

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

## 1. Name

historic Philip Sowers House

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number N.E. Side SR 1162 (Boone's Cave Road)  
0.2 mi. E. of Jct w/ SR 1167 \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Churchland  vicinity of congressional district Fifth

state North Carolina code 037 county Davidson code 057

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Dr. Wade Sowers

street & number Post Office Box 406

city, town Lexington, N.C. \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state North Carolina 27292

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title \_\_\_\_\_ has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The large two-story brick dwelling located in southwest Davidson County is maintained in a good state of preservation by the grandson of the builder, Philip Sowers, who began its construction immediately before the outbreak of the Civil War and did not complete it until circa 1870.

The house is an unusual interpretation of vernacular Greek Revival architecture, built on a three-sided plan around a hexagonal center stair hall. Constructed of brick laid in 1:5 common bond with stenciled joints, the house is three bays wide on each of the three facades. Each facade resembles a normal three-bay house facade, but broken into three dimensions by the odd plan. A pedimented gable roof of standing seam tin is carried on a box cornice and is pierced at the gable ends by single-shouldered exterior brick chimneys. The fenestration consists of six-over-six sash windows set within asymmetrically molded surrounds.

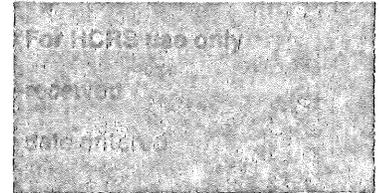
According to the present owner, the porches on each of the facades were originally identical, but the north facade is the only one that is apparently in its original form. It displays a simple, bowed one-story porch with a flat roof carried on chamfered posts. The southeast facade features a full-width one-story screened porch constructed circa 1900. The southwest facade has been altered twice with a turn-of-the-century wooden kitchen replaced in the 1950s by an unsympathetic cinder block bathroom addition. There is no porch on the southwest facade, leaving the entrance exposed and inaccessible. When the house was first constructed, the kitchen and dining room were located in the basement which has since been partially filled in.

The three entrances consist of single leaf doors with four raised panels and are flanked by sidelights. All of the entrances open into a large hexagonal stair hall flanked by three rooms on each floor. The stair is an open string with a heavy turned newel, molded rail, and turned balusters, rising in a half spiral along the south wall. All of the interior woodwork was crafted in walnut by a local woodworker, Henry Grubb, and the walls are sheathed in plaster. The execution of the woodwork indicates that the interior of the house was finished circa 1870, with simple molded baseboards, asymmetrical door and window surrounds, and four-panel doors. Five of the six wing rooms contain mantels that are post-Civil War variations on the same post-and-lintel theme. Curiously, the south room on the second floor is unfinished with bare brick walls and contains no fireplace opening. The northwest second floor room is also different with walls and ceiling sheathed in boards; however, it does display a similar mantel. The northeast room is the most completely finished room on the second floor, differing from the first floor finish only in the presence of beaded wood ceiling and plain baseboards.

To the northeast of the house are a corn crib and log barn, the only survivors of the outbuildings which supported the Sowers plantation. The crib is a one-story double pen structure sheathed in weatherboards with a gable roof of standing seam tin. The barn is an outstanding example of log construction which is of considerably older date than the house, perhaps circa 1800 or earlier. The massive logs, approximately 16 to 18 inches wide, are half-dovetailed. It is also of double-pen design with two stories, a tin gable roof, and a small pent roof on the west elevation. A 1971 photograph shows the exposed log supports for a similar pent roof on the east elevation; these supports have since been removed. Weatherboards remain in the

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the gables above the north and south walls which were protected by sheds removed by the present owner due to deterioration. Unfortunately the north wall is decaying because of the resulting exposure. Especially notable details of the interior of the barn include finely crafted strap hinges on one door and a hand-hewn log feed trough running the full width of the structure.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

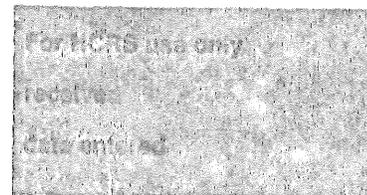
The Philip Sowers House is an unusual interpretation of late-Greek Revival domestic architecture located on a commanding site above the Yadkin River Valley in Davidson County. A unique aspect of the Sowers House is the Y-shaped triple wing design with the rooms arranged around a hexagonal stair hall. The large, two-story brick dwelling was constructed between 1860 and 1870 with later alterations, principally the addition of porches on two of the facades. The interior finish, executed in walnut, remains almost completely intact and is indicative of a post Civil War completion with simple molded baseboards, asymmetrical surrounds, and four-panel doors. Of particular note is the graceful, half-spiral staircase. In addition an outstanding log barn, probably pre-dating the house, is located on the property.

## Criteria Assessment:

- C. The Philip Sowers House is significant as an unusual interpretation of late Greek Revival architecture. Of particular interest is the Y-shaped triple wing plan around a hexagonal stair hall and the likely (but undocumented) relationship to Cooleemee nearby. The interior finish, was not completed until circa 1870, and is executed in walnut. The most outstanding interior feature is a graceful, half-spiral staircase. An older log barn stands nearby.
- D. Is likely to yield information about mid-nineteenth farm life and practices.

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In 1860 Phillip Sowers, seeking land on which to build a new home, purchased 800 acres of Yadkin River property from Robert Hargrave.<sup>1</sup> The site Sowers chose for his house had been a homestead for at least half a century judging by the apparent age of a log outbuilding, but it is not known if a dwelling was then standing. Work began on the new house late in 1860; however, the Civil War delayed construction and nearly five years passed before completion.

The identity of the architect of the unusual three sided house remains a mystery as does the name of the contractor. Henry Grubb is credited with crafting the interior woodwork, but whether or not he was involved in any other phases of construction cannot be determined. Bricks for the house and walnut for the interior came from the plantation's natural resources. Kilns for firing bricks made of Yadkin River clay were built in the bottom lands near the river. The completed product was hauled to the hill top by ox drawn wagons. Walnut was in 1860 a plentiful tree in the vast timberlands of Sowers' estate, and Grubb made it the central ingredient of his interior design. When the house was completed in 1865, it was an imposing showplace on the Davidson County landscape.

Interestingly Phillip Sowers lived in his new home only seven years before purchasing and moving into the old Alexander Long House across the river in Rowan County.<sup>2</sup> His motivations remain a mystery, but his grandson, Dr. Wade Sowers, suggests a move of convenience since the Long home stood on the coach road. For a decade after Phillip Sowers' departure, the brick home was rented to tenants.

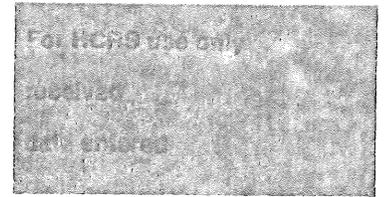
In 1883, Phillip Sowers' son, Luther Columbus (called Columbus by his father and Lum by his friends) returned to the family home with his young bride. Over the years ten children were born to the couple, including the present owner, Dr. Wade Sowers, number seven in the order of birth. All were born in the downstairs bedroom which forms one of the wings: two, however, died in infancy.

A farmer like his father Phillip, Lum Sowers specialized in watermelons but also grew large crops of corn and wheat. For his son, Dr. Sowers, "One of the happiest memories is when we took produce to market. That was an all day excursion to Salisbury or Spencer. . . Boy, those watermelons sold like hot cakes in Spencer." Though he lived in the house and farmed the land, Lum Sowers did not acquire title to the property until the death of his father in 1917. Phillip Sowers died less than a month before his ninety-third birthday. To his son Columbus he left an 800 acre tract "known as the Boone plantation," a name the land had acquired as early as 1820.<sup>3</sup>

Lum Sowers died in 1940 at the age of eighty-two. His will left his property in a life estate for his widow Fanny. After her death, everything passed to the children "share and share alike."<sup>4</sup> For about ten years the house was rented to tenants who failed to properly care for the aging structure. When Fanny Sowers died in 1951 the heirs decided to sell the estate. As one of the heirs, and one who took pride in the accomplishments of his grandfather, Dr. Wade Sowers refused to allow the old homestead to leave the family. He formulated an agreement with B. S. and P. P. Futrell who wanted the land for its abundance of timber. Sowers would grant timber

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rights in exchange for title to the house and a portion of the land. When the estate was sold at public auction on February 8, 1952, the Futrells offered the high bid of \$51,600 in the name of Denton Lumber Company. The bid was immediately assigned to Sowers, and on March 20 a formal deed was issued. Sowers owned the family home and 390 acres.<sup>5</sup>

In the mid 1950s, Dr. Sowers and his wife Lena who were then living in Lexington, decided to restore the house and make it their home. The challenge faced by the Sowers has been aptly described by M. Jewell Sink and Mary Green Matthews:

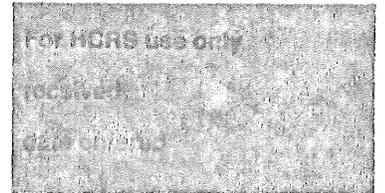
Many years of living had covered the walls and floors with soil which took countless hours of scraping, sanding, and changing. Beautiful wide heart-pine floors appeared below walnut facings around doors, and handmade paneled doors. Original furnishings were secured whenever possible, or furnishings of the time. The original "parlor," the room to the east, is refurnished with tables, chairs, and other pieces suitable. . . In the upstairs north room where the Sowers boys slept, the brick walls were never plastered over as in all other rooms, and today [1972] we may see the original baked clay bricks of 1865.

One major change from original appearance of the house is evident. As built, the ground level kitchen and dining room were located beneath the left wing, as one faces the present front. In order to enhance the rise on which the house stands, the Sowers filled in the area around the old kitchen entrance and abandoned that space within the house. The present kitchen is situated in what was once a combination sitting room and living room. Other exterior changes included the removal or alteration of two of the three identical, original semi-circular porches, and the replacement by later additions. Dr. Sower's father was responsible for the changes and the largest porch is currently used as the front of the house. Dr. Sowers assumes that his father chose to make that wing the front because it faces east.

The structures of course are closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structures. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archeological record. Therefore, archeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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<sup>1</sup>The land was bought in three tracts. Davidson County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Davidson County Courthouse, Lexington, Deed Book 17, pp. 5, 7, 8, hereinafter cited as Davidson County Deed Book.

<sup>2</sup>The purchase was made on November 17, 1872. See reference in Phillip Sowers's will, Davidson County Will Books, Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Davidson County Courthouse, Lexington, Will Book 6, p. 62, hereinafter cited as Davidson County Will Book. That he moved immediately was confirmed in a telephone interview with Dr. Wade Sowers by Jerry L. Cross, researcher, on February 22, 1980.

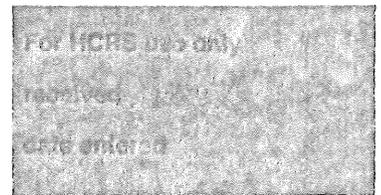
<sup>3</sup>Davidson County Will Book 6, p. 62. For reference to Boone Tract or Plantation, see deed from Pearson heirs to Phillip Sowers, copy in Phillip Sowers House File, Survey and Planning Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. The deed is dated March 3, 1820, indicating that the property was known as the Boone Tract even before that date.

<sup>4</sup>Davidson County Will Book 8, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>See Davidson County Deed Book 226, pp. 70, 72. Agreement was told to researcher by Dr. Sowers on February 22, 1980. See footnote 2.

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Bibliography

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Cross, Jerry L. Interview (telephone) with Dr. Wade Sowers, February 22, 1980.

Darken, Ed. "Sowers plantation home--and tourist attraction." Salisbury Evening Post, October 22, 1979.

Davidson County Records

Deeds

Wills

Sink, M. Jewell and Mary Green Matthews. Pathfinders Past and Present: A History of Davidson County, North Carolina. High Point: Hall Printing Co., 1972.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Philip Sowers House  
David W. Parham  
Corrected copy

Cheney, Helen. "Old House Is A Treasure --And So Are Its Memories." The Salisbury Sunday Post, June 1, 1969.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 390 acres

Quadrangle name Churchland, NC

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

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

B 

1	1	7
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5	4	9	5	1	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3	1	9	6	1	1	6	1	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

  
Zone Easting Northing

C 

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

5	4	9	5	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	1	9	6	0	2	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

D 

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

5	4	9	1	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	1	9	6	0	1	1	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

E 

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

5	4	8	2	7	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	1	9	6	0	1	1	7	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

F 

1	1	7
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5	4	7	7	5	0
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3	1	9	6	0	8	2	0
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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification The property included in this nomination is shown with red line on the attached map entitled "L.C. Sowers Estate," Boone Township, 1951. This 390 ac parcel is all that remains of the 800 acre farm purchased in 1860 by Philip Sowers. It provides not only the wealth, but the materials, which made the house possible. It is therefore closed

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries associated with the house as well as remaining in the same family for 120 years.

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Architectural description: David W. Parham, Consultant	Historical significance: Jerry L. Cross, Researcher
organization	Division of Archives and History Archaeology and Historic Preservation	date
street & number	Survey and Planning Branch 109 East Jones Street	June, 1980
city or town	Raleigh, NC	telephone (919) 733-6545
state	North Carolina	27611

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date July 25, 1980

For HCERS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	date
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	





Philip sowers house  
NE side SR 1162  
Churchland vic.  
Churchland Quadrangle

Zone 17      Scale 1:24000  
A 17 549330/3961730  
B 17 549560/3961650  
C 17 549520/3960220  
D 17 549140/3960160  
E 17 548270/3960170  
F 17 547750/3960820

