

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Erwin Cotton Mills Co. Mill No. 1 and Headquarters Building

and/or common Erwin Square

2. Location

street & number Northwest corner of W. Main St. and Ninth St. not for publication

city, town Durham vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state North Carolina code 037 county Durham code 068

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name SEHED Development Corp.

street & number 905 W. Main St.

city, town Durham vicinity of state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds
Durham County Judicial Building

street & number 201 E. Main St.

city, town Durham state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Architectural & Historical Inventory/ of Durham
has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date v 1980-81 federal state county local

depository for survey records N. C. Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh state North Carolina

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Erwin Cotton Mills Company's Headquarters and No.1 Mill, recently renovated as offices and apartments, occupy a 10.48-acre parcel at the busy intersection of W. Main St. and Ninth St. The property approximates a long rectangle, except for two small out-parcels--one right at the corner of the intersection on which a branch of Wachovia Bank & Trust currently is under construction, and another about 100 feet to the north on Ninth St. that has been the site for many years of a U.S. Post Office. The property slopes downward to the southeast, gently for most of the expanse and then dropping more sharply along its eastern boundary. The No. 1 Mill is positioned on an approximate north-south axis along the western boundary of the site, so that its narrow southern facade faces W. Main St. A few yards to the east, parallel with the mill and in line with its south facade, the office building that originally served as Erwin Cotton Mills' headquarters also faces W. Main St.

The former mill and office building are a subdivision of an enormous textile manufacturing plant operated most recently by Burlington Industries. The rest of the plant--the factory known originally as the Erwin Cotton Mills Company's No. 4 Mill and later additions by Erwin Cotton Mills and Burlington--covers approximately 10.08 acres immediately west of the No. 1 Mill. The No. 1 Mill and Headquarters are somewhat removed, however, from structures to the south, east and north by open expanses. For several decades, the south end of the property, between the buildings and W. Main St., has been a parking lot. Beyond W. Main St., the main line of the Southern Railway runs along a ridge and beyond there are acres of overgrown land cleared of buildings for the extension of the East-West Expressway. Originally the areas just to the east and north of the mill were covered with mill houses, a reservoir and industrial buildings; as these features were removed, the ground was seeded with grass so that for the past few decades a large lawn separated the No. 1 Mill from a long narrow strip along Ninth St. that has been rented to the City of Durham for public parking since 1963. With the recent adaptive reuse of the mill, most of the lawn has been converted to parking lots landscaped with trees and shrubbery. Along the east side of Ninth St. there is a thriving, modestly-scaled commercial district and on the other side of the northern boundary of W. Markham Ave. are blocks of houses built early in this century by the Erwin Cotton Mills Company for their employees. Most of these contiguous areas have been deemed eligible for the National Register as part of the proposed West Durham Historic District.

The fenestration and narrow width of the No. 1 Mill dramatically demonstrate the early manufacturing process's dependence on ventilation and ample natural light. Covered with a very shallowly pitched gable roof, the two-story, 748-foot long No. 1 Mill is characterized by three square towers projecting from the east facade and by hundreds of large and closely spaced windows that occupy most of the four elevations. When the mill was built in 1892, it was 342 feet long with a tower at each end of the east facade. Four years later, this "old mill" was lengthened 406 feet with the virtually identical "new mill" punctuated at its northeast corner by another tower.

The addition continued the original roofline and the tops of the two rows of windows in unbroken lines, but the bases of the two portions differ. The "old mill"

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has a basement marked by small segmental arched windows alternating with brick ventilators and defined by a projecting cemented water table beneath the 13' 5-1/2"-tall first story; in contrast, there is no basement in the "new mill," except at its north end due to the slope of the site, and the first floor is 17' 11-1/2" tall with longer windows and a less noticeable water table of three stretcher courses. The second story is 14' 2" high throughout both constructions and all of its windows are the same size. Columns placed in two rows divide the 76-foot wide mill into three twenty-five-foot bays running the full length of the building. Originally the three towers were four stories tall, accomodating stair wells in the bottom two stories and water tanks for the emergency sprinkler system in the upper two. In the 1950s, the upper two stories were removed.

Brick fire walls projecting slightly above the roof divide the building into units ranging from thirteen to fifteen bays in length; the "old mill" consists of three units and the "new mill" of four. Each end of the fire walls projects slightly above the roof, is decorated with a shallow round-arched panel, and appears to contain a flue. The building exemplifies "slow burn" construction with its exterior load bearing brick walls in one-to-five common bond, and its heavy timber heart pine beams (12" by 16") and columns (10" square). The floor in the first story is cement, but the second is wooden, composed of 3/4-inch tongue-and-groove maple flooring on a one-inch thick diagonal subflooring and 2-3/4" thick splined decking.

The detailing of the No. 1 Mill includes a limited amount of decoration integrated into the design. The building's most distinctive ornamentation consists of the arched denticulated lintels at all doors and windows, executed in brick and linked by small corbelled pendants to form two string courses around the entire perimeter of the building. Round metal tie rod ends are visible above each pendant of the first-floor string course. The windows are all double-hung rectangular twelve-over-twelve wooden sashes set in segmental arches. Filled in for many years until the renovation in 1983-84, the new windows in the longer first-floor openings of the "new mill" also have nine-panel transoms; originally, they had two larger sashes and no transom. All of the second-story sills are wooden timbers while most of those in the first story are brick. The surviving original doors contain six recessed, clipped-cornered panels of diagonal boards. In the south elevation, the two original doors are double and an original door in each tower is single; all of them are topped with narrow transoms. As part of the renovation, the tops of the towers were reconstructed on the basis of documentary photographs so that they now are a bit taller than the main block. Each has a heavy brick cornice with corbelled pendants and a low pyramidal roof covered with raised seam tin. Along the west elevation, there are brick buttresses with two stepped shoulders at approximately every eight bays. All of the original masonry retains some of its original red wash, particularly evident in the mortar. Heavy curved rafter ends or brackets appear in all of the eaves.

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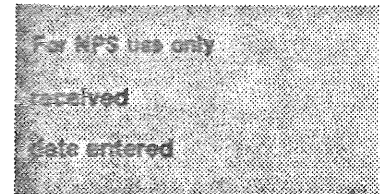
The Headquarters, whose original section was also built in 1892, is an L-shaped brick structure with a large rear wing. This addition, very similar to the neighboring mill, belies the domestic appearance of the Headquarters' front block. As originally constructed, the two-story building was only one room deep with a triple-A roofline, symmetrical four-bay main facade, and a one-story wraparound porch. When the mill was enlarged in 1896, the long, two-story brick warehouse was built on the west end of the Headquarters' rear facade. Because of the sloping terrain, the rear wing is at a lower elevation than the original structure. Around 1905, the entire building became L-shaped when the front block was enlarged with an addition to its west end identical in construction and design to the original building. With another front gable, the main facade of the addition has three windows in the second story and two windows and two doors in the first. In both portions of the front block, the openings of the first story do not line up exactly with those of the second. The porch also was extended around the new addition. Later, one-story shed wings of frame construction sheathed in German siding were added to the gable ends so that the porch is now full-facade.

In the building's front block of solid brick construction in stretcher bond, vernacular expression of the Italianate and Queen Anne styles is exhibited in the fenestration, decorative brickwork, and sawn and turned millwork. All of the openings cut into the brick walls have segmental arches, except for the gable vents which are round-arched. The two entrances have single-panel transoms and the windows are one-over-one double-hung sashes; the vents are bisected into two narrow round arches. Denticulated label hood moldings of brick coursed into the walls appear at all doors, windows and vents. On the end and main facades, immediately above the porch roof, a continuous stringcourse of brick 'prisms' marks the second floor; bands of prisms also appear beneath the first-floor windows. Plain frieze or raking boards and narrow sawn rafter ends or brackets delineate the roofline. Originally covered with raised seam tin, the roof is now sheathed in asphalt shingles. A chimney at the crest of the roof behind the east front facade gable has been removed. The porch features thick, decoratively sawn rafter ends, a spool frieze, turned posts, and ornamental sawn spandrels. A small flat-roofed frame and glass air lock has been placed in front of the main entrance at the fourth bay from the west.

Although the interior of the office portion of the Headquarters has been altered with the insertion or removal of certain partitions, many of the original details remain. The walls have approximately four-foot-high wainscoting of vertical beaded boards and plaster above. Heavy moldings surround the doors and windows of the front rooms. Several original interior doors with four raised panels survive, and all of the doorways have transoms. The two fireplaces served by the interior chimneys have been closed and their mantelpieces removed. Set into the back wall of the hall running the width of the building there is a vault decorated with a frieze of triglyphs and rosettes cast in metal. Running perpendicular to this hall, half

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flights of stairs lead down to the ground floor and up to the main floor of the warehouse wing.

With its exterior brick walls of one-to-five common bond, very low-pitched gable roof with exposed heavy curved rafter ends, and segmental arched windows, the warehouse wing of the headquarters is identical in its basic design to the No. 1 Mill and like the mill exemplifies slow-burn construction. As on the mill, the denticulated hood moldings at each window are linked with corbelled pendants to form a string course the perimeter of the wing on both levels. The ground floor, actually a raised basement on its west side due to the slope of the site, is shorter than the main, second story. Sometime after 1940, a plain, flat-roofed third story with simple rectangular windows was added to the five bays of the wing closest to the office block and a similar one-story addition was built at the northeast corner of the original building. Unlike the No. 1 Mill, most of the interior of the warehouse wing was finished with plaster walls and standard moldings upon its conversion to offices, also after 1940.

While the renovation of the headquarters for retail office space currently is under way, the adaptive reuse of the No. 1 Mill as offices and apartments was completed early in 1984. Except for the conversion of a few windows to doors, the construction of ramps at the entrances to the offices in the "Old Mill," and the placement of new roofs on the remaining two stories of the towers, the exterior renovation was restorative. All of the more than 400 windows were replaced and various small one-story additions on the west elevation were removed. On the interior, all of the heart pine posts were left exposed and incorporated into the floor plan, but new staircases had to be built throughout. Most of the interior of the "Old Mill" was left open so that the offices could be created with moveable partitions. The most extensive work took place in the "New Mill," partitioned into 56 apartments with fourteen different floor plans ranging in size from 890 square feet to 1810 square feet. Because of the additional height of the first story at this end of the mill, there was room to add another level so that the first-floor units are townhouses. Just inside the entrance to each bay, a broad staircase rises to the second-story flats. On both levels, access to the apartments is through a large lobby at the center of the bay, connected to the entrance by the stair hall.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

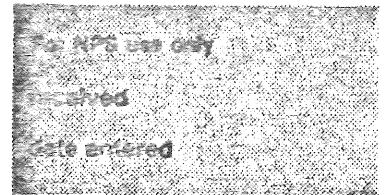
Specific dates 1892 & 1896 Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Founded by Benjamin N. Duke and George W. Watts using the profits from the Duke tobacco empire, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. represented the tremendous success of Durham's tobacco manufacturing industry as well as the expansion of the textile industry throughout North Carolina. The company grew so rapidly under the direction of William A. Erwin, another principal stockholder, that its Mill No. 1 had to be doubled in size within three years of its opening in 1893. Erwin Cotton Mills began with 5,000 spindles producing muslin for tobacco pouches, and by 1896 it had 25,000 spindles turning out an assortment of fabrics. The company pioneered the manufacture of denim in the South and became its leading producer at the turn of the century. Erwin Cotton Mills expanded through acquisition first in Durham, where it controlled three of the city's four textile companies by the turn of the century, and then in other parts of the central piedmont as it invested in new hydroelectrically powered mills. In addition to his reputation as a shrewd businessman, Erwin became known for his progressive attitude toward his workers, demonstrated by the many amenities he provided for residents of the company's villages, his shortening of the work day, and his refusal to employ underage children. Erwin Cotton Mills Co. experienced steady growth for several decades, consisting of eight mills with more than 6,000 employees when it merged with Burlington Industries, Inc. in 1970. In 1983, Burlington Industries sold Mill No. 1 and the adjoining headquarters building to SEHED Development Corp. of Durham, which renovated the mill as offices and apartments.

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- A. The tremendous success of the Erwin Cotton Mills Co., represented by its Mill No. 1 and Headquarters, was an important factor in the economic growth of Durham and North Carolina. The company reflected the success of the state's tobacco industry, which yielded the initial capital for the mill, as well as the expansion of the textile industry throughout the state,.
- B. The Erwin Cotton Mills Co. was founded by Benjamin N. Duke and George W. Watts and directed for four decades by William A. Erwin. Through the companies they directed, all three of these industrialists played pivotal roles in the economic development of Durham and North Carolina; Erwin also was noted for his progressive attitudes toward his work force.
- C. With its "slow-burn" construction and conservative brick decoration, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co.'s Mill No.1 exemplifies late nineteenth-century industrial architecture. A handsome complement to the mill, the Headquarters is a good example of vernacular late Victorian design combining elements of the Italianate and Queen Anne styles.

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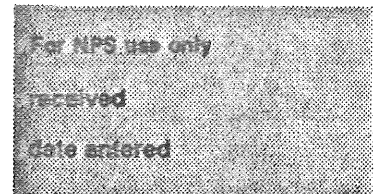
The establishment of the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. in 1892 represented both the expansion of the textile industry throughout North Carolina and the tremendous success of Durham's tobacco manufacturing industry. The textile company's founders, Benjamin N. Duke and George W. Watts, had formed the tobacco manufacturing firm W. Duke Sons & Co. with Duke's brothers, James Buchanan and Brodie Leonidas, and Duke's father, Washington, in 1878. That firm had evolved from a small farm operation processing 15,000 pounds of smoking tobacco in 1866 to one of the nation's largest tobacco manufacturers in the 1880s. Under the direction of James B. Duke, the company overcame stiff local competition by turning to the manufacture of cigarettes. Coupled with an aggressive advertising campaign, a daring move in 1884 to install Bonsack cigarette rolling machines in place of hand-rollers enabled the company "to make great strides in cornering the cigarette market." In 1890, a year of delicate negotiations guided by James B. Duke yielded one of the nation's first giant holding companies when the five major rival tobacco manufacturers, including W. Duke Sons & Co., were sold to the newly formed American Tobacco Co. in exchange for its stock. While James B. Duke presided over the American Tobacco Co.'s quest for complete control of America's cigarette business, his brother and George W. Watts sought to increase their earnings by reinvesting their tobacco profits.¹

Historian Robert F. Durden points out that Duke and Watts' decision to enter textile manufacturing reflected good business sense, not charitable inclination to ease the plight of poor farmers seeking factory jobs or a response to the local newspapers' calls for growth.² Cotton manufacturing had been spreading across the piedmont since the 1830s, proliferating in its central region. Around 1880, the nation's cotton textile manufacturing industry had begun to experience a dramatic shift toward the South. This transformation was due to a number of factors, including a series of technological changes in textile manufacturing that rendered older facilities less competitive and encouraged the construction of new mills. These technological changes included steam power and new machinery and processing methods. Many manufacturers were attracted to the South by its low wages and ready supply of raw materials and some states had been embracing industry more strongly as a vehicle for economic revival in the face of poverty and a changed land-labor relationship generated by the Civil War. Without large plantations and free labor, agriculture alone was no longer profitable enough to sustain the state's economic base and increased population. At the same time that many of the South's leaders promoted the concept of the New South, North Carolina's natural resources, mild climate and abundant labor supply attracted the attention of investors and entrepreneurs interested in industrial development. Like tobacco manufacturing, the textile industry helped southern agriculture by using crops grown regionally and it offered jobs needed by a dissatisfied tenant farmer population.³

Benjamin Duke and George Watts were aware of attractive opportunities across the country, but they wanted to keep their investments close to home.⁴ Durham seemed to

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be a natural site for textile mills because of the railroad for easy shipment of goods and the area's plentiful supplies of cotton and labor. A market for textiles already existed right in Durham where thriving tobacco factories, in which Duke and Watts were major stockholders, required muslin for the pouches in which loose smoking tobacco was packaged. Nor were Duke and Watts entering uncharted waters, for Julian S. Carr, their chief local rival in the tobacco industry, had established the successful Durham Cotton Manufacturing Company in East Durham in 1884.

Just as Carr had induced prominent textile manufacturers from Greensboro to join him in his mill venture, Duke and Watts also sought someone experienced in the field to manage their new textile enterprise. Late in 1891 or early in 1892, they began negotiating with William A. Erwin, a grandnephew of Alamance County, N.C., textile pioneer Edwin M. Holt. Born in 1856 at his family's homestead outside Morganton in Burke County, N.C., Erwin had begun his career in 1874 when he moved to Burlington to work in the Holt and Gant General Store, owned by his brother-in-law, Lawrence Holt, and John Gant. When he bought Gant's interest in the store in 1880, Erwin already was contemplating his own textile mill. Through the mercantile business he recognized the profitability of cotton dress goods, and in 1883 he induced Lawrence Holt and his brother, L. Banks Holt, to build the E.M. Holt Plaid Mills. When the Durham industrialists approached Erwin, the Plaid Mills had been operating profitably for eight years under Erwin's guidance as secretary-treasurer and general manager.

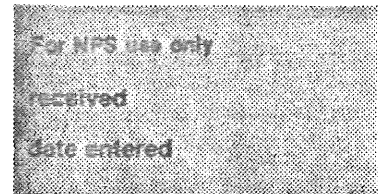
From the beginning, Erwin was confident of the profitability of the proposed Durham venture. On April 20, 1892, Erwin Cotton Mills Co. was incorporated with capitalization of \$125,000. Erwin paid in \$40,000 and the Dukes and Watts paid the balance. Ben Duke served as president, Watts as vice-president, and Erwin as secretary-treasurer and general manager. Durham historian William K. Boyd attributes the suggestion for the company's name to a Durham attorney who reportedly remarked, "Let us name it for this young man [Erwin]; then if it fails the onus will be upon him; and if it succeeds, it will be to his glory."

In his history of the Dukes, Durden declares, "The Erwin Cotton Mill did indeed succeed and, as the lawyer predicted, it was to the 'glory' of ...W.A. Erwin."¹⁰ As soon as the incorporation papers were signed, Erwin travelled throughout the Northeast to establish contacts with textile sales agents in New York and to purchase machinery in New England. He examined the site plans and factory and worker housing designs of mill villages in Massachusetts. Erwin also interviewed numerous manufacturers in order to gather the information necessary to resolve the primary question of which type of cloth to produce.¹¹

In the meantime, back in Durham Ben Duke and George Watts also were deeply involved in the start-up phase of the mill. They had decided to locate the mill in the area called Pinhook (renamed West Durham) about one-half mile beyond Durham's

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corporate limits and just to the west of the new Trinity College campus. Erwin Cotton Mills Co. purchased three large parcels ranging in size from 7.7 acres to 9.25 acres from private individuals, which it augmented with smaller tracts bought from the Trinity Land Co. and Durham Consolidated Land & Improvement Co.¹² Determined to make North Carolina a leader in the textile industry, Ben Duke considered the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. his pet enterprise. At the same time that he was working on the acquisition of land, he was seeking additional investment capital from New England manufacturers so that the company could soon build bigger mills. Their northern counterparts, however, resented the growth of the textile industry southward, and Duke and his associates had to be content with plans for gradual expansion based upon their own resources.¹³

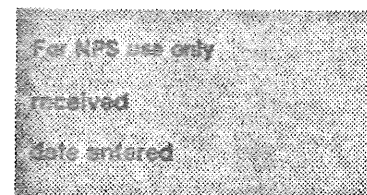
Construction of the new mill and its surrounding village began in the latter half of 1892. The factory complex consisted of the 342-foot-long two-story mill, a dye house, a picker house, a power house with a 105-foot-tall smokestack, and a two-story brick office building. Dozens of frame houses for workers were built along dirt lanes close to the mill;¹⁴ a few were situated just to the north of the office next to the mill, with the rest to the north and northwest of the factory complex.

When the mill opened in the spring of 1893, the production of its 5,000 spindles was restricted to the type of muslin used for smoking tobacco pouches.¹⁵ A few months later, Duke and Watts added \$75,000 to the original investment in order to ensure adequate working capital.¹⁶ Under Erwin's direction, the mill soon installed additional machinery and diversified profitably into the manufacture of chambrays, camlets, and denims. In spite of the nationwide "Panic of 1893," the company made a profit in its first year of operation.¹⁷ As the mill gradually cut back its production of muslin, ceasing to manufacture it altogether in 1899, it increased its output of the other cloths, particularly denim,¹⁸ which previously had not been manufactured widely or profitably in the South. Durden cites Erwin's hard work at merchandising as well as at manufacturing as a primary reason for the Erwin Cotton Mills' success with their denims; at the turn of the century, the company was the leading producer of denim in the South.¹⁹ Erwin had hired his sister's husband, Edward Knox Powe, another veteran of the Holt Mills in Burlington, as general superintendent of the Durham mill. Powe ably managed the mill's day-to-day operations, enabling Erwin to travel throughout the country to find buyers for his company's denims.

Healthy sales encouraged production, which in turn prompted the Erwin Cotton Mills to expand its facilities. In 1895, the West Durham mill had 11,000 spindles and 360 looms in operation. According to the 1895 Hand-Book of Durham, "This mill employs 375 hands, all of whom reside on the premises in nice and conveniently arranged houses belonging to the company."²⁰ The publication also noted that Erwin Cotton Mills had a paid-in capital of \$250,000. The following year, the company doubled its No. 1 Mill to its present size so that it accommodated 25,000 spindles and 1,000 looms operated by

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1,000 workers. In only four years, the factory had grown to be the largest of Durham's four textile mills and one of the larger mills in the state.

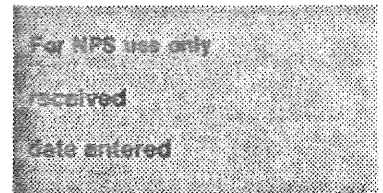
The Erwin Cotton Mills executives already were involved in two other Durham textile mills, the Pearl Cotton Mills founded by Brodie L. Duke in 1892, and the Commonwealth Cotton Manufacturing Co., acquired by Brodie L. Duke in 1893. In 1893, Duke found that he had over-extended himself and was caught short in his speculation of cotton futures. His father, brothers, and George Watts came to his aid by increasing the capitalization of Pearl Cotton Mills from \$100,000 to \$175,000, and by 1895 the mill had become highly successful under the management of W.H. Branson, manager also of Julian S. Carr's Durham Cotton Manufacturing Co. Ben Duke also invested heavily in the Commonwealth mill, which was profitable by 1897.²² After Branson's death in 1899, the Dukes, Watts and Erwin acquired both the Pearl Cotton Mills and the Durham Cotton Manufacturing Co. and placed their management in the hands of Jesse Harper Erwin, another Burlington veteran assisted in these ventures by his brother, William. With the arrival of the new century, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. stockholders controlled three of Durham's textile mills and were partially responsible for the survival of the fourth.

Encouraged by the profits of the 1890s, Erwin Cotton Mills embarked upon a major expansion beyond Durham. As the company's local interest encompassed the city's other textile firms, its directors became keenly aware of the importance of hydroelectric power to industrial growth. The company's search for a North Carolina site with enough water power for a large mill ended in 1898 when a tract was found on the Cape Fear River in Harnett Co. It took so long for the company to acquire the property that plans for the new Erwin Cotton Mills Co. Mill No.2, primarily for the production of denim, were not announced until 1902. Its surrounding village, soon to have a population of 2,000, was named Duke but was changed to Erwin in the 1920s to avoid confusion resulting from the name of the new Duke University. Four years later, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. established its Mill No.3 with the purchase of the Cooleemee Mill near Salisbury in Davie Co., which William Erwin had been managing since its organization in 1900.²³ William Erwin also was involved in the management of the Oxford Cotton Mill in Oxford, N.C., and the Alpine Mill in Morganton, N.C. Altogether, by 1905, Erwin was managing the production of more than 154,000 spindles, "probably more... than any one man in North Carolina."²⁴ The Erwin Cotton Mills Co.'s net profits for the first years of the new century were sizable: \$195,000 or 55% of capital stock in 1899 to 1901, \$187,000 in 1903, and \$215,000 in 1904.

In the mid-1900s growth slackened as the price of cotton rose and labor became less plentiful than it had been during the depression years of the 1890s. The Erwin Cotton Mills Co. had to curtail production to four-day weeks at its No. 1 and No. 2 mills in 1908 in response to the depressed market for manufactured cloth. The poor condition of the market was due largely to agricultural problems that created higher

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costs for raw materials and hence for cloth production. In spite of these conditions, the company began construction in West Durham of the large Mill No. 4, in anticipation of a strengthened market.²⁶ The new complex, erected immediately west of Mill No.1, consisted of a large spinning mill and a²⁷ large weave mill, a bleachery, a cloth room, an engine house, and another reservoir. The City of Durham Illustrated of 1910 called it "the most modern plant in the entire cotton-making section of the United States."²⁸ Built to produce bleached sheeting, the mill represented further diversification by Erwin Cotton Mills.

With the market continuing to be depressed through most of 1911, only a portion of the machinery in the new mill was put into operation, but by the new year conditions were improved and the mill was functioning at full capacity. In fact, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. was doing²⁹ so well in 1912 that William Erwin's salary was raised from \$20,000 to \$25,000. Capitalized at \$4,000,000, the company had a total of 158,000 spindles and 4,224 looms in operation. In Durham alone, the company employed approximately 1,600 people, most of whom lived in the company-constructed housing that by this time radiated in every direction from the mills.

The interests of William Erwin and his associates naturally extended beyond their factories to their mill villages. Durden writes that the mill village of West Durham "reflected many of the harsh realities of the period and of the industry...Yet in some ways Erwin, encouraged by Ben Duke, managed to do better than many of his fellow textile manufacturers."³¹ Although the paternalism and economic sanctions characteristic of southern textile mill villages certainly existed in West Durham and the other Erwin Cotton Mills villages, Erwin earned a reputation throughout the state for the progressive attitudes he demonstrated toward his workers. In his biographical sketch of Erwin, W.S. Pearson included this excerpt from a letter written about Erwin by one of his friends:

He got established in the mill town of West Durham the first graded school in the state outside of town limits wholly supported by the public school fund. He has been most active in building up the moral atmosphere of his mill communities. . .He has encouraged the education of his operatives, having at each mill town a nice school. He has around his mills a better grade of tenement houses than is generally found at cotton mills. ...At every mill he has anything to do with there are good schools, good homes and churches, and the towns are well ordered and the people law abiding. He has given much of his energy to providing for the operatives those things³² that care for the bodies as well as the souls, hearts and minds of the people.

Praise for Erwin also appears in The City of Durham Illustrated of 1910:

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He also established the first night school and cooking school for the benefit of employees and their families. He has always taken an interest in the education, morals and comfort of employees, and has done a great deal to improve the character and class of mill workers, and a most enviable reputation has been established³³ at their several mill villages of high ideals in the life of its operatives.

These enthusiastic statements are accurately reflected by Erwin's activities in his home town. In addition to arranging for the public school in West Durham, he exhibited his strong devotion to the Episcopal Church by constructing St. Joseph's Episcopal Church for the mill community.³⁴ On land south of the mills, Erwin developed a park which became a focal point of his operatives' social lives. Here in the 1920s, the company built Erwin Auditorium (destroyed in 1984), the cultural/recreational core of the West Durham community with its gymnasium, indoor swimming pool, library and activity rooms. More important than these paternalistic acts were Erwin's shortening of the work day in his mills to eleven hours in 1895 and his refusal to employ underage children. Early in the twentieth century, he actively supported stricter child labor legislation. He did not, however, relax his stance against labor unions. When an organization incited workers to strike Mill No. 1 in 1900, Erwin effectively kept labor unions out while weakening their cause by authorizing³⁵ the company store to issue food to all of the mill hands, even those on strike.

The Erwin Cotton Mills Co. continued to prosper for several decades and remained a leader in the manufacture of denim, despite its eclipse around 1920 by Cone Mills in Greensboro, N.C. Erwin guided the company until his death in 1932, having succeeded Ben Duke as president. Although Duke held the top post until his death in 1927, he ended his³⁶ close association with Erwin and the company's affairs in the 1910s due to illness. In 1925 the company built its Mill No. 5³⁷ at Duke (now Erwin) and in 1932 it purchased the Pearl Cotton Mills for its Mill No. 6. Also during the early 1930s, Erwin Cotton Mills pioneered the use in North Carolina of the sanforizing process on the production of denim. The process' elimination of stretching and shrinking in woven fabrics revolutionized the industry. Kemp Plummer Lewis, who began his association with the company in 1900 in a minor capacity, followed Erwin as president; when he resigned his post to become chairman of the board in 1948, the board elected W.H. Ruffin president. Significant expansion occurred again in 1948 with the Erwin Cotton Mills Co.'s purchase of Diana Mills near Wake Forest, N.C., and Stonewall Cotton Mills near Stonewall, Miss., for Mills No. 7 and 8, respectively. Mill No. 7 was thoroughly renovated and equipped to produce synthetic³⁸ yarns, while No. 8 was equipped with new machinery for the production of denims. As it entered its sixth decade, Erwin Cotton Mills employed around 6,400 workers operating over 220,000³⁹ spindles and 6,000 looms that turned out 165,000,000 yards of cloth annually.

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In 1963, Burlington Industries purchased all of the Erwin Cotton Mills Co.'s property, almost all of which was industrial as Erwin Cotton Mills had sold most of its houses in the 1940s, many of them to their occupants.⁴⁰ In 1970, the Erwin Cotton Mills Co. formally merged with Burlington Industries, which had kept all seven of the functioning Erwin mills in operation; Mill No. 1 already had been converted to a warehouse. The new owners also retained the 1892 office building, which had remained the Erwin Cotton Mills Co.'s headquarters until the sale, as the offices for their West Durham plant. As part of its plans to consolidate its North Carolina facilities, in 1982 Burlington sold the east end of its West Durham plant containing Mill No.⁴¹ to SEHED Development Corp. of Durham, which bought the office tract one year later.⁴¹ In 1983 and 1984, SEHED renovated the mill as offices and apartments according to designs by Eddie Belk of Architects Diversified Designers & Associates. The original, south half of the mill was converted to offices leased by Home Security Life Insurance Co. and the north end of the mill was renovated as townhouses and flats. The headquarters building currently is being restored for continued use as offices.

NOTES

¹ Claudia P. Roberts and Diane E. Lea, The Durham Architectural and Historical Inventory (Durham: The City of Durham and the Historic Preservation Society of Durham, 1982), pp. 310, 321-23 and 331.

² Robert F. Durden, The Duke's of Durham, 1865-1929 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), p.128.

³ W.J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941). pp.178-82 and 202; and memo from Jerry L. Cross to Jerry C. Cashion, Research Branch, N.C. Division of Archives and History, 2 May 1984.

⁴ Durden, p.128.

⁵ Ibid., p.124.

⁶ Julian Hughes, Development of the Textile Industry in Alamance County (Burlington, N.C.: privately published, 1949), pp.116-24.

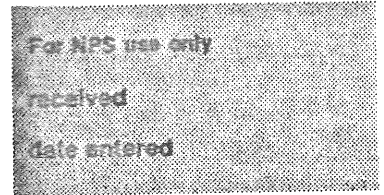
⁷ Durden, p.129.

⁸ Durham County Register of Deeds (DCRD), Book of Incorporations A, page 255.

⁹ William K. Boyd, The Story of Durham (Durham: Duke University Press, 1925), p.122.

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Continuation sheet Erwin Cotton Mills

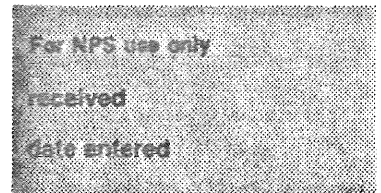
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- 10 Durden, p.129.
- 11 Ibid., p.130.
- 12 DCRD, Deed Book 12, pages 310, 312, 319, 320 and 582.
- 13 Durden, pp.130 and 12.
- 14 Sanborn Map Co., "Durham, North Carolina," 1893 series, in the North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- 15 "Ben Duke Established Erwin Mills," Durham Morning Herald, 26 April 1953; and Durden, p.132.
- 16 Durden, p.131.
- 17 "Ben Duke Established Erwin Mills."
- 18 Hughes, p.124.
- 19 Durden, p.132.
- 20 Hand-Book of Durham, North Carolina, 1895, copy in the North Carolina Room, Durham County Library.
- 21 Durden, p.133.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., pp.137-38.
- 24 W.S. Pearson, "William Allen Erwin," in Samuel A. Ashe, ed., Biographical History of North Carolina (Greensboro, N.C., 1905), III, p.117.
- 25 Durden, p.139.
- 26 Ibid., pp.140-141.
- 27 Sanborn Map Co., 1913 series.
- 28 The City of Durham Illustrated (Durham: Seeman Printery, 1910), inside front cover.

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29 Durden, pp.42-44.

30 The City of Durham Illustrated.

31 Durden, p.134.

32 W.S. Pearson, p.120.

33 The City of Durham Illustrated.

34 Hughes, p.125.

35 Durden, pp.134-36.

36 Ibid., p.145.

37 DCRD, Deed Book 105, page 61.

38 "Ben Duke Established Erwin Mills."

39 W.C. Dula and A.C. Simpson, Durham and Her People (Durham: The Citizens Press, 1951), p.26.

40 Telephone interview with public relations officer of Burlington Industries, 11 April 1984; and DCRD, Plat Book 15, pages 48, 51-57; Plat Book 17, page 159; and Plat Book 18, pages 43-47.

41 DCRD, Deed Book 1125, page 621; and Deed Book 1143, page 779.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Durden, Robert F. The Dukes of Durham, 1865-1929. Durham: Duke University Press, 1975.
 Durham County Register of Deeds.
 W.S. Pearson. "William Allen Erwin." In Samuel A. Ashe, ed. Biographical History of North Carolina. Greensboro. 1905. Vol. III.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 10.08

Quadrangle name Northwest Durham, N.C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

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6	8	7	1	4	0
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3	9	8	6	8	7	0
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B

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6	8	7	2	4	0
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3	9	8	6	8	3	0
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C

1	7
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6	8	7	2	4	0
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3	9	8	6	2	4	0
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1	7
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6	8	7	0	4	0
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3	9	8	6	4	6	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification

Durham County Tax Map 46, Block 1, Lots 32C and 32D

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
-------	-----	------	--------	-----	------

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Claudia Roberts Brown

organization Consultant date April 1984

street & number 301 E. Poplar Ave. telephone 919/968-1181

city or town Carrboro state North Carolina

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature William S. King

title State Historic Preservation Officer date July 12, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

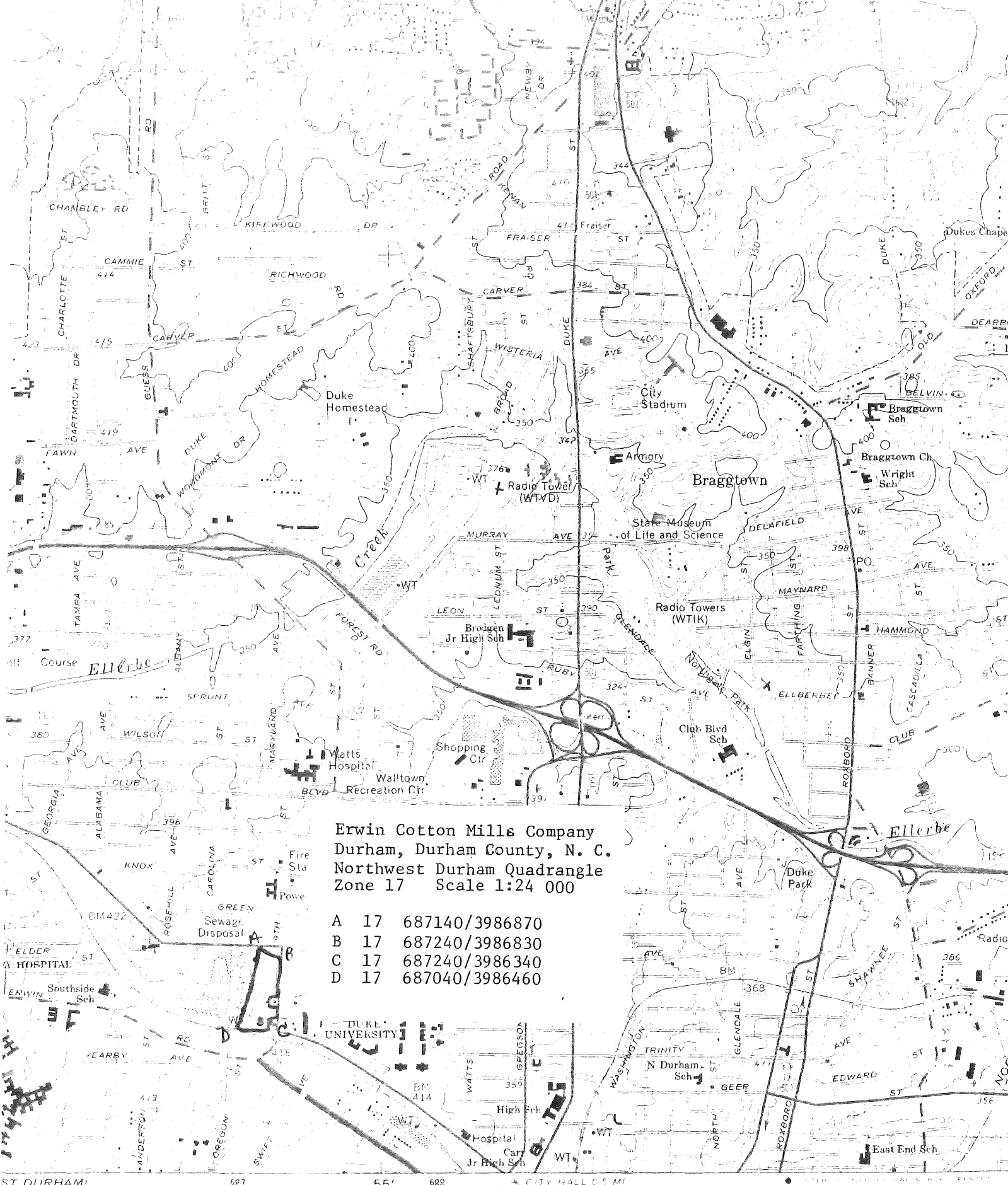
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



Erwin Cotton Mills Company
 Durham, Durham County, N. C.
 Northwest Durham Quadrangle
 Zone 17 Scale 1:24 000

- A 17 687140/3986870
- B 17 687240/3986830
- C 17 687240/3986340
- D 17 687040/3986460

ST DURHAM IV NW 1:24 000 687 55' 688 CITY HALL 0.5 MI RALEIGH 23 MI 690

1 MILE 1 KILOMETER

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road

Vertical Interval 10 FEET

R.D.

ISLAND

MARKHAM AV

ST.

NINTH

PERRY ST.



13

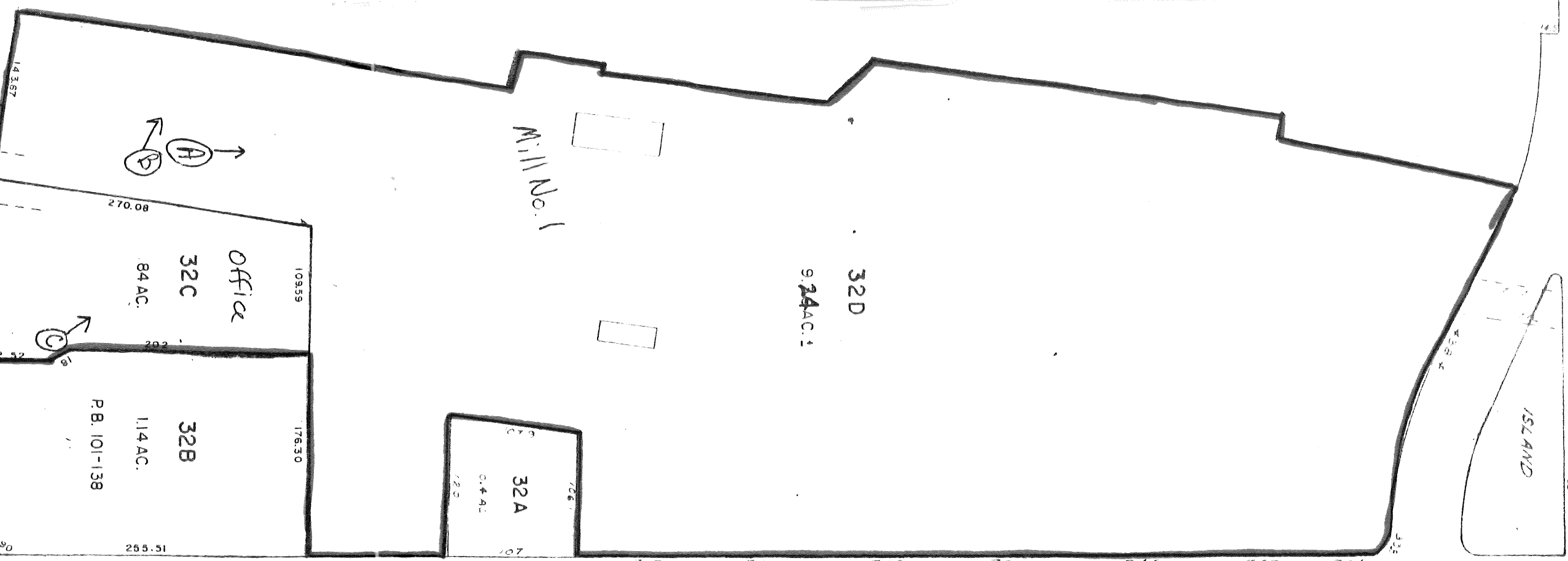
Mill No. 1

32D
9.24 AC. ±

32A
0.4 AC.
125'

Office
32C
84 AC.

32B
1.14 AC.
P.B. 101-138



Erwin Cotton Mills

