

## MSS. Collection #164

### Wafco Mills Collection, ca. 1897-1981. ½ box (13 folders), 61 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

### INTRODUCTION

This collection focuses on Wafco Mills during the early to mid-twentieth century. Owned and operated by four generations of the Watson family, the company established the first roller mill in Greensboro. It produced flour, corn meal, and later animal feed in its complex at the corner of McGee and Cedar streets. The collection includes blueprints, product bags, correspondence, photographs, and printed materials. Researchers interested in Greensboro businesses or milling operations may find it useful.

**Arrangement:** This collection is organized into five series and arranged within series by document type or subject. The series are: **Correspondence**, 1931-1954; **Drawings**, 1912-1961; **Miscellaneous**, ca. 1947-1972; **Photographs**, ca. 1900-1972; and **Printed Materials**, ca. 1897-1981.

**Provenance:** This collection was donated by Margaret J. Watson, the wife of former Wafco vice president John C. Watson Jr. (1925-1994), in July 2002 and assigned accession number 2002.30.2.

**Processing:** This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Amelia Leuschen in August 2018.

### HISTORICAL NOTE

W.A. Watson Jr. and brother-in-law Tom P. North established North and Watson mill in 1893. Located on the corner of McGee and Cedar streets, the company was the first roller mill in Greensboro, and produced flour and corn meal. After Tom North left the company in 1897, selling his portion to W.A. Watson Sr., the business changed its name to W.A. Watson & Co. The name changed again when W.A. Watson Jr. purchased his father's shares in 1912, this time to Greensboro Roller Mills. In 1923, John C. Watson Jr., the grandson of W.A. Watson Jr., opened a feed mill named Watson Feed Co. at 306 Hughes St.; it relocated to 216 N. Forbis St. a few years later. The two companies consolidated in 1942, and the feed mill moved to the site at the corner of McGee and Cedar streets. (According to a brief history in the collection, a new building was constructed for the feed mill, but the Sanborn maps do not show such a building.) Around this time, the company name changed a final time to Wafco (**Watson Flour/Feed Company**) Mills, Inc. The mill closed in 1972 and sold its brand names to a High Point company. The complex, consisting of an 1893 frame building and 1907 and 1912 brick

additions, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. By 1984, the North Carolina National Bank Community Development Corporation and College Hill Development Company had converted it into apartments that soon became condominiums.

**Historical sources:** Most of the historical information was obtained from the historical sketches and other materials in the collection. Additional information was incorporated from the Greensboro city directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey maps, National Register of Historic Places Nomination (<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/gf0018.pdf>; 1979), and the newspaper article titled, "[Flood of June 3 overturns lives in Wafco Mills](#)" (*News & Record*, June 13, 2009).

## **SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE**

Types of materials in this collection include **blueprints, correspondence, a map, photographs, product bags, and printed materials.**

Most items in this collection relate to Wafco Mills and its predecessors, W.A. Watson & Co., Greensboro Roller Mills, and Watson Feed Co. Many materials are promotional, including mailings and a newsletter (1:1-3, 5:1, 5:3). Images of the company buildings appear in photographs, on advertisements, and on letterhead (4:1-2, 5:1, 5:3). Noteworthy items in the collection include 1948 blueprints for the building at the corner of McGee and Cedar streets (2:1), an advertisement with recipes using Greensboro Roller Mills products (5:1), and unused Wafco Mills product bags (3:2).

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **1. Correspondence. 3 folders (4 items). 1931-1954.**

The correspondence primarily relates to advertising. One letter on Watson Feed Co. letterhead, sent in 1931, lists prices for various types of animal feed, while another, dated 1933, urges customers to browse an enclosed brochure about the company's winter rye grass seed and lawn fertilizers (1:2). A letter from the Black Diamond Trailer Company states that photos of a Watson Feed Co. trailer used in its advertising are enclosed (1:1; see 4:2 for one of those photos). The final letter concerns Wafco Mills' sponsorship of the WBIG morning radio program *Poole's Paradise* in 1954 (1:3).

### **2. Drawings. 1 folder (6 items). 1912-1961.**

This series contains four blueprints that show the layout of all four floors of the building at the corner of McGee and Cedar streets in 1948. Also included are nearly identical 1912 and 1961 diagrams of the milling process.

### **3. Miscellaneous. 2 folders (7 items). ca. 1947-1972.**

The miscellaneous items include a map of Greensboro at its sesquicentennial in 1958 (3:1) and six unused Wafco Mills product packages (3:2).

**4. Photographs. 2 folders (19 items). ca. 1900-1972.**

The photographs relate primarily to Wafco Mills. Of particular interest is a photo that shows the 1893 frame building alone on the site at the corner of McGee and Cedar streets. Three later photos show company delivery trucks, while nine depict displays of Feather Soft Flour in a window at the O. Henry Hotel, in stores, and being used to make food for a crowd. Also included is a photograph of five women and one man with a WBIG microphone (4:1). In addition, the series contains five images of the Watson Feed Co. building at 216 N. Forbis St. and that company's vehicles (4:2).

**5. Printed Materials. 5 folders (25 items). ca. 1897-1981.**

The printed materials consist of advertisements, historical sketches, unused letterhead, a newsletter, and receipt books. All five advertisements were produced by W.A. Watson & Co., proprietors of Greensboro Roller Mills, in the early twentieth century. Of particular interest are an ad for Watson's Purity featuring a face that changes if the card is turned upside down, and a pamphlet providing recipes using Greensboro Roller Mills products (5:1). Documents pertaining to the history of Wafco Mills and its predecessors include two brief histories of the mill and one excerpt from *The Gate City, Greensboro* typed on Wafco Mills letterhead. A 1978 *Greensboro Record* article discusses plans to repurpose the building, and a 1981 North Carolina National Bank report recounts plans to convert it into apartments (5:2). Three versions of Greensboro Roller Mills letterhead include two with images of the building, while the third has no images and is on lined paper (5:3). The newsletter, published by Watson Feed Co. in December 1941, discusses types of feed and presents customer reviews. It is titled *The "WAFCO" Feed Merchant* (5:4). The company would be renamed Wafco Mills a few years later. This series also contains receipt books representing Greensboro Roller Mills, Watson Feed Co., and Wafco Mills, as well as two blank receipts from Greensboro Flour and Feed Co. (5:5).

**FOLDER LISTING**

<b><u>Series</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Contents</u></b>	
1	1	Correspondence	-- Black Diamond Trailer Company (1938)
		“	-- Watson Feed Company (1931-1933)
		“	-- WBIG (1954)
2	1	Drawings	-- Blueprints (1912-1961)
3	1	Miscellaneous	-- Map (1958)
	2	“	-- Product Bags (ca. 1947-1972)
4	1	Photographs	-- Wafco Mills (ca. 1900-1972)
	2	“	-- Watson Feed Co. (ca. 1930s)
5	1	Printed Materials	-- Advertisements (ca. 1900-1941)
	2	“	-- History (ca. 1950s-1981)
	3	“	-- Letterhead (ca. 1897-1947)
	4	“	-- Newsletter (1941)
	5	“	-- Receipt Books (ca. 1900s-1950s)