

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 Croft Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number NC 115 (Old Statesville Rd.) and SR 2483 (Bob Beatty Rd.) not for publication N/A

city or town Charlotte vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Mecklenburg code 119 zip code 28213

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 Brown SHPO 4/27/99
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 commenting 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
<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): _____	_____	_____

Croft Historic District
Name of Property

Mecklenburg, N. C.
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>7</u>		buildings
		sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
		objects
<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single family
COMMERCE: department store
EDUCATION: school
DOMESTIC: secondary structure
COMMERCE: warehouse
TRANSPORTATION: rail-related

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single family
COMMERCE: department store
VACANT: work in progress
DOMESTIC: secondary structure
COMMERCE: warehouse
TRANSPORTATION: rail-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne
Commercial Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
walls weatherboard
brick
roof metal
other wood

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.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community Development

Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1890 - ca. 1940

Significant Dates

ca. 1890

1903

1908

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Croft Historic District
Name of Property

Mecklenburg, N.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 8 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 17 | 516000 | 3911345 |
Zone Easting Northing
2 | 17 | 516120 | 3911345 |

3 | 17 | 516180 | 3911200 |
Zone Easting Northing
4 | 17 | 516060 | 3910880 |

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 Rick Mattson and William Huffman; Claudia R. Brown

organization independent consultants; N. C. SHPO date December 1998

street & number 422 Rensselaer; 109 E. Jones St. telephone 704/375-4236; 919/733-6545

city or town Charlotte; Raleigh state N.C. zip code 28203; 27601-2807

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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Croft Historic District
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

DESCRIPTION

The Croft Historic District comprises several buildings that constitute the historic heart of a small late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century commercial settlement in Mecklenburg County. The district's main features are a general store and associated warehouses, a large and architecturally distinctive house, a two-story frame school, and a section of the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks that border the buildings to the west. Principal borders of the approximately 8-acre district are NC 115, which runs along the west side of the railroad tracks (west), the northern boundary of the parcel occupied by the Croft School (north), a recent residential subdivision (east), and a power line and woodland south of the store.

The district represents the nucleus of a railroad-oriented rural settlement that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The focal point of Croft is the 1908 S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store, a remarkably intact two-story brick building at the south end of the district that faces west, towards an unpaved lane (Bob Beatty Road), the railroad tracks, and the highway beyond. A short distance north, linked to the store complex by the dirt road and railroad tracks, a gracious yard fronts the recently restored two-story Queen Anne style S. W. Davis House, built by the founders of the store. Next door to the house is the old Croft School, built in two stages ca. 1890 and ca. 1912, and across the road is a small warehouse in the railroad right-of-way.

Today, the unincorporated community of Croft that extends for about one mile along the railroad tracks and highway is experiencing profound physical changes with rapid residential, commercial, and industrial development occurring all around the district. A steel mill is located on the state highway southwest of the district, massive warehouses stand to the northwest, and a large residential subdivision borders on the east. Fortunately, the mature oaks, sycamores, pecan trees, and cedars framing the Croft Historic District on three sides lends the area a distinctly rural character that remains strong despite the encroaching sprawl spawned by the proximity of Charlotte several miles to the south. The several acres of woodland immediately south of the district have grown up to reclaim former cultivated fields since the completion of the 1965/1971 USGS map (see accompanying "Derita, N.C." quadrangle map). While other cultivated fields and the agricultural compound associated with the S. W. Davis House have been taken in recent years for the neighboring subdivision, a narrow greenbelt of mature trees has been left in place as a screen between the new and old buildings. To the west, the embankment of the railroad right-of-way is a distinct barrier between the historic buildings and the highway and industrial development beyond.

The Croft Historic District contains seven contributing buildings, one contributing structure, and one noncontributing structure. One of the warehouses and the former Croft School have become

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deteriorated, but they remain structurally sound. The school building currently is undergoing a thorough rehabilitation by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Foundation.

Inventory List (Keyed to site map)

1. S.W. & C.S. Davis General Store; 1908; Contributing. This two-story, common-bond brick building is a locally designated historic property. The county's best preserved rural store of the early 20th century, it was owned by brothers Silas Winslow Davis (see entry 5) and Charles Spencer Davis. The store is a long, narrow rectangle, three bays wide. Its flat roof steps up in three broad stages to the main (west) facade. A one-story, flat-roofed warehouse wing, one-bay wide, runs the length of the south elevation. Early painted signage survives on the side elevations, advertising the general merchandise to arriving or departing passengers who once gathered at Croft. Both the store proper and the side wing rise from brick cellars. The main facade of the store is capped by a small false pediment atop an ornate corbeled cornice. Corbeled end blocks anchor the cornice corners. Not only is the upper facade intact, but the lower level shop front is unaltered as well. The upper level is pierced by two six-paned, segmental-arched windows; and the ground floor has two large double-hung windows with six panes in each sash and segmental-arched lintels. The central double door, beneath a transom, is faced with diagonal boards.

The interior of the store is basically unaltered. It is finished with original thin beaded ceiling boards, painted plaster walls, and smoothly planed wooden floors. Floor-to-ceiling shelves line the north and east walls. A screen of rectangular balusters defines the manager's office in the southeastern corner of the store's main block. The interior also features an upper-story L-shaped balcony reached by an original single-run stairway rising from the south wall.

2. Warehouse; ca. 1930; Contributing. This one-story, gable-front building south of the store measures approximately 25 by 35 feet. The original weatherboarding was sheathed in a metal veneer about 1950. Capped by a metal roof, the warehouse stands on a brick foundation.

3. Warehouse; ca. 1910; Contributing. This one-story, side-gable warehouse just north of the store is a weatherboarded building now sheathed in metal (ca. 1950) with a metal roof. Measuring about 30 by 45 feet, it has a batten door with diagonal boards located in the west elevation, facing the railroad tracks. According to unconfirmed reports, this warehouse is contemporary with the store (dating that is consistent with the building's fabric) and originally stood closer to the tracks. Historically, it was used primarily to store cotton.

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Croft Historic District
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4. (former) Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad Tracks; 1871; Contributing. A low embankment supports the approximately 2,150 feet of track and grassy right-of-way that define the west edge of the Croft Historic District. The tracks remain as an important reminder of the late 19th-century transportation development that was key to the rural settlement's growth and eventual transformation as a small commercial center early in the 20th century.

5. Warehouse; ca. 1925; Contributing. This long, one-story metal-sheathed building measures about 15 by 60 feet. Situated along the railroad tracks, it has two large doors facing the tracks on the east elevation, and two matching doors facing Old Statesville Road on the west. This deteriorated but not irreparable building has original weatherboarding beneath the metal veneer (ca. 1950) and was erected for storing cotton as well as fertilizer. It has a side-gable metal roof.

6. S. W. Davis House; 1903; Contributing. Among rural Mecklenburg County's finest Queen Anne style houses, this two-story dwelling was built for brothers Silas Winslow and Charles Spencer Davis, co-owners of the Davis General Store at Croft. Though C. S. Davis moved to a new location in Croft in 1925, the year of S. W.'s death, the house remained in the S. W. Davis family until 1973. Retaining the great majority of its original elements of design, the house is capped by a high hip roof with cross gables, features ornamental lathe-turned woodwork (including spindlework in the gables), and has a blend of exterior surfaces such as patterned wood shingles in the gables and narrow tongue-and-groove weatherboarding on the first floor of the facade. The boxy massing is broken by projecting bays on all sides, and a deep wraparound porch with heavy turned posts and slender balusters dominates the facade. Both the main entrance leading into the central hall and the entry on the south elevation have fluted surrounds with bull's-eye corner blocks and original paneled and glazed doors richly embellished with applied and incised decoration. A pair of tall brick chimney stacks treated with raised bands of brick and simple corbeled caps pierce the steep roof (Gatza 1987).

The largely intact interior is two rooms deep on each side of the center hall on both levels. A handsome closed-string stairway with turned balusters and a thick square newel graces the main hall. A classical mantel with free-standing colonettes and mirrored overmantel is the focus of the north front room (parlor). Simpler mantels with a variety of turned or fluted pilasters survive in the other principal first- and second-floor rooms. Doors have five recessed panels and fluted surrounds with corner blocks.

The Davis House stands in good condition, having been restored in the early 1990s.

7. Flower House; ca. 1903; Contributing. This locally rare, common-bond brick building, located just south of the Davis House, was used by the Davis family for the germination of flowers and other

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Croft Historic District
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plants. It measures about ten feet on a side, has a central door with five panels flanked by two-over-two sash windows, and a small window on the north elevation. The building is topped by a flat metal-sheathed roof.

8. Pump House; ca. 1950; Non-contributing. This small weatherboarded structure located just east of the house has a shed roof and measures about six feet on a side.

9. (former) Croft School; ca. 1890, ca. 1912; Contributing. This two-story, frame, weatherboarded school building was erected in two stages. The north half is said to have been built in the 1890s. Around 1912, the south half was built, creating a two-bay, four-room facility. With the addition, a new hip roof was put over the entire building. Now covered with patterned asphalt shingles this roof has two front-facing gables decorated with diamond-shaped vents placed symmetrically over the facade. Six-over-six sash windows are found on both the original and later parts of the building. Two exterior brick chimneys located on the rear (east) elevation accommodated coal burning stoves (which no longer survive). Facing west, the main facade has a metal hip-roofed porch with a combination of original and replacement porch supports. While the replacement posts are square, the originals are lathe-turned, and are slightly simpler on the facade's north side than on the south, reflecting the building's two stages of construction. Other visible signs of the school building's enlargement include different widths of weatherboarding on the north and south sides of the main facade, as well as the frieze of the front porch, which has decorative dentils only on the north (ca. 1890) half. The relatively unaltered interior has intact wide-board flooring and tongue-and-groove walls and ceilings. Each half of the building has a vestibule with a stairway extending in two runs to the second story. These stairways have closed strings and sturdy fluted newels.

Many years of abandonment resulted in considerable deterioration of the former school that was accelerated by damage of hurricanes and other storms in the last decade. By 1998, the weathered building exhibited broken window sash, a rotted out porch floor, and serious roof damage. Nevertheless, the school remained structurally sound and recently the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Foundation undertook its complete rehabilitation according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

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Croft Historic District
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

SUMMARY

The small Croft Historic District is the best example of the small rural, turn-of-the-century railroad commercial settlement to survive in Mecklenburg County. The district's eight buildings remain oriented to the former Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio Railroad tracks and the Old Statesville Road, the community's major links to Charlotte to the south and other distribution points to the north. Numerous other small turn-of-the-century railroad communities arose in the county (including Pineville, Matthews, Huntersville, Derita, Newell and Thrift), but only the remaining historic buildings of Croft continue to convey this community's essentially rural character despite being ringed by recent commercial, residential, and industrial development. The district's buildings, all fronting a dirt lane and the tracks and enframed by mature trees, reflect the commercial and educational roles of such settlements in this period while recalling the essentially rural character of these places. In particular, the remarkably intact and still-operating 1908 S. W. & C. W. Davis General Store with its associated warehouses, the impressive S. W. Davis House of 1908 which reflects the Davis brothers' success as farmers and merchants, and the remarkable survival of the former Croft School (ca. 1890 and ca. 1912) warehouse in the railroad right-of-way contribute to the district's significance under National Register Criterion A in the area of community development. (For associated contexts, see the discussions "Post-Bellum and Late 19th- to Early 20th-Century Agriculture (1865-1939)" and "New South Industrialization (1880-1917)" in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, "The Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," which are augmented by additional context in this nomination.) A number of buildings also lend the district significance under Criterion C in the area of architecture: the general store is Mecklenburg County's largest and most intact turn-of-the-century rural store building; the S. W. Davis House is one of the county's finest Queen Anne style dwellings; its associated brick flower house is a rare example of an unusual and distinctive building type; and the former Croft School, the largest surviving pre-1920 school in Mecklenburg County, represents the county's rural graded schools of the early twentieth century. (See the Multiple Property Documentation Form "The Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County" for discussions of the property types commercial buildings, houses, outbuildings, and schools.) The district's period of significance begins with the construction of the oldest building, the former Croft School, in ca. 1890 and extends to ca. 1940 when the school ceased to be used and by which time the Davis brothers were no longer operating the store.

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Croft Historic District
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

From the early nineteenth century, the area now known as Croft and originally called Alexandriana was a community of small to moderately-sized farms. A post office was established at Alexandriana in the home of Joseph McKnitt Alexander as early as 1822 and continued until 1882. The name Croft was in use by 1896.¹ According to local tradition, when railroad authorities were naming their new stop between Huntersville and Charlotte, they selected the name Croft in honor of Croft Woodruff, a major landowner in the area.²

The railroad was a key factor in the area's coalescing as a community and it ultimately led to the development of the small commercial center that is a hallmark of the Croft Historic District. The Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio (A. T. & O.) Railroad was built between 1860 and 1862 to connect the Mecklenburg County seat of Charlotte, several miles to the south, with Statesville, to the north in Iredell County. The railroad was abandoned and pulled up during the Civil War (probably to provide rails for more strategically critical railroads elsewhere) and rebuilt in 1871 under the same name. In 1881 it was leased and controlled by the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Railroad, and in 1894 it was bought by Southern Railway, which retained control until 1982 when it merged with Norfolk & Western to become Norfolk Southern.³ This railroad has been described as the "spine . . . along which commercial and industrial development occurred in northern Mecklenburg County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."⁴

Throughout Mecklenburg County and the South as a whole, general stores, often in concert with the railroad, were the economic and social centers of rural communities. As Paula Stathakis notes in the local designation report for the Croft School and S. W. Davis House,

The construction of railroads changed the outlook of southern agriculture and the situation of the yeoman farmer. Railroads brought the market closer to the farmer, and it seems that farmers could have reaped great financial benefits from this arrangement.

However, many farmers ultimately found themselves trapped between the railroad and

¹ William S. Powell, *The North Carolina Gazetteer. A Dictionary of Tar Heel Places*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1968, p. 128.

² Interview with Nena Thomasson Davis, widow of C. S. Davis, by Paula M. Stathakis, February 1992.

³ David Carriker, *The North Carolina Railroad Map*, Heritage Publishing Company, 1991.

⁴ Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the S. W. and C. S. Davis General Store," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1980, p. 1.

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Croft Historic District Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

the merchant. Railroads brought cheap manufactured goods, that undercut regional monopolies, and effectively put most domestic manufacturing and artisans out of production. Rural families became less reliant on domestic manufactures, and more dependent on area merchants who extended credit on purchases. Farmers were also often vulnerable to the credit system provided by local merchants which required that credit customers provide a cash crop as security on their account. In Mecklenburg county, as in many other parts of the South, farmers were consequently forced to shift from subsistence farming to cotton cultivation to satisfy merchants. Small farmers were always in debt to merchants for seed and fertilizer, and by the turn of the century, cotton became the crop that chained the farmer to the merchant in the cycle of debt and obligation.⁵

It was in this economic climate that the primary focal point of Croft for most of the twentieth century was established. Silas Winslow Davis (1873-1925) and Charles Spencer Davis (1868-1945), Mecklenburg County natives and prosperous farmers, opened the S. W. and C. S. Davis General Store in 1908.⁶ Born on a farm in the Croft area to Silas W. and Martha Cashion Davis, the brothers began buying farmland on both sides of the A. T. & O. Railroad tracks in 1903, when they purchased 90 acres on the east side of the line from D. F. Dixon.⁷ It must have been that same year that they hired local carpenter Neil Barnett to build their Queen Anne style house facing the railroad tracks and began farming the land.⁸ In 1904 and 1905, they bought 97 acres on the west side of the tracks, and in 1906 added 200 acres to their eastern tract.⁹ The two brothers apparently became prosperous in the first years of the century from a combination of farming and inheritance. They continued to buy land together next to their original purchases, accumulating approximately 500 more acres from 1910 to 1922.¹⁰

Recognizing the opportunities offered by a local market and the inconvenient distance of the nearest store more than four miles away in Huntersville, in 1908 the Davis brothers began building a general store to serve the surrounding farmers. Brick for the store was made some 100 yards east of the building site from the clay found there and fired in a specially built kiln. Typically for a country store,

⁵ Paula M. Stathakis, "Survey and Research Report of Croft Schoolhouse and S. W. Davis House and Outbuildings," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1992, p. 4.

⁶ Mecklenburg County Certificate of Death, Book 24, p. 163; U. S. Census, 1870, 1880 and 1900; both are buried at Independence Hill Methodist Church.

⁷ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 185, p. 5; *Charlotte Observer*, 5 December 1945, p. 7A.

⁸ Interview with Mrs. Helen Davis Brown by Paula M. Stathakis, February 1992.

⁹ *Ibid.*, book 198, p. 82; book 190, p. 444; book 204, p. 541.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, book 248, p. 450; book 248, p. 478; book 262, p. 374; book 473, p. 437.

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Croft Historic District Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

the business carried just about everything such a community would need, from cloth, ribbons and buttons to foodstuffs and farm supplies, particularly fertilizer. The S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store's convenient location on the railroad permitted the efficient receipt of merchandise by train, which continued to stop in Croft through World War II; until the 1920s, all of the store's goods were delivered by rail.¹¹

An important part of their trade revolved around the cotton gin that was located next to the Croft store. They not only sold cotton seed and fertilizer to the local farmers, but they also bought the ginned cotton from them and sold it to the local mills. In 1925, records show that they processed 500-pound bales of cotton for 22-1/4 to 25 cents per pound. Some of the ginned cotton was sold directly to area mills and cotton brokers, to whom it could be easily distributed by train.¹² The gin occupied one of the warehouses adjacent to the store.

In the 1980 local designation report prepared for the Davis General Store, Dan Morrill describes a typical Saturday, Croft's busiest day of the week:

Farmers would bring their cotton for ginning and for shipment on the railroad to markets near and far away. During the week, a boxcar filled with large bags of items such as sugar, flour and fertilizer would have arrived on the siding in front of the Davis Brothers General Store. The farmers would load their wagons directly from the boxcar. Meanwhile their wives and children would go inside the store, where they would find a vast array of goods and merchandise, including fabrics of many sorts, overalls, ribbons, lace, pins and needles. The post office was also in the store for many years. The Davis Brothers sold wagons, harnesses, shovels, rakes, hoes and other general farm supplies. Groceries were available. One could buy canned fruits and vegetables, chewing tobacco, cigars, snuff and coffee.¹³

In addition to operating the country store, S. W. Davis continued to farm throughout the rest of his life.¹⁴ Although specific figures are not available, documentation of the now-lost agricultural buildings (including a corn crib, hog barn, horse and hay barn, sheep and hay barn, and chicken coop) associated with his house supports the recollections of Helen Brown, Davis's daughter, that they raised the crops

¹¹ *Mecklenburg Gazette*, 3 August 1977, p. 1.

¹² Mecklenburg County Record of Accounts, Silas W. Davis, Book 20, p. 239.

¹³ Dan L. Morrill, p. 1.

¹⁴ The 1900 and 1910 U. S. Censuses list S. W. Davis as a farmer and his brother C. S. Davis as a retail merchant. See Twelfth Census of the United States and Thirteenth Census of the United States, Mecklenburg County manuscripts.

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that were typical for Mecklenburg County farmers, most notably cotton as a cash crop, corn as the most abundant staple crop, as well as wheat and oats. Much of the agricultural labor was done by the Davis children, although three or four tenants usually were living on the farm. During picking season, each child had a quota of cotton to pick. His daughter also recalls that David raised several different kinds of fowl, goats, sheep, hogs, cows, mules, and horses, and every week Davis slaughtered a cow and sold the fresh meat in the store.¹⁵ The storage cellars under the general store served as cattle slaughter rooms and fatback larders.¹⁶

The Davis brothers were involved, then, in both farm production and commercial trade in farm goods and supplies. The Davis brothers also expanded their commercial activities beyond Croft, owning stores in Huntersville and on the A. T. & O. line between Croft and Charlotte, but only the Croft store survives.¹⁷ Like many country merchants, they exerted controls over their rural economy by acting as suppliers, middlemen, and bankers to the surrounding farmers.¹⁸

The Davis brothers also played a role in local education. The community's youngsters attended the old Croft School, which was built in two stages. Physical evidence suggests that the original section was built c. 1890 and then was enlarged early in this century, but its history prior to the twentieth century is not documented. The first mention of the school lot in the deed records occurred in 1904, and in 1912 the Board of Education acquired another acre next to its original site, probably for the expansion.¹⁹ By 1924, the school had four teachers. Local lore has it that the original school had two teachers who taught grades one through nine, and that Silas Davis, who had ten children, decided it was too small. When he failed to persuade the school board to make any changes, he took it upon himself to hire carpenter Neil Barnett to double the size of the school and presented the bill to the board, for which he was promptly repaid.²⁰

By the 1920s, in the Croft School's expanded version, grades one through seven were taught by four teachers, most of whom evidently had more than one grade in their classrooms. Graduating students went on to Huntersville High School a few miles away. In her account of Croft School based upon interviews of former students, Paula Stathakis writes:

¹⁵ Mrs. Helen Davis Brown interview.

¹⁶ Property description by Mary Alice Dixon Hinson, appended to Dan L. Morrill's 1980 survey and research report on the general store.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Paula M. Stathakis, p. 3.

¹⁹ Mecklenburg County Deed Books: book 198, p. 76; book 297, p. 332. The Board of Education added another half-acre in 1919: *ibid.*, book 398, p. 588.

²⁰ Fincher, cited above.

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Croft Historic District
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Students who attended the Croft School in the 1910s and 1920s remember that the school never had electricity or running water. Students had to bring their lunch from home and they were also required to bring their own drinking glass. Each day, different children were chosen to go next door to the Silas Davis house to pump the drinking water for school. It took several trips and several buckets full to meet the school's daily drinking water requirements. However, the pupils looked forward to having their turn to escape class for a few minutes to pump water. Two outhouses were located behind the school, one for boys, the other for girls. In the winter, the school was heated by a wood stove.

Since the school was close to the general store and the railroad tracks, teachers and pupils became accustomed to the seasonal whistle of the cotton gin and the daily noise of trains. Three northbound trains passed through Croft each morning and three southbound trains passed through each afternoon. Teachers and students were so used to the noises that marked the rhythm of life in Croft that the trains and whistles frequently went unnoticed.²¹

Sometime in the 1930s, the old school building was replaced by a newer brick structure across the highway. The original two-acre school property was sold to the heirs of S. W. Davis in 1939.²²

S. W. Davis died in 1925 at the age of 51, and left ten children and his wife, Nannie J. (Nancy Black) Davis (1875 -1962), to whom he was married on December 4, 1895.²³ The operation of the store was taken over by his son, Silas Washington ("Wash") Davis, and in the division of the property between C. S. Davis and the heirs of S. W. Davis, the latter received the store property and 418 acres of farmland lying on both sides of the railroad.²⁴

When S. W. Davis died in 1925, C. S. Davis moved across the Statesville Road into a smaller existing house (razed 1990s) that had been built about 1890.²⁵ Six years later in 1931, he married Nena Faye

²¹ Paula M. Stathakis, p. 6.

²² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 978, p. 205. According to Fincher, the brick school later became a VFW hall after the school moved to Huntersville in a period of consolidation.

²³ *Charlotte Observer*, 10 January 1925, p. 7; Mecklenburg County Marriage Register; Mecklenburg County Certificate of Death, Book 74, p. 508.

²⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 679, p. 422.

²⁵ Mary Beth Gatzka, "Architectural Inventory of Mecklenburg County," 1987, on file at the Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

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Thomasson (born 1901), who had moved to the community in 1924 to teach in the Croft School.²⁶ When he died in 1945 at the age of 77, he was survived by his wife and three children, Martha Faye, age 12, C. S. Davis, Jr., age 10, and John B. Davis, age 5.²⁷

During the 1930s, small rural communities rooted in agriculture apparently held their own despite the often high rate of failure of surrounding farms during the Great Depression. Derita and Newell, Mecklenburg County's two other small, rural railroad settlements that were established during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and remained unincorporated, experienced relatively little change. Derita's small bottled water industry, North Derita Poplar Springs, remained in operation in the midst of entrepreneur G. S. Welch's cotton and grain fields and orchards at the north end of the community. In Newell, the small community store facing the tracks and the distinctive brick house of village and store co-founder W. B. Newell also remained a viable business and Newell's farm which fanned out behind his house remained productive.²⁸

Similarly, the unincorporated Croft community remained stable. While the 1930s witnessed the dismantling of the cotton gin operated by the Davises and the abandonment of the old frame schoolhouse, the settlement remained stable and even exhibited signs of improved economic health. The Davises continued to operate their large general store, C. S. Davis enlarged his house, and S. W. Davis's heirs expanded their farm's production, as indicated by the construction of large barns and other agricultural buildings (all now lost) during the decade. The built environments of the small unincorporated agricultural communities indicate that they remained relatively little changed despite the difficulties presented by declining prices, in contrast to the towns in which livelihoods dependent on local industries were often severely affected by the economic vagaries of the period.

Today the Croft Historic District is a rare surviving core of a rural Mecklenburg community built on agriculture and commerce. The intact survival of the Davis General Store and associated warehouses, the S. W. Davis House, the Croft School, and the rail line that gave rise to the community continue to convey the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century character of the unincorporated rural railroad settlement, despite the loss in recent years of the agricultural complex associated with the S. W. Davis House. The store continues to be operated by a third generation of the family, Silas Bruce ("Red")

²⁶ Mecklenburg County Marriage Register; B. C. Fincher, "Change Comes Slowly to Croft," *Charlotte Observer*, 19 April 1989, Mecklenburg Neighbors Section, p. 22.

²⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, 5 December 1945, p. 7A.

²⁸ William H. Huffman, "Survey and Research Report on the W. B. Newell House," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1991, p. 2.

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Davis, a nephew of Wash Davis, but in 1973, the family sold the property to an investment company.²⁹ In the early 1990s the S. W. Davis House was restored and the Croft School, which has stood empty since the 1930s, is about to be renovated as offices according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The relative local importance of Croft as a representative of early rural railroad hamlets is especially apparent when compared to Derita and Newell. In Derita, long embraced by the ever-expanding Charlotte city limits, all of the early buildings at the heart of the hamlet along the railroad tracks have been altered or destroyed, while Newell retains the W. B. Newell House largely intact but has lost W. B. Newell's store and other early buildings along the rail line. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission's local designation of the Davis General Store, the S. W. Davis House, and Croft School, in combination with National Register listing of the district, should help allay the threat posed to these historic resources by the county's rampant exurban sprawl generated by nearby Charlotte.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, book 3661, p. 123. It has subsequently changed hands twice more to different investors: *ibid.*, book 3673, p. 125; book 5774, p. 542.

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Croft Historic District
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UTM REFERENCES (continued)

5. e--515960; n--3910880

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the Croft Historic District are indicated by the boldest line on the accompanying Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Tax Line Map, book 027, page 53, drawn at a scale of 1" = 200', or all of contiguous parcel numbers 027-532-51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, and 59 and a portion of the Norfolk Southern right-of-way.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the Croft Historic District are drawn to encompass all of the remaining intact historic resources at the heart of the Croft community and the entire parcels on which they sit in order to include an appropriate setting.

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Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

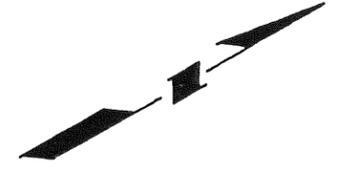
PHOTOGRAPHS

The following applies to all photographs:

Croft Historic District
Mecklenburg County, N. C.
Taken by Claudia R. Brown, 10/98
Negative stores at Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C.

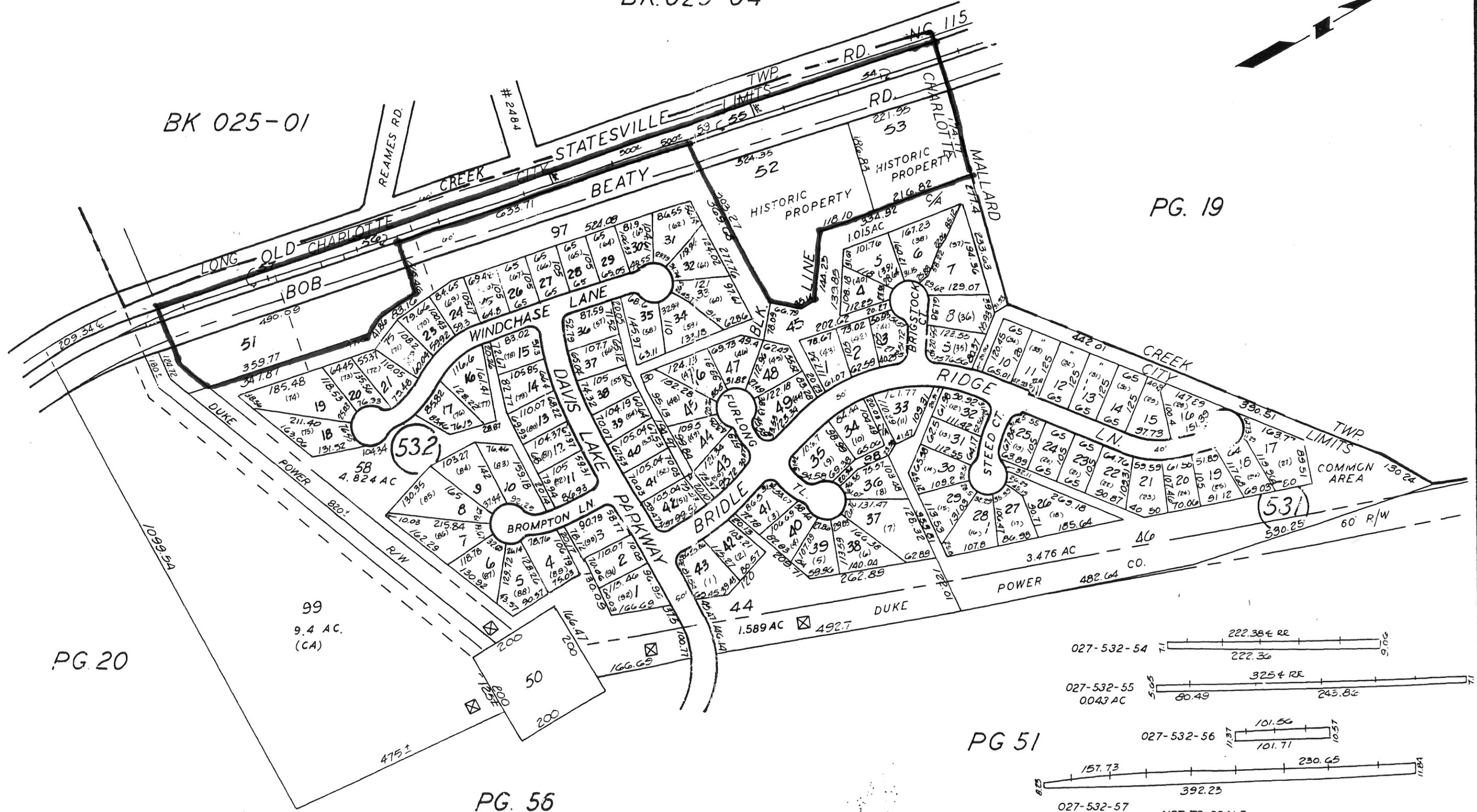
- A. S. W. and C. S. Davis General Store and (former) AT&O Railroad Tracks, to the south
- B. S. W. and C. S. Davis General Store, to the north-northeast
- C. S. W. Davis House, to the east
- D. Croft School, to the southeast
- E. View toward S. W. Davis House, to the south-southeast
- F. View down lane from S. W. Davis House to S. W. and C. S. Davis General Store, to south





BK 025-01

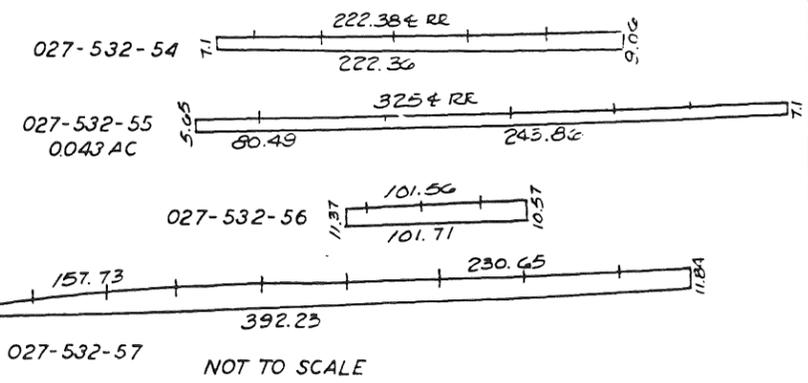
PG. 19



PG 20

PG. 56

PG 51



TAX LINE MAP	BOOK 027	PAGE 53
MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA		
REVISED 11-19-97	46	SCALE 1"=200'

CROFT HISTORIC DISTRICT