

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
**Office of Archives and History**  
**Department of Natural and Cultural Resources**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Downtown Sparta Historic District**

Sparta, Alleghany County, AL0351, Listed 12/10/2021

Nomination by Laura A. W. Phillips

Photographs by Laura A. W. Phillips, March 2021



58-60 South Main Street, view to southwest.



North side West Whitehead Street, view to northeast.

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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property

historic name Downtown Sparta Historic District  
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number First blocks of North and South Main Street and East and West Whitehead Street  
not for publication N/A  
city or town Sparta vicinity N/A  
state North Carolina code NC county Alleghany code 005 zip code 28675

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

D. J. [Signature] 11/4/21  
Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<u>    </u> entered in the National Register	_____	_____
<u>    </u> See continuation sheet.		
<u>    </u> determined eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<u>    </u> See continuation sheet.		
<u>    </u> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<u>    </u> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<u>    </u> other (explain): _____	_____	_____

Downtown Sparta Historic District  
Name of Property

Alleghany County, North Carolina  
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	
<u>22</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>22</u>	<u>2</u>	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**  
1 – Alleghany County Courthouse, NR listed 1979

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: courthouse  
GOVERNMENT community building  
COMMERCE/TRADE specialty store  
COMMERCE/TRADE department store  
COMMERCE/TRADE financial institution  
COMMERCE/TRADE professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE restaurant  
RECREATION AND CULTURE theatre

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: courthouse  
COMMERCE/TRADE specialty store  
COMMERCE/TRADE restaurant  
COMMERCE/TRADE business  
RECREATION/CULTURE music facility  
RECREATION/CULTURE monument/marker  
VACANT/NOT IN USE N/A

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

- Commercial Style
  - Classical Revival
  - Colonial Revival
- (See continuation sheet.)

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation BRICK
- roof OTHER: built up
- walls BRICK  
STONE
- other GLASS

**Narrative Description**

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

See continuation sheet.

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**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)

X 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.

X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE
- ARCHITECTURE
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- SOCIAL HISTORY
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1928-1972

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Barton, Harry - Architect (of Courthouse)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

X previously listed in the National Register Alleghany County Courthouse – NR Ref. #79001657

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**

X State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Downtown Sparta Historic District

Name of Property

Alleghany County, North Carolina

County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreeage of Property** Approx. 5.9 acres

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

Zone Easting Northing

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

See continuation sheet.

**Boundary Justification**

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

See continuation sheet.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian and Consultant to:

organization Sparta Revitalization Committee, Inc. date June 28, 2021

street & number 55 Park Boulevard telephone (336) 727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27127

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**12. 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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Wes Brinegar, Mayor; Ryan Wilmoth, Town Manager (See separate sheet for property owners – under 50)

street & number 304 South Main Street or P. O. Box 99 telephone (336) 372-4257

city or town Sparta state NC zip code 28675

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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 listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Alleghany County, North Carolina

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### 7. DESCRIPTION

#### Architectural Classification, cont'd:

MODERN MOVEMENT

#### Materials, cont'd:

Foundation:

CONCRETE

Walls:

CONCRETE

WOOD

Vinyl

#### Summary

Located at the crossing of US 21 (Main Street) and NC 18 (Whitehead Street) in the Alleghany County seat of Sparta, the Downtown Sparta Historic District marks the very center of this mountainous northwestern North Carolina county that is bordered on the east by Surry County, on the south by Wilkes County, on the west by Ashe County, and on the north by the state of Virginia. As the county's only town, Sparta is the commercial and governmental center of Alleghany County.

*NOTE: Although Main Street has a northwest-southeast alignment and Whitehead Street has a northeast-southwest alignment, for ease of description in this nomination, Main Street is considered to be north-south, and Whitehead Street is considered to be east-west and the individual buildings are described accordingly.*

The Downtown Sparta Historic District encompasses approximately 5.9 acres. Within the district, Main Street extends north and south on a fairly level plane, but the topography of East and West Whitehead Street on either side of Main Street slopes downward significantly from the intersection. The district's boundary was drawn to include the tightly knit collection of twenty-five commercial and government buildings built during the ca. 1928-1972 period of significance and centered on the intersection of Main and Whitehead streets. The district boundary follows the outermost property lines of the twenty-five included properties with one exception. The north-south rear portion of the lot on which both 38 and 68 East Whitehead Street stand is not

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included, because it consists of open land used for parking. Instead, the boundary at that place is drawn to connect more directly with the southern boundary of 11 South Main Street.

Twenty-three of the district's buildings contribute to its historic and architectural character. Of the two that do not, one (9 North Main Street) is located in the middle of a block, flanked by contributing buildings. The other (48 North Main Street) is located at the end of a row of contributing buildings but is included in the district because it is associated with the history of the district, was built during the period of significance, and is tied to the adjacent two contributing buildings (42 and 36 North Main Street) by a continuous fixed canopy.

North of 48 North Main Street, a parking lot and later commercial buildings of a different type from those in the district form a break in the continuity of the district's historic buildings. North of the district boundary on the west side of North Main Street are commercial buildings from the late 1980s and later and vacant lots. South of the district along South Main Street are vacant lots, modern free-standing commercial buildings, and a scattering of older houses. The east side of the district extends past a parking lot to include the Alleghany County Community Building at 85 East Whitehead Street, but this building is of a level of significance both historically and architecturally that its inclusion is warranted even with the intervening parking lot. East of the district are free-standing and spaced-out modern commercial buildings, the Alleghany County Sheriff's Office and Jail, open land, and houses. West of the district are parking lots, vacant land, more recent free-standing commercial buildings, and houses. By comparison, the mixed character of the areas surrounding the historic district serves to increase the district's sense of cohesiveness as Sparta's historic center.

The twenty-five properties that make up the historic district consist of twenty-three commercial buildings and two government buildings. Nineteen of the buildings are arranged along the east and west sides of North and South Main Street, and the other six buildings front the north and south sides of East and West Whitehead Street. Typical of downtown commercial centers, all but three of the buildings are contiguous structures. Only the Alleghany County Courthouse at 12 North Main Street (photo #1), the Alleghany County Community Building at 85 East Whitehead Street (photo #11), and the Choate Motor Company Building at 68 East Whitehead Street (photo #10) are free-standing.

The two governmental buildings are easily distinguished from the commercial buildings not only because they are free-standing (the commercial Choate Motor Company Building also stands alone), but also because they are partially surrounded by lawns and are architecturally distinctive from the district's commercial buildings. The courthouse is a monumental Classical Revival-

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style building with a tetrastyle Tuscan Doric pedimented portico, easily identifiable as the seat of Alleghany County's primary government functions. It is the only building in the district known to have been designed by an architect, Greensboro's Harry Barton. Fowler-Jones Lumber Company was the contractor. The courthouse was listed in the National Register in 1979 as part of the thematic nomination: Courthouses in North Carolina. While the Colonial Revival-style Community Building does not compete with the monumentality of the courthouse, it nevertheless expresses architectural boldness through its size (five bays façade and two stories) and walls of native stone. Another feature that distinguishes these two buildings is the stone retaining wall that largely surrounds both of them, individually.

The district's commercial buildings are concentrated in tight rows along the west, especially, and east sides of Main Street. For the most part, they are typical of commercial buildings erected during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Eleven buildings are two stories in height and fourteen are one story. All but three have, or originally had, brick facades, which are largely plain, save for the frequent use of a simple brick panel on the upper façade. The building at 42 North Main Street (photo #3) displays a single sawtooth band across its upper façade. Almost all of the buildings have simple parapeted cornices with a terra cotta coping, behind which the roofs slope gently to the rear. Both the Farmers Hardware Building (photo #6) at 11 South Main Street and the Bank of Sparta (photo #4) at 4-6 South Main originally had stepped and shaped parapets, but these have been removed.

Most commercial buildings have storefronts with one or more recessed entrances flanked by shop windows, many with transoms. The one-story building at 16-18 South Main Street has a mid-twentieth-century modernized storefront of metal-framed glass doors and shop windows. Two-story buildings in the district have an entrance at the center or at one far side leading to the second floor. Second-floor windows are mostly one-over-one or three-over-one sash. Some of the buildings with brick facades also have brick side and rear walls, but many are of concrete-block construction with only brick veneer on the façade.

The largest commercial building is Farmers Hardware, and it exhibits some of the most refined brickwork in the district. One of the smallest brick buildings is also one of the most unusual because of its placement. The Rufus A. Doughton Law Office at 30 North Main Street, though attached to 36 North Main Street, is set back from the sidewalk and faces the north side of the courthouse with a two-bay front porch.

Among the brick buildings, those with the most decorative facades are the 1935 Spartan Theatre (photo #2) at 27 North Main Street and the Dr. P. L. Choate Building (photo #9) at 38 East

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Whitehead Street. The 1934-1935 Spartan Theatre boasts a high center parapet, and a round arch and other details are laid in yellow brick that contrasts with the overall red brick. The façade of the 1953 Choate building, erected by the Winston-Salem Masonry Construction Company, is laid in an overall diamond-shaped diaper pattern along with other decorative brick treatments.

Three of the most architecturally distinctive buildings in the district are Smithey's Store (photo #7) at 38 South Main Street and the two Bledsoe buildings (photo #8) at 58 and 60 South Main Street, all built in the 1930s. Their use of native stone for their walls reflects a special tie to the mountainous environment of Alleghany County. Walter and Paul Andrews were the local stonemasons who laid the river rocks for the Bledsoe buildings. Another singular building is the 1946 Choate Motor Company Building (photo #10) at 68 East Whitehead Street. It reflects modernism in its angular and multi-colored façade. Sam Porter was the contractor for the building.

Certain landscape features accompany the buildings in the historic district. In addition to the lawns and stone retaining walls of the Alleghany County Courthouse and the Alleghany County Community Building are sidewalks and lighting. The sidewalks are concrete, including downward steps on West Whitehead Street to accommodate the downward slope of the street (photo #5). Due to some revitalization efforts in recent years, the Main Street sidewalks incorporate herringbone brick borders and larger brick areas at the street corners. In addition, lantern-type street lights have been installed along Main Street. At the south end of the district, a twelve-foot-wide alley between Smithey's Store and the Bledsoe Commercial Building, which the Chamber of Commerce now occupies, has been turned into a pleasant public walkway with scattered seating and plants. A decorative metal arch at the South Main Street head of the alley bears the words "Sparta Public Walkway."

Although the development of the town of Sparta began during the second half of the nineteenth century, the historic district's period of significance (ca. 1928-1972) does not pre-date 1928 due in large part to the impact of fires in Sparta's downtown. In 1927, a fire destroyed the building at 3-7 North Main Street and damaged several others around it. Sparta's worst fire, which occurred on January 7, 1933, destroyed buildings on the west side of North Main Street north of 9 North Main Street and damaged 3-7 and 9 North Main Street. The fire jumped over to the east side of the street, destroying most of the courthouse and severely damaging or destroying other buildings to its north. Many of the buildings other than the courthouse were of frame construction. The fire was confined to the area north of Whitehead Street. The courthouse was rebuilt later in 1933, encouraging the quick reconstruction of the commercial buildings that had been lost in the fire. This time, most of the buildings were erected with masonry construction. A

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third fire occurred on January 20, 1986, destroying several buildings on the west side of North Main Street north of the Spartan Theatre. The theatre's fire wall protected it during the 1986 fire and kept the fire from advancing southward. After the construction of the Bank of Sparta at 4-6 South Main Street ca. 1929 and the small building on its south side soon thereafter, commercial construction on the west side of South Main Street halted for around a decade due to the presence of an old house situated well back from the street with trees in front of it along South Main Street.

Of the buildings that stand in today's historic district, four were built in the late 1920s, nine were built in the 1930s, ten followed in the 1940s, and only two were built in the 1950s. Thus, approximately seventy-five percent of the buildings date from the decades of the 1930s and 1940s. The oldest buildings, dating from ca. 1928, include Farmers Hardware at 11 South Main Street, the Belk Building at 3-7 North Main Street, and the B&T Drug Company Building at 9 North Main Street. The newest construction in the district includes the 1953 Dr. P. L. Choate Building at 38 East Whitehead Street and the remodeling of the building at 16-18 South Main Street.

Between the end of the period of significance and today, some of the district's commercial buildings have been modified in ways typically seen in older commercial centers in North Carolina. These modifications have included the replacement of some wood-framed shopfront doors with metal-framed doors and occasionally the same type of replacement of shop windows, though the placement and size of these features generally remain the same. The most detrimental alterations have come with the addition of mansard- or shed-roofed, frame, fixed canopies over ten of the shopfronts. In addition, the concrete-block side elevations of two buildings (48 N. Main and 11 South Main) have been sheathed with vinyl siding.

### Integrity Statement

Despite alterations made to some of the buildings, the Downtown Sparta Historic District retains strong integrity. The district retains its original location, and no buildings have been moved. It retains its original setting in Sparta as the commercial and governmental center for Alleghany County. The two streets (Main and Whitehead) retain their original layout, and the district as a whole and most of the buildings individually retain their original design. In most cases, the original brick, stone, and concrete-block building materials remain intact, and the few cases where those materials have been compromised due to later sheathing (11 South Main Street, 48 North Main Street, and 9 North Main Street) have not seriously altered the overall architectural character and quality of the district. The workmanship in brick and stone that went into the

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construction of the district's buildings remains evident, and in some cases—such as the stonework of the Alleghany County Community Building, Smithey's Store, the Bledsoe Commercial Building, and the Bledsoe Ford Company Building, as well as the brickwork at the Alleghany County Courthouse, the Spartan Theatre, the Farmers Hardware Building, and the Dr. P. L. Choate Building, it shines. The district retains its historic associations with both government and commerce in Alleghany County, and because of the overall well-preserved state of the layout of the district and the historic architectural character of its buildings, it maintains its feeling as the center of a small, North Carolina town.

### Inventory List

The following inventory list provides information on all properties in the Downtown Sparta Historic District. Each entry includes the property's name, address, approximate date of construction, contributing or noncontributing status, and a summary of the property's physical appearance and known history.

Whenever possible, resources are named for their first owner-occupant or for the primary long-term occupant with which the building is most strongly associated. In some cases, however, that information is not known, and for some buildings there have been multiple owners and uses through the years. In those cases, buildings are simply called "Commercial Building." The name selection for each becomes evident in the historical information (or lack thereof) provided in the inventory entry.

Inventory entries are based on on-site recording conducted by Laura A. W. Phillips in March 2021 and on research conducted between March and June 2021. Property information provided in Alleghany County's tax records was considered, but often with skepticism. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps and city directories are not available for Sparta. Thus, historical information on properties was gathered largely through a combination of research with period newspapers, interviews with long-time Sparta residents and property owners, videos from 1939 and the 1940s, a pre-1933 aerial photograph of downtown Sparta, deeds, and several published histories. Applying an understanding of historic architectural development also aided in determining histories and approximate dates of construction for some buildings. Sources used for each property are listed in parentheses within or at the end of each entry in the inventory list. Full citations are given in the nomination bibliography.

Buildings that add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the district is significant, were present during the district's period of significance (ca. 1928-1972), relate to the documented significance of the district, and possess historic integrity are

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contributing resources. Buildings that do not add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the district is significant, were not present during the district's period of significance, or do not possess sufficient historic integrity are noncontributing resources. Loss of historic integrity occurs when alterations, additions, or the loss of historic materials hinder a building from conveying a strong sense of its appearance during the period when it contributed to the district's history. Of the twenty-five resources—all buildings—in the Downtown Sparta Historic District, only two are considered noncontributing, and in both cases, that determination is due to significant alterations, not to having been built outside the district's period of significance.

The inventory is arranged alphabetically by street name—Main Street and Whitehead Street. Properties on North Main Street are listed before properties on South Main Street, and properties on East Whitehead Street are listed before properties on West Whitehead Street. Within each street section, properties are listed in ascending order of street addresses. Property addresses and the contributing or noncontributing status of each resource are shown on the accompanying district boundary map.

### NORTH MAIN STREET

#### **Belk Building**

3-7 North Main Street  
Ca. 1928

Contributing building

The Belk Building stands on the site of Alleghany County's first courthouse, which was a frame building. It was later sold and torn down, after which Dr. James L. Doughton built a two-story brick building at this prime location. However, according to a 1927 newspaper report, the building was destroyed by fire and other buildings, including the Bank of Sparta across Whitehead Street, were damaged by the fire. Apparently Doughton rebuilt the building, for prior to 1933, William Rex Mitchell and Dalton Warren were operating a hardware store there. With the great fire of January 1933, the building and its contents were damaged but not destroyed, and Mitchell and Warren elected to discontinue their business. Thereafter, Belk undertook repairs and opened a department store in the building. Belk remained there for several decades until the Dart Department Store was established and took over the building in 1973. In more recent years, other stores have occupied the building. (Buck Mitchell Interview, March 31, 2021; *Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 36; *The News and Observer*, March 25, 1927; *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1973*, p. 187)

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The Belk Building is one of the largest of the district's commercial buildings. The two-story-plus-basement brick structure is three bays wide, multiple bays deep and has a sloped roof with a parapet—straight on the façade and stepped on the south side—that has a terra cotta coping. The bricks are laid in a five-to-one common bond which is a little more refined on the façade, where every sixth row alternates headers and stretchers. Plain brick pilasters divide the storefront into three parts, but in the last quarter century metal Ionic columns have been attached to the two inner pilasters. The central entrance has a double-leaf glass-and-steel replacement door that probably dates from the mid-twentieth century. On either side of the entrance bay are plate glass shop windows with a narrow metal divider in the center of each. A narrow transom carries across all three sections of the façade's first story, and above each transom is a soldier-course lintel. A photo that appears to be from the 1940s shows a striped cloth awning across the first story. A ca. 1970s photograph shows that it had been replaced by a suspended flat metal awning. Today there is no awning. The second floor has one-over-one vinyl-sash windows that are paired in the outer bays. They all have brick sills and soldier-course brick lintels. Likely at the same time the metal columns were added to the storefronts, metal cornices were added to the windows. At the north end of the façade, a doorway holds a recessed nine-light and two-panel modern door that opens to the stair to the second floor. On the south side of the building facing West Whitehead Street, there are three one-over-one sash windows of unknown material at second-floor level as well as partially boarded-up openings at the basement. On the rear, there is a central door at basement level and three pairs of replacement windows—both one-over-one and six-over-six sash of unknown material—at first-story level (in relationship to front of building), date unknown. The north side of the building is attached to the adjacent building.

### **B&T Drug Company Building**

9 North Main Street  
Ca. 1928

Noncontributing building

After graduating in pharmacy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1925, Thomas Roy Burgiss came to Sparta and opened Alleghany County's first drugstore, the Alleghany Pharmacy. Located initially in the two-story building on the corner owned by Dr. J. L. Doughton that burned in the 1927 fire, the pharmacy thereafter moved to this small, one-story building. Around that time, Burgiss formed a partnership with Dr. Clive Allen Thompson, who received his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia. The two called their business the B&T Drug Company, which became a long-standing fixture in the community. Burgiss later bought Thompson's share in the business, but it retained the name B&T Drug Company. Meanwhile, Dr. Thompson practiced medicine as Alleghany County's doctor for almost sixty

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years. In 1970, the drugstore moved to a new building across the street from the Sparta Presbyterian Church southeast of the historic district and changed its name to Drugcare of Alleghany. (*Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, pp. 98, 471-472)

Despite its longtime role in the commercial history of Sparta's downtown, the B&T Drug Company building is considered noncontributing to the character of the historic district because it has lost its architectural integrity. A 1940s photograph shows that at that time, the building looked like a typical commercial building of the 1920s or 1930s. Although its shopfront can't be seen in the photograph, the striped cloth awning than shaded it can. The upper façade was solid brick with a large, slightly recessed panel created by brick corbelling across the top and bottom. Terra cotta coping edges the parapet that fronts the roof. Today, none of those features remain visible, although the form of the shopfront, with its recessed entrance, may be original. Otherwise, beaded boards sheathe the upper façade and the skirt beneath the shop windows. A large fixed canopy with an asphalt-shingled roof and a beaded-board hanging cornice shelters the lower façade, which has a replacement glass door and replacement windows.

### **Alleghany County Courthouse**

Contributing building

(NR Ref. #79001657, listed May 10, 1979)

12 North Main Street  
1933

The present Alleghany County Courthouse is the fourth of those that have served this mountain county. The first courthouse was a small frame structure built in 1867 at the corner where the Belk Department Store was later built. In 1879-1880, it was replaced by the second courthouse, a brick building erected across the street on the site of the present courthouse. That courthouse was used until 1909, when it was condemned and demolished. In 1910, the third courthouse was erected by the B. F. Smith Fire Proof Construction Company of Washington, D.C. It was a Classical Revival-style building with a two-stage cupola. Despite having been built by a fire-proof-construction company, the courthouse burned in the great Sparta fire of January 7, 1933. The entire front of the 1910 courthouse was destroyed, leaving only the damaged jail and the offices of the Clerk of Court and Register of Deeds. By the end of the month, the County Commission had secured the services of Greensboro architect Harry Barton "to furnish plans and specifications for the new Court House to be rebuilt." A graduate of George Washington University with a degree in architecture, Philadelphia native Harry Barton (1876-1937) had a long and prolific career that concentrated on Greensboro, but also included other North Carolina communities. During the 1920s, he was Greensboro's leading architect, and during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, he designed classically inspired courthouses and municipal buildings in the

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state. Executed during the Depression, Barton's design for the Alleghany County Courthouse was more economical than most. In March 1933, the contract for the anticipated \$17,000 courthouse was awarded to Fowler-Jones Lumber Company. Southern Desk Company supplied the benches and other furnishings for the building. The County Commission issued bonds to pay for the new courthouse and its furnishings. The fourth courthouse has served the county for nearly nine decades. The Alleghany County Courthouse was listed the National Register in 1979 as part of the thematic nomination: Courthouses in North Carolina. (*Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 37; William B. Bushong, Adam Ronan, and Catherine W. Bishir, "Harry Barton," *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/>; Alleghany County Minutes, Board of County Commissioners, 1914-1943, Vol. 5, pp. 270, 275, 279, 506)

The relatively simple but bold Classical Revival-style Alleghany County Courthouse rests on a slight rise of land at the northeast corner of North Main and East Whitehead streets in the center of Sparta. A grass lawn surrounds the courthouse on three sides, setting it off as if it were on a square, and a concrete-capped stone retaining wall separates the lawn from the sidewalk on the west (front) and south sides. Where the east end of the retaining wall ends, it joins a wall composed of rounded concrete blocks that carries across the rear of the property. At the center of the west side, the stone wall is interrupted by stone posts that flank stone-filled concrete steps rising to the brick walk leading to the front entrance of the courthouse. Typical of courthouse squares, the front lawn contains several monuments. Northwest of the courthouse is a state highway marker honoring Rufus A. Doughton, who served as a legislator for fourteen terms, was Lieutenant Governor from 1893-1897, headed the Revenue and Highway commissions, and was a trustee of the University of North Carolina for fifty-six years. In front of the northwest corner of the courthouse, a vertical granite monument honors the men and women of Alleghany County who served and sacrificed for their country in war and peace. The monument stands on a rectangular stone-laid bed edged in concrete. American and North Carolina flags rise on poles on either side of the service monument. Southwest of the courthouse, a sculpted bronze head of Robert Lee Doughton, member of Congress from 1911 to 1953, rests on a tall, two-step granite base.

The red brick (six-to-one common bond) courthouse rests on a coursed, white concrete base which increases in height as the terrain slopes downward to the east (rear). Brick pilasters rise at the corners of the H-shaped building. Contrasting with the red brick, bands of white masonry mark the top of the water table, the expanded sills beneath the one-over-one sash windows, pilaster caps, and a multi-part cornice. Plain brick pilasters divide the bays, which have corbeling at the top of the second-floor windows, and red brick panels mark the spaces between the

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building's two stories. The four bays of the center section of the building (running east and west) rise higher than the front and rear sections. A narrow brick addition (post 1978) extends northward from the north side of the courthouse toward its rear. A glass-enclosed entry area is positioned on its west side in the corner formed by the addition and the main building. The focal point of the courthouse is its monumental tetrastyle Tuscan portico with full pedimented entablature. The portico shelters the center three bays of the seven-bay west façade. Beneath the center of the portico is the courthouse entrance, a replacement aluminum-framed double door with a plain transom. Brickwork forms a round-arched surround with a white keystone at the top. The semi-circle formed by the round arch above the door has a white background against which are the multi-colored county seal and the words "Alleghany County" rounding the arch and "Courthouse" across the bottom.

The interior has linoleum-tile floors and plastered walls and ceilings. It features a center hall flanked by offices with wood-framed glass and wood-paneled doors and transoms. At the east (rear) end of the hall, a segmental arch in the wall carries over the double-door entrance to the Register of Deeds office. At the front of the hall by the front entrance, a vestibule holds a pair of stairs leading to the second floor and its courtroom. The stairs have white-tile treads and are bordered by a decorative ironwork balustrade with a wood handrail. At the second-floor level, glass-and-wood-paneled double doors open to the courtroom. A curved wood balustrade separates the wood benches for the public from the front areas for official court business. At the front, the paneled judge's bench has a tall, paneled wall behind it which has been enlarged since 1978. Seating areas on either side, at least one for jurors, is separated from the center area by turned railings. A paneled wainscot surrounds the courtroom. At the rear of the courtroom, classical wood posts support a balcony accessed by two doors from an upper-level hall.

**Commercial Building**  
15-17 North Main Street  
Ca. 1935

Contributing building

After the downtown fire of 1933, many of the buildings that had burned were soon rebuilt, and if they had been of frame construction, this time they were brick. This large, two-story building is one example. County tax records give the date of construction as 1940, but according to Una Edwards Lindh, the building was standing when her family moved back to Sparta in 1935, when she was ten years old. An image of this section of the street filmed in the early 1940s confirms the memories of at least three of Sparta's elderly residents (Una Lindh, Amos Wagoner Jr., and Bonnie Vaughan). The store at the south end of the building was the Cash and Carry Store, a grocery. It was operated by John Mack and Pauline Edwards. North of Cash and Carry was a

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jewelry store and repair shop, established in 1946 by Clifton Evans. Based on a photograph that appears to date from the 1960s or 1970s, the store later became Sheets Jewelry, owned and operated by George L. Sheets. On the second floor of the building were the offices of the telephone company and Dr. C. A. Reeves, a dentist. (“Alleghany Memories with John Miller and Amos Wagoner Jr.,” “Alleghany Memories with Bonnie Vaughan,” Interview with Una Edwards Lindh, April 8, 2021; *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 191; *Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 37)

The building’s front and side walls are laid in common bond, and on the façade, every sixth course alternates headers and stretchers. Soldier-course bricks serve as window sills and lintels. Running across the entire the upper façade beneath the plain parapet that hides the roof is a shallow brick panel. Shopfront windows appear to have been modified from the originals, though brick skirts remain beneath them. The single- or double-leaf glass doors set within wood frames appear to be original. There are two shopfronts of uneven width and a central door between the two that opens to a hallway and stair to the second floor. Glass transoms span the storefronts and the central entrance. The south shopfront (115) has a standing-seam metal awning. Awnings above the central entrance and the north shopfront are canvas. On the second floor of the three-bay facade, three-over-one wood-sash windows are paired, and each set is covered by a canvas awning. The bays are not symmetrically arranged. Instead, two pairs of windows are centered over the large shopfront at 15 North Main, and the third pair is centered over the smaller shopfront at 117 North Main. The rear of the building is brick veneered and has miscellaneous windows.

### **Commercial Building**

21 North Main Street  
1934

Contributing building

Constructed right after Sparta’s 1933 fire, Hardin’s Store, owned by Jay and Georgia Hardin, sold dry goods, groceries, and clothing. The one-story brick building has a central recessed entrance with a replacement glass and aluminum door flanked by windows that rest on a brick skirt. A glass transom and a canvas awning carry across the whole. The plain upper façade features a slightly recessed brick panel and a plain parapet hiding the sloping roof. (Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 8, 2021; “Alleghany Memories with Bonnie Vaughan”)

### **Spartan Theatre**

27 North Main Street  
1934-1935

Contributing building

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On January 24, 1935, *The Alleghany News* announced that the new Spartan Theatre would open on February 1 at 7:00 to the screen production of "Wings in the Dark." Ben G. Reeves managed the movie theatre from its opening until 1945. The theatre was advertised as being "modern in every respect . . . and equipped with the latest machinery for producing talking pictures." Its interior "walls of stippled plaster, modern wiring and electrical fixtures, and a silvered screen—the finest type of screen obtainable—" were all noted. Of particular importance, as would be proved in Sparta's downtown fire of 1986, the entire building was fire-proof and the projection room was constructed to prevent escape of any flame that might originate there. Carrying on the entertainment tradition, the building today is used by Alleghany Jubilee, a venue for Ol' Time and Bluegrass Music. (*Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 393; "New Spartan Theatre to Open Feb. 1," *The Alleghany News*, January 24, 1935, reprinted in Alleghany County, North Carolina Sesquicentennial Celebration publication)

The Spartan Theatre is one of the most handsome commercial buildings in downtown Sparta. The three-story building with its running-bond brick façade is dominated by a stepped parapet cornice, in which the center section is broad and rises well above the main level of the cornice line and projects slightly in front of the body of the facade. A pilaster at either end of the façade rises slightly above the main cornice line and also projects slightly in front of the facade. To accentuate the tall center section of the façade, a yellow-brick round arch rises from either side of the center-bay window, which forgoes a defined lintel, up past the main cornice line into the risen parapet section. Three bricks extending inward from the arch imply a keystone and impost. The windows in the north and south bays have red brick sills but otherwise are bordered by yellow bricks, including the lintels. (The yellow bricks of the north windows have been painted white.) All three windows have one-over-one metal sash. Within the projecting side pilasters of the façade, the theatre has a deeply recessed entrance defined on either side by a vertical pilaster of decorative brickwork. A center column alternates squares of three vertical brick stretchers with three horizontal stretchers, and each square is composed of a center yellow brick flanked by two red bricks. Red Roman bricks border the decorative brick columns. Old photographs show that originally a stepped marquee that also served as an outdoor balcony accessed by the center window carried across the entire façade. It was replaced, possibly in the 1970s, by a hip-roofed, asphalt-shingled fixed canopy with a vertical-board wood skirt. At the upper edges of the hipped roof at the north and south ends can be seen portions of what appears to have been a brick corbelled cornice. Within the recessed entrance area, the walls are stuccoed and the floor is composed of multi-colored terrazzo tiles. The floor is bordered on three sides by marble blocks and has one partial east-west band of marble blocks in the center. At the northwest corner of the recessed entrance is a replacement glass door to the theatre, and adjacent to it on the south is a

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large, horizontal window. On the north wall of the recessed area, a wood door with a central glass panel opens to stairs leading to the second floor.

**Rufus A. Doughton Law Office**  
30 North Main Street  
1933

Contributing building

Attorney Rufus Alexander Doughton (1857-1945) received his law degree from the University of North Carolina in 1880. When he was licensed, he moved to Sparta where he set up a practice that he maintained until his death. In 1887, Doughton was elected to the State House of Representatives, where he was reelected in 1889 and 1891. In 1891, he was chosen Speaker of the House. In 1892, he was elected lieutenant-governor, and it was from this role that he later came to be known as "Governor Rufe." He returned to the General Assembly in 1903 and served numerous terms until 1933. While in the Assembly, he played a leadership role in the passage of the 1921 Highway Act that created the State Highway Commission, starting the state on a program of modern, paved roads. Doughton then served on the Highway Commission until 1923, when the governor appointed him State Commissioner of Revenue. In 1929, he resigned that office when he was appointed chairman of the State Highway Commission. Doughton also served on the board of trustees for the University of North Carolina for fifty-seven years. (*History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 79)

When Doughton originally had the small brick building immediately north of the courthouse erected for his office is not known. However, period newspapers reported that the building was destroyed in the downtown Sparta fire of January 7, 1933. Three days after the fire, the *Statesville Daily Record* noted that Doughton's office housed "a library of valuable law books accumulated over a period of many years. Valuable papers in the safe were protected." Ad McMillan later claimed that he and his son grabbed some canvas or tarpaulin and, piling the law books into it, carried them out back away from the fire, throwing dirt on top to protect them. Whether the remains of the building after the fire allowed it to be used in reconstructing the law office that stands today is not known, but presumably Doughton rebuilt whatever was necessary shortly after the fire, for he needed a conveniently located office to maintain his law practice. A film made in Sparta in 1939 shows the law office in place then. How the building was used during the decade after Doughton's 1945 death is not known, but in 1954 Ed M. and Stella M. Anderson purchased the property, and the building became the office of the *Alleghany News*. In 1983 Charles E. Dysart and his wife, Ruth, acquired the property, after which the building was used as C. E. Dysart's surveyor's office. In 2012, Alleghany County purchased the property, and the building has been used in a variety of ways in association with the courthouse.

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(*The Charlotte Observer*, January 8, 1933 and February 17, 1940; *Statesville Daily Record*, January 10, 1933; *Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 37; Ben Reeves, World's Fair film, 1939; Deed Book 63, p. 532; Deed Book 121, p. 630; Deed Book 355, p. 722; *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 190)

The diminutive one-story building, constructed of six-to-one common bond bricks, is a departure from the other downtown buildings. Though attached to the building at 36 North Main (built later), the Rufus A. Doughton Law Office is set well back from the sidewalk. Facing the courthouse instead of the street, its entrance is on the south side, where a hip-roofed porch with three classical posts set on brick plinths shelters the six-panel entrance in the west bay and the adjacent window. The porch is likely original, as an archival video from the late 1930s or early 1940s shows it with substantially the same appearance. The west elevation facing North Main Street features two pairs of six-over-six wood-sash windows with brick sills and soldier-course lintels. Two single windows are on the west façade and one window is on the east, rear, elevation. Like those on the west elevation, all are six-over-six sash with a brick sill and a soldier-course brick lintel. North of the rear window is a five-panel door with a soldier-course brick lintel. The building's North Main Street elevation has a plain parapet cornice and there is a stepped parapet along the south side, all with a terra cotta coping. The roof, itself, slopes downward from west to east.

### **Western Auto Store Building**

Contributing building

36 North Main Street  
Ca. 1941

Charles R. Roe established the local Western Auto in 1941. On May 1, 1941, he and his wife, Julia, along with C. G. and Zenna Richardson purchased a lot on North Main Street adjacent to R. A. Doughton's brick office. Roe and Richardson likely had this building erected soon thereafter, for a 1944 deed mentions a building on the lot. Roe is believed to have operated Western Auto at this location for at least two decades. (Deed Book 49, p. 248; Deed Book 52, p. 172; "Alleghany Memories with Una Lindh, Part 2"; *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 185; Interview with Una Edwards Lindh, April 8, 2021)

The simple one-story brick building is laid in stretcher-bond bricks on the façade and south elevation. Its plain parapet hides the slightly sloped roof and is stepped along the south elevation, the whole with a terra cotta coping. On the upper portion of the façade, a rectangular border of slightly raised brick headers creates a name panel. The shopfront has plate-glass windows that angle inward to the recessed entrance and are set on a brick skirt. The glass-and-steel double-leaf

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entrance is a replacement of the original. A shed-roofed fixed canopy with an asphalt-shingle roof and a wood shirt shelters the shopfront and continues northward to include 42 and 48 North Main Street. The rear of the building is stuccoed and features two replacement one-over-one sash windows high on the wall and a replacement double-leaf door in the center.

### **Commercial Building**

Contributing building

42 North Main Street  
1944

In June 1944, C. R. and Julia Roe and C. G. and Zenna Richardson purchased a lot adjacent to the lot where they had already constructed a building (36 North Main). They probably had this building erected shortly thereafter. For some years thereafter, Doughton Perry operated the Mic or Mac grocery here. (Deed Book 52, p. 172; Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 8, 2021; "Alleghany Memories with Una Lindh, Part 2")

The two-story, concrete-block building has a running-bond brick façade, a stuccoed south elevation and rear, and a north elevation sheathed with synthetic siding. The building has a parapeted cornice that is stepped downward along the side elevations, shielding the sloped roof. Terra cotta coping tops the parapet. The design of the façade is a bit unusual. Centered on the upper façade is the only decorative feature, a narrow band of sawtooth-laid bricks. Other than this band, the rest of the façade is asymmetrical in that the two pairs of one-over-one vinyl-sash windows on the second story and the shopfront below are all shifted to the north, all to make room for a (replacement) door at the south end that leads to the second floor. The form of the shopfront appears original, but its features have been altered. The brickwork around the shop windows has been covered with wood, and the former double-leaf wood-bordered glass doors have been replaced with a single glass-and-steel door with sidelights. A transom across the shopfront has been covered with the fixed shed canopy with asphalt-shingled roof and wood shirt that carries across all three buildings at 36-48 North Main. Both side elevations have multiple windows along the second-floor level. On the rear elevation is a concrete loading dock and a metal stair that leads to a projecting weatherboarded room at second-floor level.

### **ABC Store**

Noncontributing building

48 North Main Street  
1951

The Edwards Furniture Store is believed to have been the first occupant of this building, but it soon became the local ABC Store, owned by the Town of Sparta Alcoholic Beverage Control

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Board. According to nonagenarian Una Edwards Lindh, when the ABC Store opened, there was an uproar in town over a liquor store being in Sparta. Yet, more than a half century later, the ABC Store still occupies the building. (Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 8, 2021; *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 188)

Except for the front entrance and the canopy, the form of the one-story concrete-block building has changed little from its original appearance. However, the materials have changed significantly. The building has a parapeted façade and a stepped parapet down the north elevation. A terra cotta coping lines the parapet edge. Originally the façade appears to have been sheathed with large, square metal or glass tiles that wrapped around the northwest corner of the building. Now the upper façade and the northwest corner of the building are covered with vertical vinyl siding, and the lower shopfront around the entrance and windows is brick-veneered. The entrance consisted of a recessed, double-leaf glass-and-steel door with a transom, now converted to a non-recessed, single-leaf door with narrow sidelights. Flanking the entrance are two large square windows. Originally each consisted of a single sheet of plate glass, but now each window has a vertical, metal divider. Originally, a flat canopy was suspended across the façade windows and entrance. Today, a fixed shed canopy with an asphalt-shingled roof and a wood skirt extends across this building and continues along 42 and 36 North Main. Horizontal vinyl siding sheathes the exposed north side of the building, and the rear is exposed concrete blocks with a loading dock and a double-leaf loading entrance.

### SOUTH MAIN STREET

#### **Bank of Sparta**

4-6 South Main Street

Ca. 1929

Contributing building

Long the only bank in Alleghany County, the Bank of Sparta was established in 1902 by R. L. and R. A. Doughton, M. A. Higgins, W. C. Fields, and T. J. Carson. In 1927, a fire that destroyed the building at the northwest corner of North Main and West Whitehead streets and damaged a couple of stores north of it, also damaged the front of the Bank of Sparta at the southwest corner of South Main and West Whitehead streets. At its annual meeting on January 1, 1929, the bank's stockholders considered the erection of a new and modern bank on the present site "within a short time." It is likely that the present building was constructed soon thereafter. At the same meeting, Attorney R. A. Doughton was reelected president of the bank. When the Depression came, the Bank of Sparta was in a good financial position, and after the 1933 Bank Holiday, it was the first bank west of Winston-Salem to reopen. In 1937, the Bank of Sparta joined with the

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Deposit and Savings Bank of North Wilkesboro, the Merchants and Farmers Bank of Bakersville and Burnsville, and the Watauga County Bank of Boone and Blowing Rock to form Northwestern Bank. Edwin Duncan, who had served as Cashier of the Bank of Sparta, initially served as the Executive Vice-President of the North Wilkesboro-based bank, but in 1958, he became President and Chief Executive Officer. Northwestern Bank continued to operate in Sparta until 1985, when it merged with First Union Bank. For some years earlier in the twentieth century, professional offices occupied the second floor, including the office of Dr. C. A. Thompson. In more recent years, a variety of businesses found a home on the first floor, and two apartments have been located on the second floor. (*The Charlotte Observer*, March 21, 1937 and October 8, 1973; "Edwin Duncan," *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 75; *The (Raleigh) News and Observer*, March 25, 1927 and January 5, 1929; Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 12, 1921)

The two-story, four-bay-wide and three-bay deep brick building is laid in five-to-one common bond on the two side elevations and rear, while the façade displays more detail, with every fifth row of bricks alternating headers and stretchers. Patterned brick pilasters border the north and south ends of the façade and rise along the inner edge of each outer bay. On the second story, the two inner windows are paired, while the outer-bay windows are single. Windows on north elevation and rear are paired, while those on the south elevation (second story only) are single. All windows have been replaced recently with six-over-six sash, which are smaller than the originals and therefore have a vinyl infill between the windows and their brick surrounds. Above the windows and between the pilasters is well-detailed brick corbeling composed of one course of soldier bricks topped by two courses of headers, each course projecting a little to the front of the course below it. At the top of the façade, a border of headers forms a panel in the brickwork. Until recently, the façade was headed by a shaped parapet composed of a raised pilaster at each end and a broad center section that rose in a shallow pointed arch at the center. Due to damaged brickwork, seen in a late-twentieth-century photograph, the parapet was removed, along with the stepped parapets on the side elevations, leaving a plain parapet to hide the sloped roof. A fixed, wood-shingled, mansard canopy, probably dating from the last quarter of the twentieth century, shelters the storefront, which consists of a central double-leaf glass entrance in the center flanked by plate-glass windows that rest on brick skirts, all probably dating from the mid-twentieth century. At the north end is a smaller window and a night-deposit box, while at the south end is a modern paneled door that opens to the stair to the second floor.

**Farmers Hardware Building**  
11 South Main Street  
Ca. 1928, ca. 1940, ca. 1950

Contributing building

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The intersection of Main and Whitehead streets has always been a prime location for business activity in Sparta. A 1918 photograph shows a row of buildings running southward from the southeast corner of the intersection, including a two-story frame building on the corner that had a hipped roof and two levels of porches on the front. Adjacent to it on the south was a two-story building that may have been of brick construction that was similar in some respects to the later Farmers Hardware building, but there were enough physical differences to clarify that the two buildings are not the same. To its south were additional two-story frame buildings, one of which was the Sparta Hardware (or Sparta Supplies) store operated by Sterling Columbus "Lummie" Richardson. There was a tea room on the second floor of that building.

Around 1928, Horton Doughton built the two-story, three-bay, sixty-six-foot-wide, brick building on the corner that stands today. Three bays facing South Main Street created space for three stores, and Doughton rented them out to various businesses. At the corner was a Ford dealership, the Alleghany Motor Company, for which J. H. Doughton was the agent. It also had an Esso gas pump in front. Later, it became the Dodge-Plymouth dealership. N. B. Smithey operated one of the adjacent stores for around three years beginning in 1932 until he constructed his own building across South Main Street ca. 1935. An aerial photograph made prior to the January 1933 Sparta fire clearly shows the building, and at that time it included not only the thirty-seven foot deep architecturally refined part of the building on the corner, but also the plain, fifty-eight-foot-deep section extending along East Whitehead Street. The building was not damaged in the 1933 fire, which was confined to buildings on North Main Street north of Whitehead Street. In May of 1936, Farmers Hardware and Implement Company received a certificate of incorporation from the state. With an authorized capital stock of \$10,000, it initially had subscribed stock of \$3,500 contributed by shareholders Guy C. Wallace, J. B. Doughton of Sparta, and J. H. Doughton of Statesville. Soon, Amos Wagoner Sr. bought shares in the business, and on August 6, 1945, he bought the property from J. H. Doughton and his wife, including the building and seventy-five additional feet of land behind it along East Whitehead Street. At that time, Wagoner is believed to have added the row of three storefronts along East Whitehead Street behind the corner building for use as rental property, along with warehouse space above them on the second floor for use by Farmers Hardware. Various businesses have occupied these three storefronts through the years, including a pool hall and a barber shop. In 1971, Farmers Hardware purchased the two-story building to its south on Main Street where Lummie Richardson's Sparta Hardware had been located. Photographs show that in 1939 a frame building still occupied the site. In 1942, Clifton Evans purchased the frame building, but by 1946 he had demolished it, moved first into the front corner of Farmers Hardware and then across the street. Photographs show that by 1959 a plain brick-veneered building stood on the

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site of the frame building. After Farmers Hardware acquired the building, a hole was created in the wall between the two buildings for interior flow of the Farmers Hardware business, and the front entrance was enclosed. In later years, possibly in the 1990s, Farmers Hardware added vertical synthetic siding on the south elevation, because in heavy rains, water seeped through the concrete-block wall. In 1980, Farmers Hardware added the fixed mansard canopy that extends across the entire Main Street façade. In 1992, a door to the parking lot was added to the south elevation of the building. Farmers Hardware closed in 2018 after eighty-two years in business, but the property remains in the ownership of the Wagoner family. (*Statesville Daily Record*, January 10, 1933; Una Lindh Interview, April 8, 2021; “Alleghany Memories” with John H. Miller and Amos Wagoner Jr.; Buck Mitchell Interview, March 31, 2012; Marsha Wagoner Interview, April 19, 2021; Ben Reeves 1939 World Fair film; *Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, pp. 35, 40, and 500; Deed Book 58, p. 81)

While the Farmers Hardware building retains its overall appearance from when it was built, photographs from the 1930s to 1960 show changes that have been made through the years. The front sixty-six by thirty-seven-foot section is where the distinctive architectural design is displayed. That part of the two-story building is three bays wide and two bays deep. Brick pilasters are at each corner and divide the bays. Originally the building had a handsome stepped parapet along both the Main Street façade and the Whitehead Street elevation, but by 1959 it had been removed, leaving a flat, terra-cotta coped cornice. The rest of the exterior at second floor level retains its brickwork features, which include slightly recessed panels beneath the cornice marking the different bays, recessed panels for the placement of the windows headed by a corbeled cornice, and a brickwork projection running across each bay beneath the windows. A brick soldier course runs across the bottom of each bay above the shop windows. All windows are two-over-two paired wood sash. On the Main Street façade there are two sets of windows within each bay, while on the Whitehead Street elevation there is only one set of windows per bay. Originally the windows consisted of an upper sash with nine lights (one large light in the center with smaller lights surrounding it) in the upper sash over a single-light lower sash. Sometime after 1960, these were replaced with two-over-two sash with the dividing muntins running horizontally. Originally the shopfronts had large windows headed by multi-light transoms, and the doors were wood-framed glass. By 1959, the original shop windows had been replaced with metal-framed windows, the doors had been replaced with aluminum-framed glass, and the transoms had been covered. The fixed mansard canopy sheltering the shopfronts was added to the Main Street façade in 1980.

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The first part of the building's brick extension along Whitehead Street originally had a plain, stepped parapet. By 1960, the steps of the parapet had been removed, leaving it flat. Windows and doors in that section have been bricked up.

Farther east on Whitehead Street, the three added rental shopfronts vary somewhat in design, but each has a recessed entrance with a double-leaf door and transom and flanking shop windows of differing heights. The shortest windows are in the shopfront closest the original building, the middle shopfront has longer windows, and the easternmost shopfront has the longest windows, all of which rest on a brick skirt. The second floor of this section was added later or its height was raised later to allow for more warehouse space for Farmers Hardware. The second floor has large, multi-light, industrial hopper windows. Three smaller industrial windows are on the second floor of the east elevation overlooking the Dr. P. L. Choate Building.

The building added at the south end facing Main Street is two stories in height but shorter than the original building. It has a completely plain brick-veneered façade with a terra cotta cornice coping. The first floor has two nearly square plate-glass windows, and the central door was blocked up shortly after Farmers Hardware acquired the building in 1971. On the second floor are two nine-light industrial windows. The entire south elevation is sheathed with vertical synthetic siding and there are several small windows and two doors—one single and one double—with sheltering gabled hoods. The rear wall retains exposed concrete blocks interrupted by four nine-light industrial hopper windows.

**Commercial Building**  
16-18 South Main Street  
Ca. 1936; Ca. mid-1950s

Contributing building

The history and development of this one-story commercial building is not totally clear, but period photographs and the memories of several of Sparta's oldest citizens help to piece together a likely scenario. Although the present façade is typical of mid-twentieth-century commercial buildings, it is believed to hide behind its north end an older brick structure that may date from 1936. Tax records give that date of construction, and the lot plan in those same records shows a delineated area measuring nineteen feet wide by fifty-two feet deep at the northeast end that may indicate the original structure. Photographs from the late 1930s and 1940s show a one-story brick building adjacent to the two-story former Bank of Sparta. In one of the photographs, the building has a painted sign on the shop window identifying it as the U. S. Post Office. According to Amos Wagoner Jr., Ben Reeves erected a small building next to the bank that he used as a variety store until it became the post office. According to Buck Mitchell, the post office was there for a long

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time, and around 1940 he went there every day to pick up copies of the *Winston-Salem Journal* to deliver. Bonnie Vaughn concurs that this was the location of the post office. At that time, the land between this building and Smithey's to the south was vacant except for an old house that stood far back from the street with trees in front of it known as Transou Grove. By at least 1951, the post office had moved to Whitehead Street. Around 1940 or soon thereafter, a one-story brick building was added to the streetscape immediately south of the post office. The north half was Mitchell's 5 & 10-cent Store, and the south half was Halsey Drugs. The two storefronts were divided by brick pilasters with corbeling between the pilasters near the cornice. It seems likely that in the 1950s, the post office building and the north half of the adjacent building to the south (Mitchell's 5 & 10-cent Store) were combined and unified visually by a more modern façade which had a plain brick upper façade and a storefront with three central recessed glass-and-aluminum doors flanked by recessed store windows and then large windows of the same type in the outer bays that project to the front plane of the building. Within the recessed area, the concrete floor is painted to look like mosaic tiles. During more recent years, a fixed canopy with a 5-V metal shed roof was added. The sides and rear of the building are brick and, with the downward slope of the land, reveal a basement story. The rear has a window and several bricked-up windows on the main floor and, at basement level, each half of the building has a set of two doors beneath a shed-roofed, fixed canopy. (Buck Mitchell Interview, May 3, 2021; "Alleghany Memories with Bonnie Vaughan;" "Alleghany Memories with John Miller and Amos Wagoner, Jr." *Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 36)

**Commercial Building**  
20 South Main Street  
Ca. 1940

Contributing building

The first publication of the *Alleghany News* was on February 16, 1940. Ed M. Anderson was the publisher and John F. Reeves was assistant publisher. Ray Lowery, a graduate of the school of journalism at the University of North Carolina and former editor of the *Daily Tar Heel*, was the editor. Mrs. Ed M. (Stella) Anderson was associate. As a new newspaper in Sparta, the advent of its publication was greatly heralded by the mayor, Congressman R. L. Doughton, Lieutenant-Governor R. A. Doughton, leading merchants, and others. Over the decades since its inauguration, the newspaper occupied several buildings, but in 1995, the company purchased the building at 20 South Main Street, and that location is still its office in 2021. Prior to 1995, the building was the home of Halsey Drugs for many years. A 1940s photograph shows the Halsey Drugs sign hanging above the shopfront, and Mitchell's 5 & 10-cent Store occupied the north half of the building. Exactly when the building was constructed is not known, but a pre-1933 aerial photograph shows that at that time, there were no commercial buildings standing on this

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stretch of South Main Street south of the two-story Bank of Sparta and the one-story post office adjacent to it. Deeds reveal that up through 1946, the lot on which the building stands was being conveyed as a forty-foot-wide parcel. In 1947, the parcel was divided into two twenty-foot lots. It seems likely that after that, probably in the 1950s, the north half of the parcel and its building were combined with the post office building and that the two were unified visually by a modern façade, now 16-18 South Main. That process would have left Halsey Drugs—now the Alleghany News building—as an individual building. (*The Charlotte Observer*, February 17, 1940; Deed Book 56, p. 213; Deed Book 57, p. 154; Deed Book 197, p. 561; “Alleghany Memories with John Miller and Amos Wagoner;” “Alleghany Memories with Una Lindh, Part 2;” Bob Bamburg Interview, April 1, 2021)

The façade of the simple, one-story brick building is laid in stretcher bond except for two courses in the upper façade—a row of headers and below it, a row of rowlock bricks. Terra cotta coping forms an edge to the plain parapeted cornice that hides the sloped roof behind it. At each end of the façade is a shallow pilaster. The shopfront has a recessed central entrance with a glass and aluminum door, a single sidelight on its south side, and a plain transom over it. Large glass and aluminum windows that flank the entrance are set on a brick skirt. A canvas canopy shelters the shopfront. Because of the slope of the land, the rear of the building appears to be two stories. The exposed part of the south elevation and the rear are stuccoed, hiding whether those walls are brick or concrete block. The rear has a double-leaf glass-and-wood-paneled entrance sheltered by a fixed, shed-roofed canopy with an asphalt-shingled roof and wood sides. A single window is south of the entrance. The upper level has replacement windows of two sizes.

### Commercial Building

22 South Main Street  
Ca. 1946

Contributing building

A 1940s photograph shows that at that time there was no building in this space along South Main Street. It was the last of the buildings between the Bank of Sparta and Smithey’s to be constructed. For many years the building was used as a menswear shop. M. M. Jackson established the store in 1967, but by 1973 it had become Andrews Mens Wear, owned and managed by Bob Andrews. (“Alleghany Memories with John Miller and Amos Wagoner, Jr;” “Alleghany Memories with Una Lindh, Part 2;” *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 189) Originally, the one-story building with a running-bond brick façade was very plain. However, it is different from the other buildings on the street in having four rectangular vents running horizontally across the upper façade. A terra cotta coping caps the plain parapet that hides the sloped roof behind it. The shopfront consists of two large plate-glass windows flanking an

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aluminum-bordered glass entrance headed by a transom—all on the same plane as the façade wall. A fixed mansard canopy with a metal roof and a wood shirt shelters the storefront, replacing the flat, suspended canopy present when the building was Andrews Mens Wear. In recent years the façade was decoratively painted in two shades of pink, cream, and blue. Set against dark pink horizontal and vertical bands, lighter-colored diamonds are painted above the blue-painted vents. Rising from the parapet, two added decorative stacks have been painted in pink and cream. Because of the slope of the land, the rear of the building appears to be two stories. The building is not nearly as deep as the others in the row. Probably disguising a concrete-block wall, the rear elevation has been stuccoed. It features square windows and a door, some sheltered by fixed, striped, metal canopies.

### **Commercial Building**

Contributing building

24 South Main Street  
Early 1940s

The small scale of this diminutive one-story building—only fourteen feet wide—along with its pair of one-over-one sash windows on the upper façade, make it appear to be a two-story building. The windows have a wide, added wood surround that hides part of the soldier-course brick lintel. Set against a common-bond brick background, in addition to the upper-level windows, the façade contains a replacement French-door entrance on the north side with an added surround and canopy and a rectangular shop window on the south side. The façade's plain parapet hides the sloped roof behind it. The north and rear elevations show that other than the brick façade, the building is of concrete-block construction. Both the north side and rear have window openings, and two rear doors open to an unexpected shed-roofed porch with wood steps and balustrade. According to Bonnie Vaughan, this was Sally Bledsoe Brown's Beauty Shop. A 1940s photo of this side of South Main Street shows a sign hanging on the building noting its use as a repair shop. ("Alleghany Memories with Bonnie Vaughan;" "Alleghany Memories with John Miller and Amos Wagoner, Jr.")

### **Smithey's Store**

Contributing building

38 South Main Street  
Ca. 1935

Fashioned within the stonework of the upper façade and painted black, the name "Smithey's" has identified this building since its construction. Today the building houses other stores, but for more than half a century Smithey's was an institution in Sparta and Alleghany County. Forerunner of the modern department store, Smithey's in Sparta sold clothing, household goods,

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and groceries, and from ca. 1961 to ca. 1981 it included a small café. N. B. (Nikeard Bruce) Smithey (1880-1953) of North Wilkesboro had little formal education, but he became an expert in merchandising, banking, and tax law. In addition, he was a good stonemason. Smithey founded Smithey's in Wilkesboro in 1928, and over time he added stores in other communities until he had seventeen in northwestern North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee by the time of his death in 1953. During the Depression, Smithey was the subject of a study by Harvard University's School of Business because of his successful merchandising methods. The Smithey's chain of stores closed in the 1990s. When opening a new store, Smithey liked to rent a building for three years until he knew the business would prosper, after which he would build his own store. Smithey followed that process in Sparta when he arrived in 1932 to start a store. First, he rented space in the building that later became Farmers Hardware, but around three years later he built his own store across South Main Street. (*Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, p. 40; <http://janicecolehopkins.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-smithey-hotel-one-of-largest.html>; "Wilkes County Hall of Fame: Nikeard Bruce Smithey," <https://www.wilkescountyhalloffame.org/hall-of-fame/2018-inductees/nikeard-bruce-smithey>)

The large, one-story, stone building originally measured 62 feet wide by 103 feet deep. Later, a brick-veneered addition expanded the building 56 feet to the rear. Although a plain building, it stands out because of its size and its use of rubble stone on its façade and elevations. The parapet that hides the sloped roof is capped by a relatively flat course of rubble stones. The entire lower façade is recessed and includes a central steel-framed double-leaf entrance and flanking steel-framed plate-glass shop windows. Moving outward (north and south) from the entrance, the windows project, then recede, and then project again on the north and south ends of the building. Red terrazzo-tile flooring covers the entire recessed area out to the sidewalk. Two square, evenly spaced posts rise at the front edge of the recessed area to add support to the upper façade. A tall transom with four lights in each of three sections once carried across the lower façade above the entrance and shop windows. Photographs dating from the 1960s through the 1990s show that a flat, suspended canopy once carried across the façade immediately below the transom. More recently the store had a projecting canopy. Now there is no canopy and the transom is covered by a flat band of corrugated metal. Several windows were on the south elevation but have been infilled. Several covered windows are on the upper level of the rear elevation of the brick addition. At the center of the ground level is a rear entrance sheltered by a fixed canopy with a shed roof and corner support posts. South of the building is a twelve-foot-wide alley whose ownership was conveyed by Eugene and Laura Transou in 1935 to N. B. Smithey and D. C. Bledsoe jointly, they being the owners of the properties on the north and south sides of the alley. The alley is now a public walkway with an arched ironwork sign spanning the South Main Street end of it. (Deed Book 44, p. 256)

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### **Bledsoe Commercial Building**

Contributing building

58 South Main Street  
Ca. 1939

According to D. C. Bledsoe Jr., his mother did not like to cook. Thus, soon after his father built the large stone building for his Ford dealership (see 60 South Main Street), he built this addition to serve as a restaurant for her so she wouldn't have to cook. Buck Mitchell and Amos Wagoner Jr. concur that this was originally a restaurant and that there was a single-lane bowling alley in the rear. Later uses of the building have included a Firestone tire store, the REA office, the Social Services office, and the Town of Sparta Alcoholic Beverage Control Board office. In 1970, the Town of Sparta purchased the building, and it became the town office. It is now used by the Chamber of Commerce. Adjacent to the building on the north is a twelve-foot-wide alley whose ownership was conveyed by Eugene and Laura Transou in 1935 to N. B. Smithey and D. C. Bledsoe jointly, they being the owners of the properties on the north and south sides of the alley. The Town of Sparta holds an undivided interest in the alley, which is now a public walkway with an arched ironwork sign spanning the South Main Street end of it. (Milly Richardson Interview, May 2021; Buck Mitchell Interview, May 3, 2021; "Alleghany Memories with John H. Miller and Amos Wagoner Jr.;" *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 182; Deed Book 84, p. 349; Deed Book 44, p. 256)

A photograph from the late 1930s or early 1940s reveals alterations that have been made to the small stone building since it was erected. The period photograph looks like the façade of this building may have been on the same plane with the façade of the adjacent Ford dealership, but that may be just an illusion resulting from the angle of the photograph. Now the facade projects about five feet in front of the façade of the larger building (60 North Main). Originally, the building's façade was much lower, rising to only about half the height of the north bay of the adjacent Bledsoe Ford Company Building. Today it rises to the same height as the two outer bays of the Ford dealership building. Originally the small building had a central door with a transom, and on either side of the door was a large, 25-light window above a stone skirt. Over each window was a soldier-course brick lintel. Today, a wide stone pilaster has been added to the center of the shopfront replacing the original door. South of the pilaster is a pair of steel-framed glass windows, and north of the central pilaster is the entrance with a window to its north. Both are steel-framed glass. Above the door and windows is a wood-paneled "transom," and above the shopfront is a fixed canopy that looks like a green canvas awning but may be metal. West of the building's taller projection, the side stone wall is much lower, appearing to be the overall original height of the building. Terra-cotta coping caps the building's parapet on the front and

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north side. A long, shed-roofed brick addition extends westward from the rear of the small stone building and northward from the stone and concrete-block sections of 60 South Main. It doubtless housed the bowling alley. Doors and windows have been cut into the north side and rear.

### **Bledsoe Ford Company Building**

Contributing building

60 South Main Street  
Ca. 1937-1938

Originally serving as an automobile dealership, this five-bay-wide stone building is one of the most architecturally distinctive in downtown Sparta. Walter and Paul Andrews were the local stonemasons who laid the river rocks in constructing the building. The façade has a tall parapet that hides the broad gable roof behind it. The center three bays of the parapet rise well above the outer two bays. Plain stone pilasters define each edge of the taller center section, as well as either side of the narrow central entrance bay and the outer ends of the façade. The pilasters are capped with flat concrete slabs, while terra cotta coping tops the remainder of the parapet. The bottom half of the one-story façade and two bays on the south side are filled with large, metal-framed, plate-glass windows, three per bay, that provided an airy showroom commonly associated with car dealerships. The center entrance bay contains an aluminum-framed glass door. The rest of that narrow bay is filled with replacement vertical board-and-batten siding. Originally, the space above the door was filled with a glass transom, and the show windows were shorter than they are now but had glass transoms running above them. Crowning the transoms is a band (interrupted by the stone pilasters) of gray, soldier-course bricks topped by a band of alternating header and stretcher bricks. Inside, the showroom retains a terrazzo-tile floor, and the roof rafters are exposed. At some unknown date, the rear of the building was extended 45 feet to the west. The addition is faced with rusticated concrete blocks, and there are rows of six-over-six sash windows on the rear and sides. A window on the north side has been converted to a door. At the north end of the building is a projecting stone section, treated as a separate building (see 58 South Main Street). An early photograph shows that an island sheltering Sinclair gas pumps once stood in front of the building. It had a large, tapered, stone post at each end supporting a terra cotta-tile-covered hipped roof with exposed rafter ends. How long it stood is not known.

Duke Colvard Bledsoe (1899-1952) was the first owner of the building, where he operated a Ford dealership beginning around 1938. Duke Bledsoe graduated in 1917 from Oak Hill Academy in Virginia. In 1919, he entered Michigan State College and studied automobile engineering for one year. Thereafter, he spent seven years working with Ford and Dodge dealers in the Midwest. While in Detroit, he became Henry Ford's first paint shop foreman. After

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returning to Alleghany County in 1927, Bledsoe worked in the garage of C. C. Castevens for two years and then worked for Horton Doughton's Ford dealership. After three years there he purchased Doughton's business ca. 1932. In 1937, Bledsoe received a charter from North Carolina's Secretary of State for the Alleghany Motor Company. Claude Moxley and Wayne Sevier, who were also from Sparta, joined with Bledsoe in subscribing \$6,000 authorized capital for the business. It was probably around that time that Bledsoe had the stone building constructed for his dealership. A 1939 film shows that the building was standing by that time. According to Buck Mitchell, Duke Bledsoe shut down his dealership during World War II, because at that time dealers could not get cars to sell. After the war, Bledsoe gave up his Ford dealership but started a Dodge-Plymouth dealership in the same building. In 1948, he sold the dealership and the building to Ben G. Reeves, and Reeves and Paul Irvin operated a Dodge dealership there. After that, Reeves ran his insurance business in the building until he retired. In later years, Ronald Setliff used the building for his Dodge-Plymouth dealership known as Setliff Motors. The building currently houses the Muddy Creek Café. (*Alleghany County Heritage*, 1983, pp. 81-82; *The Charlotte Observer*, September 8, 1937; Ben Reeves, World's Fair film, 1939; Buck Mitchell Interview, May 3, 2021; "Alleghany Memories with John H. Miller and Amos Wagoner Jr.," *History of Alleghany County, 1859-1976*, p. 182)

### EAST WHITEHEAD STREET

**Dr. P. L Choate Building (Choate Motor Company Body Shop)**      Contributing building  
38 East Whitehead Street  
1953

A cornerstone at the east end of the façade proclaims this to be the Dr. P. L. Choate Building. "Leff" Choate was a physician whose office was located on North Main Street just north of the present ABC Store. He, himself, never used this building, but the cornerstone bears his name as a way to honor him. He built it for his son, Wade Choate, to serve as the body shop for the son's business, the Choate Motor Company, whose main building is located immediately to the east (68 East Main Street). Built in 1953, the building has continued to be a body shop for well more than half a century. (David Choate and Buck Mitchell Interview, March 12, 2012)

The Winston-Salem Masonry Construction Company erected the one-story brick building, which displays impressive decorative brickwork unique in Sparta and surprising for a body shop. The entire façade is laid in a diaper pattern of diamonds created through the use of darker bricks and the particular placement of the bricks. At each end of the façade is a vertical border laid with stretcher bricks. Darker header bricks form a narrow band surrounding the entrance and the

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façade's windows. The dado beneath each window is laid with long, narrow Roman bricks stacked in columns, and a concrete foundation fills the space beneath the brick dado to accommodate the downward slope of the street heading east. The three-bay façade's fenestration includes a central roll-up garage door and a large, three-part window in the west bay. The east bay contains the entrance with its aluminum-framed glass door and transom and windows east of the entrance. A window much like that found in the west bay may originally have filled the space east of the entrance, but it has been replaced in recent decades with three smaller one-over-one sash windows with vinyl siding infilling the surrounding space. A flat parapet, now capped by a length of aluminum molding, carries across the façade, hiding the sloped roof behind it. The east elevation has a stepped parapet. The east elevation is laid in common bond with every sixth row alternating headers and stretchers. The north (front) third of the east elevation has a replacement one-over-one sash window and a small steel-framed window with a concrete sill and no defined lintel. The south two-thirds contains three industrial hopper windows and a door at the south end. Like the small (bathroom?) window, the others have concrete sills, but unlike the small window each one is decoratively bordered by a soldier-course lintel, headers on either side carrying down to the concrete foundation, and beneath the sills, columns of Roman bricks. The door has the same lintel and header border. The rear elevation is laid in the same type of common bond as the east elevation. At the east end, a roll-up garage door is accessed by a concrete ramp. At the west end is a large window filled with glass blocks.

### **Choate Motor Company Building**

68 East Whitehead Street  
1946

Contributing building

On June 13, 1946, a full-page advertisement in *The Alleghany News* announced the grand opening of the Choate Motor Company on June 15 at 7:30 a.m. Wade Choate was the owner and manager of the new company, a Ford dealership and repair garage. The company offered a complete line of parts, repairs, Mansfield tires, Shell gas and oil, and, of course, prompt reliable service and efficient personnel. Sparta's previous Ford dealership, operated by Duke Bledsoe, had closed during the war, because automobiles were not being manufactured and there were none to sell. (See Bledsoe Ford Company Building, 60 South Main Street.) With the end of World War II in 1945, automobiles were once again in production, and the Choate Motor Company advertised that "We are still taking orders for New Cars, Pick-ups and Trucks, and will make deliveries as we receive them." The new company invited everyone to come see the new Ford Super De Luxe Business Coupe that was equipped with a radio, heater, and fog lights. (*The Alleghany News*, June 13, 1946; David Choate and Buck Mitchell Interview, March 12, 2012)

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Sam Porter was the contractor for the one-story Choate Motor Company building. Modernist in style, the building was unlike any that had been built in Sparta. Constructed of concrete blocks, the north façade and the west elevation are brick veneered while the walls of the east and south elevations have exposed concrete blocks. Terra cotta coping caps the wall parapets. Except for the façade, the original part of the building has steel-framed industrial windows. A concrete-block addition extends from the rear of the east end of the building past the core block, and a small frame addition with a shed roof and vinyl siding is tucked into the southwest corner formed by the juncture of the concrete-block extension and the main block of the building. A variety of windows are present on the additions. Two side-by-side roll-up garage doors are located at the west end of the façade, and another roll-up garage door is on the west elevation. The most striking feature of the building is its angular façade. This treatment is achieved through the placement of the three sections of the façade. The west section, which has the roll-up garage doors, is parallel to the street. The east section is also parallel to the street but projects around ten-to-twelve feet forward from the garage bay. At the west end of the east section is a double-leaf steel-framed door with a broad transom. A pair of large vertical windows fill the space from the door to the east corner of the building and then continue around the northeast corner with another pair of windows, the whole creating a large showroom. Connecting the east and west sections of the façade, the center section angles forward from the plane of the west section to the plane of the east section. Two gas pumps once stood on a small concrete island in front of the center section, but they were later removed. The center section is the façade's design focal point. At its west end is a single-leaf, steel-framed entrance, and east of the entrance are two sets of three tall windows divided by a post. The same type of post separates the west set of windows from the entrance. Above the door and each window are panels, like transoms, but solid, alternating deep blue and strong yellow in color. In the upper façade is a name panel created by a rectangular border of tan rowlock bricks which contrast with the red brick of the rest of the wall. Attached to the panel are light-blue-on-white letters spelling CHOATE MOTOR CO. Combined, all these façade features create a very modern appearance characteristic of the mid-twentieth century in which the building was erected.

### **Alleghany County Community Building**

85 East Whitehead Street  
1940

Contributing building

Tucked away downhill behind the courthouse, the Community Building is one of the boldest and most prominent edifices in downtown Sparta. A bronze plaque next to the front entrance reveals that the Work Projects Administration in cooperation with the county government erected the building in 1940. In 1935, Congress had approved the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act that

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funded the Works Progress Administration, renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939. Created to relieve the economic hardship of the Great Depression, this national works program employed more than 8.5 million people on 1.4 million public projects before it was disbanded in 1943. The WPA employed both skilled and unskilled workers in a great variety of work projects such as creating parks and building roads, bridges, schools, and other public structures. Sparta's Community Building was one of those projects. The designer of the Colonial Revival-style stone building is not known, but according to a local nonagenarian, the stone for the building came from a quarry alongside the New River in Alleghany County. At present, the first floor is being converted to an additional courtroom for the county, and the second floor will have offices in which attorneys can meet with clients. (Library of Congress, "Today in History – April 8," <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/April-08/> Accessed June 26, 2021; Buck Mitchell Interview, May 3, 2021; Debbie Smith (Assistant Clerk of Court) Interview, March 12, 2021)

Facing East Whitehead Street at its intersection with Grayson Street, the two-story, cut-stone building is five bays wide with a broad, metal-covered gable roof with a molded cornice across front and rear. Five interior stone chimneys—two on the front, two on the rear, and one at the east end—rise through the roof. An additional, larger, stone chimney projects part way from the rear elevation near its center. Most first-floor windows are twelve-over-twelve sash, while most of those on the second floor are eight-over-eight sash. All windows have concrete sills, and those on the first floor as well as those on the second floor of the east and west elevations have impressive stone lintels with voussoirs and a keystone. Two windows at the southeast corner have been bricked up. The main entrance is at the center of the south façade. It consists of a pair of doors with nine lights over two vertical wood panels. Over the doors is an unusually large eight-light transom divided into two rows of four lights. A simple classical surround with side pilasters and a cornice frames the entrance. The east elevation has two plain doors on the first story with a wooden handicap ramp running alongside them. A metal fire escape provide access to a single door on the second story. The west elevation has a single nine-light over wood paneled door near the north end, and another, replacement, door at near the south end. Sheltering that door is an added frame entrance porch with a broad gable roof, vinyl siding, and a wood railing. Attached to the west side of the porch is a matching, but smaller, covered handicap ramp. A wood railing flanks the ramp. One particularly distinctive interior feature is the broad stone fireplace on the east (rear) wall of the main room. It has a stone shelf and a brick-lined firebox. The stone inner face of the chimney is exposed up to the ceiling. A grass lawn fronts the free-standing building on its primary south side and on its east side. Taking advantage of the available area stone, a stone retaining wall runs along the north side of the driveway behind the Community Center, and a lower stone retaining wall runs along the east and south sides of the property adjacent to the sidewalks on North Grayson and East Whitehead streets.

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### WEST WHITEHEAD STREET

#### **Commercial Building**

24 West Whitehead Street  
Ca. 1946

Contributing building

For many years beginning in the 1940s, Virginia Osborne Setzer operated a fabric shop, known as the Carolina Silk Shop, on the first floor of this building, where she also worked as a seamstress and tailor. She lived on the second floor above the shop. (Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 12, 2021; Milly Richardson Interview, May 5, 2021; Plat Book 4, p. 105; Deed Book 175, p. 8) The two-story concrete-block building is two bays wide and three deep. It has a flat parapet roofline, stepped on the east side, with a terra cotta coping, all hiding a roof that slopes downward from front to rear. Windows are three-over-one wood sash and are paired on the second story of the façade. A door at the southeast corner of the façade has nine lights over two vertical wood panels. It probably opens to stairs to the second floor. The shopfront west of the door has been boarded up. A 1990s photograph shows that it had a center-bay double-leaf entrance and flanking windows. A short alley runs along the east elevation; the west elevation is attached to 28 West Whitehead Street. The rear of the building has windows on the second floor.

#### **Commercial Building**

28 West Whitehead Street  
Ca. 1947

Contributing building

Tax records give the date of construction for this building as 1947, but nonagenarian Una Edwards Lindh claims that all three buildings in this row were present when she was off at college from 1942 to 1946. A variety of businesses have occupied the commercial building through the years. In 1979, present owner Milly Richardson purchased both 28 and 32 West Whitehead Street from Archie Hayes and established the *Blue Ridge Sun*, a newspaper. (See 32 West Whitehead) (Milly Richardson Interview, May 5, 2021; Una Edwards Lindh Interview, April 8, 2021) The two-story building is framed in oak and has concrete-block walls, except for the façade, which is brick-veneered. The largely intact façade features a recessed central entrance with double-leaf doors composed of six lights in each upper half and three horizontal wood panels in each lower half. A plain glass transom heads the entrance. Set on a brick skirt, the shop windows angle outward from the entrance. At the east edge of the façade, a door to the second-floor stair has three vertical lights in the upper half and three horizontal wood panels in the lower half. In 2019 a fixed canopy with an asphalt-shingled shed roof was built across the first story of

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the façade hiding a header course of bricks. The second story has a pair of one-over-one wood-sash windows. The flat parapet that hides the sloped roof has a terra cotta coping. Due to the downward slope of the street toward the west, concrete steps rise to the shopfront. The rear of the building has a door and windows, those on the second story boarded up. The building has a basement.

**Commercial Building**  
32 West Whitehead Street  
Ca. 1947

Contributing building

Tax records give the date of construction for this building as 1947, but nonagenarian Una Edwards Lindh claims that all three buildings in this row were present when she was off at college from 1942 to 1946. A variety of businesses have occupied the building. In 1979, present owner Milly Richardson purchased the building from Archie Hayes and established the *Blue Ridge Sun*, a newspaper for Alleghany County, because at the time, the *Alleghany News* focused more on Ashe County. Richardson operated the *Blue Ridge Sun*, which she called “the People’s Paper,” out of this building and 28 West Whitehead Street from 1979 to 1997. The main floor of #32 was used as the newspaper office. A hole was cut in the building’s two-foot east firewall and down to the basement of #28, where the paste-up pages for the paper were prepared and a darkroom processed photographs. Those pages were then taken to Elkin and later to Galax, Virginia, where the paper was actually printed. (Milly Richardson Interview, May 5, 1921)

The two-story building has oak framing and concrete-block walls, except for the façade, which is brick veneered. The façade is nearly identical to that of #28. The shopfront features a recessed central entrance with a double-leaf door composed of six lights in the upper half of each and three horizontal panels in the lower half. Shop windows set on a brick skirt angle outward from the entrance. At the east end of the facade, a door with three horizontal lights in the upper half and three wood panels in the lower half opens to the stair to the second floor. A concrete step rises to each doorway. The second floor has two pairs of three-over-one wood-sash windows. A plain parapeted cornice is capped with terra cotta coping. The exposed west elevation has two three-over-one sash windows on the second floor. The rear elevation has two six-over-six sash windows along with a small window on the second floor. The first floor has openings largely hidden by shrubbery, and a projecting frame room or entry with a shed roof, a door, and a window on the west side.

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### Statement of Archaeological Potential

The Downtown Sparta Historic District is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological deposits such as building foundations, root cellars and ice pits, privies and wells, infrastructural remains related to the management of water, waste, and energy, accumulated debris from commercial activities, and other remains which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the district.

Archaeological deposits likely present in the Downtown Sparta Historic District include those related to the ca. 1867, 1879, and 1910 courthouses, as well as commercial buildings near the intersection of Main and Whitehead streets associated with the founding of Sparta in the nineteenth century, such as Bower's store and James H. Parks' store.

Information can be obtained from archaeological investigations to address topics significant in Sparta's history, such as the relationship between politics and government and rural economic development. Archaeological investigations can also yield details concerning pivotal moments in Sparta's history, such as redevelopment activities after the destructive fires of 1927 and 1933. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the Downtown Sparta Historic District. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is likely that they exist, and these potential remains should be considered in any future development within the district.

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### 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The Downtown Sparta Historic District, centered on the intersection of US 21 (Main Street) and NC 18 (Whitehead Street), is the focal point of Sparta, the town at the center of picturesque and bucolic Alleghany County in mountainous northwestern North Carolina. After the county was formed in 1859, the location for the county seat was selected and incorporated in 1879 as the town of Sparta, named for the ancient Greek city-state. A series of four courthouses, built between 1867 and 1933, served as the county's center of government. Business directories between 1884 and 1915 reveal the commercial development of Sparta's downtown as it came to replace rural crossroads stores as the place where farm families went to shop, trade, and socialize. Due to the destruction caused by three fires—in 1927, 1933, and 1986—no commercial buildings in the district from the late-nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century survive. However, a combination of events—the rebuilding after the 1933 fire, the electrification of Alleghany County and Sparta in 1931, the increased use of automobiles, and the Depression-period economic recovery programs of the federal government, including especially the Blue Ridge Parkway—promoted the strongest period of growth in downtown Sparta during the 1930s and 1940s. Approximately seventy-five percent (19) of the district's twenty-five buildings date from that period and represent standard commercial design in a range of complexity, the Classical Revival and Colonial Revival styles, and the Modern Movement. Overall, the physical character that the historic district acquired between ca. 1928 and the 1950s remains largely intact.

The locally significant Downtown Sparta Historic District meets Criterion A for listing in the National Register in the area of Commerce. Located in the center of Alleghany County, Sparta is the county's sole town and, as such, its downtown is the county's historic center of commerce. The Downtown Sparta Historic District also meets Criterion C for its generally well-preserved collection of commercial and government buildings that includes numerous examples of standard commercial design from the second quarter of the twentieth century along with buildings that represent well the Classical Revival and Colonial Revival styles and the Modern Movement. As the seat of Alleghany County, downtown Sparta also is the center of the county's governmental activity. Its 1933 courthouse, designed by prominent North Carolina architect Harry Barton, serves as the focal point of the historic district. On May 10, 1979, the Alleghany County Courthouse was listed in the National Register as part of a thematic nomination for Courthouses in North Carolina (NR Ref. #79001657). As part of that nomination, it was listed under Criterion A for the areas of Politics/Government and Social History and under Criterion C for the area of

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Architecture. Because of this, Politics/Government and Social History contexts are not included in the Section 8 narrative for the Downtown Sparta Historic District.

The district's period of significance, ca. 1928-1972, includes the dates of construction of all twenty-five of its buildings and coincides with the district's significant association with traditional commercial activities through the late twentieth century. Traditional commerce in downtown Sparta continued through at least the 1970s, but the commercial activity after 1972 is not of exceptional significance. Therefore, the fifty-year mark was established as the end of the period of significance.

### Commerce Context

The Downtown Sparta Historic District has a singular character as the historic commercial center of Alleghany County, North Carolina. Before the advent of the automobile, crossroads stores where people could shop, trade, and socialize largely served the rural county. But even before the automobile and especially after, Sparta has been the county's only town, and thus downtown Sparta comprises the county's only center of commerce.

The town's commercial core provided everything that local citizens might need—from professional services to retail goods to restaurants to automobile sales and service. No other concentration of such varied businesses existed historically nor exists today anywhere else in the county. In fact, aside from a scattering of individual stores or the occasional pair of rural commercial buildings, nowhere in the county is there a comparable collection of buildings representing this historic theme. Unlike surrounding counties, Alleghany County never experienced the expansion of or shift in commercial and industrial activity facilitated by railroad transportation as did the surrounding North Carolina counties of Ashe, Wilkes, and Surry. In addition to the county seat of Jefferson, Ashe County is home to two other communities—West Jefferson and Lansing—that served as commercial centers for the surrounding area. Both Wilkesboro—the county seat of Wilkes County—and North Wilkesboro feature sizeable commercial districts. Surry County is home to commercial districts across its four municipalities—in county seat Dobson, Mt. Airy, Elkin, and Pilot Mountain. By contrast, Sparta is the only commercial center in all of Alleghany County and, as such, the Downtown Sparta Historic District served as the historic commercial center of the larger agricultural community through the third quarter of the twentieth century, after which the development of nearby shopping centers affected its commercial character.

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### Architecture Context

Throughout the primary physical development of the historic district between ca. 1928 and the mid-1950s, most of the commercial buildings erected were representative of the standard commercial-style of the time, seen in commercial historic districts throughout America. Both one- and two-story buildings in downtown Sparta represent the style. While some have more elaborate features, most consist of brick facades with recessed entrances flanked by glass shop windows set on brick dados. Many have a transom that carries across the lower façade above the entrance and windows. A simple brick panel is often found on the upper facade, and a terra cotta-coped plain parapet crowns the whole. Among the district's examples are the ca. 1928 Belk Building at 3-7 North Main Street, the 1930s commercial buildings at 15-17 and 21 North Main Street (photo #2), and the 1940s buildings at 36 North Main Street (photo #3), 20 South Main Street, and 28 and 32 West Whitehead Street (photo #5). The commercial building at 16-18 South Main Street (photo #4) exhibits a later version of the standard commercial style with its mid-1950s remodeled storefront composed of aluminum-framed plate-glass doors and windows.

At the same time, other buildings were designed with more distinctive features, and these buildings, individually, have a strong impact on the architectural character of the overall district. The focal point of the district is the monumental Classical-Revival-style Alleghany County Courthouse (photo #1), designed by Greensboro architect Harry Barton and built in 1933 at 12 North Main Street. Down the hill behind the courthouse at 85 East Whitehead Street, the Alleghany County Community Building (photo #11) is a bold, free-standing, two-story stone building of Colonial Revival-style design. Two of the earliest and largest brick buildings in the district are the Bank of Sparta (photo #4) at 4-6 South Main Street and Farmers Hardware (photo #6) at 11 South Main Street, both built in the late 1920s with, in the case of Farmers Hardware, additions from later in the district's period of significance (ca. 1928-1872). On both, brick corbeling and pattered brickwork add visual interest. Both originally had stepped-parapet cornices, but these were removed in later years.

Two buildings have particularly distinctive brickwork facades. The 1934-1935 Spartan Theatre (photo #2) at 27 North Main Street achieves distinction through both its high center parapet and its tall round arch and other details executed in yellow brick that contrasts with the overall red brick. At 38 East Whitehead Street, the façade of the 1953 Dr. P. L. Choate Building (photo #9) is laid in an overall diamond-shaped diaper pattern with other decorative brick treatments not seen elsewhere in the historic district. At the south end of the historic district, stone elevations distinguish three buildings from the brick facades of all other buildings in the district except the Alleghany County Community Building (photo #11). Smithey's Store (photo #7) at 38 South

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Main Street, the Bledsoe Commercial Building at 58 South Main Street, and the Bledsoe Ford Company Building (photo #8) at 60 South Main Street, all built in the mid-to-late 1930s, stand out with this use of stone linking them to one of the natural resources of Alleghany County. They were probably also influenced by the nearby Blue Ridge Parkway. In other respects, these buildings reflect the standard commercial style seen in most of downtown Sparta's other commercial buildings, although the high center parapet and row of stone pilasters of the Bledsoe Ford Company Building lift it to a higher level of design. At 68 East Whitehead Street, the 1946 Choate Motor Company Building (photo #10) introduces progressive design to the historic district in its distinctive angled modernist façade with multicolored panels.

The buildings in the Downtown Sparta Historic District, dating from ca. 1928 to the mid-1950s, are generally comparable in terms of size, materials, and design to the commercial and governmental buildings in the towns of the surrounding Ashe, Wilkes and Surry counties, as well as to those in other small towns across North Carolina. However, they comprise the only such examples in Alleghany County, since Sparta is the only town in the county.

### Historical Background

Centered on the intersection of today's US 21 and NC 18, the Downtown Sparta Historic District is the focal point of the town of Sparta, which is at the center of Alleghany County. The county's character has always shaped the development of Sparta and its commercial center.

Alleghany County, whose name derives from a Native American word for "good river" or "beautiful stream" was formed from the eastern part of Ashe County in 1859. Located in the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains of northwestern North Carolina, it is bounded on the north by the state of Virginia, on the east by Surry County, on the south by Wilkes County, and on the west by Ashe County. The New River flows near the north border of the county, and its tributary, the Little River, flows through the central section. These are accompanied by numerous small waterways throughout the county. A section of the Blue Ridge Parkway, constructed in the mid-1930s, follows part of the county's southern boundary. Alleghany County is composed of a combination of mountains, broad rolling plateaus, and fertile river valleys with an overall average elevation of 2,500 to 3,000 feet. A place of great scenic beauty, it remained largely isolated until modern transportation in the twentieth century allowed for easier connections with the rest of the state and the outside world. Until that time, it was thought of as one of North Carolina's "Lost Provinces" along with Watauga and Ashe counties. Railroads stretched to other parts of North Carolina's mountains but never crossed Alleghany County. Largely because of

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this, large-scale industrial development never made a home in the county. Instead, agriculture became the mainstay of the county's economy.<sup>1</sup>

In her master's thesis at the University of Georgia, Sherry Joines identified two distinct periods of agricultural development in Alleghany County. First was the period from about 1880 to 1915 when farms reached the height of production while working on a minimal cash basis. The second period came with the modernization of agriculture between around 1935 and 1955, a time that coincided with the majority of development in the Downtown Sparta Historic District.<sup>2</sup>

Out of the necessity of its isolation, agriculture for much of Alleghany County's history took the form of subsistence farming and related skills and crafts. Typical early crops included wheat, corn, rye, oats, and buckwheat, while gardens typically included potatoes, cabbage, beans, pumpkins, and squash. Farmers also maintained a variety of livestock, including hogs, sheep, cattle, horses, mules, chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese.<sup>3</sup> By the 1880s, when some export of agricultural products was possible, whiskey distilling (licensed by the government) from corn harvests and turkey processing also became popular agricultural endeavors. By the mid-twentieth century, dairy and beef cattle along with burley tobacco had become the mainstays of the county's farming, and since the early 1970s, Christmas trees have become the county's largest cash crop. By the late twentieth century, Alleghany County ranked first in the state for sheep production, second in the number of dairies and dairy cows, and third in the production of Christmas trees.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1880s, the county's landscape included multiple crossroads communities that centered on at least one general store, usually including a post office, and possibly a flour or saw mill. Farmers could access these crossroads communities by horse and wagon to acquire needed supplies, trade farm products for cash or other products, and socialize with neighbors.<sup>5</sup> However, by the 1920s, the advent of the automobile began to diminish the importance of these rural stores. Instead, with an automobile or truck, farmers and their families could drive to an actual

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Sizemore, *Alleghany Architecture: A Pictorial Survey* (Sparta, North Carolina: Alleghany County Historical Properties Commission, 1983), v.

<sup>2</sup> Sherry Jane Joines, *Up Before Dawn: Farms and Farm Ways in Alleghany County, North Carolina*, Thesis for Master of Historic Preservation (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1998), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Joines, 9-10, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Joines, 14, 23, 25

<sup>5</sup> Sizemore, viii.

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town to shop and carry out their business. In Alleghany County, this meant going to Sparta, for it was the county's sole town.<sup>6</sup>

The act establishing Alleghany County in 1859 ordered court to be held at Shiloh Church until public buildings were erected. First, however, the site for the county seat had to be selected. Commissioners were named to identify a suitable site at the geographic center of the county, acquire the land for the county seat, and erect the courthouse.<sup>7</sup> The chosen site was originally known as Bower's Store for the store and post office that stood there. Merchant James H. Parks and two others donated land for the county seat in 1866, and Parks also is credited with suggesting the name of the ancient Greek city-state Sparta as the permanent name for the county seat, which was incorporated in 1879. At that time, Sparta's corporate limits were defined as one mile from the center of the courthouse to the north, east, south, and west, totaling four square miles.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after land had been donated for the county seat, plans were undertaken for the construction of a courthouse. A small frame building was erected at the corner of North Main and West Whitehead streets where the Belk Building now stands, and the first court session was held in the building in January 1868. The jail was at a separate location about where the Alleghany County Community Building was later built.<sup>9</sup> In 1879-1880, the first courthouse was replaced by the second, a brick building erected by H. F. Jones across the street on the site of the present courthouse. The second courthouse was used until 1909, when it was condemned and demolished. In 1910, the B. F. Smith Fire Proof Construction Company of Washington, D.C. erected the third courthouse, a Classical Revival-style building with a two-stage cupola. Despite having been built by a fire-proof-construction company, the third courthouse burned in the Sparta fire of January 7, 1933. The entire front of the 1910 courthouse was destroyed, leaving only the damaged jail and the offices of the Clerk of Court and Register of Deeds.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the month, the County Commission had secured the services of Greensboro architect Harry Barton "to furnish plans and specifications for the new Court House to be rebuilt." In March

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<sup>6</sup> Sizemore, viii; Joines, 20.

<sup>7</sup> David Leroy Corbitt, *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties 1663-1943* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1950, Fifth Printing, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> "A History of Sparta, North Carolina," [https://www.carolana.com/NC/Towns/Sparta\\_NC.html](https://www.carolana.com/NC/Towns/Sparta_NC.html); "Alleghany County," NCpedia. <https://www.ncpedia.org>; *Alleghany County Heritage* (Sparta, North Carolina: Alleghany Historical-Genealogical Society, Inc., 1983), 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Alleghany County Heritage*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *History of Alleghany County 1859 through 1976 Sparta, North Carolina* (Sparta, North Carolina: Alleghany County Historical Committee, 1976), 47.

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1933, the commissioners issued bonds amounting to \$20,000 for the building and outfitting of the courthouse.<sup>11</sup>

A graduate of George Washington University in architecture, Philadelphia native Harry Barton (1876-1937) had a long and prolific career that centered on Greensboro but included many buildings elsewhere in North Carolina. During the 1920s, he was Greensboro's leading architect, and during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, he designed classically inspired courthouses and municipal buildings in the state. For the fourth and current Alleghany County Courthouse (photo #1), Barton's design was, of necessity, more economical than most, because it came in the midst of the Depression. Nevertheless, the Classical Revival-style courthouse is an imposing two-story, H-shaped building with a full-height, tetrastyle Tuscan Doric pedimented portico. Many of the other stylistic design elements were achieved through the use of white-painted masonry string courses, pilaster capitals, and cornices against red-brick walls with their own subtle brick refinements. Inside, the courthouse follows a center-hall plan prefaced by a vestibule with a pair of stairs that boast decorative ironwork railings. The second-floor courtroom is replete with oak woodwork. In March 1933, the contract for the anticipated \$17,000 courthouse was awarded to Fowler-Jones Lumber Company. After more than eight decades, the 1933 courthouse continues to serve Alleghany County. It was listed the National Register in 1979 as part of the thematic nomination Courthouses in North Carolina.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, as the location for the county seat was selected and a succession of courthouses was built, the town of Sparta was developing. Even before lots had been laid out in the county seat in 1866, James H. Parks owned and operated a store at the approximate location of today's 142 and 148 North Main Street. By 1884, Branson's *North Carolina Business Directory* recorded three general stores, a cabinet shop, a carriage shop, a tannery, and a saddle and harness maker in Sparta.<sup>13</sup> In 1897, it was necessary to enact a law prohibiting the running at large of livestock in Sparta within one mile of the courthouse.<sup>14</sup> In 1905, the *North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* reported Sparta's population as 561. The town at that time had five lawyers—not surprising for a county seat—three doctors, one veterinary surgeon, five contractors and builders and one architect, one music teacher, three real estate agents, four churches (three Baptist and one Methodist), two newspapers, five stores (general merchandise, dry goods, and retail grocers),

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<sup>11</sup> Alleghany County Minutes, Board of County Commissioners, 1914-1943, Vol. 5, 270, 275.

<sup>12</sup> *Alleghany County Heritage*, 37; William B. Bushong, Adam Ronan, and Catherine W. Bishir, "Harry Barton," *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/>; Alleghany County Minutes, 279.

<sup>13</sup> Joines, 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> *Alleghany County Heritage*, 34-35.

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two confectionary dealers, and four sellers of agricultural implements. In addition, there were two hotels and boarding houses, two butchers and dealers in cattle, two blacksmith shops, two carriage manufacturers, two casket manufacturers and dealers, a leather dealer, and the Sparta Roller Mill.<sup>15</sup> By 1915, Sparta's population had increased to 1,910, and the town had added a dentist, a bank, and a high school.<sup>16</sup> Since then, Sparta's population has decreased, with the 2020 population standing at 1,719.

Despite the fact that downtown Sparta was obviously growing and there were multiple commercial buildings erected to support that growth, none of those buildings from the late-nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries survive. Most of Sparta's commercial buildings at that time were aligned along either side of the first block of North Main Street next to or across from the courthouse, but three known fires changed the character of that portion of Sparta's downtown.

On March 24, 1927, a fire believed to have started with an incubator in a basement chicken hatchery destroyed the two-story-with-basement brick commercial building at the northwest corner of North Main and West Whitehead streets owned by Dr. J. L. Doughton. Two other stores were damaged in the fire as was the front of the Bank of Sparta (photo #4) across the street at the southwest corner of South Main and West Whitehead streets.<sup>17</sup>

Next came the great fire of January 7, 1933. Originating when an oil stove exploded in Ray's Café on the west side of North Main Street, the fire quickly spread to the surrounding buildings, mostly frame, on that side of the street and jumped across the street, where it burned the law office of R. A. Doughton and most of the courthouse. With no adequate water supply and little fire-fighting equipment, the volunteer fire department was largely powerless to stop the fire and finally resorted to using dynamite in an attempt to blow out the fire at the north end of the block. Most of the buildings in this core commercial block were lost. Only the two buildings at the south end of the block's west side were left after the fire, and they were damaged. As devastating as the fire was to Sparta's commercial and governmental center, it did not cross Whitehead Street to attack the few buildings on South Main Street. Two positive effects resulted from the 1933 fire. First, it prompted the establishment of the Sparta Fire Department, and second, new

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<sup>15</sup> *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory*, 1905 (Raleigh: *The News and Observer*, 1905), 78-79.

<sup>16</sup> *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory*, 1915 (Raleigh: *The News and Observer*, 1915), 91.

<sup>17</sup> *The (Raleigh) News and Observer*, March 25, 1927.

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buildings constructed after the fire made use of brick or stone masonry construction rather than frame.<sup>18</sup>

Only four buildings in the historic district are believed to pre-date the 1933 fire: Farmers Hardware (photo #6) at 11 South Main Street, the Belk Building (photo #2) at 3-7 North Main Street, and the B&T Drug Company Building (photo #2)—all built ca. 1928—and the Bank of Sparta (photo #4) at 4-6 South Main Street, believed to have been built ca. 1929. Along with the courthouse, the commercial buildings destroyed by the fire were soon rebuilt. Since the 1933 fire, later commercial buildings along South Main Street and East and West Whitehead Street have added to the size of Sparta's historic downtown.

The third fire to strike Sparta's downtown occurred on January 28, 1986, in sub-zero temperatures and twenty-mile-per-hour winds. Beginning in the Sparta Restaurant—the same location where the 1933 fire had started—the 1986 conflagration destroyed several buildings on the west side of North Main Street north of the Spartan Theatre (photo #2) at 27 North Main. The theatre's fire wall protected it during the fire and kept the fire from advancing southward.<sup>19</sup>

Although the 1933 fire was devastating to downtown Sparta, the rebuilding that occurred thereafter coincided with several other events to help create the strongest period of growth in Sparta and its commercial center. The buildings that comprise the historic district today reflect the development of that time.

One of the most significant events of the period was the arrival of electricity in the area. In 1924, Coy and Clennel Richardson purchased the Sparta Rolling Mill just across the Little River from Sparta. The following year, they built a concrete dam to replace the earlier wooden dam and installed an electric plant. Not only did the plant provide the power needed to operate the Richardson's mill, but it also supplied power for limited lighting in Sparta. At 10:30 every night, the lights were turned off. However, with Northwestern Public Utilities Company's 1931 extension of the electric line from Roaring Gap, where it connected with the lines of the Southern Power Company, Sparta gained dependable electric power. Electricity brought revolutionary change to the way people lived in both Sparta and rural Alleghany County, and having it was a boon to the economy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *The Charlotte Observer*, January 8, 1933; *Statesville Daily Record*, January 10, 1933.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Bamberg, "Four Downtown Buildings Guttled by Fire," *The Alleghany News*, January 30, 1986.

<sup>20</sup> *Alleghany County Heritage*, 32; *The (Raleigh) News and Observer*, May 31, 1931.

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Alleghany County, North Carolina

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As the availability of automobiles grew in Alleghany County, so, too, did traffic into Sparta as people of rural Alleghany County could more easily go to town to do their shopping and attend to their legal business at the courthouse. By the late 1920s, there was even a Ford dealership, J. H. Doughton's Alleghany Motor Company, located at the center of town in the building that later became Farmers Hardware (photo #6). Saturdays, in particular, became days when rural residents congregated in Sparta to shop and socialize.

The Depression was difficult in Alleghany County, as it was elsewhere, but federal New Deal programs such as the WPA—Work Progress Administration when established in 1935 and Work Projects Administration after 1939—provided a variety of work for many. It was this program, in cooperation with county government, that built the Alleghany County Community Building (photo #11) at 85 East Whitehead Street in 1940. Both the WPA and the Civilian Conservation Corps were involved in the building of the Blue Ridge Parkway, authorized in 1933. The leadership of Congressman R. L. Doughton, a native of Alleghany County, ensured that the Parkway ran along the county's southern border. Work on the first twelve miles in Alleghany County began in 1935. Not only did this major construction project provide an economic boost to the county, but the tourism that the completed Parkway brought introduced thousands to Alleghany County and served as a boon to the economy for years to come. In addition, the heavy use of stone for bridges, retaining walls, and other features of the Parkway likely influenced the increased use of stone in local building at the time. Four buildings in the historic district—the ca. 1935 Smithey's Store (photo #7) at 38 South Main Street, the late 1930s Bledsoe buildings (photo #8) at 58 and 60 South Main Street, and the 1940 Alleghany County Community Building (photo #11)—have a strong impact on the architectural character of the historic district due their use of stone construction.<sup>21</sup>

These events—the 1933 Sparta fire, the electrification of Sparta and Alleghany County, the increased use of automobiles, and the Depression-period economic recovery programs of the federal government, especially including the Blue Ridge Parkway—combined to promote the strongest period of growth in downtown Sparta. Of the twenty-five buildings that comprise the Downtown Sparta Historic District, approximately seventy-five percent (nineteen) date from the 1930s and 1940s.

The physical character of the Downtown Sparta Historic District as it developed from the late 1920s to the mid-1950s remains largely intact, and until well into the 1970s, the downtown continued to serve as the commercial center not only of Sparta but also of Alleghany County.

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<sup>21</sup> Joines, 20-21; Sizemore, xii-xiii.

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Alleghany County, North Carolina

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Since the late 1970s, however, other developments in Sparta have pulled commercial activity from the downtown. In 1977, the town's first shopping center, Trojan Village, was opened by developer D. W. Miles. Located on South Main Street, it is southeast of the historic district. In 1986, Ken Richardson opened another shopping center, Sparta Square, in the vicinity of Trojan Village.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in the early 1980s, Walmart opened a store in Galax, Virginia, only twenty miles from Sparta, and it immediately drew many shoppers from Sparta and Alleghany County. From that point, the commercial character of the historic district began to change. Instead of department stores, there were more specialty stores and business offices. At the same time more of the buildings became vacant.

In 1997, the Sparta Hometown Revitalization Task Force was formed in conjunction with the Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce. The task force conducted a community assessment to consider the possibilities for revitalization of Sparta's downtown and to make recommendations.<sup>23</sup> More recently, a streetscape project was undertaken to make Sparta's historic government and commercial center more attractive and accessible to pedestrians. As part of this, sidewalks were enlarged and new traffic lights and lamp posts were installed.<sup>24</sup> Today, Downtown Sparta continues as the important historic center of this North Carolina mountain town.

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<sup>22</sup> "A History of Sparta, North Carolina," [https://www.carolana.com/NC/Towns/Sparta\\_NC.html](https://www.carolana.com/NC/Towns/Sparta_NC.html).

<sup>23</sup> "Town of Sparta, North Carolina: People, Places, Progress," Sparta Hometown Revitalization Task Force Report on the Community Assessment, June 17-19, 1997, 7.

<sup>24</sup> "Welcome to Alleghany County," *Alleghany County: The Heart of the Blue Ridge Parkway*, Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce.

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Alleghany County, North Carolina

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### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Datum:** WGS84

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:**

Latitude: 36.505833 Longitude: -81.120314

#### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the Downtown Sparta Historic District is shown as the bold black line on the accompanying district map entitled "National Register Boundary Map, Downtown Sparta Historic District, Sparta, Alleghany County, North Carolina" drawn to a scale of 1" = 150'.

#### **Boundary Justification**

The nominated historic district encompasses the twenty-five historic buildings associated with Alleghany County's historic center of government and commerce and the lots on which they stand totaling approximately 5.9 acres. North of the historic district, a parking lot, later commercial buildings, and vacant lots form a break in the continuity of the district's historic buildings. South of the historic district are vacant lots, modern free-standing commercial buildings, and a scattering of older houses. East of the historic district are free-standing and spaced-out modern commercial buildings, the Alleghany County Sheriff's Office and Jail, open land, and houses. West of the district are parking lots, vacant land, more recent free-standing commercial buildings, and houses. By comparison, the areas surrounding the historic district serve to increase the district's sense of cohesiveness as Sparta's historic center with its ca. 1928-1972 period of significance and commerce and architecture areas of significance. As a result, the nominated acreage provides the appropriate setting for the historic center of Sparta and Alleghany County.

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

Name of property:      Downtown Sparta Historic District  
City of vicinity:      Sparta  
County:      Alleghany      State: North Carolina  
Photographer:      Laura A. W. Phillips  
Date photographed:      March 2021  
Number and description of photographs:

1.      Façade of Alleghany County Courthouse, 12 North Main Street, view to east.
2.      West side North Main Street, view to southwest.
3.      East side North Main Street, view to northeast.
4.      West side South Main Street, view to southwest.
5.      North side West Whitehead Street, view to northeast.
6.      Overall of Farmers Hardware Building, 11 South Main Street, view to southeast.
7.      Overall of Smithey's Store, 38 South Main Street, view to northwest.
8.      Overall of Bledsoe Commercial Building and Bledsoe Ford Company Building, 58-60 South Main Street, view to southwest.
9.      Façade of Dr. P. L. Choate Building, 38 East Whitehead Street, view to south.
10.      Façade of Choate Motor Company Building, 68 East Whitehead Street, view to south.
11.      Overall of Alleghany County Community Building, 85 East Whitehead Street, view to northwest.

# National Register Location Map

Downtown Sparta Historic District  
Sparta, Alleghany County, North Carolina



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## Downtown Sparta Historic District Sparta, Alleghany County, North Carolina

Datum: WGS84

● Latitude/Longitude: 36.505833 / -81.120314

— District Boundary

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

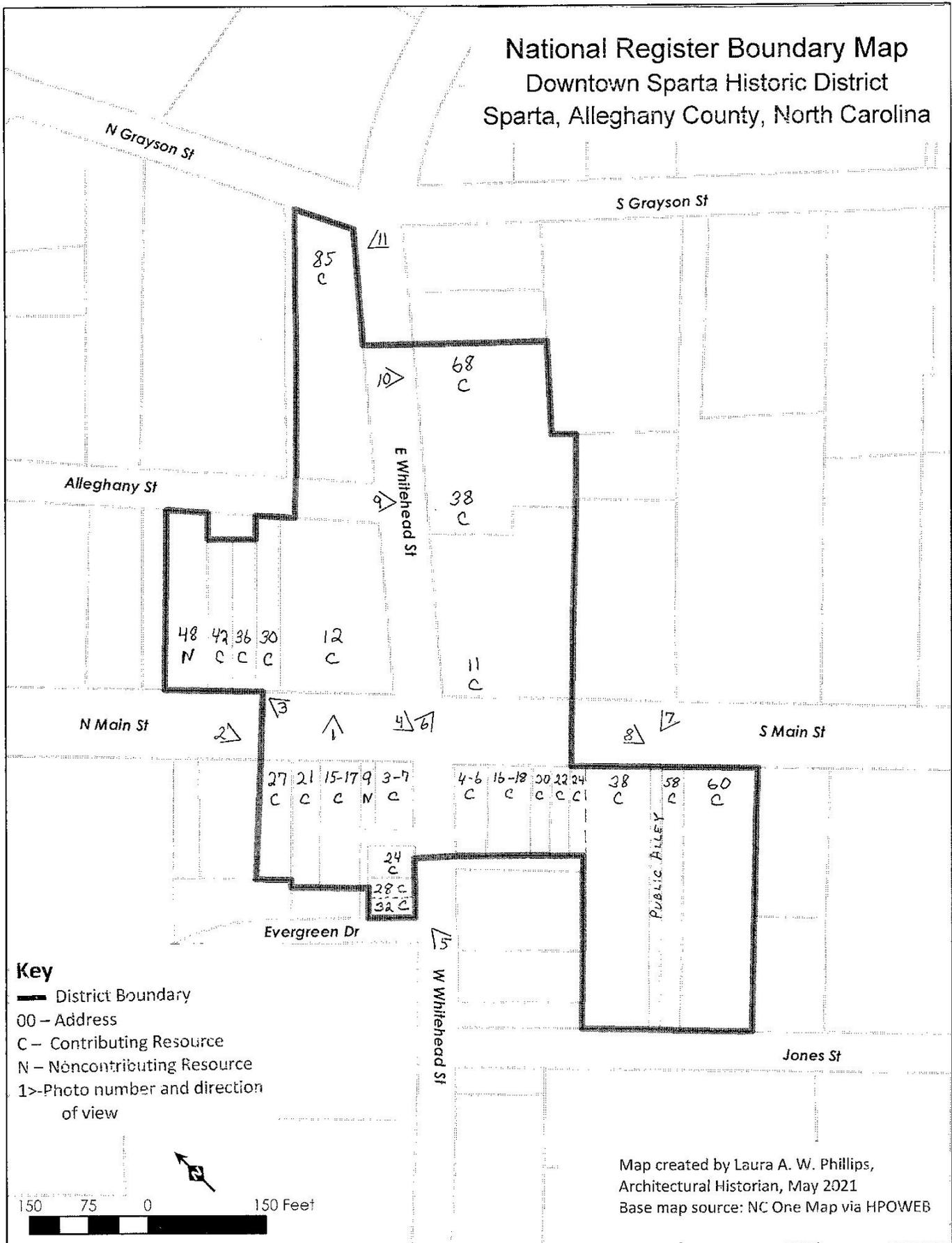


Map created by: Mary Rector

Date created: 06/08/2021

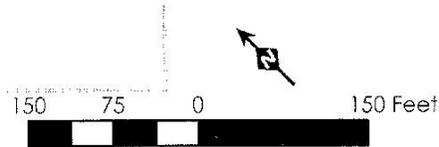
Base map source: United States Geological Survey

# National Register Boundary Map Downtown Sparta Historic District Sparta, Alleghany County, North Carolina



**Key**

- District Boundary
- 00 – Address
- C – Contributing Resource
- N – Noncontributing Resource
- 1> Photo number and direction of view



Map created by Laura A. W. Phillips,  
Architectural Historian, May 2021  
Base map source: NC One Map via HPOWEB