

## **CASE SUMMARY • LOCAL LANDMARK STUDY LIST APPLICATION**

Historic Preservation Commission Evidentiary Hearing • July 10, 2025

**Project Planner** | Benjamin Riggle | 910.341.3251 | [ben.riggle@wilmingtonnc.gov](mailto:ben.riggle@wilmingtonnc.gov)

<b>Address:</b>	201 South Water Street	<b>District:</b>	Commercial Business District Historic District Overlay (CBD-HDO)
<b>Request:</b>	Add the former Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop Building to the Study List with the goal of future listing as a Local Landmark		
<b>Property Owner:</b>	Justin W. LaNasa 533 Hidden Valley Road Wilmington, NC 28409	<b>Applicant:</b>	Clayton J. Hamerski 153 Yorktown Drive Wilmington, NC 28401



*201 South Water Street | Northwest corner, looking southeast | June/2025 (staff)*

### **Case Overview**

The applicant proposes to include the former Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop Building on the Study List in anticipation of pursuing a Local Landmark designation for the building.

Details as shown on the drawings, plans, photographs, submittals, and narrative statement contained in the application, and supplemental materials and statements made at the July 10, 2025 meeting are a part of this request unless otherwise noted.

## Property Information

### Property Description

The following property description is adapted from the Wilmington Historic District Boundary Expansion and Additional Documentation report, dated 2003 (originally listed 1974).

*The Wilmington Iron Works building, at the corner of South Water Street and Orange Street, has a front-gable configuration with segmental arch window heads and brick pilasters dividing bays on the long side. A large metal sliding door is located on the southwest corner of the west elevation. Large wood beams support the low-pitch gable roof with portions of the machinery retained among the beams.*

### Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

- **1884 Map.** A one-story frame general storage building associated with the Robinson & King industrial complex occupied the parcel.
- **1889 Map.** Same building still associated with Robinson & King, but labeled as tar, turpentine and naval stores.
- **1893 Map.** The building labeled simply as naval stores.
- **1898 Map.** Unchanged.
- **1904 Map.** Unchanged.
- **1910 Map.** Unchanged.
- **1915 Map.** The building was labeled as a machine shop for the Wilmington Iron Works.
- **1951 Map.** The building was documented as a brick building with plastered walls, but it remained a machine shop for the Wilmington Iron Works.
- **1955 Map.** Unchanged.

### Current Conditions

- The subject building is a contributing resource to the Central Business District Historic District Overlay (CBD-HDO).
- The property is zoned Central Business District-Historic District Overlay (CBD-HDO). The CBD-HDO was established on April 24, 1979.

## Proposed Findings of Fact

### Property Information

1. The subject building is a contributing resource to the Central Business District Historic District Overlay (CBD-HDO). Only that which can be seen from the public right-of-way, excluding alleys, is subject to design review.
2. The subject property is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of South Water Street and Orange Street.
3. The former machine shop building has been adaptively reused as the Museum of the Bizarre.

### Scope of Work

4. The applicant proposes to list the former Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop Building in Wilmington's Study List with the intension of pursuing listing as a Local Landmark.

## Staff Observations Regarding Significance and Integrity

5. Staff notes the following:
  - a. The exact construction date of the former Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop building is disputed. According to the Historic Wilmington Foundation plaque, the building was constructed ca. 1869, while the National Register nomination dates the construction of the building as 1926.
  - b. The Sanborn maps record that a brick structure replaced the frame structure sometime between 1915 and 1951.
  - c. Based on the internal framing of the existing building, it is likely that a substantial portion of a ca. 1869 frame warehouse was salvaged and reused when the Wilmington Iron Works constructed the current brick structure on the parcel.
  - d. A construction date of 1926 would be an interesting time for the building to be constructed because that was a year after D. L. Gore, who had owned the property from 1887 until he passed away in 1925, during the period Wilmington Iron Works was leasing the building until they purchased the property in 1929.
  - e. If the Study List application is successful, staff recommends additional research to better pinpoint the exact construction date and history of the property during this active period of the property's history.

## Applicable Study List/Local Historic Landmark Designation Standards

6. The following Study List/Local Historic Landmark Designation Standards are applicable to this request:
  - a. The application for the Study List initiates preliminary consideration of the property for local historic landmark status.
  - b. Listing on the Study List does not mean that the property is being designated as a local historic landmark.
  - c. The Study List application is reviewed by the Wilmington Historic Preservation Commission, and if the Commission finds that the property meets the minimum requirements for consideration as a local historic landmark, the Commission can add the resource to the Study List and provide instructions on how the Local Landmark nomination should proceed.

## Recommended Conditions

If the commission elects to add the New Hanover High School to the Study List, staff recommends the following conditions be applied.

1. Listing in the Study List does not mean the property is being designated as a local historic landmark and a formal Local Landmark application shall be completed before the property can be designated as an official local historic landmark.

## Attachments

1. Application (Received 5/30/2025)
2. Case Map (Dated 6/27/2025)
3. District Map (Dated 6/27/2025)
4. Narrative (Received 5/30/2025)
5. Applicant Map (Received 5/30/2025)
6. Applicant Photos (Received 5/30/2025)





Historic photo of the corner of South Water Street and Orange Street during the Wilmington Iron Works period of the building's history, looking southeast | Date unknown (Source: City Archives)



Historic photo of northwest corner of 201 South Water Street, looking southeast | Ca. 1970 (Source: City Archives)





*Historic photo of north elevation of 201 South Water Street, looking south | Ca. 1985 (Source: City Archives)*



*Historic photo of interior of 201 South Water Street, looking east | Ca. 2007 (Source: City Archives)*





*201 South Water Street | West elevation, looking east | June/2025 (Staff)*



*201 South Water Street | North elevation, looking south | June/2025 (Staff)*





*201 South Water Street | Northeast corner, looking southwest | June/2025 (Staff)*



*201 South Water Street | Southwest corner, looking northeast | June/2025 (Staff)*



201 South Water Street | Detail of current main entry on north elevation, looking south | April/2025  
(Staff)





*201 South Water Street | Detail of Wilmington Iron Works door on north elevation, looking south | June/2025 (Staff)*





*201 South Water Street | Detail of arched industrial metal frame window on north elevation, looking west | April/2025 (Staff)*



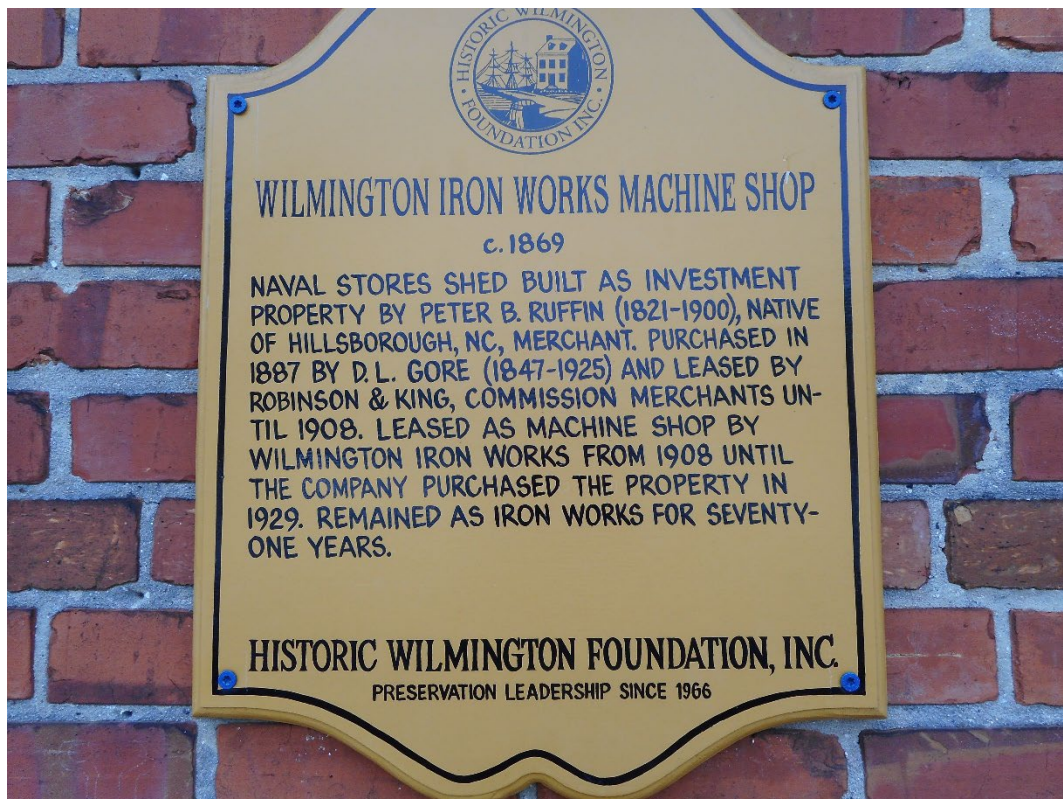


*201 South Water Street | Detail of industrial metal frame window on east elevation, looking west |  
June/2025 (Staff)*





201 South Water Street | Detail of metal sliding door on west elevation, looking east | April/2025 (Staff)



201 South Water Street | Detail of HWF plaque on north elevation, looking south | April/2025 (Staff)





201 South Water Street | Detail of interior timber framing, looking southeast | April/2025 (Staff)



201 South Water Street | Detail of interior timber framing, looking southwest | April/2025 (Staff)



*201 South Water Street | Detail of interior iron support column, looking northwest | April/2025 (Staff)*



**APPLICATION TO THE CITY OF WILMINGTON HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
COMMISSION  
FOR DESIGNATION OF LOCAL LANDMARKS**

**(1) NAME OF PROPERTY**

The Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop

**(2) NAME AND ADDRESS OF CURRENT PROPERTY OWNERS**

Justin W. LaNasa  
533 Hidden Valley Rd  
Wilmington, NC 28409

**(3) LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY**

**Address:** 201 S Water St Wilmington, NC 28401

**Phone number of owner:** (910) 352-5015

**Deed Book #:** 6087

**Deed Page #:** 1292

**PID:** R05308-008-009-000

**(4) DATE OF CONSTRUCTION**

c. 1869

**(5) HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

a. Areas of Significance

*See Exhibit A*

b. Period of Significance

*See Exhibit A*

**(6) ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

*See Exhibit A*

**(7) STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

*See Exhibit A*

**(8) HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

*See Exhibit A*

**RECEIVED**

*By Ben Riggle at 8:12 am, May 30, 2025*

**(9) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

*See Exhibit A*

**(10) PROPERTY INCLUDED IN DESIGNATION**

a. Exterior features

*See Exhibit A*

b. Interior features

*See Exhibit A*

c. Landscape features

None

**(11) TAX MAP**

*See Exhibit B*

**(12) LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

LOT 1C BLK 125 FRONT STREET

**(13) PHOTOGRAPHS**

a. Black & white 3 ½ "x 5", 4" x 6", 5" X 7", or 8" X 10" photographs (two copies of each) and one copy of a slide depicting:

1. An overall view of the property (taken at a distance to show all or as many of the resources as possible).
2. Close-up shots of significant or unusual decorative or structural details of the property.
3. One exterior view of any other major features or structures within the boundaries of the property to be designated.

*See Exhibit C*

**14. SOURCE CREDITS:** Provide footnotes and a bibliography of sources used in the preparation of the application.



**15. APPLICANT/PREPARER INFORMATION:**

Applicant's Name

Clayton J. Hamerski

Address

153 Yorktown Dr

Wilmington, NC 28401

Applicant's Phone Number

(910) 352-7991

Signature of applicant



Date

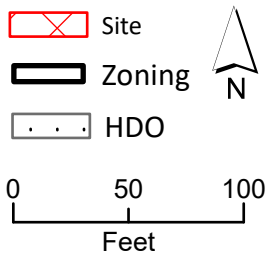
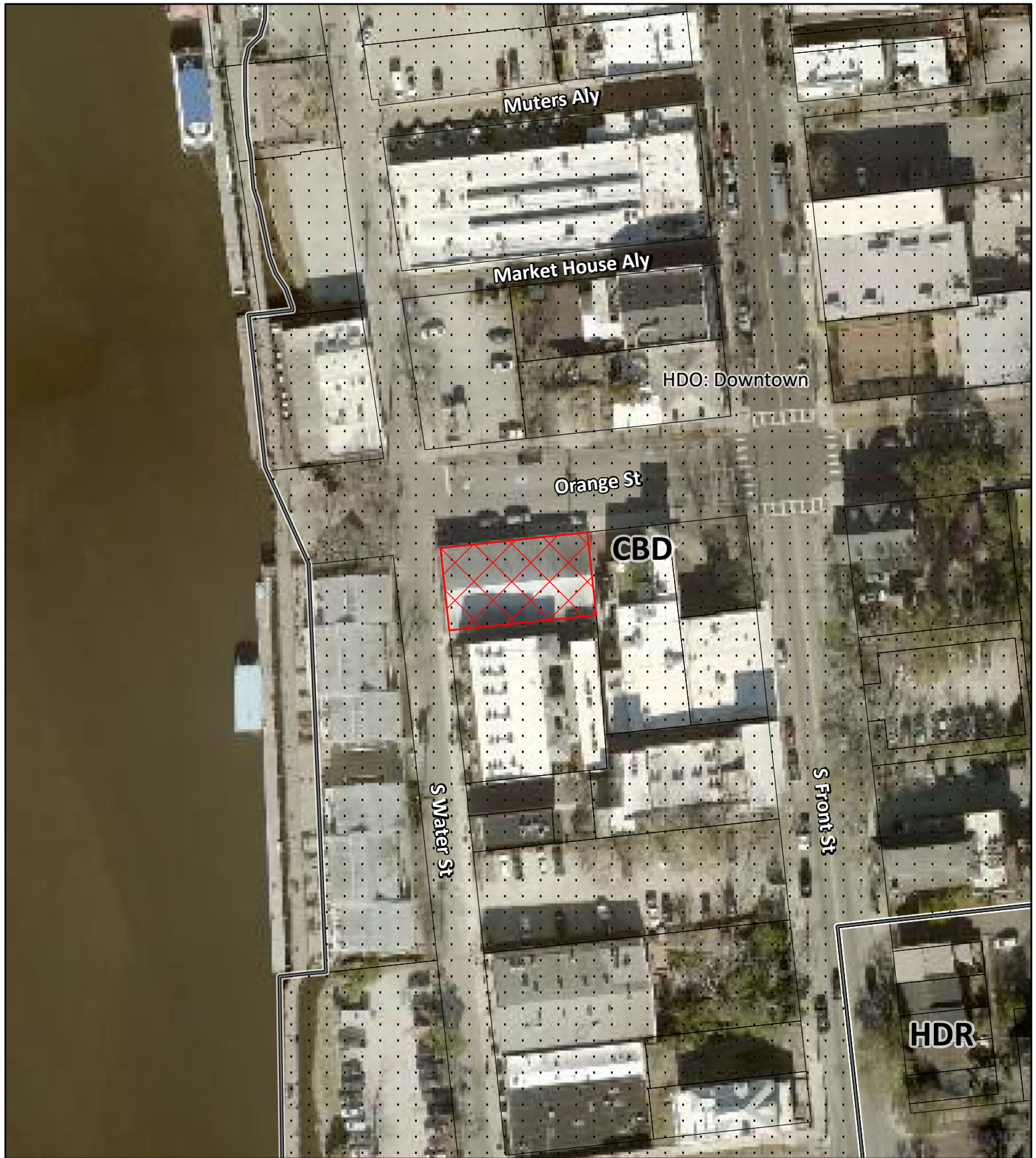
05/29/2025

Owner's Signature



Date

05/29/2025



## Historic Preservation Commission

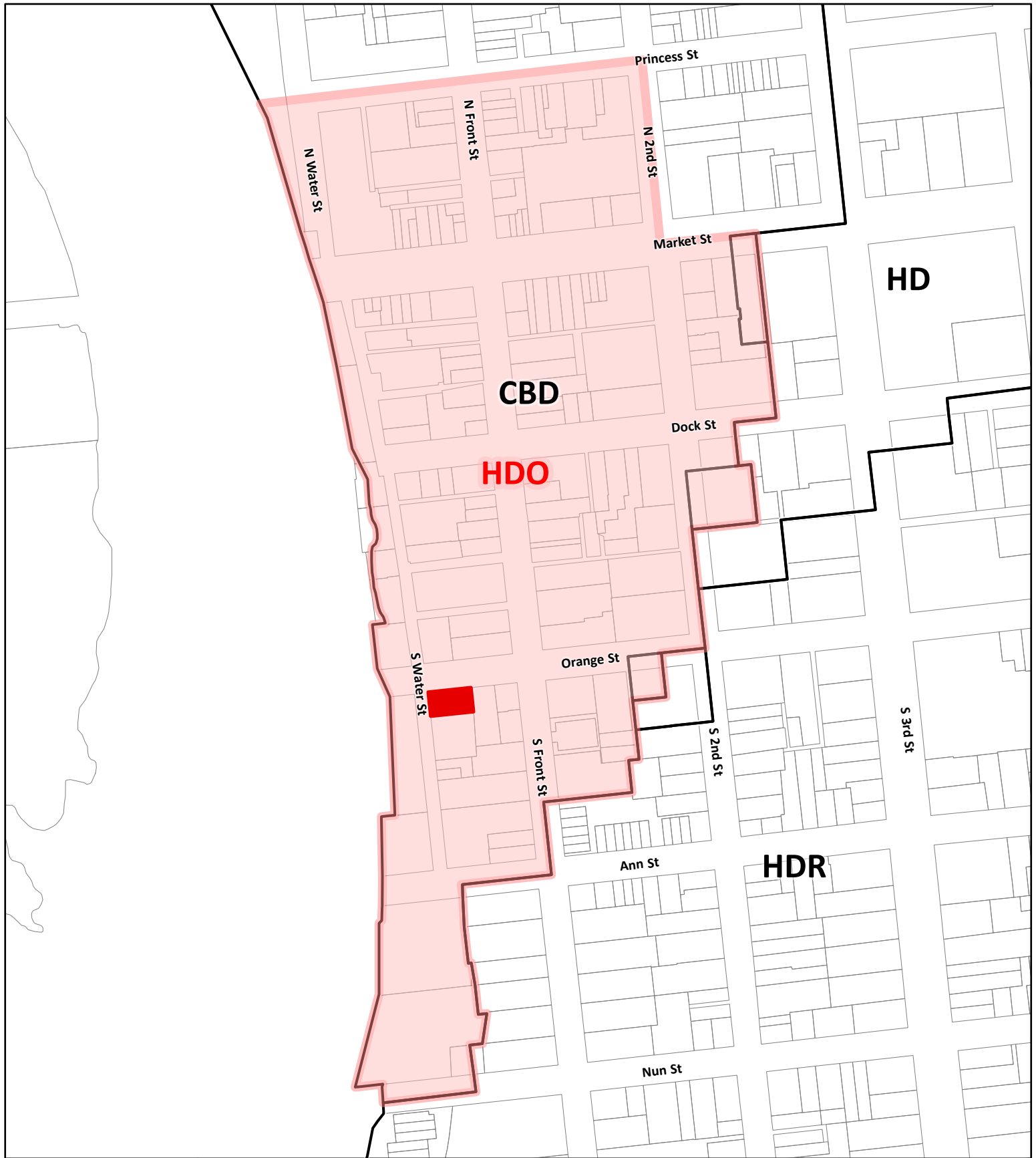
LLD-01-2607 Attachment 2 — Case Map


201 S Water St


6/27/2025









 Site

 Historic District or Overlay

 Zoning

0 100 200  
Feet

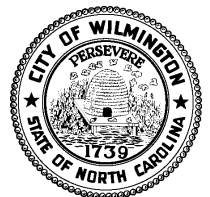
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## Historic Preservation Commission

LLD-01-2607 Attachment 3 — District Map

201 S Water St

6/27/2025



## **Exhibit A.**

### **The Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop: Historical Overview**

The Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop, located at the foot of Orange Street in Wilmington, North Carolina, tells an important story in the city's economic history. The structure housed a succession of businesses which contributed materially to the region's development, and spanned several different industries. The subject property began its life as a naval stores warehouse in the 19th century, and is today the last remaining structure connected to Wilmington's naval stores industry.<sup>7</sup> Then, it was adapted as an ironworks in the 20th century, when war, agriculture, and railroad needs provided demand for metal goods. Finally, it became a tourist attraction in the 21st century. Each of these transitions follow the City's transformation into the community that it is today.

The subject property was transferred to Peter B. Ruffin on July 25, 1831. The son of North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin (1787–1870), Peter was a merchant and financier from Hillsborough, NC.<sup>1</sup> While the specifics surrounding Ruffin's ownership of the property are unknown, a newspaper advertisement from August 24, 1864 references a "large shed" available for rent at the location, indicating its early use as a utility or storage structure. A subsequent notice from 1879 confirms continued leasing activity on the site.<sup>2</sup> The construction date of the subject property is not definitively recorded, but the Wilmington Historic Commission placed its construction in the 1870s,<sup>7</sup> and the Historic Wilmington Foundation assigned "circa 1869" on its plaque.<sup>8</sup>

D. L. Gore, a Civil War veteran and prominent Wilmington businessman, purchased the property in 1887. Gore maintained the property through the early 20th century and signed a lease agreement with the Wilmington Iron Works in 1908.<sup>3</sup> Following Gore's death in 1925, Wilmington Iron Works continued its tenancy before finally purchasing the property in 1929 from Gore's son, Claude.<sup>4</sup>

The Wilmington Iron Works emerged from a series of companies tracing back to 1859. Originally known as a "Tin and Sheet Iron Ware Manufactory," the business evolved under various names including Hart and Polley, Hart and Bailey, and Burr and Bailey. In 1892, the firm adopted the name Wilmington Iron Works.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Engstrom, Mary Claire. "Ruffin, Peter Browne." *NCpedia. Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, University of North Carolina Press. Accessed on April 30th, 2025. <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/ruffin-peter-browne>.

<sup>2</sup> *Shed Rental Listing*. Newspaper Article. 1864. Part of Bill Reaves Collection, Block Book "Orange Street"..

<sup>3</sup> *Lease Agreement between D. L. Gore and Wilmington Iron Works*. New Hanover County Register of Deeds. Deed 55/621. 1908.

<sup>4</sup> *New Hanover County Register of Deeds*, 201/594

<sup>5</sup> Tidewater Magazine, February 1984.



In 2000, Wilmington Iron Works went out of business, and their business property was sold at auction. The real estate traded hands several times in the following two decades before becoming home to the Museum of the Bizarre in 2017.<sup>6</sup>

The subject property consists of one single-story brick shed, approximately 5,400 square feet, with a galvanized metal roof. Architectural features include a reinforced metal door with “Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop” painted on the front, original or period-accurate windows and window grates, and a sliding galvanized metal garage door.

The 1884 Sanborn map shows a rectangular shed of the same size and proportions of the Machine Shop with the label “*Gen’l Storage*”. Just south of the shed, there are two labels which say “*Resin BBLs*.” Across Water street, it shows a long rectangular building long-ways along the Cape Fear River with the label “*Spirit of Turpentine W.H.*”. By 1910, the label “*Wilmington Iron Works*” appears over the Machine Shop, just south of which there is a smaller Foundry, and Office. The turpentine warehouse across the street has an updated label “*Machine Storage 1st, Pattern Storage 2nd*”.<sup>9, 10</sup> Today, the Machine Shop is the only remaining part of the original Wilmington Iron Works campus.



*Photo: Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop, Wilmington Morning Star, May 22, 1998. This layout is consistent with the 1910 Sanborn map.*

<sup>6</sup>. Star News. *Sold! 162 years of history*. February 26, 2000.

<sup>7</sup>. Star News. *Plans for Iron Works stokes fear*. 2006

<sup>8</sup>. Historic Wilmington Foundation. *Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop Plaque*. 2023

<sup>9</sup>. Sanborn Insurance Map, 1884

<sup>10</sup>. Sanborn Insurance Map, 1910

## Historic Significance

What may appear to be an ordinary brick building is, in fact, a crucial part of Wilmington's history in more ways than one.

During Reconstruction, warehouse storage with access to the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean would have been vitally important to the naval stores industry. Naval stores—products like tar, pitch, turpentine, and rosin derived from pine trees—were essential for maintaining wooden ships and had wide commercial uses. Warehouses near navigable rivers served as critical hubs for collecting, processing, and shipping these materials, allowing efficient transport to coastal ports and export markets. This strategic access supported the revival of Southern industry and trade, linking inland production with global demand during the region's postwar recovery.

As industrial capacity increased in the South in the beginning of the 20th Century, so too did demand for specialized metal products.



*Photo: Wilmington Iron Works Blueprint from 1922. ECU Collection*



*Photo: Wilmington Iron Works door at the side entrance of the DeRosset house in Downtown Wilmington*



From 1908 to 2000 the Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop operated continuously in the fabrication of iron goods to service a wide variety of industries; from doors and fences, gears, engines, boilers and saws, to large locomotives and steam-boats.

After the emergence of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad when Wilmington became a railroad hub, locomotives and metal parts to service them became crucially important. During World War II, the shipbuilding trade required specialty metal components. And as much of the American South relied on agriculture as a key part of its economy, specialized fertilizer machinery became important to produce. For all of these needs across a wide spectrum of commercial uses, the Iron Works fabricated custom metal goods.<sup>11</sup> A 1928 article in the Wilmington Morning Star reflects on the company's ability to adapt, saying *"the firm here were pioneer builders of turpentine stills at a time when the turpentine business was at its height."*<sup>12</sup>

Finally this structure, like so much of Wilmington's economy, has become connected with the tourism industry. With the Museum of the Bizarre operating at the property since 2017, this property follows a common shift in the overall economy of the region, which has seen tourism as a crucial and growing sector of the economy since the late 20th century.

Overall, the subject property tells several interesting and unique stories about Wilmington which, taken together, tell an important story of our City's economic past and present.

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<sup>11</sup>. *Wilmington Morning Star* December 14, 1909.

<sup>12</sup>. *Wilmington Morning Star*, 1928

## Bibliography

1. Engstrom, Mary Claire. "Ruffin, Peter Browne." *NCpedia. Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. Accessed on April 30th, 2025.*  
<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/ruffin-peter-browne>.
2. *Shed Rental Listing*. Newspaper Article. 1864. Part of Bill Reaves Collection, Block Book "Orange Street"..
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4. *New Hanover County Register of Deeds, 201/594*
5. Tidewater Magazine, February 1984.
6. Star News. *Sold! 162 years of history*. February 26, 2000.
7. *Wilmington Morning Star* December 14, 1909.
8. *Wilmington Morning Star, 1928*
9. Star News. *Plans for Iron Works stokes fear*. 2006
10. Historic Wilmington Foundation. *Wilmington Iron Works Machine Shop Plaque*. 2023
11. Sanborn Insurance Map, 1884
12. Sanborn Insurance Map, 1910



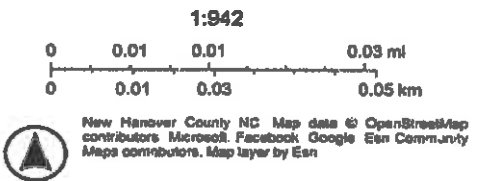
ArcGIS Web Map

Exhibit B



4/15/2025, 5:50:09 PM

- |             |                    |               |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|
| • Addresses | ▬ Municipal Limits | Aerials 2023  |
| • Landmarks | ▬ Parcels          | Red: Band_1   |
| • Parks     | ▬ Roads            | Green: Band_2 |
|             |                    | Blue: Band_3  |



**Exhibit C.**





