

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

VLR 6/19/08
NRHP 9/5/08

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name H. L. LAWSON & SON WAREHOUSE
other names/site number 128-5191-0006

2. Location

street & number 631 Campbell Avenue SE not for publication N/A
city or town Roanoke vicinity N/A
state Virginia code VA county Roanoke (City) code 760 zip code 24013

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

M. Catherine Kuser Signature of certifying official
July 24, 2008 Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: Warehouse

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: Warehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

roof bitumen

walls brick

other terra cotta

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

- commerce
architecture
transportation

Period of Significance 1925-1958 (Criteria A, C); 1925-1948 (Criterion B)

Significant Dates 1925, 1929

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Harry Leland Lawson (1877-1948)

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Eubank, Beaufort N. and Caldwell, James A. W.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- x State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .5 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing 1 17 594563 4125401 Zone Easting Northing 2 See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Daniel Bluestone, Director Historic Preservation Program
organization University of Virginia date March, 2008
street & number Box 400122, Campbell Hall 226 telephone 434-924-6458
city or town Charlottesville state VA zip code 22904

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name H. L. Lawson & Son, Inc. attn: Lucas Thornton
street & number 807 Hollins Road NE telephone (540) 529-2191
city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24019

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 1

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Summary Description

Built in 1925 at the southwest corner of Campbell Avenue SE and 7th Street in Roanoke, Virginia, the H. L. Lawson & Son merchandise warehouse is a four-story brick building designed by the Roanoke architectural firm of Eubank & Caldwell in a straightforward commercial utilitarian style. Located less than half a mile east of Roanoke's downtown business district, directly south of a major railroad yard, the warehouse occupies a steep hillside site with a brick retaining wall off the west side of the building. The warehouse's eighty-foot deep lot rises approximately 25 feet between its front on Campbell Avenue and its back, adjacent to the right-of-way of a railroad freight spur track. The historical significance of the H. L. Lawson & Son warehouse relates in part to its innovative accommodation of both rail and truck shipping of freight. Two large doors in the back of the building permitted the unloading of freight from railcars directly into the third story of the warehouse. On Campbell Avenue five doors accommodated the loading and unloading of trucks, which could be backed up to, and into, the first story of the warehouse. A large freight elevator, with a rooftop machinery penthouse, linked the third-floor rail and the first-floor truck loading areas with the storage area, concentrated primarily on the second, third, and fourth floors of the building. The foundation of the building is reinforced concrete and the structural system is primarily timber mill construction. Both the building and retaining wall retain a high degree of historic integrity.

Detailed Description

The utilitarian nature of Eubank & Caldwell's design is apparent in the main elevation on Campbell Avenue. The brick masonry work throughout the building is laid up in five-course American bond. This pattern has five courses of all stretchers alternated with a single course of all headers. Eubank & Caldwell did not change the height or placement of the window and door openings in order to have them align with the pattern of brick courses. Nor did they compose the fenestration pattern or the placement of the elevator machinery penthouse to adhere to broader ideals of symmetry or architectural composition. The main elevation is made up of six main bays. At the first floor level, the three western bays and the two eastern bays are enclosed by roll down steel doors. These doors facilitated the loading and unloading of trucks. The horizontal steel casing that holds the doors when they are open project from the top of these doors and in front of the main wall of the warehouse. A single six-pane metal sash window, providing light to a bathroom, occupies the first floor level between the two western bays. The third bay from the east corner of the warehouse is unlike the other five bays. It has a door and a transom recessed from the front plane of the building. This bay also includes a six-pane metal sash window with a projecting brick sill, located to the west of the door. The upper three floors are treated nearly identically in all six bays of the front elevation. In each bay, on each floor, there is a single metal sash window, composed of a grid of nine panes. The windows are all recessed slightly from the plane of the main elevation, and the windows all have brick sills made up of all headers that project slightly forward of the plane of the main elevation. The second bay from the west corner of the warehouse houses the building's freight elevator. Here, the door on the ground floor gives direct access from the building exterior to the freight elevator. The single windows located on each floor above this door illuminate the elevator shaft. In this second bay from the west the main elevation rises above the fourth floor and encloses the rooftop machinery penthouse for the elevator. Like the floors below in this bay,

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 2

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penthouse has a single window with a projecting brick sill. The location of the penthouse in the second bay from the west and the location of the door in the third bay from the east belie the informal and utilitarian compositional strategy employed by the architects in the warehouse design. The door gave direct access to the company offices.

Since the two eastern bays were given over to fireproof garage, the elevator was located to the west where it would be more central to the buildings storage and freight loading operations. The low parapet wall that surrounds the flat roof is capped with modest interlocking brown terra cotta tiles.

The west elevation of the H. L. Lawson & Son warehouse is largely un-fenestrated. Unlike many party walls throughout Roanoke this wall, which potentially could have served as a party wall for adjacent buildings, was built of the same face brick used in the main elevation. There was no apparent necessity connected to the warehouse operation that guided the decision to leave the west elevation blank. The other secondary and tertiary elevations of the building all have window openings. What seems to have guided the design decision was concern over the possibility of fire spreading from adjacent development. The other elevations all face onto streets, in the case of the back elevation, onto a railroad right-of-way. To the west Lawson and his architect could anticipate fire hazards from both petroleum storage tanks and from future buildings that might settle on the block. When Lawson built the warehouse he installed a 10,000-gallon gasoline tank and a 4,000-gallon oil tank underground on the lot immediately west of his building. A fire or explosion in this area could quickly spread to the warehouse and omitting windows in this elevation reduced the avenues for the fire to spread directly to the interior of the warehouse. As president of the Old Dominion Fire Insurance Company, Lawson was in a great position to assess the fire risks. Indeed, when granting permission for installing the tanks, the city insisted that Lawson “indemnify and save harmless the City of Roanoke from all claims for damages to persons or property” that might arise from the tanks.¹

Another reason for putting in place a blank wall on the west elevation was that this would be the only immediately adjacent property that could ever be developed. In many dense urban contexts the design response to potential future development was to simply leave a blank wall, assuming that future development might obscure the wall altogether. Even if the future development did not settle immediately on the other side of the property line, a building close by could, like the petroleum tanks, pose the risk of a fire spreading. The west elevation was originally built with no opening at all. In 1929 a single door was added to this wall at the first floor level. The door gave access to an exterior loading dock that expanded the truck loading capacity of the building. When the lot to the west of the warehouse was sold in 1931, the deed specifically called attention to the door and to the possibility of future development on the adjacent lot to the west. The deed underscored the fact that the use of the door was “permissive” and could be discontinued at any time and that nothing in the deed could be construed to prevent the owner of the adjacent lot from “occupying with buildings or otherwise, in whole or in part, the entire quantity of land conveyed to them.” An owner exercising this right could build a building that would entirely close any window and door opening on the western wall of the Lawson warehouse. Lawson’s design foreclosed this possibility by omitting windows altogether. Although no building was ever constructed on the lot immediately

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 3

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and part of the hill adjacent to the building did touch the west elevation. Thirty feet south of Campbell Avenue the hill and its brick retaining wall rise into the second floor level and continue to gradually rise towards the south and the rail right-of-way. The significance of this part of the site was both that the tanks and their retaining wall provided for the fueling of trucks used as part of the freight handling for the warehouse. In the 1930s a gasoline station operated on this part of the site. Moreover, the exterior concrete loading dock built in 1929 extended the loading capacity of the warehouse. Adjacent to the retaining wall, the middle section of parapet wall above the west elevation is three brick courses higher than the level of the wall at the north and south sides of the elevation. The slight rise brings one of the few gestures of pure architectural ornamentation in the building.

The parapet wall on the east elevation carries the same stepped up and stepped down motif as the west elevation. Adjacent to the east elevation, 7th Street climbs steeply from the front to the back of the building. The concrete foundation steps up the hill, going from the grade at Campbell Avenue to midway through the second floor. There are three small steel sash windows in the Campbell Avenue half of the first floor; these windows help illuminate the garage section of the building, located in the two eastern bays. At both the north and south side of the east elevation window openings are introduced approximately 21 feet from the corner. Here, in the middle half of the east elevation, in the area below the stepped up section of the parapet wall, there are three windows on each of the upper floors. These metal sash windows are identical to the windows in the front elevation.

The rear, or south elevation, of the H. L. Lawson warehouse is organized into six bays, corresponding to the six structural bays of the interior. The south elevation has a less complicated function and has a symmetry lacking in the main elevation on the north side of the building. At the ground level the wall is constructed of reinforced concrete; each bay of the ground level has a single window that, although placed on the exterior grade stands close to the ceiling of the building's second floor interior. In the area immediately inside of the south elevation, the second floor stands partially below the grade at the rear of the building. The top, or fourth floor, has six single windows that line up directly over the second floor windows set at grade. The floor in between, which is actually the third story of the building, has greater complexity to its openings. The outside bays, at the east and west corner of the rear elevation, have single windows that line up with the windows in the floor above and the floor below. The second bay in from both the east and west corner each has a 10.5 foot wide opening enclosed with a steel roll down door. The doors facilitated the loading and unloading of railcars to and from the warehouse's storage areas. The two middle bays of the third floor level of the south elevation each have a single window that lines up with the windows in the floor above and below; thus the two outside bays and the two middle bays in the south elevation are treated identically. The parapet wall of the south elevation is capped with simple brown terra cotta tiles.

The interior plan of the H. L. Lawson warehouse is quite simple. The three upper floors are unpartitioned loft style storage space. The interior is organized spatially primarily by the interior wooden mill construction posts and beams. There are six structural bays east to west and five structural bays north to south. The outermost bays

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET****H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**Section 7 Page 4

the east and west are the narrowest approximately 11.5 feet wide. The other bays are approximately 13 feet wide; the exception here is the second bay from the west corner, containing the elevator and stairs, which is the widest bay at nearly 15 feet. In the north to south direction the outermost bays are 15 feet and the three central bays are approximately 16 feet. The floors are wood except in the area of the second floor over the eastern two bays, where the floor is concrete and serves as part of the fireproofing of the ceiling of the building's garage. Both in plan and in section the ground story is more complex. Unlike the three upper floors that are 80 feet deep, the ground story is only 40 feet deep. The southern half of the ground story is unexcavated. The two eastern bays of the ground story are given over to the garage. In this area the building the ceiling is concrete and the structural system employs steel beams rather than the wood beams found in the balance of the building. The third and fourth bays from the east contain an area that was used as office space for H. L. Lawson and Son. The fifth has the freight elevator, which measures 8 feet wide and 18 feet deep. This bay also has the building's stair and at the first floor a bathroom, illuminated by the exterior window in the area between the fifth and sixth bay. The sixth and final bay from the east has an area into which a truck can be backed. A 17 foot deep space at the rear of the sixth bay and a 21 foot deep space at the rear of the fifth bay, south of the elevator, has a raised concrete floor that serves as part of a loading dock that also extends through a door in the west elevation onto an exterior loading dock area. Though the interiors do not contain particularly distinctive architectural or structural systems they do retain their original integrity. Indeed, the original architectural integrity of the H. L. Lawson and Son warehouse has been well preserved.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 5

Summary Statement of Significance

Designed by the prominent Roanoke, Virginia architectural firm of Eubank & Caldwell and constructed in 1925, the four-story H. L. Lawson & Son merchandise warehouse underscores a significant historic transition of Roanoke's regional economy. Roanoke boomed in the 1880s as a major railroad center. The rapid expansion of the city was due in large part to its selection as the junction, headquarters, and center for locomotive and rail car manufacturing and repair for the Norfolk & Western and the Shenandoah Valley railroads.² The population rose from about 1,000 residents in 1882 to 16,159 residents in 1890 and 21,495 in 1900. Roanoke citizens were surrounded on all sides by evidence of the relationship between transportation, urban growth, and economic expansion. In the early decades of the twentieth century, some members of Roanoke's business community began to scrutinize the new economic development that might flow to the city from automobile and truck transport. In the 1920s Harry Leland Lawson (1877-1948), a local insurance executive, merchant, banker, and secretary-treasurer of the local Ford car, truck, and tractor franchise stood in the forefront of an energetic group of Roanoke residents who promoted highway development and truck transportation. Lawson pursued this vision with a sense of the huge potential for trucks to complement and expand Roanoke's rail-borne commerce. The 1925 warehouse on Campbell Avenue SE that Lawson commissioned from Eubank & Caldwell captured the fresh thinking about the relationship between new transportation systems and economic development. Capitalizing on the hilly topography of the site, Lawson built a warehouse that efficiently integrated railroad and truck transportation. A Norfolk & Western spur track at the rear of the building permitted the loading and unloading of rail cars at the third floor level of the warehouse. Trucks could be backed up to, and into, the front of the warehouse at the first floor level. A freight elevator provided for easy movement of goods between trucks, rail cars, and the storage areas throughout the building. Structured around the imperatives of both rail and truck shipping the H. L. Lawson warehouse demonstrated the fluid nature of Roanoke's changing transportation system.

The H. L. Lawson and Son warehouse meets National Register Criterion A for local significance in the area of commerce and transportation. It is a good example of a building associated with the broad pattern of Roanoke's history and its pivotal role in the collecting, storing, and distributing of food stuffs and merchandise to a vast regional hinterland. The warehouse meets National Register Criterion B local significance in the area of commerce for its connection with Harry Leland Lawson, a key figure in Roanoke's business community from the late 1910s to the 1940s. The building also has National Register Criterion C local significance for its architecture and design; it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the warehouse type serving both highway and rail shipping for local commerce. The period of significance for the H. L. Lawson and Son warehouse in Criteria A and C is 1925-1958, as the warehouse continued in its important role for many decades. For Criterion B the significance goes from 1925 when the warehouse was constructed, until 1948 when Harry Leland Lawson died.

Historical Background

Harry Leland Lawson's childhood and early career placed him in an ideal position to appreciate the relationship between new systems of transportation and new commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities. It was this sense of

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 6

dynamic possibility that gave shape to his warehouse that so dramatically juxtaposed older patterns of railroad movement of freight with the emerging system of motor truck shipping. Lawson was born in 1877 at Meadows of Dan in Patrick County, Virginia, sixty-miles southwest of Roanoke. His father, William T. Lawson, was a farmer and for a time Harry worked on the family farm. Lawson's mother, Lillie D. Howard, was the daughter of a retail and dry goods merchant who operated a store in Floyd, Virginia, forty-miles southwest of Roanoke. When Harry Lawson was still in school, the family took up farming in Floyd, Virginia. As a young man Harry Lawson served for a time as a government revenue agent, engaging, among other things, in raids on illegal distillery operations.³ Like his maternal grandfather, Joseph L. Howard, Lawson also began working as a provision merchant in Floyd, linking area farms and local businesses with merchandise purchased from suppliers in Roanoke and other distant points. This work both in farming and in retail would have provided an early understanding of the basic economic and transportation links between the agricultural countryside that he had been born in and the urban suppliers and manufacturers, which he came to represent. Lawson relocated to Roanoke in 1919 and his first business position was to serve as president of the Lawrence Implement Company, a dealer in farm machinery, seeds, fertilizer, tractors, trucks and automobiles. He also worked as the secretary-treasurer of the Yost-Huff Motor Company, the supplier of Ford cars, trucks, and tractors. Thus Lawson's Roanoke business career was fundamentally involved in supplying regional farms, and in particular, providing the equipment that mechanized their farm operations. By 1923 Lawson had become a founder and president of the Old Dominion Fire Insurance Company and a few years after that he became a director of the Colonial-American Bank and the Liberty Trust Bank.

After moving with his family to Roanoke in 1919, Lawson's business interests expanded and got increasingly caught up in the broader fortunes of the city. Lawson became a tireless booster of Roanoke and by 1923 was elected to the vice presidency of the Chamber of Commerce. A few years after his death in 1948, a biographical note captured the extent of Lawson's economic boosting of his adopted city. The note declared, "A leading figure in the business and financial life of Roanoke for the last thirty years of his life, Harry Leland Lawson did much to promote the progress of the community and could be counted upon to exert his best energies in behalf of what his judgment told him was beneficial and helpful. . . . His energetic nature led him into many fields of endeavor. . . . He was prominently identified with the development of the system of modern highways from Roanoke to Floyd and Rocky Mount. . . . His constructive influence in his city's affairs and the impress of his character assure a permanent place for him among Roanoke's memorable citizens."⁴ In the Lawson warehouse, Harry Leland Lawson's divergent business interests drew upon the success of his leadership in promoting regional highway improvements around Roanoke. He anticipated the significance of motor trucks and automobiles in strengthening the economic links between Virginia farms and regional market and service centers like Roanoke. Lawson had spent his early career cultivating this trade network but had to rely on railroads and farmers' wagons. The truck

and automobile promised to increase the range of the market and the volume and attractiveness of the goods that Lawson stored and sold.

The growing importance of motor vehicles in the decade and a half that overlapped with Lawson's move to
NPS Form 10-900-a OMB No. 1024-0018
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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 7

Roanoke was inescapable. Virginia registrations of passenger cars and trucks rose from 21,357 in 1915 to 115,470 in 1920, to 282,650 in 1925 and 375,889 in 1930.⁵ In 1920 there were 28,557 automobiles owned by Virginia farmers, 15.3% of all farms. In 1920 there were 2,389 trucks owned by Virginia farmers, or 1.3% of all farms. The number jumped significantly during the 1920s. In 1930 farmers owned 88,463 automobile, 47.1% of all farms. In 1930 there were 19,459 trucks owned by Virginia farmers, representing 10.5% of all farms.⁶ As business leaders in Roanoke surveyed these developments they realized that motor vehicles could potentially intensify trade and business connections between Roanoke and the fertile southwest Virginia agricultural hinterland. They also realized that improvements made to the regional highway system would help insure their ability to tap that business.

In the early 1920s the Roanoke World-News often published a list on its editorial page under the headline "ROANOKE NEEDS." In the view of the newspaper editors the needs ranged from better water supply, to modern hotels, to a new federal building. Highway improvement frequently appeared in the list. In June 1923 the World-News, for example, argued that Roanoke needed, "Better highways leading into Roanoke from trading territory."⁷⁸ The Chamber of Commerce lobbied the Virginia highway commissioner for road improvements. However, in the 1920s provisions of the Virginia's Robertson act put the initiative and part of the funding responsibility for highway development into the hands of local residents. To receive priority for highway projects, state officials looked to localities to raise construction funds that would be lent interest free to the state highway department and then refunded slowly over time out of revenues from motor vehicle registrations and gas taxes. It was in this context in 1923 that Lawson and his colleagues in the Chamber of Commerce and the business community took a leading role in local highway development. The Chamber established the Roanoke Highway Improvement Corporation to solicit funds to loan to the highway department for the paving and improvement of local highways. Harry Leland Lawson, who was serving as the vice president of the Chamber of Commerce, also took on the position as vice president of the Highway Improvement Association.⁹ The Highway Improvement Corporation first undertook a project to fund the paving of the 23-mile road from Roanoke to Rocky Mount, Virginia. The existing condition of the road was such that "travel over it was almost entirely discouraged." According to C. R. Williams, the president of the Chamber, the condition of the Rocky Mount road and other area roads worked to "bottle up" Roanoke because it was "absolutely tabooed by tourists and on the black list of those who travel or anticipate traveling in automobiles."¹⁰ The road's improvement helped insure that north-south traffic through the Shenandoah would run through Roanoke. It connected to what at the time was said to be the longest continuous paved roadway south of the Mason and Dixon line, a road connecting Martinsburg to Rocky Mount, a distance of 217 miles.

Working with the Chamber of Commerce, the Booster Club, the Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, and American Business

club and with the Retail Merchants Association, Harry Leland Lawson and the Roanoke Highway Improvement Corporation raised \$281,000 for the road, over a third of the cost of the “magnificent highway.”¹¹ When the road was completed in December 1925, hundreds of road enthusiasts joined Virginia’s governor and highway commissioner, and delegations from Virginia and North Carolina cities and business organizations to celebrate the

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 8

new road. A motorcade led by four motorcycle policemen drove from Roanoke along the new road to the celebration in Rocky Mount. Harry Leland Lawson was among the dignitaries who proudly participated in the ceremonies. The development was seen as the “the climax to Roanoke’s long cherished dream of a hard-surfaced highway connecting her with Rocky Mount and giving her egress to North Carolina.”¹² Lawson later helped push other road improvement projects, envisioned as part of a broad “community enterprise;”¹³ this work included a road that ran southwest to Floyd, Virginia, into the trading territory where his parents had farmed and where he had begun his mercantile career.

As Roanoke leaders pushed for highway improvements they hoped to attract motor tourists to the city. They also saw in motor vehicles a new flexible way of strengthening and expanding the economic connections between Roanoke and the surrounding countryside. They saw highways and motor truck transportation through the lens of a town built solidly on a foundation of rail-borne commerce. What Harry Leland Lawson did with his 1925 warehouse project was to begin to sort through the emerging relationship between railroad and highway transportation. These two forms of transportation seemed to complement one another, occupying different levels and different sections of the warehouse but often working in concert to get goods from the producer, through the warehouse, and on to the consumer. Lawson’s warehouse gave architectural and urban form to an emerging vision of how the railroad and the motor vehicle could work together, bringing new efficiencies to the handling of freight and passengers. In May 1926 Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., the president of General Motors, wrote an article for Forbes titled, “How Rails and Motors Pull Together.” Sloan pointed out that trucks and buses were permitting railroads to abandon unprofitable lines. He also insisted that trucks could bring great economies to railroad operation by handling less-than-carload deliveries of freight between rail terminals to regional customers, significantly reducing labor and equipment costs. Using trucks to deliver and pick up freight from the terminal also could reduce congestion on the track system and provide greater flexibility in the handling of local freight. Sloan concluded, “A number of railroads have realized the advantage of coordinating the highway and rail services; this has been done in many ways, and the future will undoubtedly bring forth still more effective methods. That the motor vehicle can destroy the railroads is quite as impossible as that the railroads can destroy transportation by highway. Uncoordinated, they can be a means of much annoyance one to the other; coordinated they will be a source of much assistance and profit each to the other and to the public.”¹⁴ In 1929, A. J. Brosseau, president of Mack Trucks, published an article in Railway Age titled, “The Motor Truck, A Helper, Not a Competitor of the Railways.”¹⁵ In the same year George Hannauer, president of the Boston & Maine Railroad, voiced similar ideas in an article titled, “Joining the Railways and Highways.” that pointed out the economies that the Boston & Maine had realized using both buses and trucks. In November 1925 the Society of Automotive Engineers held a conference in Philadelphia devoted to the question of “How the Railroads Can Use the Motor Vehicle.” In the same year Railway Age published articles titled “Both Trucks and Railways Needed,” and “Motor Truck

Successful Railroad Ally.”¹⁶ All of these discussions advocated the integration of railroad and motor vehicle operations. It was precisely this concept that Lawson gave form and expression to in his 1925 warehouse project.

In 1919, as an agent of the Yost-Huff Motor Company, the Roanoke Ford franchise in which he served as
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 9

secretary-treasurer, Lawson was involved in the purchase of the Campbell Avenue land that he later built his warehouse on. Yost-Huff may have had plans to expand on the site and purchased a lot that was 80 feet deep and ran for 600 feet along Campbell Avenue, west of 7th Street. Although close to the center of Roanoke, and surrounded by both industrial and residential development, the tract was largely undeveloped. The land rose steeply south of Campbell Avenue. Part of the reason that it had remained undeveloped was that for years it had been designated as “Woodland Park,” a site intended for the leisure and recreational use of Roanoke residents. The Roanoke Land & Improvement Company designated the site as a park and donated it to Roanoke, with the condition that it be fenced and improved for park use. In the late nineteenth-century while the city grew rapidly Roanoke officials had largely neglected to provide recreational, cultural, or even adequate sanitary facilities for local residents. The city’s slowness to respond to the conditions that Woodland Park be fenced and improved led the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company to reclaim the land and to sell it to the Woodland Park Land Company, which planned to subdivide and develop the land. Working class residents of Roanoke who had grown accustomed to making informal use of Woodland Park made strenuous protests against the reversion of the land for development.¹⁷ For a time legal questions about the reversion clouded the land titles and further slowed development.¹⁸ In 1905, after legal issues were resolved, the Highland Company, headed by Roanoke developer Stark D. Ferguson purchased the tract for development. The Highland Company dedicated a thirty-foot wide right-of-way for a Norfolk & Western spur track through the former site of Woodland Park, eighty feet south of Campbell Avenue. This rail spur later shaped Lawson’s warehouse plans.

In January 1924 the Board of Directors and stockholders of the Yost-Huff Motor Company sold the Woodland Park tract and several other pieces of land to Harry Leland Lawson and his brother-in-law Samuel Green Proffit for \$10,500. Like Lawson, Proffit was one of the executives in the Yost-Huff Motor Company. This sale provided the land for the warehouse project that Lawson and Proffit initiated in 1925. The rail spur at the rear of the lot helped determine the shape of the warehouse. The deed conveying the property to Lawson and Proffit declared that the parcel included “all the rights and privileges . . . for the use of the side-track at the rear of said lots. It is further understood that this 30 feet [of rail right-of-way] at the rear of said lots is reserved and set aside for the permanent use and benefit of the abutting property owners thereof.”¹⁹ The warehouse would fill the entire depth of the lot from the Campbell Avenue to the Norfolk & Western rail spur. The fact that the track preceded the warehouse project meant that any building on the site would have to negotiate the grade between Campbell Avenue and the track. Eubank & Caldwell’s warehouse design cleverly did just this by having the building’s third story with its rail loading docks align with the spur track. The second story was partially underground at the back of the building and was partially lit by windows lining the ground along the rail spur. At the ground story the front elevation along Campbell Avenue had five truck bays with roll down doors that permitted the easy loading of motor trucks. The two eastern bays gave access to an interior garage where trucks could be pulled into the

warehouse and stored. In this way Lawson and his architects adapted a building peculiarly fitting not only to its site but also to the changing regional and national transportation system.

The design energy and imagination in the building of the Lawson warehouse was apparently relished more on

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 10

efficient planning than on ornamental or architectural effect. The warehouse is designed along simple utilitarian lines, solid, practical, useful, but not embellished. The red face brick of the exterior is laid in five-course American bond, with five layers of stretchers followed by a single course of headers. The windows are simple industrial metal sashes, cut simply into the brick wall with brick sills. The secondary west elevation stood adjacent to an exterior area with oil and gasoline tanks and an area where future development would potentially occur. To protect against fire exposure on the west side, either from petroleum tanks or from future buildings, Eubank & Caldwell simply built an elevation with no window openings. With the garage in the two eastern bays of the ground story, the freight elevator with its prominent mechanical penthouse took up an asymmetrical position in the front elevation. A single window between the two westernmost bays provided natural light to a bathroom, but was not balanced by any other opening in the elevation. A very simple terra cotta cap topped the parapet. There were no efforts to soften or mask architecturally the warehouse's many utilitarian accommodations.

Interestingly, the simple pragmatic exterior design of the Lawson warehouse reflected something of the utilitarian calculus that had earlier made the site available for development after Roanoke failed to fence and improve the Woodland Park lot initially donated to the city for park purposes. The utilitarian aspect of Roanoke's overall cityscape had struck commentators in the early 20th century. In 1907 when landscape architect and planner John Nolen was asked to develop a city plan for Roanoke he did not mince words about the relationship between the city's rapid growth and its inattention to beauty. He even played on the town's former name of Big Lick. Nolen wrote, "notwithstanding its superior natural advantages, Roanoke is today, in common with most American cities, plain, common-place and, in some localities, distinctly unsightly. . . . It possesses no public gardens, parks, or parkways, no playgrounds, no attractive school yards, no monuments, no public library, no open plazas or public squares, no wide avenues with well grown trees, no segregated fine residence section, free from objectionable features, and no public buildings of distinction. . . . The city has developed rapidly from its humble beginning, from Big Lick to Bigger Lick. It has not radically changed its character."²⁰ In the 1920s and 1930s Eubank & Caldwell demonstrated their ability to design architecturally distinguished buildings. They provided handsome picturesque apartment designs for Mrs. F. C. Wiley in Salem, Virginia and for W. H. Hitchcock on Grandin Road in Roanoke. The firm designed several churches, civic buildings for various public institutions including the Southwest Virginia State Hospital in Marion and the Western State Hospital in Staunton, and handsome school buildings in Front Royal, courthouse additions in Craig County, Carroll County, and Patrick County, and the main hotel building in Marion, the Roanoke Community Theater Building as well as the monumental residence for A. C. Needles in Roanoke. The 1940 Works Progress Administration guide to Virginia called attention to the "era of architectural ugliness in which Roanoke was born" and reported that there were "unsightly areas of houses quickly built and poorly kept, and junk heaps near historic places."²¹ The unembellished character of the Lawson warehouse was rooted in the pragmatic building tradition of Roanoke.

The utilitarian aspects of the architecture in the Lawson warehouse should not obscure the fact that the building also reflected something of contemporary utopian visions of the future city. A key strain in urban utopian planning in the 1920s revolved around the ideal rationalization of traffic and circulation in the city. Plans advocated by committed urban modernists like New York architect Harvey Wiley Corbett and New York

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 11

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architectural illustrator Hugh Ferriss envisioned a much denser skyscraper city structured around multilevel traffic routes, separating pedestrians on elevated pedestrian bridges, from freight and passenger traffic, which occupied different roadway levels below. Basket woven intersections would keep east-west and north-south traffic moving continuously. They proposed hollowing out the basements of skyscrapers and other buildings to provide off-street loading docks, thus reducing street congestion. They also promoted taller skyscrapers, some combining office, residential, and commercial functions, to further relieve street congestion. In Roanoke from the early 20th century city officials and planners had to grapple with the increased congestion of city streets, particularly after the introduction of motor vehicles. The Lawson warehouse effected a similarly visionary and quite modern separation of traffic. Pedestrians were provided with separate entrances to the building. The interior garage and the truck loading bays provided for truck loading off of the street. Train loading took place at the third floor level. Moreover, the efficient coordination of train and truck freight transportation embraced a vision of an infrastructure of freely flowing traffic, providing the hallmark of many modern urban visions.²²

The success of Harry Leland Lawson's vision for his warehouse is suggested by the fact that he was able to sell the building at a substantial profit just two years after completing the project. Lawson sold the building that had cost approximately \$40,000 to build for \$55,000 to the Finance & Storage Corporation, owned by Marion S. Battle and William S. Battle. The Battle brothers stood in an ideal position to appreciate what Lawson had done with his warehouse project. William S. Battle had spent his career working for the Norfolk & Western. In 1926 he became the vice president in charge of valuation, real estate and public relations.²³ Marion S. Battle worked in real estate development and later, between 1938 and 1942, served as Governor James H. Price's Director of the State Division of Motor Vehicles. Thus, the Battle brothers between them seemed to cover the railroad and motor vehicles aspects of the transportation system that Lawson had merged in the warehouse. For a time Lawson's warehouse partner, S. Green Proffit worked with the Battles as the vice-president of the Finance & Storage Corporation. The Battle brothers expanded the warehouse operation in 1929 by adding an exterior loading platform made accessible through a door cut in the west elevation. Loading trucks in this area of the site also complemented the fueling of trucks from the underground tanks and fuel valves that ended through the twelve-foot-high, eighty-foot-long retaining wall that extended west from the west elevation of the warehouse. In 1931, the Battles still owed Lawson and Proffit \$20,000 of the purchase price for the warehouse. At that point, in the midst of a deepening economic depression, the Battles sold the warehouse back to Lawson and Proffit for the price they had paid for it in 1927. Lawson and Proffit initially operated the building as a general merchandise warehouse while also housing the D. S. Meadows Company in the building. Meadows was an agricultural implement and seed dealer and during the early 1930s Lawson served as company president and Proffit served as vice-president. By 1934 Lawson also had established a merchandise warehouse business, H. L. Lawson & Son, taking into partnership his eldest son, Harry Leland Lawson, Jr.

The Battles initially retained the oil and gasoline distributing station and Lawson depot to the west of the warehouse, leasing it to the Spur Distributing Company. In the 1940s they purchased the adjacent lots, again consolidating the properties and the warehouse and fuel operation under single ownership. The company maintained accounts with numerous local businesses, including, Albergotti Brothers, merchandise brokers;

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 12

American Brokerage Company, food products; Martha Washington Candies, candy manufacturers and distributors; D. S. Meadows, seed and agricultural implements; Mick or Mack, grocers; Reliable Service Grocers; and Roanoke VSS Service, feed suppliers. These clients demonstrated the continued link that Lawson had cultivated between the agricultural hinterland into which he had been born and his mercantile endeavors that he had cultivated in Roanoke. Despite Henry Leland Lawson's death in 1948, H. L. Lawson and Son and members of the Lawson family continued to own and operate the warehouse through the period of significance, and onto the present day (2008).

Endnotes

¹ See "Journal of the Roanoke Common Council Minutes," 30 October 1925 and 6 November 1925.

² Rand Dotson, Roanoke, Virginia, 1882-1912: Magic City of the New South, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007).

³ Washington Post, 24 April 1905.

⁴ Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., History of the Shenandoah Valley (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), 75.

⁵ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1940 (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1941), 419.

⁶ The statistics for 1920 in: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1929 (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1929), 639; the statistics for 1930 in: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1937 (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1937), 601.

⁷ Roanoke World-News, 1 June 1923.

⁸ Roanoke World-News, 5 June 1923.

⁹ Roanoke World-News, 5 June 1923.

¹⁰ Roanoke World-News, 10 December 1925.

¹¹ Roanoke World-News, 10 December 1925.

¹² Roanoke World-News, 9 December 1925.

¹³ Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. "How Rails and Motors Pull Together," Forbes Magazine, 18 (1 May 1926): 19-21.

¹⁴ A. J. Brosseau, "The Motor Truck, A Helper, Not a Competitor of the Railways," Railway Age 87 (27 July 1929): 297-298.

¹⁵ Railway Age, 78 (6 June 1925): 1407-1410; Railway Age, 79 (21 November 1925): 941-944.

¹⁶ Rand Dotson, Roanoke, Virginia, 1882-1912: Magic City of the New South, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 20, 71, 77, 88-89.

¹⁷ See "Journal of the Roanoke Common Council Minutes," 7 May 1901 and 9 September 1902.

¹⁸ County Clerks Office, Roanoke, Deed Book 420, page 421.

¹⁹ John Nolen, Remodeling Roanoke: Report of the Committee on Civic Improvement (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907), 10-11.

²⁰ Works Progress Administration, A Guide to the Old Dominion, 301.

²¹ See: Robert L. Duffus, Mastering the Metropolis (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 72; Hugh Ferriss, Mastering the Metropolis, 1929; survey volumes of the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs.

²² Washington Post, 27 October 1947.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section 9, 10 Page 13

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9. Bibliographical Data

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“Harry Leland Lawson,” in Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., History of the Shenandoah Valley ((New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), 75.

Nolen, John. Remodeling Roanoke: Report of the Committee on Civic Improvement (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907).

United States Census, Population Name Schedules.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The half-acre property known as the H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse located at 631 Campbell Avenue SE in Roanoke, Virginia, is referenced as Lots 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 in Section 1 of Woodland Park Land Company Addition to Roanoke, Virginia. It is also known as tax parcels 4011141 and 4011116 as noted on the Roanoke City web mapping system.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries incorporate the entire H. L. Lawson & Son Warehouse and the lots to the west of the building with the exterior loading dock, brick retaining wall, and the site of the underground gasoline and oil tanks.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse
Roanoke, Virginia**

Section Photographic Data Page 14

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All photographs:

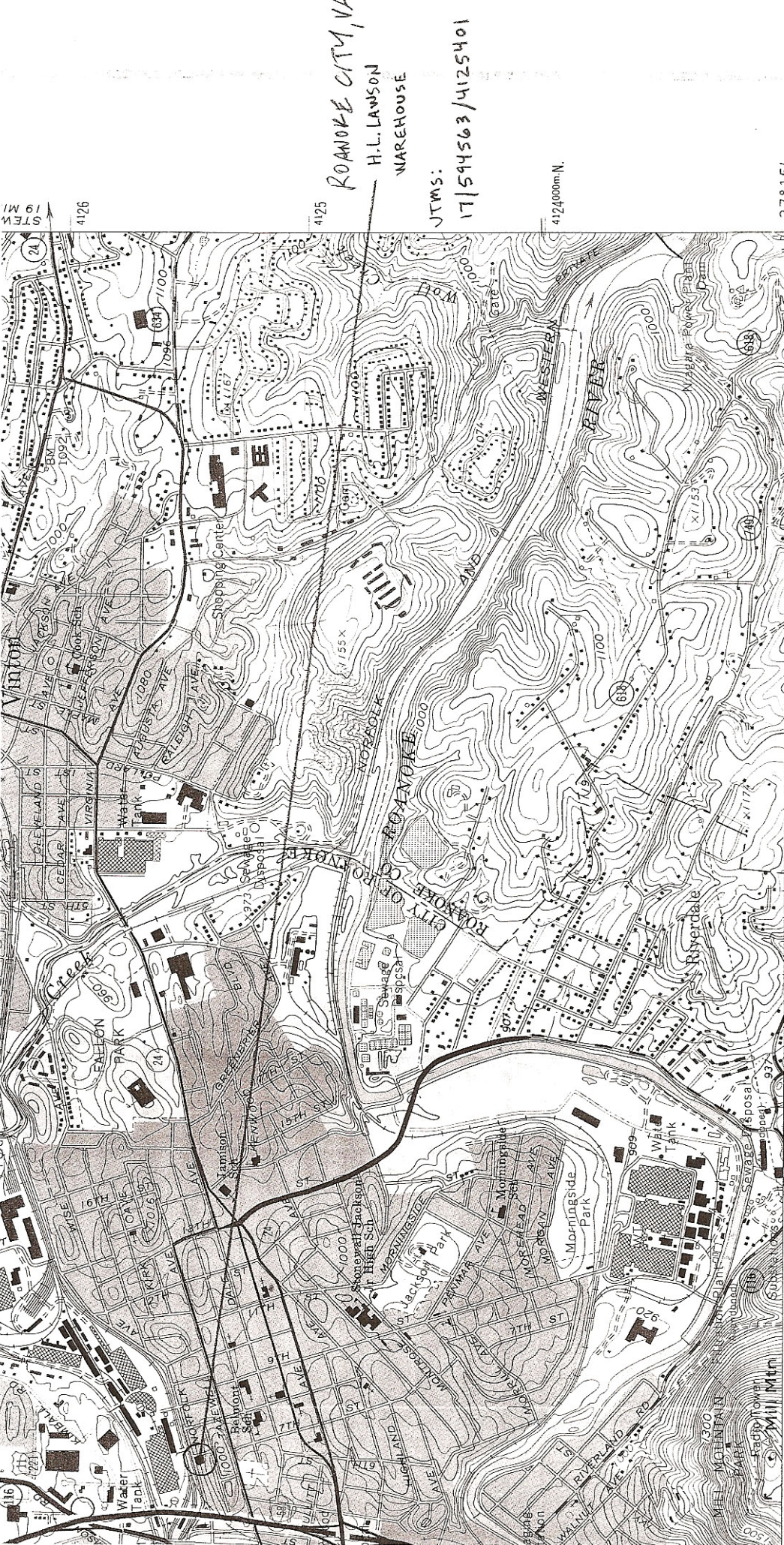
H.L. Lawson & Son Warehouse, Roanoke, Virginia

Date: March, 2008

Photographer: Lucas Thornton

Digital images stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources

1. Exterior view, north elevation
2. Exterior view, west elevation
3. Exterior view, east elevation
4. Exterior view, south elevation
5. Interior view, 1st floor
6. Interior view, 2nd floor, post and beams
7. Interior view, 2nd floor, window
8. Interior view, 2nd floor
9. Interior view, 3rd floor
10. Interior view, 4th floor



ROANOKE CITY, VA
 H.L. LAWSON
 WAREHOUSE
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37° 15'
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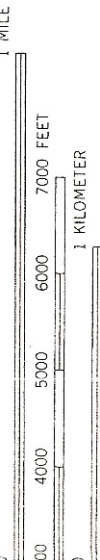
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RVAL 20 FEET
 RTICAL DATUM OF 1929

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

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



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROANOKE, VA.
 37079-C8-TF-024

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled in cooperation with Commonwealth of Virginia agencies from aerial photographs taken 1982 and other sources. This information not field checked. Map edited 1984
 Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

NAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
 GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
 JR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
 URCES, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22903
 AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

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