The West Salem neighborhood is located southwest of downtown Winston-Salem and immediately west of Old Salem. West Salem, unlike most of Winston-Salem’s neighborhoods, has a very long history that is closely related to the late 18th and 19th century history of Salem. West Salem also played a noteworthy role in the early 20th century development of the newly created City of Winston-Salem. This dual role, within the growth of the Town of Salem and later the Twin City, distinguishes West Salem from other residential areas in the city. Despite architectural differences between certain sections in the neighborhood, a consistent theme in West Salem’s development was the increasing reliance upon the burgeoning industrial economy of Winston-Salem. The number of industrial workers of all ranks and pay scales in the neighborhood was extremely high as workers from Reynolds, Hanes, and most of the other major firms lived in the area.

The physical development of West Salem is complex, but it began with 18th century and early 19th century farmsteads on Salem’s “outlots.” With the pronounced growth in the textile industry in Salem during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modestly-scaled workers’ housing was built around the Apple, Albert, and Wachovia Streets area. These dwellings tended to be simple cottages and I-houses. This development coincided with the establishment of a middle-income residential area a few blocks south on S. Poplar Street that reflects elements of the Greek Revival and Picturesque architectural styles.
Growth during the late 1910s and into the 1930s followed typical suburban models with the construction of a large collection of Craftsman bungalows. Similarly, the modest amount of new construction and expansion that came during the 1930s through the mid 1950s was often in the popular Cape Cod and Minimal Traditional styles. As such, West Salem represents the vast variety of scale, architectural detail, and combination of architectural expression typical of the late 19th century all the way through the mid 20th century. One of the most important aspects of the early 20th century growth was the development of a large number of neighborhood stores. West Salem maintains one of the best collections of historic commercial buildings in Winston-Salem.

West Salem’s period of significance is c. 1865-1957 and includes changes in development patterns and architectural styles after World War II. Although there are fewer resources dating from the postwar era than the earlier decades, these resources contribute to an understanding of the continued development of the neighborhood and changes in taste and technology related to post-World War II society.

Today, West Salem is an active and vibrant historic district that often sponsors community events and neighborhood tours. In 2009, it was nationally recognized as a “Preserve America” community.

In 2005, the West Salem Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Want to know more?

West Salem Historic District National Register Nomination
http://www.preserveamerica.gov/PACommunity-westsalemNC.html
http://www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/Planning/HistoricResourcesCommission/Articles/HRCNationalRegisterDistricts
http://www.westsalemneighborhood.org/

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission’s web site:
http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org