

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Brabson, Dr. Alexander C., House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number west side SR 1113, .6mi S jct with SR 1115 not for publication
city, town Otto vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Macon code 113 zip code 28763

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	<u>3</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	<u>1</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	objects
			<u>5</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

William S. Pugh 7-23-90
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

Function or Use	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Functions (enter categories from instructions) Domestic: single dwelling	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions) Domestic: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Materials (enter categories from instructions)
Other: 19th and 20th century plain traditional and vernacular	foundation stone walls weatherboard roof tin other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Dr. Alexander C. Brabson House, Otto vicinity, Macon County, NC, is situated in pasture land which gently descends toward the house from the Old Georgia Road, today known as State Road #1118. A gravel drive curves around the south edge of the pasture to the tool house and grain crib, coming to an end at the house yard, which is surrounded by a wire fence and contains the house, foundations for a well house and a root cellar, non-contributing sites, and a number of tall deciduous trees. The house, with its yard and tree protection, sits alone in the pasture, facing up the slope toward the old road. To the southwest of the house and yard is a poured concrete silo and the foundations of a barn. To the south and west beyond the house and pasture, woodlands roll toward the Soco Ridge and the Nantahala National Forest, obscuring vacation homes and building lots of the Otto vicinity which completely ring the property. In the distance, Albert Mountain rises to 5260 feet. Behind the house is the Cowetta Creek, hidden from view by a thicket and woodlands, and west of the creek SR 1115 crosses the property. The state roads and modern wellings are not visible from the Brabson House; looking in any direction from the homestead one sees the vista of the 1330s.

The Brabson House, two stories and attic with a one-story ell in the rear, was built in 1884 of frame with a weatherboard exterior. The roof is side-gabled and there are two brick chimneys, one in the center of the main block and one in the center of the rear ell. Across the main facade is an attached porch with shed roof, plain posts and railing with slender, widely spaced square columns. About 1906, this porch replaced a smaller, hip-roofed porch which covered only the entrance door and flanking windows. The entrance door is centered in the three-bay facade and features a handsome, double-leaf pine door with one-over-one flat panels in each leaf. Surrounding the door and extending to the outer edges of the flanking windows is horizontal tongue and groove sheathing marking the original porch wall. With the exception of a small, single window on the upper rear elevation, all of the windows are six-over-six double-hung sashes. The narrower windows on the main elevation and upper gable ends are original, while most of the others are slightly larger, fairly early placements. The foundation of the main block and of the ell is composed of one piers with concrete block infill.

The one-story ell stretches west from the main block. Its south elevation, which is sheltered by an engaged shed roofed porch, is covered in tongue and groove sheathing; the remaining elevations are weatherboard. The central brick chimney, with slightly corbelled stack, is a recent reconstruction. The ell was originally a detached kitchen attached to the house by a breezeway which

See continuation sheet

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Dr. Alexander C. Brabson House, Otto vicinity, Macon County

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was enclosed about 1906. Within a few feet of the edge of the porch are the foundations of a well house and a root cellar, made of stone and brick, and sheathed in concrete. Roofs of main block and ell are standing seam tin, replacing the original wood shingles. A shed addition, added to the main block about 1950, accommodates a bath.

The double leaf entrance door opens to a small, four-sided vestibule leading to a parlor on the left and bedroom on the right (north). This enclosure provided private access for the doctor's patients in the parlor-office. Both parlor and bedroom have pine mantels with plain architraves, although the mantel in the parlor has a curved cornice. From the bedroom, a steep and narrow boxed stair rises to the two bedrooms on the second floor. The first three steps rise along the back wall of the bedroom to a board and batten door behind which there is a landing and the steps make a quarter-turn to continue in the enclosure along the west side of the chimney. From the first floor bedroom, a raised panel door and two steps lead to the former breezeway enclosed as a sitting room and to the kitchen in the ell. The mantel in the sitting room is more elaborate, featuring fluted pilasters rising to the shelf and an architrave with two recessed panels. To the left of the mantel is a floor-to-ceiling cabinet of pine with raised panels in each door. All floors in the main block and ell are of pine and walls are of flush horizontal poplar boards. All hardware, both interior and exterior, is original. All door and window surrounds are plain.

The corn crib standing to the southwest of the house was constructed at the same time the house was built. Very large sheds for storage were added recently to each side of the crib, which has a board and batten door in the east gable end. The storage sheds are sheathed in rusticated weatherboards and render the building non-contributing. It is supposed that both well and root cellar foundations are contemporary with the house. The silo, built about 1920, stands southwest of the house, adjacent to the brick and stone foundations of a barn. The silo is constructed of poured concrete and has lost its roof.

Repairs and modern improvements have been made to the Brabson House. In some areas floors have been repaired and replaced, and the front porch has received new balusters, which, though too widely spaced, are not incompatible with the design of the house. Chimneys and fire boxes have been repaired and improved for modern use. Despite these relatively minor changes, the Brabson House remains an excellent example of the family home of the professional man in rural western North Carolina in the latter decades of the 19th century.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Health/Medicine

Period of Significance

1884-1917

Significant Dates

1884

c. 1906

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Dr. Alexander C. Brabson House, built in 1884, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of health and medicine and under Criterion C for its architecture. With its small foyer that provided private access to patients and facilitated the use of the parlor as Dr. Brabson's office, and with the surrounding acreage that he farmed in order to supplement the income from his medical practice, the property represents the life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century physician in rural Macon County. Dr. Brabson's medical career began in 1870 and spanned four and one-half decades in which the science and practice of medicine underwent significant changes which would eventually make the career of the country doctor obsolete. (Dr. Brabson is said to have been prominent locally for his treatment of milk sickness, but documentation of his accomplishments in this area are insufficient to establish significance under Criterion B.) Because most of the doctor's contact with his patients was through house calls, made by travelling to nearby mountain communities on horseback, a formal office could be substituted by the use of his parlor with the introduction of the foyer to his hall-parlor plan house. The weatherboarded two-story house with a one-story rear ell also is important as a relatively intact representative example of a traditional house type of western North Carolina. Retaining modest detailing indicative of the doctor's social standing in the neighborhood, the house has undergone a few modifications, including enclosure of the breezeway connecting the kitchen to the house and, in approximately 1906, replacing the original front porch with the current full-facade porch. The more than thirty-eight acres of pasture and woodland included in the nomination is the intact portion of the acreage assembled by Dr. Brabson in 1884 that provided supplemental income and today insulates the house completely from the resort community which surrounds it, giving the property the appearance of the 1880s.

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ARCHITECTURE: The Dr. Alexander C. Brabson House is typical of the frame family home seen in the mountain counties of western North Carolina during the second half of the nineteenth century. The frame house gradually replaced the log house in the region, and after the railroad opened the area to trade, the favored house was the frame I-house, usually built of light frame construction with milled lumber. The I-house usually was larger than the log house and, especially after 1900, was built with additions or ells, porches and ornamental trim. Examples of this house are found in all the counties of western North Carolina.

The Brabson House is an example of the smaller hall and parlor and central chimney type of frame house constructed in the lightly developed areas of the western counties before the advent of the railroad opened the region to more intensive development. When the house was built in 1884 the railroad had not yet penetrated the southern parts of Macon County, and would not be completed to Murphy until 1890. The boxed stairway and enclosed breezeway of the Brabson House refer to earlier log-cabin styles, which persisted in the western counties until the turn of the century. At its construction, however, the Brabson House was given several cosmetic details which made it appropriate for the rural physician, whose vocational and social standing had gradually risen during the 19th century.

The Brabson House was designed to serve as office and clinic for the physician as well as his residence. The entrance door, a handsome paneled double-leaf door of pine, leads to a small vestibule from which parlor and family bedroom open, allowing patients to have relatively private access to the parlor-office.

HEALTH/MEDICINE CONTEXT: The 19th century brought important changes to the practice of medicine around the world and to the social and intellectual position of the physician. At the beginning of the century, as the study of medicine became oriented toward science, physicians began deeper study of the natural sciences, with scientific experimentation, careful clinical observation and a simple and rational therapy.² Gradually throughout the century, improvements in sanitation, public health and transportation as well as the well-documented discoveries in the science of medicine, the founding of local hospitals and the establishment of schools of medicine changed the practice of medicine from the application of folk remedies and superstitious customs to diagnosis, observation and therapy. Public opinion began to recognize the merit of the physician, who until the 19th century had been a semi-charlatanesque character, and he came to be considered a dedicated, hard-working man with a strong sense of responsibility, bringing to his patients feelings of confidence and reliance.

The rural physician of the 1830s treated his patients for dysentery; "ague" or malaria; smallpox; cholera; tuberculosis; rheumatism; skin cancers of various kinds; accidents such as cuts, bites, crushing and broken bones; childbirth; diphtheria; meningitis and childhood diseases. His medical bag contained implements for dental work and minor surgery or amputations, procedures which were less harmful after the introduction of carbolic sprays

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for antiseptics in North Carolina about 1377.³ The mountain physician also treated patients for various poisons, including snake bites and poisons caused by toxic plants.

One highly toxic plant was the white snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*) which grows in rich woods and along woodland margins in Appalachia and in the central and western United States.⁴ Cows which roamed uncultivated lands often ate the roots and excreted the poison in milk which, when drunk by humans or animals, caused vomiting, constipation, pain and muscular tremors. In 1840 Daniel Drake (1785-1852), a physician and founder of the medical school at Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky, wrote the first clinical description of this illness, which he called "milk sickness":

During the first half of the eighteenth century this disease caused many deaths and much serious illness among the frontiersmen of the Middle West and actually delayed the settlement of that area. Nancy Hanks Lincoln, mother of Abraham Lincoln, died in Indiana in 1818 and the cause is said to have been milk sickness. The cause of this disease was discovered not by physicians but by an Ohio farmer, who in some remarkably well-controlled homespun experiments on farm animals, proved that the human illness was the result of drinking milk which came from cows that had fed on the white snakeroot.⁶

Milk sickness was so well known in Jackson and Macon Counties in North Carolina that a mountain peak located near US 64 west of Franklin has been named Milk-sick Ridge. The disease eventually was eradicated by the pasteurization of milk. Although Louis Pasteur introduced the process in the 1860s, decades passed before it had any impact in rural areas such as western North Carolina.

Dr. Alexander Brabson was well-known in Macon County for his treatment of milk sickness.⁷ Today Dr. Brabson's method of treatment is not known, but it is probable that he used atropine, a derivative of the belladonna plant used for the relief of pain and spasms, and white of egg and nitrate of soda.⁸ The illness to which he devoted most of his life gradually disappeared in this country. Although Brabson died eight years before the construction of the first hospital in Macon County, he saw the introduction of antiseptic technique in North Carolina and the eradication of a major illness by improvements in public health. His career illustrated the gradual change in the science and practice of medicine.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Alexander Crutchfield Brabson was born in Tennessee in 1839. Little is known of his early years. He served in the Civil War, was taken prisoner at the fall of Vicksburg, and later served in and around Richmond and Abingdon, Virginia.⁹ He graduated in 1870 from the University of Nashville School of Medicine (now Vanderbilt University) and moved to Macon County, North Carolina.¹⁰ In Macon County he joined three other practicing physicians, Dr. Henry Woodfin (1811-1881), Dr. John M. Eyle (died 1897), who began his practice in Franklin in 1850, and Dr. George H. Rush (1834-1897), who began his practice in the county south of

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Dr. Alexander C. Brabson House, Otto vicinity, Macon Co.

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Franklin in 1854. Both Lyle and Rush also were graduates of the University of Nashville. Rush had read medicine with Dr. Alexander Washington Brabson in Tennessee, who was an uncle of Alexander Crutchfield Brabson.¹¹ In 1879 the trio was joined by Dr. Samuel H. Lyle, son of Dr. John M. Lyle.¹²

In 1870 Macon County had a population of 6,615 people. The county seat, Franklin, boasted of four hotels, four general stores, nine mining companies and five flour and corn mills.¹³ Alexander Brabson joined Dr. Rush in the practice of medicine in Smith Bridge Township, about ten miles south of Franklin, in the valley of the Little Tennessee River and on the Old Georgia Road, which led from Asheville, NC, to Clayton, GA, and on to Atlanta. Brabson boarded at the home of Dr. Rush, and in 1881 married Rush's daughter, Cora (1863-1916).¹⁴ In 1884 Brabson purchased thirty-eight acres of land about one mile southwest of the Rush house and built a house for his family.¹⁵ The property was bounded on the east by the Old Georgia Road and on the west by Cowetta Creek, a tributary of the Little Tennessee River, and was within a mile of the little village of Otto, later a stop on the railroad which paralleled road and river and ran south to Atlanta.

Dr. Brabson used his home as his office for patient visits, but most of his medical practice was conducted on horseback, riding along country roads and mountain trails. His payment was rarely in cash. His journals, preserved by the Macon County Historical Museum in Franklin, show that his patient paid him in kind, with equivalent amounts of produce, farm and household implements and house and field labor. Some income was derived from his farmlands. His journal shows that patients paid for his services by "plowing five acres", "dehorning and ranging cattle", mowing, harvesting and planting. As his family of five children grew, the separate kitchen building which stood at the rear of the family home was attached about 1906 to the main house by a sitting room area and the original front porch, which had covered the central portion of the facade, was replaced with a wider porch.¹⁷ In 1891 and 1904 he had purchased additional land, extending his "home place" beyond the Cowetta Church Road, now SR 1115, which ran to the west of his lands; he also had purchased about 200 acres of land further to the west, on the Nantahala River.¹⁸ He farmed the Otto acreage with the help of his sons and continued his medical practice until his death in 1917.

Cora Rush Brabson died in 1916 and at the death of Dr. Brabson the "home place" property was transferred to his son, John.¹⁹ John Brabson farmed the property for a number of years, later renting the farm. At his death in 1974, the property was inherited by his four sons, grandsons of Dr. Brabson. Max L. Brabson, of Cataula, Georgia, and James A. Brabson, of Clarksville, Georgia, today own more than sixty acres of the Alexander Brabson property, including the home site and acreage purchased in 1891 and 1904.²⁰ The property is today entirely pasture and woodland.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Owen, Margaret, Reconnaissance Survey of Historic Resources in Western North Carolina Counties, pp 16-17.
2. Castiglioni, Arturo, A History of Medicine, p. 757.
3. Long, Dorothy, ed., Medicine in North Carolina: Essays in the History of Medical Science and Medical Service, 1524-1960, p. 637, and Clayton, Thomas H., Close to the Land: The Way We Lived in North Carolina, 1820-1870, pp. 10-11.
4. Justice, William S. and Bell, C. Ritchie, Wild Flowers of North Carolina, p. 192.
5. Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition, p. 1559.
6. Bordley, James III, MD, and Harvey, A. McGehee, MD, Two Centuries of American Medicine: 1776-1976, p. 31.
7. Sutton, Jessie, et al, eds., The Heritage of Macon County, North Carolina, p. 58.
8. Zachary, Dr. Mark, pharmacist, interview, Cashiers, NC, March 22, 1990.
9. General Services Administration, copy of parole.
10. Arthur, John Preston, The History of Western North Carolina, p. 175, and Sutton, Jessie, ed., op. cit., pp. 53-59.
11. Brabson, Max L., correspondence, April 9, 1990.
12. Sutton, et al, op. cit., p. 58.
13. Ibid., p. 45.
14. Arthur, op. cit., p. 175; United States Census for 1880.
15. Macon County Register of Deeds Book PP, page 214.
16. Macon County Historical Museum, Franklin, NC. Also Wigginton, ed., Fox-fire Nine, pp. 75-82.
17. Brabson, Max L., telephone conversation, April 13, 1990.
18. Macon County Register of Deeds Book RR, page 256; Book RR, page 169; Book G, page 462; Book G, page 464; Book X, page 224.
19. Macon County Record of Wills, Book 3, page 160.
20. Macon County Register of Deeds Book F-16, page 215; Book J-13, page 69.

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- Arthur, John Preston, Western North Carolina: A History, Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, Raleigh, 1914.
- Bordley, James III, MD, and Harvey, A. McGehee, MD, Two Centuries of American Medicine: 1776-1976, W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia, 1976.
- Castiglioni, Arturo, MD, A History of Medicine, Alfred A. Knopf Company, New York, 1947.
- Clayton, Thomas H., Close to the Land; The Way We Lived in North Carolina, 1820-1870, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1983.
- General Services Administration, National Archives and Records, Washington, copy made 1963.
- Justice, William S., and Bell, C. Ritchie, Wild Flowers of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1968.
- Long, Dorothy, ed., Medicine in North Carolina: Essays in the History of Medical Science and Medical Service, 1524-1960, vol. II, North Carolina Medical Society, Raleigh, 1972.
- Macon County Register of Deeds and Register of Wills, Macon County Courthouse, Franklin, NC.
- Owen, Margaret, Reconnaissance Survey of Historic Resources in Western North Carolina Counties, manuscript, 1980.
- Sutton, Jessie, et al, eds., The Heritage of Macon County, North Carolina, Macon County Historical Society, Inc., Hunter Publishing Company, Winston-Salem, NC, 1987.
- Turner, Nancy, and Horton, Jim, The Summer Times, Cider Press, Inc., Tampa, 1979.
- United States Census for 1880 and 1900.
- Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition, C.G. Merriman Company, New York, 1959.
- Wigginton, Eliot, ed., Foxfire Nine, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1980

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately 38.6 acres

UTM References

A 1,7 28,19,8,0 38,8,4,3,4,0
 Zone Easting Northing

C 1,7 28,18,3,0 38,8,4,1,3,0

B 1,7 28,22,0,0 38,8,4,3,4,0
 Zone Easting Northing

D 1,7 28,22,0,0 38,8,3,9,8,0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Alexander C. Brabson property is outlined by a bold line on the accompanying survey map showing the property of J.M. Brabson, et al, drawn at a scale of 1" to 200', completed in 1975 and revised in 1989.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property comprises approximately 38.6 acres of the original home site property purchased by Alexander Brabson in 1884 and recorded in Macon County Register of Deeds Book PP, at page 214, which is all of the acreage historically associated with the house that retain historic integrity. The eastern edge of the property lies on the original route of the Old Georgia Road See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn A. Humphries
 organization Consultant date May 1, 1990
 street & number Route 2, Box 175 telephone 704: 526-9462
 city or town Highlands, NC state NC zip code 25741

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

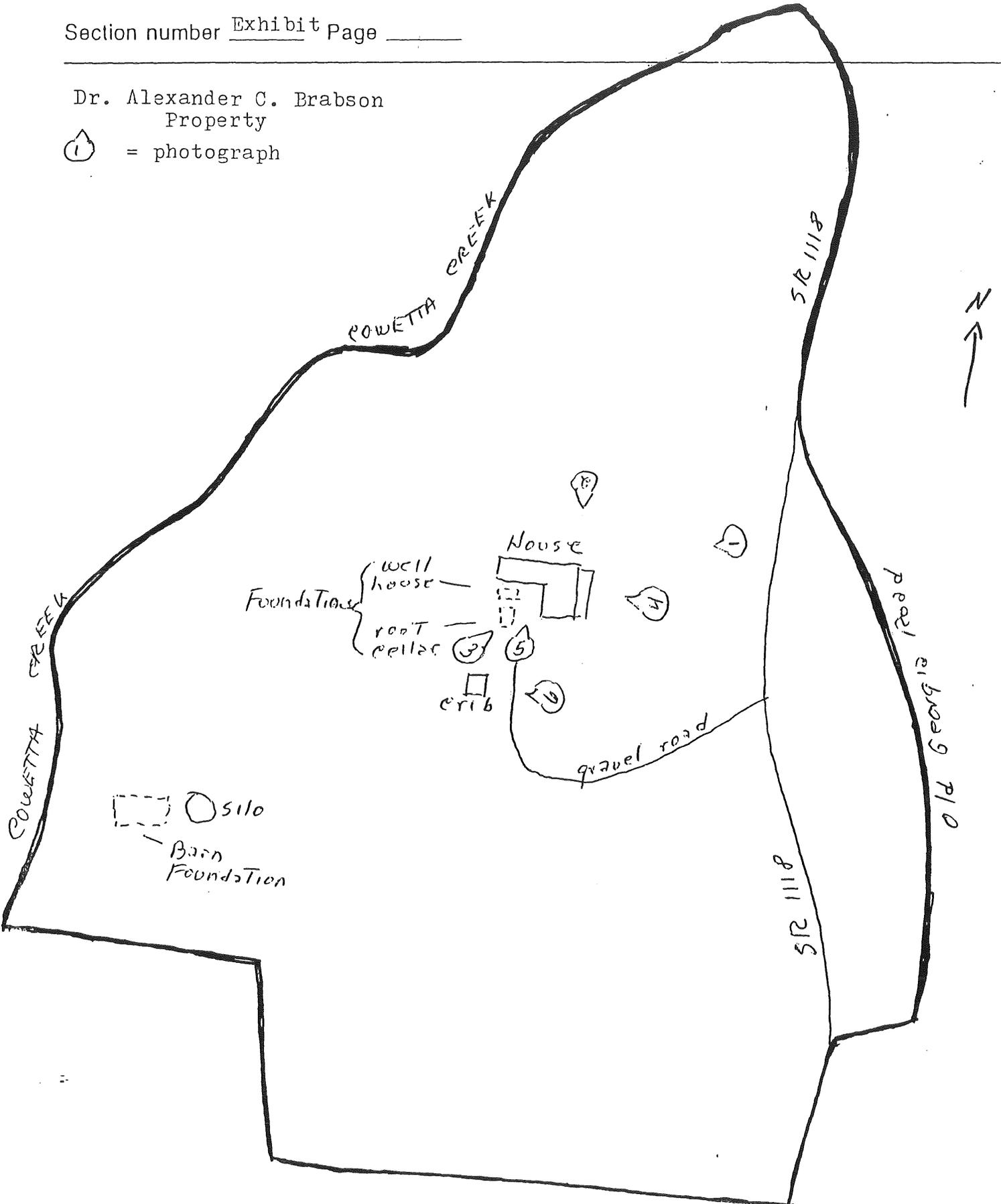
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Dr. Alexander C. Brabson
Property

 = photograph

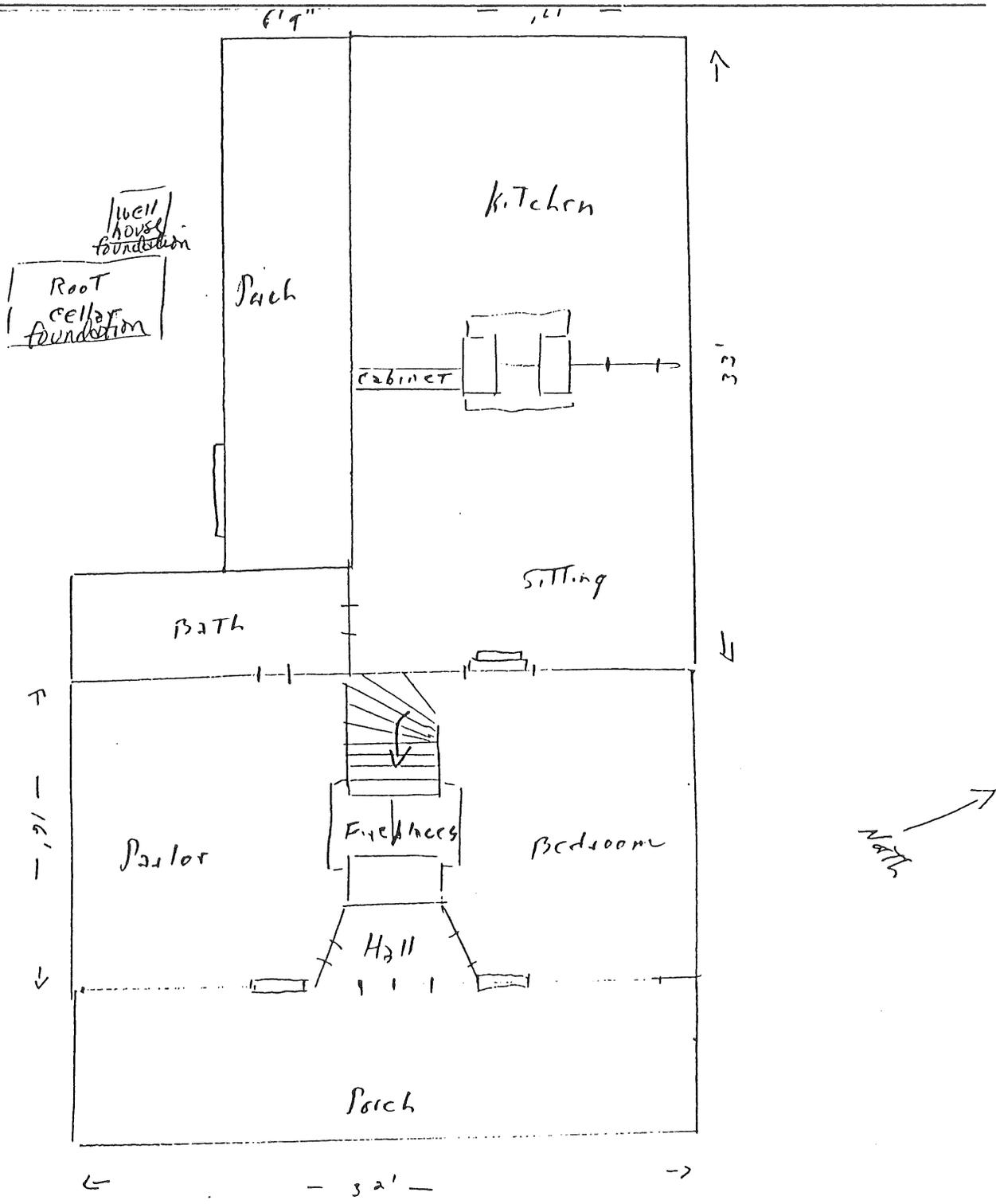


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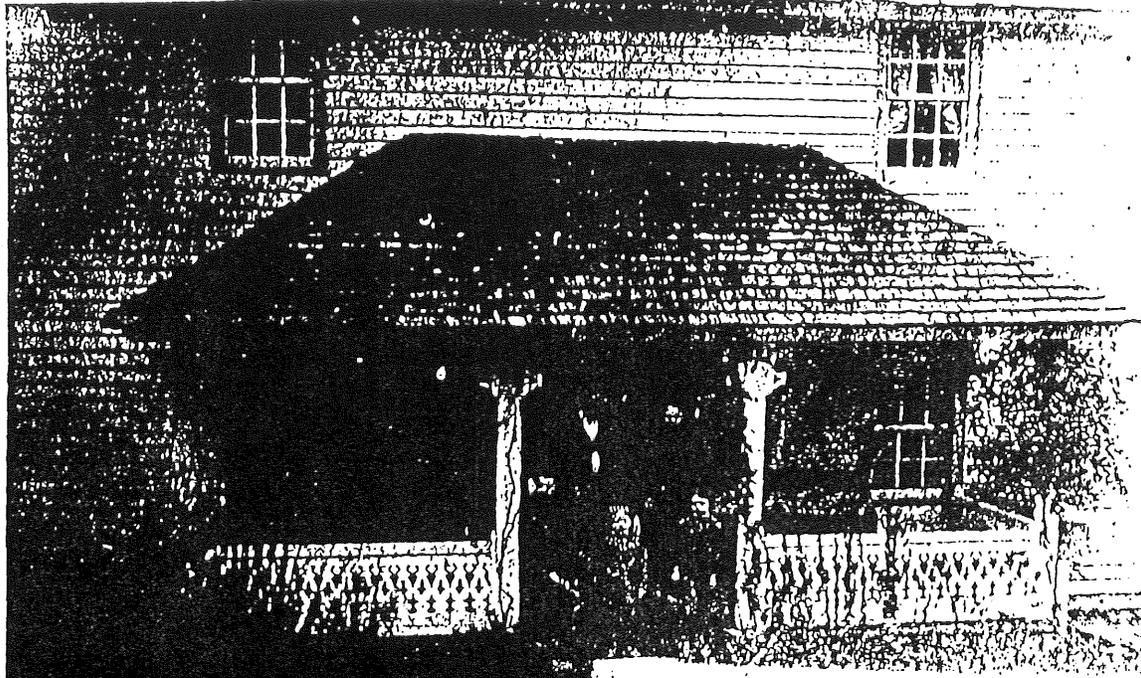
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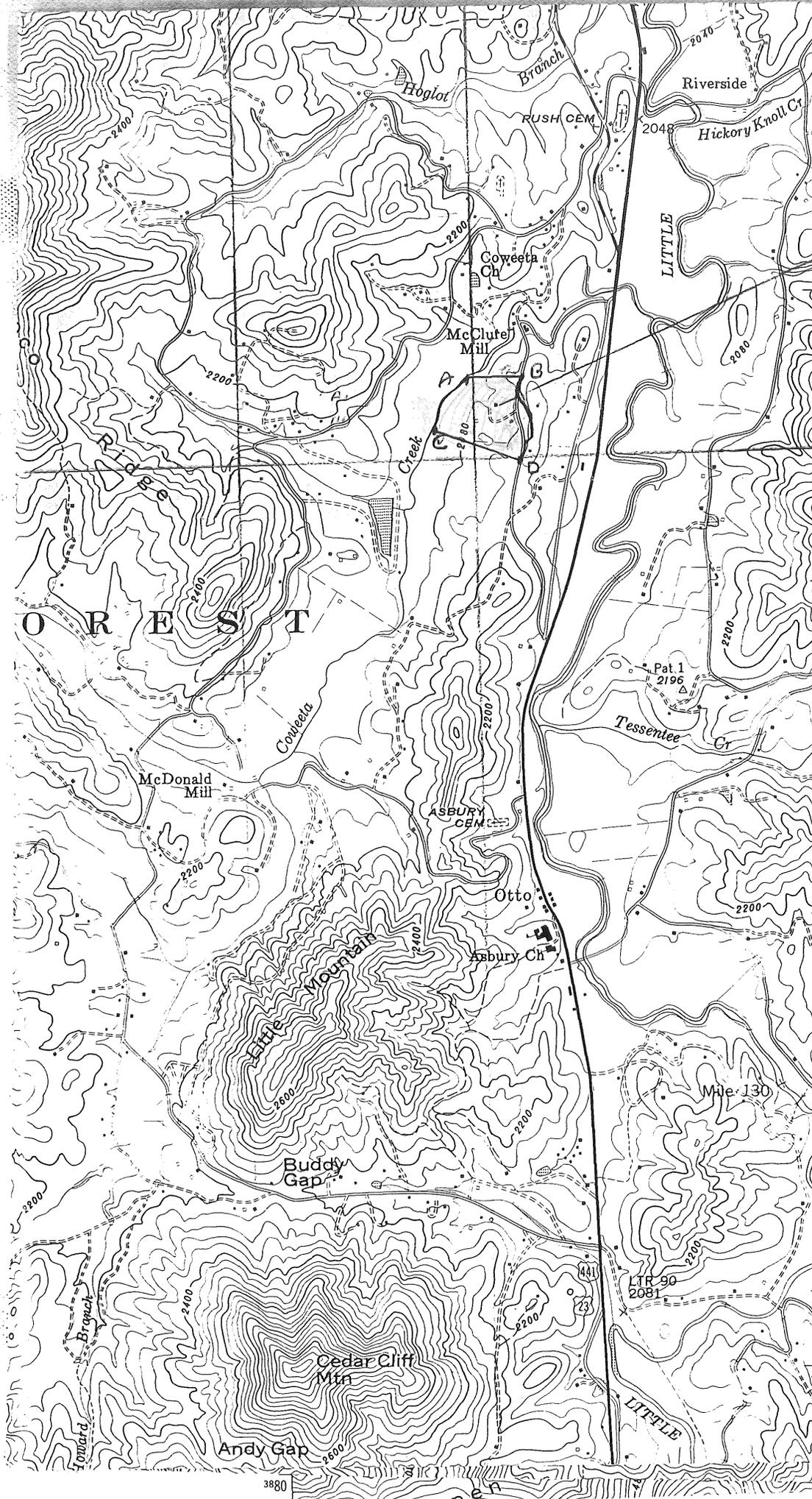
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*Dr. Alexander C. Brabson & Children
1888*

Dr. Alexander C. Brabson family, Otto vicinity, Macon County, NC
Documentary photograph, 1888



PRENTISS QUAD
N.C.

Dr. Alexander

Brabson
House

Easting
182100
Northing
3884225

Zone 17

H. Easting
281980
Northing
3884340

B. Easting
282200
Northing
3884340

C. Easting
281830
Northing
3884130

D. Easting
282200
Northing
3883980

(SCALE 167 SE)
4354 1/3 SE

2'30"
3880

3880

