



TAYLORSVILLE COMPREHENSIVE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

Taylorsville, North Carolina, is the seat of Alexander County, both of which were formed in 1847 in the foothills of western North Carolina. Taylorsville, situated in the center of the county, grew slowly in its first several decades; however, the introduction of the railroad in 1887 spurred commercial and industrial expansion. Taylorsville developed into a small manufacturing town, initially through the textile industry. Furniture manufacturing eclipsed textile mills post-World War II as the most important economic force in the county. Taylorsville experienced steady and consistent growth throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The largest town in Alexander County, Taylorsville has served as the center of commerce and government for the surrounding areas. Today, the town of Taylorsville maintains an area of just over 1.5 square miles and is home to 2,300 residents.¹

PROJECT HISTORY

Surveyor Vickie Mason included Taylorsville in a two-county reconnaissance-level architectural survey of Alexander and Caldwell Counties that took place between 1986 and 1987. Due to the wide geographic scope of the survey and the focus on unincorporated areas, only 11 individual buildings were documented in Taylorsville, along with the central business district. The reconnaissance survey documented residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional buildings built from ca. 1870 until ca. 1926, as well as the Alexander County Courthouse, constructed in 1970. This survey resulted in the addition of the Alexander County Jail (AX0048) to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office's (HPO's) Study List.

Historic preservation activity has been limited in Alexander County since the 1986-1987 survey. Until 2019, the only property listed in the National Register of Historic Places was the Lucas Mansion (AX0001, NR 1982) in Hiddenite. The recent National Register listing of the Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill (AX0033, NR 2019) signaled a revival of local interest in historic preservation. The Roger Mills (AX0072) was Study Listed in 2018, joined by the Hotel Campbell-Hotel Alexander (AX0074) in 2020. Local interest also prompted the Alexander County Board of Commissioners to create the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in 2019.

Given the lack of documentation of historic resources in Taylorsville and this growing local interest, the HPO worked with the HPC and local stakeholders to conduct the first comprehensive survey of Taylorsville in order to identify, document, and evaluate the extant historic resources within the town limits of Taylorsville. A comprehensive architectural survey serves to update the existing records created by Ms. Mason, while providing more coverage of buildings built between ca. 1926 and ca. 1975.

¹ "Statistics," Town of Taylorsville, <https://www.taylorsvillenc.com/statistics.htm>.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this municipal survey is to identify, document, and evaluate a representative sample of approximately 130 industrial, commercial, religious, institutional, and residential buildings built prior to 1975 within the town limits of Taylorsville. In total, 176 individual buildings were surveyed, 165 of which were newly surveyed. In April 2019, HPO staff Annie McDonald, Sarah Woodard David, and Lisa Buckley examined the town and determined the scope of work for the survey. The scoping map they produced served as the basis for the survey.

The Taylorsville survey was completed in four phases, as described below:

1. The first phase constituted planning and initial research. At this stage, existing survey material was reviewed, initial online research was begun, and a working bibliography was started.
2. The second phase involved remote fieldwork. Due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, online resources, including Google Street View and the Alexander County GIS system, were used to simulate traditional fieldwork. This phase centered on the downtown commercial district and surrounding residential areas, where Google Street View coverage tended to be more recent.
3. The third phase consisted of on-the-ground fieldwork. In May of 2021, Audrey Thomas spent time in Taylorsville field-checking the remote survey work she had completed thus far in the downtown district. When the survey of downtown Taylorsville was complete, Audrey was able to present the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District at the National Register Advisory Committee meeting in June 2021. The district was approved for the Study List.
4. The last phase entailed two return trips to Taylorsville in August 2021 and October 2021 to complete fieldwork and conduct site visits at several houses to document their interiors. Fieldwork involved taking photographs and completing survey forms for individual properties. While in Taylorsville, Audrey also visited the Alexander County Public Library in Taylorsville to conduct research in the Local History Room.

Due to the large spans of time between trips to Taylorsville, research and fieldwork occurred somewhat concurrently. Resources consulted included local histories, deeds, newspapers, Sanborn maps, and historic photographs and aerial imagery, as well as residents with knowledge of the town and its development.

Survey products include paper survey files and database records for each resource documented, as well as this final report, which details the findings of the survey and contextualizes them within Taylorsville's history. The report is not an exhaustive history of Taylorsville or its architectural heritage, but it contributes to the understanding of the town's history and extant architectural fabric.

These findings were presented to the County Commissioners in March 2022 at the regularly scheduled monthly commissioners' meeting.

The research, fieldwork, and final report were completed by Audrey Thomas, the Architectural Survey Specialist located in the Western Office of the HPO.

HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXTS

THE FORMATION AND THE EARLY YEARS (1847-1886)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Prior to European settlement, the land within Alexander County was occupied largely by members of the Catawba tribe, as well as some Cherokees who hunted in the more mountainous areas of the region.² By the 1750s, European hunters began exploring the area. The earliest land grant in what is now Alexander County dates to 1754. Other settlers marked their land more informally with “axe entries,” in which settlers indicated their land boundaries with axe marks. In 1795, David Caldwell obtained a land grant of 4410 acres in what was then Burke County, which would become the site of Taylorsville.³

Beginning in the 1830s, newfound political power and state investment in western North Carolina prompted campaigns for several new counties.⁴ Following this trend, in 1844, an initiative began to create Alexander County from portions of Iredell, Caldwell, and Wilkes Counties, which would succeed with the new county’s establishment in 1847.⁵

The land for the county seat, to be located centrally, was donated by Joseph M. Bogle, William Matheson, and James James.⁶ The town’s plan followed a common design of other small towns in western North Carolina with a central courthouse square and wide streets extending from the central lot. The lots surrounding the courthouse were sold throughout 1847 and 1848, and the sale proceeds contributed to the construction of the first courthouse and jailhouse for the new county. The original courthouse, constructed by T. S. Boyd, was a small, one-story frame building, while the permanent courthouse was erected in 1852 by Sumnor J. Smith. Thomas Boyd constructed the county’s first jail in 1848, which sat to the west of the courthouse, near the present-day Adams Funeral Home (unsurveyed, 307 Main Avenue Drive).⁷

² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures: A History of Remarkable People and Precious Gems* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 2012), 23.

³ William E. White, “A History of Alexander County, NC,” *Taylorsville Times*, 1926, 5, 51.
<https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/20198?ln=en>.

⁴ Catherine Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 28-29.

⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 81-82.

⁶ White, “A History of Alexander County, NC,” 1, 3.

⁷ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 84, 85, 90; White, “A History of Alexander County, NC,” 4; Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 5.

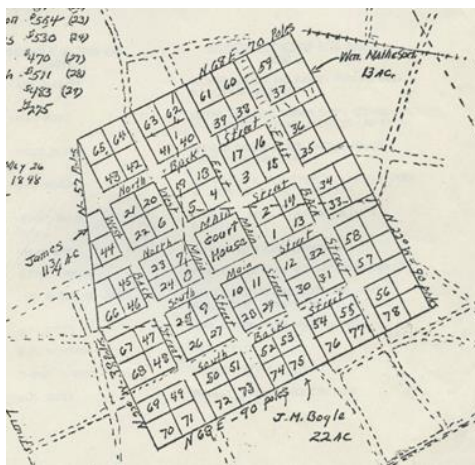


Figure 1. 1847 Plan of Taylorsville. Town of Taylorsville Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

Shortly after Taylorsville’s establishment in 1850, the town enjoyed 10 to 12 houses, a hotel, a tavern, and several stores, as well as a lawyer, mail carrier, tailor, milliner, and weaver. James James, or his son Hiram, likely operated the first tavern or hotel on the block northwest of the courthouse. Thomas Boyd also operated a tavern or hotel during this period on the block south of the courthouse.⁸

In much of western North Carolina, slaveowners derived much of their income from nonagricultural enterprises occurring in small towns rather than on rural plantations.⁹ The 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census population schedules do not differentiate between the population of Taylorsville and the rest of Alexander County; thus, it is difficult to discern whether the characteristics of enslavement in the county followed the general trend of counties to its west or to its east. In 1860, 137 whites held legal claim to 611 enslaved people in Alexander County. Roughly 30 percent of slaveowners held one enslaved person and over half (57 percent) held between two and nine enslaved people. Thirteen percent of slaveowners held 10 or more people. Only two slaveowners (Ben Watts and W. James) held 20 or more people. In 1860, there were 24 free African Americans in the county. Most of these free people of color lived in two households enumerated as part of “Taylorsville Post Office,” the place by which the population schedule was organized. One household was occupied by the families of Paton Harris and John Underwood. The adult men worked in farming, shoemaking, and painting. The other household’s names in the population schedules are illegible; the apparent head of household, John, was a farmer. Countywide, enslaved people of color made up a little more than 10 percent of the population, and free people of color about 0.4 percent.¹⁰

In 1861, while Taylorsville was still in its early stages of development, the American Civil War began. There may have been some anti-Confederate sentiment in Taylorsville, as the town, along with Mount Airy in Surry County, held the highest number of subscribers to the *North Carolina Standard*, an anti-

⁸ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 62, 88.

⁹ John C. Inscoe, “Mountain Masters: Slaveholding in Western North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1984): 144-146, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/23518750>.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, “Population schedules of the eighth census of the United States, 1860, North Carolina,” 213-350, <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu886unit/page/n313/mode/2up>.

Confederate newspaper published in Raleigh, in 1862.¹¹ Between 700 and 1,000 Alexander County residents would eventually serve in the Confederate Army.¹² While a Civil War monument located on the courthouse grounds lists the names of 321 Confederate soldiers from Alexander County who died during the war, the landscape of Taylorsville, as well as Alexander County as a whole, was able to escape the war relatively unscathed. Union soldiers seized horses and food during Stoneman's Raid in April 1865, when General George Stoneman requisitioned the McIntosh-Bogle House, which stood on the site of AX0087 until ca. 1960.¹³

In 1870, the population had grown to 169 people and 35 houses supported the town. The Black population was roughly stable, growing from 22 in 1850 to 25 in 1870, while the white population increased more quickly from 91 to 144 residents in the same period. There were seven commercial businesses in town to cater to the growing residential population. These included a grocery store, jewelry store, drug store, and a post office. Three lawyers, four doctors, and a dentist also provided services to the community. Religious institutions included a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Baptist church, as well as a prominent educational facility, the United Baptist Institute, which had opened in 1856 and stood on the site of AX0179 until 1976.¹⁴

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The early architecture that dotted western North Carolina consisted mostly of log construction for houses, barns, churches, and other structures. By the 1790s, wealthy landowners were constructing frame houses in the foothills, while brick houses were present in the area by the 1810s and 1820s. In towns, a "spirit of improvement" spurred some citizens to erect more frame and brick buildings in the early to mid-nineteenth century; however, log construction continued to characterize the bulk of the building fabric through the end of the nineteenth century and was still common into the twentieth century.¹⁵

Though Alexander County remained largely agricultural and thus sparsely populated, Taylorsville steadily grew after its establishment. Adhering to the pattern of many towns in western North Carolina, Taylorsville features a gridded street plan, adapted to the hilly terrain. The commercial district centers around the courthouse, while residential streets extend to the north and south.¹⁶ The development of Taylorsville entailed construction of institutional, commercial, and residential properties. Discussing the small boom of construction in the early decades of Taylorsville's existence, E. L. Hedrick noted sawmills struggling to meet the demand within the area.¹⁷

While there are not many buildings extant from this period, some early structures in Taylorsville are well documented in the historic record. These buildings are all within roughly a half mile of the courthouse and represent some of the early frame and brick buildings built in town. Those structures that have been

¹¹ Douglas R. Porter, "Slavery, Secession, and Sin: Religion and Dissent in the Upcountry South, 1820-1865," (PhD Diss., University of Mississippi, 2013): 216, note 68, Electronic Theses and Dissertations, <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2426&context=etd>.

¹² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 100.

¹³ White, "A History of Alexander County, NC," 58.

¹⁴ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 90, 139-140.

¹⁵ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 22, 24, 30.

¹⁶ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 53.

¹⁷ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 139-140.

widely documented from this period, or that have survived, likely represent the more substantial architecture of the period.

Institutional & Commercial Architecture

Perhaps the most prominent early building in Taylorsville was the two-story brick United Baptist Institute, erected between 1854 and 1856. The school was built in the Greek Revival style, which was the prevailing style for substantial public buildings in western North Carolina during this period. In line with this architectural mode, the school featured a portico supported by four large columns, large nine-over-nine windows, and pilasters separating the bays of the building.¹⁸



Figure 2. The United Baptist Institute employed a version of the Greek Revival style widely applied to institutional buildings, including a prominent portico and restrained classical details. Photo taken in 1889. Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

The first commercial building in town may have been a frame store building built by the firm of Bogle & Jones. The temporary wooden courthouse constructed ca. 1847 was moved away from the courthouse square and later used as a store, saloon, and dwelling.¹⁹ The earliest extant commercial building is the two-story masonry Rock Store (AX0044). Constructed by Romulus Z. Linney ca. 1870, the second floor was used as his law office. The main floor was rented out, and originally it held a grocery store operated by Thad Campbell. The store was built of rock, thought to be from Rocky Face Mountain, as well as sandstone quarried near the location. John Looper may have been the rock mason. The building has

¹⁸ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 30; Herb L. Poole, "The United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School: A History" (unpublished manuscript, 2011), 3, in the United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC.

¹⁹ White, "A History of Alexander County, NC," 4.

been greatly altered in several phases, sustaining damage from a tornado in 1916, and receiving a new brick façade in the 1930s and a new stucco exterior post-1970.²⁰

Residential Architecture

Houses constructed in the first several decades of Taylorsville’s history appear to have been close to the downtown commercial core, and some were integrated between commercial buildings lining the main roadways. Two early houses, both built ca. 1847, sat within a few blocks of the courthouse square. A restrained, vernacular version of the Greek Revival style, also prevalent in domestic architecture in the 1840s and 1850s, is present in these early examples. The McIntosh-Bogle House, located opposite the courthouse, was a frame, side-gable dwelling that stood two-stories tall and a single room in depth and had exterior gable-end brick chimneys. The Thurston House was similar in construction and appearance, but its footprint was two rooms in depth. Based on a photograph from the Alexander County Library’s local history room, the Thurston House was likely altered in the late nineteenth and/or early twentieth centuries, but many details are obscured by mature landscaping in the foreground of the photograph.



Figure 3. McIntosh-Bogle House. Landmarks Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.



Figure 4. Thurston House. Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

²⁰ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 139; AX0044 Rock Store Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.

Only two residential properties are thought to remain from the first 40 years of Taylorsville’s history. The ca. 1880 Poole House (AX0181) sits directly along W. Main Avenue roughly half a mile west of the courthouse. This two-story frame structure has an L-shaped footprint, 12 dormers, and peaked cornices over the windows. The wrap-around porch supported by square columns was added around 1918 by Ozzie Poole, most likely replacing or remodeling an earlier porch.²¹



Figure 5. Poole House (AX0181). Photo taken by author.

The Dr. William Hollar House (AX0076), completed in 1876,²² features notable, though simplified, Queen Anne-inspired details, such as the decorative gable-end sawtooth shingles and the wrap-around porch with turned supports. The interior includes simple mantels and beadboard walls, as well as a two-panel Greek Revival-style door in the kitchen wing connected to the rear of the house – perhaps a remnant of an earlier building or earlier phase of construction.



Figure 6. Dr. William Hollar House (AX0076). Photo taken by author.

²¹ Jeremiah Johnson, email correspondence with author, December 6, 2021.

²² Jeremiah Johnson, email correspondence with author, December 9, 2021.

THE RAILROAD AND A NEW CENTURY (1887-1910)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The town, though growing, remained small into the 1880s. Poor transportation access to Taylorsville and the surrounding county limited any major strides in commercial or industrial activity. Even before the county and the town's creation, area citizens were campaigning to bring a railroad through the region. In 1856, the town of Newton, 20 miles south, outbid Taylorsville for a railroad terminus.²³ The first rail line into western North Carolina arrived at Morganton in 1861; however, the Civil War halted construction and Stoneman's Raid destroyed the track that had been laid. After the war, efforts resumed, and the Western North Carolina Railroad reached Asheville by 1880 and Lenoir by 1884.²⁴ Given its small population and commercial center, many companies did not see the economic feasibility of constructing a rail line to Taylorsville. However, after Romulus Z. Linney agreed to complete the necessary grading work and provide cross-ties, a railroad finally arrived in 1887. First operated by the Statesville and Western Railroad, Southern Railway took over the line in 1894. Water towers and road crossings soon followed, as well as a new depot in Taylorsville.²⁵



Figure 7. The Taylorsville depot (AX0045) in 1909. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the Alexander County Economic Development Corporation (EDC).

Throughout western North Carolina, railroad construction improved access to the wider world and brought the promise of commercial and industrial success. The railroad allowed tourism to flourish, as visitors from urbanized regions escaped to the mountains to enjoy the pure air and a picturesque setting. Resorts, specifically those promoting healing springs, were particularly popular.²⁶ In Taylorsville, hotels were established near the depot to cater to the influx of tourists. A ca. 1850 hotel operated by either James or Hiram James was demolished by 1887 and replaced by the June Bug Hotel, later renamed the Piedmont Hotel. The Hotel Aleck and the Elder Boarding House also operated around the turn of the twentieth century. While some tourists stayed in the hotels in town, many continued to healing springs

²³ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 119.

²⁴ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 34.

²⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 119-121.

²⁶ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 36-39.

resorts in the county, such as Davis White Sulphur Springs (est. 1905) and All Healing Springs (est. 1914).²⁷

While textile mills in North Carolina were concentrated largely in the Piedmont, the incoming railroad improved industrial prospects in the western region, prompting the rise of mill construction, especially in the foothills. Steam and electric power allowed milling companies to select sites convenient to the railroad for transportation access, deviating from the earlier importance of water access.²⁸ While there was a surge of mill construction across the state in the 1890s, Alexander County largely did not have the necessary capital for a large mill, like those constructed in neighboring counties. However, in an effort to create jobs and improve the local economy, 62 stockholders came together to establish the Taylorsville Cotton Mill (AX0050) in 1907, shortly after a similar effort in Stony Point, a community located nine miles southeast of Taylorsville, established the Stony Point Manufacturing Company. Unlike early mills, which were situated along waterways to employ waterpower, the Taylorsville Cotton Mill was able to harness steam-power, like many other turn-of-the-century operations.²⁹



Figure 8. Advertisement for the Taylorsville Cotton Mill Company in a 1919 edition of the trade magazine *Textile World*.

Mill village housing sprang up along residential streets to the west of the mill, and the cotton mill soon included a company store. By 1910, 38 people worked in the Taylorsville Cotton Mill, and the enterprise came to have an important role in the economic fabric of the community. Housing, along with a steady income, attracted many farmers to the mills during the 1920s, when agriculture was experiencing a depression.³⁰

Across Linney's Mountain Road, Romulus Z. Linney, along with his wife Dorcas, donated a tract of land to the Taylorsville Milling Company (AX0033) with similar hopes of spurring development and boosting Taylorsville's economy. The roller mill company incorporated in 1902 and, like the Taylorsville Cotton Mill,

²⁷ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 145-146; Alexander County Front Matter Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.

²⁸ W. N. Watt, "Early Cotton Factories in North Carolina and Alexander County" (manuscript, n.d.), 43, Local History Reference, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

²⁹ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 6, 12, 61-64, 70.

³⁰ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 64.

was steam powered. The Taylorsville Milling Company soon became the largest mill of its type in the county, though it never employed more than 10 workers at a time throughout its operation over the coming decades.³¹

The population of Taylorsville doubled between 1890 and 1900 to about 400 people, making the town the largest in the county.³² Earlier, the town had maintained a system of dirt roads and was home to several small stores but now experienced an increase in construction in the blocks around the railroad depot and the courthouse, as well as improvements to the roadways.³³

By the turn of the century, Taylorsville was cemented as the center of commercial and political life for Alexander County, and the coming of the twentieth century promised more opportunities for its continued progress. In the early years of the new century, the growing town boasted a hardware store, livery stable, soda shop, photographic studio, two restaurants, two groceries, post office, drug store, lawyer's office, furniture store, general store, jewelry store, and the railroad depot (AX0045). Construction continued in the downtown commercial area, as the *Statesville Landmark and Record* explained in 1907: "Carpenters and laborers are all employed here that want to work. The sight of new buildings going up and town lots trading is the best indication that our town has had in a long time, that we are doing something at last."³⁴

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The architecture constructed during this period centered on the central downtown core and the railroad. Commercial and industrial properties clustered in a roughly half-mile stretch. Based on the extant architecture, residential construction appears to have anchored around downtown, though some properties extended farther, scattered along Main Avenue, Old Wilkesboro Road, and Linney's Mountain Road. Consistent with the largely rural western North Carolina region, the architecture reflected popular national trends, though sometimes lagged slightly behind and usually was more restrained in execution.³⁵

Along with the courthouse, the depot became a center of activity. Industrial, commercial, and residential architecture were all constructed in the area just northeast of Main Avenue. On January 31, 1889, *The Landmark* published the following:

Taylorsville has undergone many changes since I was last here. It has improved greatly, and is improving beyond a doubt. This is especially true of the section around the depot. There are whole rows of quite new houses, substantial in appearance and a number of them in neat and modern design. One of the first to arrest the eye is the new red soapstone storehouse of

³¹ Heather Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2019), Section 8.

³² Vickie Mason, "Historical and Architectural Development of Alexander County," 1987, 21, <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/survey-and-national-register/surveyreports/AlexanderCountySurvey-1987.pdf>.

³³ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 141.

³⁴ "Taylorsville News," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (Statesville, NC), November 5, 1907, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11735151/?match=1>.

³⁵ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 55.

Mr. Linney, which has just been rented by our countryman, L.A. Jarvis, Esq., who will soon move here to merchandise.³⁶

There is not much evidence of this turn-of-the-century development left standing around the depot. There are some scattered buildings of the period; however, most construction is of a later date.

Industrial Architecture

Following the construction of the railroad in the late 1880s, construction of a depot (AX0045) began just north of the downtown commercial core along Linney's Mountain Road. The depot featured German siding, two corbelled brick chimneys, and window and door trim consistent with the era of construction. Large brackets supported the deep overhang of the roof; today, the brackets are the only original architectural detail remaining.³⁷ Other industrial endeavors, including the Taylorsville Milling Company and Taylorsville Cotton Mill, were established around the railroad and depot.

Generally, industrial buildings of the period were functional structures of brick, frame, or metal;³⁸ this pattern is true of the early mill buildings in Taylorsville as well. In 1902, the Taylorsville Milling Company was established in a three-story, utilitarian building clad with corrugated-metal siding and a standing-seam metal roof (AX0033). The roller mill maintains an open plan with exposed posts, beams, and braces. These elements are typical of flour and grist mill construction of its age. The open plan allowed flexibility in its use of floor space, and three levels were required for steam-powered roller mills to accommodate necessary equipment. Further, the fire-resistant heavy timber structure, masonry foundation, and corrugated metal siding and roof provided some amount of protection to the building.³⁹ Like many industrial buildings, the Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill grew over time, including the construction of a ca. 1930 wing and a mid-twentieth-century addition.⁴⁰



Figure 9. The Taylorsville Milling Company (AX0033), date of photo unknown. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

³⁶ "Local Improvements – Court – A Good Population – Mules – Personal, Political and Otherwise," *The Landmark* (Statesville, NC), January 31, 1889, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/15375068/>.

³⁷ AX0045 Taylorsville Depot Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.

³⁸ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 53.

³⁹ Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," Section 8.

⁴⁰ Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," Section 7.

The 1907 Taylorsville Cotton Mill (AX0050) is also utilitarian in its appearance. This mill complex consisted of the main mill building, a cotton warehouse, and a ca. 1920 company store, though only the cotton warehouse remains standing. The one-story mill and warehouse buildings both featured brick exteriors, common due to their fire-resistant nature, and large arched window openings with multi-light metal windows. Large windows were customary in textile mills, along with other features like monitor roofs, to provide workers with light and ventilation.⁴¹ The one-story company store fronted Linney's Mountain Road. It reflected other commercial architecture of the era, including a parapet roof.



Figure 10. The Taylorsville Cotton Mill building featured a stone basement, arched window openings, and metal windows. Photo taken in 1984, in AX0050 Taylorsville Cotton Mill Survey File, HPO.

Commercial, Institutional, and Religious Architecture

Downtown commercial construction also expanded around the courthouse. Most of the commercial buildings appear to have lined the north side of Main Avenue. The downtown buildings mirrored construction found in many other small towns at the turn of the twentieth century in western North Carolina. This included several one- to two-story frame buildings with front gable roofs and false stepped parapet rooflines. Large awnings extended from the storefront levels, providing ample shade for passersby.

⁴¹ Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," Section 8.



Figure 11. Downtown Taylorsville in 1909. Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the increasing prosperity of Taylorsville was evident in the introduction of masonry commercial buildings in the downtown district. Two of the earliest masonry commercial buildings were constructed in 1889 by the Alspaugh brothers, who built two brick stores on Main Avenue north of the courthouse.⁴² An early extant commercial building located downtown is the Masonic Building (AX0042), built ca. 1909. It is typical of commercial architecture in small towns in the early twentieth century, featuring simple decorative brickwork that includes recessed panels and a stepped cornice. The building has a recessed corner entrance with a tile floor and an open arched entrance with stairs accessing the second level on its west elevation. On the interior, the building features original tin ceilings and beadboard walls on the second floor.



Figure 12. The Masonic Building (AX0042) in 1939. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

The 1852 courthouse was replaced in 1902. Constructed by B. F. Smith Fireproof Construction Company, the new building was a grand, brick, two-story courthouse with a symmetrical façade, arched windows, cornice brackets, and paired columns supporting a full-length balcony above the porch.⁴³ The

⁴² "Local Improvements – Court," *The Landmark*.

⁴³ The 1986-1987 survey file for the courthouse describes the 1852 buildings as being "replaced or expanded." A review of newspaper articles from the *Statesville Record and Landmark* and the *Carolina Mascot* between 1899

courthouse commanded a grand architectural presence in the center of town among relatively simple commercial architecture, serving as a landmark for the next half-century.



Figure 13. The 1902 Alexander County Courthouse. Photo ca. 1904.
Courthouse Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

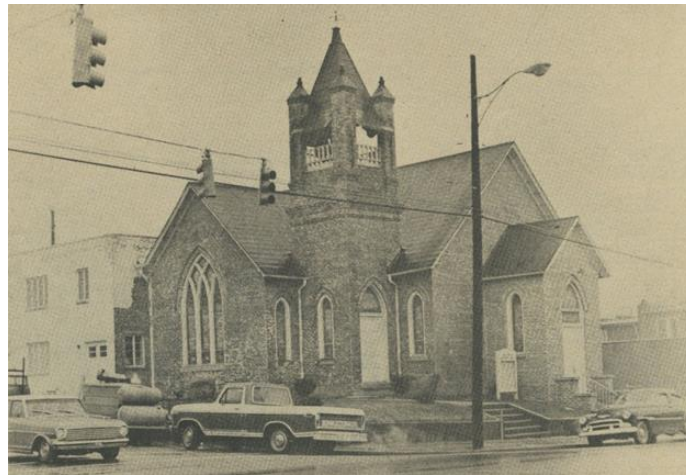
Church construction in western North Carolina during this period was dominated by the Gothic Revival and Neoclassical styles.⁴⁴ In Taylorsville, the First United Methodist Church replaced an earlier frame church with the current brick-veneered Gothic Revival-style building (AX0095) in 1906.⁴⁵ Sitting on the corner of N. Main and E. Back Street (now E. Main Avenue and Emergency Street), the new church faced E. Main Avenue between the depot and the courthouse, contributing to the growing stock of masonry

and 1902 show that an election for a special tax to build a new courthouse in 1899 failed to gain enough votes to be successful. A newspaper article from *Statesville Record and Landmark* suggests that there may have been a second vote in 1900, but the results of that election were not found in the newspaper record. However, newspaper coverage from 1902 indicates a new building was constructed. The cornerstone was laid in May 1902, construction continued throughout the summer, and the building was received by the county in the fall. This seems to confirm that the courthouse was replaced, rather than remodeled, in 1902. AX0041 Alexander County Courthouse Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC; "Taylorsville News," *Carolina Mascot* (Statesville, North Carolina), September 7, 1899, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/67897124/>; "Registrars Appointed," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), June 8, 1900, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11331447/>; "Corner-stone Laid at Taylorsville," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), May 9, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11397048/>; "New Roller Mill Started," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), July 11, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/113640093/>; "Taylorsville Items," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), July 15, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11401008/>; "Taylorsville Items," *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), September 5, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/113640114/>.

⁴⁴ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 55.

⁴⁵ "Taylorsville First Methodist Church Dates to 1848," *Taylorsville Times*, July 1, 1976, in Baptist Churches Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

buildings forming the downtown core of Taylorsville. The church features an inset corner tower and arched windows.



*Figure 14. The First United Methodist Church. Photo ca. 1976.
Landmarks Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.*

Residential Architecture

To cater to incoming tourists and visitors, several hotels sat near the depot in downtown Taylorsville. Often, hotels of the time consisted of private residences with rooms to rent. Photographs of the period show the Piedmont Hotel, Hotel Aleck, and the Elder Boarding House utilizing domestic building forms. While many hotels of the era in western North Carolina exhibited high-style Queen Anne forms and details, such as irregular rooflines, asymmetrical porches, patterned shingles, and bay windows,⁴⁶ the early hotels documented in Taylorsville were much more restrained. The Elder Boarding House was a large, relatively simple, two-story frame house with a full-width porch, while the Piedmont Hotel had turned supports, a fashionable detail at the time.



*Figure 15. The Piedmont Hotel located in downtown Taylorsville. Date of photo unknown.
Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.*

⁴⁶ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 53.

Throughout the region, wealthy citizens followed national architectural trends. From 1880-1910, Italianate- and Queen Anne-style residences were particularly popular, followed by the Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and Craftsman styles in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷ In Taylorsville, general prosperity grew alongside increased commercial and industrial activity, and this prosperity was reflected in the domestic architecture erected around the turn of the twentieth century. The extant dwellings of the period are more substantial than those erected previously and have more decorative elements, indicating increased access to building materials, growing financial stability, and changing architectural modes. While the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman styles proliferated in Taylorsville, there are no extant examples of the Italianate or Tudor Revival styles, nor did the recent survey uncover photographic documentation of buildings executed in these styles.

Use of the Queen Anne style, of which the ca. 1876 Dr. Hollar House (AX0076) is an early example, continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when it was often blended with elements of the Colonial Revival style. A ca. 1890 house on 5th Avenue (AX0216) once featured classical columns, visible in a historic photograph, which have been replaced with square posts. Interior photographs show Queen Anne-style decorative elements, including elaborate woodwork and mirrored overmantels.⁴⁸ The ca. 1900 Feimster House (AX0047) exhibits fish-scale shingles common on Queen Anne-style houses, while also featuring Colonial Revival-style elements, such as Doric porch columns.



Figure 16. An undated photograph of AX0216 shows the original classical columns. Photo provided by Jeremiah Johnson.

⁴⁷ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 55.

⁴⁸ Interior photos of AX0216 were made available via Multiple Listing Service in 2021. "26 5th Ave N., Taylorsville, NC 28681," Realtor.com, accessed November 19, 2021, https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/26-5th-Ave-N_Taylorsville_NC_28681_M51381-24584.



Figure 17. AX0216, an example of Queen Anne-Colonial Revival house in Taylorsville. Photo by author.

New house forms were introduced to Taylorsville in the early twentieth century. An early example of the bungalow, characterized by its low form often with an integral porch, is seen in the ca. 1905 Walter Watts House (AX0037). The house's exterior features squat columns over tapered supports, gable end brackets, and a geometric porch railing, all of which are evocative of the then-nationally popular Craftsman style. According to the current owner, Jack Simms, and information from the 1987 survey, the Walter Watts House was ordered from Sears and Roebuck, a large national distributor that provided a variety of customizable house plans.⁴⁹ This could explain why the residence is a particularly large, high-style, and decorative example of a Craftsman bungalow relative to others in Taylorsville. More modest examples of the style and house form were prevalent in the coming decades, likely designed and constructed by local builders.



Figure 18. Walter Watts House (AX0037). Photo by author.

⁴⁹ While the homeowner and Vickie Mason's 1987 survey file indicated the house was a Sears and Roebuck house, no plans were found from Sears or Sears and Roebuck that match the house exactly. Sears, Roebuck, and Co. sold house plans and materials from 1908–1940, meaning if the house plans were purchased from the catalog, its construction date is slightly later than ca. 1905. "What is a Sears Modern Home?" Sears Archives, last updated 2012, <http://www.searsarchives.com/homes/index.htm>.

In addition to larger residences, there was undoubtedly smaller housing for mill workers, creating a more varied domestic landscape. According to *Alexander County Treasures*, the corporation operating the Taylorsville Cotton Mill laid out and sold lots along Highland Avenue, Prohibition Avenue, and Baptist Street to the northwest of the mill.⁵⁰ The 1924 Sanborn map shows scattered and inconsistent housing in this area. It is possible that the houses at 306 and 331 4th Avenue N. (AX0227, AX0228) remain from this period of construction. These two houses are small, one-story, side-gable dwellings with front porches and rear ells, built before 1924.



Figure 19. 331 4th Avenue N. (AX0228) possibly dates from around the turn of the century and could bear an association with the area of land laid out and sold by the Taylorsville Cotton Mill. Photo by author.

The 1924 Sanborn map shows a small mill village immediately east of the Taylorsville Cotton Mill. While this contradicts the earlier reference to worker housing to the west of the mill, the village may have been constructed by new mill owners after the Taylorsville Cotton Mill was sold in 1917.⁵¹ The uniform spacing and compact footprints conform to a standard mill village. While no longer extant, most of the houses appear on the Sanborn map as small one-story dwellings with gable-front-and-wing forms, not unusual for mill houses of the period. A small unidentified one-story church is also present in the village.

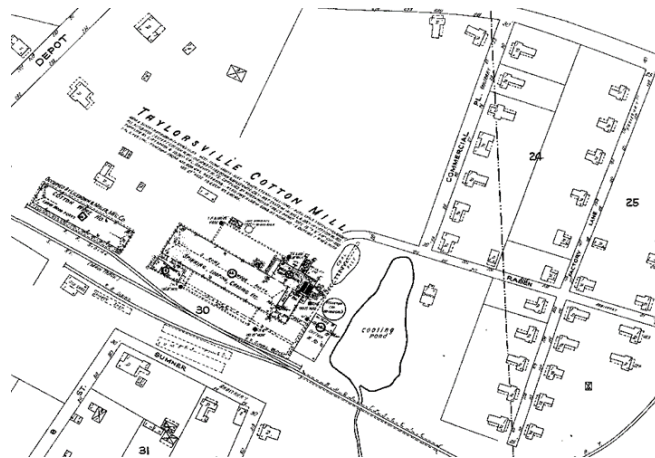


Figure 20. The 1924 Sanborn Map shows a mill village to the east of the Taylorsville Cotton Mill. Image from NC Live.

⁵⁰ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 63.

⁵¹ Review of newspaper coverage through Newspapers.com did not reveal when this mill village was constructed, though a reference to a "Taylorsville Cotton Mill Village" occurs as early as March 1916. "Locals," *The Mountain Scout* (Taylorsville, NC), March 29, 1916, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/66294094/>.

A PERIOD OF GROWTH (1910-1929)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The 1910s brought struggle and hardships to many residents of Taylorsville and Alexander County. The Flood of 1916, the result of severe rainfall after two consecutive hurricanes, caused significant property loss and loss of life across the region. In the county, the Alspaugh Cotton Mill and Alspaugh Dam were lost, while the Liledoun Cotton Mill and its company store were significantly damaged by flood waters. Crops, roadways, bridges, houses, and outbuildings throughout the county were destroyed. The Southern Railroad was hit particularly hard, which impeded the transportation of goods in and out of the region.⁵²

Nationally, World War I had immense impacts on the everyday life of American citizens. At least 250 men from Alexander County served in the war, and nine lost their lives. At home, residents experienced shortages of paper goods and food. They planted victory gardens and thrift gardens to assist in the war effort.⁵³

Despite these difficulties, continued growth characterized the 1910s and, even more so, the 1920s, as it did throughout the rest of North Carolina. By the turn of the century, the desire for better transportation prompted leaders in western North Carolina to advocate for better highways to improve trade, industry, and tourism. In 1917, the State Highway Commission allotted \$10,000 in federal funds to the county, which was used to construct a roadway between Taylorsville and Wilkes County, further improving access to the area. A state-supported highway system was established in 1921, and many new roads were built throughout the decade.⁵⁴ In town, streets were paved, and sidewalks were installed in the late 1920s.⁵⁵ Daily passenger and freight trains also ran between Charlotte and Taylorsville, feeding tourism and providing ease of transportation of goods.⁵⁶

Residents began to enjoy new conveniences and entertainment, such as electricity, the radio, and automobiles. In 1917, a hydroelectric plant at the Alspaugh Cotton Mill along the Lower Little River south of Taylorsville brought electricity to town. The first developments in a city water program came in the 1920s.⁵⁷ Taylorsville High School, chartered in 1909, established itself at the former United Baptist Institute campus.⁵⁸

Citizens engaged in public projects aimed at bettering Taylorsville and creating civic pride. The Civic League was established in 1914 with the goal of beautifying the town. Both the Ladies Betterment Association of Taylorsville and the Taylorsville Merchants Association were established in 1916 with goals of improving the town and its amenities in an effort to entice more people to move to the area.⁵⁹ The

⁵² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 181, 185. "Damage in Alexander by Flood Waters Enormous," *News and Record* (Greensboro, NC), July 19, 1916, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/936317798/>.

⁵³ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 193, 198.

⁵⁴ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 49, 51; "Public Documents" (Raleigh, NC: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co, 1919), 29, in NC Digital Collections, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-documents-1919/4115694>.

⁵⁵ Poole, "The United Baptist Institute," 8.

⁵⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 121.

⁵⁷ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 121, 129.

⁵⁸ Poole, "The United Baptist Institute," 8.

⁵⁹ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 181.

population had grown from around 400 in 1900 to over 1100 by 1920; this large influx may in part be due to the new industry forming in town. However, a decline in population occurred during the 1920s, leaving a population of 926 people by 1930.⁶⁰

By the end of World War I, both the demand for and the value of cotton goods were high, and a group of local businessmen decided to invest in a new cotton mill, incorporating the North State Cotton Mill in 1919. After a short-lived hosiery mill operated from 1917 to 1918, the Miller-White Hosiery Mill was established ca. 1927 across from North State as the first incorporated hosiery mill in the county. After Gail White took over operations in 1929, the hosiery mill employed up to 50 employees during its tenure.⁶¹

A 1928 industrial directory for North Carolina shows 14 industries operating in Taylorsville and the surrounding area: four cotton and yarn mills included Taylorsville Cotton Mill and North State Cotton Mill, as well as Liledoun and Miller Manufacturing Companies (both of which sit to the south of Taylorsville); one grain mill (Taylorsville Milling Company); and one hosiery mill (Miller-White Hosiery Mill), located to the east of town. In a similar directory from 1929, 19 industries are noted countywide, emphasizing the concentration of those 14 industries in or near Taylorsville.⁶² While Alexander County residents certainly gained industrial job opportunities, some were leaving the area for manufacturing and industrial jobs in larger cities, like Hickory, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem.⁶³

By the 1920s, a variety of businesses were operating in the downtown commercial district. The 1924 Sanborn Map shows a drug store, bank, grocery store, laundry facility, furniture store, post office, movie theater, cobbler, and the Hotel Campbell (AX0074). People's Drug Store (AX0053) was established in 1918 by Rowe B. Campbell; Merchants and Farmers Bank (AX0103), the area's first bank, was established in 1919; and Smithey's Department Store (AX0101) was established in 1927.⁶⁴ As automobile use grew, businesses catering to the use of cars were established. By 1924, there were four filling stations and an automobile repair shop along N. Main Street. The Deal Motor Company (AX0080) was also established in 1926.⁶⁵ Movie theaters became a significant source of recreation for residents, and an early theater opened around 1917 near the courthouse. While this theater closed soon after, LeGette's Moving Picture Show replaced it around 1920. The Follies, a silent movie theater, opened on Main Street (at the site of

⁶⁰ NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Annexation Study, Taylorsville NC," 1965, 7, in NC Digital Collections, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/annexation-study-taylorsville-north-carolina/2144597>; NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Population and economy, Taylorsville, NC," 1960, 7, in NC Digital Collections, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/population-and-economy-taylorsville-north-carolina/2145387>.

⁶¹ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 91, 99.

⁶² NC Department of Conservation and Development, "North Carolina Industrial Directory," 1928, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-industrial-directory-1928/2309836>; NC Department of Conservation and Development, "North Carolina Resources and Industries," 1929, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-resources-and-industries/2682102>.

⁶³ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 201.

⁶⁴ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 188, 204-205; Mason, "Historical and Architectural Development of Alexander County," 21-22.

⁶⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 204.

AX0110). It later moved across from Taylorsville High School (AX0179), was fitted for sound equipment, and renamed the Sears Palace Theater.⁶⁶

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The architecture of the 1910s and 1920s followed a similar geographic pattern as that of previous decades. Industrial architecture remained tied to the railroad, including a concentration of industrial architecture near the depot and downtown, as well as a new industrial node developing to the east of town. Commercial, religious, and institutional construction was largely confined to the blocks around the courthouse and depot, while residential construction extended a little farther out.

Industrial Architecture

As industry developed, two industrial districts took shape along the railroad. The 1924 Sanborn map recorded the footprint of these districts. Just north of downtown, around the depot, Campbell & Crowson Lumber Yard & Planing Mill sat on the north side of the railroad, and the Taylorsville Milling Co. just south of the depot. The planing mill consisted of several free-standing buildings, including the mill itself, a warehouse, and an office, as well as lumber piles. Warehouse and storage facilities, along with an old and dilapidated planing mill, lined the railroad to the south. The Taylorsville Cotton Mill stood close by, and a ca. 1920 company store was built along Depot Street (now Linney's Mountain Road). The mill village sat just to the east.

A second industrial district formed east of Taylorsville, outside the 1920s town limits, but was later annexed after 1965.⁶⁷ The North State Cotton Mill sat between State Highway No. 75 (NC Highway 90) and the railroad and utilized electric power.⁶⁸ North State consisted of a one-story, steel-frame, rectangular brick mill building. A shop extended from the north elevation, while the pickers' room adjoined the west elevation. A smaller rectangular warehouse sat to the west. A cornerstone on the former property indicated a 1925 construction date, though the cornerstone may have been commemorating an addition.⁶⁹ To the north of the railroad, an associated mill village consisted of small one-story dwellings with front porches. To the west of the mill, the T. O. Teague Cotton Gin & Veneer Mills straddled the railroad, though the Sanborn map noted that the buildings were old and dilapidated by 1924. A Polarine Oil Company and Texaco Oil Company sat nearby.

⁶⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 205, 306-307.

⁶⁷ Taylorsville annexed no land between 1847 and 1960. This area was included in a 1965 Annexation Study that explored the feasibility of annexing 514 acres over five study areas. NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Annexation Study, Taylorsville NC"; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 131.

⁶⁸ Taylorsville received its first electricity in 1917 when the owners of the Alsbaugh Cotton Mill built a hydroelectric plant. Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 129.

⁶⁹ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 91; "North State Mill Contracts Awarded," *Manufacturers Record*, April 8, 1920, 132.

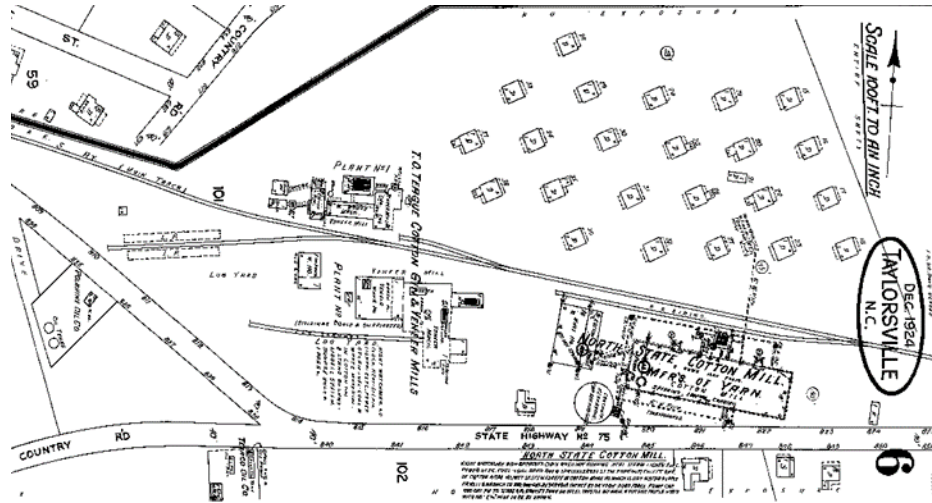


Figure 21. The establishment of North State Cotton Mill anchored a second small industrial district east of Taylorsville. 1924 Sanborn Map from NC Live.

Commercial and Institutional Architecture

In the 1920s, construction in downtown Taylorsville centered around the courthouse along N. Main Street (now W. and E. Main Street), W. Main Street (now 1st St. SW), and E. Main Street (now S. Center Street). Masonry buildings increasingly replaced the earlier frame buildings – a sign of Taylorsville’s economic success. These buildings were one to two stories with parapet roofs and minimal brick details. Brick ornamentation varied, though recessed brick panels and stepped brick cornices were common. Some details were seen less frequently, such as the projecting brick bands evident on two facades along W. Main Avenue (AX0099 and AX0100). Two storefronts retain cast iron details, popular at the time, with floral designs from G. L. Mesker & Co. of Evansville, Indiana (AX0053, AX0092).



Figure 22. AX0115 features recessed brick panels, a detail common on downtown commercial buildings. Photo by author.



Figure 23. AX0099 features distinctive projecting brick bands. Photo by author.



Figure 24. Cast iron column detail on People's Drug Store (AX0053). Photo by author.

During the 1920s, hotels were less likely to emulate domestic construction and more likely to resemble miniature skyscrapers.⁷⁰ While perhaps not quite qualifying as a “mini skyscraper,” the Hotel Campbell, constructed by 1924, was a large building of three stories on a corner lot. The brick hotel was easily accessible from the railroad depot, and storefronts lined both roadways. Brick details include the projecting piers separating each storefront, the brick panels along the cornice, and the stepped parapet roofline. The hotel acts as an anchor to the east side of the historic downtown commercial core, as development to the east transitions into a less dense mix of commercial and residential architecture.



Figure 25. Hotel Campbell-Hotel Alexander (AX0074). Photo from *Alexander County Treasures*, page 225.

Institutional construction of the day incorporated elements of classical design. On the block south of the hotel, Camden Iron Works constructed a new county jail (AX0048) in 1913-1914 to house both prisoners and the jailer and his family.⁷¹ The brick jail is two stories tall and has classical details such as faux quoins, simple porch columns, and dentils along the cornice.



Figure 26. The old Alexander County Jail (AX0048). Photo by author.

⁷⁰ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 53.

⁷¹ AX0048 Alexander County Jail Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 188-190.

Likewise, after constructing a new east wing on the original United Baptist Institute building in 1915, Taylorsville High School built a new three-story building in 1921 that became the main high school building in 1922. It featured classical details, including an entry porch with paired columns centered on a symmetrical façade. A wooden gymnasium, which reportedly had a relatively simple rectangular form with a high hip roof, soon followed in 1923.⁷²

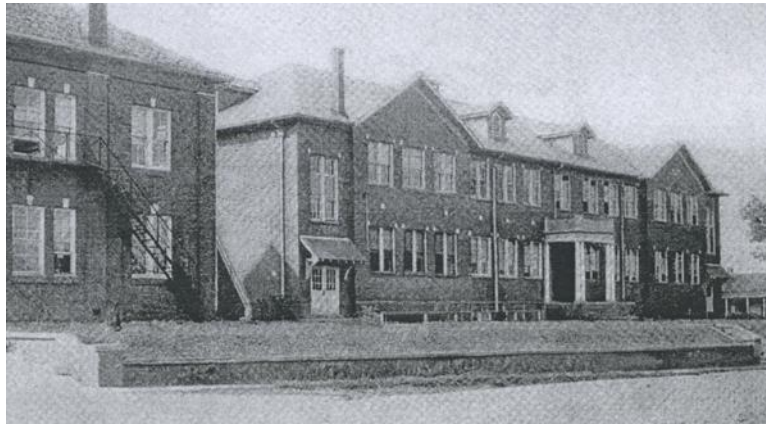


Figure 27. The 1922 addition to the Taylorsville High School campus. Photo in United Baptist Institute and Taylorsville High School Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

The earliest documented school for African American children living in or near Taylorsville was a one-room log schoolhouse called “Happy Hollow,” which in the early 1900s was located near the site of Taylorsville High School. In 1920, the Board of Education of Alexander County acquired a parcel of land about one mile southwest of downtown Taylorsville.⁷³ According to the Alexander County School Board minutes from July 7, 1930, a two-room addition at Happy Plains was constructed using the materials from a dismantled school for white children in the Ellendale community.⁷⁴ During the 1920s and 1930s, the school was called both “Happy Hollow” and “Happy Plains” at various points.⁷⁵

A list of Rosenwald Schools in North Carolina, found in Thomas Hanchett’s “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” suggests that the ca. 1920 school may have been funded with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund, which provided matching grants for school construction to African American communities from the 1910s until 1948. This would align with the 1920 deed for the Happy Plains School site. However, there is some confusion in the records of these schools due to another school for Black students in Stony Point being similarly named “Happy Hollar.” The school in Stony Point consolidated with Third Creek School, a Rosenwald-funded school, in 1926. Third Creek eventually consolidated with Happy Plains in 1933.⁷⁶ The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property

⁷² Poole, “The United Baptist Institute,” 12.

⁷³ Sanford and Celia Teague, “Happy Plains School” (unpublished manuscript, 2006), 10, 13, in Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC.

⁷⁴ Notes from the Alexander County School Board Minutes from 1926 and 1930 were compiled by Phyllis Bailey and are included in AX0243 Happy Plains School Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.

⁷⁵ Teague and Teague, “Happy Plains School,” 22, 281.

⁷⁶ AX0243 Happy Plains School Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.; Thomas Hanchett, “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. LXV, No. 4 (1988): 428.

Documentation Form for Rosenwald Schools in North Carolina indicates Rosenwald involvement in Happy Plains in the 1930-1931 budget year. This could potentially refer to the two-room addition described above, or a 1930 request for library books from the Alexander County Board of Education.⁷⁷



Figure 28. This photograph identifies Happy Hollow School as a Rosenwald Fund school. It shows a two-room addition from the year 1930-1931. Photo from NC Digital.

Residential Architecture

Residential construction was interwoven with commercial businesses on N. and S. Main Street (now Main Avenue and Main Avenue Drive). By 1924, a neighborhood laid out in a grid had developed south of downtown along S. Main Street (now Main Avenue Drive), S. Back Street (now 1st Avenue SE.), E. Main Street (now S. Center Street), W. Main Street (now 1st Street SW.), and W. Back Street (now 2nd Street SW.). A neighborhood known as Highland extended to the north along Highland Avenue (now 4th Avenue N.) and Baptist Street (now 5th Avenue N.). Houses dotted most roadways extending from the central core. Several particularly large structures were clustered on N. Main Street (now E. Main Avenue), just east of downtown, while some of the more modest houses sat to the north of the commercial district. The houses featured on the 1924 Sanborn map are one to two stories; many have front porches and rear ells. Frame houses, usually with German siding, remained dominant, though brick and brick-veneered houses were increasingly constructed as well.

⁷⁷ AX0243 Happy Plains School Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.; Kyle Obenauer and Claudia Brown, "Rosenwald Schools in North Carolina," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2015), 30, NC04.pdf.

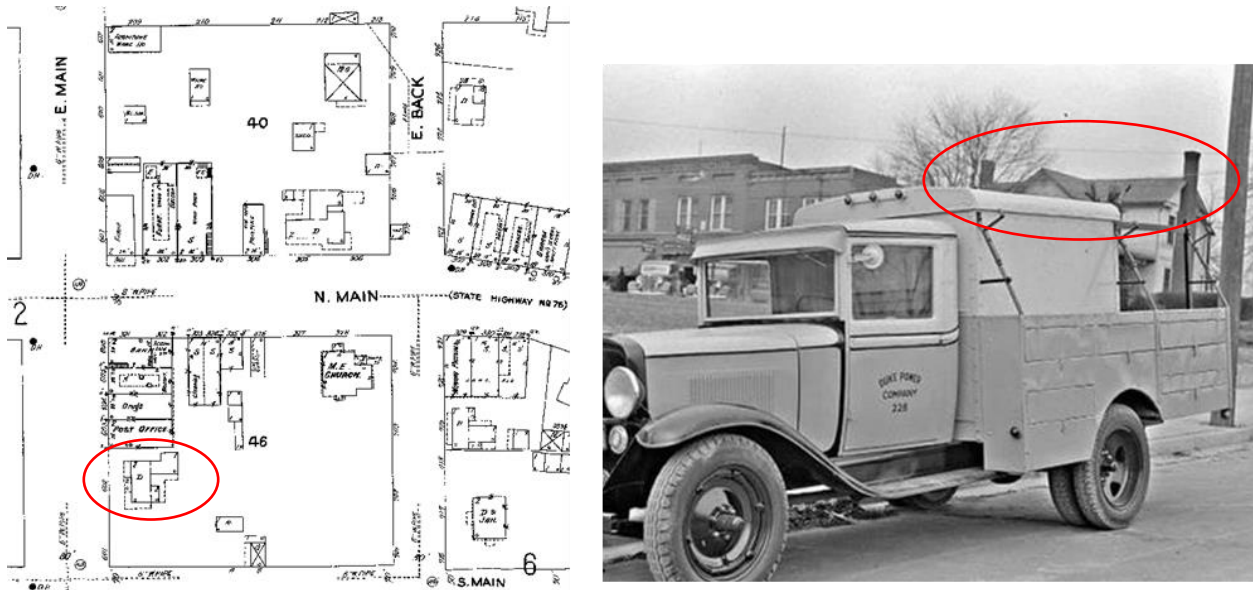


Figure 29. The 1924 Sanborn Map shows several dwellings interwoven with the commercial core. One can be seen in the background of this 1936 photo (right) next to the Masonic Building (AX0042), circled in red. Sanborn Map from NC Live. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

The increasing prosperity of the town is evident in the growing stock of more substantial domestic architecture. According to Vickie Mason’s 1986-1987 survey, the domestic buildings in town began to differentiate Taylorsville considerably from the surrounding county, which remained much more rural in the 1920s.⁷⁸ Nationally popular styles were employed in new construction, though houses in Taylorsville were generally simpler than examples found in larger towns and cities of the time. Further, architectural trends in North Carolina, especially in the western region and rural areas, often lagged behind national trends. This may be evident in the ca. 1910 Gilreath House on E. Main Avenue (AX0121), east of downtown. The one-and-a-half-story house features Victorian-era details, like its steep hip roof, wrap-around porch, and turned porch supports, and was constructed at a time when such stylistic features were losing popularity nationally.

Taylorsville presents several good examples of the Colonial Revival style, exhibiting characteristic details, such as a symmetrical façade, multi-paned sidelights, and an entry porch supported by slim columns. The ca. 1926 Taylorsville Presbyterian Manse (AX0086) and another ca. 1910 house on E. Main Avenue (AX0123) provide similar examples of frame Colonial Revival-style houses. Both are two stories in height with side gable roofs, symmetrical facades, and single-bay porches with simple square supports. The manse also features one-story wings and paired windows often seen in the Colonial Revival style.

⁷⁸ Mason, “Historical and Architectural Development of Alexander County,” 23.



Figure 30. The Taylorsville Presbyterian Manse (AX0086). Photo by author.

While frame construction accounted for the largest number of houses, brick and brick-veneered dwellings became increasingly common in the early twentieth century. Similar to the frame Colonial Revival-style examples, the 1920-1921 Dr. Samuel T. Crowson House (AX0120) is also two stories with a symmetrical façade and single-bay portico over the entrance. Unlike the frame examples, the house is clad in a yellow brick veneer and features a hipped roof, heavy brick porch supports, and a porte-cochere.



Figure 31. Dr. Samuel T. Crowson House (AX0210). Photo by author.

During the 1910s and 1920s, the bungalow form flourished in Taylorsville. Taylorsville maintains many examples of frame bungalows with minimal but typical Craftsman features, such as the gable-end brackets and shingle-clad dormer on the ca. 1920 Sweet House (AX0150). While Craftsman-style residences often feature squat or tapered porch support posts, like AX0206, many of the examples in Taylorsville feature simpler columns on their wide, recessed porches.



Figure 32. Sweet House (AX0150). Photo by author.

A substantial brick example of a Craftsman bungalow is found within the gridded neighborhood south of downtown at 112 1st Street SW. (AX0133). Characteristic of the style and type, it features a wide porch with square posts over wide brick piers. Gable ends feature brackets and exposed rafters are present on shed roofs along bay projections on either side. Pairs and bands of multi-pane-over-single-pane windows are also indicative of the style.



Figure 33. A prominent Craftsman bungalow (AX0133) in Taylorsville. Photo by author.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II (1930-1945)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Neither Alexander County nor Taylorsville escaped the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Like many other areas around the country, the region's farmers lost their farms, businesses experienced widespread closures, and industries declared bankruptcy.⁷⁹ Money was limited, and, for many, this meant food was limited. In her memoir, Ruth Rufty explained her experience as a child in Taylorsville during the Depression, including the roof leaks at her house, odd jobs such as stringing "pokes," and

⁷⁹ Mason, "Historical and Architectural Development of Alexander County," 24.

flour sack dresses. Regarding food access, she remembered, “Low prices didn’t help much, for regardless how low they were, we couldn’t buy. Food, as a whole, was scarce.”⁸⁰

The Great Depression devastated industry nationwide and reduction of rail line service or rail line closures were ordinary throughout western North Carolina in the 1930s.⁸¹ In Taylorsville, by the end of the decade, only one train a day, combining passenger, freight, and mail services, came to town. This was largely due to a decline in tourism, the bankruptcy of the Rocky Face Mountain Quarry, and the growing use of automobiles.⁸² Cotton factories were hit particularly hard, and mass layoffs, decreased pay, and poor working conditions characterized mill workplaces throughout the state. Strikes erupted, most notably in 1934, prodding reforms such as the institution of the forty-hour work week.⁸³ However, there is no record of strikes or efforts at unionization at the local Taylorsville mills.

In Taylorsville, the Miller family declared bankruptcy at the Taylorsville Cotton Mill, as well as their mills at Liledoun and Millersville. A. B. Carter of Gaston County operated the mill throughout much of the 1930s, eventually selling 36 houses, the company store, and warehouses to W. F. Kincaid of Lincoln County in 1939; Robert Goldberg acquired the mill soon after and renamed it Irene Mills, after his wife.⁸⁴ The Carolina Spinning Company, which was called North State until 1929, defaulted on their payments in 1935, and the property was bought by F. C. Sherrill of Mecklenburg County at public auction. He then opened Sherrill Yarn Company. In 1939, the Sherrill family built the Barnett Hosiery Mill on the neighboring property. Together, the two mills employed over 100 people at their peak. A mill village was situated to the north across the railroad track.⁸⁵

A paper box manufacturer, Southern Paper Box Company (AX0171), opened in 1935. The business would become another large employer in the community, employing up to 150 workers. Sipe Lumber Company opened in 1938, and a planing mill and shop associated with Berry & Sharpe Manufacturing Company appears on Sanborn maps between 1924 and 1938.⁸⁶ However, the Crowson and Campbell lumber yard disappeared from the Sanborn maps between these years, and the former T. O. Teague Veneer Mills building was noted as vacant and dilapidated. The 1938 *Industrial Directory* for North Carolina named 19 industries throughout the county, including the aforementioned textile mills, as well as the roller mill at Taylorsville Milling Company, and the newspaper publication *Taylorsville Times*.⁸⁷

Despite general financial difficulties, some commercial businesses survived, opened, or expanded during the decade. The Taylorsville Theater opened, as did the Hotel Alexander in 1937 in the former building of the Hotel Campbell. The Northwestern Bank, evolving from the earlier Merchants and Farmers Bank,

⁸⁰ Here, stringing pokes refers to adding drawstrings to cloth sacks for loose tobacco. Ruth Wike Rufty, *Raise the Window Down: An Autobiography* (Statesville, NC: Brady Printing, 1996), 74-77.

⁸¹ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 35.

⁸² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 122.

⁸³ Heather Fearnbach, “Lenoir Cotton Mill – Blue Bell, Inc. Plant,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2017), Section 8.

⁸⁴ Watt, “Early Cotton Factories,” 65.

⁸⁵ Watt, “Early Cotton Factories,” 92-93.

⁸⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 313; “About Us,” Sipe Lumber Company, <https://www.sipelumber.com/about-us>.

⁸⁷ NC Department of Conservation and Development, “Industrial Directory and Reference Book of the State of North Carolina,” 1938, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/industrial-directory-and-reference-book-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-1938/3705383>.

opened in 1938 in the same building. Deal Motor Company expanded and became a Ford dealership in 1936.⁸⁸ Taylorsville supported a variety of retail and commercial activity, concentrated in the downtown core, including two department stores (Lackey's and Smithey's), the United Variety Store, three automobile companies (Alexander Auto, Deal Motor, Solon Motor), two drug stores (People's and Munday's), several filling stations, two feed stores, several grocers and meat stores, a hardware store, a movie theater, a bank, a dry cleaner, two restaurants, and a jeweler.⁸⁹



Figure 34. The Deal Motor Company (AX0080) during the 1940s, after the 1936 expansion.
Photo in *Alexander County Treasures*, page 335.

In fact, Ruth Rufty said of the 1930s, “Taylorsville has never been so busy as it was in those days of my childhood. The Saturday deluge of people lasted from as far back as I can remember up until World War II when many of the men from the county went to war.”⁹⁰ She remembered the town as practically deserted on weekdays, maybe seeing a wagon or occasional car. However, on Saturday or Court Week, the town would become a bustling hub, with streets filled with vehicles and crowded sidewalks as residents completed errands and socialized with neighbors. A café with a jukebox in the basement of Smithey's Department Store and the theater next door were the main sources of entertainment during the 1930s.⁹¹

In response to the Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted a wide range of agencies under his New Deal platform, some of which offered jobs to the unemployed in an effort to boost the economy. In 1934, 284 residents of Alexander County were working for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) or the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The CCC provided jobs in manual labor working towards conservation efforts and emphasizing the country's natural resources, while the CWA provided jobs in construction for building or improving buildings and bridges. Some teenagers quit school during this period to work for the CCC in order to help support their families. In 1941, 16 boys left Alexander County for a CCC camp in Hickory.⁹² The CWA only lasted until 1934, though the Works Progress Administration, which also provided jobs for the construction of public buildings and amenities, followed soon after. In Taylorsville, the CWA aided in the construction of a new school for African American children, called the

⁸⁸ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 224.

⁸⁹ NC Department of Conservation and Development, *Industrial Directory and Reference Book of the State of North Carolina*, 1938.

⁹⁰ Rufty, *Raise the Window Down*, 70.

⁹¹ Rufty, *Raise the Window Down*, 66-70.

⁹² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 217-218; Rufty, *Raise the Window Down*, 99.

Happy Plains School (AX0243), and the WPA helped erect the Community Building (AX0210), as well as organize the first library in the county in 1936, which only lasted until 1942 due to financial issues.⁹³

There was widespread hope for economic recovery as the nation moved into the 1940s; however, citizens were soon met with the oncoming participation of the United States in World War II. Around 1,400 county residents enlisted in the military.⁹⁴ At home, much like in World War I a few decades earlier, residents throughout the county rationed food and goods, planted victory gardens, and purchased war bonds. A public cannery was established in Taylorsville at Taylorsville High School. Women also entered the workforce at higher rates than ever before, filling war-critical positions, especially in the production of textiles.⁹⁵

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Based on available Sanborn maps, it appears that building slowed significantly during the 1930s, which followed national and statewide trends. The Sanborn map shows much of the same building fabric present in 1938 as in 1924, as well as a small amount of scattered new construction and some building loss.

Industrial Architecture

While the economic downturn of the Depression appears to have slowed the rate of building construction, industrial construction did not cease altogether in Taylorsville. Industrial buildings remained concentrated along the railroad near the depot and along the railroad east of Taylorsville, near Sherrill Yarn Company. While no new construction appears to have occurred around the depot, the Barnett Hosiery Mill and Berry & Sharpe Manufacturing Company were established east of town, situated between NC 90 and the railroad. The Barnett Hosiery Mill, a ca. 1938 building, sat adjacent to the earlier Sherrill Yarn Company. While the bulk of the property burned in the 1980s, it appears a portion of the later development may remain at 899 E. Main Avenue. This one-story structure is utilitarian and typical of industrial buildings of the time, with a common-bond brick exterior, sloped roof, and parapet. Piercings are irregular and include small windows, security doors, and loading docks.

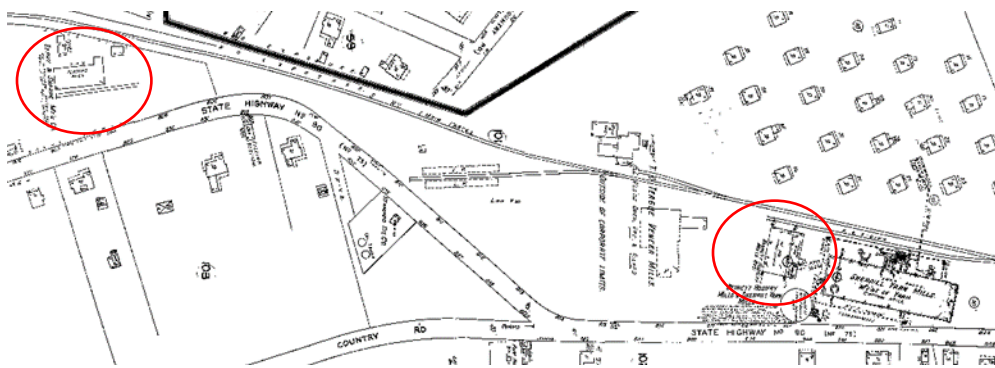


Figure 35. This 1938 Sanborn Map shows the new Barnett Hosiery Mill (right) and Berry & Sharpe Manufacturing Company (left) east of Taylorsville marked with the red circles. Image from NC Live.

⁹³ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 156, 218-219.

⁹⁴ Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," Section 8.

⁹⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 230-233.



Figure 36. This utilitarian building may be all that remains of the Barnett Hosiery Mill. 2016 image from Google Street View.

The Southern Paper Box Company (AX0171) was also established in 1935 south of town, between NC Highway 16 and Paul Payne Store Road.⁹⁶ Indicative of improving roadways, the siting of the box company signaled a departure from the need to locate industrial properties along either waterways or railways. Over the coming decades, several other industries established themselves in this area, either to the east or west of NC 16. The earliest photographic documentation of the locally nicknamed “box factory” is an aerial from the mid-1950s, showing a bow truss roof and an east elevation punctured by four large window openings facing the roadway.

Commercial and Institutional Architecture

As businesses closed and new ones opened, many utilized the existing building stock concentrated in the few blocks around the courthouse, mainly along the north side of N. Main Street (now E. and W. Main Avenue). However, some new buildings were constructed, altered, or expanded in this period. In some instances, new buildings replaced some of the earliest commercial building fabric. A lament to the loss of one of the early buildings north of the courthouse, home to the J. L. Watts Company, was described in a *Taylorsville Times* article:

This is the last of the wooden buildings in this block and its removal takes away the last of the wooden shed over the sidewalk where citizens sat protected from the heat, whittled and discussed the issues of the day. These wooden sheds with their comfortable chairs and benches, prompted the late John Moore to call Taylorsville “Loafers Glory.” While we welcome progress and improvements, the older residents will miss the shed.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 313.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 87. No date for this newspaper article is provided in the source; however, a 1928 *Statesville Record and Landmark* article details plans to move the wooden building to the rear of the lot and build a new three-story brick building. “Taylorsville to Get New Store,” *Statesville Record and Landmark* (North Carolina), April 30, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11789048/>.

Initially, the J. L. Watts Company building was moved to the rear of the lot, where it operated as a general store, but it was demolished between its appearance on the 1938 Sanborn map and the 1960s. Its replacement on Main Avenue is a brick-veneered commercial structure (AX0102) that conforms to the neighboring downtown commercial architecture with its two-story height, sloped roof, and brick cornice details. Other examples of the older frame commercial buildings were the old town tavern – a large, tall wooden building with wide steps – and a small shoe shop to the west of the First United Methodist Church (AX0095). While the former was demolished by the mid-1950s, the shoe shop persisted until at least the mid-1960s.⁹⁸ Nearby, Smithey's Department Store (AX0101) updated its façade with a unifying brick veneer with a diamond pattern that stretched along its new cornice line, covering two historically distinct storefronts. AX0104 and AX0081, small, one-story, brick-veneered commercial buildings with less decorative detail, were also constructed between the Great Depression and World War II.



Figure 37. Block north of the courthouse in downtown Taylorsville in 1927. The front-gabled building, housing the J. L. Watts Company, was moved to the rear of the lot soon after. The historic storefronts of the Smithey's Building can be seen to the left (west). Photo in Alexander County Treasures, page 205.



Figure 38. Updated façade of Smithey's (AX0101) in the 1940s. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

⁹⁸ Rufty, *Raise the Window Down*, 66-67; Ruth Wike Rufty and Harold Rufty, "Taylorsville, NC 1965," YouTube, 16:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lvihaj-rGU>.



Figure 39. A 1947 photo showing the building that replaced the J.L. Watts Company building and the new Smithey's Building facade. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

Automobile-related businesses began cropping up farther away from the commercial core along major roadways between 1924 and 1938, likely as a response to the growing automobility of the community. The service stations erected at the time followed national trends, evident at AX0096 on W. Main Avenue and the Pure Oil Station on E. Main Avenue (AX0119). AX0096 reflects the Mission Revival style with its stucco exterior and tile roof. The Pure Oil Service Station followed the company's English Cottage design with its steeply pitched roof and casement windows. Both stations also featured service bays, a growing necessity as an increase in car ownership meant an increasing need for car maintenance and repair.⁹⁹



Figure 40. The Pure Oil Station in 1941. Photo provided by Connie Kincaid of the EDC.

President Roosevelt's New Deal policies funded new buildings in the community. The construction of the Community Building (AX0210) north of downtown next to the Rock Store is one such construction project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), prompted by a partnership between the Taylorsville Woman's Club and the American Legion. WPA projects often employed streamlined designs that incorporated native materials, reducing the skill needed to execute the project and the cost of

⁹⁹ National Park Service, "Preservation Brief 46: The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations" (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2008), 2-3, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-46-gas-stations.pdf>.

construction and maintenance.¹⁰⁰ The Community Building conforms to this model, having a simple, one-story, side-gable form, gable-end chimneys, and a symmetrical façade; the stone exterior likely came from local sources.



Figure 41. Community Building (AX0210) constructed by the Works Progress Administration ca. 1935. Photo in *Alexander County Treasures*, p. 218.

In 1933, a fire destroyed the earlier frame five-room schoolhouse for Black children. Instruction for that school year was moved to a vacant house in town while a new school was constructed through the CWA. The new eight-room school opened in 1934 under the name Happy Plains School (AX0243). All instruction for Alexander County's Black children consolidated at the school, and by 1938 there were 12 teachers for 104 students of both high school and elementary ages. During the Depression, the school requested aid from the Rosenwald Fund for a library, which likely meant a collection of books rather than a building campaign, and a vocational shop was added to the school in 1943.¹⁰¹ The school, which was converted for light industrial use in the 1980s, is long and narrow with banks of large multipane windows, a central entrance within a gabled bay, and a side-gable roof. Front-gable wings extend at a perpendicular angle from each end. Around the same time, the Taylorsville High School complex also grew, adding a new frame building in the 1930s and another addition in the 1940s, addressing overcrowding with a three-story wing.¹⁰²

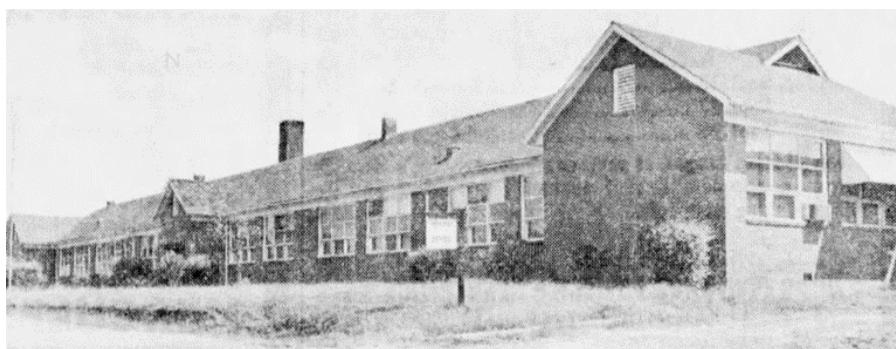


Figure 42. The Happy Plains School. Photo from *The Charlotte Observer*, "Chair Company Brings New Life to Old School," Sept 11, 1983, page 10.

¹⁰⁰ "Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-1943" (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1947), 52, <https://www.loc.gov/item/47032199/>; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 252.

¹⁰¹ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 156-157; Teague and Teague, "Happy Plains School," 8-9, 281.

¹⁰² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 158; Poole, "The United Baptist Institute," 14, 17.

Residential Architecture

No extensive residential development appears to have occurred within Taylorsville's municipal limits during the 1930s and early 1940s. Houses were still intermixed with downtown commercial properties, such as Mr. J. P. Echerd's frame house across from the Methodist Episcopal Church on N. Main Avenue (now E. Main Avenue) and Mrs. Mamie White's big white house across from the Hotel Alexander.¹⁰³ Few dwellings, however, were constructed in the commercial district (from 2nd Street to Linney's Mountain Road) after 1924. A few modest houses were constructed just north of commercial buildings on N. Main Street (now E. Main Avenue), on Oak Street (now N. Center Street) and Carson Street (now 1st Street NE.). These include AX0127 and AX0140. New construction noted on the Sanborn maps between 1924 and 1938 appears largely as infill between established residences along N. Main Avenue (W. Main Avenue), in the gridded neighborhood south of downtown, and streets in the Highland section, north of downtown. Loss of residences between 1924 and 1938 appears to have been minimal.

Perhaps the most elaborate extant residence constructed during this period is the ca. 1935 Gryder House (AX0154). A rare example of a Spanish Colonial Revival-style house in Taylorsville, it features wide, overhanging eaves, massive square porch supports, and a porte-cochere. Notably, the Gryder House also maintains its distinctive tile roof, which several houses in the community have lost, including the Wade Campbell House (AX0013).



Figure 43. The Gryder House (AX0154). Photo by author.

The Period Revival Cottage, a style that became widespread throughout town over the next few decades, also made its way into Taylorsville. While the Period Revival style likely entered the town in the 1910s or 1920s, surveyed examples were primarily constructed after the 1938 Sanborn map. The ca. 1935 R. G. Watts House (AX0136) was likely the oldest surveyed, showcasing design elements typical of the style and its use locally. It has a small one-story, side-gable form, a brick exterior, and a small entry block with a steep gable roof. Its windows have irregular-paned sashes above single-pane sashes. It also includes a small, recessed porch to one side of the main entrance, a feature that was very common in other examples in town.

¹⁰³ Rufty, *Raise the Window Down*, 66.



Figure 44. R. G. Watts House (AX0136). Photo by author.

Two small vernacular houses (AX0127 and AX0240) appear downtown between the 1924 and 1938 Sanborn maps. The simple front-gable house form was likely influenced by the national popularity of bungalows, most of which oriented the gable end of the house to face the street or road. The houses, probably identical at their construction, are one-story with front-gable roofs, front porches, and minimal decorative detail.



Figure 45. Two small vernacular houses (AX0127 & AX0240) just north of the downtown commercial core. Photo by author.

POST-WAR GROWTH (1946-1959)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

After the uncertain and trying years of the 1930s and early 1940s, the next two decades brought postwar growth. While Taylorsville gained about 350 people between 1940 and 1960 (a 30 percent increase), the township grew much more quickly – from 3,892 in 1940 to 5,810 in 1960 (a 50 percent increase). This made it the fastest growing township in the county.¹⁰⁴ Improvements in town included increased access to electricity and transportation. NC Highway 90 was extended through Alexander County, and improvements were made to NC Highway 16. New employment and healthcare opportunities were introduced during this period, as well.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ NC Department of Conservation and Development, “Annexation Study, Taylorsville NC,” 7, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 237, 241, 270.

Throughout the county, the labor force was growing. Following the national trend, the percentage of county residents working in agriculture decreased dramatically (32 percent of employed workers in 1950 to 13 percent in 1960), while employees in manufacturing increased to nearly three-quarters of the workforce (38 percent of employed workers in 1950 to 72 percent in 1960).¹⁰⁶ Small family farms persisted, but increasingly farms were operated as a secondary source of income. The percentage of the workforce engaged in construction, retail, entertainment, and recreation also grew during this period.¹⁰⁷ Following a trend started during World War II, middle-class white women increasingly worked outside of the home. Throughout the county, women went from making up roughly 20 percent of employed workers in 1940, to 24 percent in 1950, and 34 percent in 1960. Most of these women worked in textile mills, though they also worked in retail, domestic service, or for the government.¹⁰⁸ In 1960, over half of the working women in Alexander County lived in Taylorsville Township, likely due to the availability of employment opportunities in the town.¹⁰⁹

While earlier industrial enterprises such as Irene Mills, Sherrill Yarn Mills, Southern Paper Box Company, and Sipe Lumber Company continued operations, new industries developed, increasing labor opportunities for residents. Textile mills accounted for roughly a third of total employment in Taylorsville Township.¹¹⁰

Following the onset of synthetic fabric manufacturing in the 1930s, Schneider Mills, a silk weaving operation out of New Jersey, began to search for a location to establish a new rayon mill. After an intensive survey of four southern states, Schneider Mills purchased 75 acres just north of the town limits in 1946, citing the good highways, labor prospects, and picturesque landscape of Alexander County as reasons for their decision to locate near Taylorsville. Local contractor Luke Gwaltney constructed a mill large enough to employ 250 to 300 people, with room for expansion. By 1949, the company employed 80 to 90 employees. Soon Schneider Mills consolidated all their operations in Taylorsville. By 1989, the mill employed approximately 500 people, making the mill an integral part of the county's economy.¹¹¹

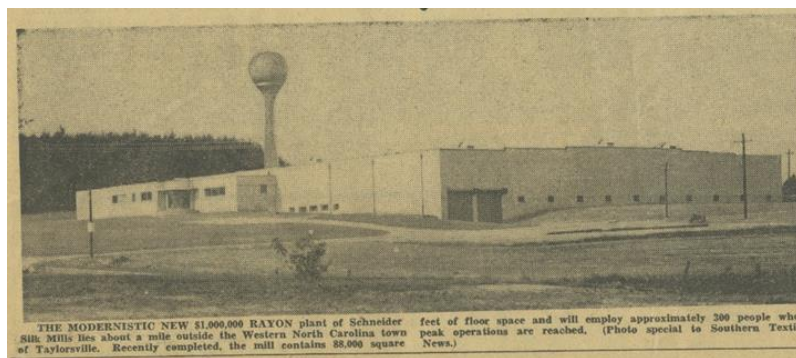


Figure 46. The new Schneider Mills plant, built in 1946, was touted as modern, utilitarian, and efficient in a 1948 edition of *Southern Textile News*. Business Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "1940 Census of Population," 322; U.S. Census Bureau, "1950 Census," 33-113; U.S. Census Bureau, "1960 Census," 35-249, 35-258.

¹⁰⁷ NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Population and economy, Taylorsville, NC," 36.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, "1950 Census," 33-113; U.S. Census Bureau, "1960 Census," 35-249, 35-258.

¹⁰⁹ NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Population and economy, Taylorsville, NC," 34.

¹¹⁰ NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Population and economy, Taylorsville, NC," 37.

¹¹¹ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 28, 100-102; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 272.

In 1945, William Jefferson Rogers and his son Albert established Rogers Mill (AX0072), a new roller mill, on the east side of Taylorsville. It was positioned between the railroad and NC 90. In addition to that location, the mill also operated out of the 1902 Taylorsville Milling Company building until 1961, when the mill sold the building. The operation would become the county's main flour, grist, and feed producer.¹¹²

Despite these advances, Alexander County felt the struggles experienced by much of western North Carolina in the years after World War II, including significant unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, and outmigration.¹¹³ Some Alexander County residents commuted to neighboring counties for higher paying manufacturing jobs, a possibility due to improved roads. The Alexander County Development Corporation formed in the mid-1950s with a mission to battle loss of labor to other communities by improving local access to industrial jobs. Soon after, Lewittes and Sons Furniture (AX0163) established a presence in Taylorsville in the late 1950s, forming a new industrial center south of downtown off NC 16. Phil Lackey opened the Ideal Frame Company (AX0164) in the mid-1950s across 5th Avenue SW. from Lewittes. East of Taylorsville, Broyhill Furniture Industries from Lenoir built a large plant that opened in 1959.¹¹⁴ By the end of the 1950s, it was clear the furniture industry would dominate the economy in Taylorsville and the surrounding area.

In less than a decade, between 1946 and 1953, businesses in Alexander County increased from 103 to 170. Taylorsville was home to service stations, clothing stores, car dealerships, and appliance stores. Lerner's Department Store joined Smithey's and Lackey's. Three car dealerships included Deal Motor Company, Dayton Chevrolet, and Matlock Motors. Other stores located downtown during this period were Rhodes-Day-Elledge, Rufty's, United Variety Store, Trio Supermarket, and Earp's Esso Station.¹¹⁵ Entertainment opportunities in town included The Main, a downtown theater that opened in 1946. The Taylorsville Drive-In north of Taylorsville opened in 1945 and was later renamed The Sunset. In 1955, a new theater, The Park, opened across from the high school (AX0179), becoming a popular spot for students. This was later called The Sears Theater.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Fearnbach, "Taylorsville Milling Company Roller Mill," Section 8.

¹¹³ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 78.

¹¹⁴ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 272; NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Population and economy, Taylorsville, NC," 41.

¹¹⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 262-265.

¹¹⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 306, 308.

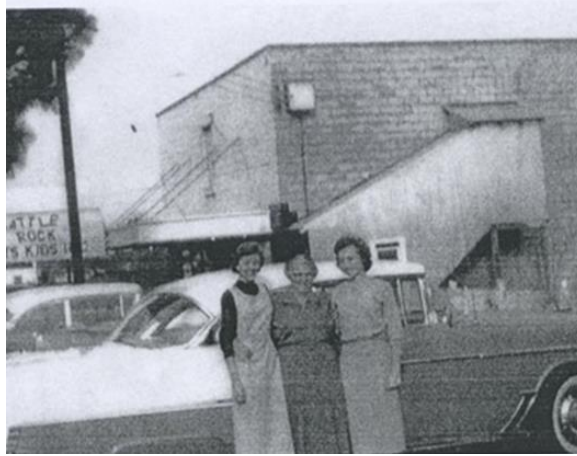


Figure 47. *The Park Theater, ca. 1950s. The United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.*

While Black residents gathered at weekly church services, homecomings, and revivals, the only entertainment-oriented business in Taylorsville that catered to Black clientele was The Big Apple, a café that provided pool and dancing.¹¹⁷ Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Happy Plains School was an important community resource for the Black population in Alexander County. Charlie Daniels, who began teaching agriculture at the school in 1945, remembered the services his students provided to the community, including canning foods, planting plants and lawns, building cabinets and mailboxes, repairing equipment, and monitoring baby chicks that were to be distributed throughout the community. The school also held a Veterans Training Program after World War II and a Bible School organized by all the Black churches in Alexander County.¹¹⁸

In the late 1940s, after the county gained its first full-time public health nurse, the passing of the 1946 Hill-Burton Act provided funding through grants or loans for hospital construction and improvements. This prompted county citizens to organize an effort to construct a hospital in Taylorsville. The Medical Care Commission, supported by donations from individuals, civic groups, and clubs, obtained the funds for a hospital and health department for the county. This hospital, which opened in 1950, maintained 20 beds and two wards for Black residents. The hospital drew patients from surrounding counties and created the need for pharmacies and other medical services, perhaps influencing the establishment of Town and County Drug in 1956. Ten years after opening, demand was great enough to add an additional 11 beds. In 1973, 31 more beds were added, reflecting population growth between the 1950s and the 1970s.¹¹⁹

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

As the town continued to develop in the postwar years, new construction replaced older construction, infilled historically vacant lots, and extended outward from the town center. By this period, more growth was also occurring outside, but in close proximity to, the town limits due to the increasing lack of available and desirable land within the limits of Taylorsville. As the town limits had not been expanded

¹¹⁷ Teague and Teague, "Happy Plains School," 331.

¹¹⁸ Teague and Teague, "Happy Plains School," 2, 336.

¹¹⁹ "Our history," Town and Country Drugs, <https://www.townandcountrync.com/our-history>; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 254.

between its founding in 1847 and 1960, a 1965 Annexation Study noted the “growing urban fringe” of development around the town’s limits.¹²⁰

Industrial Architecture

Along with reliable automobile transportation, a new industrial district developed south of downtown along NC 16, removed from the railroad, which had characterized earlier industrial development. While the Southern Box Company had opened to the east of the highway in the 1930s, the Ideal Frame Company (AX0164) began operating west of the highway in a ca. 1954 utilitarian industrial building constructed of concrete block. Likely indicative of the business’s success, a one-story addition with a stepped parapet concealing a bow roof and a concrete block screen wall was added between 1954 and 1964. A similar building is located across the roadway (AX0165). That warehouse, owned at different points in its existence by Ideal Frame Company, Sigmon Manufacturing, and Alexvale Furniture, also features concrete block construction, a stepped parapet concealing a bowed roof, and metal windows. The largest building constructed in this industrial node was the ca. 1959 Lewittes Furniture plant. The building has a utilitarian design with a flat roof and minimal decoration, and a brick veneer conceals its concrete block construction.



Figure 48. The original section of the Ideal Frame Company (AX0164). Photo by author.

Commercial, Institutional, and Religious Architecture

In the post-World War II era, downtown commercial construction was limited. Some buildings, such as AX0117 and AX0118, assumed forms similar to earlier buildings, mirroring their sloped roofs concealed by parapets, brick veneers, and minimal brick details. As with the industrial buildings of the day, commercial buildings are generally of concrete block construction that is visible from the sides and rear. These buildings conform to the historic pattern of commercial blocks in which individual buildings share partition walls, contributing to a unified commercial atmosphere along Main Avenue despite the timespan between construction periods.

Breaking that pattern, however, some commercial structures of the period are free-standing and exhibit modern elements. The 1956 Town and Country Drugs (AX0109) deviated from historic precedent with a gridded window wall serving as the front elevation and stack-bond brick veneer pattern. Catering to an

¹²⁰ NC Department of Conservation and Development, “Annexation Study, Taylorsville NC,” 6-7.

automobile-oriented clientele, the building also features a drive-thru window. Several other freestanding commercial buildings are located on blocks near the courthouse.



*Figure 49. Town and Country Drugs in 1976.
Churches: Baptist Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.*

New commercial buildings were also constructed at a distance from the downtown core, largely along NC 90. AX0185 and AX0186 follow this pattern. AX0185 appears much like a one-story commercial building downtown, including large storefront windows, a sloped roof, and stepped parapet walls. As with other commercial buildings of the era, its brick façade conceals concrete block construction. AX0186, alternatively, features unconcealed concrete block construction, an asymmetrical façade, and piecemeal rear additions.



Figure 50. AX0185 typifies a standard commercial building constructed in the post-war period. Photo by author.

There was an increase in church construction in the 1940s and 1950s. These construction endeavors seem to be limited to congregations that already existed in Taylorsville, at least one of which was moving to new property along NC 90. This is perhaps due to the need for more land to accommodate larger church facilities and parking lots. The 1950 Reformation Lutheran Church (AX0175) was constructed west of downtown, while the 1949 East Taylorsville Baptist Church (AX0192) and 1956 Taylorsville Church of God (AX0189) were both constructed to the east. All three front-gable, symmetrical brick churches display minimal Colonial Revival details. Both the Baptist and Lutheran churches have broken pediments

and pilasters at the main entrance. The small brick-veneered Church of God building has a stepped brick arched entrance and stained-glass transom.



Figure 51. The East Taylorsville Baptist Church (AX0192). Photo by author.

Taylorsville High School (AX0179) underwent new construction and campus improvements, gaining a new cafeteria in 1955, a library in 1956, and a science building in 1959. A Quonset hut added to the campus in 1949 exemplified a new prefabricated building type, as military surplus was frequently repurposed in public properties post-World War II.¹²¹ The most notable addition to the campus, however, was the 1951 gymnasium, added to the campus after an earlier gym burned in 1947.¹²² Departing from the classical building styles deployed in the United Baptist Institute and the 1922 addition, the new gymnasium was more modern in design with its arched parapet covering a bow truss roof, slim metal supports within the covered entrance, and a continuous curved corner on the southeast corner of the façade.



Figure 52. The Taylorsville High School gymnasium under construction in 1950. United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

¹²¹ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 158.

¹²² Poole, "The United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School," 28.

The major construction project of this era is arguably the Alexander County Hospital (AX0138), constructed between 1949 and 1950 south of downtown on NC 16. Architecturally, the original building is notable for its use of the International Style. While prevalent nationally, the style was much less utilized locally. Emblematic features include the emphasis on horizontality in its low form, the flat roof, and long bands of windows that wrap the building's corners.



Figure 53. The original construction of the Alexander County Hospital (AX0138). Hospital Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

Residential Architecture

Residential construction boomed during this period. Small clusters of residential development occurred along roadways in much of Taylorsville east of Liledoun Road and west of Boston Road. Many of these new residences appeared around roadways in proximity to industrial plants, such as along S. Center Street approaching the Southern Paper Box Company plant and along 7th Street SW. and 6th Street SW. near Lewittes and Ideal Frame Company.

Many houses continued the architectural trends seen in previous decades. Period Revival Cottage construction continued to proliferate, with typical examples featuring one-story forms and steeply-pitched front-gable entrance blocks. Some of the Period Revival Cottages in this era employ somewhat unusual features, such as the distinctive chimney and front-gable roof, reminiscent of an A-frame, at the Elledge House (AX0135) and the stone exterior of AX0153.



Figure 54. The Elledge House (AX0135) features an unusual roofline, along with typical characteristics of a Period Revival Cottage, including a mix of brick and stone, a recessed side porch, and a prominent chimney on the front façade. Photo by author.

Most houses built during this period were one story or one-and-a-half stories in height. However, a late example of a two-story Colonial Revival-style house, the Jennings House (AX0184), was built in 1953 on E. Main Avenue within a stretch of larger homes from the 1910s and 1920s. The side-gable roof, symmetrical façade, gable-end chimney, and slim square columns supporting the full-height, full-width porch is evocative of the antebellum Thurston House (see Figure 4), which appears to have been altered in the late nineteenth and/or early twentieth centuries after its initial construction ca. 1847. An interesting interior feature of the house is the reuse of a pressed tin ceiling from the former People's Drug Store (AX0053).



Figure 55. The Jennings House (AX0184) is a late example of a Colonial Revival-style house, evoking some of the earlier architecture of Taylorsville, such as the Thurston House (Figure 4). Photo by author.

Other styles were making headway in the community. The ca. 1951 AX0149 is an early example of a Ranch house with Minimal Traditional elements. It has a compact side-gable form, featuring an asymmetrical façade and a large picture window. AX0168, erected ca. 1952, provides a representative example of the Ranch houses that would grow in popularity over the next few decades. It features a side-gable roof, asymmetrical facade, and picture window, as well as a long, linear form and attached carport.



Figure 56. AX0149. Photo by author.



Figure 57. AX0168 is an early example of a typical Ranch house, a form that would become prolific in Taylorsville. The house has received an exterior renovation that has significantly altered its appearance since this image was created. Image from 2018 Google Street View.

Notably, there also appears to have been a surge of small, vernacular buildings built on the residential streets in the Highland section of town directly north of the downtown district, perhaps in response to increasing industrial wage labor in Taylorsville, such as the jobs available at Schneider Mills nearby. This construction was concentrated along 4th Avenue N., 5th Avenue N., Mountain Laurel Drive, and Shadowwood Drive. The buildings are all one-story in height, frame, and are a mix of front- and side-gable forms with minimal decorative details. Front porches are generally supported by slim square supports.



Figure 58. AX0231 is a side-gable vernacular house on Mountain Laurel Drive north of downtown. Photo by author.

THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY TAKES HOLD (1960-1975)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

As late as the 1960s and 1970s, the furniture industry flourished in the foothills of western North Carolina. This industry fueled the economy of Taylorsville. A 1965 Land Annexation study noted that the new industrial textile and furniture developments in or near town were gaining momentum in the local

economy.¹²³ Both Lewittes and Broyhill had been established shortly before 1960, foreshadowing the importance the furniture industry would have on the town and county's economy in the mid- to late twentieth century. This would continue into the 1970s as more furniture companies found their way to Alexander County. A few of these early furniture manufacturers include Craftmaster Furniture (established in 1972) and Masterfield Furniture (established in 1974 eight miles southwest of Taylorsville).¹²⁴ Between the 1960 and 1973 editions of the *Directory of North Carolina Manufacturing Firms*, the furniture listings in Alexander County grew from four to 12.¹²⁵ However, as land was limited in Taylorsville, most of these new operations set up outside of the town limits. Broyhill, Bassett, and Hickory Springs Manufacturing Company all seem to have been situated along the railroad off NC 90 about six miles east of Taylorsville, near Hiddenite.

While the furniture industry was quickly expanding in Alexander County, textile mills in the area experienced a sharp decline. Foreign imports began to severely undercut domestic textile products, creating hardship for the industry beginning in the 1960s. The nearby Miller-White Hosiery Mill closed in 1965. Irene Mills, which had become Gurney Industries, still employed about 275 people in the mid-1960s. However, employees were reduced by the late 1960s, and the whole operation closed in 1970. The Sherrill Yarn Company also closed around 1970, after its mill village and mill factory building were sold. The Barnett Hosiery Mill was the last to operate in Taylorsville's vicinity. Indicative of the contemporary industrial climate, Alexvale Furniture later took over the building.¹²⁶ Despite these closures, some new clothing-oriented industries were created. Blue Bell, Inc. established a sewing plant in Taylorsville in the mid-1960s that served a cutting department in Lenoir.¹²⁷ Taylor Toggs, a jeans manufacturer, had a location near downtown.¹²⁸

Near the industrial district southwest of downtown, a recording studio introduced a new industry to Taylorsville. Galaxie Studios, operated by Harry and Jimmy Deal, who played in a local band called Harry Deal and the Galaxies, opened their business on 5th Street SW. The studio expanded in 1971, adding a large addition to house a music school, and again in 1973, adding a small shop. In 1974, it was one of only seven recording studios in the state.¹²⁹

¹²³ NC Department of Conservation and Development, "Annexation Study, Taylorsville NC," 6.

¹²⁴ "About Us," Masterfield Furniture Company, <https://masterfieldfurniturecompany.com/furniture-manufacturers-hickory-nc/>; "About Craftmaster Furniture," Craftmaster Furniture, <https://cmfurniture.com/about-us.inc>.

¹²⁵ NC Department of Labor, "Directory of North Carolina Manufacturing Firms," 1960, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-directory-of-manufacturing-firms-1960/2309922>; NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, "Directory of North Carolina Manufacturing Firms," 1973, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/directory-of-north-carolina-manufacturing-firms-1972-1973/2996759>.

¹²⁶ Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 29, 66, 93, 99.

¹²⁷ Fearnbach, "Lenoir Cotton Mill – Blue Bell, Inc. Plant," Section 8.; Watt, "Early Cotton Factories," 65.

¹²⁸ "Satisfaction in Seeing Area Growth Plans Become Reality," *Taylorsville Times*, April 24, 1980, in Prominent People: Business and Industry Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC.

¹²⁹ "Records are Made in Taylorsville," *Statesville Record & Landmark*, July 6, 1974, in Business Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC; "Galaxie III Expanding," *Alexander News*, August 18, 1971, in Business Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC.

Businesses continued to expand farther from the historic downtown commercial district and catered to an increasingly mobile clientele. A local businessman named Sam Brookshire had a large influence on the physical landscape of the era. He had a hand in several significant development projects, with various local partners for each development. Two of his early construction projects were freestanding commercial buildings on W. Main Avenue: the Wash & Dry No. 1, established in 1961, and the Modern Cleaners and Laundry, constructed next door in 1965.¹³⁰

Mirroring development all over the country, Brookshire's later projects are indicative of the large commercial developments drawing activity away from condensed downtowns. These automobile-oriented projects featured large parking lots and drive-thru convenience. Brookshire was involved in the construction of a large store building on the west side of town to house the first chain supermarket in Taylorsville, Harris-Teeter, and, in 1966, the East Branch Development, a shopping center just east of downtown. In 1973, he developed a Hardee's fast-food restaurant on NC 90. In the 1970s, he established a large development on the west side of Taylorsville called Westgate Shopping Center, eventually housing a Lowes Foods, Crown Drugs, and Crest. This shopping center also included a freestanding carwash, the Westgate House (an earlier house renovated for commercial use that is no longer extant), and another fast-food establishment.¹³¹ Around the same time, John Tarlton constructed the town's first motel in 1972 on the east side of town.¹³²



Figure 59. An early shopping center on the west side of Taylorsville. The Harris-Teeter section was constructed in 1966 and the building expanded in 1969. Prominent People: Business and Industry Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

While commercial activity was being pulled away from the downtown district, a fire transformed the downtown landscape in 1967 when the 1902 courthouse burned. The historic building could not be saved due to significant smoke and water damage, as well as the general collapse of the building. The final construction plan for the new courthouse resulted in a Brutalist design by architect James Biggs of Hickory that was erected in 1970 by Herman Sipe and Company. A few blocks south, the community also gained a county library around 1975, its first since the closure of the WPA-funded library in the 1940s.¹³³

¹³⁰ "Satisfaction in Seeing Area Growth Plans Become Reality."

¹³¹ "Satisfaction in Seeing Area Growth Plans Become Reality."

¹³² Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 266.

¹³³ AX0041 Alexander County Courthouse Survey File.

The 1950s and 1960s also brought major social and political changes across the country. The 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Despite this ruling, the next decade was met with statewide efforts to evade and stall desegregation in North Carolina through political and legal tactics. The Pupil Assignment Act hindered integration efforts by using vague language for school assignments to be in “the best interest of the child” and created a system in which challenging those assignments would be expensive and time-consuming.¹³⁴ In 1957, the first schools in North Carolina desegregated in Greensboro, Charlotte, and Winston-Salem.¹³⁵ Desegregation continued slowly, and only 1,865 Black students (less than 0.5 percent of Black students statewide) were attending previously all-white schools by the 1963-1964 school year.¹³⁶ However, Title XI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and stricter compliance guidelines in the school year of 1966-1967 threatened federal funding for schools that remained racially segregated. This led to integration rates steadily rising in North Carolina schools after 1966.¹³⁷

In Taylorsville, the Alexander County Board of Education did not approve a desegregation plan until 1966. This plan allowed for freedom of choice for all students over the age of 15. In 1965, Alexander County School Superintendent Dwight Isenhour visited Happy Plains School (AX0243) to discuss freedom of choice, and at least five Black students chose to attend the formerly all-white Taylorsville High School.¹³⁸ In 1968 or 1969, the dual system ended in Taylorsville, and Happy Plains was converted for use as the Junior High School for a short time.¹³⁹ The Taylorsville High School campus was transformed into Taylorsville Elementary School (AX0179). This involved major physical changes to the campus including demolishing all buildings except the 1950s library, gym, and science building. The original 1856 United Baptist Institute building was demolished in 1976. The integrated Taylorsville Central High School opened on a new campus in 1971, not far from Happy Plains.¹⁴⁰

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The architecture of Taylorsville during the 1960s and 1970s aligns closely with national architectural trends. The construction that occurred necessitated finding space, either through replacing historic buildings or finding vacant land. The postwar trend of constructing buildings away from the center of town was amplified in this period. Commercial properties extended down E. Main Avenue in higher concentration. New residential construction projects often enlarged historic buildings or replaced them. Alternatively, large plats of land were developed into new residential neighborhoods, such as the development along Northwood Park (AX0237, AX0238) northwest of downtown. Domestic construction also occurred on small streets extending off earlier roads, like that along E. Jay Drive west of town. A

¹³⁴ Ransome E. Holcombe, “A Desegregation Study of Public Schools in North Carolina” (East Tennessee State University, 1985): 64, Electronic Theses and Dissertations, <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/2733>.

¹³⁵ Holcombe, “A Desegregation Study,” 89.

¹³⁶ Holcombe, “A Desegregation Study,” 105.

¹³⁷ Holcombe, “A Desegregation Study,” 122, 123.

¹³⁸ Poole, “The United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School,” 26; Teague and Teague, “Happy Plains School,” 278.

¹³⁹ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 282; Poole, “The United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School,” 26.

¹⁴⁰ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 158, 282.

pocket of Ranch house development also extends along Liledoun Road near the ca. 1971 Alexander Central High School (see AX0168, AX0169).



Figure 60. The former United Baptist Institute was demolished in 1976. United Baptist Institute & Taylorsville High School Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

Industrial Architecture

Development of industrial properties in Taylorsville by the 1960s largely constituted the improvement and expansion of already established buildings, while any new construction occurred outside the town limits. The development of the Ideal Frame Company between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s was discussed in the previous section. The nearby Southern Paper Box Company plant also expanded during this period, achieving its current footprint largely between the mid-1950s and 1965, with a small rear addition by 1972. Mimicking the earlier bow truss roof section, several long, arched-roof building blocks were added, drastically increasing the floor space. The last addition, at the building's northwest corner, is a utilitarian one-story brick-veneered section with a flat roof and parapet walls.



Figure 61. A 1972 aerial (right) shows the development of the Southern Paper Box Company (AX0171). The darker roof marks the early section with its bow-truss roof. Aerial photo from NCDOT Historical Aerial Imagery Index.



Figure 62. The Ideal Frame Company (AX0164) addition constructed ca. 1960. Photo by author.

Commercial and Institutional Architecture

Arguably the most significant building project in Taylorsville during the 1970s was the new Brutalist courthouse. The design incorporated the original orientation and setting of the previous courthouse, including mature trees and the Confederate Monument on the courthouse lawn. Its Brutalist design was notable for Taylorsville and Alexander County as a whole. It utilized pre-cast, pebble-finish concrete panels and aluminum ribbon windows. The two courtrooms feature a courtroom-in-the-round design, a court layout popularized in the 1970s. A large courtyard, globe-light lampposts, and large, square planters are part of the courthouse design. In a 1970 *Hickory Daily Record* article, the courthouse is described as “pushing ahead, with roots in the past.”¹⁴¹



Figure 63. Alexander County Courthouse (AX0041) in 1976.
Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.

¹⁴¹ “Roots in Past, Citizens Look Ahead,” *Hickory Daily Record*, June 18, 1970, in AX0041 Alexander County Courthouse Survey File, Western Regional Office File Room, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Asheville, NC.

Several commercial buildings were constructed downtown. On E. Main Avenue, AX0107 (ca. 1965) and AX0108 (ca. 1968) conform relatively seamlessly to the commercial character of earlier buildings. Attached on a commercial block, they maintain the one- to two-story form, brick exterior, large storefront windows, and parapet rooflines seen on other commercial buildings in downtown Taylorsville. The ca. 1970 Walker Building (AX0091) differs from other downtown construction in its long linear form and modernistic details, such as the dark stack-bond brick veneer.

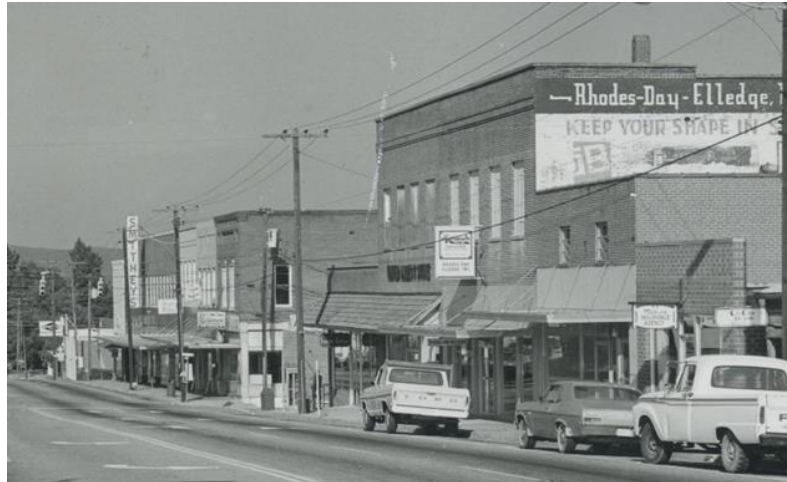


Figure 64. AX0107 and AX0108 are seen at the far-right side of the 1976 photo.
Photo Boxes, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.



Figure 65. The Walker Building (AX0091). Photo by author.

West of downtown, Sam Brookshire developed the Wash and Dry No. 1 (AX0082) and the Modern Cleaners and Laundry (AX0083). The former was a commercial building of concrete block construction with a brick veneer, flat roof, and parapet roofline. The latter employed a stylish Modern design, a partial window wall, and flat roof extending as an awning over the main entrance. The drive-thru window along its east end and the ample parking on the property exemplify the needs of an automobile-oriented society. Brookshire also developed a property for the fast-food chain restaurant, Hardee's, on NC 90 and a carwash in the Westgate Shopping Center, further anticipating changes in consumer habits.¹⁴²

¹⁴² "Satisfaction in Seeing Area Growth Plans Become Reality."

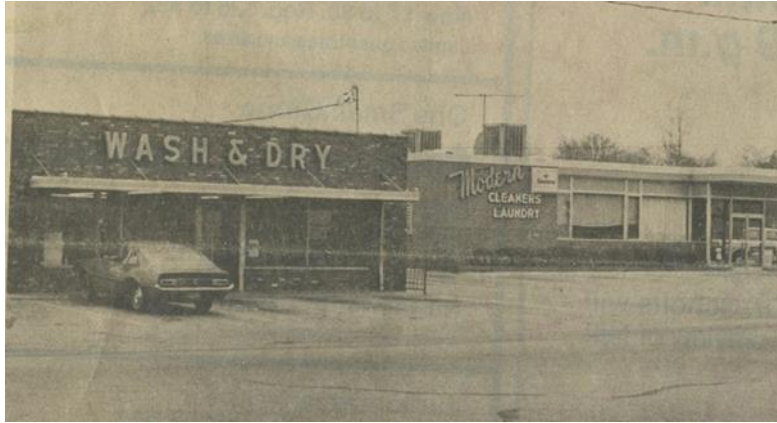


Figure 66. *The Wash & Dry No. 1 (AX0082) and the Modern Cleaners and Laundry (AX0083). Prominent People: Business & Industry Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.*

To the east of Taylorsville, along NC 90, John Tarlton of the Tarlton & Rinaldo Land Company developed the Emerald Inn in 1972-1973. The motel has a long, linear form and stylistic similarities to a Ranch house. Tourist accommodations during this period were often located on major roadways as opposed to downtown, providing easy access for motorists and ample parking for cars within steps of their lodging.¹⁴³ The motel consists of 17 rooms and an office. The roof overhangs a walkway, providing shade and cover to the exterior door opening to each room.



Figure 67. *The Emerald Inn (AX0191). Photo by author.*

The Alexander County Hospital (AX0138) underwent a major 30-bed addition and renovation project in the early 1970s. This addition created a new entrance on the south side of the campus. The exterior displays minimal decorative detail, though its Modern design is emphasized through the use of horizontal bands on each wing. At some point between 1978 and 1988, a new façade was added on the historic entrance (northeast elevation), obscuring the original International Style design. A thick curved awning extends over the drive, supported by a squat concrete pier.

¹⁴³ Bishir et al., *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, 80-81; "County's First Motel, Emerald Inn, Is Now Open," *Taylorsville Times*, January 25, 1973, in Business Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch, Taylorsville, NC.



Figure 68. The Alexander County Hospital addition in 1973. Hospital Vertical File, Local History Room, Alexander County Library Main Branch.



Figure 69. The ca. 1980 facade on the Alexander County Hospital. Photo by author.

Residential Architecture

Following the pattern of commercial buildings, residential construction also was increasingly moving away from downtown. A new neighborhood along Northwood Park was developed northeast of downtown, platted in several stages beginning in 1960. Other construction clustered along 3rd Avenue SW. and 2nd Street SW., Liledoun Road, and 3rd Avenue SE. and Oak Street. New construction also occurred sporadically throughout town along residential and major roadways.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Ranch house form dominated residential construction in Taylorsville. These one-story houses had long, linear footprints with low-pitched, usually side-gable roofs and asymmetrical façades. Some houses included spare Colonial Revival-inspired details (such as AX0213 and AX0198), particularly the square columns and wide entablatures supporting the slope of the front-porch roof. The latter house appears to utilize a split-level floor plan.



Figure 70. AX0213 exhibits elements of the Colonial Revival style on a Ranch house form. Photo by author.

Some houses of this form exhibit details inspired by the Modern architectural movement. AX0155, AX0157, and AX0202 include a broad, prominent exterior chimney that rises against the façade. AX0157 features other details common to Ranch houses, like metal foliate porch supports, a three-part picture window, and a sunken living room on the interior. Reflecting the near ubiquity of automobile ownership, Ranch houses often incorporated attached carports.



Figure 71. AX0157 sits on a large lot just south of downtown. Photo by author.

A particularly distinct and stylish house sits in the Northwood Park neighborhood. Set back from the road and situated on a heavily forested lot, AX0200 employs a long, low form and long band of windows, as well as a wide chimney. Notable and unique in Taylorsville is the prow-roofed wing jutting diagonally from the main block of the house towards the street. Two other notable houses built in the 1980s appear in the neighborhood, including a ca. 1984 Shed-style house (AX0199), as well as a ca. 1985 Ranch house (AX0194) with a deep roof overhang, wide chimney, and patio with a brick knee wall.



Figure 72. A distinctive house in Taylorsville (AX0200). Photo by author.

THE PAST 50 YEARS (1975-PRESENT)

Much of the growth characterizing the previous decades continued into the 1980s and 1990s. The population of, and industry and commercial activity within, Taylorsville continued to grow. New industries continued to open in the 1980s. The Paul Robert Chair Company established itself at the old Happy Plains School (AX0243) in 1983. East of Taylorsville, Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams began operations in 1989. Isenhour Furniture succeeded Champion Packaging at the Southern Paper Box Company facility in 1989. Kincaid Furniture expanded on the east side of town in 2000.¹⁴⁴

Industrial activity in Alexander County began to decline after the turn of the twenty-first century, mirroring the general national economy. Many furniture and textile plants closed for good as companies increasingly began pursuing cheap labor outside of the United States. The closing of businesses and industries has had a large impact on residents. The yearly average unemployment rate rose from a low of 2.2 percent in 1999 (3.3 percent statewide) before peaking during the Great Recession at 14.5 percent in 2009 (11 percent statewide). In the years between, the unemployment rate stayed between roughly 5 percent and 7.5 percent, largely in line with statewide rates. Since 2009, unemployment had been steadily declining, until the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 led to a large unemployment spike again.¹⁴⁵ Affecting both employment and healthcare access, the hospital began financially struggling in the 1990s, eventually closing in 2001. The emergency room was staffed until 2007.¹⁴⁶ Some early businesses and industries have survived, including Ideal Frame Company, Rogers Mill, and Schneider Mills.

While in 2010 the largest employers in the county no longer included furniture manufacturers and textile mills, these industries still maintained high employment rates and an important economic role. In 2011, David Isenhour, working for the Alexander County Economic Development Corporation, emphasized the

¹⁴⁴ "Our Story," Paul Robert, <https://www.paulrobert.com/our-story/>; "Our Company," Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, <https://www.mgbwhome.com/our-company.html>; "About Us," Isenhour Furniture, <http://www.isenhourfurn.com/>; Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 319.

¹⁴⁵ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 312-313; "Unemployment Rate in Alexander County, NC," FRED Economic Data, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NCALEX3URN>; "Unemployment Rate in North Carolina," FRED Economic Data, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NCUR>.

¹⁴⁶ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 256.

furniture industry's importance in the local economy, saying, "The economic well-being of Alexander County will, for the foreseeable future, be largely dependent upon the furniture industry," noting a promising slowdown in outsourcing.¹⁴⁷ In 2021, manufacturing dominated the economy; over a third of workers in the county are still employed in the manufacturing industries. Manufacturing is followed by public administration (11 percent), educational services (8 percent), and retail trade (8 percent).¹⁴⁸

The pattern of commercial business moving away from the downtown core has continued. The establishment of a Wal-Mart south of town in the late 1980s, which expanded to a SuperCenter in the early 2000s, likely lent to the decline of downtown due to the convenience of one-stop shopping and the low prices a national retail corporation can offer to local consumers. Around 1995, US Highway 64 was routed through Alexander County, and its route bypassed the downtown core to the south, instead passing near the Wal-Mart.¹⁴⁹ This pattern led to vacancies and eventually physical deterioration of building stock, which can be seen in photographs and Google Street View imagery from the first two decades of the 2000s. However, promising downtown development in recent years has included new businesses opening in downtown buildings. Likewise, recent interest in historic preservation prompted the National Register of Historic Places listing of the Taylorsville Milling Company in 2019. The Hotel Campbell-Hotel Alexander and Rogers Mill, as well as a downtown historic district, were also recently added to the North Carolina Study List, a preliminary step toward listing in the National Register.

¹⁴⁷ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 316.

¹⁴⁸ NC Department of Commerce, "County Profiles: Alexander County NC," May 2022, <https://accessnc.nccommerce.com/DemoGraphicsReports/pdfs/countyProfile/NC/37003.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Alex History Group, *Alexander County Treasures*, 330, 336.

FINDINGS

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY UPDATE

The 1986-1987 two-county architectural survey documented 11 individual resources within the current town limits of Taylorsville, as well as the central downtown business district. Of the 11 resources, all are extant. However, the majority of the properties have experienced some loss of integrity, though minimal, since the 1986-1987 survey. These integrity changes are characterized by potentially reversible partial porch enclosures on the R. K. Moose House (AX0043) and the Feimster House (AX0047). Windows have been replaced at the Little-Bell House (AX0049), and the Wade Campbell House (AX0013) has received a new door and sidelights, as well as an asphalt roof replacing its historic tile roof. The Rock Store (AX0044) and Masonic Building (AX0042) have been reclad. The Rock Store's distinctive stone exterior now is covered in stucco, while the Masonic Building's exterior second-story stair, along with various windows on the north elevation, have been covered with vinyl siding. The Alexander County Jail (AX0048), Alexander County Courthouse (AX0041), Walter Watts House (AX0037), and the Taylorsville Milling Company (AX0033) appear largely unchanged. Due to insufficient photo or documentary evidence from the 1986-1987 survey, it is unclear if the George W. Watts House (AX0046) received siding or window replacements between the 1986 survey and 2021.



*Figure 73. The R. K. Moose House (AX0043) received a partial porch enclosure.
Left: Photo taken by Vickie Mason in 1986, AX0043 Survey File in HPO. Right: Photo by author.*

Overall, the downtown commercial district documented by Vickie Mason retains much of its integrity. The commercial buildings retain their masonry exteriors, sloped roofs with parapets, and minimal brick detailing along cornice lines. The most drastic alteration is seen on the *Taylorsville Times* building (AX0094). Between 1986 and 2021, a unifying brick veneer was applied over three historic storefronts. The Smithey's building (AX0100), in contrast, had an aluminum veneer in 1986-1987 that was removed prior to the 2021 survey to reveal distinctive brick coursing.



Figure 74. The Taylorsville Times building (AX0094). Top: Photo taken by Vickie Mason in 1986, AX0040 Survey File in HPO. Bottom: Photo by author.



Figure 75. The Smithey's Building's projecting brick courses were concealed at the time of Vickie Mason's survey (AX0100). Top: Photo taken by Vickie Mason in 1986, AX0040 Survey File in HPO. Right: Photo by author.

RESULTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY

At the scoping stage, the Taylorsville survey was expected to result in the documentation of approximately 130 buildings. After the completion of fieldwork, 176 individual buildings were surveyed, 165 of which were newly surveyed. Over half of the properties surveyed were residential, with commercial buildings constituting just under a third.

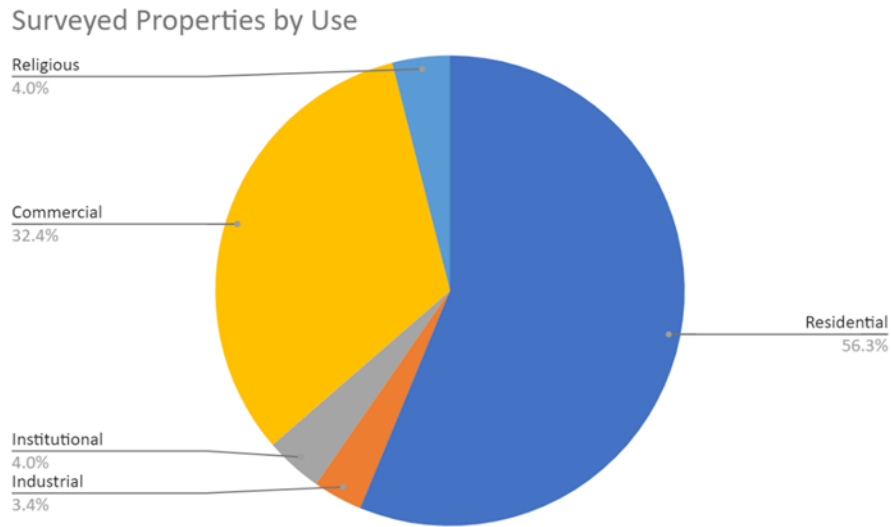


Figure 76. Surveyed properties separated by historic use. Chart generated by author via Google Sheets.

Commercial buildings, religious buildings, and institutional buildings were all largely concentrated in the downtown core and along NC 90, with a few individual properties scattered elsewhere in town. Industrial development centered around the railroad and on either side of NC 16 south of downtown. Residential development was much more widespread, with dwellings along major roadways, as well as smaller residential roads to the north and south of downtown. Construction of surveyed properties ranged in date from ca. 1870 to ca. 1990, with roughly two-thirds constructed post-World War II. This is largely due to the loss of older buildings over time through neglect, demolition, and fires, as well as the accelerated rate of construction in the postwar era.

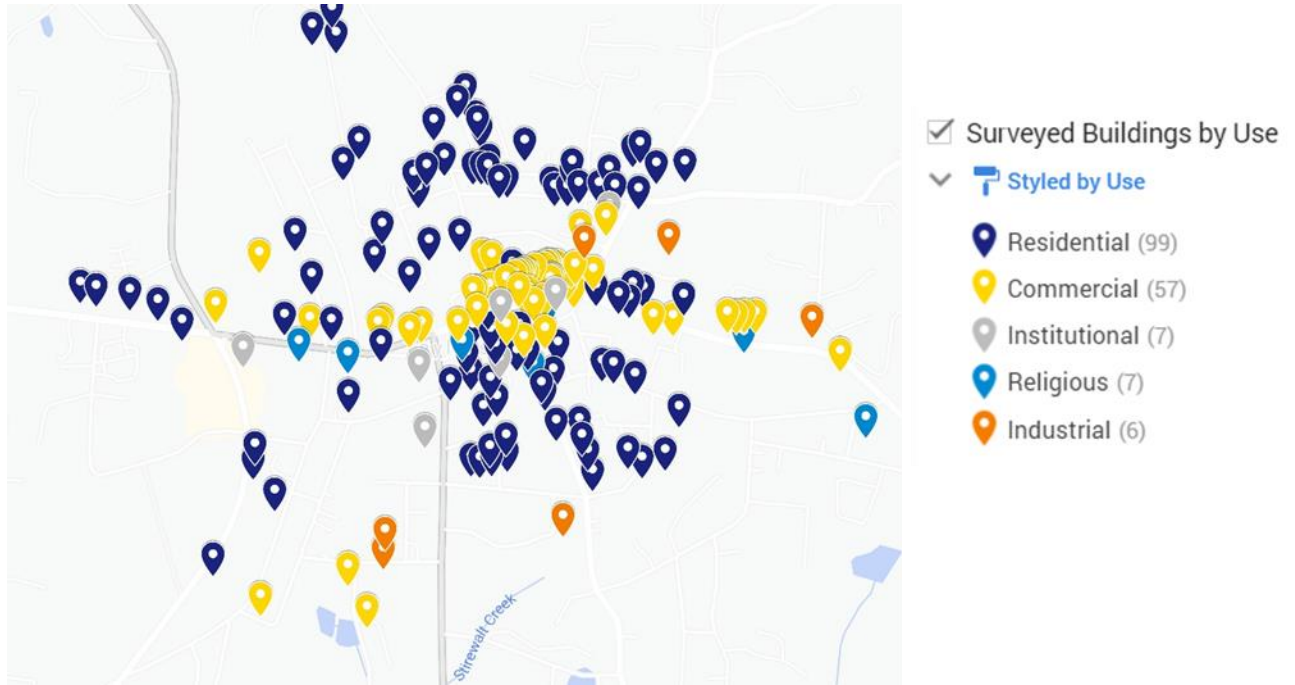


Figure 77. Geographic distribution of surveyed properties by historic use. Map generated by author via Google Maps.

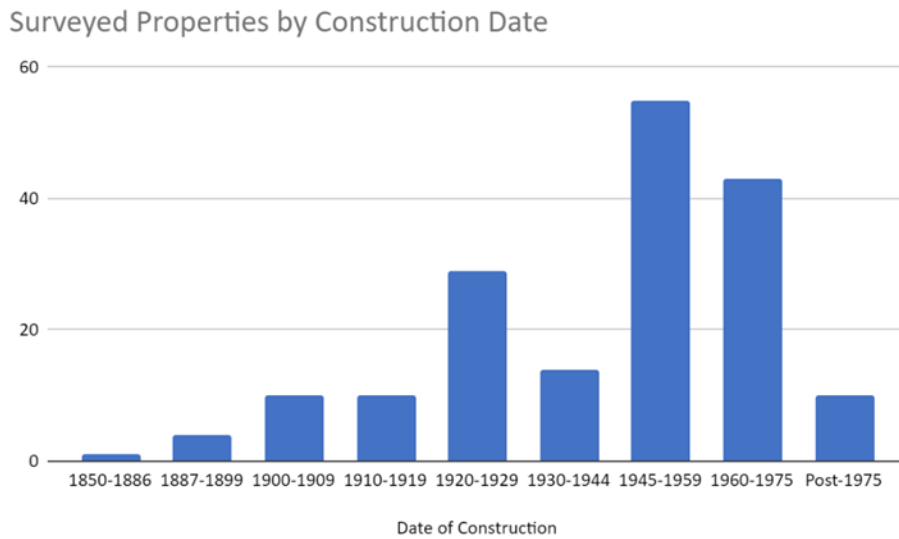


Figure 78. Surveyed properties by construction date. Chart generated by author via Google Sheets. Note: these dates are not separated evenly and are based on the time periods described in this report. Some dates are estimates.

General geographic trends reveal that earlier construction (to 1929), represented on the map below in the yellow-red range, is concentrated downtown and along NC 90, with some scattered development elsewhere. Later construction, represented by the blue-green shades (from 1930), extended farther from the historic core, likely as automobility improved and new neighborhoods developed at a greater distance.

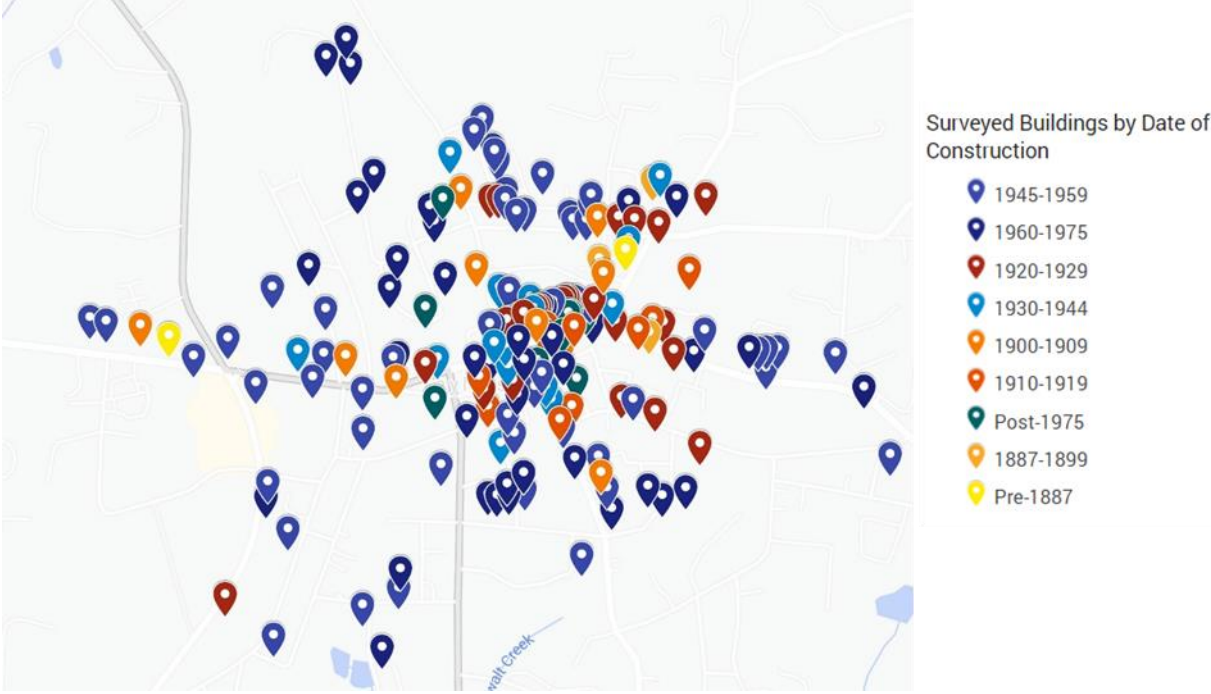


Figure 79. Geographic distribution of surveyed properties by approximate construction date. Properties built between 1850 and 1929 are represented by the yellow, orange, and red shades. Properties built between 1930 and 1990 are represented by the blue and green shades. Map generated by author via Google Maps.

Note: Some dates are estimated, and this map only reflects general trends.

NORTH CAROLINA STUDY LIST RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this survey, the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District was presented to the National Register Advisory Committee in June 2021 and was subsequently placed on the state's Study List. Taylorsville's downtown served as an important social, commercial, and political hub for Alexander County throughout the twentieth century, and its physical fabric remains a testament to the history and development of the town. The Downtown Taylorsville Historic District appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A for significance in the area of commerce and potentially under Criteria C for architecture.



Figure 80. Block north of the courthouse. Photo by author.



Figure 81. The boundaries of the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District as proposed for the Study List in 2021. Photo from HPOWeb.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research could be conducted at the Feimster House (AX0047) and the Poole House (AX0181). While both houses retain fairly intact and impressive exteriors, the interiors were not accessible during this survey. According to Jeremiah Johnson, a Taylorsville native, both houses retain much of their original interior fabric.¹⁵⁰

Further research may be warranted in Ruf-Wood Park (AX0237) and Northwood Park (AX0238) northwest of downtown Taylorsville in the coming years. The neighborhoods appear to have developed between the 1960s and 1980s and retain an intact collection of residential architecture from the period. Much of the neighborhood consists of somewhat typical Ranch houses, though several from the 1970s and 1980s display a higher degree of finish and a greater recognition of national architectural trends. As these homes “age in” according to the “50-year rule” and further research is completed, a potential district or individual Study List candidate may be identified.

¹⁵⁰ Jeremiah Johnson, email correspondence with author, December 7 and 9, 2021.

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