

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 any 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 Bear Grass School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 6344 East Bear Grass Road; NW side Highway 1001 .2 mile NE of jct. With SR 1106 not for publication N/A

city or town Bear Grass vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Martin code 117 zip code 27892

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

J. Brown SHPD 4/14/05
Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or 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 or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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
National Park Service

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North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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____ 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): _____	_____	_____

Bear Grass School
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
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>8</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	objects
<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School
DOMESTIC Single dwelling
SOCIAL Clubhouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School
SOCIAL Meeting Hall
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE Horticultural facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival
Other: Modern Movement

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
roof Asphalt
walls Brick
Weatherboard
other Wood

Narrative Description

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

Bear Grass School
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
County and State

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.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a 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)

Education
Architecture

Period of Significance

1925-1955

Significant Dates

1925
1948
1955

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Flanagan, Eric, architect

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: _____

Bear Grass School
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 9 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing
1 18 307700 3960250
2 18 307840 3960200

Zone Easting Northing
3 18 307700 3959940
4 18 307580 3960120
 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 Beth Keane

organization Retrospective date November, 2004

street & number 2001 Metts Avenue telephone 910-815-1096

city or town Wilmington state NC zip code 28403

12. 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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Martin County Board of Education and Bear Grass Ruritan Club

street & number 300 North Watts Street P. O. Box 869 (Ruritan Club address) telephone 252-792-1575

city or town Williamston state NC zip code 27892

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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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Section 7 Page 1

Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

Narrative Description

The Bear Grass School is located in the town of Bear Grass, approximately ten miles south of Williamston, the county seat of Martin County. The county lies in the northeastern coastal plain of North Carolina and includes 482 square miles of forest, swamp, and farmland. Broad sections of the county's flat coastal plain topography are interrupted by rivers and swamps and interspersed with small towns and crossroads. The county, bordered by Bertie County on the north, Beaufort and Pitt counties on the south, Washington County on the east, and Edgecombe and Halifax counties on the west, is divided into ten townships: Bear Grass, Crossroads, Goose Neck, Griffins, Hamilton, Jamesville, Poplar Point, Robersonville, Williams, and Williamston. The county's ten small towns comprise only forty-four percent of the county's total population of approximately 25,000 persons (Butchko, p. 1).

The Bear Grass School and associated buildings sit on an approximate nine-acre parcel of flat land close to Bear Grass Road (Highway 1001) within the Bear Grass town limits. The 1925 brick Colonial Revival-style school faces southeast and replaced an earlier frame school building, which burned in 1924. Large recreational fields are located behind the school. These are not included in the nomination boundaries. A frame Primitive Baptist Church, ca. 1835, sits immediately southwest of the school. The small community of Bear Grass is made up of residential houses of various ages and styles, several commercial buildings, including two early twentieth-century frame stores, several churches, and acres of open farm land.

The Bear Grass school campus is comprised of the following buildings: a 1925 brick school, a utility shed, a 1942 frame gymnasium, a 1948 brick cafeteria and high school building, a 1955 brick gymnasium, a 1955 brick principal's residence, a 1980 brick music and agricultural building, and a 1988 greenhouse. The school complex also includes a 1951 frame "scout hut," located behind the school and a 1935 frame teacherage, located on the south side of Bear Grass Road. The Bear Grass Ruritan Club currently owns both of these buildings. Two modern mobile classroom units are also located on the campus, behind the main school building. In addition, two statues sculpted by Bear Grass resident Henry C. Cowin are included in the nomination. A statue of a rampant bear, the school mascot, is situated on the lawn in front of the school, while a statue of George Washington sits on the front lawn of the 1935 teacherage.

The school campus is oriented facing southeast. In order to simplify the description of building orientation, the southeast direction will be designated as south, the northwest will be designated as north, the southwest will be designated as west, and the northeast will be designated as the east. The resources are described in chronological order as follows:

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Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

one-story, shed-roof porch supported by square wooden posts spans the facade. A wooden handicap ramp provides access to one side of the porch. The original weatherboard siding has been covered with vinyl siding. The east and west elevations include two six-over-six sash windows. A rear one-story wing with an enclosed shed-roof porch contains the kitchen, dining room, and pantry. Paired six-over-six sash windows of different sizes are positioned on the side elevations of the wing. An east-side, one-story, side-gable addition with a central one-over-one sash window on the façade elevation was added in 1976. An interior chimney serves a fireplace in the downstairs living room. An open gable-roof carport is attached to the west wall of the kitchen wing.

The interior of the house features oak floors, plaster walls and ceiling, and wide baseboards throughout. The first floor of the main block includes a living room with a brick Colonial Revival-style mantel, a bedroom, and a centrally located bathroom with the dining room and kitchen located in the rear ell. Original five-panel interior doors, kitchen cabinets, built-in corner cupboards in the dining room, and light fixtures remain in the house. A portion of the original east-side exterior wall was removed when the side wing was added creating a large open room suitable for holding meetings. A suspended ceiling, linoleum floors, and wood paneling were added to the room.

A staircase with a square newel post and plain railing rises from the living room to the second floor. The upper floor originally consisted of a hallway with a front living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and two bedrooms. Beaded board ceilings and crown molding remain in the upstairs rooms. These second-floor rooms are currently utilized for storage.

4. Old Gymnasium

1942

Contributing Building

The 1942 gymnasium is a large one-story frame building with a concrete block partition wall dividing the gymnasium from the classrooms, a brick foundation and weatherboard siding. The south-facing, gable-front building features a standing-seam metal roof with exposed rafter tails. The gymnasium is located in the rear portion of the building, while several classrooms are situated in the front part of the building. The main entrance, opening into a classroom, is located on the west side of the front elevation and is protected by a small gable-roof portico supported by wood posts and accessed by a wooden handicap ramp. Two pairs of twelve-over-twelve sash windows are located east of the door. A rectangular vent is located in the front and rear gables.

The west elevation originally featured four pairs of twelve-over-twelve sash windows, three of which have been boarded over. A set of double-leaf metal doors with a ramp is centered on the west elevation and opens into the gymnasium. The east elevation is similar to the west elevation with four sets of paired windows and another entrance. An exterior chimney is positioned midway along the east elevation.

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Bear Grass School
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A shed-roof addition for storing maintenance equipment is attached to the rear (north) elevation. Access to the shed is through double-leaf metal doors on the west elevation. Two exterior chimneys are positioned on either end of the rear wall.

The interior of the gymnasium features wooden floors, a high ceiling, and suspended lights. Wooden bleachers line two sides of the room. The gymnasium is currently utilized as a weight room. An art studio and a storage room occupy the front section of the building. The gymnasium was constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) with the majority of the timber donated by members of the community.

5. Cafeteria and High School Building 1948 Contributing Building

A covered walkway connects the east entrance of the Bear Grass School to the 1948 brick-veneered cafeteria and high school building. Low-pitched, side-gabled roofs cover the building. An extension of the covered walkway spans the front of the stepped-back cafeteria. Supported by paired, chamfered wood posts, the walkway provides shelter for the students as they move from one section of the building to the other. The cafeteria's south elevation includes central double-leaf doors with an eight-light transom, flanked on either side by three windows, each having five horizontal panes of glass. The west elevation also includes a central double-leaf door with an eight-light transom and a suspended canopy over the entrance. The door is flanked on either side by paired and single windows, each with five horizontal panes of glass. An attached one-story, hipped-roof furnace room with two single casement windows and an interior chimney is located along the rear (west) wall of the cafeteria. The interior of the cafeteria section consists of a large open dining room in the front and a kitchen in the rear.

The roof of the attached high school section is higher than the roof of the cafeteria. Double-leaf doors surmounted by an eight-light transom are centered on the east and west elevations. Circular vents are centered in each of the gable ends. The façade (south elevation) is comprised of a row of symmetrically placed single and triple windows, each containing six horizontal panes of glass. The rear elevation includes three paired casement windows. School supplies are stored in a low shed-roofed brick room that extends along the rear elevation.

The interior of the high school section features a central east-west corridor with classrooms and storage rooms on either side. Metal lockers line both sides of the hall. Originally built to service the high school classes, the wing includes several classrooms, a science laboratory, and a home economics classroom. The glazed and paneled classroom doors have six light transoms. The corridor was updated in the 1970s with suspended ceilings with integral fluorescent light panels and linoleum covered floors.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bear Grass School meets Criterion A for its educational significance in Martin County and in the school consolidation movement that occurred in North Carolina from the early 1920s to approximately 1947. The period of significance begins in 1925; the year the school began operating and extends to 1955, when the new gymnasium and principal's residence were added to the school complex, the last building episode until the 1980s. The administration of Governor Charles B. Aycock (term 1901-1905) ushered in a new era of education reform in North Carolina. The consolidated school was intended to be the agent of social, intellectual, and moral uplift for the student body and the entire rural community. State-mandated efforts aimed at curriculum expansion and improvement also resulted in the construction of a generation of handsome school buildings in Martin County.

The Bear Grass School also meets Criterion C for its architectural significance. Designed by noted school architect Eric Flanagan, the well-preserved one-story, brick 1925 Colonial Revival-style building is one of the earliest and best-preserved schools of the 1920s consolidation era still in operation in Martin County. The classical façade with projecting bays, stepped parapets, hipped-roof dormers, and ornamental brickwork reflects the school's significance as a major civic institution. The building included all the components deemed necessary by the State Department of Public Instruction for a modern school, most notably a central auditorium, modern plumbing, heating, and electrical systems, and improved school design. The replacement of former frame one-room schoolhouses with more permanent and stylish brick school buildings denoted the increasing commitment by the county and the state to provide a quality public education.

Bear Grass School has operated as a public school in Bear Grass from 1925 to the present. Although the school originally served grades one through twelve, it became a high school in the 1970s. The school has been at the center of civic spirit and community activity throughout its existence and continues to provide the students of the town and vicinity with a quality education. The Bear Grass School and its history have become an integral part of the community and the 1925 building stands as a local landmark.

Historic Background

The town of Bear Grass, located in the southern part of Martin County, was named for the Bear Grass, a type of yucca (*Yucca flaccida*) that grows less than two feet in height and is found abundantly in the region. One of the first settlers to the area was John Swinson, who received a large tract of land from the Earl of Granville, the last Lord proprietor in 1761. Bear Grass Swamp was a part of this property and was mentioned in Swinson's deed. A small

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Bear Grass School
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community gradually grew up in the area including two churches, several stores, and a school (Manning & Booker, 1977:180).

Many of the early settlers were farmers whose principal crops of cotton and corn were sold in towns along the Tar and Roanoke Rivers. Sheep, cattle, and hogs were also raised in large numbers and farmers occasionally supplemented their income with shingle making, woodcrafts, and the production of tar and turpentine. The Bear Grass Primitive Baptist Church was established in 1829, becoming the first public institution in what would become the town. The community grew to include several distilleries, cotton gins, sawmills, gristmills, and blacksmith shops (Manning & Booker, 1977:180).

A log school was established in the Bear Grass community after the Civil War. The school, which operated for a number of years across the street from the current school, had a term that ran approximately fifty to sixty days. The school would normally have three breaks during the term, one for fodder pulling, one for cotton picking, and one for potato digging (Harrison, p. 5).

With increased farm income generated from the production of tobacco and peanuts, the Bear Grass community began to prosper in the 1890s. The first general store opened for business in 1895, followed in the early 1900s by several additional general merchandise stores and a blacksmith shop. After several meetings in early 1909, the town's merchants drew up a charter and on February 16, 1909, the General Assembly granted a charter to the town of Bear Grass. The town's limits extended in a circle 500 yards from the center of town, measuring from a giant oak tree that stood at the main intersection at that time, making Bear Grass one of only a few round towns in the state (Manning & Booker, 1977:179).

Between 1912 and 1922, there were five white schools in the Bear Grass community. These were known as Macedonia, Mizzelle, Peel, Roebuck, and Bear Grass. Three schools for African American children included Brown, Rodgers, and Bear Grass. The only school to include high school classes was the Bear Grass school for white children (Harrison, p. 5).

In 1924, the frame Bear Grass school burned and a new brick school was constructed the following year. The May 6, 1925, issue of *The Enterprise* reported that a contract was let for a new eight-room school. J. W. Hudson Jr. of Tarboro was awarded the general construction contract for \$23,150; the contract for the heating system went to W. E. Dunn of Williamston for \$2,689; and the contract for the plumbing went to Howard Dixon of Rocky Mount for \$1,295. Eric Flanagan, an architect from Henderson, was chosen to draw the plans for the new school building. Flanagan was responsible for many of the schools built in northeastern North Carolina during the consolidation era. The total cost for the new school was estimated to be approximately \$30,000 and it was anticipated the building would be ready for the fall, 1925, session. The article

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Bear Grass School
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went on to say that “the building will be of the low type, such as the State is now advocating in its building program.” The new school encompassed grades one through twelve and provided the students of the Bear Grass community with a state-of-the-art building, complete with central heating, good lighting, spacious classrooms, and an auditorium. The school was expanded in 1927 with the construction of two additional classrooms.

The town added a teacherage to their school in 1935. As reported by *The Weekly Herald* (Robersonville) on June 19, 1935, the teacherage was one of eight school projects recently approved by the county Board of Education. The cost was estimated at \$5,710 with local citizens furnishing all of the lumber. Another item in the paper’s December 11, 1935, edition reported: “the teacherage was recently completed at a cost of \$4,500 and suffered minor damage by overheating of the fireplace. Blame for the fire was placed on defective construction somewhere about the chimney.”

In January, 1941, the Martin County Board of Education called for the construction of gymnasiums at both Farm Life and Bear Grass schools when delegates from both communities appeared before the board pledging their support of the projects. Headed by H. U. Peel, T. O. Hickman, Sam Mobley, Henry White, J. D. Wynn, Joseph S. Griffin, Edmond Harris, and others, the Bear Grass delegation pointed out to the board that enough lumber, or approximately 75,000 feet, had already been pledged by the school district patrons. They further offered to supply enough extra timber to pay the mill man for sawing. Delegates from the Farm Life community made similar pledges. The projects were approved subject to a working agreement with the Works Progress Administration. Four of the six high schools in the county already included gymnasiums and the proposed projects called for the construction of buildings similar to those at Jamesville and Oak City which had cost approximately \$17,000 and were fifty by eighty feet in dimension (*The Enterprise*, January 7, 1941). On December 15, 1941, Edmond and Martha Jane Harris conveyed an eighty- by one-hundred-foot lot to the Martin County Board of Education for the purpose of constructing the new gymnasium (Deed Book K-5, p. 76).

The Board of Education minutes dated May 21, 1948, approved three projects including a high school addition at Bear Grass. A combined one-story brick cafeteria and high school building was subsequently constructed. The entire school benefited from a new lunchroom and modern cafeteria kitchen.

Trustees of the Bear Grass Ruritan Club acquired the scout hut site in the middle of the school grounds from Edmond and Martha Harris for \$30 in May, 1951. The parcel was procured for the purpose of constructing a building for the use of the Bear Grass Ruritan Club, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of the white race, and other civic organizations (Deed F-5, p.181). The Ruritans built the scout hut in the same year.

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**Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC**

On February 8, 1955, the Board of Education approved a \$300,000 bond issue for the construction of four gymnasiums in the county. In June, 1955, a one-acre parcel adjacent to the school was acquired by the Martin County Board of Education from the Edmond Harris estate for \$600.00 (Deed Book W-5, p. 37). Work commenced on the new Bear Grass gymnasium within the year. The one-story brick principal's house was also built on the acquired property. It was occupied by the school principal and his family for several years, before being turned into a multi-use facility for the school.

In 1963, the town board, along with other citizens of Bear Grass, became interested in securing a building that could serve as a clubhouse or community building for the town's young people, clubs, and churches. On April 15, 1965, the town acquired the old Bear Grass teacherage at a public auction for \$3,000 (Deed Book T-7, p. 233) with many of the community organizations helping to pay for the building. Several renovations and the addition of a large multi-purpose room to the building in 1976 created a well-equipped modern hall for the citizens of Bear Grass. The former teacherage was subsequently renamed Yucca House in recognition of the indigenous plant found in the Bear Grass vicinity. On April 7, 1976, the town deeded the building to the Bear Grass Ruritan Club who continue to maintain the building and premises and make it available for community functions (Deed S-9, p. 623).

Local artist Henry C. Cowin created the two statues that enliven the Bear Grass School campus. Cowin first became interested in sculpting when, as a boy, he shaped animals from the gray clay he found on his parents' farm. After two decades of sculpting as a hobby, he honed his skill into shaping statues. The bear statue standing in front of the school was sculpted in 1981 and was fashioned after a statue in a Kinston mall. The statue of George Washington in front of the Yucca House was commissioned by the Bear Grass Ruritan Club in honor of the country's constitutional bicentennial in 1987 (Martin County Survey Files).

Martin County's desegregation plan was adopted by the Board of Education on February 16, 1969. Total integration was achieved in the county the following year. It was about this time that the Bear Grass School began teaching grades seven through twelve only. Later additions to the school campus included a one-story brick music and agricultural building constructed behind the main building in 1980 and a greenhouse for horticultural studies added in 1990. The school remains in operation today with a student population of approximately 250 students. The students are proud of their school and the Bear Grass community has worked diligently in their efforts to keep the school open. Over the years, the community has raised the funds needed for books, school supplies, sports uniforms, stadium lighting and extracurricular activities. They have donated their skills, money, and materials for additions or repairs to the building and the school campus. The whole community turns out to cheer for the school's sports teams. Since its opening in 1925, the Bear Grass School has been the center of community life.

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Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

CRITERION C - ARCHITECTURE

School consolidation and improvement in Martin County reached a peak during the 1920s when modern brick buildings were constructed for both white and black schools throughout the county. The Division of Schoolhouse Planning was established in 1920 for the purpose of aiding local boards of education in selecting school sites, plans, and designs for school buildings. Every facet of school construction was taken into account including suggestions for water fountains, music rooms, furniture, roofs, basements, auditoriums, proper lighting, heating systems, and indoor plumbing. As opposed to earlier frame schoolhouses, favored construction material for the modern schools of the 1920s was to include fire-resistant cement, brick and stone. It was also recommended that a minimum of fifty percent of a school's total floor area be utilized for instruction including classrooms, libraries, labs, workshops, assembly halls, stages, and gymnasiums. Non-instructional areas included halls, stairs, restrooms, administrative space, and closets (Blair, pp. 26-28).

The planners also preferred that a school serve double-duty as not only an institution of learning, but also as a community-gathering place. It was, therefore, recommended that public space such as auditoriums, libraries, restrooms, and gymnasiums be separate from classroom and office space, thus allowing public use of the facility without interfering with the classrooms or offices. Double use of areas such as a stage and gymnasium was also encouraged. The benefits of physical fitness were also recognized and it became common practice to locate schools on spacious tracts of ground of between six to twelve acres to provide space for physical education and sports. Easy access to the schools was deemed important resulting in their placement along newly developing highways (Blair pp. 26-28).

In many instances the county boards of education contracted with architects for the design and construction of the new school buildings. The State Department of Public Instruction, through the planning division, however, reserved the right to review all plans. They favored the use of architects who provided clear blueprints and specifications. Henderson native, Eric G. Flanagan, became a well-known and favored school architect in northeastern North Carolina. In addition to designing Bear Grass School, he has been credited with the designs of Northampton County's 1925 Woodland-Olney School and Martin County's 1936 East End School (originally known as the Robersonville Graded School), the high schools in Robersonville and Williamston (both constructed in 1929), the 1936 Jamesville High School, and the primary school in Oak City.

There was a proliferation during the 1920s and 1930s of rural and small-town schools that were remarkably similar in plan and quality. While the facades may include differing degrees of detail, the interiors and floor plans exhibit few deviations from each other. The typical schoolhouse was one or two stories, constructed of brick or stone, built on a "U", "L", "H", or

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**Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC**

“T” plan and included a flat or gable roof, numerous windows, and transverse corridors. Popular architectural styles for schools included the Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, and Gothic Revival styles.

Bear Grass School is typical of many of the schools built in North Carolina during the 1920s. Built on a “U” plan, the one-story brick school includes a large central auditorium easily accessed from several exterior doors. The administrative offices are clustered near the east wing’s centrally-located door, and classrooms and restrooms are located along two corridors. Distinctive exterior details include projecting end bays with parapeted stepped gables, twin round arched vestibules, and decorative brickwork. The hipped roof with hipped-roof vented dormers is a deviation from the more common flat roof. Following state planner recommendations, the school is prominently positioned on the main road passing through the town of Bear Grass and is located on a large tract of land, providing plenty of space for additional buildings and recreational fields.

In addition to Bear Grass School, surviving school buildings in the county dating to the consolidation era include the 1922 Asa J. Manning Farm Life School in Griffins Township (currently used as a private school), the 1927 E. J. Hayes School in Williamston (currently utilized as a county office), the 1929 Williamston High School in Williamston (currently used as a junior high and elementary school), and the 1936 East End School in Robersonville (currently vacant). Constructed of brick, the one-story schools were built on large tracts of land in prominent locations in their respective towns. Modern facilities incorporated into the school buildings included a steam heating system, indoor plumbing, standardized lighting, and water fountains. Each building provided adequate administrative space as well as large classrooms with adjoining coat closets. A large auditorium, suitable for school productions or community gatherings, was also a component of each school.

Variation occurred in the layout and exterior stylistic details of each building. The Asa J. Manning Farm Life School was built on a raised basement using a T-plan with a projecting three-bay, gable-front pavilion. The school exhibits Craftsman-style details with triangular brackets and exposed rafter tails. A distinctive central hipped-roof skylight surmounts the building. The 1936 East End School, designed by Eric Flanagan, exhibits the Colonial Revival style with its slightly projecting pedimented pavilion and simple exterior brickwork. The interior includes eight classrooms, an auditorium, a library, a principal’s office, and a storage room. Similar to Bear Grass School, the one-story 1927 E. J. Hayes School consists of a central block with a hipped roof and projecting end wings. The wings, however, feature a pedimented front gable and refined brickwork. The main entrance to the school is centrally located on the façade and features a curvilinear parapet, giving the building a Spanish Colonial Revival flair. The interior of this school also contains a central auditorium. Similarities between the E. J. Hayes School and Bear Grass and East End schools suggest that Flanagan was also the architect for the

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Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

E. J. Hayes School. Like Bear Grass, all the schools discussed include banks of large nine-over-nine or six-over-six sash windows. Each of the school campuses grew with the addition of detached gymnasiums, cafeterias, and music and agricultural buildings.

CRITERION A – EDUCATION

Early in the twentieth century, Governor Charles Brantley Aycock, an educational proponent, worked tirelessly on behalf of North Carolina's public schools. He urged the General Assembly to expand school spending, resulting in improved facilities, higher teaching standards, establishment of libraries, and lengthening the school term to four months. Local school districts increasingly taxed themselves for school support and the 1903 legislature passed a bill that loaned money to counties for badly needed school construction. Martin County began constructing larger and better school facilities throughout the county. Small one-room schoolhouses were rapidly being replaced with more spacious two- and three-teacher schools. Beginning in 1901, adjoining small school districts were increasingly combined into a single school located in a large modern building (*The Development of North Carolina's Public School System Through 1940*, p. 5).

The governors who followed Aycock continued his pro-education policies. A compulsory attendance law was passed in 1907. In 1913, the legislature established a statewide property tax for the support of schools. New colleges were established to train teachers, teacher standards were raised, text procurement procedures were improved, libraries were constructed, and school terms were gradually lengthened to six months. More importantly, enough schools were built to house the state's burgeoning school population (*The Development of North Carolina's Public School System Through 1940*, p. 6).

Proponents of school consolidation in North Carolina contended that larger, combined schools were able to offer their students a broader variety of educational opportunities than were available in the limited curriculum of the small school. Eugene Clyde Brooks, who became superintendent of public instruction in 1919, envisioned the consolidated school to be the agent of social, intellectual, and moral uplift for the entire rural community. At approximately the same time, the state's public road system underwent dramatic expansion and improved methods of transportation made it possible to transport rural children to a centrally located school. In 1925, the Bear Grass district voted a local tax, and the first section of the Bear Grass School was built. Additional consolidated schools constructed by 1925 served the following towns in Martin County: Williamston, Robersonville, Hamilton, Jamesville, Oak City, and Everetts. (Butchko, p. 29).

The 1933 General Assembly provided the entire minimum cost of operating all schools in the state for a term of eight months, while at the same time, it made a number of regulations related to centralizing the school systems for economic reasons. One of the regulations provided

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**Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC**

for smaller, neighborhood-based elementary schools and centrally located high schools. In accordance with the new law, Martin County was divided into six school districts. When the new school building at Bear Grass was constructed in 1925, consolidation of schools in that community was complete and in 1933 the district was designated No. 6 in the county system (Manning & Booker 1974:283).

From its earliest beginnings through the present, the citizens of the Bear Grass community have been actively involved with the public education system. They have supported their local school by raising funds for equipment and supplies. They have donated money and labor to expand the school campus and its buildings. They unilaterally support the school's athletic teams and many are actively involved with the Parent-Teacher Association. The community is committed to keeping the Bear Grass School open for many years to come. The relatively small Bear Grass High School continues to provide a quality education to the students of the Bear Grass community.

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Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

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Bear Grass School
Martin County, NC

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the approximate nine-acre tract are delineated by the heavy line on the accompanying 1 inch equals 100 feet tax map and includes portions of parcels 5753-07-2841 and 5753-07-6407.

Boundary Justification

The nominated tract includes those parcels of land acquired by the Martin County Board of Education on which to construct the 1925 Bear Grass School and the subsequent complement of auxiliary school buildings. The tract also includes two parcels of land owned by the Bear Grass Ruritan Club on which two buildings associated with the Bear Grass School are sited. The tract does not include the athletic fields and associated resources located north of the school buildings. The nominated acreage provides an appropriate setting for the 1925 Bear Grass School campus.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet**

**Bear Grass School
Martin County, North Carolina**

Section Photos

The following information applies to all photographs:

Name of Property: Bear Grass School Campus
County and State where Property is Located: Martin County, North Carolina
Address: 6344 East Bear Grass Road; NW side Highway 1001; .2 miles NE of jct. with SR 1106
Name of Photographer: Beth Keane
Date of Photographs: October 7, 2003
Location of Original Negatives: North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh

Photographs:

Photograph 1: South elevation (façade of 1925 school); camera looking north

Photograph 2: West elevation (1925 school); camera looking northeast

Photograph 3: North elevation (1925 school); camera looking southeast

Photograph 4: East elevation (1925 school); camera looking southwest

Photograph 5: West elevation of east wing (1925 school); camera looking east

Photograph 6: Interior (auditorium of 1925 school); camera looking west

Photograph 7: South elevation (1948 Cafeteria and High School Hall); camera looking north

Photograph 8: South and west elevations (1942 Old Gymnasium); camera looking northeast

Photograph 9: South and east elevations (1951 Scout Hut); camera looking northwest

Photograph 10: South and east elevations (1955 Principal's Residence; camera looking
northwest

Photograph 11: South and east elevations (1980 Music and Agricultural Building);
Camera looking northwest (noncontributing building)

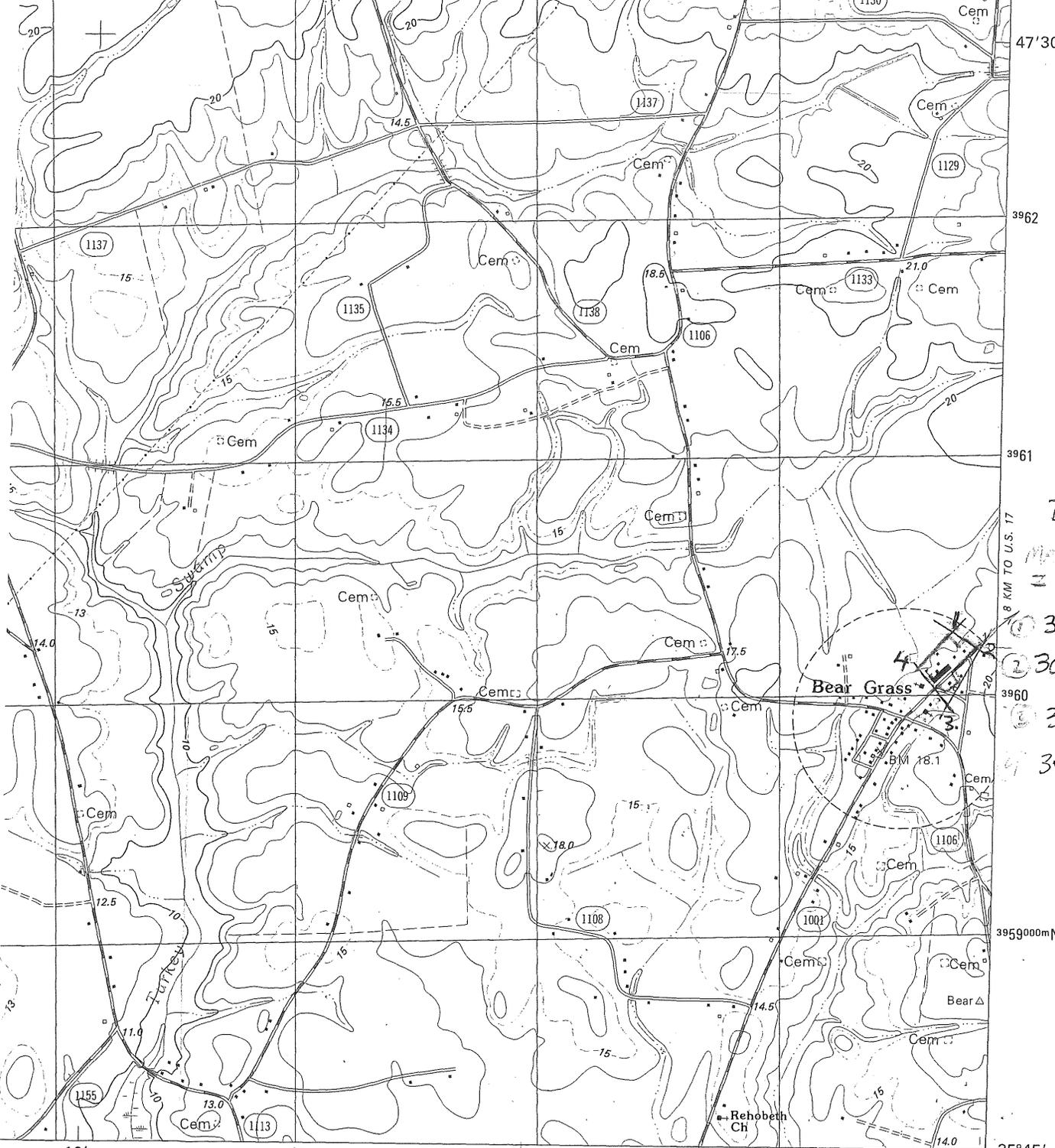
Photograph 12: South and west elevations (1955 New Gymnasium); camera looking northeast

Photograph 13: North elevation (1935 Teacherage); camera looking south

1	0.3040
2	.6096
3	.9144
4	1.2192
5	1.5240
6	1.8288
7	2.1336
8	2.4384
9	2.7432
10	3.0480

To convert feet to meters
multiply by .3048

To convert meters to feet
multiply by 3.2808



BEAR GRASS
SCHOOL
MARTIN CO.
ZONE 18

① 307700 396025
② 307840 396025
③ 307700 395999
④ 307580 396012

306 INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1982
LEGGETTS CROSSROADS 9 KM 307000mE 77°07'30" 35°45'

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Primary highway, hard surface Light-duty road, hard or improved surface ...
- Secondary highway, hard surface Unimproved road
- Interstate Route ◡ U. S. Route ○ State Route

(OLD FORD)
5555 II NE



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

CONTOURS AND ELEVATIONS
IN METERS

ROBERSONVILLE EAST, N. C.
SW/4 WILLIAMSTON 15' QUADRANGLE
N3545-W7707.5/7.5

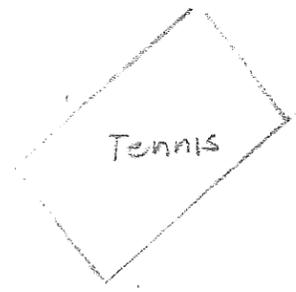
1981

DMA 5555 I SW-SERIES V842

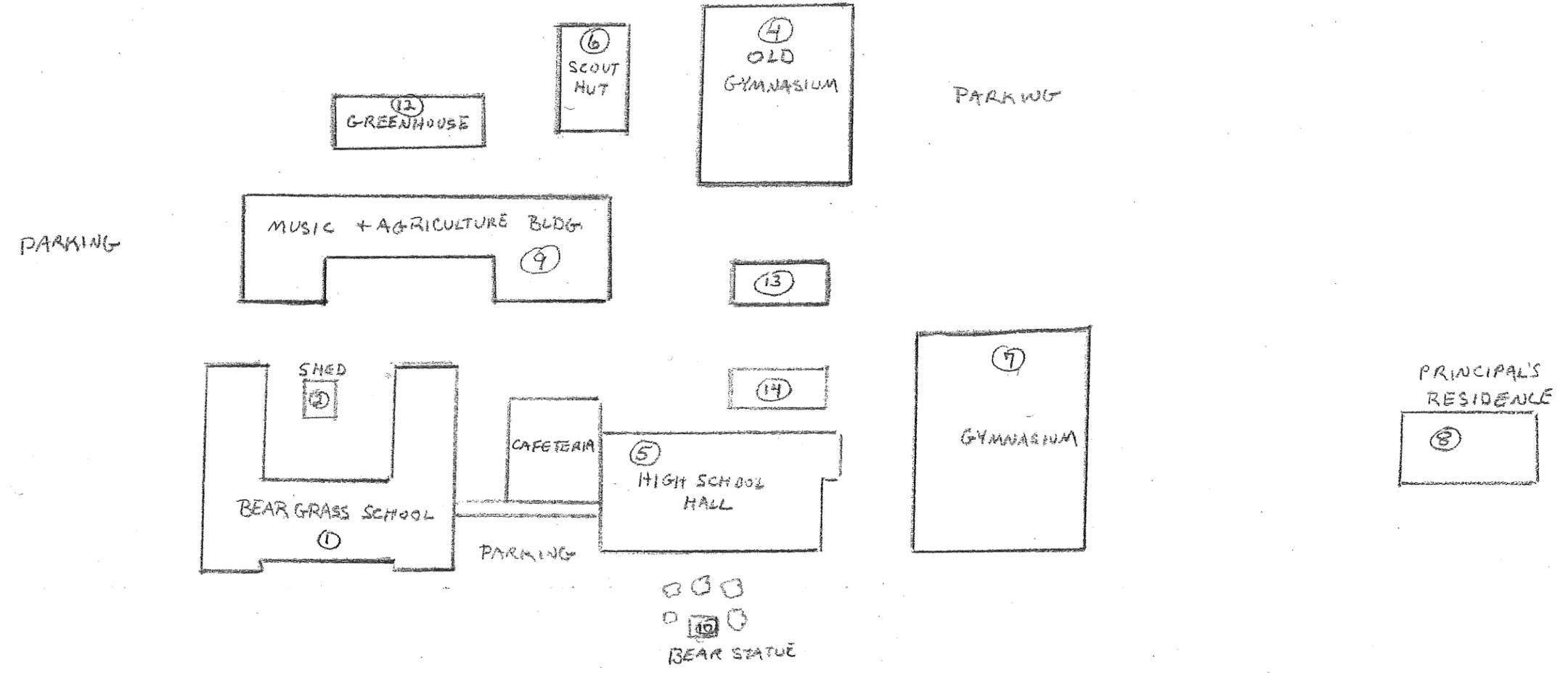
BEAR GRASS SCHOOL CAMPUS
MARTIN COUNTY, NC
(not to scale)



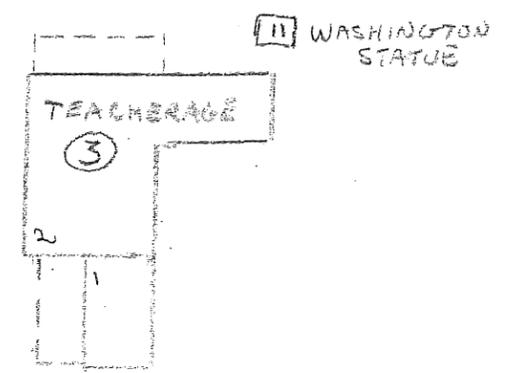
athletic fields

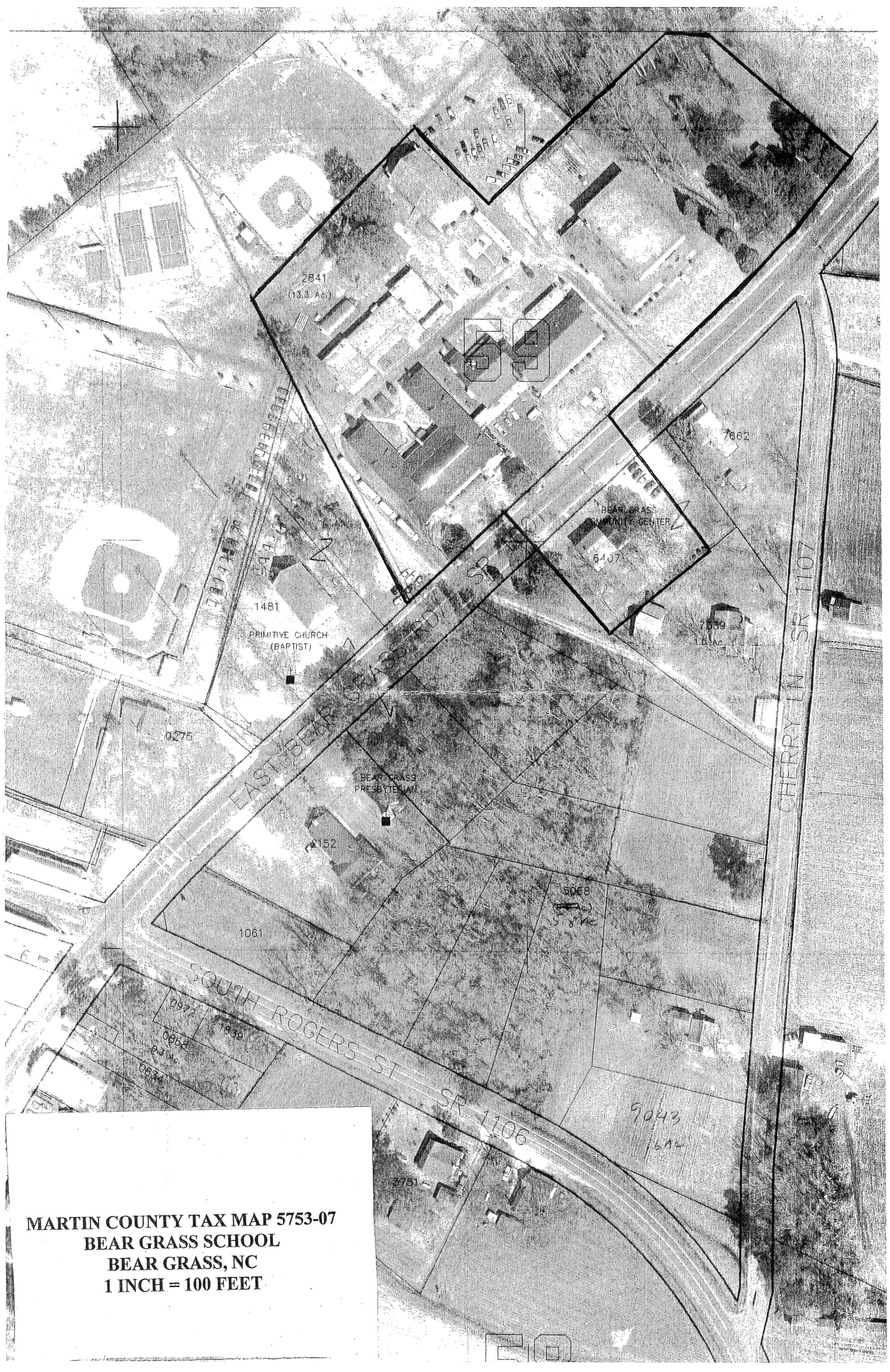


athletic fields



EAST BEAR GRASS ROAD SR 1001





MARTIN COUNTY TAX MAP 5753-07
BEAR GRASS SCHOOL
BEAR GRASS, NC
1 INCH = 100 FEET

59

2841
(13.3 Ac.)

7662

BEAR GRASS
COMMUNITY CENTER

6407

1481
PRIMITIVE CHURCH
(BAPTIST)

7639
1.6 Ac.

0275

BEAR GRASS
PRESBYTERIAN

2152

1061

5068
5.8 Ac.

SOUTH ROGERS ST
SR 1106

0972

7839

0668
2.3 Ac.

0834

CHERRY LN SR 1107

9043
1.6 Ac.

3781

120

