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Introduction

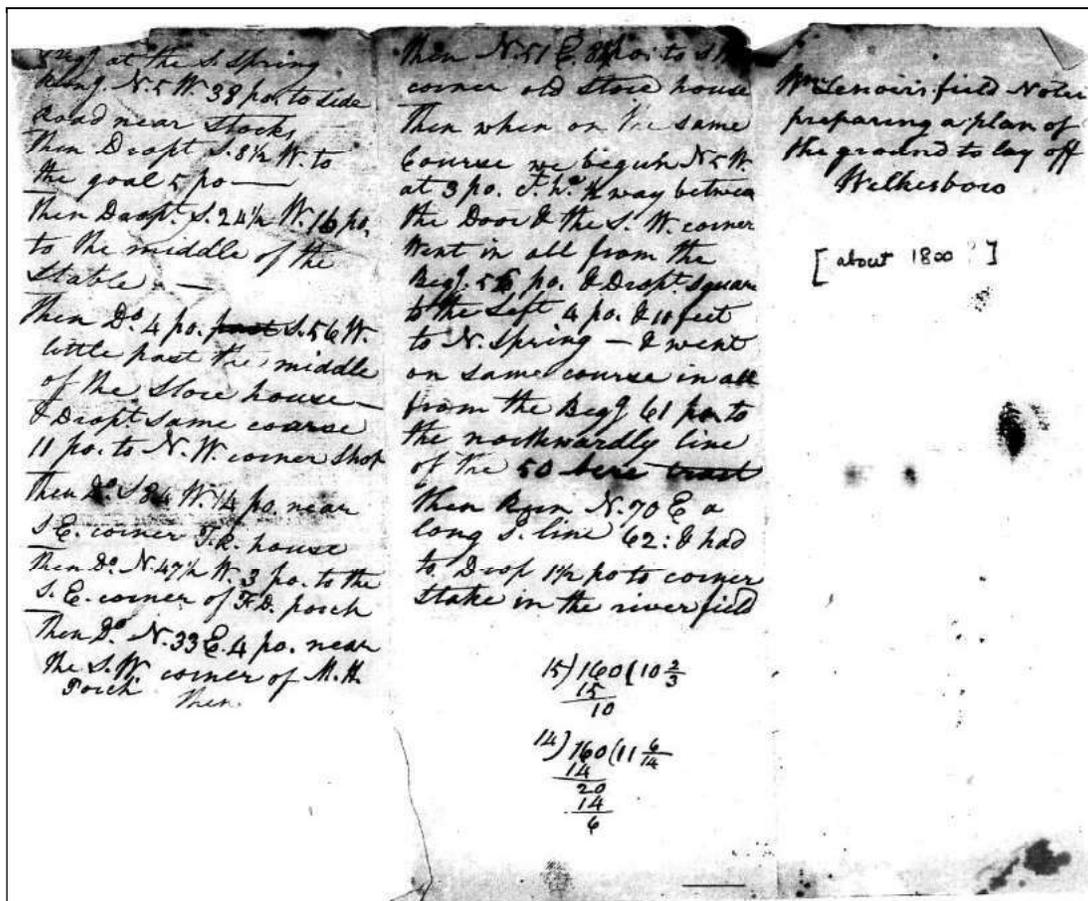
In March 2024 I was at the Wilkes County Public Library looking for any records, documents, or other historical information that I hadn't seen before. I found myself at the microfilm cabinets, and I pulled out one of the 34 reels of microfilm in the Lenoir Family Papers collection. Since 2014, I have been working on a project to map all Wilkes County land grants, and I'm always on the lookout for old maps that might provide clues to help me place the 8,000 land grant puzzle pieces into their proper position on the map. The reel that I pulled was labeled "Land Records" and I hoped that it would include surveys or maps from the early days of the county. I was in luck! William Lenoir was a surveyor – among many other things – and his papers included many pages of survey notes, maps, deeds, and court cases that would be very helpful for that project.

I recognized one of the pages as a map of Wilkesboro. I had seen surveys of the town from 1807, 1848, and 1891, but this particular one in William Lenoir's papers was dated May 21, 1800. This was the first map of the town, and it even said so on the back. I had never seen this version before. What stories could it reveal? I eventually found another related document several images away from it on the same microfilm reel that had survey notes identifying key buildings within the 50-acre town. I used the metes and bounds from the survey notes to draw those features in my land grants map. When I overlaid Lenoir's town survey on top of that, it soon revealed the locations of the original Wilkes County courthouse, the jail, stables, storehouses, and residences. All of these places were on the north side of Main Street between West Street and the Community Commons.

But I wasn't finished with Lenoir's survey. I was intrigued by the distinct layout of 36 town lots situated among a grid of streets that was largely unchanged for 225 years. I've always enjoyed organizing information to make it easier to understand and to learn from it, and this newly-found information provided an exciting foundation on which to do that. While there are different histories for the town of Wilkesboro, I haven't seen research that took an in-depth look at each of the town lots using a wide variety of sources. This book is an attempt to tell the story of these original town lots from 1800 into the early 1900s. Using William Lenoir's map as our guide, we'll get to know the people, places, and events that occurred within the original 50-acre town boundary during the Wilkesboro's first 100+ years.

While the book is divided into chapters dedicated to each lot, I quickly learned that each lot is not an isolated story. Many lots were combined and subdivided multiple times. Often one individual owned multiple lots, and sometimes ownership for one lot was shared jointly by two or more individuals. By taking all of these stories together, we start to get a sense of what Wilkesboro was like during the 1800s. We learn about the families who lived here, about the businesses that they operated, and about how we got to where we are today.

A wide variety of sources were used to tell the story of Wilkesboro's early history including deeds, court records, census and vital records, wills, newspaper articles, local history books, historic assessments, maps, and photographs. Still yet, there is always more to the story. Many of these people and places could be the subject of their own entire book, but yet they are only briefly mentioned here. William Lenoir's role in developing the town is discussed, but nothing is said of his lifelong disdain for fellow Revolutionary War patriot James Welborn. The Moravian land dispute lasted for over three decades, but it only receives a paragraph. Wilkes County was home to many Civil War veterans with harrowing stories of survival, but here they are often only mentioned in regards to land that they owned in town. This book refers to at least 19 men in Wilkesboro who served as doctors, but little time is spent on their medical practices and the impacts that they made in the growth of the town. It is impossible to cover every avenue of every story in a single book. My hope is that this book will serve as a foundation and reference for further research that unlocks more of the rich history of the people, places, and events in the town of Wilkesboro and Wilkes County.



Lenoir Family Papers, reel 26, folder 4.4.3

William Lenoir's survey notes reveal the locations of the county's courthouse, jail, and other buildings in 1800, before the streets of Wilkesboro were laid out.

Setting The Stage

The Wilkes County court met for the first time in March 1778, three months after the North Carolina General Assembly created the new county. On June 3, a group of commissioners appointed by the General Assembly determined that “the place where the Mulberry Meeting House stands” would be the most suitable place to erect a courthouse, prison, pillory, and stocks. Although they determined where the town would be constructed, they took no action to do so. Jumping ahead to 1795, the General Assembly again ordered the Wilkes County commissioners to erect the public buildings, but again nothing was done. Finally, in November 1799, the General Assembly repealed the 1795 order and issued another, more specific order that called for the creation of streets and public buildings, and within six months, the county had finally created plans for a new town. By the end of 1800, a new courthouse had been built.

There were a few reasons why it took 22 years for Wilkes County to create a formal place of government. The first obstacle was the constant focus on events associated with the Revolutionary War. The county was created during the middle of an extremely chaotic period when finances were tight and attention was diverted to more immediate concerns. Setting up a more permanent county government was not necessarily the most pressing issue.

There was potentially a lack of interest by the local justices. As William Lenoir’s survey showed, the county already had a courthouse and jail before he laid out the public streets. However, those buildings were not located on public land, and the courthouse was drafty and poorly suited for its purpose. Raleigh attorney Alexander Martin remembered attending Wilkes County court in 1780 when it was held in “an open log house” that he described as being very inconvenient and uncomfortable.

After the war, the primary challenge associated with constructing a county seat was a dispute over ownership of the land where the town would be built. In 1752, the Moravian Brethren purchased two large tracts comprising 8,773 acres along the Yadkin River from the office of Lord Granville, British proprietor of the Granville District in North Carolina. Although they never lived on the property, the Moravians owned this land until 1778 when they sold it to Hugh Montgomery of Salisbury in Rowan County. Montgomery died in 1779, and his huge estate was held in trust for his two young daughters, Rebecca and Rachel, until they married.

Meanwhile, dozens of families began moving to the area and settling on this unoccupied land. From the 1760s into the 1790s, rumors circulated that the Moravians already owned the land along the Yadkin River, but the arrival of more settlers continued. In 1778, the county land office opened, and individuals were able to purchase unclaimed land from the State of North Carolina for the first time. Families took a chance by purchasing state grants for land that overlapped the large tracts claimed by the Moravians. By doing so, these settlers were just one

court case away from being evicted for trespassing. In the 1780s, some of these families were eager to sell their land to others who were less risk averse. The buyers usually paid below market prices compared to similar land that was not in dispute. Many of these deeds reference the lack of a clear title by noting an exception to the Moravian claim. Many buyers intentionally chose not to buy land on the Moravian claim, opting instead for land just outside of it.

Ownership of this land was further complicated by the fact that the Moravians sold at least some of their claim to the University of North Carolina in 1780. While they had sold it to Hugh Montgomery in 1778, he had not yet fully paid for it before his death. With the encroachment by dozens of settlers, they feared they might never be paid, and it seems that the university was a backup buyer.

By 1799, representatives of the Moravian Brethren took the settlers to court in an effort to remove them from their land. William Lenoir led the defense, and he continued to do so for the next 30 years. The courts, including the North Carolina Supreme Court, ruled against him multiple times, but he filed multiple appeals and presented new evidence in an effort to overturn the verdict. Finally, during the 1820s, settlers who had cultivated farms on the Moravian claims either had to move or buy land from the rightful owners.

Not only was 1799 the year that the court case with the Moravians began, but it was also the year that the General Assembly created Ashe County from the northern and western parts of Wilkes. With Wilkes now less than half its previous size, the growing community on the south bank of the Yadkin River was more centrally located within the county. The General Assembly ordered the Wilkes County commissioners to purchase 50 acres of land on which to build the public buildings, and the area around the Mulberry Fields Meeting house was selected.

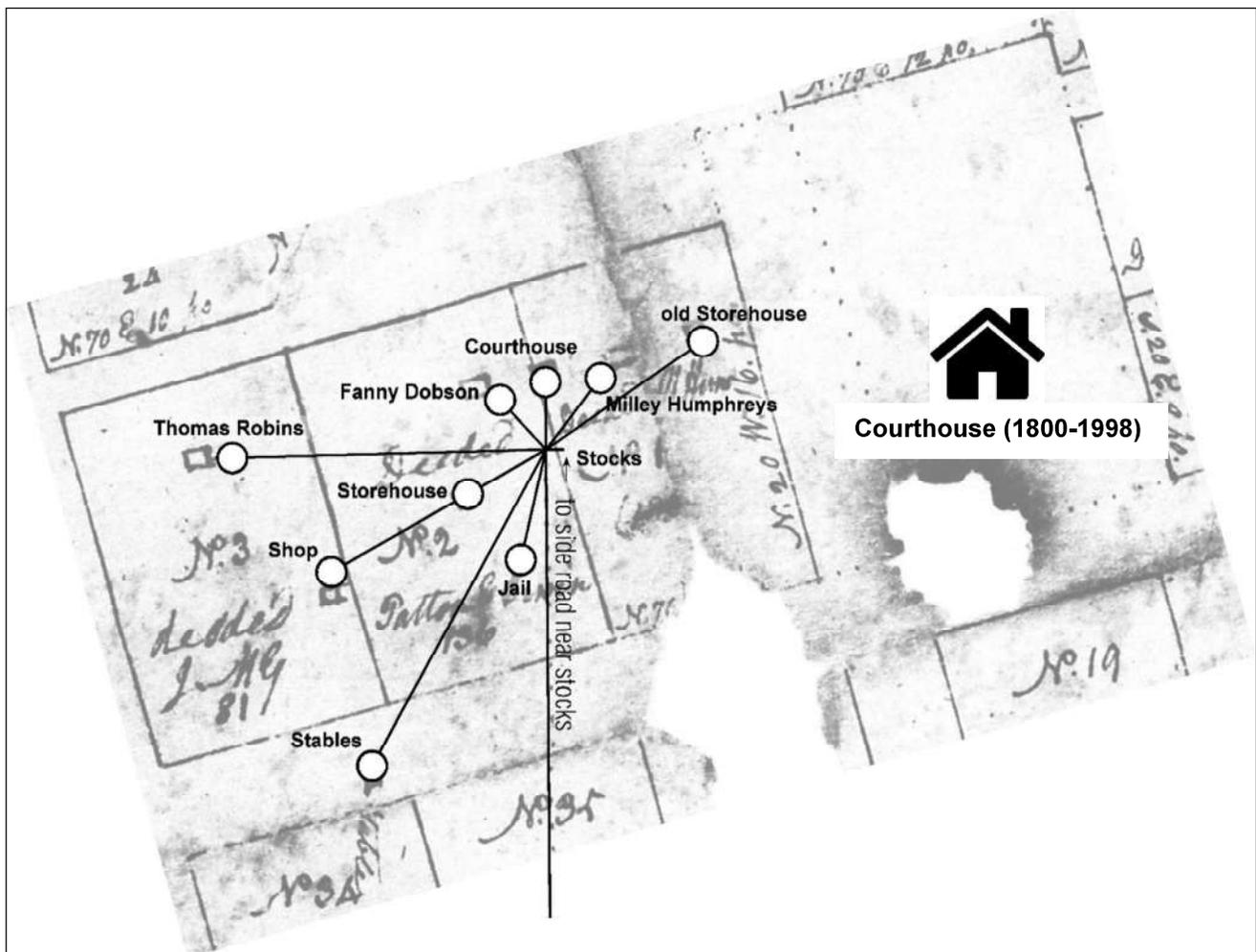
Because of the dispute over ownership, land for the new town was purchased by the county commissioners from three separate parties. By this time, Hugh Montgomery's daughters had married, and they had inherited the two tracts that totaled 8,773 acres. Rebecca married James Welborn in 1794, and Rachel married Montfort Stokes in 1796. They sold 50 acres to the commissioners for £5 on May 7, 1800 (DB C1, p328). It is sometimes written that Rebecca and Rachel were twins, but they were not. Depositions from the Moravian land dispute include testimony by Sarah Gordon and Jane Brown clearly stating that the girls were about two years apart. Rebecca was likely born in November 1777, and Rachel was born in 1779.

The commissioners also purchased land from the University of North Carolina. The deed addresses the fact that "doubts have arisen that the university of the state aforesaid may claim a right to said lands as escheted ... that said claim should be extinguished." They sold the same 50 acres to the commissioners on May 8, 1800, for one penny (DB D, p844).

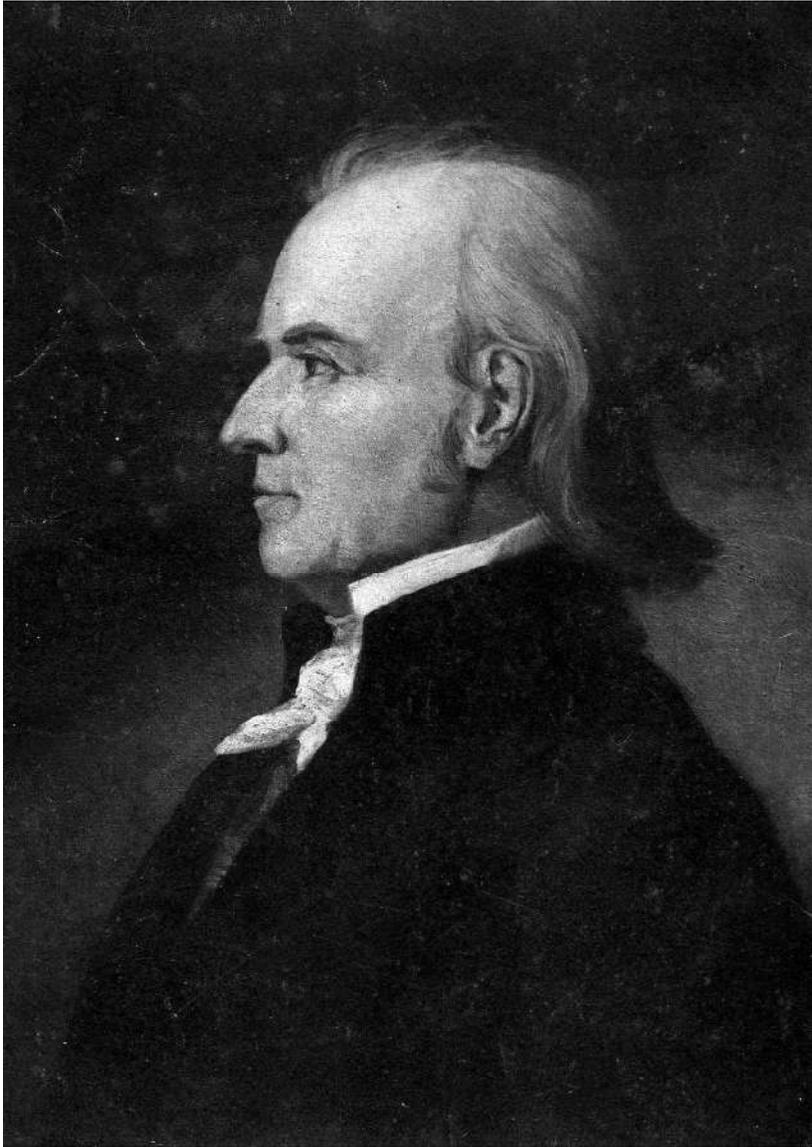
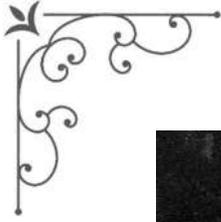
The third and final claim to the land was that of the settlers who had purchased it through state land grants and from subsequent deeds. While they would eventually lose their case, the rightful ownership of this 50-acre tract was far from being settled in 1800. William Lenoir sold

the western 22 acres for \$88 (DB D, p846). Mary Gordon sold the eastern 25 acres for \$100 (DB D, p847). John Dobson owned the middle 3 acres where the original courthouse was located, and he sold it for one penny (DB D, p845). Each of these transactions were made on May 8, 1800.

With these five deeds, Wilkes County had finally obtained clear ownership of the 50 acres that became the original town of Wilkesboro. It was only 13 days later, on May 21, 1800, that William Lenoir surveyed the property and laid out the streets and town lots. One day after that, they were put up for auction.



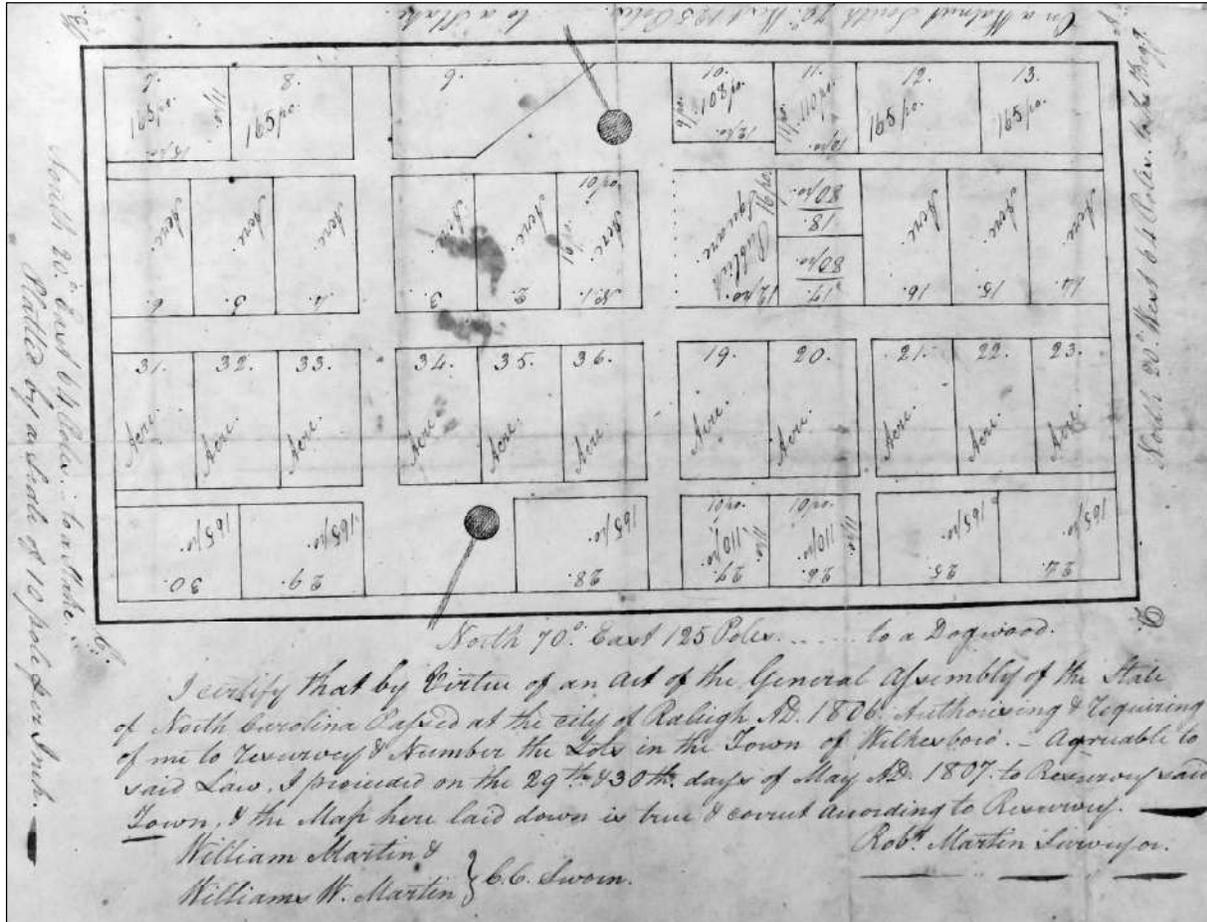
The nine marked locations are buildings noted on William Lenoir's 1800 survey. Before the streets of the new town of Wilkesboro were laid out, the courthouse was on the line between lots #1 and #2. The jail was 160 feet south of it on lot #2. All of these structures were on lots #1 through #3.



William Lenoir (1751 – 1839)

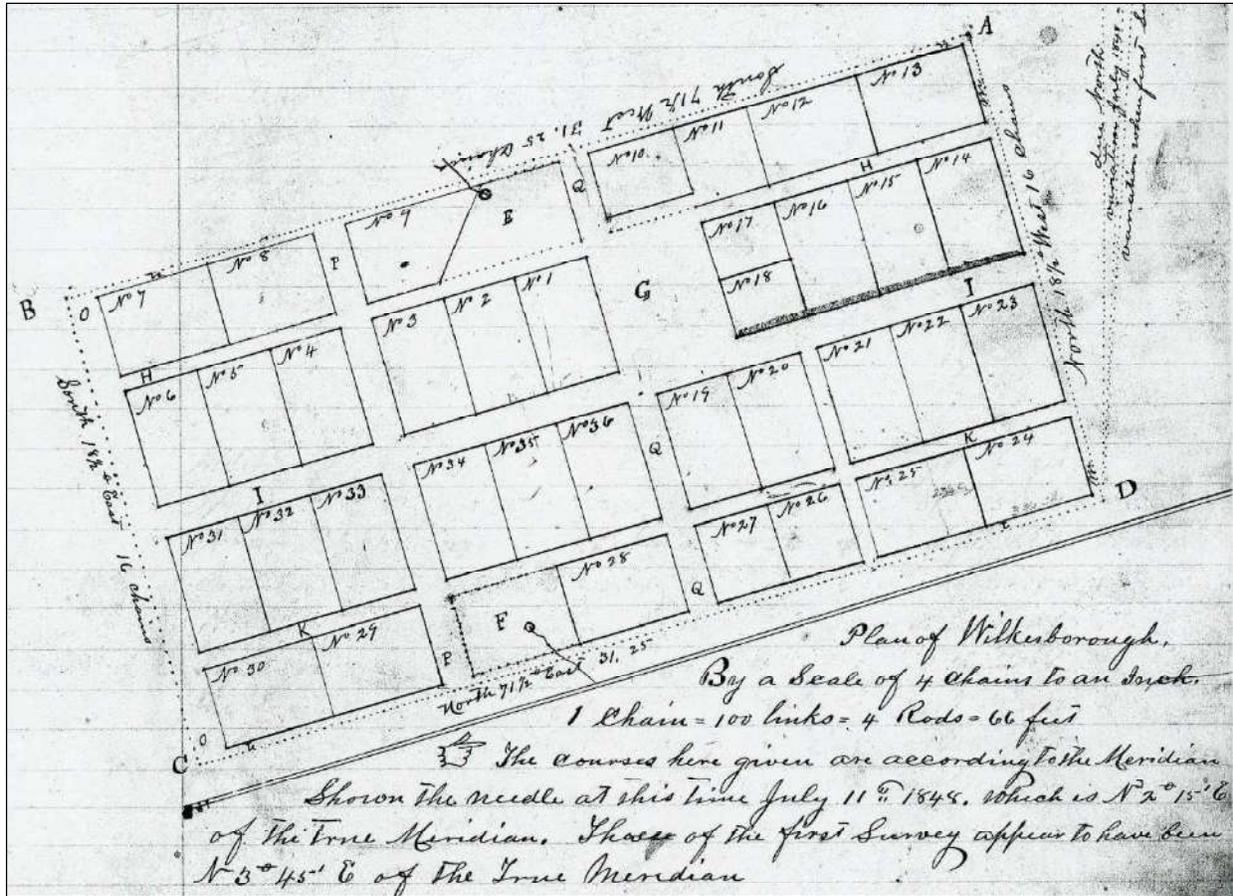


1807 Survey



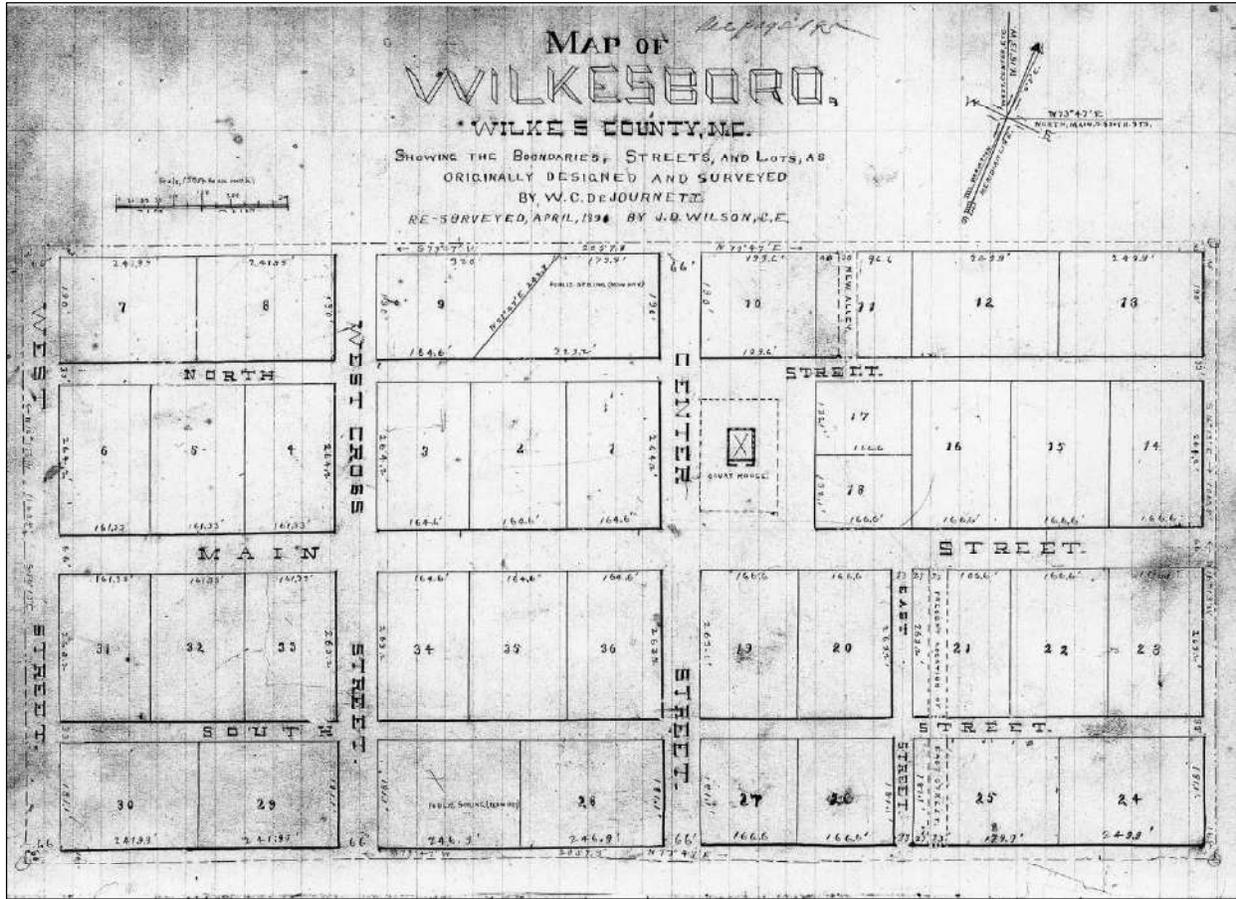
On May 29th and 30th, 1807, Robert Martin re-surveyed the town as directed by an 1806 order from the General Assembly in Raleigh. The chain carriers who assisted with the survey were William Martin and William W. Martin. There were no noticeable differences from Lenoir's 1800 survey.

1848 Survey



On July 10th and 11th, 1848, W. C. Dejournett made a new survey of the town of Wilkesboro. While the two earlier surveys were oriented at 20° from north, this survey is drawn at 18.5° from north. This difference was due to the variability in magnetic declination where magnetic north drifts over time. Dejournett noted that the earlier surveys used a magnetic declination of 3.75°, while he measured a value of 2.25° in 1848. There were no changes to the dimensions of the lots. This survey was recorded in Wilkes DB 13, p195.

1891 Survey



On March 9, 1891, the Wilkesboro town commissioners passed an order for a new town survey. The mayor hired John D. Wilson to perform the work, and he was assisted by J. F. Somers. They surveyed on March 27 and April 4, 1891, using Dejournett's 1848 survey as a guide.

This survey shows lot #10 behind the courthouse in line with other lots on the north side of North Street. It also shows East Street relocated 60 feet east of its original location. It also shows a new alley on lot #11 which would later be named Harding Hill Drive.

The east-west streets are named as they are today: North Street, Main Street, and South Street. The north-south streets are named West Street (today, Woodland Boulevard), West Cross Street (today, West Street), Center Street (today, Bridge Street), and East Street.

The town was surveyed to be oriented 16.22° from magnetic north, updating the magnetic declination recorded in 1848.

This survey was recorded in Wilkes DB 13, p210.

The Lots

Lot #1

Original Lot Size:

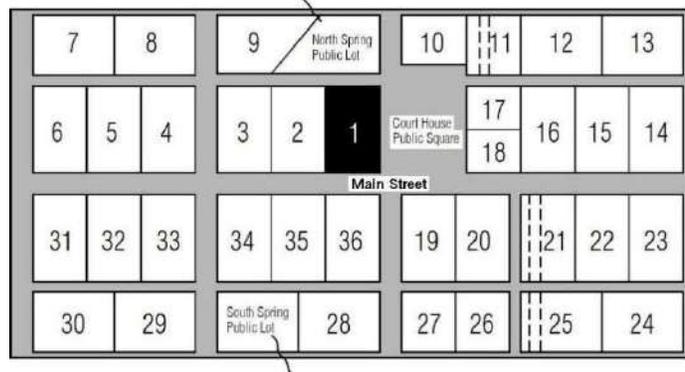
1 acre

Primary Addresses Today:

100, 102 W. Main St

Notable Properties:

- Waugh-Peden House
- Lowe Building (Rock Building)
- Community Commons Park



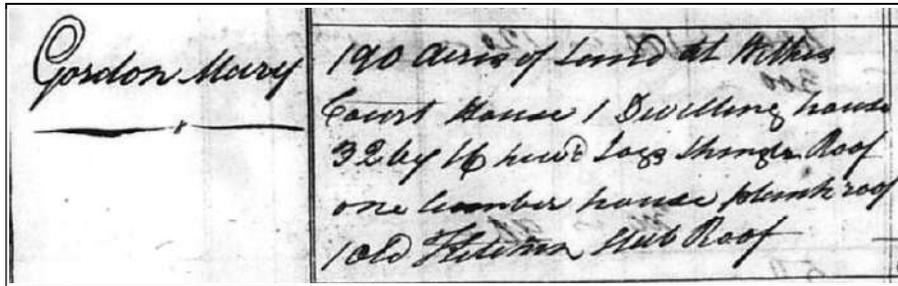
Earliest Owners

Date	Source	From	To
August 1, 1801	DB F1, p14	Commissioners	Milley Humphries
January 6, 1808	DB F2, p37	Mildred, John, Elizabeth, and Sarah Humphries	Waugh & Finley
May 10, 1845	DB T, p24	John Finley	William P. Waugh



On August 1, 1801, William Lenoir, chairman of the county court, sold lot #1 to Milley Humphries by deed for \$4.¹ Out of the 36 town lots, this appears to be the only one that was not sold at auction. William Lenoir’s papers include at least two documents that list the purchasers and prices for each of the town lots, and neither one has an entry for lot #1. Perhaps this is because the Humphries home was on land that Milley’s mother Mary Gordon was forced to sell for the creation of the town of Wilkesboro. There could have been an agreement that allowed the family to keep their home and pay only a customary price for the lot.

William Lenoir’s 1800 survey of the new town shows three structures on the one-acre tract that became lot #1. On the eastern side was the “old store house”, perhaps a general store or mercantile business that was in use during and immediately after the Revolutionary War. Closer to the middle of the lot was the home of Milley Humphries. This was a relatively large home that measured 32’ x 16’.² The county courthouse stood at the western edge of the lot.³ All three of these historic buildings were located on what is today Community Commons Park.



Lenoir Family Papers, subseries 6.1.2, folders 672-4

The 1798 federal tax list for Wilkes County includes an entry for Mary Gordon who was taxed on 190 acres “at Wilkes Court House,” a house 32’ x 16’ made of hewed logs and a shingle roof, one lumber house with a plank roof, and one old kitchen with a slab roof.

County court records documented an argument that occurred in late February 1787 at the tavern, or mercantile store, operated by Spencer and Milley Humphries. This likely was at the “old store house” shown on Lenoir’s map, particularly since the store was only sixty feet from the Humphries home. William Wilson Jr. testified that he was inside the tavern one evening when Milley Humphries was serving James Fletcher a drink. The two began arguing about how much Fletcher had paid and how much Milley had given him back in change. Wilson stepped outside to get some fresh air, and soon Milley came out to go into the kitchen which was a separate building. Suddenly, Milley’s daughter Fanny ran out of the tavern and told her mother that Fletcher had hit her. Milley sprang into action and ran into the tavern to confront Fletcher. Wilson followed behind her, and when he got to the door he saw Milley and Fletcher struggling with each other, both holding opposite ends of a long stick. Milley got the advantage and pushed Fletcher out the door. Wilson rushed inside and locked the door behind him, keeping Fletcher outside.⁴

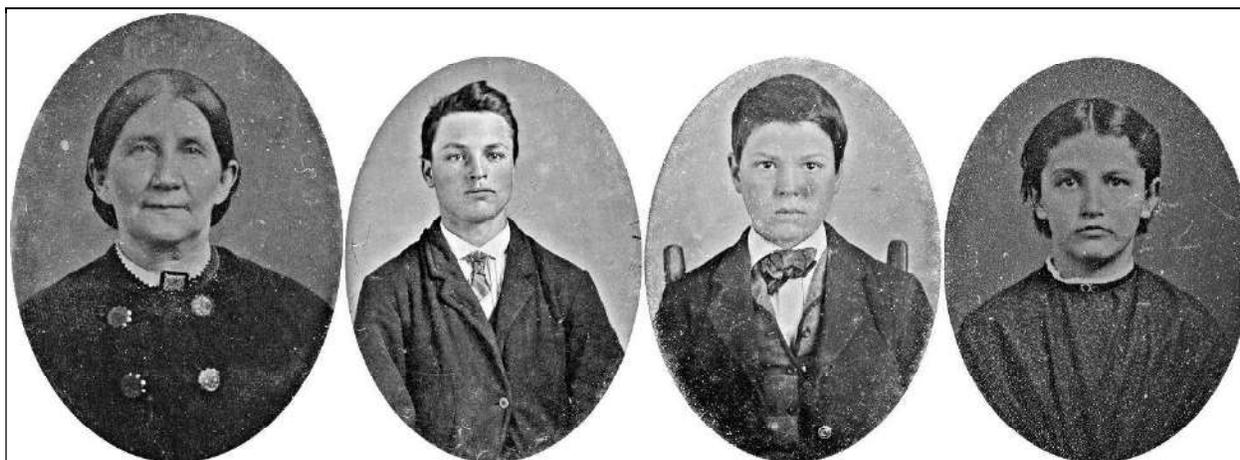
Six months later, Wilson, as a witness before the court, stated that he never saw Fletcher hurt either Milley or her daughter Fanny. He also said that Fanny had no visible injuries. The courthouse was only 120 feet from the tavern, so the case was being heard at the site of the incident. It should also be noted that James Fletcher was one of the justices who regularly presided over the court. The surviving documents do not provide the verdict, but based on Wilson’s testimony, it seems likely that Fletcher was found not guilty of assault.⁴

Twenty years later, on January 6, 1808, Mildred Humphries, John Humphries, Elizabeth Humphries, and Sarah Humphries sold lot #1 to Waugh & Finley for \$1,000.⁵ Presumably, this is Milley and three of her children. The property was described as including the garden and houses where Mildred Humphries lived, and, while court records are incomplete, they suggest that Milley did not want to sell the property. Partially torn documents describe unsuccessful late-day discussions that she had with Allen Robinett and Nelson Robinett to search for a way to convince the court to delay collection of her debts. She owed money to John Brown Jr., and he

had filed an execution with the court to recover those debts.⁶ Her efforts to retain the property failed, and she was forced to sell the lot. However, it is possible that she and her family continued to live there by paying rent to Waugh & Finley.

In 1835, William P. Waugh paid taxes on the lot based on a value of \$3,000.⁷ A decade later, in 1845, John Finley sold his share of four town lots (#1, #2, #3, and #14) to his business partner William P. Waugh. At that time, lot #1 was described as including “the house and garden where Col. Waugh keeps a store, and the house where Mrs. Mary T. Peden now lives.”⁸

A letter written to Thomas Felix Hickerson in 1939 for his book *Happy Valley* stated that the Waugh-Peden house – later called the Horton house – was built by William Pitt Waugh as a wedding present for his nephew William Waugh Peden who married Mary Taylor Williams in 1839. W. W. Peden died in 1844. Hickerson wrote that William P. Waugh, a bachelor, lived in this house beside the courthouse until his death in 1852. He left the property in trust to his nephew’s widow Mary T. Peden for the benefit of her children.⁹



Wilkes Heritage Museum

Individual tintype photos of Mary Taylor Williams Peden Barber (1819-1882) and her children John Peden (1840-1914), Joseph Peden (1841-1884), and Fanny Peden (1843-1916). c1853.

The Waugh-Peden house was built between 1839 and 1844 near the center of lot #1 facing Main Street. William Pitt Waugh died on August 14, 1852, and with the settlement of his estate, lot #1 was divided into smaller lots. As the town of Wilkesboro grew around it, this historic house remained standing for over a century until it was torn down in the 1950s.



Bayard Morgan Wooten Photographic Collection

Folder 3-1-136 (141), C2344. Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill Library.

The Waugh-Peden house was built on lot #1 between 1839 and 1844. Photo c1930s.

Division of Lot #1 – North and West Portions

The majority of the lot – marked as A and B following the next page – was held by the heirs of William P. Waugh until May 3, 1876, when Joseph W. Peden, John T. Peden, and Fanny W. Peden, sold it to Alexander Hamilton Horton for \$1,050.¹⁰



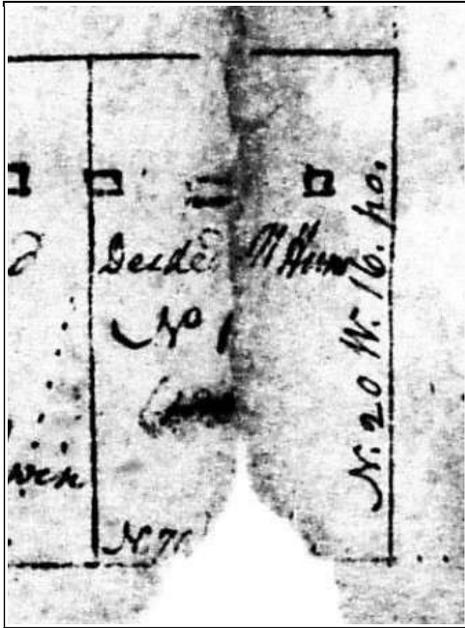
<https://longislandgenealogy.com/barna008.htm>

Alexander Hamilton Horton (1831-1890)

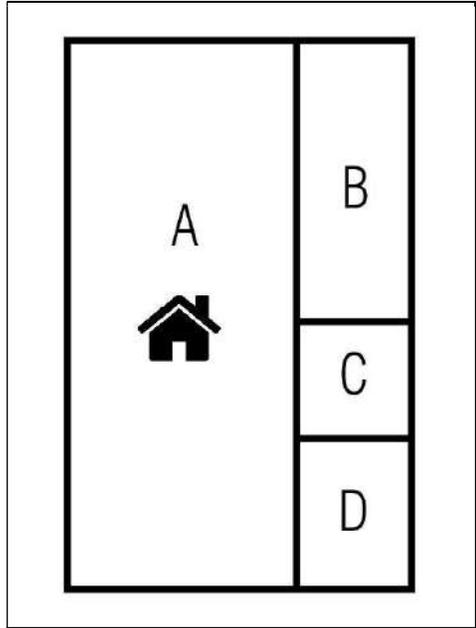
Horton died in 1890, and on June 13, 1899, a committee divided his town lot among his heirs with a note that it would not take effect until after the death of his widow, Mary Vogler Horton. His son Phineas E. Horton received the northeast corner of lot #1 (tract B as noted in the image above) which measured 54 feet by 143 feet. The western part of the lot (tract A), known as the house lot, was allotted to his son Hamilton V. Horton. This fronted Main Street 110 feet and ran northward to the back street a distance of 264 feet. It bordered the Prevette lot on the west.¹¹ In 1903, a note in the newspaper announced that Calvin J. Cowles and his family had moved into the Horton house.¹²

Phineas' portion at the northeast corner of the lot was eventually acquired by his brother Hamilton. On June 12, 1929, after Hamilton's death, his heirs sold the Horton lot (tracts A and B) to pioneering herb dealer Adrian F. Phillips for \$5,200. The northwest boundary of the Horton tract ran to the end of an old rock wall, and at the southwest corner, it ran to "Main Street at the edge of the steps to the Will Pearson store-house."¹³

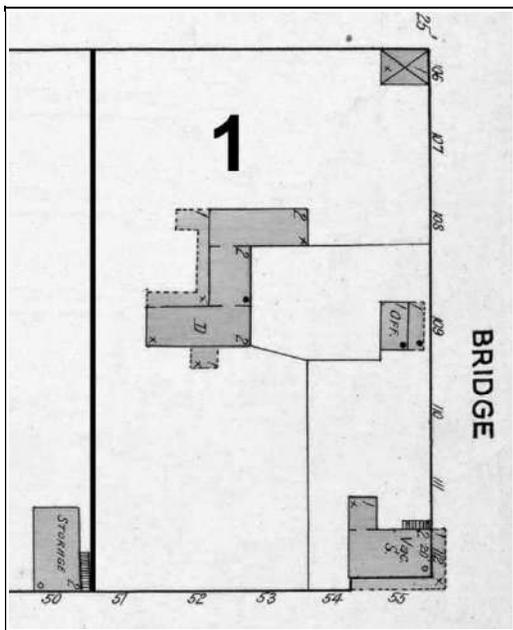
After the death of A F. Phillips, the old Horton tract was one of 26 tracts inherited by Constance Margaret Jackson Gilbert and her husband Lewis A. Gilbert of Jefferson County, Tennessee. On August 8, 1945, they sold her inheritance to Adrian's brother George W. Phillips.¹⁴ In 2018, all of the Horton land on lot #1 became Wilkesboro's Community Commons Park.¹⁵



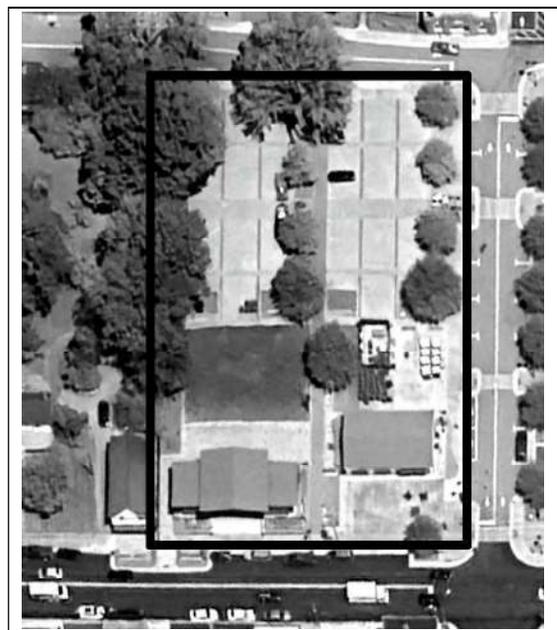
William Lenoir's 1800 survey shows three buildings on lot #1. The left rectangle represents the courthouse. The middle is the Humphries home. The right is the old store house.



The division of lot #1 began in 1856. The four initial sub-lots are denoted by the letters A through D for reference.



The 1920 Sanborn map shows the Waugh-Peden house near the center of lot #1.



A present-day satellite view shows the Community Commons occupying much of lot #1.

Southeast Corner of Lot #1

On May 9, 1856, John Waugh, executor of the estate of William P. Waugh, sold the southeast corner of lot #1 to James B. Gordon for \$1,100. In the image above, this was tracts C and D. The property measured 55 feet along Main Street and 119 feet along the courthouse square, and it was described in the deed.¹⁶

... the store house and appertenant buildings now occupied by him [James B. Gordon] and the lot of land whereon they are now situated in the town of Wilkesboro, west of the public square and north of Main Street, and opposite the house of James Calloway. Beginning at the South East corner of Lot No. 1

James B. Gordon was a revered brigadier general in the Confederate Army. He died on May 18, 1864, days after being wounded in battle near Richmond. On September 20, 1867, Gordon's heirs sold his part of lot #1 to Hamilton Brown for \$1,100, the same price that Gordon had paid for it 11 years earlier.¹⁷

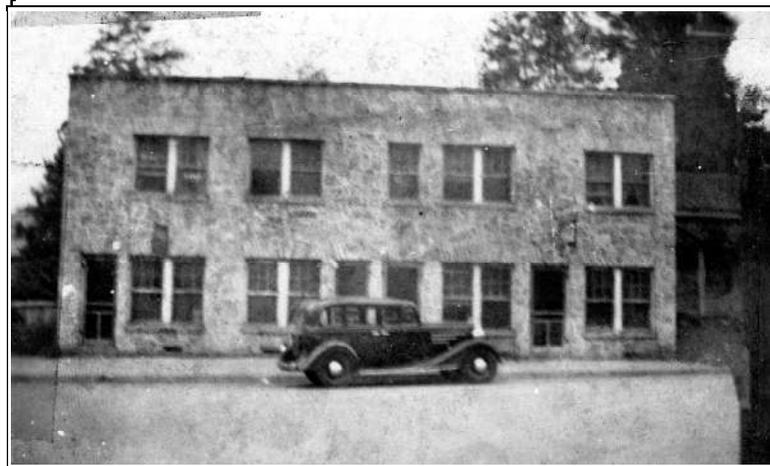
By 1881, this southeast corner lot was divided once again. On April 2, 1881, William W. Vannoy sold the northern portion (tract C) to Iredell T. Pevette for \$537.50. The property measured 55' x 56', and it was described as being a house and lot.¹⁸

*bounded on the South by the Lot and Store House of Rousseau and Finley,
on the West by the Dwelling House and Lot of A. H. Horton,
also on the North by the said Horton,
and on the East by Public Court House Square,
beginning at a stake on the Main Street [i.e. Bridge Street which is the main street running
north to south] north of Rousseau and Finley's Salt Room 4 feet,
thence running south 71.5° W 3p 9 links to a stake,
thence North 18.5° W 3p and 10 links to a stake,
thence North 71.5° E 3p and 9 links to stake on Main Street,
thence South 18.5° E 3p and 10 links with the public street to the beginning.*

Four years later, Iredell T. Pevette sold this lot to John A. Cooper for \$1,000 on March 9, 1885. In their deed, Augustus W. Finley was named as the owner of the salt room on the south side of the lot.¹⁹

In 1895, Elbert Wallace purchased the store house and lot from Cooper for \$450 as a result of an order from the Wilkes Superior Court to sell it.²⁰ In 1897, Wallace became indebted to J. E. Foster, and he was unable to make payments as previously agreed. As a result, this small lot was put up for auction, and on April 7, 1900, it was sold to R. A. Spainhour Co. for \$450.²¹

It was on this small lot that the Lowe Building, or “the rock building,” was constructed about 1935. It was unique in that it was covered with a granite stone sheathing. An ad in 1943 advertised four rooms that were to be rented out as apartments by James Lowe in the “rock building in Wilkesboro.”²² At various times, it was the location of a barber shop, insurance office, the Wilkes County Red Cross in the 1960s, and multiple law offices.²³ The rock building was torn down in 2019 for safety reasons.



Wilkes Heritage Museum

The Lowe Building was located on the west side of the courthouse.

The Southeast Corner Lot

The southeastern corner of lot #1, tract D in the image above, was owned by Rousseau & Finley by 1881. As mentioned previously, deeds from 1881 and 1885 refer to Finley’s salt room on this lot. Presumably, this is where salt was stored and sold.

On June 24, 1892, several members of the Finley family sold this portion of the lot to Adolphus H. Eller and Henry R. Starbuck for \$1,500. It measured 55’ x 73’.²⁴ In June 1904, J. A. Carlton sold it to Isaac C. Welborn for \$1,000.²⁵ After Welborn’s death in 1912, the lot went to his brother William Nathaniel Green Welborn in 1915.²⁶

W. N. G. Welborn died in 1926, and on September 1, 1928, his heirs sold two town lots to Johnson Oil Co. for \$7,000. These lots were the corner of lot #1 (tract D) and a portion of lot #36 across the road on the south side of Main Street. This corner of lot #1 was described as the place “on which is now located Dick’s Service Station,” with it being the lot known as the Gordon Store lot, a reference to James B. Gordon purchasing the lot 70 years earlier.²⁷ This service station was constructed after 1920 and before 1926 when it first appeared on the Sanborn insurance map. In 1964, the old service station building was replaced by a new Texaco service station.²⁸



Wilkes Heritage Museum

The first service station at the southeast corner of lot #1, c1940s. The rock building and the courthouse are in the background.

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1. Wilkes DB F1, p14.
 2. 1798 federal tax list for Wilkes County, Lenoir Family Papers, subseries 6.1.2, folders 672 through 674. Transcribed in the book *1798 Wilkes County, NC, Tax List And The Stories It Reveals* by Jason Duncan, 2024.
 3. 1800 Survey Map made by William Lenoir in 1800 to create the town of Wilkesboro. Lenoir Family Papers, series 4.4.3.
 4. Wilkes Criminal Action Papers, box 2, folder 12. CR.104.326.02 at the State Archives of North Carolina in Raleigh.
 5. Wilkes DB F2, p37.
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 7. Tax Records (Wilkes County, North Carolina), 1781-1908, familysearch IG #7834322, image 118 of 1,198 on familysearch.org. CR.104.703.
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 9. *Happy Valley*, by Thomas Felix Hickerson, p44. 1940.
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 11. Wilkes DB 33, p345-353 (specifically, p349-52).
 12. *The Chronicle*, April 22, 1903, p1.
 13. Wilkes DB 153, p465.

14. Wilkes DB 217, p220.
15. <https://wilkesboronc.org/> found in 2025.
16. Wilkes DB S, p545.
17. Wilkes DB Y, p161.
18. Wilkes DB 3, p92.
19. Wilkes DB 2, p459.
20. Wilkes DB 25, p387.
21. Wilkes DB 130, p440.
22. *The Journal-Patriot*, October 21, 1943, p8.
23. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for "Downtown Wilkesboro Historic District". 118 pages. Section 7, page 8. Entered into the National Register April 30, 2009.
24. Wilkes DB 14, p573.
25. Wilkes DB 49, p208.
26. Wilkes DB 106, p506.
27. Wilkes DB 154, p303.
28. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for "Downtown Wilkesboro Historic District". 118 pages. Section 7, page 38. Entered into the National Register April 30, 2009.