

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Cowee-West's Mill Historic District

other names/site number Kaw'yi, Cowe

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by the Little Tennessee River, and portions of NC 28, SR 1340, SR 1350, and SR 1341 not for publication

city or town Franklin vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Macon code 113 zip code 28734

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO 11/13/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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): _____

United States Department of the Interior
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|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____ _____ _____ | _____ | _____ |

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 56 | 23 | buildings |
| 8 | | sites |
| 3 | 2 | structures |
| | | objects |
| 67 | 25 | Total |

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

Historical and Architectural Resources
of Macon County, North Carolina, ca. AD 600-1945

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

- ~~Domestic/single dwelling~~
- ~~Domestic/secondary structure~~
- Government/post office
- Commerce/trade/specialty store
- Education/school
- Religion/religious facility
- ~~Funerary/cemetery~~
- Agriculture/processing/storage

- ~~Domestic/single dwelling~~
- ~~Domestic/secondary structure~~
- Commerce/trade/specialty store
- Education/school
- Religion/religious facility'
- Funerary/cemetery
- Agriculture/processing/storage
- Agriculture/agricultural field

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

- Other/T-house
- Bungalow/Craftsman
- Other/Art-Deco-influenced
- No style

- foundation brick
- walls wood
- stone
- roof metal
- other asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture

Architecture

Community Planning and Development

Exploration/Settlement

Archaeology/Historic/Aboriginal

Archaeology/Historic/Non-Aboriginal

Period of Significance

A.D. 600-1954

Significant Dates

1775

1819

1875

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Mississippian

Cherokee

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 369 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | |
|------|---------|----------|---------|
| 1 | 17 | 282360 | 3905240 |
| Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 2 | 17 | 281060 | 3904360 |

| | | | |
|------|---------|----------|---------|
| 3 | 17 | 279740 | 3903700 |
| Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 4 | 17 | 279300 | 3905040 |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Ervin (Land Trust for the Little Tennessee) and Jennifer Martin

organization _____ date 10-01-00

street & number 3257 Goshen Road telephone 828-524-2711

city or town Franklin state NC zip code 28734

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

Section 7. Narrative Description

The Cowee-West's Mill Historic District encompasses approximately three hundred and sixty-nine acres in a scenic area six miles north of the county seat of Franklin. The district occupies the western half of the Cowee Valley as it drops downward toward the fertile Little Tennessee River valley. This expansive district extends from a point just west of the junction of Caler Fork and Cowee Creek westward along both sides of Cowee Creek to the Little Tennessee River terminating at the Cowee Mound (NR 1973) and the Euchella Farm site at the far northwest corner of the boundaries. The northern and southern boundaries are loosely formed by the upper edges of the valley where it begins to rise to form the Cowee Mountains to the north and Mason Mountain to the south. Hall Mountain borders the district on the west. North Carolina Highway 28 curves through the heart of the district beginning at West's Cove and proceeding northward where it bends westward and runs parallel to the Little Tennessee River just outside and north of the district.

Macon County lies in the Blue Ridge chain of the Southern Appalachians, with the Cowee Mountain Range forming its eastern border, the Nantahala Range forming the western border, and the Blue Ridge Escarpment along the southeastern edge. These forested mountains tower 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the wide fertile valleys found along the Little Tennessee and its larger tributaries, such as Cowee Creek. The Cowee-West's Mill Historic District lies approximately 1,900 feet above sea level with the surrounding mountains reaching up to 5,000 feet.

The vista one has upon entering the district from the northwest is of the verdant, broad agrarian valley of Cowee with the backdrop of the forested Cowee Mountains. The center of this view is Cowee Bald, five miles distant and towering three thousand feet above the gentle farmland of the district. The vista one has upon entering the district from the southeast is of tidy pastures tucked among low forested ridges, with the dramatic backdrop of the Nantahala Mountain range ten miles to the west.

The Little Tennessee River, in the western part of the district, flows northward from Rabun County, Georgia, through Macon County to Fontana Lake. It is the only Blue Ridge river to retain all of its original species of aquatic life. Cowee Creek flows from east to west for one and a half miles through the heart of the historic district. At the east end of the district it meanders across a wide, fertile bottom where Matlock Creek joins it. After dropping rapidly around the ridge on which sits the Frank and Leo Gibson farm and picking up the waters of Bryson Branch, it meanders across another wide bottom before picking up the waters of West's Branch and dropping onto the floodplain of the Little Tennessee. The small rural community of West's Mill grew up along Cowee Creek just northeast of its confluence with the Little Tennessee River because of the accessible and fertile bottomlands there. Where the two bodies of water merge, there was extensive prime land available for the establishment of productive farms and a viable community.

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Section number 7 Page 2 Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

Since the early nineteenth century NC Highway 28 (formerly Highway 286) has been the major route through the northeastern part of the county. It forms a crossroads with West's Mill Road (SR 1340), which connects with the east side of Highway 28. West's Mill Road, only a quarter of a mile long, intersects and ends at Snow Hill Road (SR 1350), a north-south route, which intersects Cowee Creek Road (SR 1341), primarily an east-west route. The core of the village is clustered along the intersections of these roads, with homes and farms ranging further along the roads. The roads all retain their original alignment and follow the natural contours of the land.

The landscape of the district retains its rural mountain character. Most of the bottomland is covered with fescue pastures and hayfield, with some areas of rivercane growing along Cowee Creek. Several small fields are still dedicated to growing corn and sorghum; a larger percentage of the land would have been under cultivation in the past. Approximately half of the acreage in the district is in open fields and half is in forest.

Most of the forest is second growth yellow pine on old pastures, especially on the south side of the district. However, along the bluff from the Jesse and Pallie West House, around the Snow Hill Church, and east towards the former Cowee School, there is a stand of mature mixed oak which was probably once an open grazed savanna, but which has now filled in as a closed canopy forest with mixed hardwoods and pine. Around Snow Hill Church and along the bluff to the former Cowee School is a stand of large, stately oak trees. Also, striking mature hardwood shade trees surround the Morrison House as well as the T.C. Bryson House.

Ten different soil types are found in the district. The bottomland soils are some of the most productive in western North Carolina, with substantial areas of Toxaway and Arkaqua soils which originated under wetland conditions. The low ridges surrounding the district are predominately formed by clay and sandy loams of the Evard and Hayesville series, which have probably traditionally been managed as open woodland pasture but which are presently covered with closed-canopy forests.

In the steep mountainous terrain of this area, Native Americans and later, white settlers, logically tended to settle first in the flatter, richer more manageable bottomlands such as those along the Little Tennessee and Cowee Creek. Native Americans grew crops in the river valley and established an important settlement on land now encompassed by the district. West's Mill, a local enterprise for which the community was later named, was established in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century at an appropriate site on Cowee Creek by one of the families that had first settled in the area. The mill's location at the crossroads of trading and transportation routes was one of the primary reasons surrounding commercial entities and community functions were established.

West's Mill was an important trading and community center for the northern part of Macon County from the

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. It functioned as a busy, thriving village with homes, schools, churches, post office, dentist's office, grist mills, and several small manufacturing concerns. The Cowee-West's Mill Historic District is typical of rural crossroad communities of its time, but also documents settlement patterns of Native Americans in the Southern Appalachians. The district stands out from the surrounding countryside because of the concentration of commercial, institutional, and domestic buildings, with few non-contributing structures. The district encompasses the center of the village with its typical commercial and domestic buildings, plus outlying houses and farms, and sites and resources associated with Native American occupation. Most of the houses, even in the village cluster, include agricultural outbuildings and adjoining farmland. West's Mill was never an incorporated town, but rather a rural farming district with the needed services run by local families, most of whom farmed as well. After Native Americans left Cowee in the early nineteenth century, white families built close to one another and established their businesses on family land to serve the community.

Most of the buildings are wood-sided with the exception of a brick church, a stone and brick school, and a few stone or part-stone outbuildings. In addition to houses, farms, schools, and churches, the district contains an eclectic mix of structures and sites including two bridges, Cowee Creek, a stretch of the Little Tennessee River, the Cowee Mound and the Euchella site. Along the west bank of the Little Tennessee River are two archaeological sites (31MA65 and 31MA66) from which prehistoric ceramics were collected in June 1965. The artifacts from those sites are curated at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Non-contributing resources neither overwhelm contributing resources nor the landscape and viewsheds. The largest number of noncontributing primary resources stands west of NC 28 along the eastern bank of the Little Tennessee River. Their low, horizontal massing—most are ranch houses—minimizes the impact of these properties. Their presence is further mitigated by the surrounding landscape consisting of undulating hills and towering mountains.

The Cowee-West's Mill retains its historic appearance and character as seen in the important resources associated with Native American occupation and in the nineteenth and twentieth century buildings constructed by later white settlers. The surrounding agricultural fields and woodlands appear much as they did in the nineteenth century without the impact of modern development. The built resources punctuate the agricultural landscape, which attests to the historical agrarian character of the area, and the farmland is in turn framed by wooded hillsides. Descendants of the families who built the structures and whose ancestors also lived on the land own the majority of the property in the district.

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

INVENTORY

The inventory is organized by grouping together buildings or structures fronting on the same road. The first three primary listings are on NC 28 and stand at the center of the district. The properties on the east side of NC 28 are listed first, followed by the properties located west of NC 28. The resources east of NC 28 are listed in a roughly from west to east along Snow Hill Road, then west to east along Cowee Road; resources to the west of NC are listed roughly from east to west. Outbuildings are listed by letters as subgroups of the primary property. Each site is named after its first, longest, or best-known resident. The date of construction is based on historical record, local knowledge, and type of materials and construction. Dates for outbuildings are approximate since less information about them is found in historical documents and sometimes local residents tend to have less specific memories about their construction. A brief description of each property is given and an indication of whether it is contributing or non-contributing. Resources are designated as contributing or non-contributing based on whether they were constructed during or date to the period of significance and whether they retain their integrity.

1. Cowee Creek Bridge. 1921, 1968. Contributing.

The structure was originally a one-lane bridge of reinforced concrete with solid recessed panels on the sides. The original recessed-panel rail is still intact on the north side facing the village center, although the rail on the south side was replaced with a plain, undecorated panel when the bridge was widened to two lanes in 1968.

According to the plaque on the bridge rail, the bridge was designed by the State Highway Commission and built in 1921 by J.T. Plott. It was built on NC 28 (then known as Highway 286) to cross over Cowee Creek at the same time that the road was re-routed and paved. Previously, the road is said to have crossed Cowee Creek on the Snow Hill Road.

2. Will West House. 1880s. Contributing.

The Will West House stands on the northwest bank of Cowee Creek, fronting on highway NC 28. It is a two-story, T-plan frame house on a brick foundation with a one-story shed roof porch across the front and a one-story shed-roof addition on the west side. The windows are original, with the second-story sash appearing to be older than those on the first story. Some community residents say that the house was built in the 1920s, but because of materials, it appears to fit the earlier date of the 1880s cited by other reliable longtime residents. The house was partially restored in 1997 and is used as a private residence.

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

The large grist mill for which the community was named stood on this site, as did a general store, both built by William Jefferson West and Jesse West in the 1890s. Their grandfather, John West, was one of the first white settlers in the area. The West family originally owned an extensive tract of land between Cowee Creek and the Little Tennessee River from West's Mill almost to Brush Creek in Swain County.

The mill stones for the mill were shipped from France to Charleston, South Carolina, and hauled by wagon back to the mill site. The stones are now in a mill on Caler Fork in Cowee, near the junction of Cowee and Caler Creeks. The mill continued to be used sporadically to grind corn and wheat up to 1968 when NC 28 was widened, at which time it ceased operation and was demolished. Some sources report the mill was bought by the state and torn down while others indicate that it burned. A few foundation stones remain on the site.

The original West's Brothers Store, an important trading center from the 1880s, was located next to the Will West House. The business was relocated to the east side of NC 28 around 1927, and materials from the original building were used in the construction C. N. West General Merchandise store (#3). Also located on Will West site was a coffin-making shop (no longer standing) operated by Judd Potts.

2A. Shed. Early 1900s. Contributing.

Located to the east of the house facing northwest; wood siding with tin shed roof, open lattice near top of walls for ventilation

2B. Mill Site. Late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Contributing.

Foundation stones marking the location of the West Mill remain on the property. This evidence could potentially yield information about the mill and milling in general in Macon County during the earliest phases of white settlement. No excavations or studies of the site have been conducted

3. C.N. West General Merchandise. Ca. 1927. Contributing.

The C.N. West General Merchandise, constructed around 1927 by Clyde and Minnie West with materials from the old West Brothers Store that was formerly located across the road (see Will West House, #2), stands at the intersection of NC 28 and West's Mill Road (SR 1340), facing southwest. This store, along with the mill, nearby post office, and other structures on West's Mill Road, forms the heart of the West's Mill village.

The rectangular two-story frame building has a front-facing tin gable roof and a hip roof at the rear. Three bays pierce the first floor and two punctuate the second floor. A two-story porch with a shed roof wraps around the south and west sides of the second floor and is accessed by an exterior staircase that descends on

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

the façade. The original floors, counters, and shelves in the old store are still intact and in excellent condition, as are the original double front door. There is a living area on the second floor above the first-floor commercial area. The building is now used as a pottery studio and shop, which makes use of the original fixtures for display. Several outbuildings stand behind the store attesting to West's farming activities during the twentieth century.

3A. Root cellar. 1930s. Contributing. Stone and cement block building, recessed into the hillside to the east in front of the store

3B. Garage. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Two-story building with living or storage space above; wood siding with tar paper shingles and double garage wooden doors on the southeast facade; located to the northeast of the store facing southeast onto West's Mill Road (SR 1340)

3C. Log barn. Ca. 1920. Contributing. Hewn timber supports, log, and wood siding; chicken coop attachment probably from 1940s. Located to northeast of garage

3D. Wood shed. 1930s. Contributing. Vertical wood siding, tin shed roof, stone foundation supports; located north of log barn.

3E. Barn. Ca. 1930s. Contributing. Located behind the post office to the northeast; two-story large building of pine, oak, and chestnut siding, locust posts; tin, front-facing gable roof.

4. (former) West's Mill Post Office. Ca. 1920, 1935. Contributing.

To the northeast of the C.N. West store, set close to and fronting on West's Mill Road, is the former West's Mill Post Office. The post office is a small, single-story, three-room frame building with a tin front gable roof and a shed roof rear addition. Small posts support a metal-covered shed-roof front porch that shelters a three-bay façade. Other than the two windows on the front, there is only one small square window on the northeast elevation. The building has an internal brick chimney and is set on short stone piers. Inside, the old postal counter and the original beaded board walls remain. In the back room is an old dentist's chair, corroborating reports that a dental practice was housed in the building at one time.

The post office was constructed in the 1920s, where the Aunt Vonnie West House (#5) now stands, one lot to the east, and was rolled on logs to its present site around 1935. Pallie West, mother of Clyde and Vonnie West, was postmaster around this time. The post office was closed in the 1950s when home delivery became available. Typical of the pattern of family involvement in West's Mill through the generations, Clara West Owens, another daughter of Jesse and Pallie West, was the last postmaster. The building is now vacant, but

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

in excellent condition.

5. Aunt Vonnie West House. 1936. Contributing.

To the northeast of the post office facing West's Mill Road is the Aunt Vonnie West House. This two-story three-bay frame house has a gabled tin roof and an off-centered partially enclosed front porch with gingerbread trim. The foundation is stone and concrete. The interior has beaded board walls. There is an attached stone well house on the northeast side of the house, probably of a slightly later date.

The West family moved the post office building to the west from this site in order to open up this lot for the house. Vonnie West, daughter of Jesse and Pallie West and sister of Clyde West, was a schoolteacher in the Cowee schools for fifty years. The house is now vacant.

6. Will Morrison House. 1880s. Contributing.

The Morrison House, built by Will Morrison in the 1880s, faces west on Snow Hill Road (SR 1350) on the east side of the intersection with West's Mill Road (SR 1340). It is a two-story frame I- house with a one-story rear ell, side gabled tin roof, stone foundation, and one-story hip roof porch. The house was partially restored in 1994, but is now uninhabited.

A large dry goods store, which was torn down in the 1930s, also stood on the site to the south near Cowee Creek. An old road up Cowee valley along the north banks of the creek is still evident to the south of the house.

Will Morrison probably descended from William Morrison, Sr., who came to Macon County in 1832, one of the early white settlers of the area. The family farmland was in Oak Grove community, just to the north of Cowee.

6A. Root cellar. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Built recessed into earth bank to the west of the house; board and batten siding and stone retaining wall; metal flat roof.

7. Welch property. Vacant.

8. Pierret property. Vacant.

9. Jesse and Pallie West House. First half of 1800s, 1880s. Contributing.

Jesse West built this large house on a knoll with a good view overlooking West's Mill center and the bottoms where Cowee Creek enters the Little Tennessee River. He operated the original West Brothers Store (#2)

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

and mill with his brother, William Jefferson West. The house is accessed by the drive to Snow Hill Church (#11), turning north off Snow Hill Road. A dirt track leads to the house from west of the church.

The Jesse and Pallie West House is an imposing sixteen-room, two-story frame dwelling comprised of two structures. To the north stands the original one-story side-gable house with an attached shed roof porch across the north façade. This original section, possibly of log construction, is sheathed with weatherboard, and features an exterior end chimney and six-over-six double-hung sash windows. The original house, built at an unknown date in the first half of the 1800s, was connected in the late 1800s to a large two-story T-plan dwelling standing to the south. The main block of the house is relatively plain and features an attached porch supported by chamfered posts and two engaged pilasters. The original oak floors, beaded board walls, mantels, doors, hardware, and stairway with turned balusters are still in place, as are some of the original furnishings. Pallie West lived in the house until her death in 1945. Plumbing and electricity were installed in the 1940s. The exposed wiring is still in place and functional.

A one-story gabled ell was added to the west side of the main house in 1947 by the West's daughter Nancy. Attached porches were added to the west of the main block at about the same time. This house and outbuildings are a rare surviving example of a rural mountain homestead. The outbuildings, some of which are architecturally embellished as well as functional, show the quality, diversity, and style of the complex. Behind the house is an immense pear tree that has been bearing fruit for over seventy years. Although vegetation has grown up around the house and it has not been maintained for some time, its former grandeur is still evident.

9A. Well house and Ice house. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Located directly behind the house to the east; the well-house has open latticework walls on the upper half with the bottom half being open, cement floor, large wooden cylinder pulley for raising the bucket, and an attached wooden bench. The ice house is an enclosed portion at the rear of the building made of horizontal boards with latticework on the upper third and a steep gable tin roof. Most families had only a spring house for cooling. The Wests had ice brought from Franklin twice a week.

9B. Tool and Equipment shed. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Located behind the ice house to the north; rough vertical siding, tin front gabled roof.

9C. Chicken house. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located to the west of the house; vertical wood siding, tin shed roof, door made of two wide boards about 16" wide each.

10. Clara West Owens House. Ca. 1936-40. Contributing.

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This house was built on a corner of the property above, to the east of the big house, by Clara West Owens, the daughter of Jesse and Pallie West. Mr. Odell Hall, a black resident of the community, built the house.

The house is a single-story, two-bay, board and batten dwelling with a side-gable roof, a shed roof at the rear, and stone pile foundation supports. A massive stone and brick chimney on the southwest corner of the house hints at the most notable interior feature: a brick corner fireplace. A smaller cinderblock flue is found at the northwest corner. A lean-to woodshed with a shed roof is attached to the back of the house. The house has no indoor plumbing, as is true for several other buildings in the district that have not been modernized. Clara West was appointed postmaster of West's Mill post office in 1950.

10A. Well house. Ca. 1940. Contributing. A small building located to the west of the house; latticework walls, tin gable-front roof

10B. Work shop. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located north of the house; rough pine vertical siding, tin front-facing gable roof, square opening in front gable, off-center door on the front

10C. Chicken house. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located north of the workshop; rough pine vertical siding, tin shed roof with exposed rafter ends

10D. Privy. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located north of the chicken house; vertical wood siding, tin shed roof; a one-seater.

11. Snow Hill Methodist Church. 1929, 1959, 1974. Contributing.

The Snow Hill Methodist Church is located one thousand feet north on Snow Hill Road (SR 1350) from the Morrison House on the west side on a knoll above the road. The current building was constructed in 1929. The basement was finished and a furnace and kitchen added in 1959; a fellowship hall and classroom were added to the rear in 1974, and the classrooms renovated in 1985. The present structure is a brick rectangular gable front building with a square bell tower on its northeast corner. There are arched stained glass windows and a patterned tin roof.

An earlier church was built on the site of the current cemetery in 1876; because it was snowing the day the building was completed, the congregation named it Snow Hill. The congregation formed in 1833. It met in homes and then in a building that stood near the center of the present cemetery. William West, Sr. was a founding member of the church.

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Also on this site was the Peabody School, a subscription school, well-known as an excellent school which attracted students from outside the community and county in the nineteenth century.

11A. Cemetery. 1800s to present. Contributing. The cemetery contains graves of many citizens of the community from the period of significance. Jesse West donated the land on which the church and cemetery were built and is buried in the cemetery. The cemetery was enlarged in 1966 with land acquired from Clyde West and Clara Owens. Overall, the cemetery retains its historic integrity with more than 50% of markers predating 1950.

11B. Bell-tower. 1985. Non-contributing. Free-standing brick structure located to the east of the church

12. Carol Jan Ramsey property. Vacant

13. (Former) Cowee School . 1914, 1930, 1933, 1991. Contributing.

Built in 1914, this building replaced an earlier school building that burned. The imposing two-story frame structure with pyramidal roof built on a hilltop overlooks the Cowee Valley. Large 12/12 sash windows punctuate the building's four elevations. A one-story porch, which was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1933, has tapered posts on square bases. A kitchen was added in 1930. A center hall bisects the first floor and divides it into several classrooms. A pair of quarter-landing staircases flanks the front of the center hall and lead to what were originally the second floor classrooms. Original tongue and groove walls and five-panel doors remain throughout the building. Flues for woodstoves used for heat are also still visible. During a 1991 renovation, a two-story dining room and a back deck were added, and the building opened as an inn.

An earlier school building was constructed on this site in 1887; the current building was built when the original one burned. It served the community until 1943 when it was closed due to the consolidation of Liberty, Harmony, Oak Grove, and Cowee schools.

13A. Spring house. Ca. 1920. Contributing. Located in front of the old school, an unusual two story tower-like structure approximately eighteen feet high, made of stone; arched single window on second story, arched cement crown. Served as a bell-tower for the school as well as a spring house

13B. Garage. 1990s. Non-contributing. A prefabricated structure

14. Rebekah May property. Vacant.

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15. Pleasant Hill Church and Cemetery. 1929. Contributing.

Pleasant Hill Church sits on a knoll on the west side of Snow Hill Road (SR 1350) approximately one thousand feet beyond the Old Cowee School. It is one of three intact African American religious buildings in the county, and the only surviving church in West's Mill built in the simple rectangular, weather board form typical of the early twentieth century. The congregation purchased the land in 1871 but the present church building was not constructed until 1929, using materials that may have come from an earlier building on the site. A concrete foundation and steps were added in the 1950s. The church is a simple but striking wood-frame rectangular building, with a front gabled roof. There is a wooden bell tower crowning the roof ridge and double-leaf front façade doors. The raised altar with wooden rails is still in place. The original pews and pulpit were stolen after 1994.

The church is no longer in regular use but is still owned by the African American Methodist Episcopal Church. The Cowee Community Development Organization and descendants of members have sporadically maintained the building. The Land Trust for the Little Tennessee and the community development organization had the building stabilized and secured in 1999 and hope to fully restore it in the future.

15A. Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Contributing. Grave markers dating from late 1800s to present; earlier unmarked graves. Burials of descendants of church members were made as recently as 1997. Occupies the property surrounding the church building, and contains grave markers ranging from simple wood posts to stone monuments. The graves of former slaves are located in the Pleasant Hill cemetery and also the grave of the last living church member, Escomoe Howell, who died in 1987

15B. Privy. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located to the north of the church; plywood covered.

16. Cowee Elementary School. 1943,1957. Contributing.

Cowee Elementary School stands on the east side of the junction of Snow Hill Road (SR 1350) and Cowee Creek Road (SR 1341). It is a single story building of native Macon County stone with a simple Art Deco style chevron motif over the front entrance on the north elevation. It has a flat roof. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1943 constructed the school. The school is one of only two WPA schools still in use in the county. The free-standing brick cafeteria building to the west of the main building and two stone-veneered classrooms on the south end of the main building were added in 1956-1957. The interior of the school was renovated in 1985. There are two temporary modular classrooms on the site. Cowee Elementary now serves grades three through five.

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Pre-dating the school, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was built here in 1933. The CCC's biggest project was extending Leatherman Gap Road, which connects to Cowee Creek Road, all the way up to Cowee Bald for the establishment of a fire tower.

This school replaced the Old Cowee School (#13) when county schools were consolidated. It originally contained eight classrooms, plus an auditorium with a stage and dressing rooms. The auditorium has been converted to a gymnasium, but still serves its original function as well. The interior of the original building retains its corridor plan. According to a history of the school published on the event of its fiftieth anniversary, originally there was no electricity and water only at outside fountains. A storage building was converted to a makeshift lunchroom about 1944, where cooking was done on a wood stove. That building was torn down to make way for the new cafeteria building.

16A. Temporary trailer classrooms (2)—non-contributing

17. Louise Bryson Holden property. Vacant.

18. John and Geraldine Banfield House. Ca. 1990. Non-contributing.

Two story, two-bay modern novelty log house with side-facing gable roof and shed-roof front porch. One story wings grace each side elevation

19. T.R.Rickman Store. Ca. 1895. Contributing.

On the east side of Cowee Creek Road (SR 1341) just south of the junction with Snow Hill Road (SR 1350) is the T. R. Rickman Store. The building is an imposing large unadorned two-story gable front frame construction with a second story side porch enclosed with latticework over a first story native stone apple cellar on the north side. There are also native stone retaining walls along the road bank at the north of the building. It has a tin front facing gable roof on the main section and a shed roof over the porch and apple cellar. The original doors, floors, shelves, counters, and wall boards are in place and in use and chestnut paneling can be found upstairs. There is a garage addition on the south elevation with a shed roof and modern garage door.

The store was built by John Hall, circa 1895, and later bought by Horace Bryson in 1920, who sold it to Thomas Rickman in 1925. Mr. Rickman operated the store virtually unchanged until his death in 1994. Originally, the building was elevated on posts so wagons could drive underneath to load and unload, but was lowered to ground level when Mr. Rickman bought it. Mr. Rickman divided the upstairs, which had been used as a granary, into rooms for living quarters in the late 1920s.

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The building has been well maintained and was partially remodeled inside when sold after Mr. Rickman's death in 1994, at which time the board exterior was covered with aluminum siding and the apple cellar restored and opened as part of the store. Still called Rickman's Store, it is now used as a craft and food store. Mementos from earlier years in the community may be seen inside.

20. T.C. Bryson House. Ca. 1871, early 1900s. Contributing.

On the northeast side of Cowee Creek Road across from Rickman's Store is the T.C. Bryson House, a two-story single-pile house with a one-and-a-half story rear ell. The rear ell, the southeastern portion of the current structure, is the original house with loft, built in 1871 according to a Bryson descendant. It has a stone foundation, wooden piers, and a cellar. A two-story addition, now the front block, was built by T.C. Bryson to accommodate his large family in the early 20th century. The newer portion of the house has a brick chimney with stone base and a gable end patterned tin roof in good condition. Both sections are covered in masonite shingles. The interior has not been remodeled and retains the original brick-arched shallow fireplaces used for burning coal, original simple mantels, and beaded board walls or wall papered walls. Old lace tablecloths and other fabric have been found under layers of wallpaper, presumably used as insulation. The agricultural fields are still open to the east of the house, maintaining the rural appearance typical of mountain farm communities of the time. T.C. Bryson was the son of Cling Bryson and grandson of James Bryson (#25).

20A. Barn with attached garage. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located to the east of the house; wood siding, small barn has gabled tin roof, garage with open bay has tin shed roof, garage portion newer

20B. Barn. Ca. 1930. Contributing. Wood siding and timbers, gambrel roof

20C. Stock barn. 1997. Non-contributing. Board and batten wood siding

20D. Spring house. 1930s or 1940s. Contributing. Low structure covering spring, constructed of native stone with a flat metal roof

21. Darryl Queen House. 1946. Contributing.

Darryl Queen built this simple one-story bungalow in 1946. He purchased the land from Pernell Bryson. Mr. Bryson and Tom Rickman helped Queen build the house. The structure has composition shingle walls and front-facing gable shingle roof with an inset partial facade front porch.

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21A. Tobacco barn or smoke house, root cellar, canning house, and wood shed/ garage. Ca. 1946. Contributing.

Single, multi-purpose building located to the south of the house; the tobacco barn or smoke house is the second story structure above the root cellar on the east side of the building; the canning house is the front portion of the west side of the building; the wood shed/garage is the back portion. Plywood siding on garage and canning house; rough-cut siding on barn; cement block walls on root cellar; tin front gable roof on barn; tin side gable roof on garage and canning house.

21B. Barn. Ca. 1946. Contributing. Located to the northeast of the previous building; rough wood siding, side gable tin roof; shed roof chicken house attached on south side.

22. Womack House. Ca. 1964. Non-contributing.

This is a one-story brick ranch house with a side gable composition shingle roof, located to the east of the entrance to the Frank and Leo Gibson Farm (#23), on the north side of Cowee Creek Road. Betty Bryson Womack is the granddaughter of James and Emmeline Bryson (#25) and this property was part of the original Bryson farm.

22A. Shed. Non-contributing. Located to the south of the house; prefabricated barn-shaped shed

23. Frank and Leo Gibson Farm. 1925. Contributing.

On the north side of Cowee Creek Road is a dirt road leading some 2,000 feet through open fields to the Gibson house. The road crosses Cowee Creek and the surrounding bottomlands, and climbs up to the top of a high knoll where the house sits, encircled by Cowee Creek on the south, east, and west, with impressive views of the valley and the creek that has many rapids at this spot. The Gibson house was the first in the valley to have electricity, generated by the falling waters of Cowee Creek.

The house is a single-story frame building with a front porch on the west elevation, a cement block foundation, and a tin hip roof. The original siding has been covered with aluminum siding. A cement-covered brick chimney stands at the southeast end of the house.

There are many outbuildings, indicative of the diversity of activities carried on. The second, third, and fourth outbuildings listed below, having to do with farm activities, are clustered to the west of the house. The last two buildings are on the east side of the house and were used for more domestic activities. This placement of outbuildings based on farm or home function was typical of rural farmsteads.

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Jesse Bryson whose family owned extensive farmland along Cowee Creek built the house in 1925. Frank and Leo Gibson bought the house and farm from him in 1931. The Gibson family is descended from Samuel Baxter Gibson who settled in Cowee about 1850. His son, John Stewart Gibson, was one of the founders of Snow Hill Church (#11) and is buried in the cemetery there. This is still a working farm today, worked by the daughter and grandson of Frank and Leo Gibson.

23A. Hay shed. Ca. 1980. Non-contributing. Located before creek crossing by entrance road; rough sawn siding and locust posts

23B. Workshop and tool shed. Ca. 1945. Contributing. Located to the west of the house; pine siding, tin gable roof

23C. Barn. 1933. Contributing. Located to the west of house; pine with tin gabled roof, with loft; newer attached equipment shed

23D. Shed. Modern. Non-contributing. Portable metal shed located to the west of house; covered with a shed roof on round poles

23E. Canning house and wood shed. Ca. 1950. Contributing. Located to the east of house; cement block, tin roof, wood siding on wood shed

23F. Woodshed. 1933. Contributing. Located to the east of house; older than woodshed above; rough siding, stone supports, tin roof; originally had a smokehouse attached and a potato cellar underneath; space on south side was a playhouse

24. Frankabelle Scruggs House. Ca. 1957. Non-contributing.

This is a small one-story, three bay asphalt shingled house with a side-gable composition shingle roof located on the north side of Snow Hill Road, 1500 feet past the entry to the Gibson farm. Frankabelle Gibson Scruggs is the daughter of Frank and Leo Gibson (#23); Leo Gibson, now 93, lives with her daughter. The first four outbuildings below are on a level with the house and grouped to the north and east. The last three are on a hill above the house to the east.

24A. Root-cellar. Late 1950s. Non-contributing. Vertical siding and cinder block, tin roof

24B. Metal shed and wood bin. Late 1950's. Non-contributing. Manufactured shed with wood bin

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of rough cut boards attached

24C. Storage shed. Late 1950's Non-contributing. Rough wood siding, tin shed roof

24D. Chicken house. Late 1950s. Non-contributing. Horizontal siding, shed roof

24 E. Barn . Part was built in the early 1900s, but it has been much enlarged and altered. Non-contributing. Rough cut vertical siding

24F. Corn crib. Late 1950s. Non-contributing. Small tall thin building with horizontal siding with gaps for air

24G. Hay barn. Late 1950s. Non-contributing. Large building of rough-cut vertical siding with gaps for aeration

25. James and Emmeline Bryson Farm. 1863. Contributing.

Across from the Scruggs home, on the east side of Cowee Creek Road is the James and Emmeline Bryson Farm, which includes the oldest building in the district, built in 1863. It is a two-story single-pile I-house with a one-story rear ell added around 1948. There are three doors on the front elevation and a full width porch. Twin stucco-over-brick chimneys occupy the east and west ends of the house. On the interior there are two parlors bisected by a central passage. The original mantels, doors, floors, and other woodwork are still in place. Asbestos shingle siding sheathes the exterior.

The farmland was acquired in 1856 from Emmeline Bryson's parents, the Thomas Shepherds, who acquired it as part of a state land grant. James Bryson was the son of Samuel Bryson who is thought to have moved to the area around 1813 and received a large land grant in the 1830s. The Bryson family has continuously inhabited the house since it was built. Mrs. Frances Bryson, now 94, continues to live in the house and is an excellent and entertaining source of oral history.

A number of outbuildings, along with the fields, pasture, small creek, large trees, and old home, are nestled in a sunny hollow and give this cove the appearance of a functioning farmstead that has changed very little in character over the years. The open farmland across the road to the northwest of the house was part of the original holdings, some of which the Bryson's still own, and some of which is part of the Gibson Farm (#23). All outbuildings are arranged informally to the east and northeast of the house.

25A. Privy. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Vertical wood siding, tin shed roof; huge virgin maple stump

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behind privy

25B. Chicken house. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Very small structure with rough wood siding, tin shed roof; deteriorated

25C. Barn. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Calf and horse barn; vertical wood siding and front-facing gable tin roof

25D. Tobacco barn. Ca. 1945. Contributing. The largest outbuilding; vertical rough wood siding, gable and flat tin roof; used for burley tobacco. Mr. Bryson fell of the roof of this building while constructing it and broke his leg

25E. Garage. Ca. 1945. Contributing. Vertical wood siding, front gable tin roof, open front bay

25F. Canning and wash house. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Vertical wood siding, tin, steep gable roof, old wash tubs still hanging on exterior; has a lean-to wood shed attached to the rear of the building with a tin shed roof

25G. Root cellar and smokehouse. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Native stone lower -story root cellar has one small window; vertical siding on upper story smokehouse; tin gable roof

26. Joel and Selma Dalton House. 1936, mid-1940s. Contributing.

The Joel and Selma Dalton House stands in a cove 400 feet north of the Bryson Farm on the east side of Cowee Creek Road. The single-story frame house with weatherboard siding has small wings on both the east and west sides. The front porch, which has four square posts on top of a partial enclosing wall, and two front rooms were added on in the mid-1940s. The composition-shingled roof is a front-facing gable, with side gables on the wing additions. On the east end is a brick chimney inlaid with an arched pattern.

The land was given to the Joel Daltons by his parents, John Henry and Ada Dalton. (#27) Joel Dalton worked for the CCC camp formerly located on the site of the Cowee Elementary School and Selma Dalton was a teacher in Cowee schools.

26A. Barn. Ca. 1940. Contributing. Located southeast of the house; rough-cut wood siding, locust posts, gambrel roof, unique sliding wood latch on door

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26 B. Garage. 1960s. Non-contributing. Open front, gable- roof structure to the rear of the house.

27. John Henry and Ada Gibson Dalton House. 1927. Contributing.

The Dalton house stands on the east side of Cowee Creek Road 700 feet north of the Joel and Selma Dalton house. It is a one and a half-story frame dwelling with one-room single-story wings on the east and west sides. The east wing was the kitchen and John Dalton, who was the county surveyor, used the west wing, which received afternoon sun, as an office. A covered porch extends across the front and around the sides to the wings. There is lattice underpinning, a brick chimney, and a patterned tin side gable roof. Inside, the original beaded board walls and ceiling are in place, as well as tongue-in-groove pine flooring.

John and Ada Dalton were the parents of Joel Dalton and ten other children. The land was purchased from the Shepherd family, one of the first families to settle in the area. The house was built in 1927 on the site of an older house. Mrs. Josephine Dalton Corbin, granddaughter of John and Ada Dalton, recalls Sunday gospel sings on the porch of the house, attended by family and neighbors and says that the sound of music filled the valley (from an interview with Josephine Corbin, 2/4/99). Mrs. Corbin owns both her parents' and grand-parents' homes and lives on a hill above them on family land.

27A. Smokehouse and root cellar. Ca. 1900. Contributing. Located to the north of the house; stone and cement cellar with rough-sawn lumber smokehouse above , pre-dates current house

28. Cowee Creek. Contributing site.

This fast-flowing mountain stream courses through the West's Mill community and is largely responsible for its presence. The community lies just northeast of the creek's confluence with the Little Tennessee River. Where the two bodies of water merge, there is extensive prime land available for the establishment of farms, roads, and a viable community. The grist mill for which the community was named was located on Cowee Creek. The creek flows from east to west for one and a half miles through the heart of the historic district. At the east end of the district it meanders across a wide fertile bottom where Matlock Creek joins it. After dropping rapidly around a ridge and picking up the waters of Bryson Branch, it meanders across another wide bottom before picking up the waters of West's Branch and dropping onto the floodplain of the Little Tennessee River.

29. Moore property. Vacant.

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30. Barn. Ca. 1940. Contributing.

Side gabled tin-roof wood building with horizontal siding. Originally part of Will West property, now stands alone

31. Robert Morgan House. 1950s. Noncontributing.

One-story, four-bay stucco house with asphalt-shingle side-gabled roof and a center brick chimney

31A. Cottage. Ca. 1960. Non-contributing

Side-gabled rectangular building with composition shingle roof

31B. Cottage. Ca. 1960. Noncontributing.

Side-gabled rectangular building with composition shingle roof with carport

32. Bell House. Ca. 1980. Non-contributing.

One-story, brick ranch house with side-gabled composition roof

33. Dale Morgan House. Ca. 1970. Non-contributing.

One-story, brick ranch house with side-gabled composition shingle roof on south end and front facing gable roof on north end

33a. Barn. Ca. 1950. Contributing.

Front gable tin roofed barn with horizontal siding

34. Everett and Katherine Johns House. Mid-twentieth century, Ca. 1990. Non-contributing.

Simple rectangular one-story, side-gabled house extensively remodeled. Aluminum siding and metal roof

35. Cowee Mound (31MA5) (NR 1973). Date Unknown. Contributing.

One of the few remaining earthen mounds in western North Carolina, and because of its potential archaeological resources, one of the most significant archaeological sites in the region. The prehistoric structure stands along the southern bank of the Little Tennessee River north of the river's junction with Cowee Creek

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36. Euchella Site (31MA207). Contributing site.

The Euchella reservation was located at the southwest bank of the Little Tennessee River and encompassed much of the site of Cowee Town, the political center of the Middle Settlements during the Late Colonial, Revolutionary, and Federal periods. The site is approximately 450 meters southwest of the Cowee Mound. It is presently pasture land that has been intensively cultivated during the last 150 years.

Euchella registered his claim of land at Cowee in 1819; it is unknown when he first occupied the land. His claim indicated that three people made up the household. Joseph Welch purchased 299 acres of the reservation in the state sales of 1821. Welch dispossessed Euchella of his claim and the native man filed a suit of ejectment against Welch in Buncombe County Superior Court. Judge John Hall ruled in favor of Euchella, but pointed out that the life estate was invalid because the President or a commissioned surveyor had not signed the survey certificate. Court documents noted that Euchella's land included "a field cleared and fenced, a crib within the enclosure where he housed his corn and a hut." Euchella vacated the land at Cowee sometime prior to September 1819 settling in Euchella Cove near the Nantahala River. He resided there until Cherokee Removal. After he helped Federal troops capture Tsali and his sons, Euchella was granted immunity from removal and became head of Wolf Town in the Qualla settlement where he lived until his death.

Katherine Porter, approximate age 77, was raised on and still lives on the former Euchella Reserve. According to Ms. Porter, her great-grandfather acquired all 640 acres of the Euchella land during the 1820s and that Cherokees continued to occupy the property throughout her grandmother's childhood. She remembered the ruins of the Welch house, a log cabin, on the hillside overlooking the Euchella farm.

Collection and testing of the Euchella site by archaeologist Brett H. Riggs in 1988 indicated the presence of a late historic (post Revolutionary War) Cherokee component. According to Riggs' report,

No attributable Cherokee features were encountered in the limited testing of the Euchella site. Although it is impossible to directly attribute these remains to the Euchella occupation, the presence of a contemporaneous component and the historical importance of the Euchella personage as a leader of the Citizen Cherokees warrants further investigation of the site. In addition, the archaeological significance of the site is greatly augmented by the intact Middle Woodland deposits, and further study and preservation of these resources is recommended.

37. Pedestrian Bridge. Ca. 1948. Contributing structure.

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Steel and cable single-track pedestrian suspension bridge built to provide a connection between the east and west sides of the Little Tennessee River

38. 31MA65. Prehistoric. Contributing site.

Site along the west bank of Little Tennessee River recorded on June 11, 1965 during a reconnaissance survey. Situated seventy meters from the river in a cultivated field, the site elevation is 1,950 feet above mean sea level (amsl). Prehistoric ceramics were collected from the alluvial soils by personnel from the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where the artifact collection is curated. (Source: North Carolina Office of State Archaeology CREP site form)

39. 31MA66. Prehistoric. Contributing site.

Site along the west bank of Little Tennessee River recorded on June 11, 1965 during a reconnaissance survey. Situated ten meters from the river in a cultivated field, the site elevation is 1,940 feet amsl. Prehistoric ceramics were collected from the alluvial soils by personnel from the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where the artifact collection is curated. (Source: North Carolina Office of State Archaeology CREP site form)

40. Portion of Little Tennessee River. Contributing Site.

The river played a pivotal role in the development of communities for Native peoples and white settlers. The portion included in the district stretches for its confluence with Cowee Creek and ends adjacent to the Euchella site. The Little Tennessee provided a water source as well as a source for fish.

41. Landscape. Contributing site.

The rural mountain landscape itself contributes to the historical integrity of the district, because not only do the buildings of the period remain, the landscape appears much as it did during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The landscape is comprised of agricultural fields and open space at the lower, flatter elevations, rivers and creeks, and wooded hillsides. The built resources punctuate the agricultural landscape, which attests to the historical agrarian character of the area, and the farmland is in turn framed by wooded hillsides. Curving roads follow the natural contours of the land. The difficult terrain of the mountains and the necessity for creek and river crossings led to the relatively late settlement of the area, historical isolation of the community, and the slow modernization.

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Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, Macon County, NC

SUMMARY

The Cowee-West's Mill Historic District is a rural historic district located along the Little Tennessee River and Cowee Creek and centered around the crossroads community of West's Mill. The 369-acre district occupies a valley of the Cowee Mountains just north of Franklin. For centuries, most likely as early as A.D. 600, Native Americans lived and farmed in the broad valley of the Little Tennessee River. During Cherokee occupation in the eighteenth century, Cowee (Cowe) was the principal town of the Middle Cherokee. In his travels in 1775 naturalist William Bartram described the Cowee community as consisting of one hundred dwellings dominated by a townhouse atop an earthen mound. The district encompasses several important archaeological sites. The Cowee Mound (NR, 1973), likely built during the Mississippian period and later used by the Cherokee, stands in the northwest portion of the district. Just to the west of the mound archaeologists have documented the Euchella farm, the site of a citizen Cherokee farm taken over by a white settler in the early nineteenth century. Separate deposits of prehistoric ceramics were collected at two sites (31MA65 and 31MA66) on the west bank of the Little Tennessee River by archaeologists in 1965.

Beginning in the eighteenth century this fertile valley attracted white settlers, who mined lead, silver, and gemstones, farmed the Little Tennessee and Cowee valleys, and established the community of West's Mill, named for the mill established by the West family likely as early as the late eighteenth century. West's Mill continued as an important trading and community center for the northern part of Macon County in the nineteenth century when country stores and a post office were established. During the late nineteenth century, a small community of African Americans settled here and established a school and the Pleasant Hill AME Zion church; their small frame chapel still stands in the northeast corner of the district. The community prospered in the twentieth century, with most residents growing crops and raising livestock. During the Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps built the Art Deco-influenced Cowee School of local stone. By 1954, activity in the community had slowed enough to warrant the closing of the West's Mill post office.

The Cowee-West's Mill Historic District retains its historic buildings and structures as well as the surrounding rural agricultural and natural landscape ringed by mountains and intersected by the Little Tennessee River and Cowee Creek. The district is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of exploration/settlement, agriculture, and community planning and development. The district is also eligible under Criterion C for architecture due to its outstanding collection of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings typical of North Carolina's rural mountain communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, the Cowee-West's Mill Historic District is eligible under Criterion D at the state level as the important site of both Mississippian and Cherokee activity. Containing the best described eighteenth-century Cherokee town in North Carolina, the district possesses unusually rich potential for correlating archaeological study with the contemporary description. The period of significance begins in A.D. 600 and extends to 1954, a period during which this community served as an important center of social, economic, and cultural life for Native Americans and white and African American residents.

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The significance of the Cowee-West's Mill Historic District is discussed in the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Historic and Architectural Resources of Macon County, NC ca. AD 600-1945," in Context I: Native American and Early White Settlement, pre-1938; Context II: A Period of Transition: White Settlement in the Early Nineteenth Century; Context III: The Birth, Division, and Growth of Macon County: 1827-1874; Context IV: The Richness of Macon's Resources Realized: 1875-1904; and Context V: The Transportation Revolution in Macon County: 1905-1945. The district meets the registration requirements for significance in the history of the county's architecture outline in Property Type 1: farm complexes; Property Type 2: Houses; Property Type 4: institutional buildings; and Property Type 5: commercial buildings.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

For thousands of years, the Little Tennessee and Cowee valleys have been centers of human settlement because of their fertile soils and accessibility to water sources. Cowee is a Native American word meaning "place of the Deer Clan."¹ Before Cherokee settled in Cowee, most likely by the mid sixteenth century, and established what became the principal town of the middle Cherokee in the eighteenth century, pre-historic people formed a community here and built an earthen structure occupying the southern banks of the Little Tennessee River just north of its confluence with Cowee Creek. The Cowee Mound (NR, 1973), likely constructed by the Middle Mississippian period, served as the settlement's spiritual and cultural center and remains the largest of four known flat-topped earthen mounds in the upper Little Tennessee Valley built by Mississippian cultures. It is believed that Native Americans inhabited the area approximately 11,000 years before white settlement began.

White explorers and traders frequently traveled the valley at least by the mid eighteenth century. In 1775, the renowned naturalist William Bartram visited several Cherokee towns including Nikwasi, present-day Franklin, and Whatoga. Of Cowee he wrote:

[It is] situated on the bases of the hills on both sides of the river, near to its bank, and here terminates the great vale of Cowe...ridges of hills rising grand and sublimely one above and beyond another, some boldly and majestically advancing into the verdant plain ...whilst others far distant, veiled in blue mists, sublimely mount aloft, with yet greater majesty lift up their pompous crests and overlook vast regions.²

At the time of Bartram's visit, the Cherokee town consisted of about one hundred dwellings situated on both sides of the river and was dominated by a large circular townhouse sitting atop the ancient mound. Bartram provided a glimpse into Cherokee farming: "All before me and [on] every side appeared little plantations of young corn, beans, ...divided from each other by narrow strips of grass."³

¹ The original spelling was "Kaw'yi." It later became Cowe.

² William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 221.

³ Ibid.

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Merchants from Charleston, South Carolina and other major commercial centers knew the town of Cowee as the largest center of trade with the Cherokee people prior to the American Revolution. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Wedgewood pottery of England purchased several tons of white kaolin clay from the Cherokee, from the banks of the Little Tennessee River at Cowee but more accessible sites were found and the trade did not continue.⁴

During the eighteenth century Cowee and other Middle settlements were attacked and destroyed by American and British troops. While some smaller settlements folded as a result of the conflicts, Cowee was rebuilt several times. In 1761 a British force under Lieutenant Colonel James Grant occupied Cowee and used it as a base camp from which to destroy nearby towns before burning Cowee itself. In 1776 General Griffith Rutherford's North Carolina militia destroyed Cowee. In 1783 Major Peter Fine and Colonel William Lillard led a group of Tennessee volunteers to Cowee where they burned the town. Despite the destruction, Cowee was rebuilt and continuously occupied by the Cherokee until 1819.⁵

There had been a few white settlers in Cowee before the last quarter of the eighteenth century including a trader who lived there well before the 1770s. An 1819 treaty relinquished Cherokee lands east of the Nantahala Mountains, including Cowee, and opened all of the territory of what is now Macon County to white settlement, except for a portion along the Nantahala River. White settlement and land claims rapidly accelerated after the treaty. Macon County was formed in 1828 from a portion of Haywood County. In 1836, the United States government forced the removal of Cherokee from the territory east of the Mississippi along a route from North Carolina to Oklahoma in an event that became known as "the Trail of Tears."

Most of the white families who settled in the area received their land as land grants from the government after Cherokee removal, although John West is believed to have "bought land and a village from Old Jake, a Cherokee chief" on the north side of Cowee Creek in the 1820s.⁶

Several Cherokee in Cowee participated in a federal government program set forth in treaties drafted in 1817 and 1819 that allowed each head of a Cherokee family who wished to become a citizen of the United States a life reservation of 640 acres with reversion in fee simple to his children. A reservee's removal from the land claim would result in the title passing to the United States government. The government also agreed to pay for improvements to land left by Cherokees who vacated their reservations. Over 300 heads of Cherokee families enlisted for reservations under the conditions stated in the two treaties.⁷

Many Cherokees who participated in the program experienced problems with their white neighbors and in some

⁴ See North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources highway historical marker on NC 28 near Will West House.

⁵ Vicki Rozema, *Footsteps of the Cherokees: A Guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1995), 262.

⁶ Jesse Sutton, ed., *The Heritage of Macon County, North Carolina* (Franklin, NC: Macon County Historical Society, 1987), p.3.

⁷ David Keith Hampton, *Cherokee Reservees*, n.p.

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cases, state governments. The North Carolina government failed to make provision for natives when land was surveyed, and releases were eventually obtained from the reserves. The inability of the United States government to enforce the treaties of 1817 and 1819 led to many legal cases in the following years. One of the best-documented cases of the transition of land from Cherokee control to white ownership is the Euchella reservation. This farm was located at the southwest bank of the Little Tennessee River and encompassed much of the site of Cowee Town. The site is approximately 450 meters southwest of the Cowee Mound. It is presently pasture land that has been intensively cultivated during the last 150 years.⁸

Euchella registered his claim of land at Cowee in 1819. His claim indicated that three people made up the household. Joseph Welch purchased 299 acres of the reservation in the state sales of 1821. Welch dispossessed Euchella of his claim and the native man filed a suit of ejectment against Welch in Buncombe County Superior Court. Judge John Hall ruled in favor of Euchella, but pointed out that the life estate was invalid because neither the President nor a commissioned surveyor had signed the survey certificate. Court documents noted that Euchella's land included "a field cleared and fenced, a crib within the enclosure where he housed his corn and a hut." Euchella vacated the land at Cowee sometime prior to September 1819 settling in Euchella Cove near the Nantahala River. He resided there until Cherokee Removal. After he helped Federal troops capture Tsali and his sons, Euchella was granted immunity from removal and became head of Wolf Town in the Qualla settlement where he lived until his death.⁹

Katherine Porter, approximate age seventy-seven, was raised on and still lives on the former Euchella Reserve. According to Ms. Porter, her great-grandfather acquired all 640 acres of the Euchella land during the 1820s and Cherokees continued to occupy the property throughout her grandmother's childhood. She remembered the ruins of the Welch house, a log cabin, on the hillside overlooking the former Euchella farm.¹⁰

Several other Cherokee enlisted in the reserve program held claims in and around Cowee that they had registered in 1819. Au-to-weh, Axe and Ah-see-nee held reserves on the Little Tennessee River at Cowee. Whipperwill held a reserve "on a small creek near the Trout's place; the Trout was another Cherokee claimant."¹¹ Deer in the Water registered his claim in July for reserve located "at West's old mill place."¹² The Fence, with six members in his household, had a reserve at Cowee. Other Cherokee holding reserves around Cowee included Ne-ne-tu-ala, whose household included five individuals, Too-naugh-he-ah who lived with seven household members, John Quchey, and the Old Mouse whose household included four other individuals. The exact locations of these reserves remain unknown pending archaeological investigation.¹³

⁸ Brett H. Riggs, "An Historical and Archaeological Reconnaissance of Citizen Cherokee Reservations in Macon, Swain, and Jackson Counties, North Carolina." Report Submitted to the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1988, 30-32.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hampton, p.8

¹² Hampton, p. 9.

¹³ Hampton, p. 12.

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Among the early white settlers to Cowee were men from the Indian campaigns and their descendants who, knowing of the fertile soil and abundant natural resources found in the Cowee Valley, returned to settle in the following decades. Presbyterian minister William Hall who accompanied Rutherford's troops, preached a sermon of victory in 1776 from the top of Cowee Mound.

During the nineteenth century, the Cowee area evolved from a frontier settlement to a prosperous organized farming and trading community. Cowee established a post office in 1852 and then discontinued the office in 1866. Apparently, after the Civil War the area came to be known as West's Mill because records indicate that the West's Mill post office opened in 1875 with Pinkney P. McLean as postmaster.¹⁴ The name Cowee would not disappear however. Sometime later, most likely in the mid to late nineteenth century, the township containing the community of West's Mill would be named Cowee. Since the nineteenth century, the community immediately surrounding the village of West's Mill has been referred to as Cowee.

Farms in West's Mill and Cowee were largely self-sufficient, but because roads were few and poor, a small commercial and community centers grew up to serve the needs of local families. Community centers in rural Macon County contained businesses for buying and selling goods and products, small manufacturing and service concerns like mills and blacksmith shops, and community buildings such as churches and schools. The Wests, one of the first families to settle in the area, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, built West's Mill, from which the community derived its name.¹⁵ The mill was located on the banks of Cowee Creek just before it drops onto the floodplain of the Little Tennessee River. Gristmills were very important to rural communities of the period since grinding grain efficiently could not be done at home; consequently mills were often among the first commercial establishments in a community and became the business and social center of rural hamlets in mountain counties.

In the earliest years of white settlement at West's Mill, subsistence and livestock farming, principally hogs run on forest land, were predominant. As farms developed, with more improved land for pasture, hay, grains, and other crops, cattle and poultry and a few cash crops such as tobacco and corn became important supplements to subsistence activities. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the number of farms in Macon County increased from about six hundred to over a thousand, but the actual amount of acreage remained nearly steady and crop production went up, meaning that the average farm size was smaller but land was being used more intensively.

Production of tobacco, an important cash crop, increased greatly during the last half of the nineteenth century because markets became more accessible to farmers as transportation improved. The legacy of tobacco production is evident in the tobacco barns still standing in the district. The timber industry, an important contributor to the cash economy, grew throughout the period, up until the Depression. In the earlier decades,

¹⁴ Vernon S. Stroupe et al, eds., *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina*, n.p.

¹⁵ Although the construction date of the mill remains unknown, the mill was mentioned in the 1819 reserve claim of a Cherokee named Deer in the Water. His reserve was documented as located "at West's old mill place." See Hampton, p. 9.

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logging had been mostly restricted to farmers cutting timber off their own land in more accessible areas. Handling timber was cumbersome and time consuming. But after the railroad reached nearby Murphy in 1890 and railroad spurs extended into Macon County, lumber companies began to exploit the rich timber resources, including steeper, more easily damaged areas. The railroad never reached West's Mill, but much timber was cut in the area and many men were employed in the business. On a much smaller scale, fruit orchards became more profitable during this time for the same reason. Apples and peaches were the primary crops in West's Mill. Livestock remained a dominant element in the agricultural economy of West's Mill throughout its history and up to the present because even poorer land was suited to grazing and less management is required, allowing even part-time farmers to manage pasture land.

William West emerged as one of the most prosperous farmers in West's Mill during the late nineteenth century. In 1880 on his eleven hundred acres, West held oxen, cattle, sheep, swine, and poultry. He had forty-three acres in corn, thirty acres in wheat, fields of sweet and Irish potatoes, and apple orchards. More typical of the period was the small-scale operation of John West who rented seventeen acres whereon he held two cows, three sheep, and five heads of poultry, and grew corn, wheat, and pulse on twenty-five acres.¹⁶

One of the more prominent farms to be established in the nineteenth century was the James and Emmeline Bryson farm (#25). James Bryson (1823-1904) and his wife Emmeline Shepherd Bryson acquired the property in 1856 from her parents, Nancy and Thomas Shepherd, Jr., who had received the property as a state land grant soon after the Cherokees were removed. Both the Bryson and the Shepherd families had been in Cowee since at least the early nineteenth century: Thomas Shepard is believed to have been the fourth white man to settle in the valley among the Cherokee and James Bryson's father is believed to have settled in Cowee around 1815. The Bryson farm, typical of farms in West's Mill during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, produced corn, wheat, rye, vegetables, cane syrup, livestock, and tobacco. In 1863 James and Emmeline Bryson built a substantial farm house on their land. In the 1920s James and Emmeline's grandson, Carr Bryson (1894-1981) and his wife Frances Rickman Bryson (b. 1906) took over the farm and implemented some of the common progressive farming techniques of the period including soil conservation practices. Carr Bryson worked for the local CCC unit during the Depression and later for the Soil Conservation Service. The Bryson farm retains forty-four acres and an eclectic assortment of outbuildings including a burley barn, wash house, spring house, shed, livestock barn, garage, and privy.

While West's Mill remained a viable rural community throughout the twentieth century, the self-sufficient farmstead persisted as the basic agricultural unit in Macon County until the 1930s when the small farm way of life began to wane somewhat. In the early twentieth century, better opportunities in logging, commerce, and professions presented more options in ways to make a living and many families supplemented their income with outside work. At the same time, farms were divided up among family members, making them less profitable, and agriculture in marginal areas all over the country declined as large-scale agriculture and shipping grew. Government policies did not favor small farms either. In 1928, a resident of West's Mill lamented that "the poor

¹⁶ Census of Agricultural Production, 1880 (microfilm).

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farmers are taxed until they can't live...all the young men are leaving the farms."¹⁷ Though cash from farming was scarcer during the Depression, family farms provided many of the needs of their residents. Part-time farming continued as part of the community economy and lifestyle. Even during the depths of the Depression in July 1932, a local newspaper reported, "farmers of this place are busy stacking wheat and laying corn while the ladies are getting ready to take care of the berry crop."¹⁸

In addition to farming, key to the development of West's Mill as a community in the nineteenth century was the establishment of commercial enterprises. In the early years of the community, businesses were established on family land to serve the immediate community and when feasible to facilitate trade with the outside. Items produced locally, like animal hides, tobacco, mica, and corn were often bought by local merchants and hauled to outside buyers, rather than being marketed by individual producers. By the late nineteenth century the crossroads community boasted several stores, gristmills, churches, small manufacturing concerns including a coffin-making shop, two schools, and a post office and a dentist office. Inaccessibility due to difficult terrain, poor roads, and numerous creeks and rivers remained obstacles to commerce with the outside world.

The T.R. Rickman Store (#19), built by John Hall around 1895, stood as a focal point of the community for over a hundred years. Hall had an earlier store on the bank of Cowee Creek, but had to relocate to more healthful, higher ground, as he suffered from tuberculosis. Horace Bryson bought the store in 1920, and Tom Rickman, who had been renting it from Mr. Bryson, purchased it in 1925. Rickman operated the store continuously until his death in 1994. The building was originally raised up on posts to allow wagons to drive under it to load and unload; Rickman lowered it to ground level when he bought it. He operated a gristmill next to the store and stored apples to sell from his own orchard in a stone apple cellar attached to the building. The first telephone in the community was in the store and Rickman would deliver messages about births and deaths and other important news from the outside world. He also had the first gasoline vehicle in the community, a truck that was used not only for hauling but also as an ambulance and hearse. The store sold some local products like eggs and apples, but most things that could be produced locally were produced by each family. More important were manufactured goods and certain staples and imported foods—shoes, plows, coffee beans, hardware, cloth, animal feed, bananas, patent medicines. Mr. Rickman said flour was the biggest seller because everyone baked bread. Near the end of his life he declared, "I couldn't give a bag of store bread away."¹⁹ He also bought animal skins and furs and sold them to dealers and hauled mica from the valley to Sylva and Asheville. To get the power company to bring electricity to the store, he put up his own pole, after which the company agreed to run the line from Iotla, located between West's Mill and Franklin. The store held an important social function for the community for people would gather to play checkers and horseshoes or just to pass the time of day. Up until Tom Rickman's death, on a winter's day a few old timers could be found sitting around the wood stove and Mr. Rickman knew the name of every school child that came in after school at the nearby Cowee School to buy a treat. Continuing the tradition of local trade, today the store sells fresh eggs and vegetables grown across the

¹⁷ *Franklin Press*, 1928.

¹⁸ *Franklin Press*, July 2, 1932.

¹⁹ *Heritage of Macon County* (Franklin: Macon County Historical Society, 1987), p. 78.

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road at the T.C. Bryson House by the current store owners. The original counters, shelves, floors and woodwork, apple cellar, signs, and many reminders of years gone by preserve the flavor of the old T.R. Rickman Store.

In the late nineteenth century gemstones, including rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, were discovered at Cowee and surrounding communities. Around 1880 American Prospecting and Mining Company began to operate in the upper Cowee Valley, stimulating the local economy. Although major commercial quantities of gems were not found, notable individual gems were located. A September 1954 newspaper reported "oldtimers in the Cowee section still talk about a \$65,000 pigeon blood ruby found in the area in the late 1890s although none remembered seeing it." According to the paper a local boy, drunk on moonshine, discovered the area's first ruby and had it sent to New York. Long time residents of the Cowee section told the paper that "By the time it reached New York, two men from there were on their way here to tip up 1,600 acres of land for mining." A company operated commercial mines at Cowee until around 1912 after which the mines were opened only occasionally.²⁰ In a local paper in 1932 area resident John E. Rickman commented that the gem mines at Cowee "were large producers of fine rubies, and are known the world over. It is here that the pigeon blood rubies are found, being mined only one other place on earth."²¹ Mica mines proved more commercially viable and mica was mined from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Stores in West Mill bought and hauled the mica to markets in Sylva and Asheville. According to local residents, evidence of hand-dug mica pits is found on most farms in the community.

Early post offices at West's Mill were housed alternately in the Rickman, West, and Morrision (demolished in the 1930s) mercantile stores. The former post office remaining in the community dates to the late 1920s; it was moved one lot to the east in 1935. It ceased operation in the 1954, but members of the West family continued to live in the domestic quarters contained in the building. The post office served an important community function since traveling to Franklin to pick up mail would have been difficult and time consuming. By the 1950s, home delivery was established in the rural areas, and it was easier to get to Franklin to pick up mail, as well, so that rural post offices in small communities throughout the county ceased to operate.

The establishment of schools was as important to the development of West's Mill as commercial enterprises. In 1840, Macon County established a school board and public money was allocated to subsidize local schools, allowing for an extended the school year. In 1897, one dollar was allocated for each student. In 1903, Macon County passed the first compulsory attendance law in the state, requiring children to attend school until the age of fourteen.²² In the West's Mill the Peabody School was built in 1875 near the cemetery of the Snow Hill Church (#11). It was considered to be one of the best schools in the area and students from neighboring counties and communities boarded with local families so they could attend the school. The Peabody School closed and a new school was built in 1897 on the land where the Old Cowee School (#13) is located. The Old Cowee School was built in 1914 when the original building burned. The WPA built the current Cowee Elementary School (#16) in

²⁰ *Franklin Press*, September 2, 1954

²¹ *Franklin Press*, May 24, 1932.

²² Heritage of Macon County, op cit., p. 63.

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1943 when the smaller schools of Cowee, Tellico, Liberty, Harmony, Rose Creek, and Oak Grove were consolidated.

The presence of a sizeable African American population made Cowee and West's Mill unique in rural western North Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most substantial black populations were found in larger towns or in the region's only city, Asheville. Many of the original African American residents of Cowee came in bondage while others settled as free blacks. William Morrison, Sr., an early settler in the area, was opposed to slavery and had freed his inherited slaves in Burke County. He brought his family to Macon County to find peace, away from the other slaveholders who were angered by his actions. A number of freed blacks came with him and they and their descendants lived in Cowee and West's Mill. With its rich farming, the Cowee Valley attracted large-scale farming and created a demand for labor that was met with slavery. Among the slaveholders in Cowee before the Civil War were William West, who owned nine slaves eight of whom were mulatto, and John West who owned three slaves including one mulatto.²³

Just after emancipation in 1870, the African American population in the county totaled 397, with eighty-seven individuals or fourteen families living in Cowee. Outside of Franklin, Cowee had the largest African American population in 1870. By 1910, the county's black population was 557, with 154 individuals living in Cowee.²⁴ In 1920 twenty-one African American households lived in Cowee.²⁵ Meanwhile the 1930s proved a racially tense period in the county seat of Franklin. In October 1932 the local newspaper reported that "Negroes driven off streets by band of young white men and boys following the arrest of three negro women on disorderly conduct charges."²⁶

James Deal (b. 1849, death date unknown), an African American farmer, settled in Cowee as a young man. In 1936 an Asheville newspaper reported that Deal, also known as Uncle Jim, a former "body servant" of Col. Clinton Huger, owned a 160-acre farm at Cowee. Deal served as a hostler, or caretaker of horses, to Huger and lived in Charleston at the opening of the Civil War. A year after the war began he and his family were sent to Anderson, South Carolina where they were sold first to John Cowen, and then to Abraham Taylor who brought them to Macon County. Fearing separation from his family, Deal ran away from Taylor, but in 1863 he was captured and sold to James Deal of the Holly Creek community for \$1,200. Upon emancipation Deal attended the newly-organized school for African Americans in Cowee. He later bought a farm just below West's Mill post office where, like the majority of his neighbors, he grew garden produce, wheat, and corn and raised livestock and poultry. Twenty acres of his farmland was tilled or used for pasture; forests occupied the remaining acreage.²⁷

²³ Slave Census of 1860.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 84.

²⁵ Population Census of 1920, Macon County, North Carolina.

²⁶ *Franklin Press*, October 6, 1932.

²⁷ *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 3, 1936.

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Before the Civil War, a limited number of African American children in Macon County attended community schools with white children. After the war, students were segregated and two schools opened for African Americans—one in Franklin, and one in Cowee. A May 2, 1957 article in a local newspaper recounted the history of the African American school in Cowee:

The first colored school (in Cowee) was in a log cabin building located on a hill about one-fourth mile from where the colored church now stands. For several years after the Civil War it was taught by white teachers. It was later moved on the ridge back of the colored church. At this time it was financed by county tax money and colored teachers were employed to supervise the advancement of colored children. Later it was consolidated with the Franklin (Chapel) elementary colored school.²⁸

Two black churches were established in Cowee after the Civil War—Piney Grove Baptist and Pleasant Hill AME Zion (#15). The Pleasant Hill congregation purchased one acre of land in 1871 for eight dollars. The present church was constructed in 1929, and it is believed there may have been a log church on the site before that time. The cemetery includes graves of former slaves who lived in the community and the grave of the last member of the church, Mr. Escomoe Howell, who died in 1987, and is still used by descendants of members.

Like most communities in western North Carolina, the Great Depression had a great impact on West's Mill. Many residents abandoned the community in search of better opportunities, but for those who stayed, the federal government, through New Deal work relief programs, namely the CCC established in 1933, provided jobs building roads, buildings, trails, campgrounds and planting and thinning trees. One of the county's most active CCC camps was established in West's Mill at the site of the Cowee Elementary School. A period newspaper reported the county's four CCC camps furnished "labor for beautifying portions of the Nantahala forest in Macon, and for grading and surfacing new roads."²⁹

Several West's Mill residents found employment with the CCC at camps outside the community. Clyde Anderson, a timber cutter, served twenty-four months beginning in April 1939 at the camp in Smokemont in Swain County. William Lee Rickman, whose reason for enrolling was "to help grandmother who is invalid," worked at the Otto camp from October 1938 to September 1940. Weaver Hurst, whose father was a carpenter, only served at the Otto camp for six months in 1941 before he was drafted into the Army. Frank Hughes' tenure was ever shorter; he deserted the CCC camp at Smokemont after only twenty-one days.³⁰

Agricultural production in the Cowee Valley and along the Little Tennessee bottoms rebounded in the 1940s. An Asheville newspaper reported in 1940 that "corn, small grain, potatoes, cabbage, truck crops, apples and other

²⁸ Ibid. p. 87.

²⁹ *Asheville Citizen-Times*, ca. 1933 (clipping in the WPA Writers Project files, North Carolina State Archives).

³⁰ Civilian Conservation Corps Records: Enrollment and Discharge Records, Macon County (North Carolina State Archives).

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fruits...find a ready market" and are suited to the area's rich soils.³¹ In 1945, 315 farms were scattered around the county. Frank Gibson was typical of the West's Mill farmer in 1945. On the ten improved acres of his seventy-acre farm he produced two acres each of corn and hay and smaller parcels of potatoes and garden crops. His livestock consisted of two cows and thirty-five hens. Sixty acres of his land remained woodland. C.N. West who owned a local mercantile held forty-nine acres; a tenant worked twenty-five acres of his land. West was slightly more diversified than Gibson growing corn, oats, different varieties of hay, and potatoes, but like his neighbor, also raising hens. Only fourteen acres of his farm remained woodland. In general, hens and pullets, or young hens, were plentiful, while few farmers raised pigs. Cows were common, but not in large herds. Most farmers owned one or two head. Fruit trees were common as were crops of corn and potatoes. Compared to earlier in the century, few farmers raised wheat or oats.³²

After World War II many people left West's Mill and other rural mountain settlements to find better work and ore prosperity elsewhere. Some went no further than Franklin or Asheville, while others traveled to the Northwest where work could be found in the logging industry. The exodus of locals to the west had its roots earlier in the community's history. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, local men, like J.W. Slagle, who moved to Washington, and Ed Slagle, who settled in Idaho, sought prosperity elsewhere. World War II did not mark the end of the West's Mill as a community. This small settlement remained active after the war. In 1954, a lunchroom was added to the Cowee Elementary School to accommodate a growing student population and a \$28,000 addition was made to the Cowee Baptist Church (just outside the district). The Cowee Rural Development Organization was established at mid-century to provide residents with an opportunity to socialize and communicate their concerns with one another.³³ Into the 1950s the county's only newspaper, *The Franklin Press and Highland Highlander* reported local news in a column entitled "Wanderin' in West's Mill." The only indication that development in West's Mill was slowing came when the post office closed in October 1954.

Today West's Mill remains a quiet picturesque settlement tucked away in a valley along NC 28 as it meanders its way along the Little Tennessee River from Franklin north to Graham County. Evidence of Native American traditions, perhaps thousands of years old, remains visible in the Cowee Mound. The history of African Americans stands proud in the Pleasant Hill Church and cemetery, while prosperity by whites shows in the substantial two-story farmhouses that dot the fertile land. The community has been revived in recent years with new businesses occupying Tom Rickman's store and the C.N West General Merchandise. Recognizing the important legacy left by free persons of color and ex-slaves who once lived here, a group in the community has worked to stabilize and preserve Pleasant Hill Church. The former Cowee School, once a fading monument to early education in West's Mill, stands restored and functioning as an inn. Members of the community hope that the nomination of Cowee-West's Mill to the National Register will document its importance in the history of a variety of cultures, a history that makes it a unique and important place in North Carolina and the Southern

³¹ *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 17, 1949.

³² 1946 Farm Census for North Carolina (Macon County): Information Secured Through Tax Supervisors and Compiled by the North Carolina and United States Departments of Agriculture and County Commissioners.

³³ *Franklin Press*, February 2, 1954.

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Appalachians.

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6. Function or Use (continued)

Historic Functions

Domestic/village site
Domestic/camp
Religion/ceremonial site
Agriculture/agricultural field
Industry/processing/extraction/manufacturing facility
Landscape/forest
Landscape/unoccupied land
Landscape/natural feature

Current Functions

Landscape/forest
Landscape/unoccupied land
Landscape/natural feature

7. Materials (continued)

Foundation stone

Walls metal
 log

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Geographical Data

UTM References (continued):

| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|----|------|---------|----------|
| 5: | 17 | 280320 | 3905300 |
| 6: | 17 | 280440 | 3904840 |
| 7: | 17 | 281220 | 3905510 |

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundaries for the Cowee-West's Mill Historic District are drawn on the accompanying Macon County tax map (note that some of the data on the original map has been removed to allow for National Register-related labeling). In most instances the boundaries follow property lines; otherwise, the boundaries coincide with changes in historical land use patterns (e.g., borders of fields and forests).

Boundary Justification: Boundaries for the Cowee-West's Mill Historic District are drawn to encompass an area containing contributing resources and a continuity of historic landscape characteristics associated with prehistoric and historic significance. The boundaries are based on historical descriptions of Native American occupation and on the location of above-ground resources and their associated activities. The boundaries include the highest concentration of contributing buildings, structures, and sites as well as a landscape that has remained nearly unchanged since the period of significance. Pastureland is included in the district because of its association with the district's agricultural significance as related to historic livestock grazing or crop production. Most of the edges of the district coincide with property lines; in places where the boundaries do not conform to property lines, they follow natural features such as the Little Tennessee River, or areas where land use changes occur from open fields to thick forests.

