

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 an 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 Rice-Cornell-Brown House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 29 Rice Branch Road N/A not for publication

city or town Asheville N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Buncombe code 021 zip code 28804

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey J. Cross SHPO 11/16/98
Signature of Certifying Official/Title Date

State of 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 official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Rice-Cornell-Brown House
Name of Property

Buncombe Co., NC
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	3	buildings
		sites
	2	structures
		objects
1	5	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/Animal facility

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/Agriculture outbuilding

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/Processing

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: log/frame house

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls log

weatherboard

roof asphalt

other stone

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.)

- 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 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)

Social history

Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1850-1948

Significant Dates

ca. 1850

1890

1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Rice-Cornell-Brown House
Name of Property

Buncombe Co., NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 26.75

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	1	7
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3	6	2	0	0	0
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3	9	4	5	2	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

1	1	7
---	---	---

3	6	2	3	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	4	4	9	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

2

1	1	7
---	---	---

3	6	2	1	1	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	4	5	2	4	0
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4

1	1	7
---	---	---

3	6	2	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	4	4	8	2	0
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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 Sybil Arginter Bowers, Preservation Planning Consultant

organization Bowers Southeastern Preservation date October 23, 1998

street & number 166 Pearson Drive telephone 828.253.1392

city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28801

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name see continuation sheet

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Rice-Cornell-Brown House
Buncombe County, NC**

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Description

The Rice-Cornell-Brown House, a single story, side-gabled log and frame house whose present appearance evolved over a century beginning about 1850, is located in the northern portion of Buncombe County, in the Beaverdam Valley. This valley runs in an east-west direction, with Beaverdam Road as the main access through the valley. Originally the Beaverdam Road closely followed the creek bed of Beaverdam Creek on the north, with some portions following the road that is currently there today. There are scattered early farmsteads in the valley, with the majority of the current development dating primarily from the 1950s to the 1990s. Roads to the various housing developments run primarily north-south from Beaverdam Road. Beaverdam Road borders the Rice-Cornell-Brown House property, approximately 26.75 acres, on the northern boundary. Rice Branch Road and Rice Branch Creek borders the property on the east, and additional wooded acreage borders the property on the west. To the south of the property are scattered houses within a rural setting, with some new subdivisions currently under development to the east. A gravel drive, the remnants of the Old Rice Branch Road, winds south from Beaverdam Road to the house, with the old road bed passing in front of the row of boxwoods to the north of the house. A newer gravel road extends from the old road up the hillside to the west. This hillside begins to the west side of the Old Rice Branch Road (current gravel drive), rising in elevation approximately two hundred feet from the bottomland and road up to the top of the hillside.

The Rice House is located on approximately 1.7 acres of bottom land at the southeast corner of the 26.75 acre tract. Five additional acres of fertile bottomland lie north of the house and extend east to Rice Branch Road. The entire property is bordered by a creek and newer subdivisions on the east, scattered houses to the south, newer subdivisions across Beaverdam Road to the north, and a continuation of wooded hillsides to the west. A wooden foot bridge crosses the creek near the house to Rice Branch Road. There are remnants of a wooden split-rail fence along portions of the eastern boundary of the property, and a flat-rail fence to the west side of the new barn. A row of boxwoods, thought to be approximately one hundred years old, forms a screen to the front or north side of the house. Located to the southeast of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House is a small tool shed (1953), and across the field to the north and west is a horse barn (1968), both non-contributing resources. Further up the hillside, west of and not visible from the Rice house, are one additional building and two additional structures on the property, including a log cabin (circa 1848), a smoke house (circa 1848), and a pig pen (circa 1848), all of which were moved to this site from northern Buncombe County. Because they were moved they are considered non-contributing resources. However, these nineteenth century log buildings are very much in keeping with the architecture of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House and are well-suited to this densely-wooded mountain setting.

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The acreage currently associated with the Rice-Cornell-Brown House is approximately 26.75 acres. It is the residual portion of the same 210-acre property which was bought by James Overly Rice on the Buncombe County courthouse steps in 1850, after his father-in-law, William Wolfe, died intestate in 1847 (see Exhibit A).¹ Rice had married Wolfe's daughter, Mary Elvira Wolfe, about 1838. This land remained in the Rice family for many years, being divided among James Overly Rice's heirs. Fifty-one acres of the Rice property remained with a daughter of James Overly and Mary Elvira, Mary Matilda Rice Cornell. The original circa 1850 cabin and the current site are part of this acreage, as written in an affidavit by Janie Cornell Kimberly (daughter of Mary M. Cornell), in 1923. It was in 1923 that these fifty-one acres were bought by Hugh C. and Edwin L. Brown. This acreage originally stretched across to the east side of Rice Branch Road, where the Hugh C. Brown family home was built (see Exhibit C). During the Depression in the 1930s, the Brown family lost much of this land, but approximately half was bought back in the 1940s, for a total of 26.75 acres which still remains with the house today.

During the time James Overly Rice and Mary Elvira Rice owned this land, the eastern side running from the house east to the current Rice Branch Road, and north to Beaverdam Road, was used for farming, being a prime site with a large area of rich bottomland. Remnants of hollow logs used for drainage of this bottomland are still located under this portion of the site, attesting to the fact that this was indeed a farm area. Up the hillside to the west were fruit trees, including apple, plum, cherry, and persimmon. Livestock was also pastured on this hillside, which was partially cleared pastureland and not quite as heavily wooded as now, for grazing.² Apple trees were also located along the east side of the old Rice Branch Road (current driveway). To the south of the house was a spring house over the spring, some remnants of which are still visible. This remained on the site until the 1970s. Separate from the original cabin was a log kitchen, located at the southwest side of the cabin, and a corn crib and barn and chicken house located to the west (see Exhibit D). William Stephen Cornell and Mary Matilda Cornell continued to farm the land, and also ran the Cornell School that was located on the northern edge of the property at Beaverdam Road (see Exhibit D). After Hugh C. Brown bought the property in 1923, the land continued as a farm for many years, with a neighbor, Winfield Scarborough, a descendent of J.O. Rice, working the land for

¹Buncombe County Deed Book 27, p. 250.

²Interview with Eleanor Hall, March 26, 1997.

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**Rice-Cornell-Brown House
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the Browns.³ Crops such as wheat, flax, and vegetables were grown, and livestock continued to be kept on the farm. There was an older barn and corn crib on the land, which remained on the farm until the 1960s.⁴ Many of the old fence posts from the fence which surrounded the land are still visible on the western and southern edges. Farming activities on the site were continued until the 1950s, when Mr. Scarborough died. Since that time the family has used the house and land for gatherings, and in recent years, the moved cabin on the hillside has been rented. The family continues to use the main house for meetings, square dances, barbecues, parties and reunions.⁵

Rice-Cornell-Brown House. Contributing. circa 1850; 1890; 1927

This house clearly exemplifies an evolution of a mid-nineteenth century log cabin into a late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century house. The house is an assemblage of three main side-gabled blocks that reflect the century-long development of the house from a single-pen log cabin to a modest but well-crafted log and frame house that retains integrity from each of its periods of development. It is comprised of the original circa 1850 one-room cabin, the 1890 additions to the east and south, and the 1927 addition at the southeast corner. The 1953 addition replaces a portion of the 1890 additions, and fills in the rear and southwest corner of the house. The original portion of this cabin was built circa 1850 (see Exhibit B). It is possible that it dates from earlier than this, due to the fact that James Overly Rice and Mary Elvira Wolfe were married circa 1838 and had a large family by 1850. Although they did not own the land at this time, it is likely that Mary's father, William Wolfe, allowed them to build a cabin on a portion of his land. Rice did not own the land until 1850, however.

The original circa 1850 cabin, a one and one-half story plus loft, one-room structure, is constructed of half-dovetailed, hand-hewn logs. It measures twenty-three by eighteen feet, with a side gable roof currently covered with asphalt shingles, and an exterior random rubble stone end chimney. (This chimney now appears as a central chimney, due to the addition in 1890 of another room on the other side). The house is currently set on a foundation of concrete block with random rubble stone set along the outer edges to cover the concrete block, and to be in keeping with the stone piers which formed the original

³Winfield Scarborough was the grandson of Myra Ann Rice, youngest daughter of J.O. Rice, and William Burnette Scarborough. The Scarboroughs owned the adjacent land to the Browns, which was given to Myra Ann Rice Scarborough when the land was divided among the daughters of J.O. Rice.

⁴Tbid.

⁵ibid.

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foundation of the building. The exterior surface has been well maintained. The exposed logs have weathered but still exhibit original construction detail. The east and south elevations of the original cabin are covered by later additions. The original south elevation remains uncovered inside the 1953 addition, however, and still exhibits exceptional detail and original chinking. The clapboard on the west side gable end has been replaced with sawn cedar shingles. The gable-end framing consists of tapered logs mortised and pegged into the log wall plate. Based on previous alterations and additions, it is assumed that the roof frame was replaced in 1890, with local tradition holding that the original cabin may have been a full two stories in height, modified to its current height in 1890. The north elevation of the original circa 1850 portion consists of a central multi-light over two-panel door, which was probably placed there in the 1890 addition. Windows to the east of this door appear to be original, and consist of two horizontal single pane fixed windows with simple framing.

A porch is also located on the north elevation, added with the 1927 addition to the original cabin. It is unknown if there originally was a porch in this location. Floor boards are random width. There is a shed roof, with exposed rafters. The circa 1890s turned posts and Chinese lattice-style railing were added in 1927. These were probably from the Biltmore Avenue house which was torn down, with materials re-used for the 1927 addition. The foundation of the porch is logs. The west elevation has what appears to be a later six-over-six double hung window in the center, with a shed roof over it. A school bell, which was originally located at the Brown home across Rice Branch Road, has been placed at the west side of the porch, set on a tree trunk.

The first addition to the circa 1850 cabin, built in 1890, extends to the east. There is a small vestibule or transition area adjacent to the east side of the original cabin with a two-light over two-panel door. The porch at the entrance to this door was built along with the later 1927 additions. The 1890 addition is wood frame construction, with clapboard siding, unpainted, and a side gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. There was also a nine-foot-wide addition constructed at this time which extended the full length of this addition and the original cabin. Portions of this addition remain, but some has been replaced by the final 1953 addition (see Exhibit B). The exterior of the 1890 addition, on the east elevation, has a square four-light window in the gable, exposed rafter ends, and plain window framing around the double two-over-two window. The north side has a double two-over-two double hung window.

The exterior of the 1927 addition, located to the southeast of the 1890 addition, is also frame construction with unpainted clapboards, and a gable roof with asphalt shingles. The Hugh C. Browns tried to create an addition which was in keeping with the circa 1890 changes to the cabin, and according to the current

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owner, used materials from an 1890s house torn down on Biltmore Avenue, for much of the detailing. The north elevation of this addition has a central double door of glass over two panels, which forms the entrance into this room from a small porch. This porch is only the width of the door, with a shed roof and wide board floors. A large field stone is used as a step up to the porch. As on the front porch, posts are turned. The east elevation of the 1927 addition has a double one-over-one double hung window in the center. The south elevation has a single window in the center.

The exterior of the 1953 addition is stained board and batten siding, with a low pitch gable roof, covered with asphalt shingles. The 1890 stone chimney is still in place on the west elevation, along with a double casement window. (This chimney was originally part of the 1890 kitchen located here). The south elevation has a projecting bay at the southwest corner, with triple multi-light casement windows in the center. Rustic casement style windows are located in the gable. The east side of this projecting bay has a vertical board door, with a square four-light window to the north of it. Three wooden steps lead up to the door. Continuing on the south elevation, there is a single square window on the west, and a double square window on the east side of the elevation.

Inside, the original circa 1850 cabin is comprised of a single room. Floor boards are random-width tongue and groove pine panels and are laid on log joists that have been mortised into the side walls. Hewn timbers mortised in the side walls support the attic floor. The ceiling joists span the entire eighteen-foot depth of the structure. The ceiling joists are laid approximately thirty-six inches on center. An unusual feature is the high ceiling compared to most cabins of this time. The ceiling is sheathed with wide boards, forming the flooring for the loft. The entire interior, including the upstairs loft, has been whitewashed. Evidence indicates that a plank partition wall once separated the open floor plan near the west wall and that, most likely, a ladder rose to the attic in the southwest corner of the room as opposed to an enclosed stairway. This is currently closed off, but the ghost lines of this wall are still visible on the floor. The mantel appears to be original to circa 1850, but the open hearth was filled in, in 1953, with concrete, and field stone has been placed in concrete on the surface. The circa 1850 hearth may have been dirt, but this is not documented. The mantel is simple in its post-and-lintel mantel detailing, and appears to have been constructed on site of pit-sawn boards with few decorative details. The interior door into the east (1890) addition is a late nineteenth-century five panel door with rim locks and cast hinges. The door to the 1953 addition to the south is vertical boards.

There is a transition vestibule between the original cabin and the 1890 addition to the east. Floors here are narrower tongue and groove boards. The hearth in this room, on the west wall, is also brick, and shares

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a chimney with the original one-room cabin. The Classically-influenced mantel here is more elaborate than in the circa 1850 cabin, including detailing such as raised panels and fluting. The interior finishes in the 1890 addition exhibit a more detailed finish, including beaded ceilings, plaster and lath walls, and paired two-over-two double hung windows on the north and east elevations. Window and door surrounds are molded boards. Baseboards also have a molded profile. A closet is located at the southwest corner of this room, with beaded boards. Doors are five-panel, exhibiting profiles consistent with the 1890 construction date. The window locks and door hardware are cast iron, with porcelain handles.

Two rooms of the shed addition (the sleeping area and the bath) that was originally placed along the rear or south elevation remain, but the 1890 kitchen area has been removed and replaced with the 1953 kitchen. At the south side of the large 1890 room is a sleeping area with beaded board ceiling, plaster walls beneath the current Sheetrock, and square four-light casement windows on the south wall. This room, and the adjacent bath to the west, currently have sheet vinyl floors over the original wood floors. Fixtures in the bath were added in 1927, but are probably from the 1890 Biltmore Avenue house, since they date from this time period. There is a square four-light window in this room as well. Soon after the Hugh C. Browns bought the property, the family added another room in 1927. This room is located to the southeast of the 1890 addition. It is frame construction, with rough sawn board walls and ceiling. The pine tongue-and-groove floors were placed there in 1995. There is a double door on the north wall to the porch, with a double window on the east and a single window on the south. Door and window framing is simple, more in keeping with the 1927 time period, but door and window details date from the 1890s (see above).

The 1953 addition, built on the south side of the original 1850 cabin (see Exhibit B), runs the full width of the cabin. The interior was designed to be in keeping with the rest of the cabin, including the exposed roof rafters, paneled walls, plain door and window framing, and pine floor. There is a triple casement window on the south wall, and a double casement window on the west. Walls on the west are walnut panels. The original 1890 hearth is now covered with hand made brick from the log portion of the house, set on top of a concrete base. The simple mantel in this room was completed in 1994 to be in keeping with the mantel of the circa 1850 log cabin. This is a narrow hearth, not used for cooking, but large enough for a cook stove which was vented out the chimney here. On the east wall is a small four-light square window. There is wainscot on the south wall, with Sheetrock above. The door to the exterior, also on the east side, is vertical boards, made on site in 1995. The north wall of this room is formed from the

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original exterior north wall of the 1850 cabin. It has been left exposed to show the original log construction and chinking.

Tool Shed. Non-contributing. 1953

Located to the southeast of the cabin is a small, one-story tool shed of frame construction, and covered with board and batten siding which is unpainted. The door on the west side is vertical boards, and there are several small square four-light windows. The shed roof is covered with tin.

Horse Barn. Non-contributing. 1968

This long, linear, one-story, two-stall building is located to the northwest of the Rice cabin, on the east side of the entrance drive. It is frame construction and built of wood cut on the property. The southeast corner of the building is an open storage area used as a feed room. Two Dutch doors, also made from the same plans, open onto this storage area. Windows are single-pane, double sliding style with aluminum framing, located on the north and south elevations. On the west are three single transom type windows, also with aluminum framing.

Pig pen. Non-contributing. circa 1848

Located at the entrance to the circular drive up the hill from the Rice cabin, this is a low, pen style, one-story structure constructed of notched logs and a "puncheon" floor. It was used for fattening hogs. The shed roof is covered with tin, and the building sits on stone piers at all corners. The small building is raised up off the ground approximately eighteen inches on two sides, and is flush with the ground on the other two sides.

North Buncombe County Log Cabin. Non-contributing. circa 1848; circa 1890

Up the hill, on the south side of the circular gravel drive, is a one and one-half story half-dovetailed-notched log cabin with a later rear ell, which was moved from neighboring north Buncombe County by Eleanor Brown Hall and James Hall in 1975. All logs were numbered, and all stone from the disassembled chimney was moved, to be reconstructed on the new site. While the cabin dates from the same time period as the Rice cabin, and is very much in keeping with all of the structures on the property, it must be a non-contributing building since it was moved from its original site after the period of significance.

Smoke House. Non-contributing. circa 1848

This one-story structure is also constructed of logs, approximately ten inches in width, half-dovetailed, with no chinking. The gable roof is supported by round log rafters, and is covered with hand-split wood shingles. Due to the slope of the land beneath the building, it sits approximately eight inches off the ground in the front, and almost two feet off the ground at the rear.

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Summary

The Rice-Cornell-Brown House is one of two identified surviving houses in the Beaverdam Valley section of Asheville that are known to have evolved from a mid-nineteenth-century log house into a modest farmhouse; and is one of only three surviving mid-nineteenth-century houses in the area. The house possesses local significance in the area of architecture as an intact example of a rapidly-disappearing building type. The original single-pen log cabin which forms one block of the present house is thought to have been erected around 1850. Frame additions to this house were made in 1890 and 1927, and reflect the modest prosperity and traditional lifestyle of mountain farm families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interior and exterior features and fabric of the circa 1850 original log portion of the house and the additions remain virtually intact, exhibiting original construction materials and techniques, original fabric and wall finishes.

The present twenty-seven-acre site on which the house is located is the residual tract of a holding that has been home to generations of the Rice, Cornell, and Brown families since 1836, when William Wolfe purchased a 210-acre tract from Joseph Killian. Wolfe's daughter, Mary Elvira, married James O. Rice about 1838 and thus united two families associated with the early settlement of the Beaverdam area in the late eighteenth century. The Rice family drained and cultivated the rich bottomland of their holding, and pastured livestock on the hillside west of the one-room log house with its detached kitchen. J.O. and Mary Rice raised two sons and six daughters, but during the course of the Civil War, all of the male members of the family perished. Following Mary Rice's death in 1872, the holding was partitioned among her daughters. Mary Matilda Rice Cornell claimed the fifty-one acres that surrounded the log cabin which she and her husband, William Stephen Cornell continued to farm in the traditional manner. The Cornells augmented their farming activities with the construction of a school on the north edge of their property, and with various outside employment. By 1890, the family had prospered enough to add an additional room and indoor kitchen to the forty-year-old cabin.

The Cornells farmed the land until 1923, when they sold it to Hugh and Edwin Brown. In 1927, Hugh Brown added an additional room to the house, and in 1953 the 1890 shed kitchen was incorporated into a wood frame gable-end room. This expansion marked the plumbing and wiring of the house. The Browns engaged Winfield Scarborough, a descendent of J.O. Rice, to farm the land. Scarborough raised corn and vegetables, as well as livestock there from 1923 until his death in the 1950s.

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During the Depression, the fifty-one-acre tract was divided, and the present twenty-seven-acre tract surrounding the house remains in the possession of the Brown family. Eleanor Brown Hall, daughter of Hugh Brown and one of the current owners, has maintained the house and the land much as it appeared throughout its period of significance, and, along with her husband, James Hall, relocated three extremely rare mid-nineteenth-century log buildings from the Sandy Mush Nuclear Plant site onto the hillside southwest of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House. Today the twenty-seven-acre site retains its historic traditional agricultural character through maintenance of the bottomland and careful timber management on the hillsides. The house, that is rooted in the land and that has evolved over the course of a century, serves as a summer and special occasion retreat for the Brown family. Together the Rice-Cornell-Brown House and its site serve as an evocative and significant picture of the traditional Mountain farming lifeways that have all but disappeared in Asheville's rapidly developing environs. This property is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, for its contribution to the social history of the Beaverdam Valley in Buncombe County, and under Criterion C for architecture which exemplifies mid-nineteenth century log cabin construction techniques and later evolutions of the building into the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Historic Background and Social History Context

Some of the earliest settlements in what was to become Buncombe County included Bee Tree (near Swanannoa), Swanannoa (near Biltmore), Hominy Creek, Reems Creek, and Beaverdam Valley. In 1783, the State of North Carolina signed a treaty with the Cherokee Indians to allow for some of this early settlement, and in 1784 white settlers occupied the Swanannoa Valley. Settlers moved from this eastern part of Buncombe County over into the northern areas, and settled many of the valleys there, including Beaverdam. In 1792 Buncombe County was formed, with portions of the northern and westernmost settlement areas later becoming part of counties further to the west. Beaverdam Valley remained a part of Buncombe County and was initially settled in the late 1700s. Much of the land in this area was given to these settlers as land grants for service during the Revolutionary War. Beaverdam Road, begun in 1799, originally ran from the town of Asheville to the head of Beaverdam Creek, through Craven's Gap and down into the Bull Creek Community.⁶ Early families who settled the Beaverdam and Swanannoa Valley areas include the Davidsons, the Fosters, the Killians, the Wolfes, the Rices, the Youngs, the Gudgers, the

⁶"Bits of Beaverdam Valley", p. 10.

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Cravens, the Pattons, the Alexanders, the Moores, the Swains, the Lanes, the Bairds, and the Burtons.⁷ Many of these families settled into the wide valleys and coves in Beaverdam, bringing with them the essentials needed for early settlement and farm life. Bottomlands, as exemplified by the site of the circa 1850 Rice-Cornell-Brown House, were prime agricultural land. Log homes, the "shelter of necessity" were built from trees cut on the properties, and many featured chimneys constructed of stone and mud.⁸ Logs were chinked with mud straw and horse hair.⁹ Often, as the farm became established and the family prospered, these early cabins were either added to or abandoned for a newer house. The Rice cabin exemplifies this building trend, with additions made to the cabin through the years as the family prospered.

The Rice-Cornell-Brown House is one of the few intact mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century farmhouses remaining in the Asheville city limits. Located at the intersection of Beaverdam Road and Rice Branch Road, the original log cabin core of the house and subsequent alterations and additions represent the evolution of a frontier homestead into a late-nineteenth to early twentieth century farm. Deeds and census records indicate that the original site of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House was owned by Joseph Killian as early as 1836 and consisted of a 210-acre parcel.¹⁰ Joseph Killian was related to Daniel Killian, who was granted 850 acres by the state of North Carolina in the late 1700s. Daniel Killian also purchased an additional 450 acres in 1823, making him one of the largest landholders in the early settlement of the Beaverdam valley. In 1836, William Wolfe purchased the property from Joseph Killian.¹¹ William Wolfe had a daughter, Mary Elvira Wolfe (born February 21, 1818; died October 11, 1872), who married James Overly Rice. James Overly Rice (born March 13, 1819 and died March 8, 1863) was the grandson of one of the earliest settlers to the Swanannoa/Beaverdam valleys, Joseph Marion Rice. Joseph Rice was the first settler in the Bull Creek area of the Swanannoa valley, having settled there in 1782 on a land grant of 200 acres, settling there in 1782.¹² In 1838, Joseph Rice obtained a one hundred-acre land grant on Beaverdam Creek, in the Beaverdam Valley, and paved the way for his grandson, J.O. Rice, to move there soon after

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁸Doug Swaim, Cabins and Castles, p. 12.

⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰Buncombe County Deed Book 20, p. 266, bought for \$240.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Joseph Marion Rice's brother William Rice, settled in what is now Madison County. The Riceville area of Buncombe County, near Swanannoa, was named for the Joseph Marion Rice family.

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his marriage. By 1844, Joseph Marion Rice had accumulated land totaling approximately 1,773 acres, most of which was in Bull Creek.¹³ Upon William Wolfe's death, said to be a suicide, in December of 1847, the 210-acre parcel which Wolfe had bought from Killian did not pass to his heirs, but was auctioned at the Asheville courthouse due to his death intestate.¹⁴ In the same year of Wolfe's death, it appears that all heirs to the Wolfe property gave up rights to a portion of the land owned by Wolfe, and the property was given only to Wolfe's widow. Then, in 1850, the property was put up for auction on the courthouse steps.¹⁵ James O. Rice and his wife Mary Elvira Wolfe Rice then purchased this same 210-acre tract in fee simple for \$350.00.¹⁶ It is possible, though not documented, that the Rice cabin may have been built on Wolfe's property soon after Mary Elvira Wolfe and James Overly Rice married circa 1838, before Rice actually bought the land in 1850. Possibly the cabin was a wedding gift from Wolfe, but there is no documentation to prove this. Census records from 1850 indicate that Mary E. and James O. Rice already had a large family by then, including two sons, (William Philetus, born in 1841, and John Marion, born in 1842) and four daughters (Martha Jane, born 1843, Sarah Rosey Elizabeth, born 1845, Mary Matilda, born 1846, and Harriett Elizabeth, born 1848). In addition, a twenty-year-old female, Margaret, was also listed in the 1850 census as living with the family. According to Rick Walker, this was probably James O. Rice's sister, known as "Aunt Peggy".¹⁷ The 1850 census records indicate that Mary E. and James O. Rice lived in a cabin with these children, but there is no documentation to show if this was the present Rice-Brown-Cornell House original log cabin portion or another one which they were living in while the Rice cabin was being built. A third son, James Taylor, was born on February 13, 1850, but died five days later.¹⁸ Nancy Evelyn Rice was born in 1851, Winfield Jefferson, a son, was born in 1853, Myra Ann was born in 1855, and the Rice's last child, Emma Adilaide, was born in 1859, but died in 1861.¹⁹

During the Civil War, Corporal James O. Rice and his two sons, William Philetus, and John Marion, joined the Confederate Army, Company C, 60th NC Infantry, leaving the farm and its upkeep to Mary and the

¹³Rex Harmon Redmon, "Bits of Beaverdam Valley", p. 19.

¹⁴Interview with James Black, Frank Roberson, and Rick Walker, all descendents of J.O. Rice or his siblings, January 14, 1997.

¹⁵Buncombe County Deed Book 24, p. 175.

¹⁶Buncombe County Deed Book 27, p. 250.

¹⁷Interview with Rick Walker, descendent of Nancy Evelyn Rice, January 14, 1997.

¹⁸Family Group Record, Rice family genealogy, NC Collections, Pack Memorial Library.

¹⁹Ibid.

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daughters.²⁰ Family legend indicates that J.O. Rice agreed to go to the War in place of a younger man in exchange for the sum of \$300, which he used to pay off the debt on his house and land. Apparently, J.O. Rice knew he would be called to the War at some point, and saw this as an opportunity to insure that his family would not lose their farm if he did not return.²¹ The harsh conditions and severity of the war took a significant toll on the Rice family. James O. Rice contracted measles in the Confederate army camps and died March 8, 1863 at Buckner Field Hospital, the old Catoosa County, Georgia courthouse.²² He is buried in Ringgold, Georgia. His sons went on to fight in the Battle of Chicamauga where William fell in the battlefield. The soul survivor, John Marion Rice, contracted the measles and suffered from severe malnutrition. He was furloughed out thirty days before he died, traveling to his home in Beaverdam where he died from complications on January 5, 1864. John Marion Rice is buried at the Asbury Memorial United Methodist Church Cemetery in the Beaverdam Valley.

Upon the death of Mary E. Rice in 1872, the entire 210-acre parcel and the family home was left to her six daughters. By 1884, the property had been subdivided into six lots but still remained in the hands of all the heirs.²³ In 1887, Mary Matilda Rice Cornell claimed her portion of the original 210-acre parcel left to her and her sisters upon her mother's death, which included approximately fifty-one acres of the original 210-acre tract which her father had owned.²⁴ The family's log cabin and the later Cornell school was located on this tract. Mary Matilda Rice married William Stephen Cornell in 1875. Born in New York, Cornell had come to the Asheville area in 1869, apparently for health reasons. He later worked as the manager of the Elk Mountain Cheese Factory, founded by Nicholas Woodfin and Thomas Patton. This venture did not last long, and soon thereafter Cornell married Mary M. Rice.

As the Beaverdam area continued to grow, the Cornells donated land for use by the community to construct a one-room school house. This land was located on Beaverdam Road on a portion of the Rice family property (on the portion of land soon claimed by Mary M. Cornell in 1887). On May 1, 1884 the public school opened with the support of Mary Matilda Rice Cornell and her husband William Stephen Cornell. As a reflection of their contributions, the school was locally known as the

²⁰Interview with Rick Walker, January 14, 1997.

²¹Taped interview with Liza Palmer, descendent of J.O. Rice, by James Hall, 1963.

²²Ibid.

²³Records of this original platted subdivision no longer exist.

²⁴Buncombe County Deed Book 77, p. 214.

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Cornell School. The building remained in use as a school and later was used by both the Episcopal and Baptist Churches. According to Eleanor Hall, the current owner, the building was torn down sometime before 1923, when her family bought the property.

Mary Matilda and William Stephen had two daughters, Martha Jane Cornell, born 1876, and Harriett Elizabeth Cornell, born in 1877. The younger daughter, Harriett, died at the age of sixteen. Mary Matilda also had two children previous to her marriage to Cornell, Cyrus Fitzhugh Rice, born 1865, and Mary McDowell Rice, born 1867.²⁵ In 1890 the Cornell family added a wood-frame single-story, side-gabled addition on the east side of the log cabin and a shed addition along the rear (south) elevation which virtually tripled the floor space of the residence. In addition to keeping the farm running in Beaverdam, William Stephen Cornell was hired in 1885 as the first superintendent of Riverside Cemetery, in Asheville, founded this same year by the Asheville Cemetery Company.²⁶ Asheville City Directories indicate that the Cornells lived in Woolsey, on the north side of town, in closer proximity to the cemetery, beginning circa 1896 and continuing until Cornell's death in 1917. Cornell served as superintendent for Riverside for thirty-two years, up until his death. During this time, the Rice-Cornell-Brown House and farm was rented to other members of the family and continued in use as a working farmstead.²⁷

The property stayed in the Cornell family as an operating farm, on which was cultivated flax, corn, sugar cane and a variety of livestock including hogs and sheep, until 1923 when the fifty-one acres and the cabin were purchased by Hugh and Edwin Brown of Asheville.²⁸ This fifty-one-acre parcel of land extended onto both sides of Rice Branch Road, with the Rice-Cornell-Brown House (minus the additions by the Hugh C. Browns at this time), being located on the west side (see Exhibit C).²⁹ The Hugh Brown family built a new home on the east side of Rice Branch Road. During the 1930s, the Brown family sold some of the land purchased in 1923, but approximately half of it was bought back in the 1940s as economic conditions

²⁵Interview with Jane Scarborough Pearson, descendent of J.O. Rice, by Eleanor Hall, March 25, 1997.

²⁶Thomas Patton was one of the founding members of the Cemetery Company, and probably knew Cornell from his earlier associations with him at the cheese factory.

²⁷Interview with Eleanor Hall, March 26, 1997.

²⁸Buncombe County Deed Book 275, p. 34. Also in 1923, an affidavit was signed by Jane Cornell Kimberly, daughter of Mary Rice Cornell, attesting to the fact that this was the same land owned by her mother, and previously her grandfather, James Overly Rice. This document also confirms that the cabin was part of this 51 acre parcel.

²⁹Survey of property of Edwin L. Brown, et. al., 1930.

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improved. The current site encompassing approximately twenty-seven acres was part of this fifty-one acre purchase, but only the twenty-seven-acre portion on the west side of Rice Branch Road remained in the Hugh C. Brown family after the 1940s. From 1923 to the present the property has remained in the Brown family and continued as a working farm until the 1950s. Winfield Scarborough, a descendent of J.O. Rice, farmed the land for the Browns from 1923 until his death in the 1950s. Cows, pigs, horses, and chickens were part of the farm, and crops such as corn and other vegetables were grown.

In 1927 Hugh Brown added a single-story wood frame bedroom on the southeast corner of the original circa 1850 single-pen house. The entire house was plumbed and wired at this time. In 1953, the 1890 shed kitchen was incorporated into a larger wood frame, gable-end kitchen which was added to the rear of the original log cabin. The family has continued to enhance the historic conditions of the acreage by relocating threatened structures from the north part of Buncombe County to the property. Most specifically, in 1975, the family relocated a log cabin similar to the Rice House from the proposed site of the Sandy Mush Nuclear Plant site. This building was reassembled at the top of the ridge overlooking Rice Branch. Eleanor Brown Hall, daughter of Hugh C. Brown, and her husband, James. M. Hall, also relocated a hand hewn, half dovetail log pig pen to the site and erected a rough-sawn siding frame barn in keeping with the time period and vernacular character of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House. Since the 1970s, the relocated cabin has been used by members of the family and as rental property, while the Rice-Cornell-Brown House serves as a summer retreat and hosts special occasions for the family. A portion of the wooded hillside to the west side of the property is designated as timber land, utilizing advanced forestry conservation techniques. The bottomland along the east side of the property is no longer farmed, but has remained intact as an open field, sometimes in use as pasture land and a riding ring. Since the Brown family purchased the property in 1923, it has received much care in order to maintain the integrity and fabric of this historic site. Just as the house evolved architecturally through the years, the land use has also evolved to meet current needs of the owners.

Architecture Context

The Rice-Cornell-Brown House is one of only three houses in the Beaverdam Valley known to have evolved from a mid-nineteenth century single-pen cabin to an early twentieth-century farmhouse. It retains a high degree of architectural integrity from each of its three periods of development. Of the three known surviving examples, it is the most architecturally intact, and displays the most typical local construction

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techniques. It represents the evolution of a mid-nineteenth century single-pen log cabin that housed subsistence farmers, into a late nineteenth to early-twentieth century working farmstead.

The Swain-Lane House, a comparative example, was built circa 1856, but has undergone extensive rebuilding and reconstruction through the years. Located nearby on Beaverdam Road, it probably originally was a two-story hall and parlor log house with an ell on the back. The other contemporary example, the Wally W. Killian House, located east of the Rice House, on Beaverdam Road, is a much more formal style than the Rice-Cornell-Brown House, being constructed in a Carpenter Gothic style. It was built circa 1842, and consists of a one and one-half story central hall dwelling with board and batten siding. This was a highly unusual building style for the valley, and attests to the wealth of the Killian family. The Rice-Cornell-Brown House is much more typical of the Beaverdam Valley in its building construction techniques than the earlier Killian House. It exemplifies the use of native materials and deeply-rooted house types and construction techniques. The addition made to the original cabin at the end of the nineteenth century reflects local building techniques and materials common at that time and indicates the family was established. The addition made in the 1920s continues the evolution of the building from a single-pen cabin into a modest farmhouse, the center of the working farmstead. Half-dovetailed log buildings such as the original block of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House were common throughout the county through the nineteenth century.³⁰ The rectangular form, field stone chimney, and loft were also typical features of the nineteenth century log cabins, and the simple frame additions found on the Rice-Cornell-Brown House were typical of evolution of early cabins into modest early-twentieth century farmhouses.³¹

³⁰Swaim, Cabins and Castles, Asheville: Historic Resources Commission, 1981, p. 55.

³¹Ibid., p. 57-59.

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Asheville City Directories, 1896 - 1917.

Black, James A. Jr., Roberson, Frank, and Walker, Rick. Descendants of the J. O. Rice family. Interview, 14 January 1997.

Buncombe County Deed books (D.B. 20, p. 266; D.B. 24, p. 175; D.B. 27, p. 250; D.B. 77, p. 214; D.B. 160, p. 232; D.B. 275, p. 34; D.B. 423, p. 19).

Hall, Eleanor Brown. Property owner, Asheville, North Carolina. Interview, 26 March 1997.

Obituary, William Stephen Cornell. Asheville Citizen. 14 August 1917.

Palmer, Liza. Daughter of Martha Jane Rice, Asheville, North Carolina. Interview by James Hall, 1963.

Redmon, Rex Herman., "Bits of Beaverdam Valley, The Early Years".

Swaim, Douglas. Cabins and Castles. Asheville: Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County, 1981.

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Rice-Cornell-Brown House: Photographs

The following information applies to all of the photographs, except where noted.

Name of Property: Rice-Cornell-Brown House
Photographer: Sybil Argintar Bowers
Date of photos: November 1996
Location of original negatives: Division of Archives and History
One Village Lane
Asheville, North Carolina 28803

1. Rice-Cornell-Brown House, circa 1850 portion in foreground, looking southeast
(Photographer: Nick Lanier, April 1997)
2. Rice-Cornell-Brown House, 1890 and 1927 additions, looking southwest.
(Photographer: Nick Lanier, April 1997)
3. Rice-Cornell-Brown House, 1927 addition in foreground, looking northwest
(Photographer: Nick Lanier, April 1997)
4. Interior of circa 1850 cabin portion of building, looking southeast.
5. Interior of 1890 addition, looking southeast.
6. Interior of 1927 addition, looking west.
7. Interior of 1953 kitchen addition, looking northwest.
8. Old Rice Branch Road and drive to upper cabin, looking south.
(Photographer: Nick Lanier, April 1997)
9. North Buncombe County cabin, circa 1848, moved to current property, view southeast.
(Photographer: Nick Lanier, April 1997)

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Boundary Description

The boundaries for this nomination are indicated by a bold line on the accompanying 1" = 100'-scale Buncombe County orthophoto tax map, noted as the "Property Boundaries and Sketch Map". The northern boundary runs along Beaverdam Road (SR 2033) for approximately 700' to its intersection with Rice Branch Road (SR 2068) and Rice Branch Creek, which serve as the eastern boundary. This eastern boundary line turns south for approximately 1000'. The southern boundary runs approximately 1200' to the west, just to the south of the smoke house and North Buncombe County log cabin. The western property then runs north approximately 1400' to complete the polygon.

Boundary Justification

The approximately twenty-seven-acre nominated tract includes the residual acreage of a tract that was farmed by the J.O. Rice family who built the original log cabin section of the Rice-Cornell-Brown House about 1850. The boundaries encompass the acreage that conveys the setting, feeling, and association of the type of mid-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century mountain farm that supported traditional agricultural lifeways in Buncombe County.

Property Owners:

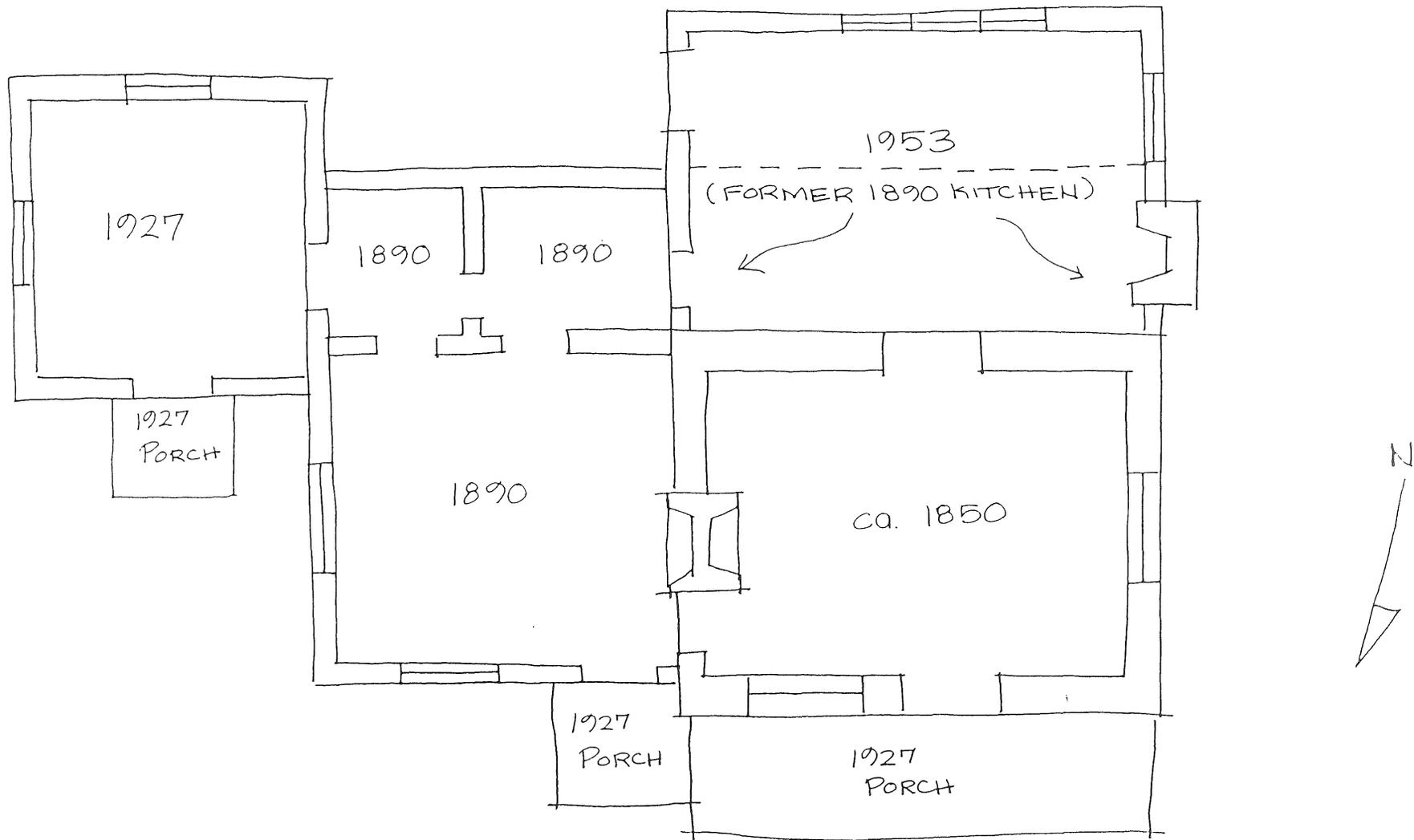
Mrs. Eleanor Brown Hall
7 Pine Tree Road
Asheville, NC 28804

Mr. Hugh C. Brown, Jr.
P.O. Box 428
Patterson, LA 70392

Dr. Edwin L. Brown
416 Brookside Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Mrs. Peter H. Sprague
30 Kimberly Knoll Rd.
Asheville, NC 28804

FLOOR PLAN SKETCH - EXHIBIT B



RICE-CORNELL-BROWN HOUSE
BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NC
LOT TO SCALE

