they sought spacious one-story facilities. At the closure of the Willow Street plant, Renfro employed more than 4,700 workers at fourteen manufacturing and distribution facilities in North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee, as well as in Canada and Honduras. The company manufactured more than three hundred styles of socks and more than three thousand

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different individual products (Leonard, "Renfro Closing;" Leonard, "Top Sock Maker").

In 1998, the Renfro Corporation donated its 100,000 square foot Willow Street plant to the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History located just east of the mill on Main Street (Lindenfeld). Current plans call for a preservation-minded conversion of the mill to housing for the elderly.

Architecture Context -

Renfro Mill is architecturally significant in representing well two industrial building types in Piedmont North Carolina. First, it is an excellent example of the form of building typically used for tobacco factories and tobacco leaf houses in the late nineteenth century. Buildings of this type are brick, multiple stories (often three to five), and rectangular in shape with the depth of the building being much longer than the width. The front and rear gable ends are hidden behind stepped parapets, often there is decorative brickwork on the facade—typically panels, window labels, and corbeling—and windows are segmental-arched. These buildings tend to be located in urban tobacco centers.

Renfro Mill is part of a group of similar tobacco-related buildings in Mount Airy located at the intersection of Willow and Oak streets. In addition to Renfro Mill, which was originally the R. Roberts Leaf Tobacco House built in the early 1890s, these include two buildings of the Sparger Brothers Tobacco Company built in 1891 and the Banner & Lovill Leaf House built around 1910. (These buildings are not being nominated to the National Register at this time because of lack of owner interest.) Sanborn Maps show that there were other buildings of the type located near the Willow Street buildings just west of Mount Airy's commercial Main Street, but these no longer survive. Elsewhere in Mount Airy are the late-1890s addition to the Hadley, Smith and Company Plug Tobacco Factory on W. Pine Street and the ca. 1890 Globe Tobacco Warehouse on S. Main Street. (This latter building was used in the late 1930s and early 1940s as Renfro Plant #2.)

Other examples of this type, which are only a fraction of those that once existed, include the H. K. Reid Leaf House and the E. M. Redd and Company Leaf House, both built by 1885 in Reidsville (Rockingham Co.). In Winston-Salem (Forsyth Co.) stands the ca. 1890 W. F. Smith and Sons Leaf House, currently awaiting rehabilitation and adaptive re-use as apartments. (The above discussion on tobacco buildings is derived from Sanborn Insurance Maps for Mount Airy, the author's personal observations, and the author's historical surveys of Surry County and Reidsville—published in *Simple Treasures: The Architectural Legacy of Surry County and Reidsville, North Carolina: An Inventory of Historic and Architectural Resources*.)

The other industrial type with which Renfro Mill is associated is the apparel mill of the first half of the twentieth century. These mills needed large, open, manufacturing spaces as well as areas designed to support specific manufacturing processes.

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The open floor spaces typical of the late-nineteenth-century tobacco buildings were well suited to the needs of the apparel industry. When many of the tobacco factories and leaf houses closed down in the early twentieth century, apparel companies took over the ready-made spaces. This was true not only for the Renfro Mill but also for the other tobacco-related buildings at the intersection of Willow and Oak streets, which became part of Spencer's, Inc., a manufacturer of infants' and children's clothing (Phillips, *Simple Treasures*, 184-185). Then, when Renfro Mill expanded in the 1940s, the large addition on the east side of the building simply continued the open spaces of the original mill. At the same time Renfro built an addition to the north side of the original mill that reflected the specific needs of the boarding process, wherein the socks were steamed on rows of foot-shaped forms to provide the neat, finished appearance needed for their sale. To make this a workable space, the boarding addition was designed with side windows, wall vents, and a high, metal-truss roof with a monitor. Outside air was sucked into the space through fans in the vents and then the hot air created by the steam moved upward to the ceiling, where it escaped through the windows of the monitor roof. This portion of the Renfro Mill expansion can still be clearly read in terms of its original use (Merritt Interview, November 9, 1999).

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Renfro Mill
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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Merritt, Robert. "Further Historical Notes." Typescript, May 20, 1991. Copy in possession of author. (Robert Merritt is the grandson of W. E. Merritt, one of the founders of Renfro Mill. He joined Renfro in 1955, was made president in 1965, and later CEO. In 1992 he was named Chairman of the Board. In 1995 he retired as Chairman but continues as Vice Chairman.)
- Merritt, Robert. Interviews by author, Mount Airy, N.C., November 9 and November 29, 1999. Interview notes in possession of author.
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Berrier, R. J. "Local Industrial Giant Turns 70 This Year." May 20, 1991.
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"1,500 Tour New Renfro Mills Plant." March 27, 1970.
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- Taylor, Gwynne S. National Register nomination for W. F. Smith and Sons Leaf House and Brown Brothers Company, 1977.
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Lindenfeld, Sarah. "Old Sock Plant Could Hold History Lessons." January 27, 1998.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 10 & Photos Page 11

Renfro Mill
Surry County, North Carolina

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the nominated property is defined as Tax ID #5020-11-65-7237. It is shown by the heavy black line on the accompanying tax map, drawn to a scale of 1" = 100'.

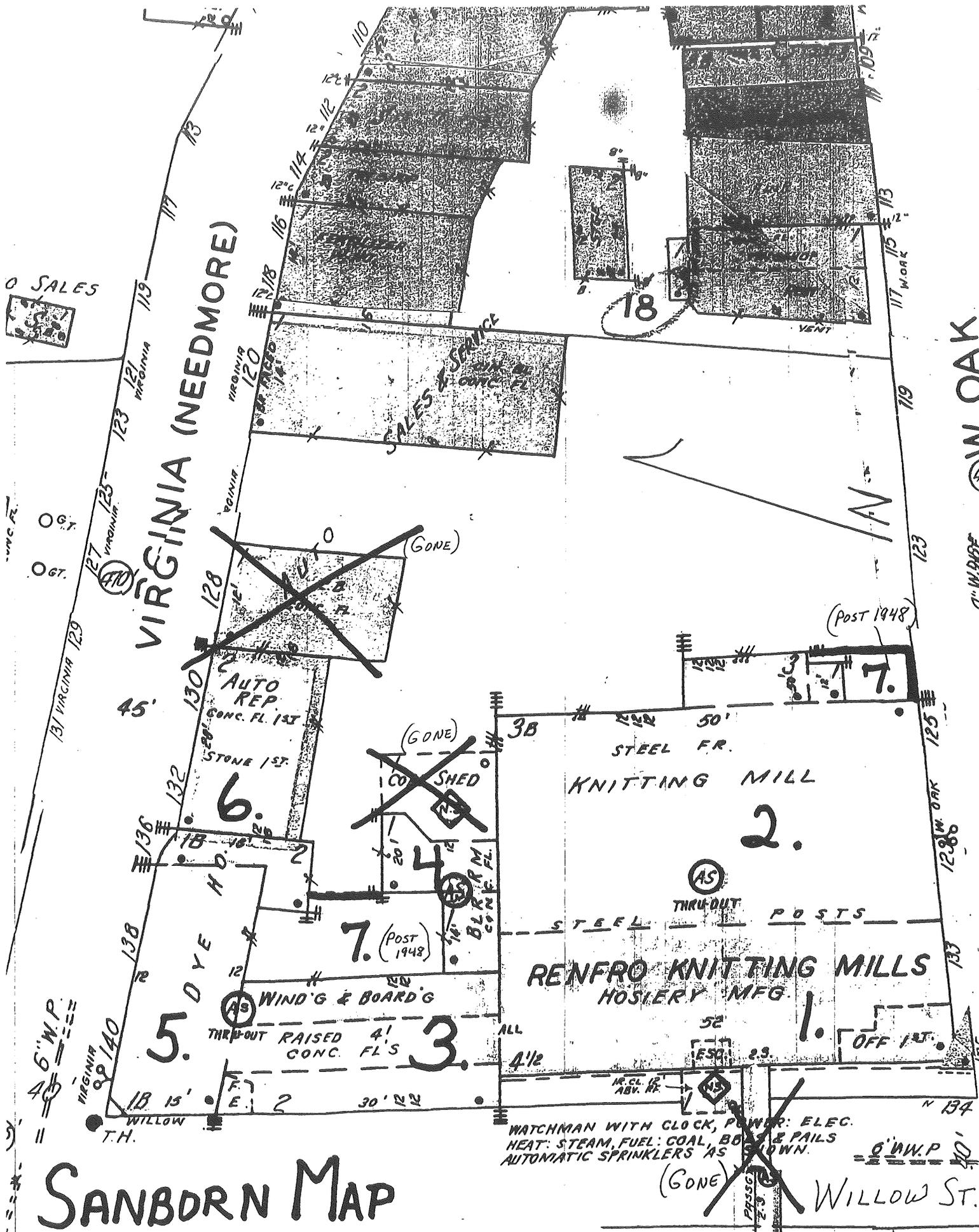
Boundary Justification:

The nominated property, consisting of a town lot of less than one acre, constitutes the historic and current setting of Renfro Mill.

PHOTOGRAPHS

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

- 1) Renfro Mill
- 2) Surry County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) 11/99
- 5) State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina
- 6-7)
 - A: Overall of south and west elevations, view to NE
 - B: Detail, south facade, view to NE
 - C: Overall of south and east elevations, view to NW
 - D: East elevation, view to SW
 - E: Overall of north and west elevations, view to SE
 - F: Roof view of several additions, view to NW
 - G: Offices, 1st floor, view to S
 - H: Open work space, 1st floor, view to SE
 - I: Winding and Boarding room, 2nd floor, view to N
 - J: Attic storage, view to SW



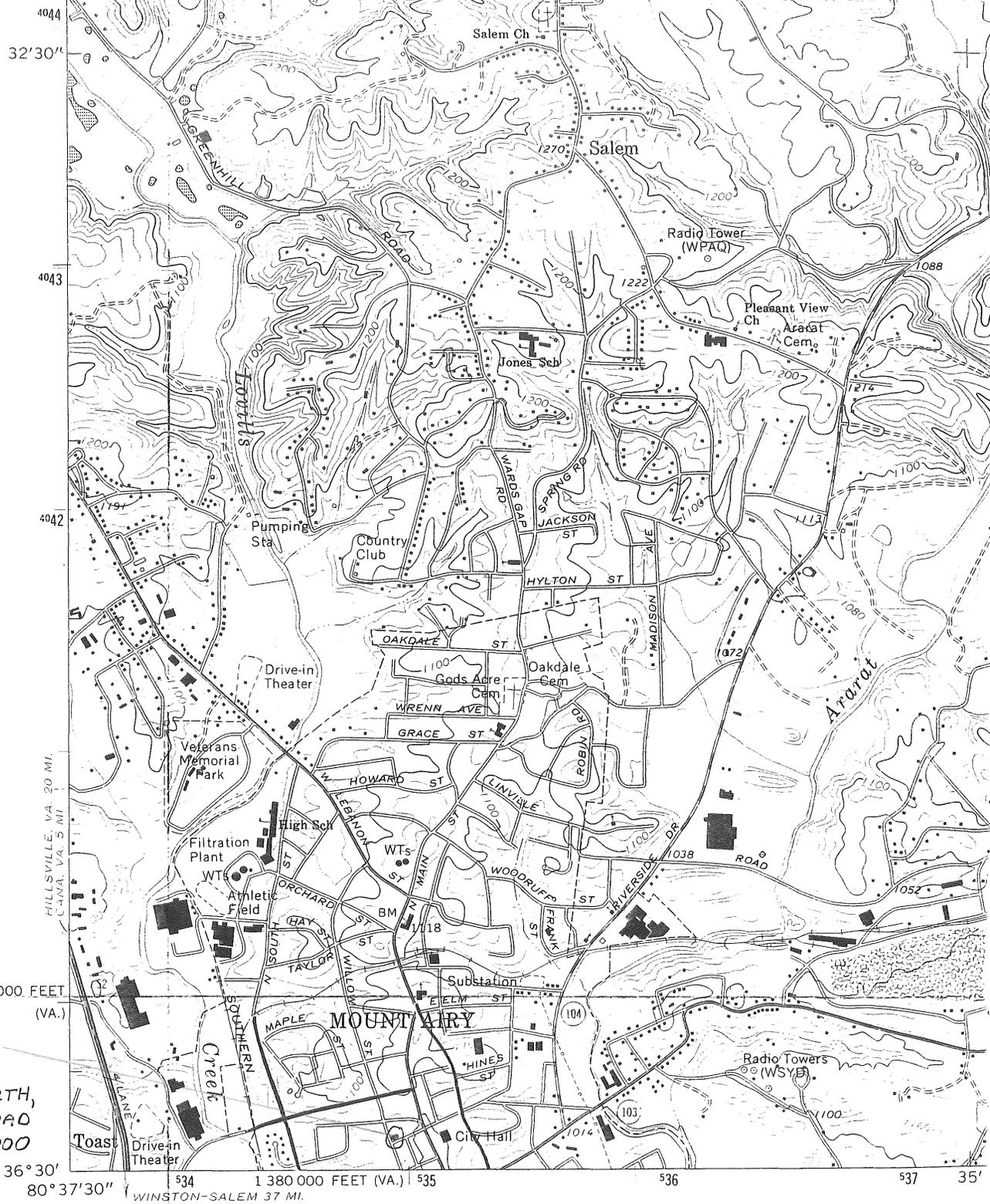


RENFRO MILL

MOUNT AIRY, SURRY CO., NC
 SURRY CO. TAX ID # -
 5020-11-65-7237

SCALE: 1" = 100'





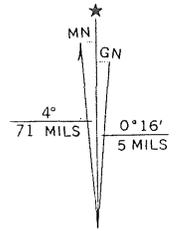
70,000 FEET (VA.)
 RENFRO MILL
 SURRY CO., NC
 MOUNT AIRY NDRTH,
 VA.-N.C. QUAD
 SCALE - 1:24,000
 ZONE 17
 E-534930
 N-4039420
 (DOBSON)
 4856 / NW

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
 Control by USGS and USC&GS
 Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
 taken 1967. Field checked 1968

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
 10,000-foot grids based on Virginia coordinate system, south zone,
 and North Carolina coordinate system
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17,
 shown in blue

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with Commonwealth
 of Virginia agencies from aerial photographs taken 1976. This information
 not field checked. Map edited 1977



UTM GRID AND 1977 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

