

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Mars Hill Commercial Historic District**

Mars Hill, Madison County, MD0284, Listed 09/08/2015  
Nomination by Sybil Argintar  
Photographs by Sybil Argintar, July 2014



10-20 North Main Street, looking northeast



2-34 South Main Street, looking southwest





**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>9</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>9</u>	<u>1</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**  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce/Trade Sub: specialty store  
Commerce/Trade department store  
Commerce/Trade restaurant

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce/Trade Sub: specialty store  
Commerce/Trade restaurant  
Vacant/Not in use

**7. Description**

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

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick  
roof rubber  
walls brick  
concrete  
other wood

**Narrative Description**

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

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

(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.

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1915 - 1965  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

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

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Western Office, Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina

Mars Hill Commercial Historic District  
Name of Property

Madison County, North Carolina  
County and State

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acree of Property** approximately 2.0 acres

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

Zone Easting Northing  
1 17 360080 3965660  
2 17

Zone Easting Northing  
3 17  
4 17  
\_\_ See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

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

### Boundary Justification

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

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Sybil H. Argintar, Preservation Planning Consultant

organization Southeastern Preservation Services date April 29, 2015

street & number 166 Pearson Drive telephone (828) 230-3773

city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28801

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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 multiple

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

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

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing 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 Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Mars Hill Commercial Historic District  
Madison County, North Carolina

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### Summary

The Mars Hill Commercial Historic District is located in the town of Mars Hill in Madison County, North Carolina, approximately seven miles east of the county seat of Marshall. The historic district is located along North and South Main Street, roughly bounded by the east, west, and north property lines of the historic resources, and by Cascade Street and Carl Eller Road (formerly the Marshall Highway), a major east-west road through town, on the south.

Immediately outside of the district, to the south, is a small pocket park at the corner of S. Main Street and Carl Eller Road, and more recent commercial development, with institutional, residential, and altered, older commercial development to the north and east. The north boundary of the district excludes altered and younger commercial buildings to the north, with residential neighborhoods beyond. To the west of the district is the campus of Mars Hill University.

Downtown Mars Hill is located near the center of the town. Bailey Mountain is located northwest of the district, at the north edge of town. Residential areas north of the historic district are generally higher in elevation than downtown and the University campus. The topography drops in elevation to the east and south of the district, in a series of rolling hills. The district rises in elevation from Cascade Street on the south to the north boundary, with building lots on the west side of Main Street level to the rear. The rear lots of the buildings on the east side of Main Street are lower in elevation, creating an additional story at the rear elevations of these buildings.

The district, which encompasses approximately two acres, incorporates within its boundaries buildings dating from ca. 1915 to ca. 1945, forming an intact and integrated grouping of Mars Hill's historic commercial buildings. The nine contributing and one non-contributing one- and two-story commercial buildings are all constructed of brick with flat roofs and parapet walls and are all contiguous buildings set back uniformly from the street. Six-foot-wide sidewalks run in front of all buildings in the district. While there are a handful of contiguous buildings to the north of the district, including two buildings that fall within the period of significance, these are not included due to the fact that they are separated from the rest of the district by non-contributing buildings that are so designated due to age or significant alteration.

### Inventory List

The group of ten buildings comprising the district are located on the east and west sides of South Main Street, and on the east side of North Main Street. They are listed in the inventory by address, from low to high numbers, with North Main Street listed first, followed by South Main Street. 15 College Street is included in the entry for 2-14 South Main Street. Two properties have street addresses that differ from the address listed in the tax records. In these cases, the building street address is listed first, with the tax record address following in parentheses. Building

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construction dates are based upon field investigation, documentary photos, North Carolina yearbooks, and Mars Hill College annual yearbook ads. Buildings are named, where known, for their original or later historic occupants, or, if not known, for their building type.<sup>1</sup> Contributing buildings are those buildings constructed during the period of significance which have retained sufficient integrity to reflect the history of the district.

The non-contributing building at the north edge of the district, 6 – 20 North Main Street, was constructed during the period of significance, but has undergone architectural changes on the first floor that have significantly altered its original appearance. If the building was rehabilitated to a compatible design similar to its historic appearance at the first floor level, it may have the potential to be a contributing building in the district.

### North Main Street:

#### **10 North Main Street. Mars Hill AG Market. Contributing. ca. 1945.**

This two-story textured brick and concrete block unadorned commercial building, which steps down from north to south in elevation along North Main Street, retains a single storefront flush with the façade, with a center entry, and a second door on the north end to the upstairs. The storefront has had modern anodized aluminum framing added within the original storefront opening, and transom lights are boarded over. The two window openings with brick sills on the façade have been boarded over, but the original multi-light, metal-frame awning windows are visible on the south and east (rear) elevations. Walls on the south and east are painted concrete block. The south elevation has five bays on each of the first and second levels, and five at the partially above-ground basement level. Openings on the first level are small and square, most of which have air conditioning units in them. The second level opening have metal-frame, multi-light window sash. Openings at the basement level, stepping down the hillside from west to east, alternate between multi-light windows and paneled doors. The rear of the building has two stories plus basement, with three replacement window bays at the basement, and three window bays on each of the two upper levels. The north end of both levels have a smaller rectangular two-light, transom-style windows. This building housed the Mars Hill AG Market ca. 1950 (Pack Library North Carolina Collection, MS242.003F). Arthur Wood remembers an earlier building here when he was a young boy in the mid to late 1930s, which housed, in the basement a traveling show that all of the local children would attend. The 1910 model of the college campus

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<sup>1</sup> All known available records for the town have been researched, and there are no city directories available for the period of significance. Sanborn maps were also not available. Available sources, including *The Laurel* yearbook and the local school newspaper, *The Hilltop*, did not list addresses of the businesses, since Mars Hill is a small town. Names of some of the buildings, where known, are based on oral history interviews with residents who have lived in Mars Hill from the 1930s on.

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and village on display in the Blackwell Administration Building on campus identify this as the Jim Jarvis Store Building, a wood frame structure.<sup>2</sup>

### **14 North Main Street. Commercial Building. Contributing. ca. 1945.**

This two-story textured brick, five-course, common bond, unadorned commercial building has modern anodized aluminum storefront framing added within the original flush storefront opening with a soldier course above. Windows in the four window openings on the second floor have been boarded over, but the window openings retain their concrete sills and soldier course lintels. The lot drops in elevation from west to east, and the rear of the building is two stories plus a basement. There are two bays at the basement level including, on the south end, a four-light square window, and on the north, a double-leaf six-light-over-two-panel door. The windows on the first floor level are boarded over, but there are four original four-vertical-light-over-one windows on the second level. At the end of World War II Roscoe Phillips built this building and operated a restaurant in it.<sup>3</sup>

### **16 – 20 North Main Street. Medical Office Building. Non-contributing. ca. 1920.**

This two-story brick commercial building has been altered at the storefront level with modern materials including T-111 plywood siding, modern doors and windows, and the addition of a pent-roof shingled awning. Brick pilasters extending to the roofline frame the storefront, and there is corbelling at the cornice. The five original four-vertical-light-over-one, double-hung wooden sash windows on the second story are inset within a recessed brick panel with a brick soldier course in a continuous row above and below the windows. The rear of this building is a full two stories plus basement, with stucco applied to the brick. The basement level has one modern door inset into the south end. The first floor level has three window bays, with replacement windows, and there appears to be the ghost line of a fourth window. The second floor has five window bays, also with replacement windows. This building appears in a ca. 1920s photo where it is visible in the background of a photo of two women college students on Main Street. This building, if rehabilitated on the first story in a compatible design to its historic appearance, would be a contributing building in the district. A 1920s photo of two young women in front of this building has a sign in front noting “dentist office.”

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<sup>2</sup> Wood, Arthur. Long-time resident of Mars Hill and former college professor at Mars Hill College. In-person interview with Sybil H. Argintar, April 16, 2015; “Mars Hill College and Surrounding Village 1910, a model located in the Blackwell Administration Building, Mars Hill University campus; and Dillingham, Richard, interview with Owen Tilson, Mayor of Mars Hill, 1955 – 1960 and 1985-1987, December 9, 1988, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Dillingham, Tilson interview, p. 7.

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### South Main Street:

#### **2 – 14 South Main Street; 15 College Street. Tomberlin's Florist; 5 & 10; Post Office. Contributing. ca. 1920.**

This one-story, textured brick, unadorned, commercial building has two storefronts facing North Main Street, a corner entry facing the intersection of North Main and College Street, and a storefront entry facing College Street. Storefront configurations facing North Main Street are intact, with original brick kickplates and replacement door and window framing. The southernmost storefront (2 South Main Street), with a canvas awning, has a central entry framed by square display windows, with replacement wood framing, and brick kickplates. The modern door is aluminum frame, single light, with a transom and sidelight. The central storefront bay (10 South Main Street) has undergone the most change with the addition of a multi-light-over-panel door, but the flanking square display windows with original wood framing and brick kickplates are intact. There is a pent roof shingled awning, with a row of basket-weave brick, a stylistic element of the Commercial Style, above the storefront. The north end of the façade has a new operable sliding-four-pane window which replaces a single fixed-light display window. There is a row of basket-weave brick and an awning above. The entry to this business (14 South Main Street) is at the corner, with the original metal post supporting the brick overhang of the recessed entry with a replacement door.

On the College Street (north) elevation, the parapet roofline steps down from east to west. There are two bays of replacement sliding-four-pane windows on the east end, followed by a single multi-light-over-panel replacement door and a door and window bay with the same door and window design as on the other bays. The rear of this building is eight bays wide, from north to south including a square display window, a high window with vents, a four-over-four window, two modern replacement doors, two tall six-over-six windows, and a tall window opening that is boarded over. There is a modern free-standing covered wooden deck to the west, behind the building.

This building does not appear in a 1917 photo of the streetscape, and it replaced the two one-story wood-frame buildings with tall stepped parapet rooflines shown in that photo. There is a USGS marker on the front exterior wall of the building, placed there in 1935. A photo from the 1940s, looking south on Main Street, includes this building. The current business located in the center bay facing Main Street, a barber shop, has been in existence there since the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Metcalf, Tim. Current business owner, and son of the barber who operated this business in the 1950s. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, April 16, 2015. The 1940s photograph is in the personal collection of Mr. Metcalf.

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Tomberlin's Florist was located at the corner store, currently Papa Nick's restaurant.<sup>5</sup> Arthur Wood remembers that this building also housed a variety of restaurants, where students would often gather in the 1930s and 1940s. College rules at the time only allowed female students to be downtown for limited hours in the afternoon. They were not allowed to be off campus after dark. He also noted there was a ladies' dress shop at the west end of the building facing College Street, and that there was a 5 & 10 Store where the barber shop is currently located. The post office was located where the current El Dorado restaurant is now.<sup>6</sup> In the 1980s Mars Hill Flower Shop operated in the building.<sup>7</sup>

### **9 South Main Street. R.S. Gibbs Company. Contributing. ca. 1915; addition ca. 1930s.**

This business, the oldest in the district, appears on the 1910 model of the campus and the village, as a wooden building operated as the R. S. Gibbs Company.<sup>8</sup> This building was replaced by the current building, the first brick building in the town. According to Richard Dillingham, the bricks were made locally by John Robert Anderson in a kiln on his property.<sup>9</sup> Originally a one-story building, as evidenced by physical examination in the field, the second story was added later, probably in the late 1930s to early 1940s, with rooms on the second floor rented out to Mars Hill College men. Entry to the rooms was from the stairs on the north side.<sup>10</sup> At this time, it is likely the later windows were added, and the façade was probably replaced at the same time, with newer windows installed. The current appearance of this two-story, brick commercial building includes a corbelled cornice and the storefront configuration from the 1930s of an off-center door flanked by display windows. New aluminum framing replaces the original, and the transom glass above the storefront is boarded over. Two, paired windows on the second story façade are boarded over, but the ca. 1930s single and double windows, four-vertical-light-over-one, remain intact on the north elevation facing Mountain View Road. There is also a multi-panel door on the second floor and an open metal staircase on this elevation. The four bays on the upper portion of the first floor on the north elevation are small, square, single-light windows recessed within segmental-arch openings, an indicator that the age of the first level is older. The rear of this building is clad in vinyl siding, and is partially covered by ivy. Rear windows all

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, Ralph. "Mars Hill Our Town." Poem written by Lee, who was mayor of Mars Hill from 1931 – 1955. Darhyl Boone, current town manager, grew up in Mars Hill in the 1960s and confirmed this business was located here. In-person interview with Sybil H. Argintar, April 16, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Wood interview.

<sup>7</sup> Dillingham, Tilson interview, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> "Mars Hill College and Surrounding Village 1910." The model shows several other commercial buildings near the campus, including the Riddle Business Building and the Riddle Hotel. Both of these properties were purchased by the college in 1914 and 1915 respectively, and have been replaced by other college buildings.

<sup>9</sup> Dillingham, Tilson interview, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Wood interview. Mr. Wood lived in Mars Hill from 1931 to the present day, and remembers, when he was a student at the college, visiting friends in the building in the early 1940s.

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appear to be replacements, and there is a modern, double-leaf door at the basement level. Roy's Café operated in this building in the 1940s through the 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

### **15 – 25 South Main Street. Gibbs Department Store. Contributing. ca. 1915.**

This two-story brick commercial building with a corbelled cornice has two distinct sections on the first floor. There is a central entry door with display windows to the north, and a recessed entry flanked by display windows on the south end. This appears to be the original storefront configuration, but with replacement aluminum-framing materials. The windows on the second level, with concrete sills and lintels, are all boarded over. The south elevation of the building is painted, bevel-edged concrete block. Due to the change in topography, the east end of the south elevation has an exposed basement level with small square openings with windows boarded over.

The first floor of the building has five six-light square window bays, and the second floor has ten taller window openings, with all windows boarded over. The rear of the building is two stories plus a basement, with six boarded-over bays at the basement level. At the first floor level there are six bays, with a door at the south end, followed, to the north, by a replacement window, and then four six-over-six windows, some of which appear to be original. The second floor level appears to retain all of its original windows, and the third floor is four bays, with original single and double six-over-six windows. Grace Gibbs, daughter of the owner, ran the store. In later years, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was an upscale women's dress shop in this building.<sup>12</sup> The original R. S. Gibbs Store building was to the north and appears to have been the original location for this business.<sup>13</sup>

### **18 South Main Street. Bruce Pharmacy. Contributing. ca. 1915.**

This one-story painted brick commercial building retains its storefront configuration, with new aluminum frame door and display windows. Brick pilasters frame the north and south ends of the building, and they extend above the roofline. There is an inset brick panel above the storefront. The boarded-over transom remains, as do the brick kickplates with brick sills. The rear of this building is five bays wide, with a modern replacement door in the center and retrofitted one-over-one windows on either side. At either end are small square window openings, one of which is boarded over and one that has a nine-light window. The three center openings have flat brick arches, and there is an added covered wood deck. Bruce Pharmacy was located in this building in the 1930s and 1940s. Inside the store was a small soda shop with several tables.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Wood interview.

<sup>12</sup> Wood interview.

<sup>13</sup> "Mars Hill College and Surrounding Village 1910."

<sup>14</sup> Wood interview.

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**22 – 24 South Main Street (24 - 26 South Main Street). Commercial Building. Contributing. ca. 1915.**

This two-story brick commercial building has brick pilasters which extend above the roofline, on the north and south ends. The building features a deep corbelled cornice. There is a single storefront and a door to the second floor on the first floor, and the second floor consists of four one-over-one vinyl replacement windows with flat arched openings and concrete sills. The storefront, within the original configuration, is all replacement wood materials, including a narrow band of transom windows and smaller display windows than originally, a single light-over-panel door, stuccoed kickplates, and a cloth awning. The replacement single-light-over-panel door to the second floor is located on the north end. The rear of this brick building has three bays on the upper floor consisting of replacement or boarded-over windows. There is a basement entry door flanked by two square window openings. Alfred Sprinkle and W. L. George built this building and the three adjacent buildings to the south (the southernmost is no longer extant).<sup>15</sup>

**26 – 30 South Main Street (28 - 30 South Main Street). Bank of Mars Hill. Contributing. ca. 1915.**

This two-story brick commercial building has brick pilasters which extend above the roofline, on the north and south ends. The building, which features a corbelled cornice, abuts 24 – 26 South Main Street and shares some design features. There is a single storefront and a door to the second floor on the first floor, and the second floor consists of four one-over-one vinyl replacement windows with flat arched openings and concrete sills. The storefront, within the original opening, is all replacement materials, including aluminum framing of the display windows and door, and tile kickplates. The transom lights are covered by signage, but the original I-beam storefront lintel is visible above. The replacement single-light door to the second floor, located on the south end, retains its original transom light. A fiberglass shed roof supported by metal brackets shelters the door. The rear of this brick building has three window bays on the second floor, with one-over-one wood sash windows. The basement entry steps down from grade, and original four-over-four windows remain on the basement level, one of which is boarded over. There was a bank robbery here in 1935, in which a young woman was critically injured when she ran out of Bruce Pharmacy two doors down, to see what was happening. This building was later a market.<sup>16</sup>

**32 – 34 South Main Street. Ammons Dry Goods Store. Contributing. ca. 1915.**

This two-story, five-course, common brick commercial building has brick pilasters which extend above the roofline, on the north and south ends. The building, which is adjacent to 28 – 30 South

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<sup>15</sup> Dillingham, Tilson interview.

<sup>16</sup> Wood interview.

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Main Street, shares many design elements, and features a corbelled cornice. There is a single storefront and a door to the second floor on the first floor, and the second floor consists of four retrofitted replacement one-over-one wood sash windows with flat arched openings and concrete sills. The storefront, within the original opening, is all replacement materials, including aluminum framing of the display windows and door, but original brick kickplates remain. The transom lights are intact and covered by a metal-covered pent roof. The single-light door with transom to the second floor is located on the south end. The rear of this building, due to the land sloping to the west, is a full two stories plus basement. Windows are all one-over-one replacement, and the bay on the north end on the first floor has been changed from a window to a door into an apartment. There are two apartments, one with a basement entrance and one as noted above. A deck and stairs have also been added. This building, in the 1930s and 1940s, housed the Ammons Dry Goods Store, later Coxe Dry Goods.<sup>17</sup> A documentary photograph from 1917 indicate there originally was a fourth building of similar design to the south of this one, which has since been torn down and replaced by the current stuccoed and buttressed south wall. This building was torn down when Carl Eller Road and Cascade Street were widened in the 1970s. In the 1940s it housed a grocery, the Dixie Store.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Wood interview.

<sup>18</sup> Boone, Darhyl. Current town manager, Mars Hill, and lifelong resident. In-person interview with Sybil H. Argintar; and Wood interview. Mr. Wood worked at this grocery when he was fourteen years old, in the late 1930s.

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### Summary

The Mars Hill Commercial Historic District in Madison County, North Carolina, meets National Register Criterion A for its important association with the commercial development of Mars Hill, a town closely tied to Mars Hill College (now Mars Hill University), founded in 1856 as the French Broad Baptist Institute, and chartered as Mars Hill College in 1859. The district, which developed along with the college, incorporated many thriving retail, institutional, and office-related businesses located along Cascade Street (Marshall Highway) and North and South Main streets during the first six decades of the twentieth century. Serving the local community, but supported greatly by the presence of a growing student population at the college, the district has a period of significance from ca. 1915, the date of construction of the earliest extant commercial building, to 1965, the fifty year cut-off date for the historic time period. Although the buildings continued in business after 1965, the post-1965 commercial use is not of exceptional significance.

### Historic Background and Commercial Context

Madison County was formed in 1851 from portions of Buncombe and Yancey counties. The county's second county seat of Marshall was incorporated soon after, in 1855, following earlier county seats of Jewell Hill, in the Walnut community of the county, and later Lapland, which was renamed Marshall.<sup>19</sup> The county was primarily agrarian at the time it was founded, with the establishment of the 1828 Buncombe Turnpike, which ran from Greenville, Tennessee, through Marshall, to Greenville, South Carolina, serving as an economic stimulus to the county and the development of its early towns. Other towns in the county included the town of Hot Springs, settled in the late eighteenth century but not incorporated until 1893, the same year as Mars Hill.

Mars Hill College (now Mars Hill University) was founded as a Baptist school, the French Broad Baptist Institute, in 1856, just five years after the founding of Madison County. The French Broad Baptist Institute was chartered as Mars Hill College in 1859.<sup>20</sup> The school, part of a general movement beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century, of churches bringing educational institutions to the mountains, was located in a remote, rural, sparsely populated section of Madison County. Edward Carter, a native of Madison County, was instrumental in bringing the school to the county after he sent his eldest son to a Methodist-affiliated academy in Yancey County.<sup>21</sup> Carter soon learned the value of this kind of education, and began working towards bringing a similar, Baptist-affiliated, school to Madison County.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.visitmadisoncounty.com/who-we-are/madison-county/marshall-chosen-as-county-seat-of-madison-county-nc> Accessed April 17, 2015.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 8-32.

<sup>21</sup> Hood, Davyd Foard. "Mars Hill College Historic District." National Register Nomination, p. 8-38.

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Mars Hill College struggled economically during the Civil War, closing its doors for a time, beginning in 1863. When Thomas McDowell Hufham was president of the school upon its reopening in 1865, through 1890, the school was still struggling and many of its buildings were in use for other purposes.<sup>22</sup> The school was administered by several different presidents through most of the 1890s, but it was not until Robert Lee Moore became president, from 1897 to 1938, that the school experienced tremendous growth, including a major building campaign. In 1921, during Moore's tenure, the school became an accredited junior college.<sup>23</sup> By 1926, the school became a four-year college.<sup>24</sup> From 1938 to 1966, Hoyt Blackwell was president of the college, a time when the college again expanded, with the construction of a new science building and a girls' dormitory, among other buildings. In the 1950s, a library and an auditorium were built. The school became a full four-year senior college in the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Mars Hill College became a university within the past five years.

A post office was established in what would later be called the town of Mars Hill on September 28, 1871. The name was changed to Mars in 1892, and then to Mars Hill on September 6, 1893, after the town was officially incorporated by the North Carolina legislature.<sup>26</sup> When the town of Mars Hill was incorporated, the town limits were to be "twelve hundred yards in every direction from the old Mars Hill college building in a direct line," creating a governmental connection between the college and the development of the town. A mayor, three aldermen, and a town marshal were to be the elected officials, with W. O. Connor serving as the town's first mayor.<sup>27</sup>

As noted above, beginning with the town limits created by extending out from the oldest school building, and continuing into modern times, the school and the town have always been inextricably connected politically, socially, and economically. As the school, then the college, and now the university grew, so did the commercial center of Mars Hill. Downtown businesses served local residents, faculty, and students, as places to buy books and supplies, but also as places of entertainment, including restaurants and a theater.<sup>28</sup>

The commercial center of the town originally included buildings along North and South Main Street, as well as a small group of buildings south of Cascade Street facing South Main Street,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 8-40.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 8-45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 8-51.

<sup>25</sup> Bishir, Catherine W., Southern, Michael T., and Martin Jennifer F. A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 250.

<sup>26</sup> Underwood Collection 2004. Mars Hill history files. Southern Appalachian Archives. Mars Hill University.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Dillingham, Tilson interview.

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and another small group facing north on the south side of Cascade Street.<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, a small number of businesses were located in a handful of original wood-frame buildings in downtown Mars Hill, including, in 1903, three general merchants, one lawyer, and two doctors.<sup>30</sup> By 1905 there was also a telephone and telegraph company.<sup>31</sup> Some new businesses had opened by 1907, with five general merchants, three doctors, one druggist, and one lawyer in the town.<sup>32</sup> In 1910, these businesses included the Riddle Business Building, the Riddle Hotel, the Jim Jarvis Store, and the R. S. Gibbs Store, none of which are extant.<sup>33</sup> By 1911, with a population of 410, Mars Hill businesses included four general stores, four doctors, one drug store, two hotels and boarding houses, and two livery stables.<sup>34</sup> The population of the town increased slightly to 520 citizens, by 1915, with five doctors, two schools, two churches, one drugstore, four general stores, three hotel and boarding houses, three livery stables, and one newspaper located in the town.<sup>35</sup>

In 1921, as the college enrollment increased and new buildings were being constructed, an election was held to extend the town limits out to nine hundred yards in every direction to accommodate this expansion.<sup>36</sup> In the 1925 – 1926 school year, there were 254 students enrolled at the college.<sup>37</sup> There were eighteen different businesses in the downtown in the 1920s, including the N. S. Whitaker Department Store; Mars Hill Café; The College Pharmacy; a dentist; Mars Hill Bus Line; Dickinson Florist; Mars Hill Laundry; S. L. Carter; Ammons & Crowder groceries; Dickinson Florist; College Photo; Mars Hill Café; Mars Hill Laundry; D & H Motor Company; T. L. Bramlett and Company; Olympia Candy Kitchen; and L. D. Edwards Insurance.<sup>38</sup> At nearly the same time the school became a junior college in 1921, a resolution was passed by town aldermen on March 13, 1920, to obtain \$31,000 in water bonds to help establish water, sewer, light, and electric systems within the town, and to build and improve streets and

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<sup>29</sup>Wood, Arthur. In-person interview with Sybil H. Argintar, April 16, 2015. These buildings to the south side of Cascade Street, facing onto Main Street, as well as those lining the south side of Cascade Street, were torn down in the 1970s when the road was widened.

<sup>30</sup>The North Carolina Yearbook and Business Directory. Raleigh, North Carolina: *The News and Observer*, 1903, p. 355; and “Mars Hill College and Surrounding Village 1910.” Model located in the Blackwell Administration Building, Mars Hill University campus.

<sup>31</sup>Underwood Collection 2004. Mars Hill history files. Southern Appalachian Archives. Mars Hill University.

<sup>32</sup>The North Carolina Yearbook and Business Directory, 1907, p. 370.

<sup>33</sup>“Mars Hill College and Surrounding Village 1910”.

<sup>34</sup>The North Carolina Yearbook and Business Directory, 1911, p. 310.

<sup>35</sup>The North Carolina Yearbook and Business Directory, 1915, p. 343.

<sup>36</sup>Underwood Collection 2004. Mars Hill history files. Southern Appalachian Archives. Mars Hill University.

<sup>37</sup>Hood, Davyd Foard. “Mars Hill College Historic District.” National Register nomination, p. 8-51. Student enrollment numbers are not included in the population numbers of Mars Hill.

<sup>38</sup>The Laurel, 1927 and 1929. Many businesses advertised and the yearbook provides good documentation of the types of businesses in the downtown.

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sidewalks.<sup>39</sup> Downtown was the only commercial center, with a variety of different businesses, including two automobile service stations.<sup>40</sup>

In 1929, enrollment at Mars Hill College reached 440, dropping slightly, in 1931, to 430, with students from fourteen states and two foreign countries represented.<sup>41</sup> By the late 1930s, there were over twenty-three businesses operating in downtown, including several additional cafes, and other retail stores. Some of these included, in addition to those existing in the 1920s, Ammons & Landers, groceries and hardware; City and College Barber Shop; Bank of Mars Hill; Pure Oil Service Station; T. L. Bramlett Department Store; the Gibbs House (room rentals); P. P. Hartsell dry cleaners; Mrs. Airheart's Caf ; W. L. George & Son drug store; Ebbs Brothers Company, wholesale grocers; Dixie Home Store, groceries; Mars Hill Telephone Company; Roy's Caf ; Pope's Pharmacy; Allen's Cash Store; and the Variety Shop.<sup>42</sup> Many local residents rented rooms to students, and several boarding houses also catered to the student population.

The town, in the 1930s, despite the large number of operating businesses, was struggling financially and was in default on water bonds from the 1920s. Several resolutions were passed to extend payment deadlines into the early 1950s. The town's water system was considered to be inadequate, and even contaminated in some places, with an insufficient water supply. The town applied to the Works Progress Administration for funding to rectify this situation, and at the same time passed a bond referendum for the matching funds required.<sup>43</sup> Delinquent property taxes was an issue for the town in the late 1930s, prompting the town to pass a resolution to request the General Assembly to allow annexation of properties outside the corporate limits, to make up for the fact that much land within the town limits had been purchased by Mars Hill College, and was thus taken off the tax rolls.<sup>44</sup>

By 1940, population of the college increased to 738 students representing nineteen states and Cuba. In 1944, enrollment was 704 students, with 979 enrolled by 1947, with 23 new instructors added.<sup>45</sup> Enrollment increased slightly in 1952, with 735 students enrolled.

Many businesses from the 1930s continued to thrive into the 1940s and 1950s. Additional businesses that began operation in this time period included Wells Market; Gibbs Department

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<sup>39</sup> Underwood Collection 2004. Box 15. Mars Hill history files. Southern Appalachian Archives. Mars Hill University.

<sup>40</sup>Photos from the 1930s and 1940s show a Sinclair gas station south of the district, and a Pure Oil station to the north, neither of which are extant.

<sup>41</sup> The Hilltop. Newspaper of Mars Hill College, September 21, 1929 and September 25, 1931.

<sup>42</sup> The Laurel. 1930, 1931, and 1936.

<sup>43</sup> Town Minute Books. August 31, 1938 and September 26, 1938.

<sup>44</sup> Town Minute Books, February 8, 1939.

<sup>45</sup> The Hilltop. October 7, 1944 and September 27, 1947.

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Store; Carl's Shoe Shop; Adam Hats; Mac's Market; Campus Corner Café; Mars Hill Taxi; Scott's Variety Shop; Citizens Bank; Charlie's Shoe Service; Mars Hill Dry Goods; Home Electric and Furniture Company; Sandwich Shop ("Just Below the Mars Theatre"); Cox Department Store; The Grill ("Mars Hill's Newest and Most Modern Restaurant"); David's Men's Shops; Tugman's Home Furnishings; Soda Shop & Café; Mars Hill Building and Supply; Mars Hill 5 & 10 Cent Store; and J. F. Ammons general store, which had purchased and consolidated the W. L. George Grocery Store in 1931.<sup>46</sup> The town continued to provide needed services to its residents in the 1940s and 1950s, passing a bond referendum for \$12,000 on March 10, 1942 to build a sewer system.<sup>47</sup> In 1954, an additional water bond was passed for \$45,000 to again expand and improve upon the water system.<sup>48</sup>

Enrollment at the college continued to increase through the 1950s and 1960s with 850 students and 9 new faculty in 1954; 1,059 in 1957; and 1,324 in 1964, with 79 faculty members.<sup>49</sup> When Mars Hill Junior College became a four-year college in the 1960s, the student population grew and so did the downtown businesses, many of which were in existence in the 1950s and continued to thrive.<sup>50</sup> In 1965, twenty-seven percent of the town's population was employed in retail commerce.<sup>51</sup> Downtown Mars Hill, unlike many other western North Carolina downtowns that began to lose economic vitality in the late 1960s, continued to serve as the commercial center of the town. Businesses changed hands through the years, but stores stayed open and businesses were successful, due in large part to the student population at the college adjacent to the downtown.<sup>52</sup>

Today, there are several cafes, the university's bookstore, real estate offices, attorney's offices, and gift shops which serve the population of the town and the university. Downtown now, as compared to the period of significance, is not as commercially viable. The student population now has automobiles and often leaves the campus on weekends to drive easily to nearby Asheville for shopping and entertainment. As in many small mountain towns, highway systems developed in the 1970s and it became easier to travel between communities. Mars Hill University students, as well as local residents, now take advantage of that ease of access.

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<sup>46</sup> The Laurel, business ads, 1940, 1943, 1945, 1947, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1958.

<sup>47</sup> Town Minute Books, March 10, 1942.

<sup>48</sup> Town Minute Books, June 8, 1954.

<sup>49</sup> The Hilltop, September 20, 1952; September 25, 1954; September 28, 1957; and September 26, 1964.

<sup>50</sup> The Laurel, business ads, 1936, 1938, 1940, 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Underwood Collection 2004. Box 15. Various Mars Hill history files. Southern Appalachian Archives. Mars Hill University. "Population and Economy, Mars Hill, North Carolina." Pamphlet, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Harmon, Peggy. Long-time Madison County resident and archivist at Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill University. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, 14 November 2014.

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Southern Appalachian Archives. Underwood Collection, 2004. Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, North Carolina.

The Hilltop. Mars Hill College newspaper. 1931 to 1965. Located in Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina.

The Laurel. Yearbooks for Mars Hill College, 1920s to 1960s. Located in Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina.

Wood, Arthur. Long-time Mars Hill resident (1931 – present) and former professor of math, physics, and engineering at Mars Hill College (1949 – 1991). Mr. Wood graduated with a degree in Engineering Physics from the University of Tennessee in 1949, and with a masters degree in physics from Clemson University in 1951. In-person interview with Sybil H. Argintar, April 16, 2015.

### Section 10

#### Boundary Description

The boundary of the historic district is shown on the accompanying Madison County tax map by a heavy black line, at a scale of 1" = 94'.

#### Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the district include the largest concentration of contiguous contributing properties dating from the period of significance, ca. 1915 through 1965. Immediately outside the historic district are altered historic commercial buildings or buildings that post-date the period of significance.

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### Additional Documentation

#### Photographs

The following information applies to all photographs, except where noted.

Name of property:            Mars Hill Commercial Historic District  
   Mars Hill, Madison County, North Carolina  
Photographer:                Sybil H. Argintar  
Date of photos:                July 2014  
Location of digital negatives: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

#### Photo Log

1. Streetscape, North Main Street, view northeast
2. Streetscape, South Main Street, view southwest
3. Streetscape, South Main Street, view southeast
4. Streetscape, South Main Street, view northwest
5. 15 – 25 South Main Street, view northeast
6. 16 – 20 North Main Street, view east
7. 10 North Main Street, view northeast

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National Park Service

Mars Hill Commercial Historic District
Name of Property
Madison County, NC
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number SLR Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 15000575 Date Listed: 9/8/2015

Property Name: Mars Hill Commercial Historic District

County: Madison County State: NC

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

8/17/2022  
Date of Action

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Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 7:  
The SLR is issued to clarify the status of one property within the boundaries of the Mars Hill Commercial Historic District, which was listed in the NRHP on September 8, 2015.

The building located at 16-20 North Main Street, Medical Office Building, is hereby considered a contributing resource to the Mars Hill Commercial Historic District. Originally considered noncontributing primarily due to the T-111 siding used in the storefront and the wooden pent awning. However, re-evaluation which places emphasis on the intact upper floor and original 4/1 ribbon windows as character-defining features and the more temporary nature of the awning leads to the conclusion that the building is a contributing resource.

Section 5:  
The resource count is hereby changed to 10 contributing buildings and 0 noncontributing buildings.

Tax Credit Project #45239

\_\_\_\_\_  
The NC SHPO has been notified of this amendment.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DISTRIBUTION:**  
National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)