

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 SILER CITY HIGH SCHOOL  
other names/site number PAUL BRAXTON SCHOOL

### 2. Location

street & number 119 SOUTH THIRD AVENUE  N/A  
 not for publication  
city or town SILER CITY  N/A  
 vicinity  
state NORTH CAROLINA code NC county CHATHAM code \_\_\_\_\_ zip code 27312

### 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.)

[Signature] SHPD 5/28/98  
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:

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): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Property

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	
3		buildings
1	1	sites
		structures
		objects
4	1	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)

EDUCATION/ school

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility

EDUCATION/ education-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility

SOCIAL/ civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

Weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other CAST 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.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions of property significance.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with checkboxes and descriptions of property characteristics.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1922 - 1948

Significant Dates

1922

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

C.C. WILSON

BUN B. BRAY

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):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, National Register, National Historic Landmark, Historic American Buildings Survey, Historic American Engineering Record.

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of repository:

SILER CITY HIGH SCHOOL

Name of Property

CHATHAM CO., NC

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 6.7

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid for reference 1: Zone 17, Easting 639290, Northing 3954120

UTM grid for reference 3 and 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

Form prepared by KAYE GRAYBEAL, HISTORIC RESOURCE SPECIALIST, DSAtlantic CORP., date 3-2-98, street 7820 NORTH POINT BLVD., telephone 336-759-7400, city WINSTON-SALEM, state NC, zip code 27106

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.)

Property owner name: Town of Siler City

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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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1Siler City High School  
Chatham County, NC**Section 7: Description**The Setting

The 1922 Siler City High School building is located on the quiet street of South Third Avenue two blocks west of Siler City's central business district and on the southeastern edge of the East Raleigh Street residential neighborhood. Situated prominently at the end of East Beaver Street (formerly John Street as late as 1931), and being the largest building in the area, it serves as a dramatic focal point in a mostly residential area, although a one-story brick commercial building is located across the street. The school building is sited close to the street on a plot of land which slopes from north to south and is sized a little more than an acre. A few small trees including spruces, dogwoods and an elm grow close to the facade. To the southeast of the school building, three contributing resources located within the boundaries of the nominated property include a mid-1930s one-story brick woodworking shop building which now serves as a community center, a one-and-a-half-story frame gymnasium begun in 1930, and an early 1930s dirt baseball field which was initially a football field. These contributing resources basically retain their original appearance, the only exception being the removal of a wooden fence from around the baseball field and covered frame bleachers from behind home plate. A small asphalt basketball court, a noncontributing resource, lies behind the community center. A one-story red brick building constructed in 1952 which served as the high school until 1956 is located on a lot to the adjacent northeast of the property and is not included within the National Register boundaries. A one-story, mid-twentieth-century brick office building is located on each of the two street corners across Third Avenue west of the school.

The Exterior

The two-story, red brick, flat-roofed school building is laid out in T-plan and rests on a raised basement. The front (west) facade addresses the street with a boldly rendered and streamlined Art Deco overture. The five bays of the long linear building are delineated by brick pilasters with four windows spanning each of the four outer bays. Although the overall building is horizontally-oriented, a central projecting bay crowned with a stepped parapet lends verticality and distinguishes the central entrance. Though the building ornamentation is spare for the most part, the parapet is adorned with an ornamental cast-stone shield and numbers depicting the 1922 construction date. A pair of cast-stone horizontal bands accentuate the three central bays and corners of the building, while single continuous bands delineate both the fascia and the water table. Recessed within the central bay, the opening of the entry vestibule is crowned with a cast-stone relieving arch which is anchored at each end with a small cast-stone shield. The opening is further distinguished by cast-stone quoins at the corners of the projecting bay. The double-leafed entry is lit with eight lights in the upper two-thirds of each leaf, with two recessed vertical panels in the lower third. Three-light sidelights flank the entry which is headed by a low-arched multi-light transom. Further lending to the verticality of the projecting bay are triple-grouped, triple-hung windows with the central windows having fifteen lights. The window grouping at the second-story rests on a paneled plinth cresting the entry. The fenestration of the remaining facade is comprised of single twenty-four-light triple-hung windows with cast-stone sills.

A two-story stair vestibule sheathed in wire brick is located at the north end of the building and a three-story at the south end. The landings at each of the two upper stories are recessed, creating balconies which act as covered entrances to the interior building corridors. The end entries to the building are double-leafed, sidelit and transomed. Square iron balustrades span the balcony openings which are flanked by brick pilasters on the facade and headed by a pair of cast-stone bands at the building fascia.

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The ground-floor entry on each end of the building is flanked by pilasters with cast-stone quoins supporting a cast-stone relieving arch. A two-story auditorium wing projects to the rear of the central main block and is distinguished by large round-arched openings with flat relieving arches and standing buttresses separating the four bays. The main block of the building is highly intact and although the window openings are boarded, the original windows and doors remain in tact. The covering of the openings has protected the interior of the building as it awaits rehabilitation for an adaptive reuse as a senior living facility. A ca. 1952 one-story brick T-plan cafeteria addition which extends to the rear of the auditorium wings is slated for demolition.

To the southeast of and a few yards away from the main school building are two contributing resource buildings. One is an mid-1930s one-story hipped-roof red brick building which served as a wood working shop for students and currently serves as a community center. The eight-bay facade is fronted by a hipped-roof stoop and punctuated with six-over-six-sash windows. A front entrance ramp is the only apparent change to the building. To the immediate south of this building is a large one-and-a-half-story clapboard-sided Works Progress Administration gymnasium erected in 1930 which is currently utilized by the town's recreation department. The hip-roofed lower level of the building is eight-bays-long, while the second level is smaller and projects from the hip roof in side gabled form. The rafters at both roof levels are exposed and the windows of both levels are boarded as the building awaits rehabilitation.

The Interior

The ceremonial entry of the school building opens onto a gracious vestibule with flanking staircases. The three-flight, open, straight-run stairs rest on a wooden carriage and adjoin the wall with a wood wall string. The square balustrade terminates at a molded and chamfered wooden newel with flattened cap. A simple crown molding, flat chair rail and seven-inch wall base delineate the twelve-foot-high plastered vestibule walls. Otherwise, the interior of the building is relatively unembellished.

Opposite the main entry, a set of sidelit eight-light doors with horizontal panels below separate the vestibule from a transverse corridor running the length of the building. This twelve-foot-high corridor, along with similar eighteen-foot-high corridors on the two upper floors, serve as a spine for classrooms located collaterally along it. The classroom doors contain with nine lights in the upper half and exhibit molded and recessed panels in the lower half and are surrounded with simple wide molded trim. As in the entry vestibule, simple molded chair rail and baseboards delineate the corridor walls. Just to the south of the vestibule, the corridor floor drops three steps to accommodate a sloping floor in a centrally located auditorium wing projecting to the rear of the building. The principal's office is located at the northern end of the corridor and is flanked by two smaller offices. The cellar, also located at the northern end, reveals structural characteristics such as brick relieving arches, cross-braced two by tens foundation laid in common bond.

Most of the classrooms are laid out with two entries from the corridor and a coat closet at one end. The rooms are well lit with recessed twenty-light triple-hung windows and were heated with steam radiators. The plaster walls are delineated with picture mold.

Entrances leading to the two-story-high auditorium wing are located directly across from the main entry vestibule. The two nine-light double-leafed entrances off the corridor lead into two isles dividing the auditorium seating, which is mounted to a sloping oak-strip floor, into two sections. Double-leafed multi-light doors leading to the exterior are located on each side of the room.

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Chatham County, NC**

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Additionally, three multi-paned chain-hung casement windows on each side are crowned with round-arched fanlights lending a dramatic classical feel to the facility. Six lighting fixtures, originally with globes, hang from the high ceiling. The high ceiling accommodates a rear-located balcony with a railing of metal tubing mounted above beadboard panels. Beadboard also sheathes the panels below the raised stage. The square stage opening is delineated with heavy molding. The rear walls of the stage area are canted.

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Siler City High School  
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## Section 8: Statement of Significance

### Summary Paragraph

The Siler City High School building is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the area of *Architecture*. The only intact Chatham County school building dating to the county school consolidation era of the 1920s and 1930s, it is also the most architecturally distinctive. The building exemplifies the proliferation of the nationally-popular styles that influenced the architecture of school buildings as well as other civic buildings across the state during the 1920s and 1930s, and is one of the few surviving civic examples of the rarely implemented Art Deco style in Chatham County. The 1922 building is the earliest of the ten Chatham County schools erected as a result of the county-wide consolidation plan as well as the largest.

The Siler City High School property is also eligible under Criterion A in the area of *Education* as the one of two remaining physical vestiges of the Chatham County school consolidation era of the 1920s that was part of a statewide trend. During this period, the one-room school houses that served the communities of the county closed and more commodious school buildings such as that of the Siler City High School were erected to accommodate a growing student population as well as to enable a more efficient use of equipment and financial resources. The Siler City High School building was the first of these facilities erected in Chatham County. With its expansive brick edifice rendered in a nationally popular style, the Siler City High School building is prototypical of buildings erected statewide in response to this reorganization of the school system. Thus, it is a significant representation of the considerable advances in public education in Chatham County during the 1920s. In contrast to the modest frame schools that were typical in the rural as well as urban areas of the county during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Siler City High School building further represents the scale of school buildings erected during that booming decade. Three resources within the boundaries, a 1930 Works Progress Administration gymnasium, an early 1930s baseball field, and a mid-1930s woodworking shop building are contributing given that they are historically associated with the school and for the most part, retain their original appearance. The period of significance for the property extends from the 1922 construction date of the main building to 1948, the year which marks the National Register age criteria for events to have occurred at least fifty years ago in order to have achieved historic significance.

### Historical Background

The Siler City High School building, located at 119 South Third Avenue (formerly Jordan Street as late as 1931), is a product of a school consolidation plan that was implemented during the 1920s and 1930s in Chatham County and statewide. Constructed between 1922 and 1923 as the largest and finest school building in Chatham County, it is also the only completely intact school building surviving from the period. According to a granite cornerstone, the architect was Charles Coker Wilson, the contractor was Hancock and Davis, and the builder was Bun B. Bray.

A prominent architect of the southeastern states, Charles Coker Wilson was a designer of many educational and public buildings. Born in Harrisville, South Carolina he received a technical education at the State College in 1886, and in 1888 completed a post graduate course in mechanical and civil engineering. Wilson began his professional career as assistant engineer of the Columbia, Newberry, and Laurens Railroad in South Carolina, but eventually set up private practice in Columbia, where he was city engineer from 1896 to 1899. Until that time, he had been primarily concerned with railroad location and construction, bridge and highway construction, and water and sewer infrastructure. In 1890, he decided to practice architecture studies at the Ecote des Beaux Arts in Paris for two years.

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Upon his return to the United States, he began work with Carrere and Hastings Architects in New York and assisted in designing some of the firm's significant works.

Wilson realized great success in the field and went on to begin his own practice becoming one of the most notable architects in South Carolina. From offices located in Gastonia and Wilson, North Carolina as well as Columbia, South Carolina he was commissioned for projects throughout the southeastern United States, including Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Virginia (National Cyclopedia 1947).

Wilson specialized in the field of educational buildings. Among notable examples of his buildings designed before 1920 were four at the University of South Carolina; McClintock and Alumni Halls at the Women's College in South Carolina; Judson Hall at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina; and buildings at the Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina. Later works include nine buildings at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina (Whitney and Whitney 1970, p. 662). Wilson also designed over fifty grade schools and high schools in the southern states. Among the more significant were the Grade School at Darlington, South Carolina, the Central Grammar School at Jacksonville, Florida, and the Greenwood, South Carolina High School which was much publicized in architectural journals (Whitney and Whitney 1970, p. 662).

Although the major emphasis of Wilson's work was schools, he also was successful in designing hospitals throughout the south. During the 1920s he was commissioned to design three hospitals in North Carolina: the Gastonia City Hospital, the Thompson Memorial Hospital in Lumberton, (1926), and the St. Luke's Hospital in Tryon. He was also involved in mill construction in Gastonia and other private buildings throughout the southern states (National Cyclopedia 1947).

Wilson helped to organize the South Carolina State Association of Architects, as well as the American State Association of Architects and in 1922 the North and South Carolina chapters of the American Institute of Architects. Besides being the first president of these organizations in South Carolina, Wilson was the chairman of the South Carolina state board of architectural examiners and a member of the American Society of Engineers. In 1924 Wilson was appointed by the American Institute of Architects, of which he had been a fellow since 1905, to serve on a national committee to assist in the architectural component of the national capital improvement plan. As a writer in his field, he composed many articles and addresses which were published in technical journals or presented to engineering and architectural societies. A few years prior to his death, he joined architect Harold Tatum in partnership (National Cyclopedia 1947).

The contractor for the construction of the Siler City High School building, Bun B. Bray, was an active independent builder and mason in Siler City. He began his career in 1906 by overseeing the brickwork on the C. D. Riddle commercial building at 109 South Chatham Avenue. Throughout the 1920s Bray specialized in brick and cement construction. Other examples of his work include the First United Methodist Church sanctuary at 121 South Chatham Avenue constructed in 1925 and the Elder Motor Company at 118 East Raleigh Street. He also oversaw the construction of the first cement sidewalks in downtown Siler City (Hadley 1987, p. 36).

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The tract of land on which the Siler City High School building is located appears to originally have been part of a larger tract of land owned by Cattie Matthews Jordan, a descendant of the locally prominent Matthews family, given that deeds indicate that she was owner of land to the adjacent northeast (1924 Chatham County Deed Book, p. 106). Additionally alluding to Jordan's ownership, long-term residents of the town recall that she owned cultivated and pasture land in the vicinity of the lot on which the school is now located (Graybeal interview with Wade H. Hadley, Jr. and Nathalia Bray Thomas, February 28, 1998). The cost of construction for the school building and its equipment was approximately \$100,000.

In 1930, the construction of a frame Works Progress Administration gymnasium was begun a few hundred yards south of the school by local contractor Robert Siler. The first basketball game was played there in 1934. A football field located to the rear of the gymnasium was modified for use also as a basketball field in the early 1930s.

A brick woodworking shop building was erected between the school and the gymnasium in the mid-1930s (Graybeal interview with Kenneth McPherson, Parks and Recreation Director, February 28 and April 8, 1998). The main building remained as a high school until 1956 when a new school building was erected a few miles east to serve the burgeoning high school student population. The land for this new building was donated by Cad N. Bray and his wife, and the school name, Jordan-Matthews, was derived from the surnames of Mrs. Bray's parents, J. M. Jordan and Cattie Matthews Jordan (Bynum 1971, p. 296).

Between 1957 and 1977, the Siler City High School building served the elementary grade levels and was renamed in honor of Paul Braxton, an Alamance County native who served as principal for more than three decades—from 1931 to 1968. He served as principal of the Siler City High School from 1931 to 1956. The school became known as the Paul Braxton Elementary School in 1957 and Braxton continued his position as principal until 1968. Braxton also served as a math teacher and coach from 1926 to 1931 (Graybeal interview with Paul Giles Braxton, November 13, 1997). The Paul Braxton Elementary School, along with the 1931 Henry Harrison Siler School, were closed when the Siler City Elementary School opened in 1977 west of town on Ellington Road (Hadley 1987, p. 52). The Siler City High School building now awaits rehabilitation for adaptive reuse as a senior living facility.

Architectural Context: 1920s and 1930s School Buildings in Chatham County

Given the historically agrarian economic base of Chatham County, few civic buildings were erected other than town halls, churches and schools. Especially few are those civic buildings erected from the 1920s onward. In the first two decades of the twentieth century a general air of prosperity pervaded Chatham County but was thwarted by the Great Depression and returned only gradually to the county thereafter. A few building trends from the previous century continued, but increasingly, technologically-inspired nationally-popular styles and standardized forms came to predominate over the earlier, more vernacular approaches to civic buildings. Those civic buildings that were erected during the 1920s and 1930s including school buildings, often embodied the nationally-popular styles such as Art Deco, Moderne, Colonial Revival or Greek Revival (Osborn and Seldon-Sturgill 1991, p. 49).

Brick-molding machines, which came into use at the turn-of-the-century, facilitated the use of brick in the implementation of these styles, and the material began to be used more frequently in commercial, civic, and school structures in the county (Osborn and Seldon-Sturgill 1991, p. 44). In 1919 only one school in the county was brick, but by 1939, twelve of the largest schools were brick (Bynum 1971, p. 292). These trends in material and style are evident in the architecture of the 1922 Art Deco Siler City High School.

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The 1931 Bonlee Elementary School building, located just south of Siler City and demolished in 1991, was similar in form to the Siler City High School with its flat-roofed horizontal form and central projecting bay flanked by lateral wings (Osborn and Seldon-Sturgill 1991, p. 198).

At the time of its construction in 1922, the Art Deco-style of the Siler City High School building was one of the few examples, if not the only representation of the Art Deco style in Chatham County as well as in the adjacent Randolph County. Only a few renditions of the style followed, but mostly not until the 1940s. The only other examples of Art Deco that appear in the Chatham County architectural inventory are the small commercial examples of Siler City's Justice Building (1941) at 223 North Chatham Avenue and the Bill and Bill Service Station (1936) at 201 North Second Avenue (Osborn and Seldon-Sturgill 1991, pp 122 and 139). Randolph County boasts larger and more fully-developed examples exhibited by the Asheboro City Hall, the Asheboro High School, and the Southern Motors Equipment Company, all dating to the 1940s (Whatley 1985). Thus, given the later construction dates of these buildings the Siler City High School was quite likely the premier of the Art Deco style in the two-county region.

County school buildings other than the Siler City High School that were constructed as a result of the consolidation plan during the period between 1922 and 1940 in Chatham County include those modernistic 1932 Bonlee Elementary School and 1935 Colonial Revival Goldston Elementary School. The Bonlee building was demolished in 1991, and only the Goldston School gymnasium survives (Turner interview w/Paul G. Joyce, Assistant Superintendent of Chatham County Schools, 11/27/97 and Bynum 1971, p. 295-297). The Siler City High School is the only surviving example of a Chatham County school building erected as a result of the early consolidation era.

### Educational Context: The Consolidation Era of the Chatham County School System- 1922-1940

The origin of Siler City educational institutions lies with the private Thompson Academy (1887-1897) which was considered one of the outstanding preparatory schools in North Carolina. Public school operated during the 1890s in the Masonic Hall on the north side of the 100 block of East Beaver Street. In 1897, the Thompson Academy building began housing the Siler City Institute which remained in operation until 1903, and when it finally evolved into a public grade school which operated there until the Siler City High School opened on Third Avenue in 1923. The now demolished two-story fourteen-room frame Thompson Military Academy building was demolished in the early 1930s to allow the site to be used for the construction of the current City Hall building (Osborn and Seldon-Sturgill 1991, p. 125). The bell which originally hung at the school building, and later at the Siler City High School, is now mounted on a pedestal on the front lawn of the City Hall.

As early as 1915, the concept of a state-wide school consolidation plan was being considered by the State Department of Education, and during the decade preceding the depression, some 1,500 rural one-teacher schools state-wide were consolidated to form larger, more economical schools (Knight 1916, p. 345). In July 1920, the Chatham County Board of Education "...ordered that the Superintendent buy two trucks provided that he can make an agreement with the district (district not named) to pay all expenses in running these trucks and guarantee to get the children to school." The purchase of the transport trucks was the first step towards facilitating the consolidation of schools in Chatham County by making it possible for students to attend schools further from their home (Bynum 1971, p. 290).

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The earliest existing record of Chatham County Board of Education minutes is dated June 2, 1924, although the board was most likely organized before the 1922 construction of the Siler City High School. The October 1925 minutes of the board indicate that a "county-wide school plan" was adapted which included the establishment of ten schools throughout the county over the next fifteen years. During this period the approximately eighty one-room union school houses, which served grades one through twelve throughout the county, were closed and more commodious brick school buildings were erected to accommodate a growing student population as well as to pool equipment and financial resources. The Chatham County Board of Education minutes indicate that between September and December 1929, at the onset of the depression, fifty-one school buildings across the county were auctioned off for other uses. New "union" schools, or those encompassing grades one through twelve, were to be constructed at or near Pittsboro, Moncure, Bonlee, Siler City and Bells. The elementary schools were to be located at or near Bennett, Silk Hope, Bynum, Brickhaven and Corinth. In the 1920s, the Corinth and Brickhaven schools were merged to form Moncure School and in 1946 the Bynum School (1923) closed and merged with Pittsboro School (Bynum 1971, p. 297 and Graybeal interview with Maxwell Cotton, Assistant Superintendent of Chatham County Schools, 1967-1968 and principal of Goldston School 1961-1967, 12/18/97). The Bells School was destroyed by fire in 1949. The 1922 Siler City High School is the only completely intact Chatham County school building surviving among those dating to the consolidation plan era and was the first constructed in the county as a result of the plan.

The school buildings other than the Siler City High School that were actually constructed as a result the consolidation plan during the period between 1922 and 1940 in Chatham County include those located in the communities of Moncure (1938), Bennett (1932), Bonlee (1931), Silk Hope (1932), Pittsboro (1924), and Goldston (1935). Bennett School was constructed as a result of a cooperative plan between Randolph and Chatham Counties. During the mid-1920s, Silk Hope high school students were transported to the Siler City High School until the new school was built in 1932 (Bynum 1971, 296).

Only portions of these school buildings survive, some of which have been adaptively reused. Among them is the Goldston School gymnasium which currently houses a fire station. Bonlee and Bennett Schools were demolished in 1991, and only a 1937 teacherage boarding survives on the Bennett property. Silk Hope School was demolished in 1992. A 1958 portion of the Moncure School remains, and the vocational agricultural building is all that remains on the Pittsboro school property (Turner interview w/Paul G. Joyce, Assistant Superintendent of Chatham County Schools, 11/ 27/97). Additionally, several small schools for Blacks were consolidated in the early 1930s and moved to the 1932 Siler City School located at 439 East Fifth Street (which became Chatham High School in 1954 and closed in 1969), the county's first organized public high school for Blacks The Henry Harrison Siler Elementary School, named for a locally noted early twentieth-century teacher, was constructed at 502 West Third Street in 1931 independently of the consolidation plan and closed in 1977 (Bynum 1971, p. 298, and Hadley 1987, p. 52).

With the onset of the depression in 1929, overall financial support for education declined statewide; however, a revolutionary transformation occurred in public education with the strong effort to keep schools open. The most immediate effect of the depression on the public school system was a decrease in revenues and a demand for retrenchment. Taxpayers' associations called for relief in 1930, and the school system, which absorbed almost half of local revenues, was the first victim of budget-cutting. The most common ways of reducing expenditures were to curtail building, cut teachers' and superintendents' salaries and positions, shorten the school term and to further consolidate schools (Bell 1982, p. 63).

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Thus, special district taxes, levied only for that district's schools, provided funds for new buildings, buses, additional teachers, for longer terms for some schools and other benefits which were not available to county schools supported only by the countywide levy.

In 1931 the county became the tax unit thereby eliminating district taxes. Additionally, in a radical move, the state enabled local governments to further reduce local taxes by the creation of a state-supported six-month school system. However, local school districts could vote to levy additional taxes to provide school terms longer than six months and by 1932 three-fourths had elected to do so (Bell 1982, p. 63). For some years, until 1931, the state had made distributions from the state-equalizing fund to counties to equalize teacher's salaries and for the operation of buses. In 1931, the state began providing funds for additional operating costs, and to finance this transition, the legislature introduced a property tax, cut superintendents' and teachers salaries, and increased average class sizes. One of the budget items most affected by cuts was capital improvements funds. Counties were expected to finance construction and renovation of school buildings, equipment repairs and additional buses (Bynum 1971, pp. 291-292). This created a virtual moratorium on building which combined with rising school attendance created overcrowding in the classrooms (Bell 1982, pp. 64-65). It took many years to equalize facilities and funds were available only for gradual improvements.

Tremendous strides in school consolidation were made between 1919 and 1939, during the twenty-year administration of Chatham County School Superintendent W.R. Thompson, a graduate of the University of Chapel Hill. Consolidation of the white schools was complete by 1940 and the consolidation of Black schools had begun. Of the 113 schools in operation in 1918 and 1919, seventy-nine had only one teacher, twenty-five had two teachers, six had three teachers, and only three had four or more teachers. In 1938 and 1939, only twenty-three schools had one teacher, ten had two teachers, three had two to four teachers, five had seven to sixteen teachers, and two had seventeen or more teachers.

Most communities in the state, among them Siler City, had formed a local "school committee," a trend which lasted well into the 1960s. The committees provided general advice and recommendations on personnel to the county school board, but they were not imbued with decision-making authority. One of the state's mandates in 1942 was to add the twelfth grade-level to all school programs; however, many such as Siler City High School had previously added the grade during the 1930s (Turner interview with Dr. Samuel Holton, retired professor of education, UNC-Chapel Hill, 11/27/1997). The trend of school consolidation in the county lasted well into the 1960s with the Moncure School being combined with Pittsboro, Silk Hope with Jordan-Matthews, and Bennett with Chatham Central (Bynum 1971, p. 299)

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Section 10: Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register boundaries follow the tax parcel boundaries as indicated on the accompanying tax map for lot number 119-3-12A. This land tract was deeded to the Town of Siler City by the Chatham County Board of Education in 1994 and is recorded in Chatham County deed book 733, page 846.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass the current 6.67-acre tract which includes the main school building, and three contributing resources historically associated with the school, including the 1930 gymnasium, the early 1930s baseball field and the mid-1930s woodworking shop building.

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**Photo Schedule:**

All photographs were taken by Kaye Graybeal on 9/12/97 unless otherwise noted. All photograph negatives are located at the State Historic Preservation Office, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources.

1. Overall front (SW facade), looking southeast
2. Central front entry bay on southwest facade
3. Central front entry bay on southwest facade (Rachel Osborn, photographer, 3/29/83)
4. Southeast facade
5. Interior stair balustrade and newel (Rachel Osborn, photographer, 3/29/83)
6. Front facade of community center (originally the woodworking shop), looking east
7. Gymnasium, looking northeast





