

State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

Iredell COUNTY

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

\_\_\_\_\_ QUAD

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR \_\_\_\_\_ THEMATIC NOMINATION

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Welch-Nicholson House and Mill Site  
AND/OR COMMON \_\_\_\_\_

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN \_\_\_\_\_

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_

Houstonville

VICINITY OF \_\_\_\_\_

9th

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

NC

CODE \_\_\_\_\_

037

COUNTY \_\_\_\_\_

Iredell

CODE \_\_\_\_\_

097

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER <u>Storage</u>

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME (House) Mr. Johnny Dickerson (Mill Site) Mr. Michael Miller

STREET & NUMBER Post Office Box 175 2515 Spring Garden  
Greensboro, NC 27403

CITY, TOWN Hamptonville, NC 27020 VICINITY OF \_\_\_\_\_ STATE North Carolina

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Iredell County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, TOWN Statesville STATE NC

**6 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE Laura A. W. Phillips

ORGANIZATION \_\_\_\_\_

DATE Feb. 4, 1980

STREET & NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CITY OR TOWN \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" 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

The Welch-Nicholson House, located just south of Yadkin County on a steep rise overlooking Hunting Creek, is visually shielded from the road by timberland, which surrounds the farmstead and helps to preserve its rural feeling and its principal ties with the creek.

The frame house, a typical Piedmont dwelling, two stories tall and one room deep has a sheo porch across the front and shed rooms across the rear. It exhibits one of the most significant collections of details representing the transitional Georgian/Federal style in the county. Apparently built shortly after Samuel Welch acquired the property in 1791, the house has been little touched, saved by neglect, since it was partly remodeled ca. 1830, probably by James Nicholson.

Interesting interior features of this center hall plan house include two staircases. Physical evidence suggests that one of these no longer present and perhaps removed by Nicholson, led from the right-hand room to the room above only, while the semi-closed stair from the left hand room leads to the rest of the second floor and attic.

Throughout the house are traces of the painter and glazier's art. Bright primary colors subdued by two centuries of wear flicker from unworn corners. Marbled walls and ceilings, set off by jet black baseboards and chairrails (sometimes real, sometimes trompe l'oeil), set the stage for panel-moulded wainscot partitions. Raised panel doors in two-tone red and white are hung on original wrought iron hinges and closed with original locks and brasses.

The fine mantel in the left-hand room is transitional Georgian/Federal in style with its plain corner stiles, frieze with two raised panels enclosed by a stop-fluted pilaster treatment on either side, and deeply molded five-tier shelf blocked outward at each corner. The Georgian fireplace in the room above is no less spectacular in its own way. The segmental-arched firebox is painted white, while the molded, shelfless surround with its gouged and drilled center band is painted blue. This imposing composition is set against a marbled wall with black wainscot below the window-high chairrail.

If these details, along with the Flemish bond double shoulder chimney (the other now gone) and circular openings in the upper gables, did not provide adequate clues, the front porch with its boldly chamfered posts (with cyma-curved lambs tongues), flush sheathing showing traces of white paint, white nine-over-six sash with blue paneled shutters, and the red door with its brass knob and escutcheon and white surrounds to the six raised panels would surely reveal that this was no mean house.

This richness of detail is available wherever one looks, and includes even the long cut in the hillside - to allow level access to the basement - which is paved and lined with stone walls, as well as the outbuildings which straddle the dirt lane leading to the house. The two-story frame barn with straight-sawn flush sheathing is well-built and commodious. Its central post is so boldly chamfered as to rival the details of the house, as do its strap hinges which end in onion finials. The log corn crib has joints which are dovetailed, while the mortice and tenoned shed now housing the tractor has a fully boxed eave.

The Welch-Nicholson House, along with its outbuildings, is truly an architectural gem. Unfortunately the house, which is now vacant and used for storage purposes, has become rather delapidated due largely to neglect and the forces of nature. Half of the house is suffering with a century-old wood shingle roof, and the tin has blown away from parts

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date entered

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of the other roof half. The house is still restorable, however, and is well worth stabilization and preservation efforts.

Across SR 1828 and a short distance down Hunting Creek are the remains of the Welch-Nicholson Mill and dam. The mill burned in 1968, but beautiful dry-laid stone wall foundations and some machinery remain. Just upstream are the remains of the impressive stone-filled log crib dam with fieldstone abutments at either bank. Along the south side of the dirt road leading to the mill site are two frame buildings which may relate to later stages of the mill. The westernmost of the two structures is now covered with sheet metal. The other has dry-laid stone foundation piers, weatherboard siding, a flush sheathed interior and some mill equipment in evidence.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL

~~\_\_\_\_\_ STATE~~

\_\_\_\_\_ LOCAL

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Welch-Nicholson House is an important and unaltered example of early domestic architecture in the Piedmont; the woodwork is especially significant for its completeness and the retention of original paint of varied and skillfully applied design. The richness of the transitional Georgian-Federal detailing is enhanced by its complete survival and the colorful paint, trompe l'oeil, and marbled finish. In addition, there are significant outbuildings including a two-story frame barn, shed, and others, and the remains of a related mill and dam. The complex is one of the most complete of its kind in the region, and the house itself among the most important in its type and period in the state.

## Criteria Assessment:

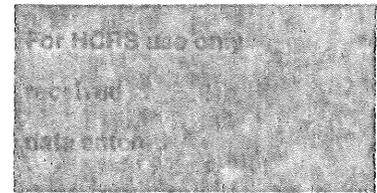
- A. Associated with late eighteenth and/or early nineteenth century agrarian economy of rural Iredell County, and with the milling business so important to that economy.

## CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- C. Embodies in unaltered form important aspects of form, craftsmanship, and painting seen in excellent and colorful form here in the Welch-Nicholson House.

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The house and mill, later taking their names from James Nicholson, appear to have been built by Samuel Welch in the mid 1790s. Welch had purchased 450 acres on the north fork of Hunting Creek on May 3, 1790. The cost of purchase was approximately \$2.00 an acre, suggesting that the land was then unimproved. Furthermore, the grantor, Thomas Cowan, resided in Rowan County which also supports the belief that no mill or house existed at the time Welch acquired the property.<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that Welch's mill was among the thirty-five listed in Iredell County in 1800.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the early mills were gristmills, although eleven also contained sawmills.<sup>3</sup> Some years later James Nicholson referred to his grist and sawmill, but it is unclear whether Welch operated a lumber business along with his gristmill in the early years of the nineteenth century. Welch apparently built a new dwelling house shortly after purchasing the Hunting Creek property and resided there for about twenty years, more or less.<sup>4</sup> While Samuel Welch appears to have been a substantial landowner and successful mill operator, there is no documentary evidence to suggest that he achieved major significance beyond the local level.

By 1816 Welch apparently had decided to leave Iredell County. On November 11, he sold the house and mill tract to Robert Simonton for \$3,700.<sup>5</sup> Simonton was a wealthy planter and a leading citizen of the county who lived near Statesville.<sup>6</sup> The records failed to show what happened on the property during his ownership. He may have leased it to tenants or allowed members of his family to have use of the house and mill, for Simonton was known to employ both techniques in the management of extensive landholdings.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, however, he transferred the tract to James Nicholson, whose family owned and occupied the house and mill for nearly three-quarters of the century.<sup>8</sup>

Nicholson had moved into his Hunting Creek home by 1830, and architectural analysis indicates that he partially renovated the structure.<sup>9</sup> Among the outbuildings associated with the dwelling house was a barn which Nicholson considered especially significant. A clause in his will, unusual for the time, bequeathed to his wife, Mary, one fourth of land "also the dwelling house and barn there, . . ." The barn now standing near the house is possibly the one referred to in Nicholson's will. A sawmill was included in the will also: ". . . and likewise bequeath to her (his wife) one fourth of the profits arising from the Grist and saw mill."<sup>10</sup>

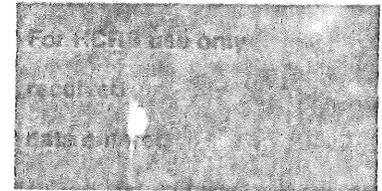
Little else was uncovered about James Nicholson. Local tradition maintains that he was a wheelwright from Stokes County who constructed other mills in Iredell.<sup>11</sup> The census records from 1830 to 1850, however, show another James Nicholson residing in Stokes County during the same years a James Nicholson lived on Hunting Creek in Iredell County. Between 1830 and 1850, there were at least four James Nicholsons in the region.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, one cannot conclude without research that the wheelwright from Stokes County was the same James Nicholson of Hunting Creek.

James Nicholson of Iredell County died in 1852, leaving his wife, Mary, a life estate in one-fourth of his property. The remaining three fourths were divided between his sons Thomas A. and John M. Nicholson. Following her death in 1867, Mary's interest reverted to her sons.<sup>13</sup>

John M. Nicholson moved to Yadkin County while Thomas A. remained in the homeplace.

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Eventually Thomas reconsolidated most of his father's estate along Hunting Creek, amounting to more than 400 acres.<sup>14</sup> Apparently few alterations were made to the dwelling house, but significant changes took place at the millsite. Nicholson erected a miller's house and a boarding house along the old road leading to the mill.<sup>15</sup> The latter appears to have housed travelers on the Jonesville Road, clients bringing raw products to the mill for manufacture, and mill employees. The two frame structures close to the site may well be the remains of these structures. For over a quarter of a century, Nicholson's Mills housed the local post office, being finally replaced by the advent of rural free delivery.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas A. Nicholson encountered financial reverses in the late nineteenth century. He tried to protect his property by transferring title to his wife, Rebecca, but the effort was futile. One of the creditors, John Anderson, brought suit against Nicholson for outstanding debts. A special proceeding of the Superior Court directed that part of Nicholson's property be sold at public auction.<sup>17</sup> The court decision in early 1886 split the home tract and the mill tract into separate units.

On April 5, 1886, the eighty-five acre mill tract was put up for bids in accordance with the court proceeding. John Anderson became high bidder at \$3,300.<sup>18</sup> Anderson continued the mill operation, though the facility was known as Nicholson's Mill until the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1902 the mill complex returned to the Nicholson family by way of J. A. Barnard who had married Anna Nicholson, Thomas A.'s daughter. Barnard purchased "all of the Nicholson Mill place . . . including the boarding house lot, miller's lot, saw mill lot, and the original tract of the Nicholson mill place . . . continuing 20 acres."<sup>19</sup> For most of the century, until it burned in 1968, the site was known as Barnard's Mill, even though it passed out of the family some years ago. The millsite is now owned by Michael Miller of Greensboro.<sup>20</sup>

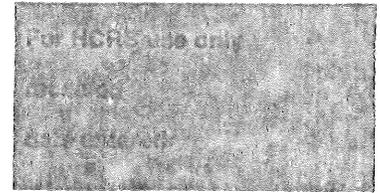
Although J. A. Barnard lived near the mill, he did not live in the Nicholson House. Rebecca Nicholson lived there until her death in 1903, after which the heirs petitioned the court for a sale of the estate and division of the proceeds. The land was sold on December 7, 1903, to W. T. Nicholson for \$920.63. Five months later, W. T. Nicholson sold his grandfather's house and 131 acres to J. W. Reavis for only \$650.<sup>21</sup>

Reavis owned adjoining property and it is not clear whether or not he lived in the Nicholson House. He may have rented it to tenants or reserved it for his children. The house remained in the Reavis family for thirty-five years. After the death of J. W. Reavis in 1939, the house and 119 acres were sold to A. F. and Bertie Dickerson. It has since remained in the family with Johnny L. and Carol Dickerson of Yadkin County being the current owners.<sup>22</sup>

The house has remained vacant for some years now, being used primarily for storage. It has deteriorated badly and unless stabilization action is taken relatively soon, the house will crumble under the pressures of nature. Local preservationists seek a means of saving the house. The mill burned in 1968, leaving only some stonework, dam fragments, and remnants of structures associated with the milling complex.

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<sup>1</sup> Iredell County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Iredell County Courthouse, Statesville, Deed Book C, 264, hereinafter cited as Iredell County Deed Book.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Iredell County Tax List, 1800, quoted in Homer M. Kever, Iredell: Piedmont County (Statesville: Iredell County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 147, hereinafter cited as Kever, Iredell County.

<sup>3</sup> Kever, Iredell County, 147.

<sup>4</sup> An architectural description of the house suggested a building date between 1790 and 1810. Welch was residing there by 1800, thus the approximate residency dates. See notes from Laura A. W. Phillips in Nicholson House File, Survey and Planning Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Nicholson House File. See also Second Census of the United States, 1800: North Carolina - Iredell County, Population Schedule, 619. Census records hereinafter cited by number, date, and page.

<sup>5</sup> Iredell County Deed Book M, 256.

<sup>6</sup> See Iredell County Records, Estates Papers, State Archives, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Robert Simonton Estate Papers: Iredell County Will Books, Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Iredell County Courthouse, Statesville, Will Book 2, p. 19, hereinafter cited as Iredell County Will Book; and Kever, Iredell County, 36, 42, 100.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Simonton Estate Papers; and Simonton's will, Will Book 2, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Iredell County Deed Book Z, 452; and Book 31, p. 287.

<sup>9</sup> See description in Nicholson House File.

<sup>10</sup> For unstated reasons, Nicholson's will was recorded in Iredell County Deed Book Y, 669.

<sup>11</sup> Kever, Iredell County, 150, 154.

<sup>12</sup> Fifth-Seventh Census, 1830-1850, indexes.

<sup>13</sup> Iredell County Deed Book Y, 669 (see fn. 10); and Book 3, p. 490

<sup>14</sup> Iredell County Deed Book 4, p. 837. See also Book 31, p. 287.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholson House File; and description of property in Iredell County Deed Book 12, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> Kever, Iredell County, 287.

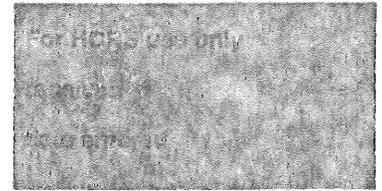
<sup>17</sup> Iredell County Deed Book 9, p. 326; and Book 12, p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> Iredell County Deed Book 12, p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> Kever, Iredell County, 154; Book 30, p. 173; and Book 28, p. 456.

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<sup>20</sup> Keever, Iredell County, 154; and Nicholson House File. See also Map of Iredell County, North Carolina, 1917.

<sup>21</sup> Iredell County Deed Book 30, p. 173; and Book 31, p. 287.

<sup>22</sup> Iredell County Deed Book 135, p. 123; and Nicholson House File.

See Continuation Sheet Item #8.

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Evans, Virginia Fraser, comp. Iredell County Landmarks: A Pictorial History of Iredell County. Statesville: The Iredell County American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1976.

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 15 1/3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

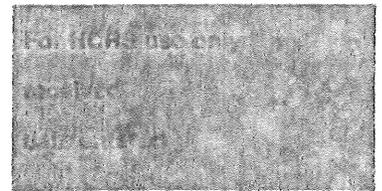
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	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			
C	1,7	5,2,0	5,0,0	3,9	8,9	3,1,5	D	1,7	5,2,0	9,6,0	3,9	8,9	3,1,5

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Portions of Tracts 2 and 21, Block A, Map 17N, Eagle Mills Township, as outlined in red on map. The property being nominated includes the house with its outbuildings and the mill site with its dam remains, along with enough woodland surrounding to help ensure the site integrity of this historic property.

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Bibliography

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Iredell County Records

Deeds

Estates Papers

Superior Court Records: Special Proceedings

Wills

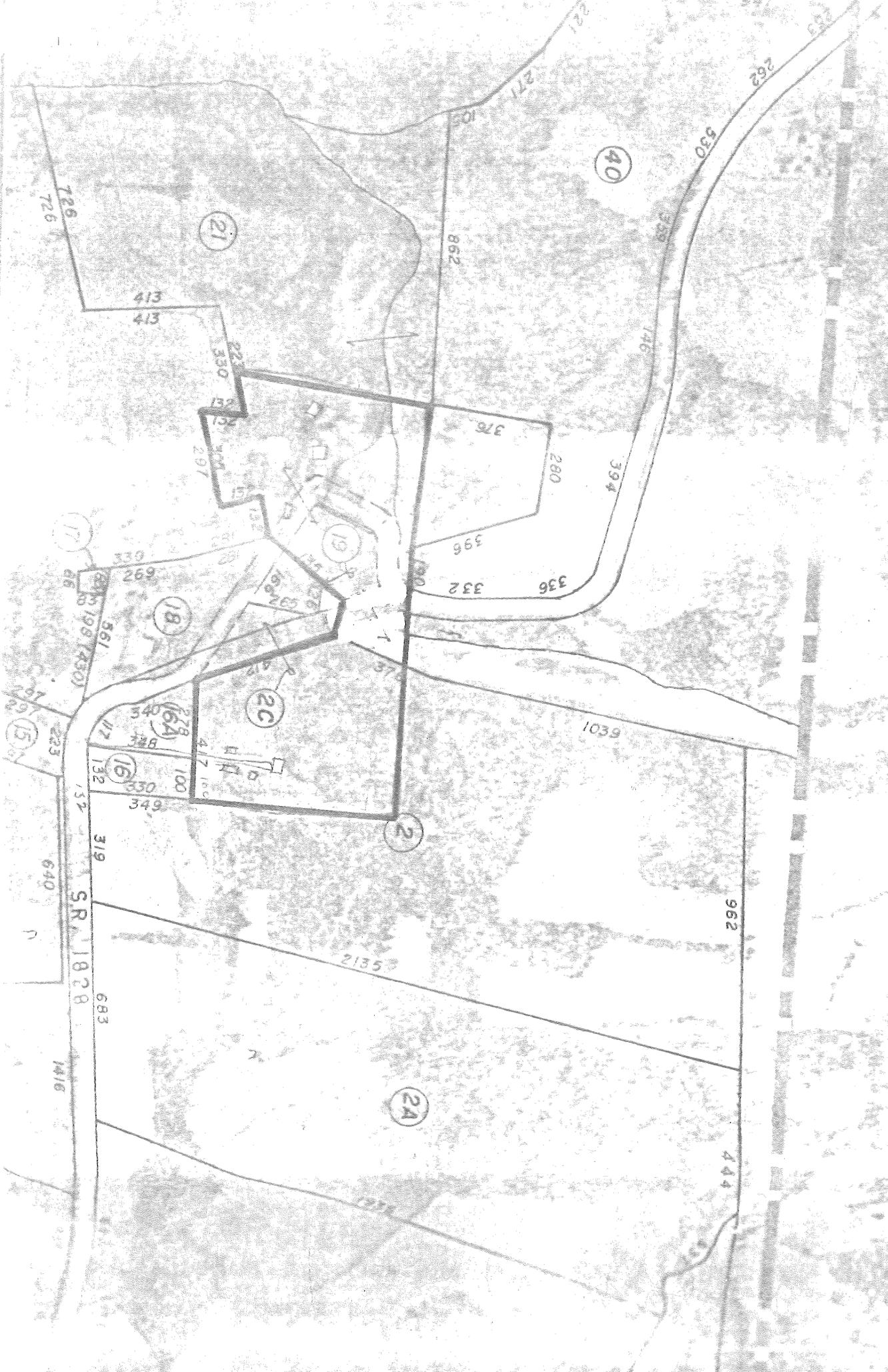
Keever, Homer M. Iredell: Piedmont County. Statesville: The Iredell County  
Bicentennial Commission, 1976.

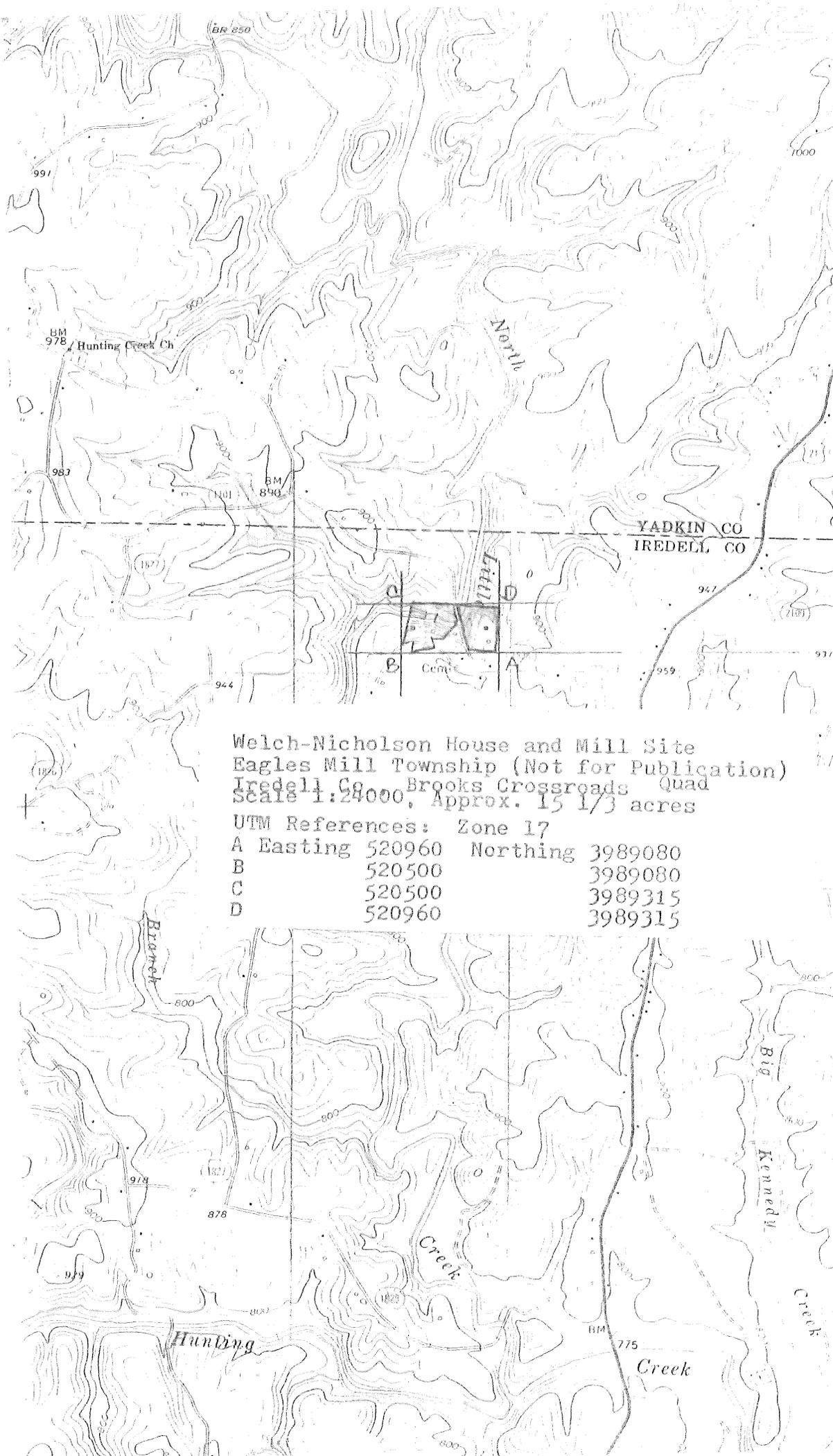
Map of Iredell County, North Carolina, 1917. State Archives, Raleigh.

Nicholson House File. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

United States Census Records, 1830-1850.

YADKIN COUNTY





3991  
3990  
3989  
3988  
3987  
3986

#1  
WELCH-NICHOLSON  
HOUSE &  
MILL SITE

Welch-Nicholson House and Mill Site  
Eagles Mill Township (Not for Publication)  
Iredell Co. Brooks Crossroads Quad  
Scale 1:24000, Approx. 15 1/3 acres

UTM References: Zone 17

A	Easting 520960	Northing 3989080
B	520500	3989080
C	520500	3989315
D	520960	3989315

2'30"

40  
ID

