

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Elk Park School

Elk Park, Avery County, AV0083, Listed 12/16/2005
Nomination by Clay Griffith
Photographs by Clay Griffith, July 2004

See photo at the end of the nomination

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

**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 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Elk Park School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 253 Elk Park School Road not for publication N/A
city or town Elk Park vicinity N/A
state North Carolina code NC county Avery code 011 zip code 28622

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- 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): _____

Elk Park School
Name of Property

Avery County, North Carolina
County and State

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
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
In the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multi-family housing

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Rustic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
roof Asphalt
walls Stone
 Concrete Block
other _____

Narrative Description

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

Elk Park School
Name of Property

Avery County, North Carolina
County and State

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)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

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.)

Property is:

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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

Period of Significance

1938-1955

Significant Dates

1938

Ca. 1951

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Works Progress Administration

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository:

Avery County Morrison Public Library, Newland, NC
Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

Elk Park School
Name of Property

Avery County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 2 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 17 411820 4002090
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
____ 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 Clay Griffith

organization Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc. date September 9, 2005

street & number 825-C Merrimon Ave., #345 telephone (828) 281-3852

city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28804

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

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Blue Ridge Housing of Elk Park, LLC

street & number PO Box 2510 telephone (828) 264-2683

city or town Boone state NC zip code 28607

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.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Section 7. Narrative Description

The Elk Park School, constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) between 1935 and 1938, sits on a hilltop north of Elk Park's business district. Rising authoritatively above the town, the school is an important surviving public building in the small mountain community, which lies in the western part of Avery County near the Tennessee border. The school is surrounded by a residential area. The building served elementary school students of Avery County until 1999, and then was temporarily used for two years by students of Cloudland Elementary in Carter County, Tennessee, whose school was damaged by a flood in 1998. Elk Park School Road (SR 1304) approaches the school from the southwest and terminates in a paved circular entrance drive that passes both in front of and to the rear of the school building. Stone steps lead from the lower driveway to the front of the building; a wood sign supported by a square stone pillar rising from a stone base stands just to the east of the base of the steps. Only the school building and its immediate two-acre grounds are being nominated. The remainder of the five-acre site, which contains an athletic field located slightly downhill from the school to the northwest, now partially paved for parking, and a three-story L-shaped apartment building and gazebo erected in 2004, is not included in the nominated boundaries.

Elk Park School, 253 Elk Park School Road. 1935-38, ca. 1951. Contributing building

Constructed by the Works Progress Administration, the Elk Park School is a one-story, E-shaped Rustic Revival style stone building sixteen bays wide with a large gymnasium ell projecting from the rear of the building. The school is capped by a hip roof with a plain boxed cornice. Stone masonry fire walls separate the central block of the building from the two end wings and rise above the roof line to form a low parapet. Other stone masonry walls, which connect the main block to the gymnasium wing, rise above the ridge line at the center of the building to form a peaked parapet. The two end wings, which extend to the north, were originally equal in length. Around 1951, a one-story, flat-roof, concrete block cafeteria addition was constructed at the north end of the west wing. A one-story, flat-roof block with additional classrooms was also added around 1951 and demolished ca. 2000. The east wing was extended to the north by two bays in 2004, with stone work and windows closely matching the original construction of the school. New stone pilasters located on the side walls obscure the joints between old and new construction.

At the entrance concrete steps with stone knee walls topped by a concrete coping lead to a front-gable portico supported by two square, stone posts. A pair of double-leaf entry doors is surmounted by a sixteen-light transom. The façade on either side of the doorway features five groups of windows, the projecting fire wall with corbelled parapet, and three more groups of windows. The nine-over-nine, double-hung sash windows appear in groups of one, two, and three over concrete sills. Stone keys and voussoirs form flat arch lintels above door and window openings throughout the building. On the east side of the portico, concrete steps framed by stone walls with a concrete coping lead below grade to a basement entrance.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

The east elevation consists of seven groups of windows, with the last two added in 2004. The north end of the wing contains a projecting double-leaf entrance vestibule under a hip roof. Two courtyards are formed between the end wings and the center gymnasium ell. Double-leaf entrances open onto the courtyards from both the inner walls of the wings and both sides of the gymnasium. The side walls of the gymnasium contain three groups of three nine-over-nine double-hung windows topped by six-light transoms, with a separate single window located near the corner formed by the main block and projecting ell. The north elevation of the gymnasium is windowless.

The west wing of the building has five groups of windows before it abuts the 1951 cafeteria addition. Constructed of concrete block, the cafeteria wing projects from the north end of the west wing and into the west courtyard. Eight-light metal frame sash with lower hopper windows appear in groups of three (and one pair) in the cafeteria addition. The north walls contain minimal openings and a large opening on the northwest wall has been filled with new block and a single-leaf entrance.

Although the interior was renovated for use as sixteen apartment units in 2004, the overall character of the school remains intact. The main entrance hall leads from the front entry to a central corridor running the length of the building from east to west. The corridor retains its original wood floors and beaded board wainscoting with high chair molding, which continues in the two end wings. In the west wing, the corridor has a split stair and handicap ramp providing access to the cafeteria. The cafeteria and kitchen were also renovated for apartment units in 2004. Openings for the classrooms, restrooms, and offices located on either side of the hallway remain in place with original glazed and paneled doors and six-light transoms or simple five-panel doors. Replacement doors, where needed, replicate the configuration of the originals. Located opposite the main entrance hall, an original blank wall is set back from the corridor and contains two sets of double-leaf doors that open into the gymnasium. A transverse hallway created in 2004 by newly partitioned offices located in the south end of the gymnasium leads to restrooms at either end, while a central passage between the office spaces opens into the remaining open area of the gymnasium, which is now used as a community room. The original hardwood floor and elevated stage at the north end are intact.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Section 8. Statement of Significance

The Elk Park School, a one-story stone building erected between 1935 and 1938, occupies a prominent hilltop site in the small town of Elk Park in western Avery County. The school was built through the cooperative effort of the county and federal government working under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a New Deal-era relief program. Architecturally, the school embodies the regionally-popular Rustic Revival style, which utilized local stone and wood building materials as well as local craftspeople and laborers. The style also drew from the naturalistic design principles established by the National Park Service in the western national parks and later applied at Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway in the 1930s and 1940s. The Elk Park School meets National Register Criterion A in the area of education as an important local educational institution built as a consolidated school under the New Deal-era building programs. The school also meets Criterion C as an intact example of a WPA-built, Rustic Revival style stone school building, the largest facility constructed during the county's building campaign of the late 1930s. The period of significance for the school, which served Avery County students until 1999, extends from its completion in 1938 to 1955. The school remained in use for educational purposes until the end of the twentieth century, but the years after 1955 do not meet Criteria Consideration G.

Historical Background and Education Context

The Elk Park School is located in the small mountain community of Elk Park in western Avery County in the northwest corner of the state close to the Tennessee border. The Elk River originates near Banner Elk in the northern part of the county and flows into Tennessee near Elk Park, where it joins the Toe River and Tennessee River system. Carved from portions of Mitchell, Caldwell, and Watauga counties, Avery County was not formed until 1911—the last of North Carolina's counties to be created. Avery County was created as a result of residents' complaints about the long and arduous treks to their various county seats across mountain roads. The first court sessions were held in Elk Park, but a new county seat was chosen at Old Fields of Toe, near the geographical center of the county. The town's name was changed to Newland in July 1911 to honor Lieutenant Governor W. C. Newland, who helped pass the bill creating Avery County.¹

Although the county was not created until 1911, settlement in the area began nearly a century earlier. Northern industrialists were interested in the area's mineral deposits, especially iron, as early as the 1790s, but the remote area was accessible by only the most rugged trails. Settlement remained sparse through most of the nineteenth century, with small subsistence farmers spread thinly along the river bottoms and creek valleys and a few concentrations of population near the iron mines at Cranberry and the mica mines at

¹ Horton Cooper, *History of Avery County, North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: Biltmore Press, 1954), 9.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Plumtree. In 1866, the State of Tennessee granted a charter to the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad Company (ET&WNC) for the construction of a line from Johnson City, Tennessee, to Cranberry, two miles east of Elk Park. The company's initial \$30,000 capital was quickly spent laying only a few miles of track. In 1875, the iron mine was purchased by the Cranberry Iron and Coal Company, which also acquired the ET&WNC Railroad and completed the line in 1882. Affordably and efficiently transporting iron ore over the railroad to the furnaces in Johnson City was an integral part of the mining operation.²

The community of Elk Park grew into a regional center following the completion of the railroad. A post office was established in 1883, along with a depot and several hotels. Two trains ran daily between Cranberry and Johnson City with stops in Elk Park for passenger service. With the ET&WNC Railroad as the major transportation route, Elk Park served as a gateway between North Carolina and Tennessee, with the county's goods funneling through the town from Banner Elk to the north, from Old Fields of Toe (present Newland) and Montezuma to the east, and from Minneapolis and Plumtree to south. The railroad not only allowed iron ore, mica, timber, and ginseng to be transported to larger markets outside North Carolina, but later brought tourists into area resorts such as Linville and the Cloudland Hotel on Roan Mountain.³

The Cranberry mine was a significant part of the area's economy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1862 and 1930, total production of the mine was estimated at 1.5 million tons of iron ore. In 1892, the mining operations covered seven acres, with an average daily output of forty tons sent to the furnace at Johnson City. The mine was worked sporadically in the 1920s and ultimately the mining operation was abandoned in 1930.⁴

Prior to 1900, schools in Avery County were mostly one teacher schools, started when Watauga and Mitchell counties, which Avery had been a part of until 1911, participated in the program for common schools through the State Literary Fund. Unfortunately, records of the Watauga County Board of Education were destroyed by fire in 1878, and the Mitchell County records were destroyed by a 1901 flood. It is known, however, that Mitchell County had fifty-nine white school districts and four African American districts in 1900. Each district was provided with a school building, including eleven log and fifty-four frame structures.

² M. H. Kline and T. J. Ballard, "Cranberry Magnetite Deposits, Avery County, N.C., and Carter County, Tenn.," Report of Investigations (Washington, DC: Bureau of Mines, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1948), 3-5. Clyde J. Dellinger, *Tweetsie and the Clinchfield Railroads* (Morganton, NC: The News Herald Press, 1975), 4-5, 10.

³ Cooper, 9, 97. Dellinger, 14-21.

⁴ Kline and Ballard, 5. Mallory Hope Ferrell, *Tweetsie Country: the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1976), 12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

The schools were located in each of the rural communities prior to the era of consolidation beginning in the 1920s.⁵

The earliest public schools only offered classes through elementary grades. A few private institutions, typically church-sponsored, were formed to address the lack of secondary educational opportunities. The Mennonite Church, through its mission programs, asked Emily C. Prudden (1832-1917) to establish a private school in Elk Park in 1887. Though nearly deaf and slowed by arthritis, Prudden established fifteen schools in western North Carolina and upper South Carolina in the years from 1882 until her retirement in 1912. Typically Prudden established the schools and directed their operation for several years before turning it over to a church or church-related agency. Classes at Elk Park were held in rented facilities, and Miss Prudden taught Latin, Algebra, and advanced English until 1891, when she began work on the Saluda Seminary in Polk County. The school closed around 1900, after a public school was created by Mitchell County. The Mennonite Church also established a school and orphanage for African-Americans in Elk Park. The school closed in 1900, and the orphanage in 1905, but Elk Park remained the site of the county's public school for African-Americans until the 1960s. None of the early schools in Elk Park remain extant.⁶

A three-member Board of Education was appointed in April 1911, soon after the formation of the county, and W. M. Francum was selected as the first superintendent. The first order of business for the new board was determining which schools were located within the new county. Forty-seven school districts were identified including twelve from Mitchell County, ten from Watauga County, and five from Caldwell County. The twelve Mitchell County schools included two African-American districts in addition to ten for white students. Nine of the schools—eight from Mitchell and one from Watagua—were two-teacher schools and the remainder were one-teacher schools. The new board assigned two teachers to Elk Park for the 1911-12 school year. The July and August meetings of the board brought the first requests for building and maintenance funds. The valuation of school property between 1911 and 1920 rose from \$10,225 to \$31,500, due in large part to brick buildings erected at Elk Park and Newland. The new school building constructed in Elk Park was financed by an \$8,000 bond issue approved in 1915 by voters in the Elk Park district. From the time the county school system was formed until consolidation began in 1920, few changes were made in the number and location of school districts.⁷

⁵ Robert E. Woodside, *The Educational Development of Avery County* (Master's thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952), 19-21, 28-30.

⁶ Woodside, 51-3. Also see Emily C. Prudden, "Emily C. Prudden: An Autobiographical Sketch," *The American Missionary* (March 1914), and Ryder Hall National Register Nomination, Saluda, NC (2005).

⁷ Woodside, 37-9, 45.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Avery County schools led the movement to create a statewide compulsory school attendance law. On January 1, 1912, citizens in the Elk Park district presented a petition to the Board of Education requesting that the existing law be made applicable to their district; their request was granted without a referendum. One year later, the Board of Education advised the county's representative to the General Assembly that a statewide compulsory attendance law was desired, and if the statewide measure failed to pass, a special local bill should be introduced applicable only to Avery County.⁸

By 1920, the push for consolidation and the development of accredited high schools in the county began in earnest. Many county residents, however, opposed consolidation due to the poor condition of roads and the lack of school buses and shortage of automobiles. The move toward consolidation coincided with the formation of three public high schools in the county, which provided logical administrative units for the reorganization of the numerous smaller districts. The three high schools were located at Cranberry, Crossnore, and Newland. Prior to this time there were no formal high schools, and high school courses such as first year Latin and algebra were taught at only a few schools. The first high school was located in Newland, and the second high school—called Avery County High School—was established in 1913 at Elk Park. Avery County High School moved to Cranberry in 1923, and its name changed to Cranberry High School.⁹

In 1922, the county undertook an ambitious building program to provide improved facilities in the Banner Elk, Cranberry, and Newland districts. The buildings were funded through bond issues and the State Literary Fund, which raised the county's school indebtedness to over \$150,000. A contract was awarded to Beeler and Ray, general contractors, on December 20, 1922, for a new two-story brick building at Cranberry to be constructed following the same plan as the building in Newland, which was under construction at the time. Built at a cost of \$40,095, Cranberry High School opened for the 1924-25 school term. Budgetary problems ended the building campaign and were compounded in the late 1920s by shortfalls in tax revenues that led to increasing maintenance issues. For the 1929, 1930, and 1931 school terms some teachers taught without pay until such time as sufficient funds could be found.¹⁰

Although the county Board of Education seriously strived for school consolidation during the 1920s, the process was hindered by transportation issues. Five county-owned buses were operating by 1922, and four others were added by 1925. In at least one instance, the Board of Education appropriated money to make a road passable for students to reach a new school building. When he was appointed county school

⁸ Woodside, 40.

⁹ *A History of Avery County Schools* ([Newland, NC]: Avery County Retired School Personnel, 1989), n.p. (hereinafter cited as *Avery County Schools*). Woodside, 59-60.

¹⁰ Woodside, 61-3.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

superintendent in 1931, George M. Bowman redoubled the efforts to consolidate the remaining one and two-teacher schools. By the mid-1930s, poor roads were less of an obstacle to his consolidation goals than the lack of centralized classroom facilities. Bowman's efforts benefited significantly from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal relief agency established as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program.¹¹

Beginning in 1934, the Avery County Board of Education sought a loan of \$100,000 from the WPA to fund new construction in Banner Elk, Crossnore, Elk Park, Newland, and Riverside and to provide more centralized facilities. When combined with a \$30,000 loan from the State Literary Fund for the county's share, the WPA funding initiated a second major building phase in Avery County. The Elk Park School, built between 1935 and 1938, was one of eight structures funded by the WPA and constructed by local laborers. Pal Wiggins, a carpenter from Winston-Salem, served as the foreman for construction of the Elk Park School, although most of his experience came from building houses. Wiggins lived in nearby Banner Elk during the construction of the school.¹²

In addition to the stone school building in Elk Park, the WPA funded stone schools at Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, and Riverside; frame schools at Crossnore and Minneapolis; a stone gymnasium at Newland; and a frame gymnasium at Cranberry. When construction was completed in 1941, the total valuation of the eight buildings was \$330,000. Despite the variety of relief projects funded by the WPA between 1935 and 1941, construction and engineering projects outstripped all other work in terms of numbers employed, comprising 75.2% of all public works employment. Four percent (\$404 million) of the total money spent on WPA projects nationwide went to the construction of educational facilities.¹³

W. Kenneth Anderson succeeded George Bowman as superintendent of Avery County schools in 1951, and though Bowman had overseen tremendous improvements in the county school system, there were still many issues to be addressed. Anderson found that nearly every school needed additional classroom space, enlarged lunch room facilities, and more educational equipment. Avery County received nearly \$358,000 as its share of the \$50 million state bond issue of 1950, which was used to build two new facilities—elementary schools at Crossnore and Newland—and expand others. Additional classrooms were added to Banner Elk, Cranberry High, Elk Park, and Riverside, while lunch rooms were constructed for Beech Mountain, Crossnore High, Elk Park, Newland High, and Riverside.¹⁴

¹¹ Cooper, 48; and Woodside, 59, 66-9.

¹² John R. Patton, Jr., Interview with Elizabeth Bender, April 22, 2002. Woodside, 63-4.

¹³ Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943), 128.

¹⁴ Cooper, 62; and Woodside, 64-5.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

The Avery County school system continued to evolve and adapt to changing conditions during the second half of the twentieth century. Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* declaring that racial segregation in public schools deprived students of equal educational opportunities, the Avery County Board of Education developed plans to build a new school building near Plumtree for the county's thirty African-American students. Approved in 1956 and completed in 1961, the new school replaced the African-American school in Elk Park, but by 1966, local authorities were persuaded to integrate the county schools. Beginning in 1964, the board undertook another round of school consolidation, passing a resolution to consolidate the three high schools. Plans for the new high school—at a cost of \$1,200,000—were accepted in 1965. The new Avery County High School, which remains the current high school facility, opened to students for the 1970-71 school year.¹⁵

At present the Avery County school system consists of Avery County High School, two middle schools, and six elementary schools. All of the schools in use have been constructed or extensively remodeled since 1970, with the exception of Banner Elk and Beech Mountain, which still utilize the buildings erected by the WPA in the late 1930s. Both the Banner Elk and Beech Mountain schools retain their historic integrity, although Banner Elk has two rear additions, a classroom wing constructed in the 1950s and a modern addition built ca. 1990.

WPA Schools in Western North Carolina: Architecture Context

The Works Progress Administration was one of a number of relief agencies formed under President Roosevelt's New Deal program of the 1930s that put the nation's unemployed labor force back to work on public projects. In particular, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), also part of the New Deal program, had a strong presence in western North Carolina. The CCC trained unemployed young men in various skills and worked extensively building roads, bridges, and recreational facilities through the region. CCC workers helped build the Appalachian Trail through the southern mountains and undertook a wide range of projects to develop visitor areas in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The creation of the Blue Ridge Parkway, a 469-mile scenic highway through North Carolina and Virginia, ranks as one of the most spectacular accomplishments of the public works era. Although the idea for a scenic highway along the Blue Ridge originated years earlier, construction finally began in North Carolina in 1935. The WPA tackled a wide variety of public works projects, but it is the building projects that remain the most visible reminders of the agency's relief work.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Avery County Schools*, n.p.

¹⁶ Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 73-8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

The natural and rustic style of CCC construction and engineering work reflected a national style developed from the National Park Service's design standards for national parks, which emphasized a close harmony of built structures and natural environment. The style was manifest in low, horizontal buildings constructed using native stone or rock, massive logs, and heavy timbers. The WPA also adopted a similar rustic style for the numerous civic buildings—schools, post offices, libraries—erected under the auspices of the agency, although traces of the Craftsman or Colonial Revival style helps to differentiate these structures and their important public functions.

The Elk Park School is the largest of the WPA-built schools in Avery County. The low, horizontal building displays the irregularly coursed stonework commonly found in the mountain counties and the solid timber construction also typical of local building traditions. Door and window openings are topped by flat arches formed with stone keys and voussoirs, and the numerous groups of large windows provide the interior with ample natural light. Tall beaded board wainscoting, wood floors, and dark wood moldings set against white plaster walls supply the interior of the school with an understated stylishness. The E-shaped plan of the school, with its prominent gymnasium ell, distinguishes it from the smaller one-story stone buildings at Banner Elk and Beech Mountain, which consist of a single corridor with gymnasium at one end. The Banner Elk School was enlarged during the 1950s with a one-story wing constructed of brick and aluminum-frame windows and a modern rear addition. The Beech Mountain School, which is located in the remote northern section of county, serves a small student population and likely has not been enlarged. The frame school at Minneapolis is the only other surviving WPA-era school in Avery County, but it is no longer used for educational purposes. The stone gymnasium in Newland, built 1938-39, remains largely intact, although the school has been rebuilt or extensively remodeled. The Newland gymnasium, however, differs from the other WPA-built facilities in its stonework and Gothic Revival style details. The building was reportedly modeled on the gymnasium at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.¹⁷

Nearly every county in western North Carolina had some buildings constructed by the WPA, including many stone schools, to help deal with the economic effects of the Great Depression in rural communities. Cove Creek High School in Watauga County (NR, 1998) was erected in 1941 by the WPA. The architect-designed two-story stone building was executed in the Collegiate Gothic style. The United States Post Office in Boone (NR, 1996) was also built by the WPA in the 1930s, but the stone building is finished with numerous Colonial Revival style details. Yancey County also received WPA funds to build five consolidated schools in the 1930s, all of which still stands. The schools at Bald Creek and Micaville are relatively unaltered, and the Micaville school closely resembles the E-shaped plan of the Elk Park School. Madison County received assistance from the National Youth Administration to construct three schools in remote areas of the county, and all three now serve as community centers. Other examples survive at Cowee in Macon County and

¹⁷ Avery County Historical Society, *Avery County Heritage*, Vol. 4 ([Banner Elk, NC]: Puddingstone Press, 1986), 182.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Stecoah in Graham County. The surviving buildings have undergone a wide range of alterations and renovations to remain viable educational or other public facilities.

The Elk Park School retains a high degree of integrity and fully conveys the rustic architectural style common to WPA-built schools in western North Carolina. The overall mass and form of the E-shaped building remain intact, as well as the irregularly-coursed stonework and generous banks of windows. The cafeteria addition at the north end of the west wing and the new construction at the north end of the east wing do not compromise the integrity of the building's exterior. Changes to the interior, while more common, also do not detract from the building's overall integrity. The primary public spaces and load-bearing walls remain intact, which helps to retain the interior configuration of spaces including the corridors and door openings. Some classroom walls may have been removed to create apartment units during the 2004 rehabilitation, but these changes are not readily visible. The gymnasium was converted into a community room with newly partitioned offices at its south end in 2004, although the openness of the community room and the original stage at the north end clearly convey a sense of the original gymnasium space.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 11

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Section 9. Bibliography

A History of Avery County Schools. Avery County Retired School Personnel, 1989.

Avery County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Avery County Courthouse, Newland, North Carolina.

Avery County Historical Society. *Avery County Heritage*. Vol. 4. [Banner Elk, NC]: Puddingstone Press, 1986.

Bishir, Catherine W., Michael T. Southern and Jennifer F. Martin. *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Cooper, Horton. *History of Avery County, North Carolina*. Asheville, NC: Biltmore Press, 1954.

“Cove Creek High School.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1997.

Dellinger, Clyde J. *Tweetsie and the Clinchfield Railroads*. Morganton, NC: The News Herald Press, 1975.

Ferrell, Mallory Hope. *Tweetsie Country: the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad*. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1976.

“(Former) Linville Falls Tavern.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 2000.

Howard, Donald S. *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943.

Kline, M. H., and T. J. Ballard. “Cranberry Magnetite Deposits, Avery County, N.C., and Carter County, Tenn.” Report of Investigations. Bureau of Mines, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1948.

Patton, John R., Jr. Interview with Elizabeth Bender. April 22, 2002.

Prudden, Emily C. “Emily C. Prudden: An Autobiographical Sketch.” *The American Missionary* (March 1914).

Ryder Hall draft National Register of Historic Places nomination. Saluda, NC. 2005.

Stevens, Elizabeth. “Avery County Final Essay.” Report. North Carolina Office of Archives and History Western Office, Asheville, NC. 1985.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 12

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Woodside, Robert Edward. *The Educational Development of Avery County*. Master's thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 13

Elk Park School, Avery County, NC

Section 10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property for the Elk Park School is shown by heavy dashed line on the accompanying Avery County tax map (PIN No. 1829-17-00-2813).

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes approximately two acres of the 5.18 parcel historically associated with the Elk Park School. The boundary has been drawn along the outer edge of the paved driveway encircling the Elk Park School to include the school building, stone steps and sign, and landscape features in front of the building. The boundary excludes a three-story apartment building built in 2004 to the rear of the historic school, gazebo, and athletic field, which has been partially paved for a parking area.

