

Uptown Lexington National Register District

The Uptown Lexington Historic District constitutes the historic core of Lexington's commercial and governmental center. Situated roughly along Main Street between Third Avenue and Second Street, the district is made up of sixty-eight resources, including sixty-four buildings, three sites, and one object. Eighty-eight percent of the resources are commercial in nature. Of those which aren't, two are the former Davidson County Courthouse and the former United States Post Office, now used as the county history museum and the county arts center; three are the park-like quadrants of the Courthouse Square; and one is the Confederate Monument. Sixty-eight percent of the resources date from ca. 1890 to ca. 1930, and the rest are fairly evenly distributed among the periods prior to 1890, 1930-1946, and post 1946. Eighty-two percent of the resources in the Uptown Lexington Historic District contribute to its historic character, reflecting its 1824-1946 period of significance. One property, the former Davidson County Courthouse, is already listed in the National Register.

The Uptown Lexington Historic District is a tightly-knit historic urban commercial space that is distinguished from its surroundings in several ways. Outside the boundaries of the district the character of the buildings and the urban space changes. South of Third Avenue, the buildings become more spaced out and consist largely of churches, modern service stations, and generally non-contributing buildings. The east side of S. Main Street between Second and Third Avenues was excluded from the district because all but one of these buildings, in their current form, do not contribute to the historic character of the district because of post-1946 construction dates or substantial alterations. East of Marble Alley, the buildings become more recent and more spread out, merging with industrial areas. West of Greensboro Alley/LSB Plaza, buildings become more spread out and more recent, and the commercial and governmental buildings here quickly give way to residential areas. North of Second Street, the commercial fabric along N. Main Street becomes considerably more spread out and, for the most part, more recent in date of construction. There are several good 1920s-1930s commercial buildings as well as the remodeled mid-nineteenth-century jail in this area, but these buildings are too separated from the main body of the district by more recent non-contributing buildings and open spaces to warrant their inclusion in the district.

The layout of the Uptown Lexington Historic District follows the grid pattern of the city's central streets. Although the orientation of the district lies northeast to southwest, for purposes of clarity in this nomination, conventional compass points will be applied to the descriptions. The district encompasses parts of five blocks along Main Street between Third Avenue on the south, Second Street on the north, Marble Alley on the east, and Greensboro Alley/LSB Plaza on the west, with the exception that on W. Second Avenue, the district extends west of Greensboro Alley but falls short of State Street.

At the center of the district is Courthouse Square, which dates from 1824 when the land was purchased and laid out for the county seat of the newly formed Davidson County. The square is unusual in that it is arranged in four quadrants around the intersection of the city's two main streets known since at least 1885 as Main Street and Center Street. The 1856-58 former Davidson County Courthouse (#1) takes up the southwest quadrant,

while the other three are composed of grassy lawns with sidewalks, trees, hedges, and various commemorative markers. The first courthouse (ca. 1825) was located in the center of the square, with Davis and Steele' Streets (now Main Street) and Stanly and Cameron Streets (now Center Street) leading to it. After the 1856-58 courthouse was built, the original courthouse was torn down. In 1905 the Confederate Monument was installed at that location, but it was eventually moved (after 1929) to the southeast quadrant of the square (#38) to better accommodate vehicular traffic.

Most of the buildings in the district are two-story brick structures, although some are only one story and a few are three. With one exception (#50), the one-story buildings are located along the district's secondary streets. Most of the buildings are aligned with the sidewalk and are contiguous with other buildings. The exceptions are the former Courthouse (#1) and the former Post Office (#25). Green space in the district is confined to three quadrants of Courthouse Square (#38, 47, 64) and the lawn of the old Post Office. At the time of the district survey, Bradford pear trees lined most of Main Street, but these are currently being cut down and will be replanted with smaller trees of a different variety. Six rear parking lots associated with particular buildings are located throughout the district.

The buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District represent various architectural styles that were popular during the hundred years from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Good design and workmanship are present in most of these buildings. The names of only a few architects and builders who worked in the district are known. These include George Dudley and William Ashley, who were responsible--as designers or contractors--for the 1856-58 Courthouse (#1); George F. Barber, who designed the Raper Building (#3); and James Knox Taylor, the supervising architect for the 1911-1912 Post Office (#25).

Classical design in various manifestations was one of the most prominent stylistic tendencies in the district. The oldest building in the district, and one of the most architecturally refined, is the former Davidson County Courthouse (#1) erected in 1856-58. The two-story stuccoed brick building is an excellent example of the Roman-influenced Classical Revival and is dominated by a Corinthian hexastyle temple portico. After the turn of the twentieth century, classical influence continued in two of the most architecturally important buildings in the district--the former March Hotel (#11) and the former United States Post Office (#25). The March Hotel took on its Renaissance Revival appearance around 1910. Except for the loss of its one-story central portico, the grandiose three-story brick building survives largely intact. Although it is a relatively small building, the 1911-1912 Post Office achieves monumentality through its stone construction and Neo-Classical Revival styling. Six Tuscan columns create an imposing facade, and the interior lobby is replete with classical details.

Occasionally in the late nineteenth century classicism was expressed in the district's buildings through the use of Italianate styling. This was accomplished through such devices as arcaded windows--sometimes emphasized with rusticated stonework--and arcaded or classical cornices. The commercial buildings at 17-21 S. Main Street (#36) and 16 and 18 S. Main Street (#6 and 7) exemplify this Italianate classical influence. All three were apparently built by 1885.

Classical influence continued in the detailing of many of the district's buildings from the late 1910s and 1920s. Focused around the doors and windows and on string courses and cornices, these details were often emphasized by the use of white stone or terra cotta against red brick walls. Excellent examples of this classical phase include the Commercial Building (#12) at 106-114 S. Main Street, the Moffitt Building (#30), the Commercial Building (#57) at 121 N. Main Street, and the J. C. Smith Building (#60).

Most of the other commercial buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District fall into the category of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century standard commercial design. These buildings are one, two, or three stories in height and vary from one to several store fronts in width. Most are red brick buildings, but some are tan or yellow brick, and a few are multi-colored brick. Decorative detailing makes use of brick, stone, terra cotta, stucco, metal, and/or wood. Decoration takes the form primarily of brick patterning, raised brick detailing, brick panels, and brick corbeling, although it is sometimes achieved through trim of contrasting materials. Decoration can remain very simple, particularly in the case of one-story buildings, or become fairly elaborate. Examples of one-story brick buildings which exhibit simple standard design include the commercial buildings on the north side of W. Second Avenue (#14-17), on the south side of E. First Avenue (#32-34) and at 8-10 E. First Street (#52). Similar design in two-story buildings can be seen in the law offices along Court Square (#4-5) and in the commercial building at 3-5 E. First Avenue (#31). Fancier two- and three-story examples include the Smith-Thompson Block (#35), the Development Building (#39), the Buchanan-Siceloff Building (#22), the Hinkle Block (#53), the Hankins Building (#54), Hedrick's Hall (#55), and the commercial buildings at 104 N. Main Street (#59) and 22 S. Main Street (#9). Other buildings, such as the Earnhardt Building (#18) and the commercial building at the southwest corner of E. Center Street and Marble Alley (#40), achieve a decorative effect through the use of a shaped parapet. Although many of the first-story interiors of the district's buildings have been remodeled, many retain early twentieth-century pressed metal ceilings. Among these are the Earnhardt Building (#18) and the commercial buildings at 24 W. Second Avenue (#15), 22 S. Main Street (#9), 120 S. Main Street (#13), 8 E. First Street (#52), and 6 N. Main Street (#65).

In addition to the buildings which contribute to the historic character of the Uptown Lexington Historic District, three sites and one object also contribute. The sites are the southeast, northeast, and northwest quadrants of the Courthouse Square (#38, 47, 64). Each is characterized by a grassy lawn, internal sidewalks, several trees, a holly hedge, and commemorative markers of various types. In the southeast quadrangle stands the Confederate Monument, the contributing object in the district. The tall bronze statue on a granite base was erected at the center of the intersection of Main and Center Streets in 1905 and was moved to its present site after 1929.

The appearance of the district during its period of significance (1824-1946) followed a natural progression, judging from documentary and physical evidence. The original twenty-five acres that were purchased and laid out for the county seat in 1824 included all of the present district except for that portion south of Second Avenue. The street names have changed, but the street layout remains the same. The lots surrounding the courthouse were sold in 1824, but what was actually built is not known. When the second

courthouse--a grandiose Classical Revival structure--was built in 1856-58, it doubtless set the tone for expectations concerning the physical development of the county seat town. By 1867, Branson's North Carolina Business Directory reported the existence of seven stores, six lawyers and three physicians who would have required offices, and one hotel in Lexington. Only a decade later, The North Carolina Business Directory for 1878 reported that the number of merchants had increased dramatically to twenty-eight. Prior to 1885, however, we have few clues as to the appearance of all these buildings. In 1885 the first Sanborn Insurance Maps were published for Lexington. By that time the streets in the district had taken on their current names. Both brick and frame stores were located near the courthouse, particularly in the block of S. Main between Center Street and First Avenue and in the first two blocks of Main Street north of Center Street. The Sanborn Maps for 1902 and 1913 show a progression in the number of brick and frame stores, but also show a few houses mixed in with the stores. By 1923, Main Street between Second Avenue and Second Street had been largely filled in with stores and offices. Photographs made by local photographer H. Lee Waters during-the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s give a sense of the appearance of Lexington's commercial and governmental core during those years and help to demonstrate the relative intactness of the Uptown Lexington Historic District today. Most of the earliest buildings were replaced by other brick buildings during the period of significance, and only a few of these have been replaced by more recent buildings, although others have been remodeled to varying degrees.

Most of the buildings in the district remain in good to excellent condition. Additions have been minimal, as most buildings were built to fit the space available. What additions there are usually have been made to the rear of buildings and do not present an integrity problem. The exception comes with the former W. G. Penry House (#10), where substantial mid-twentieth-century additions to the facade and east side converted this building from a contributing to a noncontributing element in the district. The biggest difference in the district now and during its years of significance is that most buildings have altered first-story shopfronts--a common malady in historic commercial areas--and a few of the facades have been sheathed with modern materials. However, the upper stories of most buildings remain largely intact, still strongly conveying their period of construction. Other than continued maintenance, there is little in the way of current restoration or rehabilitation activity in the district. Nevertheless, several buildings appear poised for Tax Act rehabilitation with listing of the district on the National Register. With eighty-two percent of the resources classified as "contributing," the Uptown Lexington Historic District as a whole retains historic integrity reflecting its period of significance (1824-1946) in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Summary:

The Uptown Lexington Historic District, composed of the historic commercial and governmental core of this central Piedmont town, is locally significant in the history of Lexington and Davidson County in the areas of architecture, commerce, and politics and government. Lexington began as a small village in the late eighteenth century, and when Davidson County was formed in 1822, it was soon selected as the county seat. The twenty-five acres which were purchased adjacent to the village in 1824 and laid out into a

courthouse square and surrounding lots with a grid pattern of streets became the center of government and commerce in Lexington and form the nucleus of the Uptown Lexington Historic District. As the location of the Davidson County Courthouse from ca. 1825 to 1958 and other local government buildings, the district was the center of local politics and government for over 125 years. The area encompassed by the district developed into a primary center for commerce and trade in Davidson County and remains so today. The district meets Criterion A for listing in the National Register because of these strong associations with local government and commerce. As the center of Lexington developed to serve the needs of government and commerce, it acquired a collection of architecturally significant buildings dating from the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Several of these buildings, including the 1856-58 (former) Davidson County Courthouse, the ca. 1910 (former) March Hotel, and the 1911-12 (former) United States Post Office, are significant individually for their well-articulated variations on classical design. At the same time, the group of buildings in the district as a whole forms a fine representative collection of late nineteenth- and early-to-mid-twentieth-century brick commercial stock expressive of the distinctive design and physical characteristics of standard commercial architecture of the period. As such, the district also meets Criterion C for National Register listing. Although many of the buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District have experienced some typical mid-to-late twentieth-century alterations--particularly of first-story shopfronts--the district as a whole maintains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association representing its period of significance from the 1824 purchase and layout of the county seat to 1946, the last year in which the district meets the fifty-year criterion for listing in the National Register.

Historical Background/Politics and Government and Commerce Contexts:

Lexington had developed as a village long before its establishment as the seat of Davidson County. Local tradition claims that it acquired its name in honor of the pivotal Revolutionary War Battle of Lexington, Massachusetts on April 19, 1775. The first known appearance of the name of Lexington in Rowan County records, however, was in 1790. A post office was established in the village in 1800, and Lexington was first listed in the 1810 Census with a population of eighty-three (Sink and Matthews, 71-75).

As the nineteenth century progressed, there were numerous complaints from people living in the eastern sections of Rowan County about the inconvenience of having to travel to the county seat of Salisbury to attend court. Thus, between 1819 and 1822, one session of court each quarter was held in Lexington until, in December of 1822, Davidson was formed as a separate county named for the Revolutionary War hero, General William Lee Davidson (Sink and Matthews, 76-77; Touart, 9). After some disagreement between the proposed county seat (to be called "Marion") and the already established village of Lexington, Lexington won out and was ultimately selected as Davidson's county seat. On March 3, 1824, the county purchased a tract of twenty-five acres adjoining the town of Lexington on which to erect the public buildings of the new county. The land was laid off in lots with the courthouse lot in the center and a grid pattern of streets, thus establishing the street plan which survives today in the Uptown Lexington Historic District (Sink and Matthews, 40-43) .

Davidson County's first courthouse, completed by 1825, was erected in the center of what was then known as Washington Square. No plans or photographs are known to exist for this building, but court records reveal that it was a two-story building with a portico, and it is believed to have been brick. Of great significance is the fact that the courthouse was designed by William Nichols (Sink and Matthews, 44). Nichols was an English-born architect who had produced significant buildings in eastern North Carolina, including, in particular, the 1820-22 remodeling of the State House in Raleigh. Nichols became official architect for the state before departing in 1827 for Alabama and Mississippi (Bishir et al., 126-129). Such an impressive start in the new county seat was a telling indicator of the quality of building to come.

The old part of Lexington and the new county seat soon merged, and the town was incorporated in 1827 (Sink and Matthews, 78). With the courthouse in place, Lexington--and particularly its commercial center surrounding the government center--began to take on new life. A major effort at bringing prosperity to Lexington was undertaken in 1839, when the Lexington Manufacturing Company built a large brick cotton mill. Unfortunately, the mill burned in 1844, and this disaster caused a setback in industrial development in the town for some years (Sink and Matthews, 82).

Of great significance to the nineteenth-century development of Lexington and other towns in North Carolina was the completion of the North Carolina Railroad from Goldsboro to Charlotte in 1855. Its arrival in Lexington was celebrated on July 4, 1855, by an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 people. As reported in the July 13, 1855, issue of the Greensborough Patriot and Flag (quoted from the Salisbury Whig), the celebration included a "sumptuous barbecue," an early reference to this important Lexington culinary tradition. The railroad brought a long-awaited transportation link between the eastern and western parts of the state and instigated a building boom in Lexington (Sink and Matthews, 83).

In its February 1856 session, the Court in Davidson County ordered that "building of new courthouse in the town of Lexington is necessary for safekeeping of records of several courts of this county" (Sink and Matthews, 44). Accordingly, five commissioners were appointed to superintend the location and erection of a new courthouse. They selected the southwest quadrant of the courthouse square on which to build the new courthouse, thus removing its location from the center of the square, and chose George Dudley and William Ashley to build it. The cost for the new courthouse given in the March 20, 1857, Greensborough Patriot and Flag was \$20,000. On October 8, 1858, the same paper reported that "The new courthouse at Lexington will be christened this week by the Davidson County Superior Court....." and the October 15th issue of the paper carried the following description:

The new building is indeed magnificent, by far the best we ever saw and we presume the finest in the state. Beautiful and magnificent Temple of Justice, it will stand for ages as a monument both of their taste and liberality, while the stranger in passing will involuntarily stop to gaze on its beautiful proportions, its majestic columns and admire the artistic skill of the master workmen which is so admirably and tastefully displayed in

every part of the building. Messrs. Dudley and Ashley have done themselves great credit and the committee may deem themselves fortunate in having secured for the work gentlemen of so much taste and skill and who have so conscientiously and faithfully fulfilled their contract.... The foundation of the main building and also the steps and platform upon which rest the lofty columns of the portico which extends the entire front of the building are of granite and cost about \$4,000. The Courtroom is on the second floor and is most beautifully and tastefully finished.... (Sink and Matthews, 45).

Davidson County's new "Temple of Justice" was indeed a source of pride for the county. Lexington citizens evidently thought that proximity to the courthouse made business property more valuable, for when J. P. Mabry advertised his hotel for sale in 1858, he stated that it was the only hotel in town and that it was "situated on Main Street, near the new \$20,000 courthouse and 300 yards north of the railway station" (Sink and Matthews, 84). Thus, it was a terrible blow to the county and to the citizens of Lexington when, seven years later, the courthouse burned on November 23, 1865, during the time General Kilpatrick and his men were occupying Lexington. Whether or not Union soldiers were responsible for the fire has never been proven. Nevertheless, the county was insistent upon rebuilding the courthouse, and this undertaking continued through 1868. Since the total cost for "rebuilding" was under \$11,000, and the original cost of the courthouse had been \$20,000, of which \$4,000 had been for the granite foundation, steps, and platform, it is assumed that the walls and columns also remained after the fire and that the primary work at this time centered on the interior (Sink and Matthews, 47, 86).

Branson's North Carolina Business Directory for 1867-68 provides a sense of the condition of Lexington in the years immediately following the Civil War. At that time there were seven merchants (out of eleven listed in the county as a whole), one hotel, two churches (Methodist and Presbyterian), one school, six lawyers (out of nine in the county), and two physicians. Ten years later, The North Carolina Business Directory for 1877-78 demonstrated the tremendous growth which had taken place in the county seat. Lexington's population was given as 600, well above the next largest town in the county, Thomasville, at 300. In the decade since 1867-68, Lexington had quadrupled its number of merchants. In 1877-78 the town could boast twenty-nine merchants--nearly half of all those listed in the county and almost twice as many as were listed in Thomasville. There were also two hotels, three boarding houses, nine churches, five lawyers, and three physicians. There were, however, only three manufactories listed--cabinet making, cabinet and undertaking, and millwrighting-- out of twelve for the county as a whole (six of which were in Thomasville). Clearly, at this time commerce rather than industry was Lexington's drawing card.

An interesting off-shoot of Lexington's commercial prosperity at this time was the attempt by the Davidson County Commissioners in 1873 to have a bill passed in the State Legislature to allow them to sell the three plots of the public square (other than the one on which the courthouse stood). The reasoning of the commissioners was that the county was in debt and these three parcels of public land afforded no income to the county. Each of the three plots was to be divided into three lots--obviously with the hope of

capitalizing on the desirability of commercial land close to the courthouse. Fortunately, the owners of the adjacent properties sought and won a court-ordered injunction restraining the commissioners from selling the lots, and this decision was eventually affirmed by the North Carolina Supreme Court (Leonard, 42-43). Thus, the public square was saved and remains intact at the center of today's Uptown Lexington Historic District.

Branson's North Carolina Business Directory for 1884 showed continued growth in Lexington. Sixty merchants and tradesmen were listed, which were twice as many as were listed in the second busiest town, Thomasville. This listing showed the wide variety of goods and services offered in the county seat. There were, for example, general stores, furniture stores, jewelers, confectioneries, millinery shops, drug stores, fertilizer and grain dealers, a sewing machine dealer, livery stables, shoe stores, hardware stores, a saddle and harness dealer, a lumber dealer, and a marble yard. In addition, there were painters, a mineralogist, a miner, an auctioneer, a notary, an artist, and brick masons. Manufactories included foundry and machine shops, wagon making, cabinetmaking, millwrighting, blacksmithing. (2), whiskey distilleries (3), and tobacco factories (3), among others.

In 1885 Sanborn Insurance Maps were first produced for Lexington. These maps, which were updated in 1890, 1896, 1902, 1907, 1913, 1923, and 1929, show graphically the growth of the town and particularly its governmental and commercial core which became today's Uptown Lexington Historic District. The 1885 maps show that there were both frame and brick stores in the uptown area--primarily along Main Street--and also a few scattered houses. Both sides of S. Main Street between Center Street and First Avenue were filled with stores, including the present-day brick commercial buildings at 16, 18, 22, 15, and 17-21 s. Main Street (#6, 7, 9, 37, and 35). In the next block to the south, the precursor of present March Hotel building was in place as a frame building on the southwest corner of S. Main Street and W. Second Avenue. North of Center Street, stores were filling in the west side of N. Main Street between Center and W. First Streets and on the east side of Main between First and Second Streets.

Other improvements in the 1880s were reported by Mayor M. H. Pinnix. He reported that more street grading was done and more sidewalks laid out in the year ending 1888 than had ever been done for the town in its whole history; that hundreds of loads of stone and gravel had been spread upon the streets; and that rotten plank walk had been taken up and stone and gravel put down. At the same time, the greatest addition to the industrial life of Lexington was the building in 1886 of the Wenonah Cotton Mills, a manufacturing plant still in operation (Sink and Matthews, 90-91).

In 1890 an event occurred in Lexington that was destined to shape the appearance of the town's architecture. This was the arrival in Lexington of a brick making machine which could produce a stronger and more durable brick and at the same time render the surfaces in a smoother and cleaner fashion better suited for late nineteenth-century construction. The Davidson Dispatch announced that

Messrs. [William A.] Watson and [D. K.] Cecil have moved their brick machine from Concord, N C where they have been making brick for some

time and will put it up at once in Lexington. It will be placed in the northern part of town, near the cemetery. They will make the brick for a larger block of buildings to be put up soon near where Mr. Leach's law office now stands....

With a capacity of shaping fifty to eighty bricks a minute, this new brick machine facilitated the manufacture of building brick at a time when major portions of Lexington's commercial and domestic architecture were being replaced (Touart, 31).

Change indeed was coming to Lexington. Between 1890 and 1900 the population grew from 626 to 1440, and the Sanborn Maps for 1890 and 1896 reflect a parallel growth in the commercial buildings erected along Main Street both north and south of the courthouse square. Some of these survive today, including the commercial buildings at 117 and 125 S. Main Street (#27 and 26), the Marble Works at 12 E. Center Street (#41), and the commercial buildings at 5, 7, and 11-15 N. Main Street (#44, 45, and 48) .

Growth continued unabated in Lexington after the turn of the century and brought the construction of some of the district's finest buildings. The population jumped from 1440 in 1900 to 4163 in 1910-- an increase of 189.1 percent. In 1908 the North Carolina Division of the Travelers Protective Association published a Commercial History of the State of North Carolina, which summed up Lexington's situation in glowing terms:

Lexington, North Carolina, presents in a nutshell the story of the new South. In less than a decade it has developed from a straggling village into a splendid modern town, bustling with activity, throbbing with new-found energy, accomplishing each day more than the old town did in twelve months.

Since 1900 Lexington has planted more than thirty manufacturing industries; the municipality has built modern streets, waterworks, sewerage, electric lights, and perfected a system of public education that cannot be surpassed in the State....

About one and one-half millions are invested in manufacturing; the output is valued at about three millions; fifteen hundred workingmen find employment.

Industrially, educationally, socially, Lexington is an ideal town. Its homes are elegant, its churches and schools numerous and ample; its climate and drainage all that could be desired. It offers opportunities, it possesses possibilities. It extends a welcome to the world.... (Sink and Matthews, 93).

Several significant achievements of this period had a direct impact on the physical character of the district. In 1905 the Confederate Monument was erected at the center of the square where the two major streets--Main and Center--intersect. It remained at that location until some time after 1929, when it was moved to the southeast quadrant of the

courthouse square (#38), doubtless to preserve it in the face of increased vehicular traffic. Around 1907 the Raper Building (#2), designed by Knoxville architect George F. Barber, was built directly behind the Courthouse, beginning what was to become known as Lawyers' Row. Around 1900 the frame March Hotel was replaced by a two-story brick hotel, which was itself substantially remodeled around 1910 into the elegant Renaissance Revival building (#11) which stands today at the corner of S. Main Street and W. First Avenue. Then in 1911-1912 the Neo-classical Revival United States Post Office (#25), designed by supervising architect James Knox Taylor, was built at the northwest corner of S. Main Street and W. Third Avenue, where it provides a solid anchor for today's Uptown Lexington Historic District. Not surprisingly, it was during this period, on October 30, 1909, that the leading men in town organized the Lexington Board of Trade during a luncheon meeting at the March Hotel. The slogan for Lexington became "The Center of the Great Piedmont Section, in the midst of the famous cotton and furniture manufacturing district, the junction and distributing point of the South's two greatest railroads" (Sink and Matthews, 96). (The two railroads were the Southern Railway and the Winston-Salem Southbound. The route for the latter had just been selected. Sink and Matthews, 96)

The Sanborn Maps for 1902, 1907, and 1913 show the overall and continued progress of building in the district. Several buildings, in addition to the Raper Building, the March Hotel, and the Post Office, are worthy of note. These include the 1900 Smith-Thompson Block (#35) at 23 S. Main Street with its ironwork oriel balcony and granite-outlined leaded glass arched window; the Hankins Building (#54) and Hedrick's Hall (#55) at 107 and 109-111 N. Main Street, both built in 1902, which are excellent examples of turn-of-the-century standard commercial design; the Hinkle Block (#53) which was built between 1902 and 1907 at 101-105 N. Main Street with its small, polygonal turrets; and the three-story Development Building (#39) with its prominent location adjacent the southeast quadrant of the courthouse square. All are brick buildings.

The 1910s and 1920s were prosperous years for uptown Lexington with much new building and re-building. One-third of the buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District date from this time. Many exhibited standard commercial design for the period, while others--particularly those built during the 1920s--were infused with classical design influences. The years between 1913 and 1923 brought many new, and often large, buildings north of Center Street. Among these are the J. C. Smith Building (#60) at 100-102 N. Main Street, the commercial building at 104 N. Main Street (#59), the Hege-Harmon Building (#63) at 12-20 N. Main Street, and the commercial building at 2-10 N. Main Street (#65) which has housed the Conrad and Hinkle Grocery since at least 1925. The former Lexington Fire Department (#61) at 8 W. First Street was built during this time, and the town's police station was located on S. Main Street, though it now longer survives. South of Center Street were the Varner Building (#29) at 103-107 S. Main Street and the commercial building (#12) built in 1919 at 106-114 S. Main Street. During the 1920s, law offices (#4 and 5) filled in along Lawyers' Row behind the courthouse, the Earnhardt Building with its shaped parapet facade was built at 27-31 W. Second Avenue, the large Buchanan-Siceloff Building (#22) was erected at 200202 S. Main Street, and the classically-detailed commercial building (#57) at 121 N. Main Street was built.

Supporting this growth was the Lexington Merchants Association, which was organized in 1917 with forty-five charter members. The purpose of the association was to boost Lexington and encourage new industry to locate in the city. Population figures for Lexington reinforce the image of growth and prosperity suggested by the new uptown construction. While in 1910 the population was 4,163, and in 1920 it stood at 5,254, by 1930 it had leaped to 9,652 (Sink and Matthews, 98, 101, 103, 105).

The Great Depression of the 1930s hit Lexington hard and strongly affected the town's commercial center. Little new construction took place in the 1930s and 1940s. In sharp contrast to the busy decades prior to 1930, fewer than ten buildings which survive today in the Uptown Lexington Historic District are believed to have been built in the 1930s and 1940s. These include the ca. 1937 Office Building (#3) at 1 W. Center Street, the ca. 1935 commercial buildings (#15, 16) at 22-24 and 28 W. Second Avenue, the ca. 1945 commercial building (#17) at 30 W. Second Avenue, the former Vestal Building (ca. 1935 but remodeled around the 1960s) at 109 S. Main Street (#28), .and the former City Barbecue, built ca. 1940 at 5 Greensboro Alley. Most of these are extremely simple brick structures, and four of the six are only one story in height.

Since 1946 and the close of the district's period of significance, several events have had a strong effect on the district, helping to establish its character today. First of all, in 1958 the county built a new courthouse, and a new post office was erected in 1967--both outside the district. The fire department and the police station also were moved to buildings outside the district ... However, the majestic former Davidson County Courthouse has continued to be used by the county for various offices, and since the nation's Bicentennial in 1976, it has housed the Davidson County Historical Museum. The former United States Post Office, now owned by the county, was used as the Davidson County Library from around 1970 to 1986, and since 1986 it has been used as the Davidson County Arts Center. In 1991, the Davidson County Commission donated a preservation easement to the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, Inc. for the 1856-58 Davidson County Courthouse building, thus helping to ensure its long-term preservation. Davidson is the only county in the state to have thus far taken such a measure. In 1993 Uptown Lexington, Inc. was formed as part of the North Carolina Main Street program. The focus of this non-profit organization is revitalization of uptown Lexington, which includes the historic district, based on the Main Street four-point approach of organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. For Uptown Lexington, Inc. historic preservation plays an important role in this process and includes the sponsorship of this National Register district nomination and the encouragement of Tax Act rehabilitation projects once the district is listed. All these factors have worked to preserve the distinctive historic and architectural character of Lexington's commercial and governmental core.

Architecture Context:

The Uptown Lexington Historic District has the largest and most concentrated collection of commercial buildings from ca. 1885 to ca. 1945 in Davidson County. Several of the buildings--including the former Davidson County Courthouse. (#1), the former United States Post Office (#25), and the former March Hotel (#11)--are architecturally

significant on an individual basis. Together, the collection of fifty-two contributing buildings in the district forms a cohesive continuum of commercial architecture representative of the period.

Arranged primarily along Main Street between Third Avenue and Second Street, but also along the side streets which cross Main, the district is centered on the unusual four-part courthouse square. The grid plan of streets with central courthouse square that was laid out for the county seat in 1824 is unlike any other town arrangement in Davidson County. Thomasville, the closest town to Lexington in the county in terms of size and economic character, presents a totally different image with its commercial area divided by the railroad tracks which run through the center of town.

Lexington's plan with the central square intersected by the main streets in town provided, historically, a focus for the development of the town's commercial center. The closer to the courthouse, the more desirable the location, and, in fact, the construction of stores and other commercial buildings did proceed outward along Main Street both north and south of the courthouse. Lexington's commercial center also provided the perfect setting for a variety of professional and business offices. These were generally located on the upper floors of buildings, except in the case of law offices, where it was most prestigious to occupy a first-floor office on Lawyers' Row, as the alley behind the courthouse came to be known.

The buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District follow two primary stylistic themes--classicism and so-called standard commercial design. The first building of great importance to the district no longer survives but set a precedent for good design. The first Davidson County Courthouse, built ca. 1825, was designed by English-born architect William Nichols, whose academic designs earned him the title of official state architect. That two-story building was apparently classical in design, judging from the fact that it had a portico. This building was replaced in 1856-58 by one of grandest surviving Classical Revival courthouses in the state. The temple-form second Davidson County Courthouse (#1)--with its stone base, hexastyle Corinthian portico, elaborate classical cornice, and cupola--provided a powerful center point for the district then and now. When the Neo-classical Revival style former United States Post Office (#25) was built in 1911-12, its stone construction and colossal Tuscan portico not only added an impressive architectural gem to Lexington's uptown at the time, but today provides a solid anchor for the south end of the historic district. It survives as a prime example of the monumental buildings which were typical of federal post office architecture of its period. When the three-story March Hotel (#11) was remodeled in the Renaissance Revival style around 1910, it made a clear statement as to the prestige associated with staying at this elegant hotel. Though no longer a hotel, the building's well-preserved appearance is still a dominant feature in the Uptown Lexington Historic District.

A number of other buildings in the district, while perhaps not of major architectural significance individually, nevertheless reflect well the continuation of classical design into the 1910s and 1920s. Italianate classicism is seen in some of the district's oldest commercial buildings through the use of arcaded windows and rusticated stonework trim. Examples include the commercial buildings at 17-21 S. Main Street (#36) and 16 and 18

S. Main Street (#6 and 7). In buildings of the 1910s and 1920s, classical influence was typically expressed through the use of classical detailing around doors and windows and on string courses and cornices. These details are often emphasized by the use of white stone or terra cotta in contrast with red brick walls. Particularly good examples include the J. C. Smith Building (#60), the Moffitt Building (#30), and the commercial building (#57) at 121 N. Main Street.

So-called standard commercial design characterizes most of the other historic commercial buildings in the district. These one, two, and three-story buildings vary in width. Red brick is the usual primary building material, but variations include brown or yellow brick and multi-colored brick. Ornamentation is achieved primarily through the use of brick, stone, terra cotta, stucco, metal, and/or wood facade detailing. Decorative treatment often takes the form of brick patterning, raised brick detailing, brick panels, and brick corbeling, although such detailing can also be achieved through the use of contrasting materials. Decoration varies from the very simple--particularly on one-story buildings--to the elaborate. Among the many good examples of standard commercial design in the district are the commercial buildings at 104 N. Main Street (#59), 22 S. Main Street (#9), and the south side of E. First Avenue (#32-34); the Smith-Thompson Block (#35), the Development Building (#39), the Buchanan-Siceloff Building (#22), the Hankins Building (#54), and Hedrick's Hall (#55).

Typical of most active commercial areas, many of the buildings in the Uptown Lexington Historic District have altered first-story shopfronts while retaining relatively intact upper stories. In Uptown Lexington the quality of design continues to convey the appearance of a commercial district which evolved primarily between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. And while buildings of standard commercial design can be found in historic commercial areas of towns throughout North Carolina, the number and cohesiveness of those found in the Uptown Lexington Historic District create a unified image worthy of recognition and preservation.

Laura A. W. Phillips, 1996