

CITY OF HIGH POINT

AGENDA ITEM



Title: Designation of Fli-Back Building as a Guilford County Historic Landmark
(City of High Point)

From: Chris Andrews, Interim Planning & Development Director

Meeting Date: May 16, 2022

Public Hearing: Yes

Advertising Date: May 6, 2022 and May 11, 2022

Attachments:

- A. Landmark Designation Ordinance
- B. Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission Recommendation
- C. High Point Historic Preservation Commission Memo
- D. Local Landmark Report

Advertised By: Planning & Development

PURPOSE:

To consider designation of the Fli-Back Building at 710/716 W Green Drive as a Guilford County Historic Landmark.

BACKGROUND:

Guilford County's Historic Landmark program began in 1980 to recognize sites with important elements of culture, history, architectural history, or prehistory for the education, pleasure, and enrichment of area residents. The landmark designation process begins when an application is submitted to the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission. Privately owned landmark properties are eligible for a property tax deferral of up to 50 percent. Landmarks may not be materially altered or demolished without the approval of the Guilford County Historic Preservation.

Currently, there are 113 Historic Landmarks in Guilford County with 20 located within High Point.

BUDGET IMPACT:

There is no budget impact.

RECOMMENDATION / ACTION REQUESTED:

The Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission unanimously recommended that the Fli-Back Building be designated a Guilford County Historic Landmark property at its meeting on March 15, 2022.

At its meeting on April 13, 2022, the High Point Historic Preservation Commission also unanimously recommended that the City Council approve the local historic landmark designation for the property.

AN ORDINANCE ADOPTED BY THE MAYOR AND THE HIGH POINT CITY COUNCIL
DESIGNATING THE FLI-BACK BUILDING AN HISTORIC LANDMARK

WHEREAS, all the prerequisites to the adoption of the ordinance, as prescribed in chapter 160D, Article 9, Part 4 of the North Carolina General Statutes, have been met;

WHEREAS, the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission has submitted a report, which is incorporated herein by reference, and recommended in a public hearing that the property described below be designated as an historic landmark;

WHEREAS, appropriate notice has been given of the public hearing as required by law;

WHEREAS, the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission finds that the property described herein is of historical, architectural, educational, and/or cultural significance, and its preservation should be encouraged so as to safeguard the heritage of the City and County and to promote the use and conservation for the education, pleasure, and enrichment of the residents of the City and County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE HIGH POINT MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL.:

Section 1. The Mayor and the High Point City Council accepts the findings of the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission and adopts the recommendation of the Commission for the preservation of the subject property by the authority set forth in Chapter 160D, Article 9, Part 4 of the North Carolina General Statutes and local ordinance adopted pursuant thereto.

Section 2. The designation includes the interior and exterior of the building and the entire 0.30-acre parcel at 710/716 W Green Drive and as described by Guilford County Parcel Identification Number 172331 and Guilford County Registry Deed Book 8556, page 0651.

Section 3. The Guilford County Landmark Plaque shall be installed on the property, and such sign shall indicate that such property has been designated as an Historic Landmark. Details of the display of the plaque are to be approved by the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission before installation.

Section 4. The procedures provided by law, including waiting periods, shall be observed prior to demolition, alteration or remodeling referred to as the Certificate of Appropriateness process or removal of the designation from the property.

Section 5. A certified copy of this ordinance is to be appropriately recorded with the Register of Deeds, the Tax Department, and Inspections Department in accordance with provisions of Chapter 160D, Article 9, Part 4 of the North Carolina General Statutes and the local ordinance adopted pursuant thereto.

Section 6. This ordinance shall be effective from and after its adoption.

Adopted by the City Council
City of High Point, North Carolina
The ___ day of _____

By: _____
Jay W. Wagner, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa B. Vierling, City Clerk



GUILFORD COUNTY
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission

Recommendation for Local Historic Landmark Designation

Date: May 5, 2022

To: Mayor Wagner and High Point City Council

From: Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission

Property: Fli-Back Toy Factory Bldg., 710/716 W. Green Dr, High Point, NC

Property designation details: The designation comprises the entire parcel and building, includes the interior as well as the exterior of the building.

Statement of Significance summary: The Fli-Back Toy Company was one of the most important manufacturers in High Point history. The Fli-Back Toy Factory *building* has retained a high level of integrity and is representative of High Point's industrial boom in the first half of the 20th century. Built in 1945, the building was the manufacturing location for the Fli-Back Corporation, which popularized, assembled, and distributed the iconic paddle ball toy to worldwide markets. The building's period of significance ranges from its construction date in 1945 to its last year of production, 1983.

Motion to recommend: Following review and discussion of the Landmark application at its regular meeting on March 15, 2022, the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission voted 6 to 0 with 1 abstention to recommend Historic Landmark designation for the entire property.



To: Historic Preservation Commission Members

From: David Fencl, Senior Planner

Meeting Date: April 13, 2022

Subject: Designation of the Fli-Back Building (710/716 W. Green Drive) as a Guilford County Historic Landmark

PURPOSE:

The Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously at its meeting on March 15, 2022 to recommend landmark designation for the Fli-Back Building to the High Point City Council. As is the City's procedure, the application is next reviewed by the City's HPC, and a recommendation accompanies the application to the City Council for its consideration.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The Fli-Back Building is being proposed for designation on account of its local historical significance as the place where the Fli-Back Corporation manufactured wooden toys, including the Fly-Back, a paddle ball toy, from 1945 to 1983. Founded in 1931, by James E. Gibson, a High Point businessman, the Fly-Back Company was incorporated in 1950 and employed between 100-200 people to work in its factory. The Fly-Back Company made millions of Fly-Back toys for a worldwide market. At the time of Gibson's death in 1968, the Fli-Back Corporation was producing over 150 different toy products and doing business in more than 20 countries around the world. In 1972, The Fli-Back Company was sold to the Ohio Art Company, the makers of Etch-A-Sketch, with toys continuing to be produced at the W. Green Drive factory until it was closed in 1983.

The Fli-Back Building proposed for designation housed the company's enameling and drying process on the first level and toy assembly on the second level. Another Fli-Back building located to the south, that was demolished between 1993 and 1998, was utilized for woodworking and assembly.

The Fli-Back Building has retained a high level of integrity. The steel-frame, two-level, painted brick building rests on a brick foundation. The building is four bays wide and eight bays deep. A tiered terracotta tile parapet rises across the center two bays of the front and rear facades. Every window on the façade is an identical 30-light steel-framed window. On the first level, poured concrete floors, brick walls, and the steel-frame windows contribute to the building's industrial feeling. Metal beams and columns, painted white, are positioned throughout the space to provide adequate support for the second level. The original metal sprinkler system is still intact and runs

underneath the second level. A two-level, one-bay wide wing that was built shortly after construction of the original building is located on the north elevation and contained a small apartment with a full bathroom and bedroom.

The proposed boundary for the Local Landmark Designation is the property's current 0.26 acre parcel. The property is currently owned by Bricks & Beams, LLC.

RECOMMENDATION / ACTION REQUESTED:

Staff finds that the application supports approval of the landmark designation. Furthermore, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the City Council that the ordinance designating the Fli-Back Building at 710/716 W. Green Drive a Guilford County Historic Landmark be approved.

Attachments: Guilford County Local Landmark Report



FLI-BACK TOY FACTORY LOCAL LANDMARK REPORT

710 West Green Drive
High Point, North Carolina 27260

Application for Guilford County Local Landmark Designation
Prepared by Gate City Preservation L.L.C.
February 2022



Guilford County Planning & Development Department

Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission

HISTORIC NAME(S) OF PROPERTY

Fli-Back Toy Factory
Fli-Back Building

ADDRESS OF PROPERTY

710 West Green Drive, High Point, North Carolina 27260

PIN # 6890928227

DEED BOOK & PAGE # 4429-01518

PLAT BOOK AND PAGE # N/A

ZONING HI

Amount of land/acreage to be designated

0.26 acres

Interior to be designated

☒ Yes ☐ No

Property Owner's Address & Phone:

Rudi Nijssen (Eric O'Leary Project Lead)
501 South Centennial Street
High Point, North Carolina 27260

E-mail

eric.oleary@tariki.com
rudi@schwnunghome.com

Applicant's Address & Phone:

Gate City Preservation L.L.C.
211 Tate Street
Greensboro, North Carolina 27403

E-mail

samantha@gatecitypreservation.com

The application is due no later than twelve noon (12 noon) on the **last** Tuesday of the month, 21 days before the regularly scheduled meeting held on every third (3rd) Tuesday of the month. Please address to:

**Guilford County Planning Department
ATTN: Historic Preservation Commission
PO Box 3427
Greensboro, NC 27402**

II. Maps and Floor Plans

Guilford County Tax Map

Search
Details
Map

Zoom all
Mailing labels
CSV

Table view
Clear

THAYERCRAFT INDUSTRIES
716 W GREEN DR

[Property Report](#) [Community Info](#)
[Water Quality](#) [Neighborhood Sales](#)
[Parcel Verify](#) [Tax Appraisal Information](#)
[Tax Bill](#) [Map Links](#) [Oblique Photos](#)

Parcel Number	172331
PIN	6890928227
Owner	THAYERCRAFT INDUSTRIES
Owner History	Card Image
Mail Address	710 W GREEN DR
Mail City	HIGH POINT
Mail State	NC
Mail Zip	27260
Property Address	716 W GREEN DR
Legal Description	W GREEN DR
Deed	004429-01518
Plat	

GIS Data Viewer
Quick Search
Identify
Street View
Community Info
Map Themes
Print

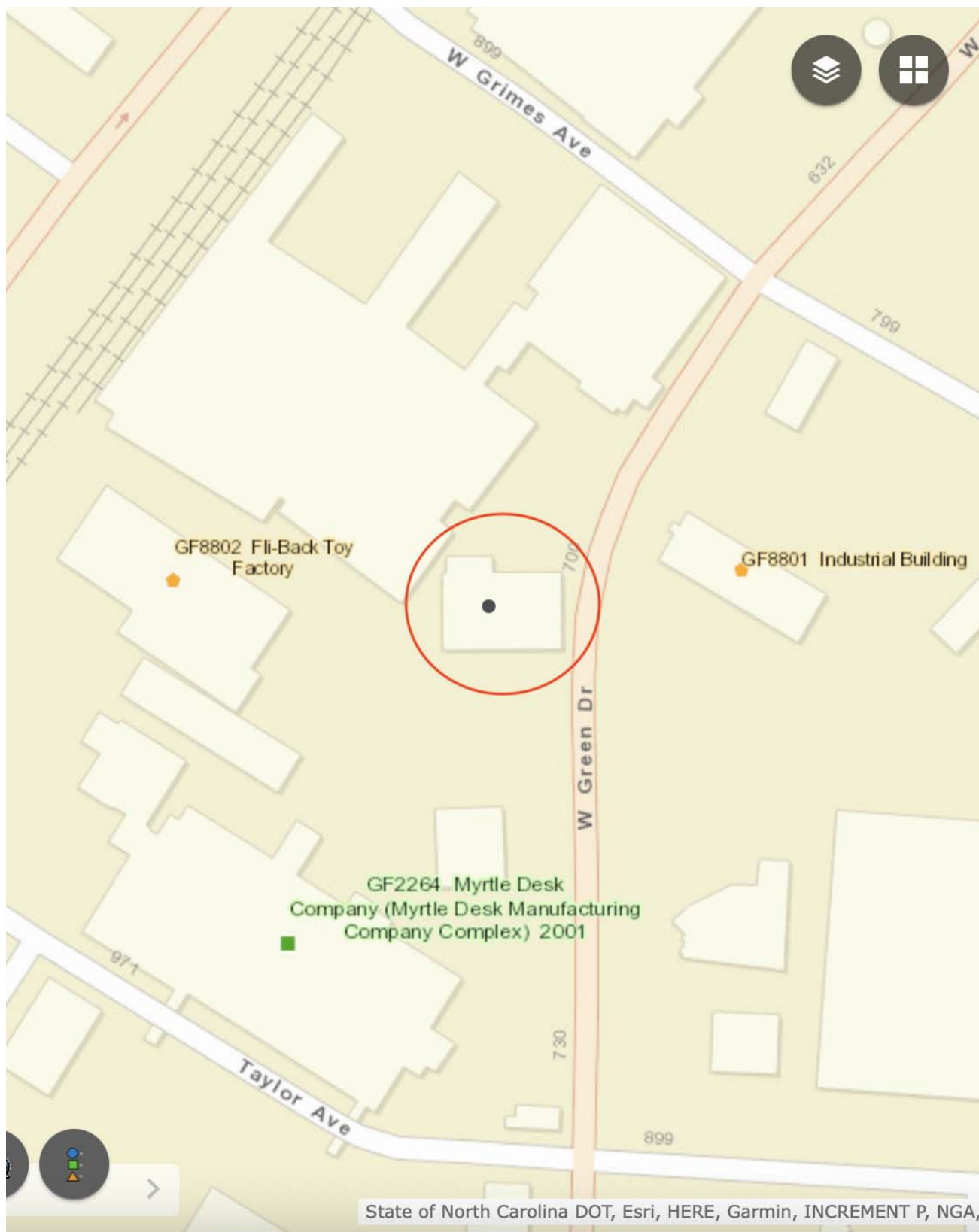
Aerial Map



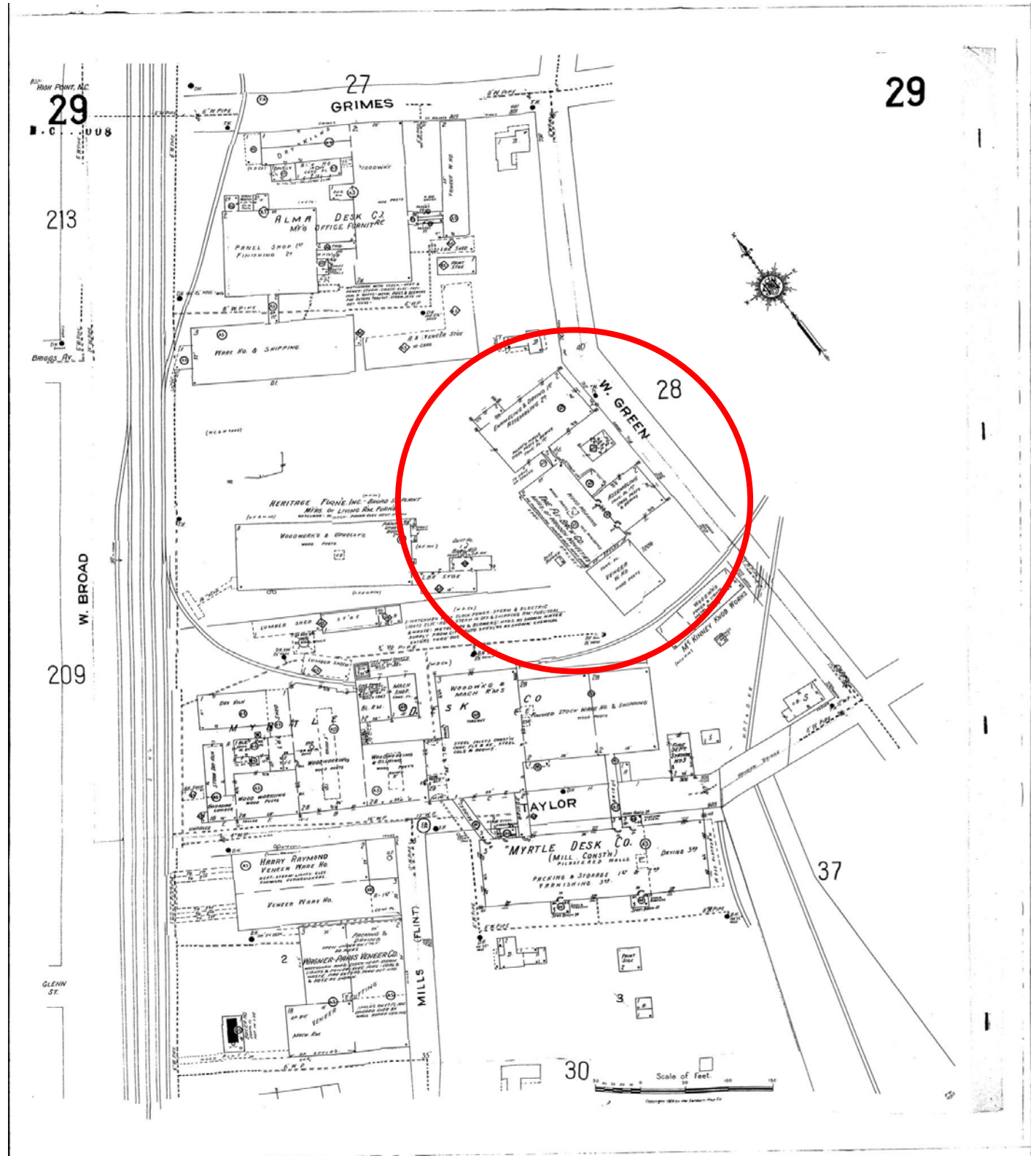
Aerial View



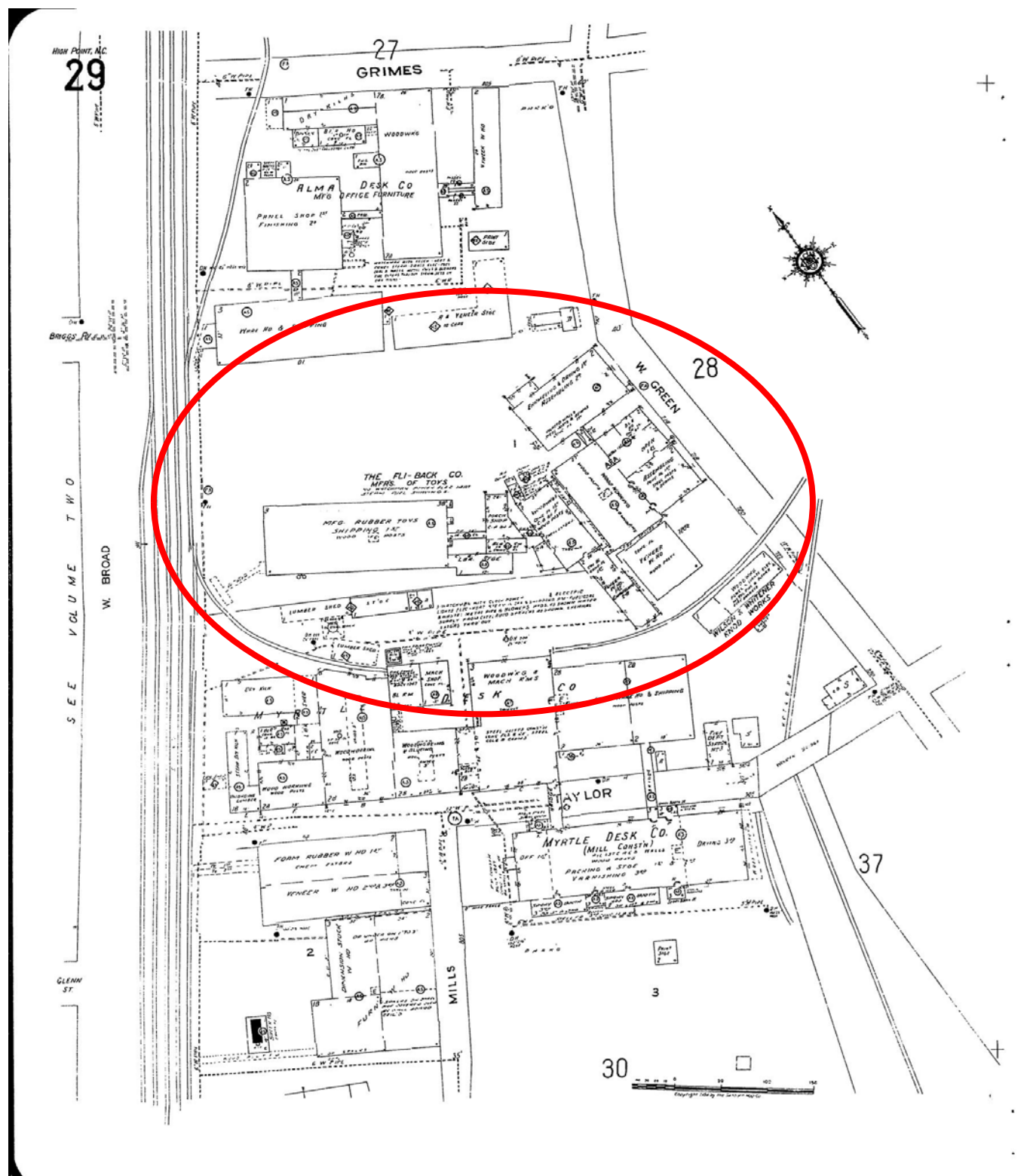
HPOWeb Map



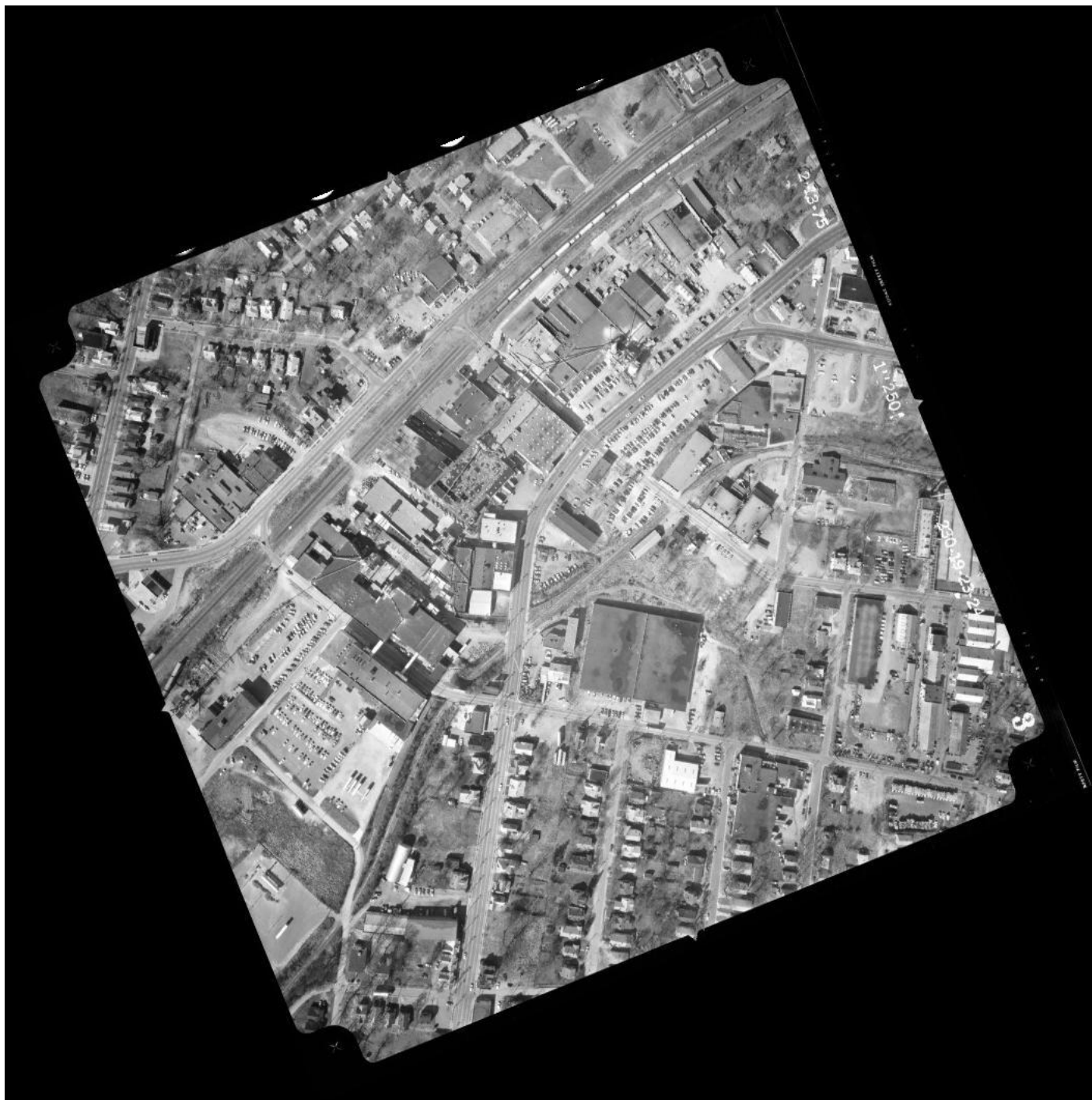
Sanborn Map, 1950



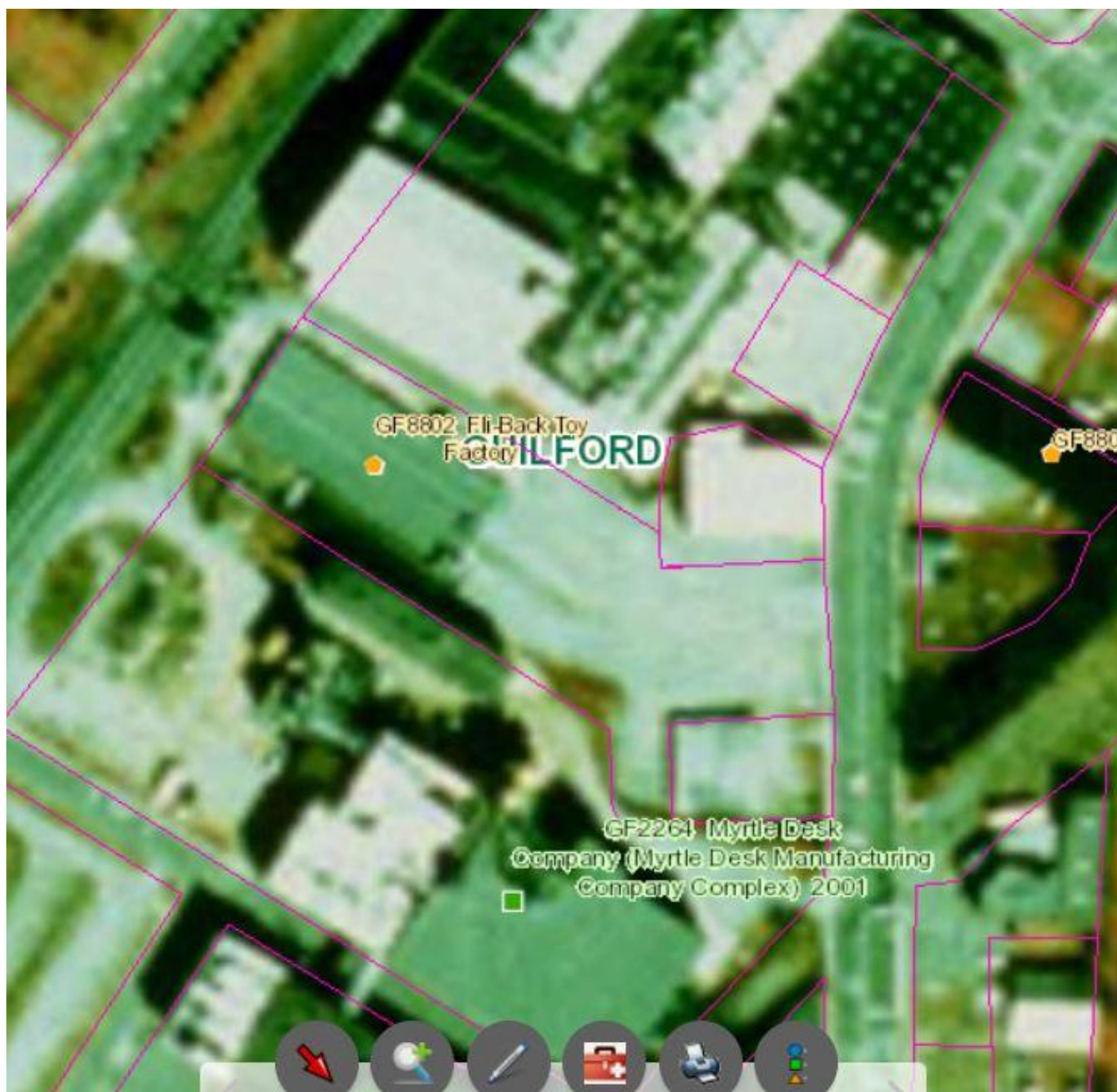
Sanborn Map, 1956



Aerial Map, 1975

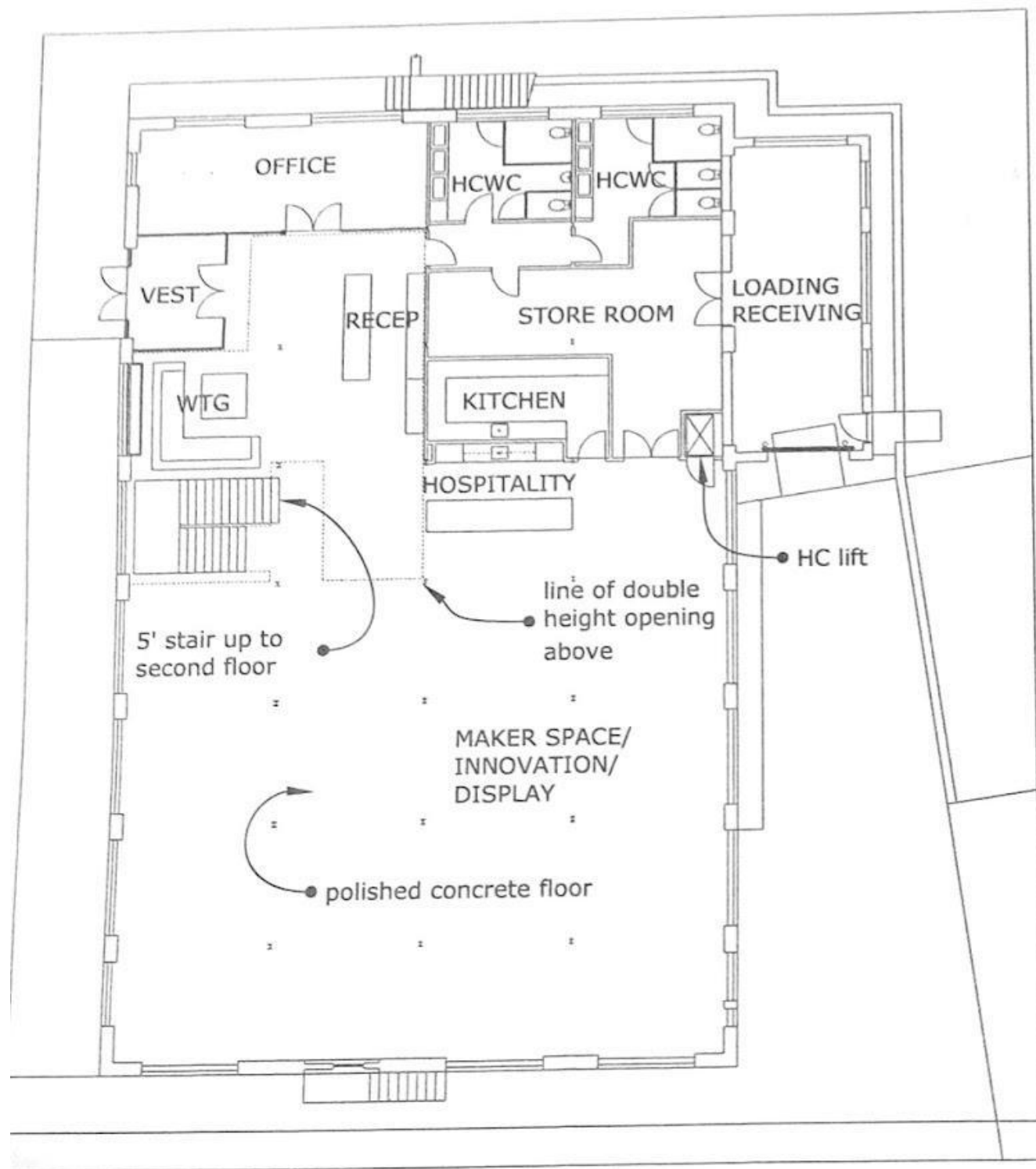


Aerial Map, 1998

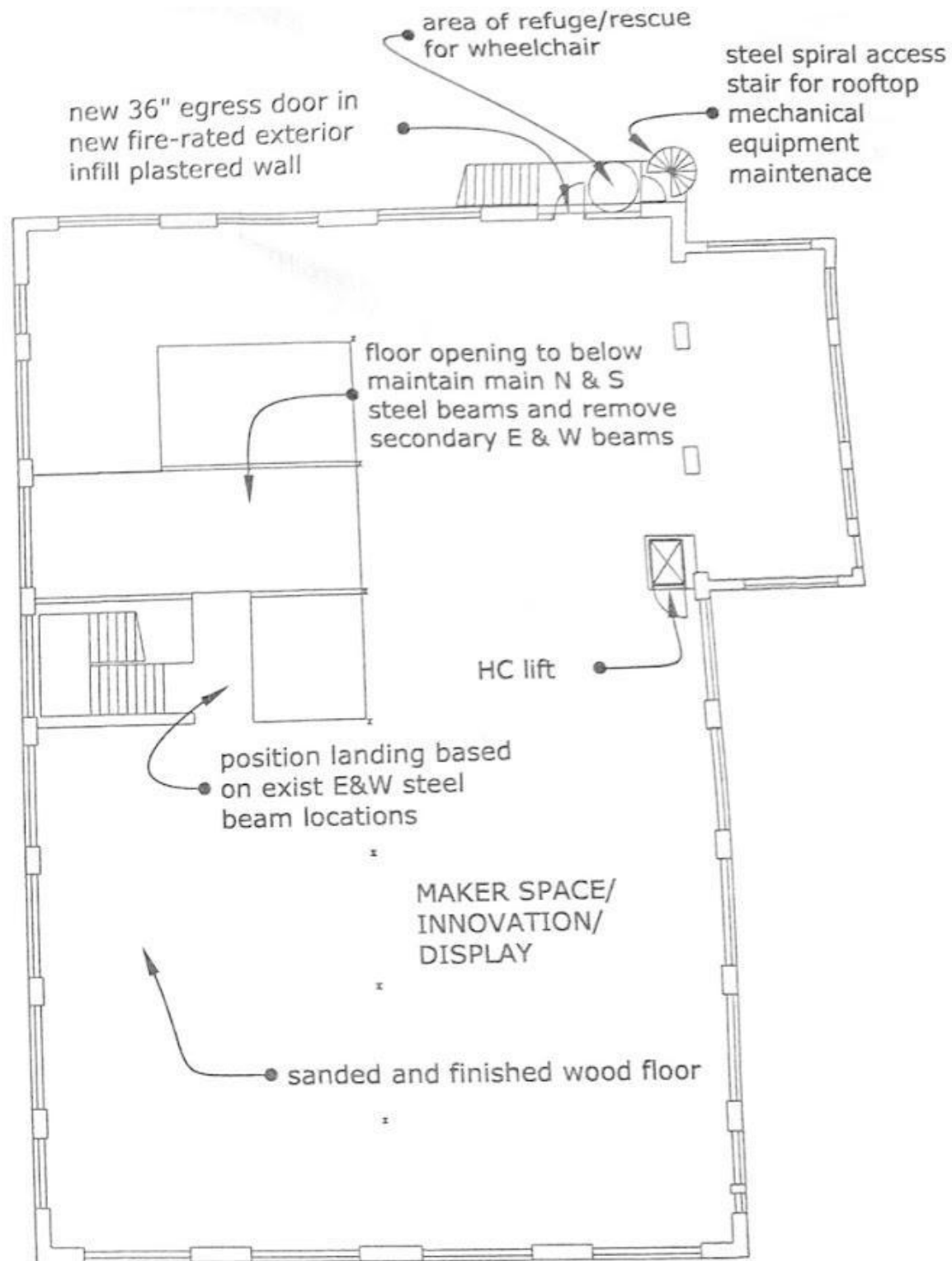


Architectural Drawings

First Level



Second Level



III. Architectural Assessment

Architectural Description

Setting

The Fli-Back Building is located on the west side of West Green Drive between Taylor Avenue to the south and West Grimes Avenue to the north (Fig. 1). The lot is small with minimal vegetation and the building takes up most of its lot, similar to other industrial and commercial buildings in Guilford County. The topography of the lot rises to the northwest. A sidewalk runs down its east exposure. The building is positioned close to the sidewalk and to West Green Drive. The Myrtle Desk Company (Study List, 2001) is located south of the Fli-Back Building, across the vacant lot where the demolished building, used for woodworking and assembly, once stood. The building used for shipping, though altered, is still located to the west of the Fli-Back Building. To the north of the Fli-Back Building is another significant mid-century modern industrial building that was operated by the Alma Desk Company (Surveyed in 2014, GF1996). Although one building is now gone and another has been substantially altered, the feeling of this industrial area as an important manufacturing district is still present.

Front (East) Elevation

The Fli-Back Building has high integrity. The steel-frame, two-level, painted brick building rests on a brick foundation. The bricks for the building were wire cut and laid in common bond with a row of ten stretchers to one row of headers (Fig. 8). The building is four bays wide and eight bays deep (Fig. 2). The tiered, terracotta tile parapet rises across the center two bays of the façade (east) and rear (west) elevations (Fig. 6). The building has a flat roof. A painted line of faded blue runs across the entire cream-colored building between the first and second levels and a block-lettered “710” marks the building’s address on the bottom corner of the north side of the façade (east elevation) (Fig. 7). The building has retained its large thirty-light and fifteen-light steel-framed windows with central openings (Fig. 9).

Every window on the façade is an identical thirty-light steel-framed window. The windows vary in condition. Some have been painted and some have lights that have been replaced, but the steel frames have retained a high level of integrity. From south to north, the first bay is comprised of a window, followed by an inset, metal pedestrian door, then two identical windows which make up the northern end of the façade. The number “710” is painted in block letters under the far north window. The first level sits significantly higher than street grade, so a set of concrete stairs with eight treads leads from the sidewalk on West Green Drive to the front door (Fig. 10). On the second level, there are four bays of identical thirty-light steel windows.

Side (North) Elevation

The first level of the side (north) elevation, from east to west, is comprised of a vertical window with three horizontal lights and a fifteen-light window, both steel frame, four more bays of thirty-light windows identical to the façade, and a steel fire escape leads to the second level, which has a nearly identical configuration (Fig. 3). The second level differs from the first to accommodate a metal pedestrian door at the top of the fire escape. Directly to the east of the door is a fifteen-light steel frame window. On the rear of the north elevation there is a two-level, one-bay-wide wing that was constructed a few years after the building’s original construction, as evidenced by the enclosed windows on the second level to the rear of the north elevation. On the east-facing side of the wing on the first level, there is a loading dock with a large, metal garage door, protected by a simple flat-roof overhang. On the north elevation of the wing, there is a metal pedestrian door, a fifteen-light steel frame window and a thirty-light steel-frame window. On the second

level of the wing on the east elevation, there is evidence of an enclosed thirty-light window, which adds privacy to the bathroom. A vertical steel-frame window with four horizontal lights has been installed in its place. On the second level of the north elevation, two thirty-light windows have been enclosed and replaced with smaller, fifteen-light windows.

Side (South) Elevation

On the side (south) elevation, the first level, from west to east, is comprised of a metal pedestrian door (boarded), six thirty-light windows, and one fifteen-light window (Fig. 4). On the second level, there is a fifteen-light window, two thirty-light windows, large metal double doors with strap hinges, a row of three thirty-light windows, and a fifteen-light window.

Rear (West) Elevation

The first level of the rear (west) elevation, from north to south, is comprised of three thirty-light steel frame windows, and a large metal sliding door (Fig. 5). The second level is comprised of four thirty-light windows. The stepped terracotta parapet is visible from this elevation.

Interior

The interior of the building has retained a high level of integrity (Fig. 11). On the first level, poured concrete floors, brick walls, and the steel-frame windows contribute to the building's industrial feeling. Metal beams and columns, painted white, are strategically positioned throughout the space to provide adequate support for the second level. The original metal sprinkler system is still intact and runs underneath the second level subfloor. On the south elevation, a steep wooden staircase leads to the second level.

The second level flooring material is severely deteriorated oak plank flooring. Where flooring is missing, plywood has been laid. The northeast quadrant of the second level is missing its flooring entirely, revealing the metal support beams below. Other than the differentiation in floor material, the second level is similar, in materials and design, to the first level.

In the wing addition on the north elevation there is a small apartment with a full bathroom and bedroom. The bathroom is accessed first through the entryway. The floors are linoleum and the walls have been covered with a vinyl sheet that resembles faux-wood paneling. The bedroom walls are painted brick. Thirty-light windows, once located on the south wall of the north elevation, were removed to accommodate the construction of the wing addition. The materials used in this addition are exact matches to the original building, making it likely that the wing addition was completed soon after the original construction.

IV. Historical

By the beginning of the twentieth century, High Point's mass industrialization had already begun. In Charles Hart's 1913 aerial view of the city, factories were already lining the south side of the railroad tracks west of South Main Street.¹ Most manufacturing at this time was of low-to-mid-end furniture, but all non-war-related manufacturing stopped during World War I in order to redirect time, attention, and resources to the war effort. In the post-war period, High Point industries expanded their markets to reach other regions of the country, but the boom was short-lived. After about a decade of prosperity and growth, the Great Depression hit (1929-1941), resulting in the closure of nearly half of the city's furniture factories.²

¹ Laura A. Philips, *High Point's Industrial History*, 4.

² Laura A. Philips, *High Point's Industrial History*, 8.

It was during this time that James E. Gibson, a High Point Businessman, was struck with inspiration. In 1931, as businesses were floundering, Gibson was inspired when his 13-year-old daughter Josephine came home one day with a paddle ball toy from the ice cream shop.³ After examining the toy, Gibson decided to start his own business producing high quality paddle ball toys at affordable prices. The business started in a frame shed in the backyard of Gibson's father-in-law, where the family's buggy was housed (Appendix 4).⁴ Gibson started distributing the toys to stores around North Carolina, loading them up in his Model A Ford and selling them from the trunk of his car. ⁵ In 1932, either Gibson's wife, Rozena Perryman Gibson, or Gibson's brother, Walter Irving Gibson, (both are credited by different sources) coined the name "Fli-Back" along with its iconic symbol of the bronc-riding, paddle ball-playing cowboy.⁶

Although paddle ball toys had already been invented in the late 1840s, Gibson made the toy an international sensation. He began marketing his version of the paddle ball toy, the Fli-Back, up and down the east coast. After a trip to New York where Gibson introduced the toy to Macy's Department Store, sales exploded on a national level. Even during the Great Depression, business was booming, and the factory outgrew its buildings four times in eight years before making plans for a new complex on West Green Drive. On June 6, 1945, *The High Point Enterprise* reported,

"The Fli-Back corporation, manufacturer of toys and novelties, today was issued a permit for construction of two semi-fireproof buildings on West Green Street near Grimes Street at an initial cost of \$30,000...The two buildings will be of brick, steel and concrete construction and will contain a sprinkler system. Each will be two stories in height. One structure will be 68 by 106 feet. Construction will be of the most modern factory and mill type. Work is scheduled to get under way within a few days...It is the largest single new construction project to be announced here within several months...Building officials said that just as soon as the necessary labor and materials can be released, High Point will experience one of the largest new construction and modernization booms in the city's history."⁷

It is likely that the Fli-Back factory complex on West Green Drive was a point of pride for company executives because an illustrated rendering of the factory was featured in the Fli-Back Corporation logo for decades (Appendix 1). Originally, the factory was comprised of two structures. The extant Fli-Back Building housed the enameling and drying process on the first level and toy assembly on the second level. The other building, located to the south, was utilized for woodworking and assembly. It was demolished sometime between 1993 and 1998. From what can be interpreted from 1950 and 1956 Sanborn maps and the illustration of the complex used as the Fli-Back Corporation logo, the southern building, demolished sometime between 1993 and 1998, was a two-level masonry building with two large wings, one to the east and one to the south. Inside the main block, the building had wood posts rather than steel. The eastern wing, used for assembling, had steel posts and beams. The southern wing, labeled as "veneer warehouse," had wooden posts. Concrete flooring was used throughout.

³ "Thwap! Thwap! Thwap! Paddleball Isn't As Big Today As It Was In The '30s But High Point's Fli-Back Co. Proves It Isn't Dead Yet," *Charlotte Observer*, Sunday, May 30, 1976. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

⁴ Laura A. Philips, High Point Industrial Survey (2014). Newspaper excerpt. *The High Point Enterprise*, Sunday, July 4, 1976.

⁵ "Thwap! Thwap! Thwap! Paddleball Isn't As Big Today As It Was In The '30s But High Point's Fli-Back Co. Proves It Isn't Dead Yet," *Charlotte Observer*, Sunday, May 30, 1976. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

⁶ Both Rozena Gibson and Gibson's brother have been credited with branding the product. "The Fli-Back Company," a narrative history found in the High Point Museum research files claims the name was coined by Rozena Perryman. "Thwap! Thwap! Thwap!" an article from the *Charlotte Observer* (1976) claims it was Gibson's brother. Ancestry.com research shows Gibson's brother's name as Walter Irving Gibson.

⁷ "Two Brick, Concrete and Steel Structures To Be Built At A Cost Of \$30,000," *High Point Enterprise*. June 6, 1945. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

By 1956, Fli-Back Corporation had acquired the large three-level building to the west, previously owned by Heritage Furniture Company, to be used for shipping on the first level and for the manufacture of rubber toy parts on the second and third levels. This building is still extant; however, it has been significantly altered and is now a one-level building, likely due to the significant fire damage the building sustained in 1969.⁸ According to the Sanborn map of 1956, this building originally stood at three levels and there were no openings in the main block. Between 1950 and 1956, the Fli-Back Corporation constructed several accessory buildings and additions between the south and west buildings.

With a finished manufacturing complex and a few years of exceptional marketing strategy, the paddle ball toy became known to the world as a “Fli-Back.” In January of 1950, the business was officially incorporated, with an authorized capital stock of \$500,000 and subscribed to J.E. Gibson, Rozena Gibson, and J. E. Gibson, Jr. (Appendix 3).⁹ The corporation was employing anywhere between 100-200 people to work in the factory, the majority of whom were Black women. Women were employed in various capacities at the plant, including “the manufacture, inspection, packing, and shipping of the toys.”¹⁰ Although the source has not yet been found, several reports claim that all workers at the Fli-Back factory, regardless of race, were paid the same wage.¹¹

As the *High Point Enterprise* reported in “High Pointers of High Point (1976), “One of the most amazingly successful industrial developments to make High Point famous in the 1930s was the paddleball boom in which the late J. E. Gibson developed the Fli-Back Company which poured them out by the millions for a market that was worldwide...the Fli-Back plant is wedged between two giant desk manufacturers [Myrtle Desk and Alma Desk] in a lineup of great firms dominating their respective fields.”¹² According to Steven Reddicliffe from the *Dallas Times Herald* in 1985, The Fli-Back was among the “great toys, in the playroom pantheon with [Etch-A-Sketch], Silly Putty, the Slinky, the Wiffle Ball...Play-Doh, Lincoln Logs, [and] Tinker Toys.”¹³

All over the country, from North Carolina to Florida to Ohio to California, the Fli-Back toy became ubiquitous. A 1972 photograph from South Carolina’s *The Columbia Record* shows two young boys, devoting “some vacation time to figuring out the intricate operation of a ‘fli-back’” (Appendix 2). It was affordable, costing only 10 cents, which made it accessible to children of all socioeconomic backgrounds. J. E. Gibson’s son, Walter, remarked, “Since the company’s inception it has been its aim to provide toys that each child could afford, regardless of the economic strata or conditions.”¹⁴ Dozens of newspaper entries can be found referencing Fli-Backs given to guests as party favors at children’s events or as prizes in competitions.

The Fli-Back became an even bigger sensation when the corporation sponsored one of the first 3D movies to come to theaters, *House of Wax* (1953), which involved a massive distribution of 10 million paddle balls ahead of the movie premiere, each toy stamped with, “Featured in Warner Bros.’ Thrilling Natural Vision 3-

⁸ “Fli-Back Plant Guttled By Fire,” *The High Point Enterprise*, Wednesday, May 7, 1969. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

⁹ “New Corporations,” *The News and Observer*, Wednesday, January 25, 1950. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁰ “Santa Claus Carrying Toys of High Point Origin This Year,” *The High Point Enterprise*, Sunday, December 3, 1950. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹¹ This claim is found in the High Point Museum research files as well as a North Carolina Museum of History blog post by Katie Edwards, Curator of Popular Culture for the North Carolina Museum of History, “Fli-Back to North Carolina,” <<https://www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/blog/fli-back-to-nc>>.

¹² Holt McPherson, “High Pointers of High Point,” *High Point Enterprise*, 1976. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹³ “An Eternal Clean Slate,” *The Modesto Bee* (Modesto, California) reprint of *Dallas Times Herald*, Sunday, May 19, 1985. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁴ Holt McPherson, “Walter L. Gibson, High Pointer of the Week,” *The High Point Enterprise*, Sunday, April 13, 1969. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

Dimension Motion Picture ‘House of Wax,’ color by WarnerColor.”¹⁵ The movie begins with a gratuitous paddle ball scene that utilizes the three-dimensional technology of the film. *The Misfits* (1961), starring Marilyn Monroe, featured an iconic paddle ball scene as well. The Fli-Back paddle ball became a major part of American entertainment and recreation in the post-war period and continued to be a popular game for the young and old alike until the 1980s.

By the time the company started reaching international markets, The Fli-Back Corporation was producing more than its iconic paddleball. An article from the *High Point Enterprise* in 1965 announced a notable claim that the Fli-Back Corporation had become the number one producers of yo-yos after the bankruptcy of the Luck factory in Wisconsin.¹⁶ By Gibson’s death in 1968, the Fli-Back Corporation was producing over 150 different toy products and was doing business in more than 20 countries around the world.¹⁷ As the production grew, so did the complex on West Green Drive. To keep up with demand, the company began to expand outside of High Point, establishing warehouses in the Midwest and on the West Coast.¹⁸

After J. E. Gibson’s death, his widow, Rozena Perryman Gibson became company president. In 1972, the company was sold to the Ohio Art Company, the makers of Etch-A-Sketch. In an open letter to Fli-Back employees, President Rozena Gibson emphasized, “The Fli-Back Company will continue to operate under its present management, at its present facilities and with the same office and factory personnel.”¹⁹ Rozena and J. E. Gibson’s son, Walter Gibson, continued to advise with the company after the acquisition. The factory continued making toys until it was shut down in 1983.

Chain of Title

- **Book 8556 Page 651-653**
 - Recorded on December 15, 2021
 - Grantor: Thayercraft Industries
 - Grantee: Bricks & Beams, LLC
- **Book 4429 Page 1518-1534**
 - Recorded on June 21, 1996
 - Grantor: Alma Desk Company (Bankruptcy) (J. Brooks Reitzel, Jr., Trustee in Bankruptcy for All Liquidation Inc., ADC Liquidation, Inc., and CII Liquidation, Inc.)
 - Grantee: Thayercraft Industries
- **Book 333 Page 0947**
 - Recorded on November 8, 1983
 - Grantor: Brown Group Recreational Products, Inc.
 - Grantee: Alma Desk Company

¹⁵ “3-D Movie Brings Promotion Tie-Up With Paddle Firm,” *The Paris News* (Paris, TX), Sunday, April 19, 1953. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁶ Holt McPherson, “Good Afternoon,” *High Point Enterprise*, Monday, July 26, 1965. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁷ “It Happened in N.C.: His Invention Still Popular,” *The Daily Times News*, Saturday, March 2, 1968. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁸ “It Happened in N.C.: His Invention Still Popular,” *The Daily Times News*, Saturday, March 2, 1968. Newspapers.com. Accessed on December 27, 2021.

¹⁹ “Ohio Outfit Buys Fli-Back Company,” *High Point Enterprise*, article excerpt found in High Point Museum research files.

- **Book 3185 Page 934**
 - Recorded on October 14, 1981
 - Grantor: Eagle Rubber Co., Inc
 - Grantee: Alma Desk Company
- **Book 3127 Page 506**
 - Recorded on January 27, 1981
 - Grantor: Fli-Back Company, Inc.
 - Grantee: Eagle Rubber Co., Inc.
- **Book 2600 Page 572**
 - Recorded on June 30, 1972
 - Grantor: Sock-It Company
 - Grantee: Fli-Back Company, Inc.
- **Book 1083 Page 357 (Correction Deed made in 1964: Book 2137 Page 664)**
 - Recorded on July 2, 1945
 - Grantor: Rozena M. Gibson
 - Grantee: J. E. Gibson, Sr.

V. Finding Aid for Photographs

- Fig. 1: Setting
- Fig. 2: Front (East) Elevation
- Fig. 3: Side (North) Elevation
- Fig. 4: Side (South) Elevation
- Fig. 5: Rear (West) Elevation
- Fig. 6-10: Exterior Features
 - Fig. 6: Parapet
 - Fig. 7: Painting
 - Fig. 8: Brickwork
 - Fig. 9: Windows
 - Fig. 10: Doors
- Fig. 11: Interior Features

VIII. Figures

Fig. 1: Setting



Fig. 2: Front (East) Elevation



Fig. 3: Side (North) Elevation



Fig. 4: Side (South) Elevation



Fig. 5: Rear (West) Elevation



Fig. 6: Parapet



Fig. 7: Painting



Fig. 8: Brickwork



Fig. 9: Windows



Fig. 10: Doors







Fig 11: Interior

First level, east elevation



First level, front doors



First level, east elevation



First level, stair



First level, south elevation stair



First level, rear elevation door



First level, south elevation windows



Second level, west elevation

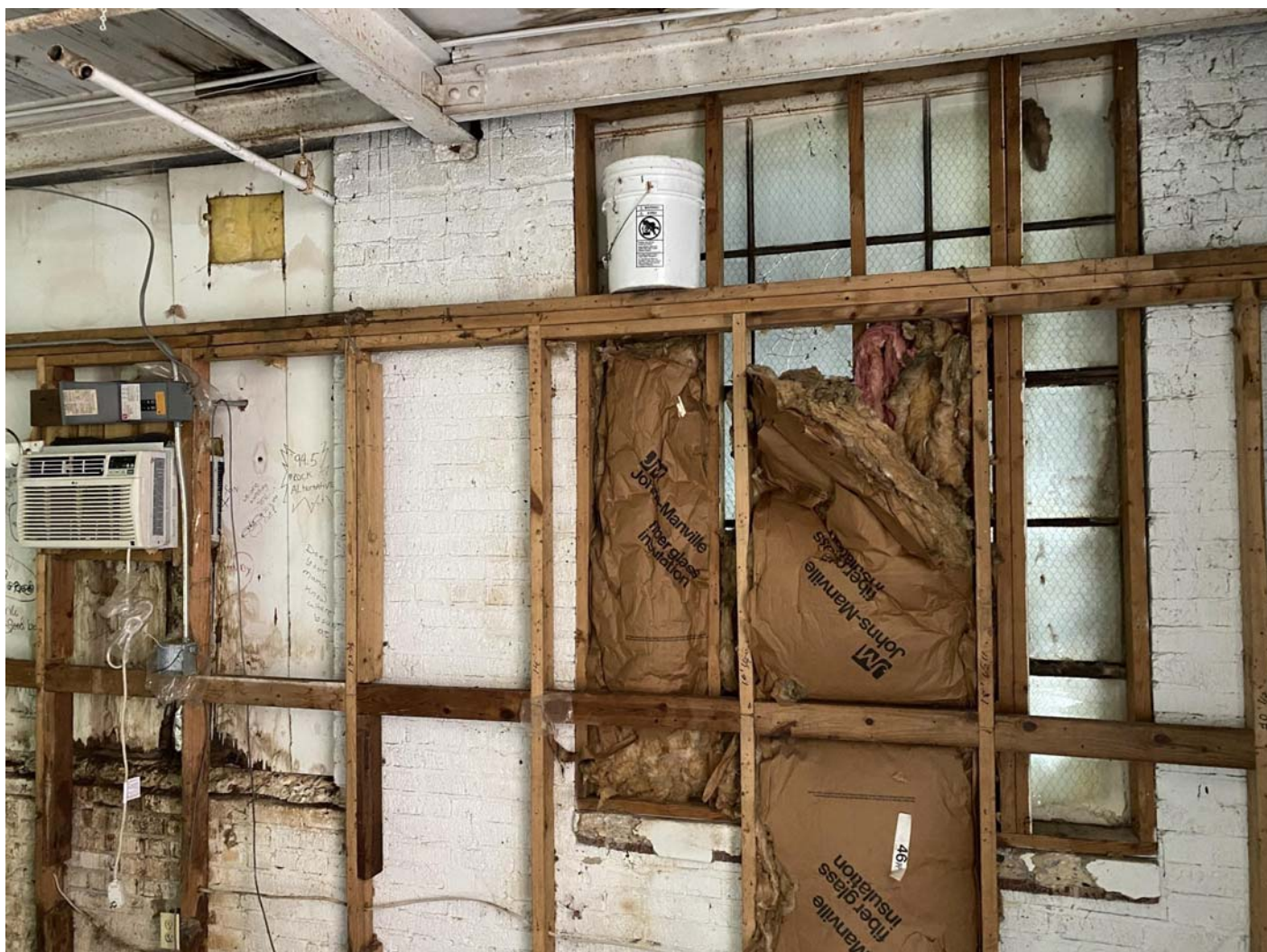


Second level, east elevation of the north addition, bathroom addition



Completed February 2022

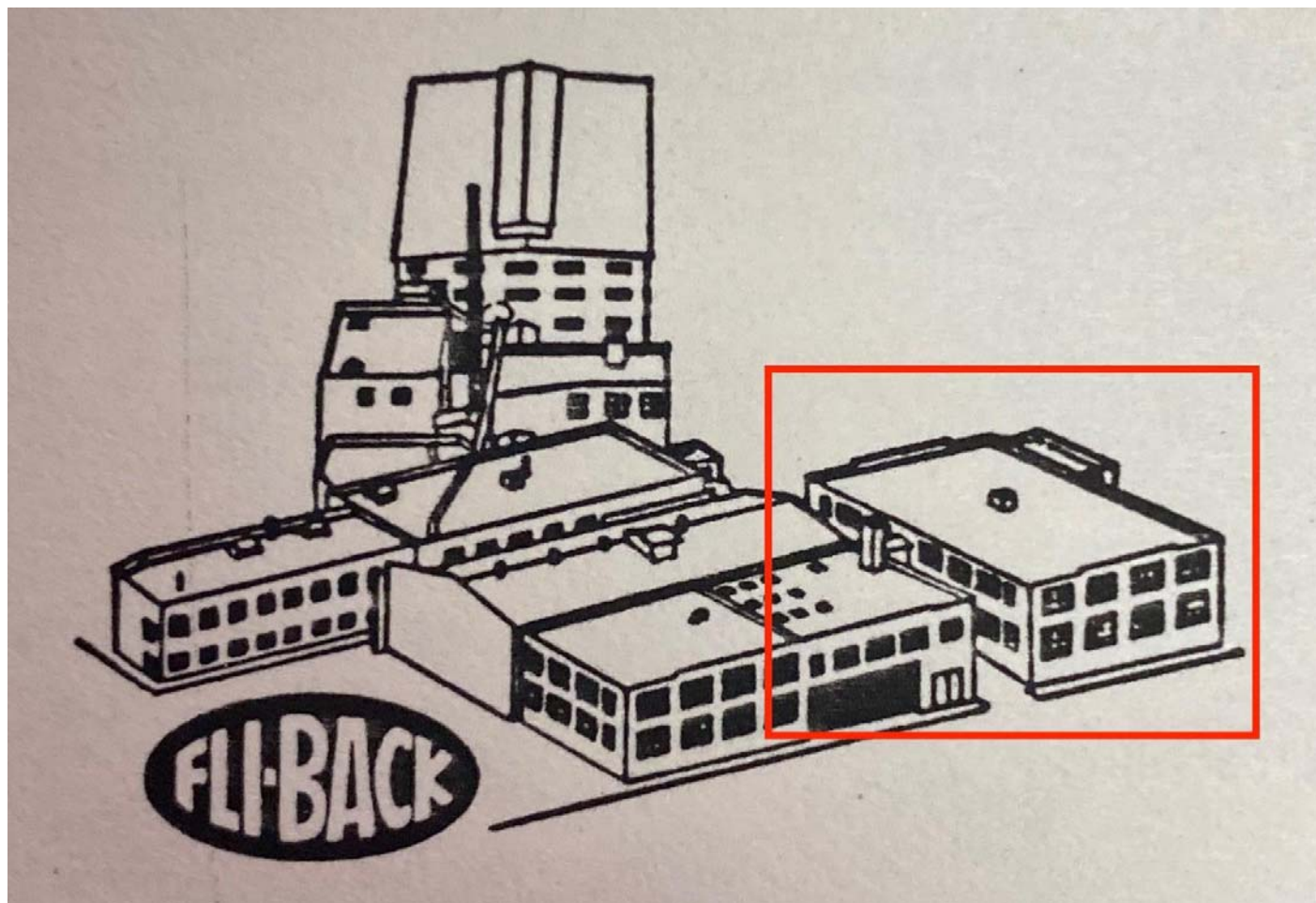
Second level, south elevation of the north addition, apartment addition



VII. Appendix

Supporting Photographs and Documents

Appendix 1: Fli-Back Corporation Logo with Fli-Back Building marked in red.



Appendix 2: *The Columbia Record*, Thursday June 8, 1972.



Appendix 3: Fli-Back Company Incorporation Document



To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

I, Thad Eure, Secretary of State of the State of North Carolina, do hereby certify the following and hereto attached (FOUR (4) sheets) to be a true copy of the Certificate OF INCORPORATION OF THE FLI-BACK COMPANY

and the probates thereon, as the same is taken from and compared with the original filed in this office on the 23rd day of January A.D., 19 50.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal.

Done in Office, at Raleigh, this 23rd day of January in the year of our Lord 19 50.


Secretary of State



62412

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION
OF
THE FLI-BACK COMPANY

* * * * *

16
This is to certify that we, the undersigned,
do hereby associate ourselves into a corporation under
and by virtue of the laws of the State of North Carolina,
as contained in Chapter 55 of the General Statutes, en-
titled "Corporations", and the several amendments there-
to, and do severally agree to take the number of shares
of capital stock in said corporation set opposite our
respective names, and to that end do hereby set forth:

1. The name of this corporation is The Fli-
Back Company.

2. The location of the principal office of
the corporation in this State is in the City of High
Point, Guilford County, North Carolina; but it may
have one or more branch offices or places of business
outside of the State of North Carolina, as well as in
said state.

3. This corporation is to carry on the busi-
ness of inventing and designing all kinds of toys and
novelties made from any type of material; manufacturing
wooden toys, plywood paddles, rubber balls and toys,
rubber balloons, plastic toys, inflated rubber balls,
games and novelties made of wood, metal, plastic and
paper or any other kind of material; the corporation
shall also have authority to deal in the manufacture

62412

and sale of all the articles above enumerated, either as principal, jobber, broker or agent and at wholesale or retail; the corporation shall likewise have authority to deal in any materials and equipment that is or may be useful or convenient in connection with the powers herein granted; to purchase or otherwise acquire, and to sell, improve, manage, develop, lease, mortgage, dispose of, or otherwise deal with land required for any of the purposes of the corporation; to apply for and to purchase and acquire patents and privileges and inventions or improvements in any invention which may be considered conducive to the attainment of any of the objects of the corporation, or in any way connected therewith.

The several clauses contained in this statement of powers and objects, except where otherwise expressed, shall be in no wise limited or restricted by reference to or inference from the terms of any of the other clauses in this statement, but the objects and powers specified in each of the clauses in this certificate shall be deemed and regarded as independent objects and powers.

4. The total authorized capital stock of this corporation is Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00) divided into Five Thousand (5,000) shares of the par value of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) each; but the corporation may organize and begin business when Three Hundred Dollars (\$300.00) of the capital stock, composed of three (3) shares shall have been subscribed for.

62412

5. The names and post office addresses of the subscribers of stock, and the number of shares subscribed for by each, the aggregate of which being the amount of the capital stock with which the company may commence business, are as follows:

Name	Post Office Address	No. of Shares
J. E. Gibson	High Point, North Carolina	1
Rozena M. Gibson	High Point, North Carolina	1
J. E. Gibson, Jr.	High Point, North Carolina	1

6. The period of existence of this corporation is unlimited.

7. The board of directors of this corporation shall have power, by vote of a majority of all of the directors, and without the assent or vote of the stockholders, to make, alter, amend and rescind the by-laws of this corporation.

In Witness Whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and affixed our seals, this the 6th day of January, 1950.

J. E. Gibson, Sr.	(SEAL)
Rozena M. Gibson	(SEAL)
James E. Gibson, Jr.	(SEAL)

Signed, sealed and delivered by J. E. Gibson, Rozena M. Gibson and J. E. Gibson, Jr. in the presence of: Vola A. Myrick, Subscribing Witness.



To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

I, Chad Eure, Secretary of State of the State of North Carolina, do hereby certify the following and hereto attached (FOUR (4) sheets) to be a true copy of the Certificate OF INCORPORATION OF THE FLI-BACK COMPANY

and the probates thereon, as the same is taken from and compared with the original filed in this office on the 23rd day of January A.D., 19 50.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal.

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Secretary of State





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Done in Office, at Raleigh, this 23rd day of January in the year of our Lord 19 50.


Secretary of State



Appendix 4: *High Point Industrial Survey* by Laura A. Philips, 2014.

North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

Historic Property Survey SummaryCounty: **Guilford**SSN: **GF8641** *Q102* Blockface#

Quad: High Point West
 PIN: 0172331 & 0172326
 X: Y:
 DOT Project #:
 OSA#:

Update Mo: Yr:

☐ No Alt ☐ Alt ☐ Det ☐ Rehab
☐ Removed ☐ Outbldg Loss
☐ No Acc. ☐ Not Fnd ☐ FileMsg
☐ Newly ID'd ☐ Needs Resch.

Property Name: Fli-Back Toy Factory		
Street or 911 Address: 710-718 W. Green Street West side		
Location Description:		
Town/vicinity: High Point		
District: None ()		
District Dates:	NRdate:	SLdate: DOEdat:
Local District:		

<input type="checkbox"/> Recommended for SL	<input type="checkbox"/> StudyList	SLdate:	<input type="checkbox"/> NR	NRDate:	NR #: None
<input type="checkbox"/> DOE	DOEdat:				
DOE Type:	Local Status: None	Ownership: Private			

Principal Resource Material Integrity: **High** Condition: **Good** Location Integrity: **Original**

Architectural Data: Date(s): ca. 1945	
Major Style Group(s) Not specified	
Construction: Steel Frame	
Ext. Material: Brick	Later Covering: None
Height: 2 story	Roof: Parapet/Comm. Plan: Not known Core Form (Domestic):
Design Source and attribution: Not specified	

Major Theme: Industry	2nd Theme: Architecture
Group Association: Not Specified	Religious Affiliation: N/A
Historic Function: Industry - manufacturing facility	

Written Summary

High Point salesman James E. Gibson founded the Fli-Back Company in 1931 to produce the Fli-Back paddle ball -- a rubber ball attached to a wood paddle. Starting on a very small scale in a shed behind his house, the rising popularity of the toy necessitated moves to larger quarters four times in eight years. By the time of Gibson's death in 1968, the company was producing numerous toys in addition to the Fli-Back paddle ball, including yo-yos, spinning tops, balloons, batons, beach balls, play balls, and other toys. Its sales extended throughout the United States and to twenty other countries.

In 1945, the Fli-Back corporation was issued a permit to erect two factory buildings of brick, steel, and concrete construction on West Green Street near Grimes Avenue. One of these, which housed the enameling and drying processes on the first floor and assembling on the second floor, survives. The two-story, painted-brick-faced building is four bays wide and eight bays deep and has a one-bay wide wing at the rear of the north elevation. The building's terra cotta tile coped parapet rises one step across the center two bays of the façade. Doors are utilitarian pedestrian and loading doors and windows are fifteen- or thirty-light steel-framed with center sections that pivot open. By 1956, the former Heritage Furniture Company close to the railroad at the rear of the property had been taken over for Fli-Back's shipping department. Still standing, it is a large, one-story, brick building with a flat roof.

Four years after Gibson's death in 1968, his wife sold the company to the Ohio Art Company -- makers of the Etch-a-Sketch toy -- which continued to produce the Fli-Back line of toys at the High Point facility until 1983.

Wednesday, October 08, 2014

North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

HISTORIC PROPERTY FIELD DATA FORM

Circle your responses or write custom responses.

County _____ Survey Site Number: 8802 GF 8441 ER: _____ GIS: _____
 Property Name: Fli-Bach Co. Factory
 Street Address / location description: 710th W. GREEN DRIVE
 Town: _____ vicinity _____ Ownership: fed state local private non-profit unknown
 District / Neighborhood Association: _____ contrib non-contrib
 Surveyor: _____ Date: _____

For Survey Update: No substantial change | change by alteration | change by deterioration | outbuilding loss |
 rehabilitated | removed or destroyed | not found | no access | file missing | newly identified | needs research

Study List / DOE recommendation: eligible | not eligible Criteria: A B C D

Material Integrity: High | Medium | Low | N/A Gone

Condition: Good | Fair | Deteriorated | Ruinous | N/A Gone Location: Original Moved (year if known _____) Uncertain

Const. Date: ca. 1945 Major Style Group: Georgian | Geo/Fed | Federal | Fed/GkRev
 Greek Revival | Italianate | Gothic Revival | Queen Anne | Victorian - Other | 19th-20th c. traditional-vernacular |
 Neoclassical Revival | Colonial Revival | Southern Colonial | Beaux Arts | Spanish Mission | Tudor Revival |
 Rustic Revival | Craftsman/Bungalow | Period Cottage | Minimal Traditional | International | Moderne | Art Deco |
 Misc. Modernist Standard Commercial/Industrial | Ranch | Split Level | Other _____

Construction: Timber frame | Balloon frame | Load bearing masonry | Masonry veneer | Log | Steel frame | Concrete |
 Unknown | Other _____

Primary Original Ext. Material: Weatherboard (plain beaded molded novelty type unk.) | Batten | Wood shingles |
 Exposed logs | Brick | Stone | Stucco | Pebbledash | Other _____

Covering: None | Aluminum | Vinyl | Asbestos Shingle | Later brick veneer | Metal | Paper | Undetermined

Height (stories): 1 | 1 ½ | 2 | 2 ½ | 3 | more than 3 (enter) _____

Roof: Side gable | Front gable | Triple A | Cross gable | Hip | Gambrel | Pyramidal | Mansard | Parapet | Flat
 Other _____

Plan: Not Known | 1-room | Hall-parlor | 3 room | Side passage | Center passage | Saddlebag | Dogtrot | Irregular
 Shotgun | Other _____

Core Form (domestic): I-house | Single pile | Double pile | Foursquare | other _____

Design Source: _____ attributed | documented

Special Associations / Themes: _____

Outbuildings and landscape features (continue on back if necessary)

Use back of sheet for narrative description and field notes and sketches



Say Officials

**Two Brick, Concrete
and Steel Structures
To Be Built At a
Cost Of \$30,000** 6/6/45

The Fli-Back corporation, manufacturer of toys and novelties, today was issued a permit for construction of two semi-fireproof buildings on West Green street near Grimes street at an initial cost of \$30,000. J. E. Gibson is owner and manager of the company.

The two buildings will be of brick, steel and concrete construction and will contain a sprinkler system. Each will be two stories in height. One structure will be 60 by 53 feet, and the other will be 68 by 106 feet. Construction will be of the most modern factory and mill type. Work is scheduled to get under way within a few days.

The project when completed will probably represent an expenditure of \$50,000 or more. This will include equipment and installations. It is the largest single new construction project to be announced here within several months.

Meanwhile several other large building projects are in the planning stage and are expected to be announced soon. Building officials said that just as soon as the necessary labor and materials can be released High Point will experience one of the largest new construction and modernization booms in the city's history.

Three Divorce Actions Filed In Court Today

Three divorce actions were filed this morning in the municipal court, all on grounds of two years separation. They were: Mamie Hutchens Morris from Elsie Grady Morris, Nettie Emerson from Willie Emerson, and W.

this morning.

If you are a bond purchaser, you are invited by Sanders Dallas, chairman of the Seventh War Loan campaign, to send a name and compete for a \$25 bond, which Mr. Dallas will present to the person sending in the best name by Saturday of this week.

UPSET SKIN?
BLACKHEADS - PIMPLES
EXTERNALLY CAUSED
Palmer's
SKIN SUCCESS
SOAP and OINTMENT

DR. NAT WALKER

**EYES EXAMINED
GLASSES FITTED**

Over Walgreen's - Phone 2908
Careful Attention to Children

STANLEY'S
JEWELERS

Next to J. C. Penney Co.

LEARN TO FLY

CHARTER SERVICE

To any point in the Country - Two and three place ships, radio equipped, and flown by Army trained pilots - Fast and Safe - Reasonable rates.

FRALEY FIELD

HIGH POINT, N. C. - Phone 2908

**FOR DIAMONDS
WATCHES, JEWELRY,
AND FINE CHINA
AND GLASSWARE**

COME TO

RUBY'S



Gibson's Fli-Back Toy Industry Comes Of Age

From a printer's devil in an eastern North Carolina print shop to the ownership of a fabulous toy industry is the story of a veteran High Pointer, J. E. Gibson, president of Fli-Back Corp.

Gibson, the son of a Perquimans County farmer and merchant, started work at the age of 15 in Harts Print Shop at Elizabeth City. He worked for one summer as a printer's devil at \$1 a week, before taking a job as a salesman for a grain and seed firm. Selling and sales promotion came naturally to Gibson and he has flourished in the business.

His travels over southern states took him to High Point where he met and married Miss Rozena May Perryman.

In 1931 when national business was floundering, Gibson, then the father of five children, started production of the simple toy known throughout the world today as the fli-back paddle ball. It consisted of a simple rubber ball attached to a paddle by means of an elastic band. First production started in a home workshop which housed the family buggy.

Two workers produced the new toy and each day's production was loaded into Gibson's Model A Ford and sold in stores in North Carolina.

Sales were limited to the area traveled by Gibson until he made an exploratory trip to New York and introduced the toy for promotional sales on a counter at R. H. Macy's Department Store. Syndicate buyers soon saw the birth of a new toy in the nation and sales have spiraled upwards since the first day's production.

Even during the depression the toy business grew, moving to larger quarters four times in eight years.

The paddle ball never faltered in popularity and today Gibson's Fli-Back paddle ball is in greater demand than it was in mother's day or even grandmother's day.

In addition to making paddle balls the Fli-Back company now produces balloons, sponge return balls, sponge baseballs and play balls, Fli-Back return tops and spinning tops.

Gibson, a slow talking businessman, is a great believer in free enterprise since he has seen the rise of his own company through this democratic system. Familiar with national and international trade policies and being a widely traveled man, Gibson has seen the chaos created in socialists and communistic countries. A poster in the office of his large toy plant on W. Green St. depicts America's production cost system as compared with the socialistic system or the Communist system.

"I believe," Gibson says, "if a



J. E. GIBSON

... up from printer's devil

man can produce an item better and cheaper than his competitor he will find customers flocking to his door."

He has proven this theory by selling toys at the same price or cheaper than they were 20 years ago. And the Gibson Fli-Back paddle ball still sells for 10 cents — the same price as it was in the lean depression years of the 30's.

Under State Law, the county welfare budget must be adopted by both the county welfare board and the county board of commissioners in joint session. The State Board of Allotments and Appeal certifies the amount of Federal and State funds available to each county.

STOMACH-ULCER PAIN MUST FADE AWAY or money back

When even stomach acid means fury, burning acid, pain, indigestion, gas, heartburn, etc., get fast relief with Udo's Tablets. Udo's 3 powerful, speedy-acting ingredients — like a doctor's prescription — cool off and rest the inflamed stomach lining with a protective film. Then stomach acid goes down and you can eat without fear and enjoy life again. 125 million sold since 1925. Try Udo's on money back guarantee. You must get relief or your money back.

BODEN

News To Go

SHAW ALUMNI

The Shaw Univ. will meet Thursday. Mrs. Armetta Byrd St. at 5 o'clock. are welcome to the of Shawites.

29TH ANNIVERSARY

The 29th annive Friendship Baptist (g m Sunday. The s Monday night. Re pastor of Mt. Olive. Choir and congreg Board in charge.

Tuesday night, B son, pastor of Bet Church. Choir and usher board in chu Wednesday night McLeod, pastor of

gregation, senior e Thursday night, I liams, pastor of M. E. Church. Ch gation, Home. Mls charge.

Friday night, R ton, pastor of St. ness church. Choir tion: Junior Choir

LOCAL GIRL COVER GIRL

Mrs. Marion Be Louise Wilson of pears on the cover national magazine. "The group girl group of inter YMCA NEWS

The Rose Bee the Seventh Day. is having its first fall program. The boys and girls are ing project on Mo 5 o'clock on the se Each boy and girl in the cooking or food.

Boxing classes on three evenin week. Any boy or is interested in le or taking lessons later on Tuesday, ursday night. T trainers have classes.

Scheduled

Monday 5 p.m. —Seventh Day A Bridge & Whist. Tuesday 7 p.m. 8 p.m., Pyramid Wednesday 2:3 Club Fairview St. Young Men's Cl Thursday 1:30 Club Seventh Day Program Commit m., Gra-Y Club p.m., Boxing Clu

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10/10/54

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foreign held dollars could then
be redeemed with gold and
still leave adequate reserves.
The result would be, he con-
tends, that this ultimately would
create a shortage of dollars in
the world market and the United
States could write its own ticket.
Not so, says Lazar. "Raising
the price of gold would only
provide a temporary relief. In
two or three years, we would

(See VIETNAM on 6C)

WEATHER

There is a good chance the
High Point area will be get-
ting some rain during the next
day or so, according to the
weatherman at Friendship.

Tonight is expected to be
cloudy and warmer, with rain
likely before morning. The prob-
ability of any precipitation to-
night is at 60 per cent.

Thursday's forecast calls for
cloudy skies and cooler, with
rain continuing. Chances of
precipitation on Thursday is at
70 per cent.

Today's high was to be in
the mid to upper 50s, and to-
night's low should be in the
upper 30s. Thursday's predicted
high is in the 40s. Last night's
low temperature was 18.

(See MAJOR on 7B)

(See RULING 13 on 6C)

J. E. Gibson Is Dead At Age 74



J. E. Gibson

J. E. Gibson, 74, president
of the Fli-Back Co of High Point,
died in his home at 1112 Forest
Hill Dr. Tuesday at 11:15 p.m.
after an illness of two years.
A native of Hartford, N. C.,
he was born Aug. 8, 1893, and
had lived in High Point since
1916, when he was married to
Miss Rozema Mae Perryman.

Mr. Gibson began his business
career as a feed and seed sales-
man. After his marriage, he
sold hosiery and dry goods and
engaged in real estate trans-
actions. He founded the Fli-Back
Co. in 1931 and began production
in a woodshed behind his house.
The company, which produces
rubber balls and toys, today
is located at 716 W. Green Dr.
and manufactures around 150
different items in its toy line.
It has sales throughout the
United States and in 20 other
countries.

Mr. Gibson was a member
of Emerywood Baptist Church.
A life-time deacon, he directed
two building fund drives for the
church. He was a trustee of
Mars Hill College. A new 64-
room dormitory at the college
is named for his son, J. E.
Gibson Jr., who died several
years ago.

Surviving Mr. Gibson are his
wife, Mrs. Rozema Mae Perry-
man Gibson; two daughters,
Mrs. E. W. Tipton Jr. of Kings-
port, Tenn., and Mrs. Robert
Grimes Griffith of High Point;
two sons, Walter L. Gibson and
Earl S. Gibson, both of High
Point; his mother, Mrs. S. S.
Gibson of Greensboro; two
brothers, Leroy Gibson of Chat-
tanooga, Tenn., and W. I. Gibson
of Randleman; and 12 grand-
children.

Funeral will be held at 2 p.m.
Thursday at Emerywood Baptist
Church. The service will be con-
ducted by the pastor, Dr. W.
Eugene Spears Jr. Burial will
be in Floral Garden Park
Cemetery.

The body will remain at
Sechrest Funeral Home until
placed in the church 30 minutes
prior to the funeral.

Youths Return From War Zone

By ROBERT MARKS
Enterprise Staff Writer

Guerrilla warfare in Saigon
was a world away today for
the three Hope boys.

Buist, David and Robbie ar-
rived at Greensboro - High
Point-Winston-Salem Airport at
8:05 a.m. today after an air-
plane journey from Singapore.

They thus returned to the city
that had been their home for
several years when their father,
the Rev. Samuel R. Hope, was
pastor of Forest Hills Presby-
terian Church.

Since July, 1966, the Rev. Mr.
Hope has been personnel direc-
tor in Vietnam Christian Ser-
vice, which carries on relief and
assistance programs in camps
for refugees of the Vietnamese
war.

His wife and three sons were
with the Rev. Mr. Hope in Sai-
gon until the outbreak of the
Viet Cong Tet offensive the last
of January. Because of the fight-

ing in Saigon, Mrs. Hope and
the three children were evacu-
ated to a camp in Penang,
Malaysia. The decision was then
made to send the children back
to High Point.

Mrs. Hope saw them aboard
the plane in Singapore. She is
hoping to return to Saigon to
be with the Rev. Mr. Hope
until his work in Vietnam ends
in May.

The three boys are to stay
with Mr. and Mrs. Allen Mebane
of 908 Forest Hill Dr. The Me-
banes are members of Forest
Hills Presbyterian Church.

The boys are to be enrolled
in Northwood Elementary
School for the remainder of the
school year. Buist is in the
sixth grade, David in the fifth
and Robbie in the third.

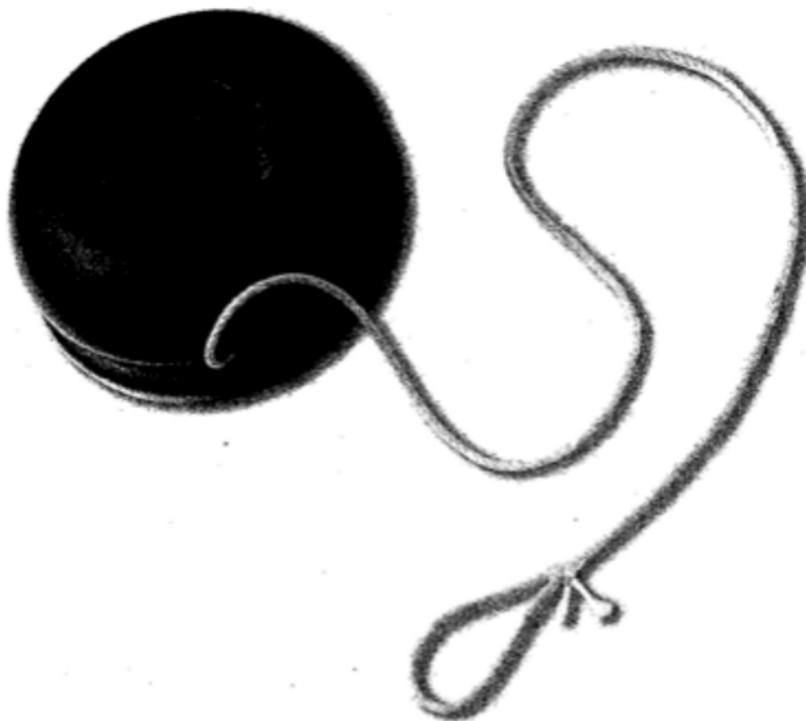
Greeting them at the airport
this morning were Mebane, Mrs.
Bill Benschl and her son, Frank;
and Edward Hope of Fayette-
ville, grandfather of Buist,
David and Robbie.

High Point Enterprise 28 FEB 1968 1C

follow the bouncing ball

*With his popular Fli-Back paddleball toy,
High Point creator James Gibson had the world on a rubber string.*

BY JIMMY TOMLIN



126 Our State July 2005



It's only fitting that High Point businessman James Emory Gibson's greatest claim to fame was the Fli-Back, the popular dime-store paddleball game that challenged players to continuously bounce a sponge-rubber ball that was attached to a small, wooden paddle with an elastic string. It's fitting because, frankly, few people have ever bounced back as impressively as Gibson did.

Paddleball bearings

The year was 1931, during the depth of the Depression, and it was all Gibson and his wife, Rozena, could do to make ends meet and provide for their five children. He had been in the real estate business, but when the stock market crashed in October 1929, Gibson wound up owing some \$75,000. After that, he had found work selling hosiery as a jobber in the textile industry, but he was allergic to the dye in the hosiery — "so allergic that his throat would bleed at times," says Gibson's youngest son, Walter, now 75 and living in Pfafftown. "He knew he needed to get out of that kind of work, but it was putting some food on the table during the Depression."

Enter Gibson's oldest daughter, Josephine, a young teenager who came home one afternoon with a paddleball game she had been given at a local ice cream shop. "My father was in the living room," Walter recalls, "and here comes Josephine paddling away on that game. My father looks at it and says, 'Let me try that.' Well, he liked the game right off."

In fact, Gibson — who was quite the optimist, despite his setback in real estate — liked the game so much that he confided to his wife, "I believe this item will sell." Rozena, who did not see things through the same pair of rose-colored glasses as her husband, raised an eyebrow at his suggestion, but she didn't raise much of an argument. "She didn't want to try something and fail, because she knew they couldn't afford it," Walter says.

Gibson researched the paddleball game, and when he learned it hadn't been patented — meaning he was free to manufacture and sell his own such game — his dream took flight. He



Brochures and marketing pieces tout the thrill of the Fli-Back toy.

bought a supply of plywood, rubber balls and elastic cord, and rented a band saw for 10 cents an hour. His first manufacturing facility, if you will, was an old shed that had formerly housed his father-in-law's buggy. In that small shed, Gibson and his wife — and the children who were old enough — assembled the crude paddleball game that ultimately would become the Fli-Back. Gibson used the band saw to carve the paddles, and the others attached the balls and cords with staple hammers.

At day's end, Gibson would load the day's production into the trunk of his Model A Ford and haul the toys to retailers and wholesalers throughout the Triad area of High Point, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem — and eventually to points beyond. Meanwhile, Rozena kept track of the company records, paid the bills, and managed the family household. The product was selling well enough that Gibson stopped selling it under the umbrella of his textile business, Gibson Textile Company, and began selling it under the name that would become famous — Fli-Back.

Seeing red

The dream didn't stop there, however, because the optimistic Gibson harbored a much larger dream — nationwide distribution. "He wanted to sell to the chain stores," Walter explains, "because that would be where he would get his big break and where he could really make some money."

As he was preparing for a trip to New York City, where he planned to solicit a number of large variety-store chains to carry the Fli-Back, Gibson embarked on a side journey that ultimately evolved into one of the funniest stories in company lore. It also may have led to the big break he'd been looking for.

When Gibson spotted a newspaper ad for a clothing store in Asheboro, he realized he would need a new suit for his upcoming business trip. He drove there one weekend and told the clerk, "Let me see some of your least expensive suits." The clerk complied, but Gibson didn't see anything in his price range. He asked if the clerk had anything else.

"Well," the clerk said with a slight grin, "we've got one more, but I don't



After the success of the Fli-Back, Gibson expanded his company to include other toys.

think you want to see it."

Intrigued, Gibson asked to see the suit, so the clerk disappeared for a moment and returned carrying a garishly red suit. "It was a bright red," Walter says, "and my father laughed at it. The clerk laughed, too, and he said it was on sale for \$15. My father tried it on and said, 'I believe I'll take this,' and he wore it back to High Point that afternoon."

Walter recalls that his mother was horrified by the red suit. "Don't you dare wear that suit around here," she told her husband. "We'll be the laughingstock of the whole town."

Gibson had no intentions of wearing the suit around town; he planned to wear it to New York City, where he was sure it would catch some big-shot businessman's eye. And sure enough, as he waited in a room full of salesmen at the headquarters of S.H. Kress & Company, one of the largest chains in the nation, the red suit helped earn Gibson an appointment with a company buyer. "Does everyone in the South wear such red suits?" the man asked. Gibson laughed and replied, "No, not everyone."

The two men chatted for a while, Gibson regaled the Northerner with some of his well-worn jokes, and before long they had forged a friendship and, more importantly, a business relationship. The executive offered a few suggestions — beveling the paddle edges and improving the method of printing the trademark on the paddle, for example — and when those changes were made, the buyer

agreed to stock the Fli-Back at his stores throughout the country.

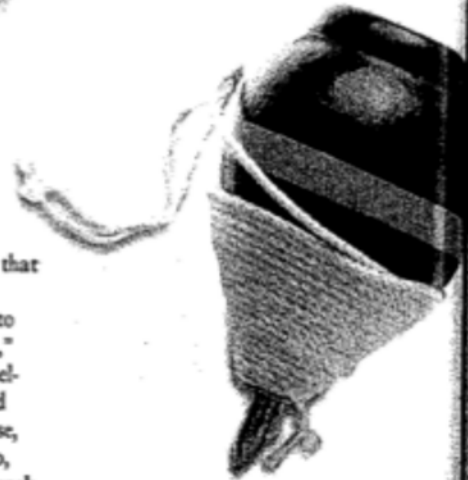
Then, when other chains learned that S.H. Kress & Company would be stocking the product, they decided to follow suit. "In two or three weeks," Walter says, "my father had a bushel-basket full of orders. He had to find some more band saws and rent those, and he had to hire some people, too, because he had to start making a bunch of toys." Within a couple of years, Walter says, Fli-Back was manufacturing some 60,000 toys a day, working only one shift.

Toying with success

As the company grew — even as other businesses around it were struggling mightily — Fli-Back expanded its product line to include yo-yos, tops, balloons, batons, beach balls, and other toys. And Gibson, whose own wife had doubted his ability to turn a simple paddleball game into a profitable business venture, became one of North Carolina's greatest success stories.

Moreover, Walter remembers that his father paid off that \$75,000 debt he had incurred when the stock market crashed. "His attorney told him he didn't have to pay it all — that he could pay a certain percentage and they would still declare the debt paid for — but my father didn't want to

GIBSON, WHOSE OWN WIFE HAD DOUBTED HIS ABILITY TO TURN A SIMPLE PADDLEBALL GAME INTO A PROFITABLE BUSINESS VENTURE, BECAME ONE OF NORTH CAROLINA'S GREATEST SUCCESS STORIES.



handle it that way," Walter says. "He paid it all."

In 1968, J.E. Gibson — "Mr. Fli-Back," as he was known in High Point — died of cancer at age 74. Four years later, Rozena sold the company to the Ohio Art Company — best-known as the toy conglomerate that makes the Etch-A-Sketch — for an estimated \$1.6 million. The company continued making its products in High Point until 1983 before shutting down that facility.

Gibson's success story is still well-known in High Point, however — not surprising, considering he was able to overcome a \$75,000 loss and turn a 10-cent paddleball game into a \$1.6 million windfall for his heirs. Maybe that's why they called him Mr. Fli-Back. ➡

Award-winning newspaper columnist and freelance writer Jimmy Tomlin lives in Greensboro.

Notes on FLI-BACK CO, INC:

Company founded in 1931, according to obituary of J. E. Gibson (Sr), High Point Enterprise, February 28, 1968, page C1. His wife is listed as president of company in 1969.

1930 High Point City Directory listing for James Emory Gibson:

"Gibson Jas E (Rosina M), slsmn, h 607 4th

First Fli-Back listing found in 1933 High Point City Directory (NCC does not have 1932):

"Fli-Back Co (Jas E and Rozena M. Gibson) novelty mfrs 603 S Main"

1940 High Point City Directory listing:

"Fli-Back & Sock-It Co (J Emory Gibson) novelties 911 W Broad"

1950 High Point City Directory listing:

"Fli-Back Co Inc J Emory Gibson pres-treas J Emory Gibson jr v-pres-asst treas Mrs Rozena M Gibson sec toy mfrs 716 W Green"

"[Fli]-Back Sales Corp J Emory Gibson jr pres J Emory Gibson Edw R Klug v-pres Mrs Rozena M Gibson sec David E Carter treas 716 W Green"

1950 High Point City Directory listing for Gibson home(s):

"[GIBSON] J Emory (Rozena M) pres-treas Fli-Back Co and v-pres Fli-Back Sls Corp h1109 Forest Hill dr"

"[GIBSON] J Emory jr (Daisy E) pres Fli-Back Sls Sock-It and v-pres-asst treas Fli-Back Co h1005 Emery rd"

Last Fli-Back listing, 1982 High Point City Directory:

"Fli-Back Co Inc (Eagle Div) toy mfrs 716 W Green Dr"

NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION
VERTICAL FILE NC/HP
Historic Businesses

check with High Point Museum, also



Stanley Taylor

The U.S. Furniture Industries, established here in 1946 by Stanley Taylor, has spread its varied lines into a dozen units—seven of them in High Point (and another close by at Thomasville) where home offices are based—producing a vast amount of furniture closer to markets. There's one each at Milford, Conn.; Heath, Ohio, near Columbus; Dallas, Texas; and Beloit, Wisconsin, as units of its Chatham County line. It draws a lot of its wood pre-cut from Yugoslavia, Spain, Poland and Israel. Its executive vice president, Bob Friedman, is also executive vice president of the U.S.-Yugoslav Economic Council.



A. Pat Brown

The late Pat Brown, who topped a remarkably varied business career by building a worldwide lumber operation, opened the Amazon River basin in Brazil to large-scale exotic wood developments in cooperation with the Brazilian government. He had to overcome a world of problems in setting up in that tropical area sawmills, living quarters, even a hospital, to develop into the largest shipper through North Carolina ports. After selling his lumber business, Mr. Brown devoted himself to redevelopment and philanthropies, including a \$500,000 gift of property to High Point College.

And Norman Schwartz, who set up here his Rosaine Shop dealing in ladies ready-to-wear, has spread that operation to include additional outlets at Lexington, Hickory, Morganton, Asheville, Gastonia and Winston-Salem.

Another far-flung merchandising operation directed from High Point is the White Star Discount Centers, Inc., health and beauty aid emporiums founded in

Pilot Mountain, Troy, Sanford, Kannapolis in North Carolina, and one at Wytheville, Va. It is serviced out of Foleys, Inc., in High Point.

Herman Bernard and Arthur Cassell set up Casard Furniture Manufacturing Company in 1948 and have spread it into three plants here, three at Greensboro and one at Mebane.

George S. Erath, a veneer manufacturer based in High Point, operates cutting plants at Martinsville, Va., and Harrisonburg, West Virginia.

Many High Point manufacturing plants maintain sales offices and in many instances their own warehouses serving strategic markets directly. Alma Desk Company, with three huge plants, the largest manufacturer of wood office furniture and a pioneer in its field, is a case in point with two warehouses in Texas, and one each in Kansas City, Kansas, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle.

Myrtle Desk Company, another pioneer desk firm and a large supplier of library furnishings as well, maintains its own warehouses in much the same manner Alma does successfully.

One of the most amazingly successful industrial developments to make High Point famous in the 1930s was the paddleball boom in which the late J. E. Gibson developed the Fli-Back Company which poured them out by the millions for a market that was worldwide. They still produce 5 or more million annually. World War II shut down Gibson's plant, but it re-opened in 1942 making a line of wooden tanks and Jeeps designed by Mr. Gibson's son, Emory, Jr. In 1946 the Fli-Back returned and was joined by a growing assortment of tops, batons, beachballs and other toys, but Mr. "Fli-Back" Gibson remained most loyal to the 10-cent paddleball made from two sheets of Brazilian meranti veneer around a filler core of Peruvian lapuna. The Fli-Back plant is wedged between two giant desk manufacturers in a lineup of great firms dominating their respective fields.

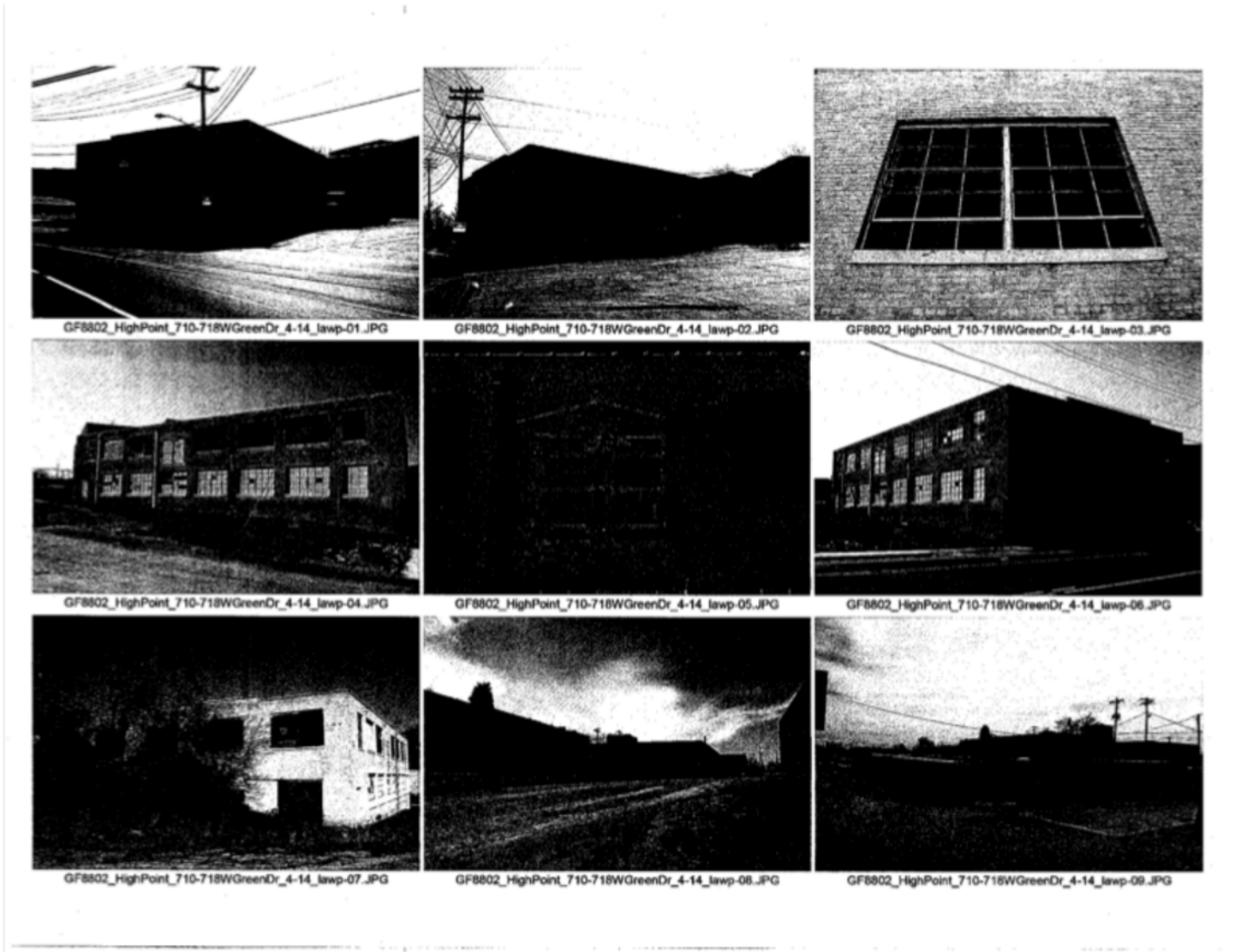
Carolina Container Company, one of three large independents in the field, began business in 1928 when the late C. T. Ingram, together with the late I. Paul Ingle and Grattan Foy, organized the Carolina Container Company being carried on by Mr. Ingram's son, C. T. Ingram, Jr., as president, treasurer and general manager. The firm has just added at a cost of \$15 million a 1200-foot long corrugating machine, one of eight which are the largest and newest doing work as wide as 109 inches. It produces containers for the High Point base plant as well as for the Hickory branch plant, together serv-

FLI-BACK

NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION 9
VERTICAL FILE NC/HP

High Point - Historic Businesses

High Pointers of High Point By Holly McPherson 1976



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