

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Bissette-Cooley House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Southeast Corner W. First St. & E. Washington St. not for publication

city, town Nashville vicinity of

state M.C. code 037 county Wash code 127

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Braswell & Braswell Properties AS of 2/19/09 owners are Jackson & Patsy Lawrence

street & number 1120 Birchwood Drive

city, town Nashville vicinity of state N.C. 27856

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Nash County Courthouse

street & number Washington Street

city, town Nashville state N.C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Tar-House; Inventory of Historic Resources of Nash County has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1976; 1984-1985 federal state county local

depository for survey records N.C. Division of Archives & History

city, town Raleigh state N.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Commanding the east end of Nashville's most prestigious residential boulevard, the spacious white-columned Bisette-Cooley House derives its imposing quality from its location as well as its architecture. The property fronts First Street on a large lot occupying most of a block placed so that Washington Street makes a tight S-curve around the southwest corner of the lot. The house is sited toward the southwest corner of the block so that the main entrance faces the landscaped median defining the historic residential blocks of Washington Street leading to Nashville's business district. Heading east from the courthouse square, one has the impression that Washington Street ends in the front yard of the Bisette-Cooley House.

Towering oak trees and evergreens, large crape myrtles and magnolias, and mature shrubbery surround the Bisette-Cooley House. Access to the house is via a wide concrete walk leading from the intersection to the main entrance and from a driveway off Washington Street close to the corner that passes under a portecochere and continues around the north and east sides of the house to a cluster of one-story hip-roofed out-buildings. These ancillary structures include a brick garage and three frame storage buildings. The large yard on the east side of the house contains the statuary, raised beds, and benches of a formal yard that has not been tended for several years. At the south end of the garden area, toward First Street, there is a square gazebo with latticed walls, round-arched windows, and a hipped roof covered with patterned pressed tin.

The Bisette-Cooley House epitomizes the Neoclassical Revival style as it appeared in North Carolina in the early twentieth century. Of frame construction, the house has a two-story, two-pile, central hall plan, and a symmetrical main facade dominated by a full-height pedimented portico overlapping a one-story wraparound porch. The configuration of the principal block also is symmetrical, with a shallow two-story wing projecting from the middle of each side elevation. As originally constructed, an offset, single-story wing containing the kitchen extended from the rear of the two-story block and the rest of the rear elevation was augmented by a hip-roofed porch, enclosed at one end for a bathroom; a two-story wing presently under construction encompasses the earlier wings. Two tall interior brick chimneys with corbelled stacks rise above each side facade to punctuate the slate covered, steeply pitched hipped roof topped with a broad deck. On the rear plane of the roof there is a gabled attic dormer. The

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house rests on a full brick basement and is sided in bevelled weatherboards. All of the windows contain one-over-one double-hung sashes and feature flat lintels bearing simple molding across the top. Other details appearing throughout the exterior include molded box cornices, a plain frieze beneath deep eaves, and simple corner boards.

The veranda and entrance portico are the dominant elements of the house. Unprecedented in the earlier classical styles, this dual-level porch type is one of the original elements characteristic of the accomplished interpretations of the early twentieth-century Neoclassical Revival style. The full-height pedimented portico is typical in its monumental wooden Ionic columns in groups of three at the outer corners, Ionic entablature with modillioned cornice, and oval leaded window-centered in the pediment. In contrast to the stately nature of the entrance portico, the wraparound veranda is elegant and graceful with its unusual concave entrance bay behind the portico. Featuring Tuscan columns, a railing with turned balusters, and an entablature with two-part architrave and plain frieze, the veranda curves around the southwest corner of the house to the porte-cochere. A balustrade with match stick balusters and short box posts in line with the Tuscan columns accentuates the distinctive outline of the porch.

Neoclassical motifs also embellish the main entrance. The wide front door with six raised panels is enframed by leaded sidelights above raised wooden panels and a three-part transom above the sidelights. Very slender Ionic colonnetes flank the sidelights and the entire composition is encased in a neoclassical surround with a prominent dentilled cornice. Above, there is a Palladian window which originally contained a door leading to the second-story deck.

The main entrance leads to a wide center hall flanked by a parlor and dining room to the left and a living room and library to the right. Beyond the entrance to the living room, a wide three-run staircase in an open stair well dominates the hall. Tall panelled wainscoting lines the hall and stairwell and appears in the dining room. As originally built, the house contained wide pocket doors leading from the hall to the parlor and living room and fairly simple door and window surrounds throughout with molded lintels similar to those on the exterior.

Around 1950, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Cooley embellished the interior with several Federal style elements. Identical door surrounds composed of Ionic pilasters and dentilled cornice

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bearing a large modillion at each end and a carved sunburst in the middle appear at the parlor and living room doors leading to the dining room and library, respectively. These surrounds are believed to have been removed from an as yet unidentified early nineteenth-century house. Another surround, at the door at the rear of the hall, has Ionic pilasters supporting a full dentilled entablature. Mantelpieces in the parlor and living room feature delicately fluted pilasters and central panels and panelled end blocks with medallions. The parlor mantelpiece also has garlands carved in relief on the frieze while the mantelpiece in the living room displays dentilling at the base of the mantel shelf. The mantelpieces and hall door surround probably are reproductions. In the library, the Cooleys built cabinets and bookcases in round arches on the east wall containing an original fireplace, which they adorned with a panelled overmantel. They also encased the pocket doors in the walls, creating wide, open doorways from the hall to the living room and parlor.

The second story of the house contains four bedrooms and two bathrooms arranged around a hall in a plan very similar to that of the first floor. The original, relatively plain trim remains intact, highlighted by the molded railing and turned balusters outlining the large stair well in the wide center hall. As originally constructed, the hall extended the full width of the house and provided access to the deck of the wraparound veranda via a door with a fanlight and sidelights in a Paladian arrangement. When the Cooleys enclosed the west end of the hall for a third bathroom around 1950, the door was replaced with a window.

Although no documentation regarding its construction is known to survive, the house closely resembles the work of John C. Stout, an architect from nearby Rocky Mount. Stout designed many large Neoclassical Revival style houses in Nash County and elsewhere across eastern North Carolina during the first decades of this century. Photographs of several Rocky Mount houses certainly attributed to Stout appear in a promotional publication compiled around 1911 by the Rocky Mount Record which is on file at the Braswell Memorial Library in Rocky Mount, and in Central City Historic Buildings Inventory, Rocky Mount, North Carolina written by Kate Mearns in 1979. Many of Stout's houses pictured in these books display a graceful, artfully designed wraparound veranda overlapped by a monumental entrance portico similar to that of the Bissette-Cooley House.¹

The Bissette-Cooley House currently is in the process of

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an extensive renovation for conversion to offices that is being conducted according to the Secretary of the Interior's standards. The only significant alteration to the house is the addition of a two-story rear wing incorporating the kitchen ell that is in keeping with the original design of the house. On the interior, the second-story bathroom added around 1950 is being removed, all existing decorative elements are being preserved and a few features, such as the wide pocket doors leading from the first-floor hall and the door in the Palladian window at the second story, are being restored.

Note

1 Another Rocky Mount architect and contractor of the period who specialized in the Neoclassical Revival style was H. S. Pool, also featured in the Rocky Mount Record publication; it appears, however, that his residential designs tended to be less accomplished and pretentious than the Bissette-Cooley House and other dwellings attributed to Stout.

[Note: This description is based in part on the entry for the Bissette-Cooley House prepared by Rick Mattson, principal investigator for the Nash County architectural inventory currently nearing completion.]

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1911 **Builder/Architect** John C. Stout (attributed)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

As one of the most important residential landmarks of Nash County's governmental seat, the Bissette-Cooley House reflects the most prosperous period in Nashville's history. The design of this handsome textbook example of the early Neoclassical Revival style is attributed to Rocky Mount architect John C. Stout, known for his commissions throughout eastern North Carolina. It was built in 1911 for George N. Bissette, a "self-made" man who was one of Nashville's leading citizens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bissette began his successful career in merchandising in the 1880s as Nashville entered a period of economic vitality as one of the county's major marketplaces. By the time he built the imposing Bissette-Cooley House, he had diversified into cotton ginning and real estate and had earned a reputation as a civic leader and pillar of the local Methodist church. Several years after his death, Bissette's heirs sold the house to Nashville attorney Harold Dunbar Cooley, the Fourth Congressional District's U.S. Representative from 1934 to 1966, whose family occupied the house until 1981. Frequently cited as one of the state's greatest Congressmen, Cooley was a forceful advocate for North Carolina's farmers as a member of the House Agriculture Committee for his entire career in Washington and as chairman of that committee from 1949 until 1966, the longest tenure of that post in the history of Congress.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

B. The Bissette-Cooley House is associated with its builder George N. Bissette, one of Nashville's leading citizens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with its subsequent long-time owner, Harold Dunbar Cooley, U.S. Representative for the Fourth Congressional District from 1934 to 1966.

C. Attributed to Rocky Mount architect John C. Stout, the Bissette-Cooley House is a handsome textbook example of the early Neoclassical Revival style.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Commanding a prominent site at the head of Nashville's most historic street, the Bissette-Cooley House stands as one of the important residential landmarks of Nash County's governmental seat. It was built by George N. Bissette, one of Nashville's leading citizens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and subsequently owned for many years by veteran Congressman Harold Cooley. Significant in its own

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right for its architecture, the Bissette-Cooley House represents a major segment of Nashville's history due to the circumstances of its construction and the background of its occupants.

Nashville epitomizes North Carolina's rural county seats with its activity concentrated in a small business district around the courthouse at the center of town and a variety of farm-related services and industries at its periphery. Surrounded by rich farmland, Nashville originated in the late 1780s when the first permanent courthouse for Nash County was constructed on undeveloped property purchased from one of the largest landowners in the county. The small settlement, consisting of the courthouse, jail, and a few houses, remained little more than a dot on the map until 1820 when the town of Nashville was laid off in forty lots. Over the next few decades, a small community gradually grew around the courthouse as businessmen began serving the market created by people visiting Nashville on legal business. When a new courthouse was built in 1834, Nashville had several stores, four taverns, stables, a large warehouse, and a gin and gin house. By the Civil War, the town boasted many more accoutrements, including a hotel, bootmaker's shop, carriage shop, mercantile establishment, and a male academy. Nashville slowly recovered from the ill effects of the Civil War and by the early 1880s was entering a period of steady economic growth as one Nash County's principal marketplaces.¹

Born in 1864 on a small farm near Bailey in Nash County, George N. Bissette moved to the county seat in the mid 1880s to seek his fortune in merchandising. Apparently he was very enterprising, for within a short time he was managing a general merchandise store bearing his name and that of a "silent" investor, a tobacconist named Arrington who was a member of one of the county's wealthiest families. Situated opposite the courthouse, the Arrington-Bissette Store became Nashville's largest mercantile establishment.² During the 1890s, Bissette began to diversify his business interests with investment in a local cotton gin and real estate throughout the county. The Nash County grantor/grantee indices indicate that Bissette began acquiring considerable real estate holdings, primarily tobacco farms, in 1898 and continued to invest in real estate into the 1920s.³ Also in 1898, Bissette built an elaborate Queen Anne style house for his wife and young family on Washington Street, the town's principal residential avenue. With Nashville's most stylish house, which contained the town's first ceramic bathtub and later had the telephone

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number "one," Bissette vividly symbolized his "self-made" success.⁴

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, Bissette's stature in the community increased as his investments prospered, and he assumed an increasingly active role in community affairs and the Nashville Methodist Church. A little more than a decade after building his first residence, Bissette decided to build the larger and more stylistically up-to-date Bissette-Cooley House for his family, which had grown to include three daughters and a son. Although no documentation related to the construction of the house is known to survive, the early Neoclassical Revival style design closely resembles the work of John C. Stout, Nash County's most noted early twentieth-century architect known for his residential commissions throughout eastern North Carolina.⁵ In January, 1911, Bissette purchased an entire block at the head of Washington Street for his new house, which was completed later that year.⁶

Bissette remained one of Nashville's most prominent citizens until his sudden death from appendicitis in 1926. His accomplishments were enumerated in his obituary which appeared on the front page of Nashville's newspaper, The Graphic:

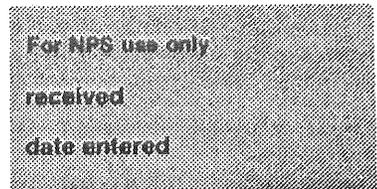
George N. Bissette was one of the most prominent, progressive and influential citizens of which Nashville has been justly proud to boast and hold in the very highest esteem. His business career and activities in the town have been outstanding features... He gave his hearty support and influence to every worthy and elevating moment, contributing liberally of his means to the church, and is largely responsible for the beautiful Methodist Church building in this city...⁷

The obituary also cited Bissette's services as a town commissioner who often "temporarily financed problems" and as a member of the board of trustees of the Nashville School whose contributions enhanced the educational facilities.⁸

Bissette left the Bissette-Cooley House to his children, who sold it to their mother in 1929.⁹ Later that year, Bissette's daughter and son-in-law, Lucy James and Julian Briscoe Gassaway, purchased the house from Mrs. Bissette with the provision that she remain in the house with the Gassaways and receive anything in excess of \$12,000 in the event that they sell the house.¹⁰ J. B. Gassaway had managed the Arrington-Bissette Store from around 1920 until it burned prior to Bissette's death, at which time Gassaway inherited

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the cotton gin. The Gassaways, their three children, and Mrs. Bissette lived in the Bissette-Cooley House for several years. J. B. Gassaway died in 1936 and his wife died in 1944.¹¹

In October, 1945, the Gassaway children and Mrs. Bissette sold the house to Harold Dunbar Cooley, who jokingly stated at the time that he had realized the last of his three ambitions with that purchase -- to study law, marry Madeline Strickland, and live in the biggest house in Nashville.¹² Cooley was born in Nashville in 1897, the son of attorney R. A. P. Cooley and Hattie Davis Cooley. Educated in the public schools of Nash County and at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Cooley served in the Naval Aviation Flying Corps during World War I after which he earned a degree at Yale Law School and opened a law practice in Nashville. He embarked upon a political career as a Democratic presidential elector in 1932 and two years later was elected to the Seventy-Third Congress to fill out the unexpired term of deceased Fourth Congressional District Representative Edward W. Pou.¹³ Shortly after his election, C. A. Upchurch wrote of Cooley in the Raleigh News and Observer:

...he flashed across the Fourth District horizon for two brief months, in a hastily prepared campaign, to reach the national House of Representatives and take a seat that had not accommodated a newcomer from this district in 34 years.¹⁴

Often cited as one of the state's most gifted orators, Cooley ran successfully for fifteen subsequent terms.

Cooley earned a reputation as a forceful advocate for North Carolina farm interests. He authored much of the progressive farm legislation enacted during his thirty-two-year career in Washington and often was called upon by presidents to represent the United States in international efforts to promote agriculture, world trade, and rehabilitation.¹⁵ Shortly after his first election, Cooley waged a quiet and successful drive for membership on the powerful House Agriculture Committee, considered a difficult feat for a freshman Congressman, and in 1949 he became the first North Carolinian in 104 years elected chairman of that committee.¹⁶ Cooley held the chairmanship for seventeen years, the longest tenure of that post in the history of Congress. A 1950 News and Observer article summarized Cooley's activities on the House Agriculture Committee:

A long parade of vital legislation has occupied the committee: soil conservation, flood control, rural electrification and rural telephone service,

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price supports, crop insurance, promotion of foreign trade in farm products, the Farmers Home Administration, the Farm Credit Administration and the Production Credit Association.

Cooley's name popped to national attention in 1944 when he headed a special committee which investigated the Farm Security Administration and unearthed evidence of extravagance and waste. His bill to create the Farmers Home Corporation as a credit service to farmers grew out of that study.¹⁷

On April 1, 1964, Cooley guided three major pieces of legislation through the House -- the food stamp bill, the wheat bill and the cotton bill. Throughout his career in Congress he maintained ties with his law practice, run by his partner in their office next to the Nash County Courthouse, and spent much time on his two Nash County farms whenever he was home. In spite of his Ivy League education, Cooley referred to himself as a "dirt farmer" and always displayed an active interest in the agricultural affairs of his constituents.¹⁸

Beginning in 1956, Cooley's previously wide margins of victory progressively dwindled each election year. In his 1964 contest, the first time he had to struggle, Cooley defeated Republican James Carson Gardner of Rocky Mount by only 5,000 of the 140,000 votes cast. In 1966, Gardner successfully ended a ninety-one-year Democratic reign in the Fourth Congressional District when he handed Cooley his first defeat. After the bitter campaign, Cooley attributed his loss to the conservative backlash against the civil rights and other liberal policies of President Johnson, with whom Cooley was identified.¹⁹ Cooley and his wife returned to Nashville where he practiced law for several years. When he died in 1974, he was hailed as "one of North Carolina's greatest congressmen" by Lt. Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., who said that Cooley "did more than anyone in Congress since the Depression to build a strong rural economy in America."²⁰

Mrs. Cooley continued to live in the Bissette-Cooley House until her death in 1981. Braswell and Braswell Properties of Nashville purchased the house in 1985 and currently are renovating it as offices according to the Secretary of the Interior's standards for rehabilitating historic buildings.

NOTES

¹ Nash County Bicentennial Commission, Nash County Historical Notes, edited by T. E. Ricks (Rocky Mt.: Dixie Printing & Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 23-24, 63-64, 278.

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Interview with Julian Briscoe Gassaway, Jr. and Mrs. Edith Chick, grandchildren of George N. Bissette, in Rocky Mount, May 3, 1985; and interview with Mrs. Sally Braswell, long-time resident of Nashville who lives in Bissette's first house, May 3, 1985.

3 Nash County Register of Deeds (NCRD), grantor and grantee indices; for example, Book 103, page 27, Book 112, page 657, and Book 118, page 223.

4 Gassaway/Chick and Braswell interviews.

5 See promotional book in vertical file of Braswell Memorial Library in Rocky Mount entitled Rocky Mount, the consolidation of two publications put out by the Rocky Mount Record in 1906 and c. 1911.

6 NCRD Deed Book 194, page 125. Later, the north end of the block was sold to a Mr. Jordan.

7 The Graphic, vol. XXXI, no. 15, 9 April 1925.

8 Ibid.

9 NCRD Book 336, page 201.

10 NCRD Deed Book 337, page 259; and Gassaway/Chick interview. The provision regarding Mrs. Bissette, never recorded, is mentioned in Deed Book 501, page 114.

11 Gassaway/Chick interview.

12 NCRD Deed Book 501, page 114; and Jack Riley, "Harold Dunbar Cooley," The News and Observer, 28 May 1950.

13 We The People, vol. 4, no. 2, June 1946, p. 12.

14 C. A. Upchurch, Jr., "Career of Harold D. Cooley Has Been a Legend of Success," The News and Observer, 10 June 1934.

15 Bill Humphries, "Harold Cooley Day Celebrated As Thousands Honor Nash Solon," The News and Observer, 19 October 1956.

16 The last House Agriculture Committee chairman from North Carolina was Rep. Edmund De Berry, a Whig who served from 1837 to 1845. James Free, "Under the Dome," The News and Observer, 6 February 1949.

17 Jack Riley.

18 "Ex-Rep. Cooley Dies in Wilson," The News and Observer, 16 January 1974; and Jack Riley.

19 Bland Simpson, "Barometer of Political Rebellion: the Fourth Congressional District of North Carolina, 1964-1966," honors paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1967 (photocopy of typescript in North Carolina Collection), p. 2.

20 "Ex-Rep. Cooley Dies in Wilson."

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[Note: All newspaper articles are located in the North Carolina Collection Clipping file through 1975, UNC Library, Chapel, under "Cooley, Harold Dunbar (1897-1974).]

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.33 a.
Quadrangle name Nashville, N.C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Nash County Tax Map n. 380120704549 (map 380120, block 70, parcel 4549)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Claudia Robertt Brown, consultant

organization

date May, 1985

street & number 301 E. Poplar Ave.

telephone 919/968-1181

city or town Carrboro

state N.C. 27510

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

William S. Fair, Jr.

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date July 11, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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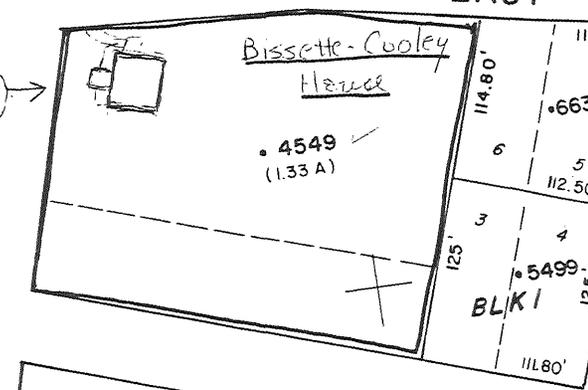
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Nash County Tax Map 380120,
Block 70, parcel 4549



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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