

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

EXP 12-31-84  
FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED  
DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Gray Gables

AND/OR COMMON

James S. Mitchell House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Winton

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

North Carolina

N/A VICINITY OF

CODE

037

COUNTY

Hertford

CODE

091

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED during Summer	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<b>N/A</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Miss Elsie W. Jordan and Thelma C. and Mary E. Mitchell Miller

STREET & NUMBER

184 Hamilton Road 6923 16th Ave. North

CITY, TOWN

Chapel Hill, NC 27514 VICINITY OF

St. Petersburg, Florida

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hertford County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Winton

STATE

North Carolina

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

N/A

Determined eligible: No

DATE

N/A

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

One of a few surviving late-nineteenth century structures in Winton, Gray Gables stands as a focal point in this eastern North Carolina town. The stylish Queen Anne structure with its irregular massing and shingled tower, is traditionally thought to have been designed by Samuel Sloan, architect of the North Carolina Governor's Mansion. Because Winton was burned during the Civil War, this house is one of the oldest in the town, dating from the period of post-war affluence.

Gray Gables is a three-story frame structure with a tower on its northwest corner. The tower is shingled on its third story; pendant brackets support the roof of the eight-sided conical tower. A porch with turned posts and carved brackets wraps around the house on three sides. The railing is supported by turned balusters, and a delicate spindle frieze carries across the top of the porch. A once-open porch on the second story was enclosed years ago to create a sun room; a shingled dormer is located directly above it. The fenestration is irregular, with windows placed on the first and second levels of the tower and also projecting bays on the south side of the house. Interior chimneys pierce the steeply pitched gable roof.

The house is entered through double doors with etched glass windows surrounded by a transom and sidelights. The main portion of the house consists of a center hall with two rooms on each side. A carved spindle screen carried on turned posts divides the hall, which has a paneled wainscot. The stair, located to the center left of the hall, is anchored by a square post with carved medallions topped by a tulip-shaped newel. The same newel posts occur on the landings on a smaller scale. The balustrade carries on turned balusters. A stained glass window is located at the top of the first landing.

The front rooms have plaster medallions, although the medallion in the southern room has been covered by a drop ceiling. The windows in these rooms, like those throughout the house, are two-over-two with molded surrounds; all doors consist of four panels.

The mantel shelf in the sitting room across the hall is supported by reeded Ionic colonettes. The egg and dart motif occurs along the shelf edge, and a simple decorative carving is found below. A bay projects off this room and the one behind it. Originally the "wash room" where the dry sink was kept, the tall windows which form the bay made this area impractical for the bathroom when plumbing was added. Those facilities were added to the back of the house.

Located behind the sitting room is a bedroom. The mantel is a plain post and lintel with simple brackets supporting the shelf.

The dining room, located on the northeast corner of the main section, features a molded chair rail above a wainscot of thin paneling. The mantel is of dark stained wood with a simple carved motif. The shelf is supported by slender turned colonettes.

The upstairs rooms all contain simple post and lintel mantels with plain brackets. The entrance opening onto the sun porch is identical to the main entrance below. The stair leading to the third floor is also identical to the one between the first and second floors, except the newel posts are smaller.

The bathrooms were added onto the back of the house in the first half of this century, as was the kitchen. All additions are unobtrusive.

# 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 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

N/A

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

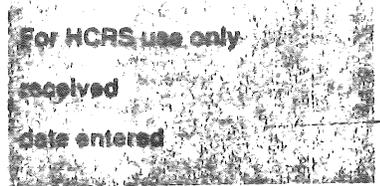
Gray Gables, built in 1899, is the best example of Queen Anne architecture surviving in Winton and one of a few fine buildings of this era in the county. Its original builder, James Saunders Mitchell, II, was a locally prominent planter and politician who served as sheriff for a number of years. Although undocumented, family tradition maintains that the stylish structure, with its three-story tower, irregular massing, and beautiful woodwork, was designed by Samuel Sloan, architect of the North Carolina Governor's mansion.

## Criteria Assessment:

- B. Associated with James Saunders Mitchell, II, locally prominent planter and politician.
- C. Embodies characteristics of high style Queen Anne architecture, one of a few such examples in the county.

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Around 1899 James Saunders Mitchell, II, built a house in the town of Winton, Hertford County.<sup>1</sup> The structure has since become known as Gray Gables by the Mitchell descendants and as the "castle" by some local residents. It is noteworthy for its Queen Anne architectural design which, according to local tradition, is the work of Samuel Sloan who planned the governor's mansion in Raleigh and other well known buildings in the state. Gray Gables is also indicative of the type of houses built by the wealthy as well as socially and politically prominent North Carolina families in the late nineteenth century.

James Saunders Mitchell, II, was born at a family plantation near Ahoskie in 1847. His father was William Watson Mitchell, a prosperous and influential planter.<sup>2</sup> The elder Mitchell owned an estate valued at around \$45,000 by the Federal census in 1860. He also possessed eighteen slaves in that year.<sup>3</sup> Active in local government, he served as chairman of the county court from 1861 to 1866 and as one of the leading county justices for over twenty-five years. He was also a founder of Chowan Baptist Female Institute (later Chowan College) and has been called by one local historian, "the patriarch of the county." (His plantation house is on the National Register of Historic Places.)<sup>4</sup>

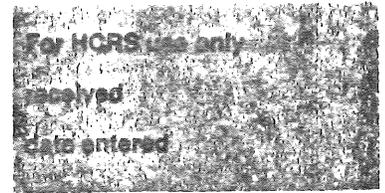
The mother of James Saunders Mitchell, II, was Mary Elizabeth Winnifred Mitchell, the daughter of James Saunders Mitchell, I, who was a member of the state senate in 1842. Her son received his early education on the family plantation at Ahoskie.<sup>5</sup> After the outbreak of the Civil War he joined the Confederate Army at age sixteen. He served until after Appomattox and then attended Wake Forest College. He graduated in 1872, second in his class.

Returning to Hertford County he eventually became a retail grocer. In the 1880 census he is listed as a grocer living with one J. R. Turner, a retail merchant, in Winton.<sup>7</sup> Mitchell became a businessman when a mercantile business was a relatively profitable venture for those who had capital to invest in Hertford County in the aftermath of the Civil War. Even before the war Winton had been an important commercial center for providing goods and services to planters and farmers in the countryside. Vessels traveled up the Chowan River to the small town to discharge their cargoes from ports like Norfolk, Virginia, to be sold by local merchants to planters like William W. Mitchell who were involved in the large-scale cotton economy of Hertford County. After the war, however, much of that economy was wrecked by financial stringency and the abolition of slavery. As a result the farm tenant and crop-lien system grew to dominate the agricultural life of the area. Under that system small town merchants such as James Saunders Mitchell, II, provided supplies on credit to tenant farmers and share croppers sometimes in return for a lien on their crops.<sup>8</sup> In addition to his grocery business, Mitchell also had farming and land interests in the county and eventually would inherit a significant part of his father's estate including a cotton mill in Harrelsville township.<sup>9</sup>

In 1884 Mitchell entered local politics and was elected county sheriff as a Democrat. The following year he married seventeen year old Hattie V. Owen.<sup>10</sup> By 1899 their house in Winton was under construction. For the new structure, he ordered much of the bracket, moulding, and trim work from Winbourne and Rea, manufacturers of building materials in Edenton. Some of the construction items had to be imported via Norfolk, and Mitchell apparently selected the materials with considerable care. In October, 1899, for example,

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the manufacturer wrote to him: "We are sorry the newill [sic] did not suit you. However we will try and get one to suit you if possible. In regards to the eve brackets they were shipped with the porch columns and stain work. . . ."11 Difficulties occurred in the construction of the house when the contractor carried away the plans believed to have been prepared by Samuel Sloan. Nevertheless, the structure was near enough completed for workmen to finish the job. When Gray Gables was completed, it fast became a landmark typifying the grandeur of the houses constructed by the old planter families who retained or resurrected their fortunes in the aftermath of the Civil War. County residents also considered it a proper edifice for one of their local social and political leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Mitchell served as sheriff almost continuously until the turn of the century. But like a number of disaffected Democrats in the state, he abandoned the Democratic camp and joined the Populist Party in 1894. In that year's state elections the Populists fused with the Republicans and gained control of the state and some local governments.<sup>13</sup> As a Populist Mitchell evidently professed sympathy for workers, farmers, and small businessmen as well as some opposition to corporate wealth like the railroads. "Oh," he lamented in a letter to Populist leader Marion Butler in 1898, "the power, the power of the Rail Roads in this world. . . ." In 1900 he ran for the state legislature but was defeated by Lloyd D. Lawrence when the Democrats regained control of state government in the "white supremacy" campaign of the year.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to managing his business and investments, James Saunders Mitchell, II, and his family lived in the Winton house until he died intestate in 1918. His widow and children lived on there for a time after his death, and various other family members have held title to Gray Gables. It is presently owned jointly by Elsie Winnifred Jordan, Thelma Cole Miller, and Mary Elizabeth Mitchell Miller.<sup>15</sup>

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

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Invoices of Building Materials from Winborne and Rea, Manufacturers of Building Materials, Edenton, North Carolina, September-December, 1899. Copies of invoices are in James S. Mitchell House file, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Winborne and Rea invoices.

<sup>2</sup>John R. Jordan, Jr., "Biographical Data on James Saunders Mitchell, Builder of Mitchell House, Winton, N.C.," an unpublished manuscript in James S. Mitchell House file, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1, 3, hereinafter cited as Jordan, "Biographical Data on James Saunders Mitchell."

<sup>3</sup>Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Hertford County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 32; Slave Schedule, 145.

<sup>4</sup>Benjamin B. Winborne, The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, North Carolina (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1976), 236-237.

<sup>5</sup>Jordan, "Biographical Data on James Saunders Mitchell," 1; John L. Cheney, Jr. (ed.), North Carolina Government, 1585-1974: A Statistical History (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, 1975), 311.

<sup>6</sup>J. Ray Parker and others, The Ahoskie Era of Hertford County (Ahoskie: Parker Brothers, Inc., 1939), 198; George Washington Paschal, History of Wake Forest College (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1943), II, 11.

<sup>7</sup>Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Hertford County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 440, hereinafter cited as Hertford County Census, 1880.

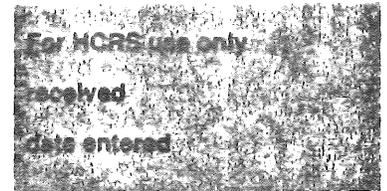
<sup>8</sup>Bill Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina (Raleigh: Sharpe Publishing Company, 1958), II, 866, 871; Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 522-525.

<sup>9</sup>Hertford County Census, 1880, Agricultural Schedule, Winton Township, 2; Hertford County Deed Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, passim; Hertford County Will Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, Will Book C, 534.

<sup>10</sup>Winborne, The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, 262; Hertford County Marriage Register, December 29, 1885 (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>11</sup>Winborne and Rea invoice, October 24, 1899.

<sup>12</sup>Jordan, "Biographical Data on James S. Mitchell," 3.

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<sup>13</sup> Winborne, The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, 278; "Simeon Alexander Delop, "The Populist Party in North Carolina," Trinity College Historical Papers, Series 14 (Durham: Trinity College Historical Society, 1919), 56-57.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver H. Orr, Jr., Charles Brantley Aycock (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 136; Winborne, The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, 287.

<sup>15</sup> John R. Jordan, attorney, "Chain of Title to Gray Gables," a copy of the chain of title is in the James S. Mitchell House file, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

Quad name: Winton, NC

Scale: 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

	Latitude	Longitude			
A	118   3   6   2   3   2   6	7   6   5   5   5   9	B		
	ZONE EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE EASTING	NORTHING
C			D		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property included in this nomination is the less than one acre residential lot and house located at the northeast corner of Main and Wynn streets.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A		N/A	
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE JoAnn Williford, Survey Specialist  
Joe Mobley, Researcher

ORGANIZATION Survey and Planning Branch DATE April 9, 1981  
Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section

STREET & NUMBER North Carolina Division of Archives and History TELEPHONE (919) 733-6545  
109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*William S. Price*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE April 14, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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\_\_\_\_\_. "Chain of Title to Gray Gables," James S. Mitchell House file, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

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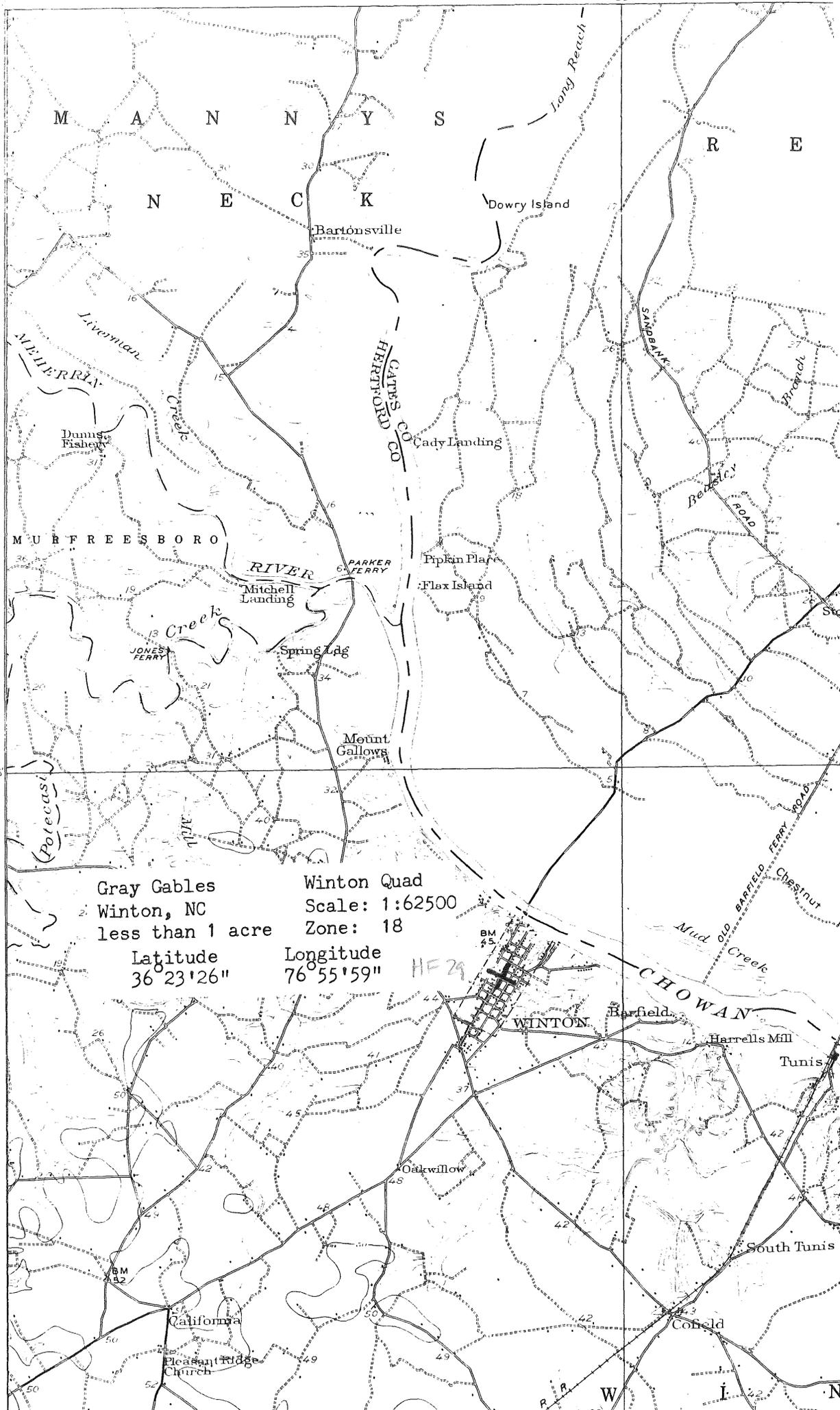
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M A N N Y S  
N E C K

Dowry Island

Bartonsville

MELHERRIN  
Linnon

Dunns  
Fishery

GATES CO  
HERNFORD

Cady Landing

MURFREESBORO

RIVER

PARKER  
FERRY

Pipkin Place

Mitchell  
Landing

Flax Island

Creek  
JONES  
FERRY

Spring Ldg

Mount  
Gallows

25

Gray Gables  
Winton, NC  
less than 1 acre

Winton Quad  
Scale: 1:62500  
Zone: 18

Latitude  
36 23'26"

Longitude  
76 55'59"

HF 29

CHOWAN

WINTON

Harfield

Harrells Mill

Tunis

Oakwillow

South Tunis

BM  
432

California

Elegant Ridge  
Church

Confield

W

N

