



JOHNSTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Historical Sketch

In 1746 the North Carolina Colonial Assembly created Johnston County from Craven. The first county courthouse was built of wood near present day Clayton. The county was divided in 1758, and a new courthouse was erected at Hinton's Quarter two years later. When Johnston lost Hinton's Quarter to newly-formed Wake County, still another courthouse had to be built, this time on the land near the Neuse River belonging to John Smith. In 1777 the state legislature passed an "act for founding a Town on the lands of John Smith where the courthouse and other public buildings now stand." The new town was named Smithfield and in 1797 the county purchased a site for a new courthouse, which is the location of the present structure.<sup>1</sup>

In 1920 the county commissioners decreed that a new courthouse and jail should be erected on the site of the old building. They emphasized that the building was in a "delapidated condition and unsafe," and that the jail was in such a "state of decay, and unsanitary" that prisoners charged with serious crimes had to be removed to other counties for safekeeping. The commissioners employed architect Harry Barton of Greensboro, who designed many courthouses in North Carolina in the first quarter of the twentieth century, to prepare plans. They also issued bonds worth \$500,000 to finance the new construction which was completed in 1921.<sup>2</sup>

Architectural Description

The Johnston County Courthouse, built in 1921, is an outstanding example of mature Neo-Classical Revival architecture. Designed by Greensboro architect Harry Barton, this building displays the formality of design and sophistication of ornament characteristic of the five courthouses which Barton planned in the 1920s. The Johnston County Courthouse embodies the Neo-Classical Revival at its most imposing in its monumental scale, knowledgeable handling of proportion and ornament, and in the liberal use of rich materials.

The three-story cut stone veneered structure is rectangular in shape and is fronted by a four-column portico in antis. The columns carry a rich Doric entablature and the level roofline is defined by a stone balustrade. The main entrance is contained in a recessed area beneath the portico. Above are large two-story windows which light the courtroom. All windows are tripartite. The Second Street facade is fronted by a giant order tetrastyle pedimented portico which features a representation of the Scales of Justice in its tympanum.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnston County Courthouse, an unpublished research paper, in An Historical Survey of the Courthouses of North Carolina compiled by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of North Carolina, October, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston County, Minutes of Board of County Commissioners, February 2, 1920, January 12, February 7, 1921.

The interior is equally well detailed and remains relatively unaltered. Wide cross halls lined with marble wainscots meet at an octagonal center. Deep plaster cornices, mosaic tile floors, and console brackets accent the halls. Stairs with iron railings appear at either end of the halls. The courtroom, occupying most of the second and third floors of the central area, is a well-appointed chamber distinguished by its fine classical woodwork. While Barton thoroughly integrated his classical details throughout his public buildings, he concentrated his decorative efforts on the courtroom. Pedimented overdoors, high wainscots, and a frontispiece behind the judge's bench are typical features of Barton's courtrooms.

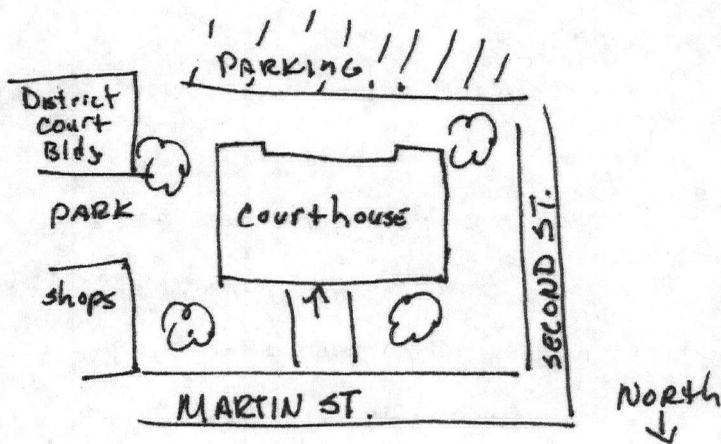
The courthouse square, located in the heart of Smithfield's business district, is a park-like setting marked with historic monuments, fountains, and walks which enhance the formality of the courthouse.

Address: Norman C. Denning, Chairman, Johnston County Commissioners,

Johnston County Courthouse, Smithfield, N.C. 27577

Acreege: *less than 1 acre*  
UTM reference: 17/740550/3932770

Verbal boundary description: The courthouse square is bounded to the north by Martin Street, to the south by a parking lot, to the west by Second Street, to the east by shops, a public park, and the District Court building.



Property

North Carolina Courthouses Thematic Group

State

N.C.

Working Number

12.12.78.4763

TECHNICAL

Photos

#62

Maps

57

CONTROL

OK 12.14.78

HISTORIAN

57 county courthouses ranging from early 19th century to 1930s. Significant in long time associations with ~~the~~ commercial, political and legal activities in the communities. Some questions on integrity of subject, justification on 1930s samples. Needs call for minimal information.

ACCEPT / ACCEPT 5/16/79

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

The survey forms covered adequate descriptions and statements of significance. Yet lack of conveyance of the courthouse sets the same importance of many buildings are being nominated. I think we should return for proper completion.

RECALL 3/26/79

ARCHEOLOGIST

1930's structures justified in continuation sheets; additional photos received. Brunswick Co. Courthouse has suffered some loss of integrity but retains missing fenestration, being symbolizing public building - would accept but defer to architectural historian opinion.

ACCEPT 5/18/79

OTHER

HAER

Inventory \_\_\_\_\_

Review \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

Articulate presentation of significance of these Courthouses.

one apparently eligible property held back because of county opposition, but I cannot see rejecting entire thematic of exclusion of one property.

Accept 5/10/79

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up

6-5-79

Send-back

\_\_\_\_\_

Entered

MAY 10 1979

Federal Register Entry

Re-submit

\_\_\_\_\_

5/10/79



NEGATIVE NUMBER N-76-12-700 REC 12 1978

PHOTOGRAPHER JOANN SIEBURG-BAKER MAY 10 1979

PHOTO DATE 12/16/76

SUBJECT Johnson Co. Courthouse

*North Carolina Courthouses*

*Thematic Group*

*Currituck*  
~~*Alamance*~~ *County*

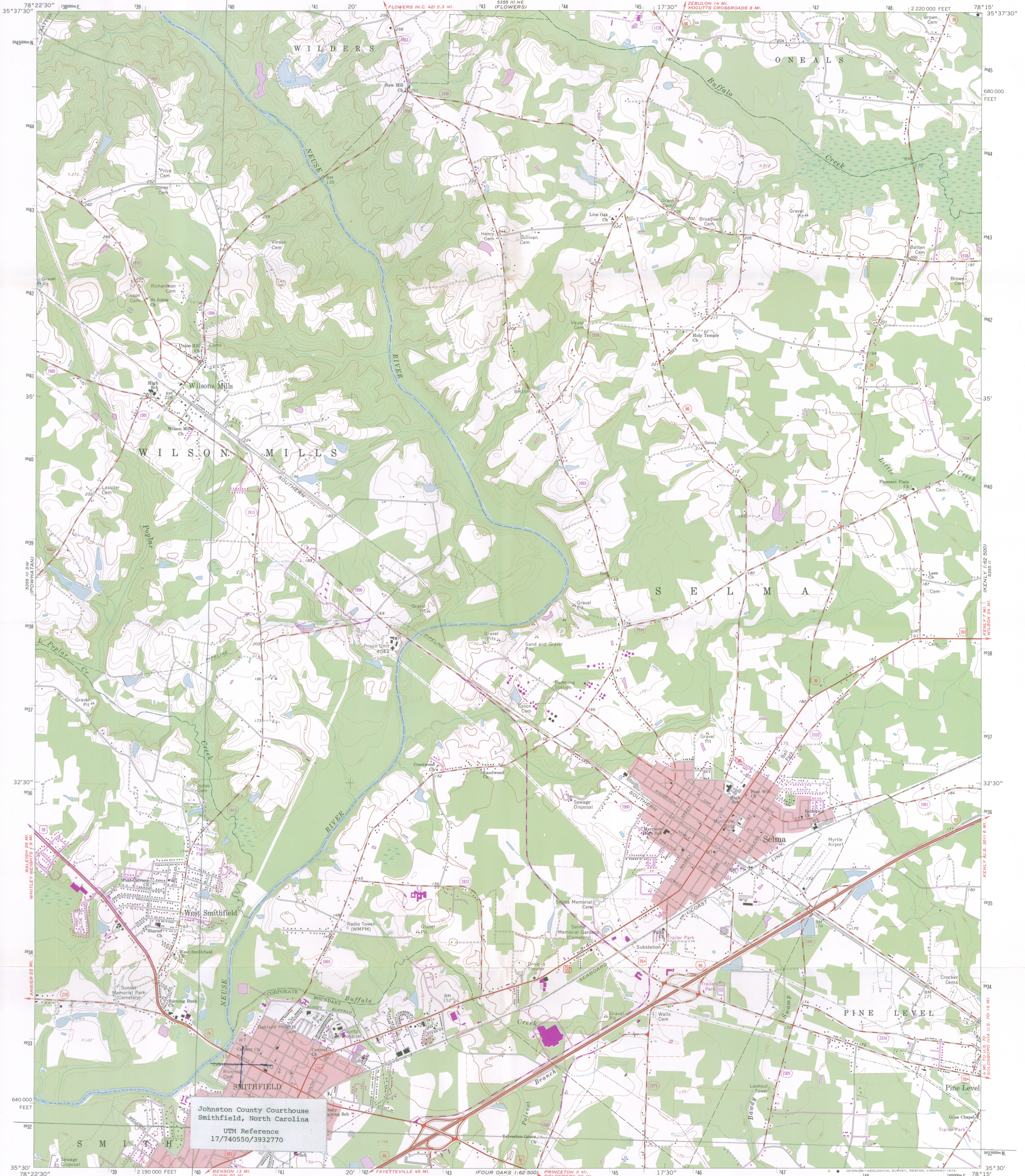
*#27 of 62*

FROM DIVISION OF  
ARCHIVES & HISTORY,  
RALEIGH, N. C.

MAY 22 1980 JAN 26 1978

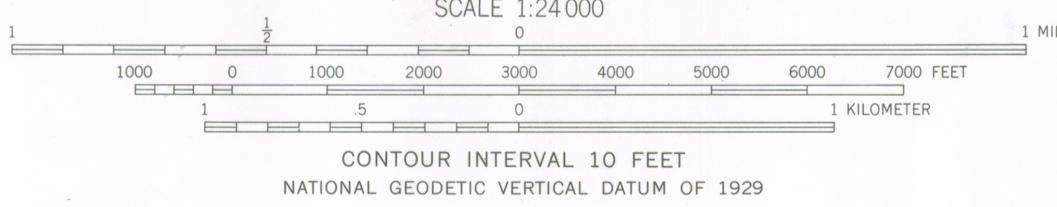
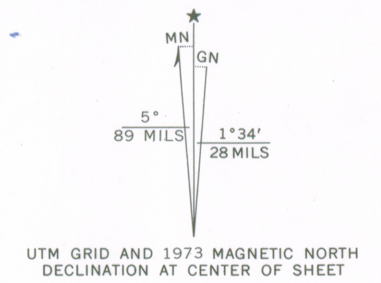
*Johnston*

PRINT BY  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION



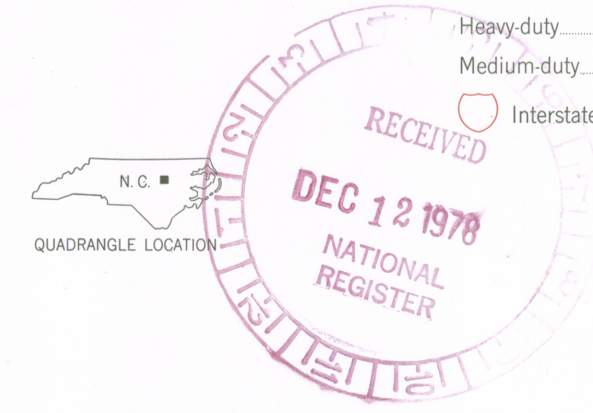
Johnston County Courthouse  
Smithfield, North Carolina  
UTM Reference  
17/740550/3932770

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1962. Field checked 1964  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North Carolina datum  
100,000-foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 17, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial  
photographs taken 1973. This information not  
field checked



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route



SELMA, N. C.  
SE/4 SELMA 15' QUADRANGLE  
N3530—W7815/7.5  
1964  
PHOTOREVISED 1973  
AMS 5355 III SE—SERIES V842

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Johnston