

EDGEMONT NEIGHBORHOOD
Roughly bounded by Elm Street, East Main Street,
Lyon Street, Walker Street
Durham
Durham County
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-377

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

EDGEMONT NEIGHBORHOOD

HABS No. NC-377

Location: Roughly bounded by Elm Street, E. Main Street,
Lyon Street and Walker Street.

Durham
Durham County
North Carolina

Present Owner: Multiple owners

Present Occupants: Multiple occupants and vacancies

Present Use: Residential

Significance: The Edgemont Neighborhood was originally the housing area for the Durham Hosiery Mill employees and their families. Remnants of the mill village are still evident today although much of the area is dilapidated. The Durham Hosiery Mill today has been converted to housing for the elderly. A public and private partnership was formed (including the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) to finance the project in 1987. The continuing redevelopment plans for the Edgemont Neighborhood is the reason for this HAB's documentation.

PART I. Physical Setting of the Edgemont Neighborhood

The Edgemont Neighborhood encompasses over six blocks located south of the Durham Hosiery Mill No. 1 (National Register Property). The Mill, located in the 800 block of Angier Avenue, is four stories tall and features a six story tower, a visible landmark throughout the neighborhood. The tower is constructed of brick, as is the rest of the building, and includes segmental arched windows on the lower four stories and highly decorative corbelled bands and arches on the upper two stories. A hip roof, box cornices and shallow gabled dormers on each side of the roof reflect the Romanesque Revival style. The main block of the building is broken up by segmented arched windows. The purpose of this documentation is to illustrate the relationship between this structure and the surrounding neighborhood. The building was rehabilitated in 1987 and now serves as a home for elderly citizens. The surrounding neighborhood is part of an overall project called the Edgemont Redevelopment Plan.

Edgemont is located in an area that stands out because of its abrupt changes in topography which includes steep hills and lowlands. The topography has changed very little from the turn-of-the-Century, and the area still maintains trees from this period. The physical condition of the area is poor with several streets remaining unpaved, few sidewalks and a lack of street lighting. The original site was laid out to provide housing for the mill workers and remnants of these structures are still in existence. The remaining structures are deteriorated to dilapidated. To the east of the site is a commercial district located on E. Main Street, five blocks east of Downtown Durham. This commercial district began to develop around 1915 due to the needs of the residents.

The buildings in the neighborhood fall into a variety of types including: L-shaped, F-shape, "shotgun", duplex and "story-and-a-jump" (one and one half story without dormers). All houses in the neighborhood are frame construction with brick piers and all feature porches. Today, many have replacement siding and windows and other major interior and exterior alterations. Larger more elaborate houses, that served the white collar workers, are also apparent throughout the area. These homes are generally of a vernacular Victorian style with decorative sawnwork and are located on the better lots. Like the other structures, they are in poor or dilapidated condition. Most of these homes have been greatly altered inside, with little historic fabric left. In fact, in the early 1980's, the N. C. Division of Archives and History agreed with the City that the neighborhood was so greatly altered that it would not be eligible for listing on the National Register, and thus it was excluded from the City's Multiple Resource nominations

in 1985.

Neglect, vandalism and fires in the project area have made the quality of life of the few remaining residents and the surrounding less than that of most other areas of the City. Moreover, the elderly make up a large portion of the population of the area and they are increasingly concerned about their safety. The planned improvements for the Edgemont Neighborhood are necessary to protect the Durham Hosiery Mill and the adjacent neighborhoods.

PART II. Historical Context - The Development of Edgemont

In 1898 Julian S. Carr, a prosperous tobacconists, merged two small hosiery companies into the Durham Hosiery Mills Corporation to better compete with the large northern hosiery mills. He chose a site to the east of Downtown Durham at the junction of the Norfolk and Western Railroad with the Southern and Seaboard Airline Railroads. In 1900 he owned all of the land which he named Edgemont and began the construction of the Durham Hosiery Mill on Angier Avenue. At the same time , streets and lots were laid out to the south and East of the Mill site. The streets were laid out in an irregular pattern due to the hills and steep embankments. Carr's fondness for flowers lead him to name all of the streets after flowers (today all of the street names have been changed). While the Mill was under construction, small frame structures were built to house the mill workers.

The housing that was constructed over the next 15 years was very diverse for a mill village. Very few houses were identical and most were distinctive with decorative elements; such as sawnwork and large porches. Also mixed in with the workers housing, were the more elaborate white collar homes. These houses were larger and typified the vernacular Victorian styles that were popular at the time. Several small commercial properties also began to surface in the neighborhood. By 1927 over 300 residential structures were built for mill workers in Edgemont.

In 1910 Durham Hosiery Mills was the largest manufacturer of cotton hosiery in the world. The mill produced hosiery for men, women and children and employed over 1000 employees in these early years. The company continued to prosper under the direction of Julian Carr, Jr. , who took over the operation from his father shortly after the mill was constructed. The success of the Mill began to diminish after World War I, due to the newly popular silk stockings for women. Women's hosiery represented approximately half of the operation. The mill continued to manufacture cotton socks for men; however this market was not as profitable and the mill closed in 1934.

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Durham Hosiery Mill remained unoccupied except during its use by the Red Cross during World War II. It was used as a tobacco warehouse after the war and later a storage warehouse. In 1978 the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and today it has been uniquely rehabilitated as housing for the elderly.

The Edgemont Neighborhood continued to survive after the closing of the mill. The area was convenient to Downtown Durham and to the black commercial and business district known as Haiti. The decline of the neighborhood began in the 1950's, and urban renewal efforts in the 1960's helped very little. Today Edgemont is experiencing a revitalization. The new plans for the area incorporate an element of harmony between the proposed new structures and the remaining houses.

Sources: *An Inventory of Edgemont and East Durham: Early Textile Mill Villages*; R. Little Stokes and Pat Dickinson Eds.; DTI Press; Durham, N.C.; 1980.

The Durham Architectural and Historic Inventory; Claudia P. Roberts; City of Durham; 1982.