

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 Hicks Field

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number NE corner East Freemason and Woodard Streets not for publication

city or town Edenton N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Chowan code 041 zip code 27932

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. Crow, Acting SHPO 27 July 95
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 certifying 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
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____

Hicks Field
Name of Property

Chowan County, NC
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
1		sites
4	1	structures
	1	objects
6	3	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE/sports facility

RECREATION & CULTURE/sports facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (see continuation sheet)
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: columns and truss (grandstand)

OTHER: functional (fieldhouse and dugouts)

NO STYLE: (diamond and fields)

foundation concrete

walls wood

concrete block

roof metal

other steel

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)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1939 - 1952

Significant Dates

1939

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Works Progress Administration

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:

Hicks Field
Name of Property

Chowan County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 3.5 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	8
---	---

3	5	5	4	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	9	2	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

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 Thomas R. Butchko, Consultant

organization _____ date May 30, 1995

street & number Post Office Box 206 telephone (919) 355-7916

city or town Elizabeth City state NC zip code 27907-0206

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 Edenton-Chowan Board of Education

street & number P. O. Box 206 telephone (919) 482-4436

city or town Edenton state NC zip code 27932-0206

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 1

7. Description

Materials

roof: concrete

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina**7. Narrative Description**

Hicks Field is a square plot of land measuring approximately 383 feet north to south and 400 feet east to west containing about three-and-a-half acres. It is located at the northeast corner of East Freemason Street and Woodard Street, at the southwest corner of a twenty-six-acre tract of land occupied by the buildings and athletic fields of John A. Holmes High School, the high school for Edenton and Chowan County. The two-story brick school building was erected in the 1950s near the center of this tract, with the baseball diamond located to the south along East Freemason Street and the football field located to the east along North Oakum Street. Both athletic fields are known collectively as Hicks Field, a name that has been attached to the entire block surrounded by Park Avenue on the north, East Freemason Street on the south, North Oakum Street on the east, and North Broad Street on the west since the 1720s. In this nomination, the use of "Hicks Field" pertains only to the baseball field.

Hicks Field consists of nine resources, six contributing and three noncontributing, that are categorized as two buildings, one site, five structures, and one object. All are integral to the operation of the baseball facility. The six contributing resources -- the Grandstand (A), the Baseball Diamond and Field (B), the two concrete Dugouts (C), the Fence (D), and the Field House (E) -- are the dominate resources of the property that date from before 1952. The noncontributing resources -- the Lighting System (F), the Refreshment Stand (G), and the Scoreboard (H) -- do not detract from the historic character of Hicks Field, and in fact, the usefulness of the baseball field would be greatly diminished without them.

Adjacent to Hicks Field are residential areas along East Freemason and North Broad streets, the rear property lines of the latter being Woodard Street. The houses along the south side of East Freemason Street are most immediate to Hicks Field, with the mixture of one-and-a-half and two-story forms and varied roof forms being easily visible from throughout the field, especially so from the Grandstand (A). The second-story windows of many of these houses have no doubt provided vantage points for baseball games, just as the porches enabled residents to listen to the crowd reaction and public address announcer. Though occupied on a sporadic basis during the eighteenth and early- and mid-nineteenth centuries, this area did not begin to develop until the 1880s, when newly-prosperous black Edentonians erected modest one-story frame dwellings here on the northern edge of an expanding black residential area between North Broad and North Oakum streets. The nearby 400, 500, and 600 blocks of North Broad Street has been a neighborhood of comfortable dwellings for successful white merchants, farmers, entrepreneurs, and professionals since its systematic development during the first decades of the twentieth century. It has a wide mixture

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 7 Page 3

of examples of the Colonial Revival and Craftsman Bungalow styles, the two prevailing architectural fashions in Edenton and statewide between 1910 and 1940 (Butchko 1992, 168-169, 98-101).

Edenton is a historic town which in 1990 had a population of 5,268; Chowan County, of which Edenton is the seat and only town, had 13,506 residents. It is nestled on Edenton Bay and was settled by the late seventeenth century. The town established here in 1712 was renamed Edenton in 1722 in honor of recently deceased Governor Charles Eden, and from then until 1743 it served as the capital of the rapidly growing colony. The town is well known for its architecture, including two National Historic Landmarks, the 1758 Cupola House and the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse, and impressive examples of domestic, commercial, and religious buildings from the 1730s through the 1930s (Butchko 1992, passim). The Edenton Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1973 as one of the earliest districts in the state and contains over two hundred resources illustrating the architectural development of the oldest part of town. Its northern section extends along North Broad Street to Freemason Street, which forms the southern boundary of Hicks Field. However, the district and Hicks Field are not contiguous as Hicks Field lies about two hundred feet east of the intersection of North Broad and East Freemason streets.

Inventory ListA. Grandstand (Contributing structure, 1939-1940)

The primary architectural feature on Hicks Field, the grandstand is entirely wood frame in construction and approximately seventy-three feet long, twenty-seven feet deep, and thirty-five high at the peak of its gabled roof. This roof is carried by five laminated columns, each measuring nine inches by eighteen inches, that are anchored to a concrete base with angle irons and bolts. The roofing system is composed of five trusses held together by through bolts, with the column serving as the king post of the truss. Each truss is cantilevered beyond the front of its main column, with the rear of the roof resting on smaller secondary columns. Stabilization is obtained by generous bracing between all columns. The trusses carry six purlins that support the rafters. The roof surface is fully sheathed with wide, square-edged sheathing, upon which is laid five-V-crimp galvanized metal roofing.

The twelve rows of bleacher-type seats are arranged with two interior aisles each three feet ten inches wide, providing seating for about 530 spectators. The seats are made of standard two-by-ten boards with forty-five-degree beveled corners. Boards of the same comprise the flooring and the treads in the aisles, with two boards utilized for each row of flooring and one board corresponding to each row of seats, yielding two steps per row of seats. The bottommost step continues across the front of the grandstand, serving as a foot rest for fans in the front row. Simple board

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 7 Page 4

rails are used at the back of the topmost row and along each side. Because the stability of the upper portions of the grandstand was determined to be deficient in 1994, a temporary chain link fence was erected in front of the columns, confining fans to the front four rows until the grandstand is restored.

A concrete walkway forty-five inches wide runs across the front of the grandstand. Rising in front of this walkway is a chain link screen that connects to the front of the grandstand roof and serves as a backstop for fouled and passed balls. This chain link screen spans the entire length of the grandstand and continues on each side as a four-foot-tall fence parallel to the baselines behind each Dugout (C), terminating at a spot slightly beyond first or third base. The fence has a gate for players and officials halfway between the backstop screen and each Dugout.

B. Baseball Diamond and Field (Contributing site, 1939-1940)

The Baseball Diamond and Field are the single most important component of Hicks Field, for without it, the facility would be useless for baseball. The dimensions of the diamond are just slightly less than major league size, being eighty-nine feet between home plate and the three bases and fifty-nine feet between homeplate and the pitcher's plate. The dirt pitcher's mound is seventeen feet in diameter. While the infield area is now grass, and has been for a number of years, it was originally dirt. The earliest mention of the diamond and field in the local newspaper was in early 1940, when Max Bishop, an official with the New York-Pennsylvania League, noted that Hicks Field had "an ideal baseball diamond for early training" (The Chowan Herald, January 5, 1940). One month later, representatives of the minor league teams from Reading, Pennsylvania (Class B Interstate League) and Pocomoke City, Maryland (Class D Eastern Shore League), the first minor league teams to spend spring training in Edenton, said they were "especially impressed with the baseball diamond and field house" (The Chowan Herald, February 1, 1940). Two years later, the only fault that Gene Martin, the business manager of the Binghamton, New York "Triplets" (Class A Eastern League), could find in the local facilities was that the infield was dirt instead of grass (The Chowan Herald, February 19, 1942). Perhaps the grass infield was installed in time for the 1947 spring training return of the Binghamton team, when it was reported that the infield had gotten its "face lifted" (The Chowan Herald, March 13, 1947).

One of the features that most impressed Martin, the Binghamton manager, in 1942 was that "the distances from the plate to the fence are long in all fields, particularly center and right" (The Chowan Herald, February 19, 1942). These long distances were due to the fact that the center and right outfields were also used as part of the football field for Edenton High School (known as John A. Holmes High School since the late 1950s) until a separate but adjacent football field was built in the 1980s. The dimensions of the early outfields were not reported in the newspaper until 1946, when left field was 230 feet to the home run fence, center

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 7 Page 5

field 600 feet, and right field 525 feet (The Chowan Herald, February 21, 1946). Today, the dimensions of the outfield, as indicated by small painted signs on the fence, are 302 feet along the third base line, 335 and 365 feet in left center field, and, as determined by measurement, 355 feet in dead center field and 317 along the first base line.

C. Dugouts (Contributing structures, 1947)

The two dugouts, one each along the first and third base lines, are perhaps the most remarkable features at Hicks Field, as few baseball fields this small had such substantial dugouts. Each dugout is six feet six inches wide and twenty-five feet eight inches long, covered by a simple angled roof three feet five inches above grade in the front and three feet in the rear. In the front center, five steps four feet wide descend to the dugout floor which is three feet five inches below grade. The dugout is composed throughout of poured-in-place concrete, including the four inch thick roof, which is supported in the front by vertical pipes and at the rear by four, sixteen inch wide concrete posts, the intervals between posts being backed by the four-foot-tall chain link fence that extends from the backstop of the Grandstand (A). Of particular note is the six inch recess into the roof at the steps to allow additional headroom for players descending into or ascending from the dugout. The construction of the dugouts was reported by the local paper in March 1947 when it noted that the sports writers for the Binghamton newspapers had commented on "the new dugouts" (The Chowan Herald, March 13, 1947).

D. Fence (Contributing structure, 1939-1940)

The wooden fence that encloses three sides of Hicks Field stands eight feet tall and is anchored by six-inch square concrete posts rising six feet ten inches above grade and spaced a fairly uniform seven feet nine inches apart. The boards that comprise the fence are painted gray, are one-and-one-eighth inches thick and a fairly uniform seven-and-a-half inches wide, especially in the sections nearest the grandstand. Further away, boards vary in width from five-and-a-half to eleven inches, and in left field the average board width is nine to ten inches. The fence is topped by a simple wooden cap. Of note is that the last 111 feet of fence along East Freemason Street before reaching the home run fence has wooden four-by-six posts spaced a uniform six feet apart instead of the poured concrete posts employed elsewhere, indicating repairs undertaken after the 1940s. The wooden fence continues along East Freemason Street for 172 feet beyond (to the east of) the home run fence (the home run fence being perpendicular to East Freemason Street), indicating the extent (572 feet along East Freemason Street) of the original football field. However, this area east of the home run fence is not included in the nomination as it is no longer primarily connected to baseball activities.

At the northeastern corner of the field, just to the left (west) of center field, the fence changes from the traditional wood to a modern chain

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 7 Page 6

link fence, and continues around center at a height of eight feet before dropping to a four-foot-height as it enters right field. It ends thirty-one feet from the wooden fence along East Freemason Street, allowing for vehicular access between the baseball field and football field to the east along North Oakum Street. Between the first and third baselines, the fence serves as the home run fence, although for less than half of its length, that area between the third base line and a spot just left (west) of center field, is it the traditional wooden fence. There are several gates through the fence: for spectators, two chain link gates from Woodard Street, one between the Grandstand (A) and Refreshment Stand (H) and another to the south of the Field House (E), and another chain link gate in the wooden fence in left-center field leading from the school; for players, a gate in the chain link fence at right-center field; and for vehicles, a wooden two-leaf gate to the south of the Grandstand (A), a chain link two-leaf gate along East Freemason Street, and a two-leaf gate along Woodard Street adjacent to the Field House (E). To the east (right) of the Field House (E) are small wooden signs painted with the names of the members of the Northeastern Conference in which teams from John A. Holmes High School compete: Ahoskie, Roanoke Rapids, Edenton, Williamston, Roanoke, and Plymouth.

The fence, while repaired through the years and having replacement boards added on occasion, is a continuation in size, extent, and character of the original one. Its intended construction was announced on January 5, 1939 in the first newspaper article about the new Hicks Field, although the field was apparently not ready for use until early 1940. Although the fence was originally intended to be "creosoted," this apparently was not done, as all local recollections of the fence is as it now stands (The Chowan Herald, January 5, April 20, 1939; January 8, 1940).

E. Field House (Contributing building, 1939-1940)

Located at the northern corner of the property, the Field House is a frame shed-roofed building fifty-six-feet long by twenty-two-feet deep. It was originally sided with wide weatherboards, was later covered with asphalt shingles, and more recently covered with vinyl siding. The latter, having a brittle character under sudden impact, now bears numerous puncture wounds created by baseballs. The Field House has four doors facing the field, with the three western (left) doors leading to bathrooms and a storage area, and the eastern (right) door, being wider than the others, providing storage for field maintenance equipment.

The completed Field House was first mentioned in the local paper on January 8, 1940, when Max Bishop, an official with the New York-Pennsylvania League, termed the building as "adequate" (The Chowan Herald, January 8, 1940). One month later, representatives of the minor league teams from Reading, Pennsylvania and Pocomoke City, Maryland said they were "especially impressed with the baseball diamond and field house" (The Chowan Herald, February 1, 1940). When informing Edenton officials of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 7 Page 7

their plan to return for spring training in 1947, officials of the Binghamton, New York Triplets requested an improvement in the hot water facilities of the Field House, noting it was inadequate to take care of the needs of the team. A subsequent joint meeting of the Town Council and Board of Public Works approved the installation of an extra forty-gallon hot water tank in the Field House (The Chowan Herald, February 21, 28, 1946).

F. Lighting System (Noncontributing structure, 1994)

The present lighting consists of six tall metal poles each containing six, eight, or thirteen high-power bulbs, located as shown on the site plan. These were installed using funds raised by the Hicks Field Restoration Commission to replace eight wooden poles determined too deteriorated to be repaired. The first lights on Hicks Field were installed in 1946 in large part because the lights were seen as a "distinct asset to the town and would go a long way in providing recreation for citizens at night, which is and has been very much lacking in Edenton for many years (The Chowan Herald, February 28, June 13, 1946). The first night game was played on July 17, an 8 to 0 Albemarle League victory over Camden (The Chowan Herald, July 25, 1946).

G. Refreshment Stand (Noncontributing building, 1950s)

The Refreshment Stand is a two-story concrete block building approximately fifteen feet long, eight feet deep, and fifteen feet tall. Though small, it serves three important functions: ticket booth, press box, and refreshment stand. It is covered by a shed roof of shallow pitch. On the first level there is an entrance on the south side adjacent a ticket window, beside which is a chain link entrance gate through the fence. On the front (east) elevation are two rectangular openings for concession sales, and on the north elevation (right) another opening for sales. The upper story, assessible by simple open wooden steps on the north, has two rectangular openings on the front for the public address announcers with small windows on each side elevations. Between the two stories on the front is an attached wooden sign displaying the words REFRESHMENT STAND along with the emblem of the local American Legion Post 40, who erected the building and maintain the concession as a fund-raising venture.

H. Scoreboard (Noncontributing object, 1960s)

The electric scoreboard is made of sheet metal and is fourteen feet wide, approximately five feet tall, and supported by two telephone poles so that the uppermost edge is about fourteen feet above the ground. It contains panels to display the game's statistics: score, inning, balls, strikes, outs, hits, and errors. It was manufactured by the Scorebrain Electro Mechanical Corporation of Wrightsboro, Georgia and displays a large Coca-Cola emblem on the left.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 8

8. Narrative Statement of Historical Significance

Summary

Few recreational activities have had the imprint upon the American psyche as has the game of baseball, and Hicks Field in Edenton is a remarkably intact example of North Carolina's love of the "National Pastime" as it developed in countless small towns during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The game had apparently been introduced into North Carolina during the Civil War, and by the late 1870s, its popularity had spread statewide. Edenton's taking to the game most surely predates 1895, when, in the first known mention of baseball in extant local newspapers, the editor felt compelled to offer advice to "our baseball enthusiasts." From the 1890s through the 1950s, Edentonians embraced baseball as enthusiastically as any city or village in the state, supporting a variety of teams of both races, and, with the construction of Hicks Field by the Works Progress Administration in 1939, Edenton could boast of a facility equal to any in the Albemarle region. Here, fans witnessed not only high school and American Legion games, but cheered the "Sluggers" and the "Colonials", the latter an entrant in the semi-pro Albemarle League which battled rivals from Elizabeth City, Hertford, Plymouth, and Windsor from the 1920s until its demise in 1950. Furthermore, almost every spring from 1940 through 1950 brought one or two minor league teams to Edenton for spring training, during which locals watched young men chase dreams of playing baseball with teams from Binghamton, New York; Reading and Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Pocomoke City, Maryland; and Denver, Colorado. Edenton's minor league flirtation peaked in 1951 and 1952 when it fielded teams in the Class D Virginia and Coastal Plain leagues, respectively, and reached a fitting climax by winning the 1952 playoffs. These minor league teams and their opponents brought to Edenton such legendary baseball figures as future Hall of Famers Charles "Chief" Bender (Philadelphia Athletics), Robert "Lefty" Gomez (New York Yankees), and Bob Feller (Cleveland Yankees), along with other major stars of the 1940s. Since 1952, Hicks Field has continued as the home to scores of teams in local, Legion, and Little leagues, in addition to the "Aces" of adjacent John A. Holmes High School.

Hicks Field meets Criterion A for local significance in the history of Entertainment and Recreation, and Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years. The period of significance for the property extends from the 1939 construction date of the Baseball Diamond and Field, the Grandstand, the Field House, and the Fence; through the 1947 construction date of the two concrete dugouts; and ends in 1952 with the last playing season of the Class D Virginia and Coastal Plain leagues. The present appearance of the field is a rare, largely intact physical representation of the importance that the semi-pro and Class D minor leagues achieved in the collective imagination of the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 9

small towns in eastern North Carolina between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Hicks Field consists of nine resources, six of which are contributing. These six resources -- the frame Grandstand (A) that seats about 530 fans; the Baseball Diamond and Field (B); the two concrete dugouts (C); the enclosing fence (D); and the Field House (E) -- are dominant resources of the property that date from before 1952. The three noncontributing resources -- the Refreshment Stand (G) that post-dates the use of the field by the minor leagues; the Scoreboard (H) that was erected in the 1960s; and the modern lighting system -- compliment the contributing resources, but do not detract from the historic character of the property; in fact, their presence enables the continued use of the field. The entire Hicks Field complex is remarkable for its survival in its largely original state that reflects the cresting of the popularity of minor league baseball in Edenton. Since the disbanding of the Class D minor leagues in 1952, the complex has been used in a seasonal manner by numerous Little League, church league, and recreational baseball teams. The field complex is owned by the Edenton-Chowan County Board of Education, and a campaign to restore the complex has been launched by the Hicks Field Restoration Committee.

Historical Background and Entertainment/Recreation Context

It is impossible to say when baseball was first played in Edenton, though local residents most likely became familiar with the game soon after the Civil War. While the origin of the game of baseball is uncertain, by 1845 it was being played in an organized fashion in the northeastern states and its introduction into North Carolina came as early as 1862 when it was played by Union prisoners at a Confederate prison camp near Salisbury (Sumner 1990, 26-27). Even though there is no record of baseball being played among the Union troops who occupied Roanoke Island from February 1862 until the end of the war, they almost surely were familiar with the game and very possibly used it to help relieve the boredom of being stationed along the isolated Outer Banks. Other Union troops were stationed after February 1862 throughout the Albemarle region, of which Chowan County is part, and troops stationed in Edenton may well have played the game in 1862 as well (Butchko 1992, 38-39). Furthermore, the Albemarle region has since its settlement in the mid-seventeenth century maintained close trading relations with Norfolk, Virginia, particularly after the enlargement in 1829 of the Dismal Swamp Canal that connected the Albemarle Sound with Norfolk by way of Elizabeth City. The Union army also had a sizeable presence in Norfolk after 1862. Norfolk baseball enthusiasts had organized a baseball club there as early as October 1865 and by mid-1867, according to one Norfolk newspaper, the city had "baseball on the brain" (Butchko 1989, 13, 135, 137-138; Parramore 1994, 229). Since the daily contact of Edentonians was much greater with people coming south from Norfolk rather than with those from the North Carolina piedmont (where Salisbury is located), it can be postulated that baseball's introduction into the Albemarle was from Virginia and not from the rest of North Carolina. The allure of baseball was that it crossed all social and class lines and required a minimum of expense; gloves were not used until the late 1870s and bats and balls were frequently homemade. Jim L. Sumner,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 10

Curator of the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame, states that advocates held that the game's "speed and excitement, its blend of teamwork and individuality, and its honor and manliness characterized the strengths of America. That baseball was the national pastime was an axiom by the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Summer 1990, 26-28; Grant 1979, 411-412).

An understanding of the early history of organized baseball in Edenton is complicated by the dearth of surviving newspapers from the last two decades of the nineteenth century. While Edenton had a newspaper during much of the period, only scattered copies survive from 1880, 1881, 1886, and 1889 to 1896. The first local reference is from the Fisherman and Farmer, which was published weekly from 1886 to 1896 by A. H. Mitchell, who came to Edenton from Baltimore. Like many editors of the day, Mitchell was a progressive man, urging a building up of the town, and even included positive reports about the activities of the town's sizeable black population, something few papers in eastern North Carolina did until the the 1920s (Butchko 1992, 90). Without question, he was also a fan of baseball, for at the start of the 1895 season he provided insight into local interest in the game:

We advise our baseball enthusiasts to organize and begin practice if they hope to make a showing this year. Don't put it off until the middle of the season and then spring the tacky aggregation of so-called players upon us as heretofore. Begin at once. Get in thorough practice, and give us a club that will be a credit to the town and pride to the lovers of the national game (Fisherman and Farmer, April 5, 1895).

Limited copies of the town's papers provide scant details about Edenton's two baseball teams, the white "Colonials" and the black "Quicksteps". The Colonials played on Hicks Field, which was the term historically given to the entire block bounded by Broad, Freemason, and Oakum streets and Park Avenue. This property had been given in 1723 to the town commissioners by merchant and Register [of Deeds] Robert Hicks (d. 1733) to be used for pasturage and was to be kept "Perpetually as a Common for the use of the said Town" (Butchko 1992, 168). Hicks Field was the site from 1889 until sometime in the late 1890s of the fairgrounds of the Edenton Agricultural and Fish Fair, which every fall hosted an exposition that promoted the products of the section. A large octagonal "exhibition hall" was erected the first year, and pre-fair promotions focused heavily on the "wide, level" track for horse racing. Unfortunately, no mention is made of baseball being played at the fair (Fisherman and Farmer, June 21, 1889; October 4, 1895; Butchko 1992, 49-50).

While little is recorded about the earliest baseball field that preceeded the 1939 field on the Hicks property other than it was located in the center of the plat, the exploits of the Colonials found frequent mention in the local paper. Earliest is the terse notice in 1895 that the team from Woodville, a tiny farm crossroads in neighboring Perquimans County, had beaten Edenton by the score of 15 to 5. The 1900 result of a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 11

home rematch of a loss to rival Elizabeth City was more satisfying to editor and fan alike, with the 35 to 0 score trumpeted as "A complete walkover." In contrast, the disagreeable result of a game played just one week later caused it to be reported simply as "Game Tuesday, Williamston 14, Edenton 6" (The Chowan Herald, January 5, 1939; Fisherman and Farmer, August 2, 1895; Eastern Courier, June 28, July 12, 19, 1900).

Organized recreational activities, like many aspects of life in the South, were carefully segregated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was particularly so in professional baseball, with the Negro Leagues not being formed until after World War I and the Major Leagues not admitting the first black until 1946 (Sumner 1990, 39, 47-48, 59). It is then somewhat surprising that the Quicksteps were the best known of Edenton's baseball teams during the late nineteenth century. The team enjoyed a wide reputation, playing teams from New York to South Carolina, and had healthy rivalries with teams from the nearby Virginia cities of Franklin, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Berkley, the latter now part of Norfolk. Their name may well have been adapted from the Quickstep Club team that had been organized in Norfolk during the early 1880s (Parramore 1994, 229). Baseball was so popular among blacks that special railroad or steamship excursions often carried fans to away games, particularly when teams from the much larger Virginia cities ventured to Edenton. While local tradition states that the Quicksteps played on a diamond at the nearby northwest corner of Broad and Hicks streets, there is account of at least one game having been played at the "fairgrounds," a 15 to 3 thrashing on August 1, 1895 of a Suffolk team which had brought an excursion of fans. No doubt other games were played on the larger fairgrounds field as well, probably including a game the next week against the Norfolk "Red Stockings" (Fisherman and Farmer, June 19, August 2, 9, 1895; Eastern Courier, September 6, 1900; Parramore 1994, 229; Butchko 1992, 49, 168).

While Edenton had a weekly newspaper for most of the first quarter of the twentieth century, the few surviving copies provide no reports as to baseball activities in town. Nonetheless, the game flourished and the year 1925 saw the start of the Albemarle League with teams in Edenton, Elizabeth City, Colerain, and Hertford. Fans throughout the league were avid supporters of their team and the league, and Frank Sutfenfield, a catcher for the Edenton team, recalled that upon his arrival about 1926 the local fans met him at the bus "and made me feel just as welcome as could be." Another Edenton player, Jim Partin, related that "The fans were there for every game. As soon as baseball started, they were there" (McCall 1985, part one, 2, 4). The Albemarle League was semi-pro in that, though players were paid a modest amount--usually several dollars a week--to play, most held other jobs as well. The league folded in 1934 or 1935 when the economic hardships of the Great Depression inundated the teams with debts and forced fans to save what little spending money they had for essentials. Although the league had a one-year revival in 1939, it was not until after World War II that the Albemarle League resumed play on an annual basis. By then, the Edenton Colonials were playing in modern Hicks Field (McCall 1985, part two, 1-2, 6).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

In early 1939 The Chowan Herald carried an item announcing the construction of the present Hicks Field:

Work Started On New Athletic Field Old Fence and Grandstand Already Torn Down

WPA workman this week started work on Hicks Field for the erection of a new and modern athletic field. The first work done was to remove the old and dilapidated grandstand and fence. When this has been completed grading of a new field will be started preparatory to erecting a creosoted fence about the field as well as a grandstand for baseball fans and bleachers along the football field.

The location of the new field will be along Freemason Street, thus removing it from the center of the plat as formerly.

(The Chowan Herald, January 5, 1939)

Unfortunately, there has never been a comprehensive compilation of North Carolina projects undertaken by the Works Progress and Works Projects administrations between 1935 and 1943. In North Carolina, the WPA was involved in the construction or improvement of 536 playgrounds and athletic fields and 789 buildings. Nationally, the WPA assisted in building 3,026 new athletic fields in addition to 2,302 new outdoor stadiums, grandstands, and bleachers; the latter category was not enumerated for each state. The Hicks Field project, as originally approved, was to include "constructing grandstands with showers and dugouts, grading and landscaping ball park grounds, erecting fence, and performing incidental and appuertenant work." However, the showers were placed in the Field House (E) instead of in the Grandstand (A), and the two Dugouts (C) were not added until 1947. Since the WPA was primarily interested in putting the unemployed to work, it is not surprising that \$4,771 of the \$5,905 total cost was for labor (Federal Works Agency 1946, 135, 131; Hicks Field Records, National Archives).

For reasons also unknown, Edenton's new Hicks Field was not ready for use until early 1940, and all local games of the Albemarle League in 1939 were played on the diamond at the Edenton Cotton Mills, a simple facility with minimal bleachers known primarily from a ca. 1930 aerial photograph (The Chowan Herald, April 20, 1939; Butchko 1992, 258). The League in 1939 consisted of teams in Edenton, Elizabeth City, Plymouth, Perrytown, Oak City, and Scotland Neck. Only "home talent" was to play, with no hired players allowed. The Edenton team boasted "5 new uniforms that were contributed by that many merchants" (The Chowan Herald, March 23, April 20, 1939). The locals won all of their first ten games except a home game against Plymouth that was promoted as promising to "attract a record crowd [as] Considerable rivalry exists between the two teams." One of the wins

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 13

was a "listless and uninteresting affair" against Oak City until the ninth inning when, it "developed into sort of a dime novel episode." Edenton finished second in the standings, but was eliminated in three straight games by Scotland Neck in the first round of the playoffs (The Chowan Herald, June 29, July 6, 13, 20, 27, August 10, 24, September 7, 1939). The year 1939 also saw the organization of a three-team soft ball league sponsored by local civic organizations, the Lions, the Red Men, and the third team jointly by the Rotarians and Masons (The Chowan Herald, May 25, 1939).

The first newspaper mention of baseball in 1940 documents that newly-constructed Hicks Field was almost ready for play. Among a group of sportsman who had come to Edenton for a day of hunting with David Holton, a local merchant and avid baseball fan, was Max Bishop of Baltimore. Bishop, a former second baseman with the Philadelphia Athletics, was connected with the old Minor League Class A New York-Pennsylvania League, which in 1938 became the Class A Eastern League. In noting Bishop's remarks that Edenton would be "an ideal location for spring training headquarters," the Edenton paper related his approval of the "convenient armory for indoor workouts, an adequate field house and an ideal baseball diamond for early training." Furthermore, he liked the size of the town because "it lacked many of the detrimental temptations which beset a group of young baseball recruits in large cities." Within a month, contracts had been signed with the Class B Interstate League team from Reading, Pennsylvania and the Class D Eastern Shore League team from Pocomoke City, Maryland. About sixty players and team officials would be arriving in late March for a six-week period to end about May 1. The announcement stated that "The athletic plant, except for a few minor plumbing fixtures" was completed the last week of January, with an public open house scheduled for February 3 and 4. Furthermore, the news of the pending arrival of a minor league team for spring-training "greatly stimulated interest in baseball" in Edenton (The Chowan Herald, January 8, February 1, 1940). The armory spoke of by Bishop is the North Carolina National Guard Armory at 706 North Broad Street, which was erected by the Works Progress Administration in 1936-1937 near the northwest corner of the Hicks property and remains in use for recreational and civic functions (Butchko 1992, 102).

The construction of Hicks Field coincided with a national boom in minor league teams. While the economic hardships of the Depression forced many teams and leagues to fail in the early- and mid-1930s, the advent of lights for night games and a complete reorganization of the minor leagues in 1931-1932 (which included moving the administrative offices of the minor league association to Durham) began a dramatic revival of minor leagues. This increase in the number of teams, many looking for spring training sites, benefited Hicks Field until 1950, and the Reading team that came in 1940 was no doubt especially excited as the club had just been reorganized after five years of inactivity. Between 1933 and 1940, the number of minor leagues increased from fourteen to thirty-three nationally, and nowhere was

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 14

this increase more dramatic than in North Carolina. The Tar Heel state saw a proliferation of teams in Class D leagues--the smallest classification--with the formation of the Bi-State League (Mt. Airy, Mayoden, Reidsville, Leaksville) in 1934; the North Carolina State League (Cooleemee, Landis, Lexington, Mooresville, Thomasville, Salisbury) in 1937; the Coastal Plain League (Goldsboro, Greenville, Kinston, New Bern, Wilson, Williamston, Tarboro, Snow Hill) also in 1937; and the Tar Heel League (Gastonia, Hickory, Lenior, Shelby, Statesville, Newton-Conover) in 1939. These leagues joined teams in the Class B Piedmont League (Asheville, Charlotte, Rocky Mount, Winston-Salem) which operated without interruption between 1920 and 1955. North Carolina is often used as the example of the "grip" baseball has had on the country since the early twentieth century, a fervor that was especially strong "when the sport is seen from the small towns, where the game is played for local pride and the commercial machinations of the majors seem a world away." In recognizing the appeal of small-town baseball, it is important to realize that "the more impressive feature may be how deep and extensive the roots of baseball have traveled rather than how high the branches have reached" (Johnson 1993, 24, 26, 28, 36, 41-42, 76-77, 175; Sumner 1990, 45-47; Sullivan 1990, 171). Baseball also prospered in neighboring Virginia, which had teams in the Class D Virginia and Bi-State leagues in addition to strong Piedmont League clubs in the large nearby cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Richmond (Johnson 1993, 24, 82-83). This period also saw the 1938 revival of the Class B Eastern League, which during the 1940s would furnish Hicks Field with spring training teams from Binghamton, New York; the formation in 1939 of the Class C Interstate, which the next year moved up to Class B and supplied training teams from Reading in 1940 and Lancaster in 1941; and the rebirth in 1937 of the Class D Eastern Shore League, from which came the Pocomoke City team to Edenton in 1940 (Johnson 1993, 28, 73, 75, 79).

Weekly issues of The Chowan Herald during the training period of the Reading and Pocomoke City teams have long articles relating the "many efforts to entertain the men," the successful tryouts of area high school stars, that Reading manager Tom Oliver praised the town by saying that he "had been in many places in his baseball connections but had not seen any to equal Edenton," and the names of numerous players from both teams and their opponents. The exhibition schedule included games against the Elizabeth City "Rebels", the Norfolk "Cavaliers," and the semi-pro Norfolk "Ingloos" (formerly the "Monarchs"); teams from Williamston and Tarboro and the Norfolk Naval Station; two of Reading's league rivals from Sunbury and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (the latter training in Greenville); and a group of Edenton All Stars (The Chowan Herald, March 28, April 11, 18, 25, May 2, 1940). Toward the middle of their stay, the paper ran a glowing editorial on their visiting ballplayers, who, while proving themselves "to be

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 15

gentlemen of the first water," have "ingratiated themselves into the heart of the community." The editor went so far as to suggest they:

decide to give up the bat and ball and stick around.

Edenton is glad they came, glad they are here, and sorry as Ned they like Reading or Pocomoke City better. They have been welcomed by a hundred signs, thanks to the energetic Dave Holton, but a million such signs wouldn't extend the real welcome Edenton extends them.

(The Chowan Herald, April 11, 1940)

For two local boys, pitcher William "Little Bud" Cayton and John Byrum, captain of the Campbell College team, the period was especially fruitful as they both signed to play professionally with the Pocomoke City "Chicks" (The Chowan Herald, April 11, 25, May 2, 1940). Even though both teams enjoyed and benefitted from their training weeks in Edenton, their regular seasons were in sharp contrast to each other. Reading won the Interstate League regular season with a record of seventy-six victories and fifty-two defeats before losing in the finals of the playoffs, while Pocomoke City finished last in the Eastern Shore League with a record of fifty wins and seventy-five losses (Johnson 1993, 200-201).

Little was reported on the local baseball season during the summer of 1940. In May a schedule was announced that included games against teams from Smithfield, Virginia and long-time rival and neighbor Plymouth, in addition to the Petersburg "Shamrocks", the Norfolk "Cavaliers", and the Ocean View "Cardinals;" the 15 to 8 victory over Plymouth was "very listless and of little interest to the goodly number of fans on hand." The final article of the year included mention that Cayton had had a .305 batting average with the Pocomoke City team and that another local product, pitcher Lester Jordan, had "quite a record on the mound" for the Mooresville team in the North Carolina State League that interested "several big league scouts." John Byrum, the other local Pocomoke City signee, ended the season playing semi-pro ball in Waverly, Virginia (The Chowan Herald, September 19, 1940; February 27, 1941; Johnson 1993, 202).

March of 1941 saw the arrival of the Class B Interstate League team from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Though the appropriately-named "Red Roses" were in town for just three weeks, they, like their predecessors, were "very favorably impressed with the friendliness and hospitality." Included in the entourage were George Kirchener, sports editor of the Lancaster New Era, four managers and coaches, ten veterans from last year's playoff champions, and twenty-four recruits. Surnames like De Maricor, Tulaz, Gustof, Graziani, Scala, Geraci, and Stasak must have seemed odd among the typically English, Irish, and Scots names of the area, but not to Edenton baseball fans long familiar with major league stars. Exhibition games were promoted with motorcades that included the Edenton High School band in the "brand new" Lancaster bus motoring to towns in Perquimans, Tyrrell,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 16

Washington, Bertie and Hertford counties. In addition to complimenting the "personable lot of boys" and wishing for the team's return next year, the Edenton editor expressed the wish for "league laurels" for the team. That was not to be as the Red Roses finished last in the league with a record of forty-three wins and eighty-three losses (The Chowan Herald, March 6, April 10, 17, 24, 1941; Johnson 1993, 204).

The other big baseball news in Edenton during 1941 was the playing of a regular season Class D Coastal Plain League game between the Williamston "Martins" and the Tarboro "Orioles." Originally scheduled for Williamston, the game was transferred to Hicks Field as a "gesture of appreciation" for the support given the Williamston club from Edenton fans. The game received considerable press buildup, and the local paper, in urging a large crowd, declared that Edenton is "honored" by the game, noting that "there will undoubtedly be a large number of fans accompanying each club which should afford a splendid opportunity to mingle with our neighbors and thus become more acquainted" (The Chowan Herald, June 12, 19, 1941).

The Binghamton, New York "Triplets" of the Class A Eastern League came to Edenton for spring training in 1942, having previously trained in Norfolk in 1935, in High Point in 1936, and in South Carolina from 1937 through 1941. Edenton was chosen in part because of its proximity to other minor league teams in training, including Elmira, New York in Tarboro; Hagerstown, Maryland in Rocky Mount; Hartford, Connecticut in Greenville; and Reading, Pennsylvania in Wilson. Their business manager, Gene Martin complimented Hicks Field for its size, the deepness of center and left fields, and the "fine" grandstand and bleachers. The Norfolk "Tars" of the Class B Piedmont League, a farm club of the New York Yankees like Binghamton, also came to Edenton for training but for two weeks less than the Triplets. Binghamton's pitching coach was Charles "Chief" Bender, a former star with the Philadelphia Athletics from 1903 to 1925. This "hero of many a mound battler" was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1953. Among the exhibition games were contests against the teams from Hagerstown, Hartford, Elmira, and Newport News, Virginia (The Chowan Herald, February 12, 19, March 26, April 2, 1942; Johnson 1993, 210-211; Readers Digest 1981, 788; Meserole 1990, 335).

The headline event was the contest between the Binghamton Triplets and the team from the Norfolk Naval Reserve Outfit, which included major league stars stationed in Norfolk for wartime service. Receiving top-billing was Bob Feller, the "boy wonder" of the Cleveland Indians, whose twenty-year pitching career earned him Hall of Fame recognition in 1962. Even though Feller did not play, he was the "center of attraction". Other "nationally known baseball idols in uniform and in action" on Hicks Field with the Norfolk squad were pitcher Fred Hutchinson of the Detroit Tigers, Sam Chapman, Maxie Wilson, and Clarence "Ace" Parker, the latter a football All-American at Duke and future member of both the College and the Professional Football Halls of Fame. Played before "a record crowd of baseball fans The grandstand and bleachers were filled to capacity

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 17

with the overflow standing along the first and third base [lines] and some even sitting as far [away] as the football bleachers," the game was won by Binghamton in ten innings, delighting local fans of the Triplets. At the end of training, the local paper stated that the team has "every right to believe [the] club will make a fair bid for honors in the league," which proved true as they finished third in the regular season before bowing in the playoff finals (The Chowan Herald, April 9, 16, 1942; Readers Digest 1981, 788; Meserole 1990, 335, 340, 343; Johnson 1993, 210).

While there is no mention in The Chowan Herald of baseball of any kind being played in Edenton during 1943, there surely would have been informal pick-up games to relieve the stress of war. The ten minor leagues that did continue--the only North Carolina participant being the Durham "Bulls" of the Piedmont League--were kept close to home by wartime travel restrictions. Many teams, particularly those in Norfolk and Portsmouth, were comprised of active service men, and the return of organized baseball to Edenton in 1944 was largely the result of service men and women stationed at a Marine Corps Air Station that opened east of Edenton in early 1943. The Leathernecks played in a Service League composed of teams from Consolidated Aircraft in Elizabeth City; the Naval Air Station (Blimp Base) near Weeksville; the Harvey Point Naval Base south of Hertford; and the Patrol Plane Base near Elizabeth City; in addition to civilian teams from Sunbury and Merry Hill. Although game reports are limited, the Edenton team did win the Service League championship. All games were played at Hicks Field with no admission fee so as to provide free entertainment to the public. A notable exception was a benefit double-header on June 11 that was organized to raise money for the Family Hospital Association at the Naval Air Station Hospital near Weeksville so that military dependents could be sent there instead of to Norfolk or New River, near Jacksonville. The double-header at Hicks Field consisted of a game between the local Marine team and the Elizabeth City Coast Guard outfit, and another between Womens Reserves teams from Edenton and Cherry Point. As the games were part of the effort to raise the \$2,000 quota for new equipment, fans were urged to "turn out en mass and help swell the fund" (Johnson 1993, 209, 213; Butchko 1992, 75; The Chowan Herald, April 27, May 4, June 1, 22, July 13, 1944; May 17, 1945).

In the midst of all the wartime shortages and belt-tightening, Edenton baseball fans were no doubt pleased to read that local favorite Lester Jordan signed a contract to pitch for the Toronto club in the International League, which was, then as now, just one step below the majors. Jordan, recently released from the Army for physical reasons, selected the Toronto team over a number of others, including the Philadelphia Athletics, where his try-out received the personal praise of managerial legend Connie Mack. In addition to a "generous" signing bonus, Jordan's salary was "understood" to be \$400 per month, a salary unheard of in the Depression- and war-weary Albemarle region (The Chowan Herald, June 22, 1944; Johnson 1993, 215).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 18

With the Allies on the verge of victory in both Europe and the Pacific in early 1945, baseball resumed some of its prewar importance in Edenton. In March 1945 the local Marine Corps Air Station was taken over by the Navy as a Naval Air Station, meaning that 1945 baseball players were navy personnel rather than marines. Among the players were several with "big league" experience with teams such as the Brooklyn "Dodgers," the Columbus (Ohio) "Red Birds," and the St. Louis "Browns." New additions to the Albemarle Service League included the Coast Guard Base near Elizabeth City, but the results were the same, with Edenton finishing in first place with a commanding seventeen wins against only three losses. Their overall record was equally stellar at twenty-seven victories and eight defeats, with non-league games against a "strong" team of the Norfolk Naval Air Station, Convair of Elizabeth City, and teams from Suffolk (Virginia), Jackson, Williamston, and Windsor. Though many of the games were played on the base diamond, some were played on Hicks Field for the "benefit of civilians who enjoy the national pastime." This was particularly true later in the season when games attracted "increasingly large" crowds (The Chowan Herald, May 17, 24, 31, June 7, 14, 24, 28, August 9, 16, September 13, 1945).

Throughout the mid- and late-1940s, the very existence of the baseball facility at Hicks Field was threatened by the need to find a site for a proposed hospital in Edenton. As early as March 1945, the hospital trustees were meeting with architects from Kinston, Wilson, and Norfolk regarding the design. A much more vexing problem was where to build it, with the trustees voting on several occasions in favor of Hicks Field, which would have necessitated moving the baseball field to the eastern end of the property along Oakum Street. This location for the hospital was protested by many, arguing that Hicks Field was not a logical site for a hospital and that the property would most "assuredly" be the site of the new high school, which materialized in the mid-1950s. A number of additional sites were investigated, but in May 1946 the hospital Directors voted unanimously in favor of Hicks Field. Protests were "concerted" at the June meeting of the County Commissioners, when petitions were presented by contributors to the hospital fund, the PTA, and the Junior Women's Club arguing that a school and athletic grounds were "not conducive to a proper atmosphere" for the hospital." While any arguments that mentioned the benefits of the present baseball facility were not reported in the paper, the opposition of the site for the hospital was effective nonetheless in protecting Hicks Field. The decision was postponed several times until 1949, when a site was selected at the corner of Virginia Road and North Granville Street, where the hospital was built in the early 1950s (The Chowan Herald, March 1, 8, November 11, 1945; May 9, 16, June 6, September 5, 1946; March 17, 1949).

With the end of hostilities and the return of servicemen from around the world, Americans were free from almost two decades of economic hardship and war. Baseball was embraced on all levels, with the number of minor leagues more than tripling in the first year. The pre-war leagues in North

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 19

Carolina and Virginia returned to fill an insatiable public desire for baseball. Hicks Field once again was chosen by Binghamton as its site for spring training, the first of three successive trips by the club to Edenton. The Binghamton Sun wrote that Edenton was "steeped in tradition" and about "capacious" Hicks Field. The fifty recruits included many who played while in the military or who had minor league experience before the war, including Johnny Howard, a Twin State League veteran who had pitched on the West Coast while a marine, once limiting New York Yankee slugger Joe DiMaggio to one hit in four at-bats; and pitcher James Stasatis, who was had a record of thirty-five wins and only six losses in three years of service ball. Exhibition games were reported against teams from Norfolk and Raleigh (The Chowan Herald, February 21, 28, March 28, April 4, 11, 25, 1946).

The return of the Binghamton Triplets was only the start for a very busy season of baseball at Hicks Field during 1946. In April the local Naval Air Station team was organized into a service league including teams from installations in North Carolina and Virginia, but, for reasons unknown, this league lasted less than six weeks. The semi-pro Albemarle League was revived in May to include the Edenton "Colonials", Elizabeth City "Senators," Hertford "Indians," Colerain "Trappers," Windsor "Rebels," and Camden "Pirates." Each team was required to play county boys with the privilege of hiring three outside players. The organizational meeting for the Edenton team was attended by many "very enthusiastic" fans, with the officers and directors consisting of Marvin Wilson, L. S. Byrum, Irving Leigh, Graham Byrum, John Graham, J. P. Partin, and Earl Goodwin, local businessmen and professionals who invested their own money in the club (The Chowan Herald, April 11, May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 1946). In support of these efforts, The Chowan Herald ran the following editorial:

Let's Have Some Baseball

Plans are now well underway for the enjoyment of baseball in Edenton during the summer. Though the baseball team at the Edenton Naval Air Station has been abandoned, prospects are now bright for league baseball between Edenton, Hertford, and Elizabeth City. Many of us remember the keen rivalry which existed between these towns not so many years ago when a scheduled game amounted to practically a holiday so far as business was concerned, for large crowds of people flocked to the games, when Edenton had a good team, but not such a good diamond. Now the Edenton baseball park is second to none in this section of the State, so that there should be more pleasure witnessing games.

For the past several years little time has been given to baseball of any other sport for that matter,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 20

for because of the war, our athletes were called into service and due to war-time conditions, thoughts were directed in other directions, and even if teams were organized, it was practically impossible to get anywhere due to travel limitations.

Now that the actual fighting has terminated and most of our boys are home, baseball, as much as anything else, should tend to erase from their minds, for a time at least, many of the grim realities they have faced. It will cost some money, to be sure, to operate a baseball club, so that this brief comment is presented in the hope that whatever method is adopted to raise money, many of our people will fall in line and help those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility to provide the great national pastime.

W. Jim Daniels is president of the league, while Marvin Wilson has been chosen president of the Edenton club, and Tex Lindsay manager. This trio feels very optimistic regarding the chances for interesting baseball, and they need the backing of many more fans.

(The Chowan Herald, May 23, 1946)

The Colonials got off to a slow start, being mired in fourth place in late July. Then the Colonials caught fire and, playing before "large" and "overflowing" Hicks Field crowds estimated at 2,500 to 3,000 fans, won fifteen out of eighteen games to take over first place by the end of August. The remarkable season was capped by defeating Colerain and Windsor to win the playoff championship. The local paper was never more eloquent in its praise, declaring the season "Truly the golden era of sports" in this "historic tidewater haven" (The Chowan Herald, June 6, 13, 20, 27, July 4, 11, 18, 25, August 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, September 5, 12, 19, 1946).

Perhaps a significant part in the Colonials' march to the championship was the installation of lights at Hicks Field in late July, just when the turn-around began. The topic of lights was first broached in February, with advocates stressing that adding lights to the field which would be "a distinct asset" by providing town citizens with recreation at night, something which had been "very much lacking in Edenton for many years." The first night game at Hicks Field was an 8 to 0 thrashing of Camden on July 17 (Johnson 1993, 175; The Chowan Herald, February 28, June 13, July 4, 25, 1946). The effect of lights was felt immediately, as noted by the local editor less than two weeks after the first game:

Local interest in baseball has greatly increased since the inauguration of night games, so that despite the addition of extra bleachers, some games attract more people than can be accommodated in the grandstand

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 21

and bleachers. Most likely the largest crowd ever to witness a baseball game in Edenton turned out Saturday night for the Hertford-Edenton game. The grandstand and bleachers were packed to capacity so that many latecomers were obligated to stand or sit along the left field line (The Chowan Herald, August 1, 1946).

The Colonials were by no means the only game in town during 1946. April saw the first newspaper mention of the "Sluggers," a black team who went up against the Norfolk All Stars, Elizabeth City Fire Fighters, and Winton "Bees". In June, the Ed Bond American Legion Post entered a team in a junior baseball league with teams from Ahoskie, Roanoke Rapids, Wilson, Raleigh, and Durham. Though they lost the first five games, T. W. Jones, owner of the Albemarle (Ford) Motor Company, agreed to underwrite most of the expenses (The Chowan Herald, April 25, June 6, 13, 20, July 4, 1946). On October 4, Hicks Field was filled as never before when a crowd estimated at 4,000 to 4,500 persons saw a team of Albemarle League players lose 13-0 to a touring team of major league players. Not only were the grandstand and bleachers filled, fans lined both foul lines, sat atop the fences, and half-filled the football bleachers far out in right field. The opponents were mostly natives of the Carolinas and included players from the Pittsburgh Pirates, Washington Senators, Chicago White Sox, and New York Yankees (The Chowan Herald, September 26, October 3, 10, 1946).

Although the local high schools, white and black, had used Hicks Field in the past, the first newspaper accounts of high school games played there occurred in 1946. The Edenton High School baseball team met Elizabeth City squad in April and the football team opened its home schedule against Columbia on September 27. The "Dragonettes" of Edenton Colored High School played at least twice on Hicks Field in 1946, falling 12 to 7 to Washington High School but defeating Booker T. Washington High School of Suffolk, Virginia by the score of 13 to 7 (The Chowan Herald, April 11, September 12, October 3, 10, 1946).

The Sluggers received considerable newspaper coverage in 1947 and 1948. While the accounts make no mention of organized league play, the team put up an enviable record against teams from throughout northeastern North Carolina: the Hertford "Tigers," Murfreesboro, Plymouth All-Stars, Winton "Bees," Gatesville "Braves," Williamston "Bears," Woodville Prison Camp, and the Elizabeth City "Binghams;" and from Virginia: the Franklin "Braves," Tidewater (Portsmouth) "Tigers," Bolling Brook (Norfolk) "Badgers," Suffolk, Norfolk County (Chesapeake) "Aces," Richmond "Eagles," Deep Creek (Chesapeake) "Tigers," Lynnhaven (Virginia Beach) "Quick Steps," and the Smithfield "Aces." Of the fourteen games for which the scores were given, the Sluggers lost only once, with at least eight of the games being played at Hicks Field, including contests against big city foes Lynnhaven, Bolling Brook, and Richmond. While printed accounts of the games lack the details reported for the Colonials, the Sluggers were no doubt popular as

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 22

several games were reported to be witnessed by a "large crowd of fans" and "many fans, white and colored" (The Chowan Herald, June 12, July 3, 24, 31, August 28, 1947; June 10, July 8, September 6, 1948).

The minor league Binghamton Triplets were joined for spring training in 1947 by the Denver team from the Class A Western League. The headline attraction this year was Binghamton manager Robert "Lefty" Gomez, the former New York Yankee pitching ace and future Hall of Fame member. Both Gomez and Marty McManus, the Denver manager and former manager of the Boston Red Sox, were "well pleased" with Hicks Field, which during the winter had had its "face lifted," dugouts constructed, and additional bleachers erected. Home exhibition games were scheduled against teams from Wake Forest College, Rocky Mount, Norfolk, and Hartford (Reader's Digest 1981, 788; Meserole 1989, 335; The Chowan Herald, March 13, 27, April 3, 17, June 12, 1947; Johnson 1993, 224).

As exciting as it must have been for local baseball fans to watch potential big league stars, the Colonials were their favorites. This was admitted by the newspaper when, in reporting "no little interest" among local fans due to the "big league teams" training here, it added that this interest "will, of course, mount as the Albemarle League completes plans for opening of the local league season." The 1947 season began with an organizational meeting where it was also decided to finance the team by selling season tickets at \$13.50 for thirty home games instead of asking for donations or selling stock, with the "calibre of players to be hired" dependant upon the success of ticket sales. The 1947 team did not have to make a late season charge, leading the league from start to finish. They attracted overflow crowds all summer, with the Fourth of July night game crowd estimated at "over 3,000." Although they beat Hertford in the playoff semi-finals, the Colonials fell in the finals to Colerain. The deciding seventh game at Hicks Field was witnessed by the "largest crowd ever," with fans not only filling the grandstand, bleachers, temporary seats, football bleachers, and both foul lines, but "some even standing far out in center field on the baseball diamond itself" (The Chowan Herald, March 13, May 8, May 29, June 5, 12, 19, 26, July 3, 10, 17, 24, August 7, 14, 21, 28, September 4, 11, 1947).

Very little was written in the newspaper about Edenton's 1947 entry in the American Legion Junior League. The league was divided into three areas to reduce travel, with Edenton grouped with Elizabeth City, Ahoskie, and Roanoke Rapids. Between forty and fifty boys tried out for the teams before the end of May (The Chowan Herald, May 29, 1947).

The Binghamton Triplets made their final spring training sojourn to Hicks Field in 1948, and were joined for a shorter stay by the Class B New England League team from Manchester, New Hampshire. Games were scheduled at Hicks Field with teams from New Bern, Rocky Mount, Wilson, and Wilmington, North Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; and Williamsport and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 23

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At least two games were played to benefit the Edenton baseball club (January 1, 22, March 18, April 1, 15, 22, 29, 1948).

Changes were in store for the Colonials in 1948, as the team was incorporated because the directors felt that "baseball in this area had attained such a proportion that it should be handled by a legal body instead of a loosely organized association." Shares of stock were on sale for \$10.00 each, with a limit of ten shares per person. A new team in the league was the Plymouth "Rams," joining established clubs in Elizabeth City, Hertford, Colerain, and Windsor. The Colonials again led the standings most of the season, winning the pennant with a record of forty-six victories and twenty-four defeats, and besting Hertford and Windsor in the playoffs. In a rousing editorial titled "Hail the Champions," the newspaper gave credit not only to the players but to David Holton and L. S. Byrum for their "untiring effort" in support of baseball in Edenton. It declared that baseball "has attracted more people to Edenton than any other thing in recent years," and saluted the players as "a real group of champions. They have won the Albemarle League championship, but what should be more important, they have won the hearts of a large group of fans in Edenton and elsewhere." The baseball season in Edenton ended with a shortened post season series with the Class D minor league Suffolk "Goobers," the winners of the Virginia League pennant. While the teams played only two of the five games scheduled, it whetted Edenton's appetite for a team in the Virginia League three years hence (The Chowan Herald, May 6, 13, 20, 27, June 3, 10, July 15, 22, 29, August 19, 26, September 2, 9, 16, 1946).

In 1949 the Colonials led the standings in the six-team Albemarle League for most of the season and once again won the regular season pennant. However, they fell in the playoffs to the third-place Colerain Trappers in seven games (The Chowan Herald, April 21, 1949; The Daily Advance, June 1, 6, July 7, 26, August 23, 26, September 14, 15, 16, 1949). While the playoffs attracted capacity crowds at Hicks Field, several league teams ended the season deeply in debt. The next season turned out to be the last for the Albemarle League. While Windsor had difficulty raising the \$3,000 necessary to finance the team and Hertford failed altogether to field a team, Elizabeth City moved up to the Class D Virginia League, leaving a four-team Albemarle League composed of Edenton, Plymouth, Windsor, and Colerain. With the end of long-standing rivalries among Edenton, Elizabeth City, and Hertford, and "beseiged by the most crippling rainfall in many a summer," attendance was the worst in league history. The Windsor team folded in late July, leaving the league no choice other than ending with a playoff between Edenton and Plymouth, the top two teams, won by Edenton four games to two. Thus, the Albemarle League faded from view (The Daily Advance, April 17, June 17, July 10, 20, July 24, 25, 28, 29, 1950).

Minor league teams continued to train in Edenton until the early 1950s, except for 1949 when Edenton was bypassed. The Norfolk Tars, a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetHicks Field
Chowan County, North CarolinaSection number 8 Page 24

Class B New York Yankee farm club in the Piedmont League, trained at Hicks Field in 1950, with exhibition games played against teams such as the Greenville "Robins" of the Class D Coastal Plain League; the Amsterdam, New York "Rugmakers" of the Class C Canadian-American League, who were training in Windsor; and a team from the Norfolk Naval Air Station (The Daily Advance, April 17, 19, 24, 1950).

With the demise of the Albemarle League, Edenton fans faced 1951 with the prospect of no organized baseball. Instead, they joined the Class D Virginia League, facing stiff competition from the Petersburg "Generals," Suffolk "Goobers," Franklin "Kildeas," Emporia "Nats," and Elizabeth City "Senators." Still, the Edenton team acquitted itself well, finishing third in both the standings and in attendance before falling to Elizabeth City in the playoff semifinals in what turned out to be the league's last year of competition (Chrisman 1989, 107-111; Johnson 1993, 260, 43). Edenton's Colonials again went looking for a league in 1952, landing in the Class D Coastal Plain League consisting of teams from Kinston, Wilson, Goldsboro, Roanoke Rapids, Rocky Mount, Tarboro, and New Bern. The Colonials not only finished in third place with sixty-nine wins and fifty-five losses, but beat Wilson and Goldsboro to claim the championship. This was also the last season for the Coastal Plain League, like many other minor leagues throughout the nation during the 1950s, a casualty of a changing America and the growing popularity of television (Johnson 1993, 267, 26, 263).

Though in different forms, baseball has continued through the late twentieth century as a part of warm, humid Edenton summers. Whether played by high schools, church leagues, Legion leagues, or recreation leagues, the crack of the bat continues to reverberate throughout the town and county as eager boys and girls of all ages enjoy the only "national pastime." Hicks Field remains the primary ball field in the county, and its importance in the recreational and social life of the town remains intact, underscored by the commitment of the Edenton-Chowan Schools and the Hicks Field Restoration Commission to undertake renovations that will bring new life to the property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 9 Page 25

9. Bibliography

Butchko, Thomas R. On The Shores Of The Pasquotank, The Architectural Heritage of Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County, North Carolina. Elizabeth City, N. C.: The Museum of the Albemarle, Inc., 1989.

Butchko, Thomas R. Edenton: An Architectural Portrait, The Historic Architecture of Edenton, North Carolina. Edenton, N. C.: The Edenton Woman's Club, 1992.

The Chowan Herald. Edenton, N. C.

Chrisman, David F. The History of the Virginia League (1900-1928, 1939-1951). Bend, Oregon: Maverick Publications, 1988.

The Daily Advance. Elizabeth City, N. C.

Eastern Courier. Edenton, N. C.

Federal Works Agency. Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-42. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946.

Fisherman and Farmer. Edenton, N. C.

Grant, Edward J. "Baseball," in Encyclopedia International. New York: Grolier Incorporated, 1969.

Hicks Field Records, Record Group 69, Index to Reference Cards for WPA Projects, Microfilm Reel T935 #10, Office Project Number 665-32-2-308. Washington, D. C.: National Archives.

Hoie, Bob, "The Minor Leagues," in Thorn, John and Palmer, Pete, Total Baseball. New York: Warner Books, 1989.

Johnson, Lloyd and Wolff, Miles, eds. The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball. Durham, N. C.: Baseball America, Inc., 1993.

McCall, Marguerite Butler. "Albemarle League Baseball," unpublished paper in three parts. Edenton, N. C., 1985.

Meserole, Mike, ed. The 1990 Information Please Sports Almanac. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.

Munson, Lou Ann. Interview and materials gathered on April 18, 1995 in her City of Wilson Office of Historic Preservation.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 9 Page 26

Parramore, Thomas C, with Peter C. Stewart and Tommy L. Bogger. Norfolk: The First Four Centuries. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1994)

Reader's Digest 1981 Almanac and Yearbook. Pleasantville, N. Y.: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1981.

Sullivan, Neil J. The Minors: The Struggle and the Triumph of Baseball's Poor Relation from 1876 to the Present. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Sumner, Jim L. A History of Sports in North Carolina. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1990.

Sumner, Jim. "Minor League Baseball," in Windhausen, John, ed., Sports Encyclopedia North America, Vol. 5. Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press, 1993.

Sumner, Jim. Interview on April 18, 1995 in his office as Curator, North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame, Raleigh.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number 10 Page 27

10. Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of Hicks Field is delineated by the heavy dashed line on the accompanying 1 inch=100 feet scale Chowan County Tax Map 7805.20 labeled Exhibit B.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of Hicks Field was drawn to encompass the resources associated with baseball that are enclosed within the fence that surrounds the property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Hicks Field
Chowan County, North Carolina

Section number _____ Page 28

Photograph Identification

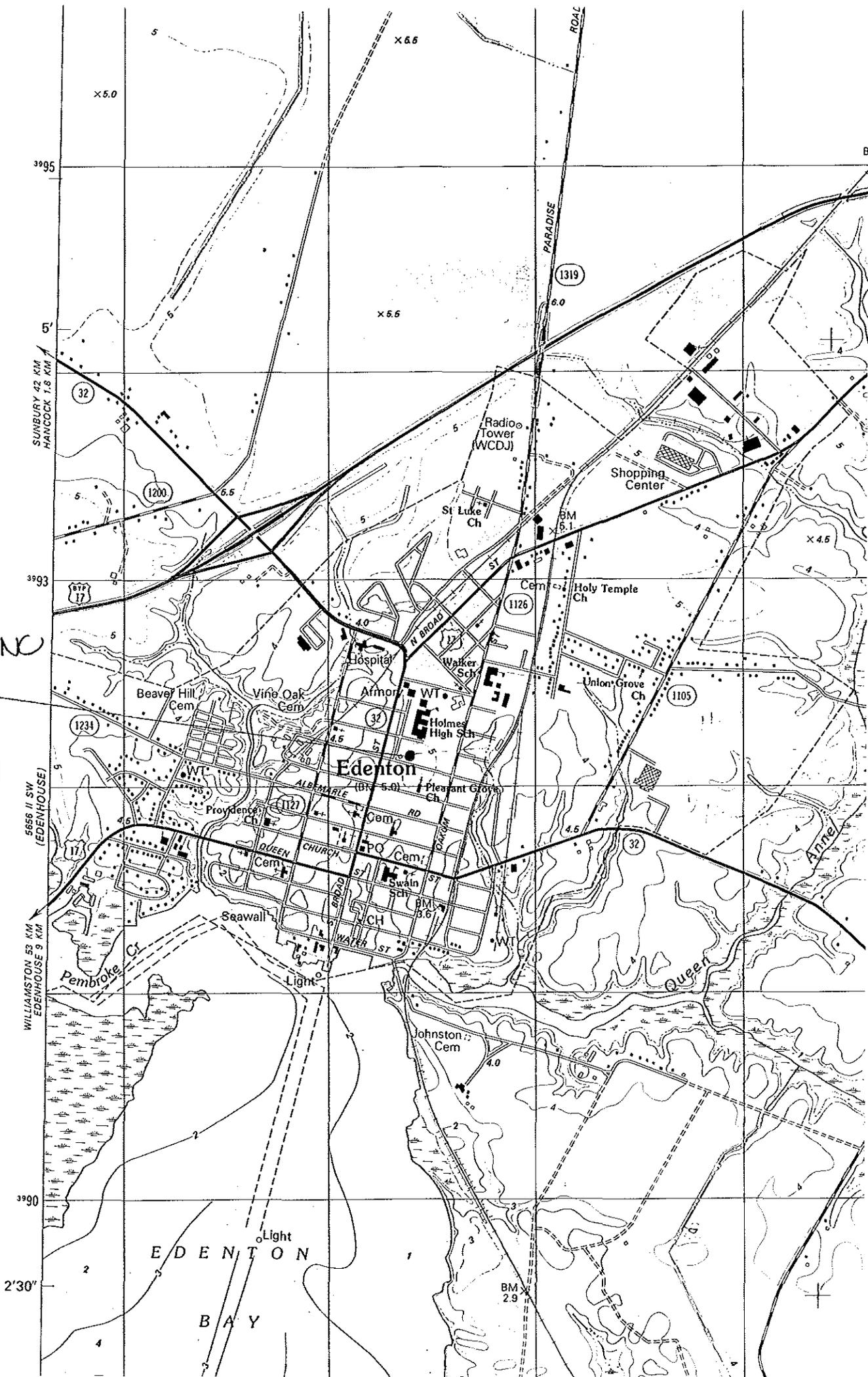
Hicks Field information applies to all photographs.

Photographer: Tom Butchko, April 12, 1995.

Original negatives at State Historic Preservation Office, Survey and Planning Branch, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

1. Standing in Right Field looking west, showing, from left, resources D (Fence), C (Dugout), F (Lights), A (Grandstand), B (Baseball Diamond and Field, G (Refreshment Stand), and C (Dugout).
2. Standing on East Freemason Street looking west, showing, from right, resources D (Fence), F (Lights), and A (Grandstand).
3. Standing on East Freemason Street near intersection with Woodard Street looking northwest, showing, from right, resources D (Fence) and A (Grandstand).
4. Standing inside fence along East Freemason Street looking northwest, showing, from left, resources D (Fence), A (Grandstand), and G (Refreshment Stand).
5. Standing in center of Grandstand (A) behind backstop looking east along First Base Line, showing, from left, resources B (Baseball Diamond and Field, F (Lights), D (Fence), and C (Dugout).
6. Standing in center of Grandstand (A) behind backstop looking north along Third Base Line, showing, from left, resources G (Refreshment Stand), D (Fence), F (Lights), C (Dugout), H (Scoreboard), E (Field House), and B (Baseball Diamond and Field). John A. Holmes High School is the brick building in the right background.
7. Standing inside Third Base Dugout (C) looking north, showing, from left, resources E (Field House), D (Fence), and B (Baseball Diamond and Field). John A. Holmes High School is the brick building in the background.
8. Standing in Left Field looking northwest, showing, from left, resources D (Fence) and E (Field House).

Hicks Field,
Chowan County, NC
Zone 18
N/3992140
E/355400
Edenton Quad



U
N
I
C

S

—

P

H

P

O

P

1

(

F

2

r

3

S

(

4

s

S

5

a

a

6

a

D

(F

bu

7

le

Fi

ba

8

re

