

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Alum Spring
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number West side of SR 1211 1.6 miles S. of SR 1001 N/A not for publication
city, town Catherine Lake vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Onslow code 133 zip code 28540

3. Classification

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

Name of related multiple property listing:
Onslow County Multiple Property Documentation Form

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: outdoor recreation

Health Care: resort

Landscape: natural feature (spring)

Domestic: institutional housing

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape: natural feature (spring)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.**SUMMARY:**

Alum Spring lies approximately one mile south of the community of Catherine Lake and issues boldly from a south-facing slope. The water which wells up from this spring at a volume of 2,000 gallons per minute has a strong sulphurous smell and forms a clear and sandy-bottomed stream which flows 300 feet south-ward to a branch of Southwest Creek, a tributary of the New River. Over the spring is a large gabled shelter (a noncontributing structure) which was built circa 1970 by Dr. K.R. Padgett (the present co-owner of the spring) in the likeness of the shelter which stood over the spring during the early twentieth century. Dr. Padgett also rebuilt the cribwork of large timbers which forms a series of pools and a cascade stepping down from the spring to the stream. Near the spring are mature oaks, tulip poplars, and other deciduous trees, some draped in Spanish moss, which date from the heyday of the "Big August" picnics at the spring. In the 1850's the site may have been shaded by a natural growth of pines (Avirett: 100). Other landscape features include the remains of the road leading to the spring from the north, bordered by drainage ditches, and hollows and depressions (some formed by treasure hunters with metal detectors, others related to the historic use of the site). The entire fifteen-acre site is counted as a single contributing resource. Present information on the earlier physical appearance of the site comes primarily from James Battle Avirett's reminiscences on ante-bellum Onslow County, The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin before the War (1901), and from early twentieth century photographs and the descriptions of local informants.

Formerly Alum Spring was thronged with structures of various sizes and functions, several of which appear in an early twentieth century photograph (see accompanying copy). The gabled spring shelter had square wood posts, eave extensions supported by simple brackets, wood shingle roofing, and benches for seating. Close to the spring shelter on its east side stood a small weather-boarded frame bathhouse used for dressing. On a rise to the west of the spring stood the open dance pavilion which had a gable roof with eave extensions and a weatherboarded railing (Onslow County Museum Photograph Archive). These three spring-related structures were probably built during the late nineteenth century; the mid-nineteenth century dance platform which Avirett described stood on the east side of the spring and was apparently gone by the early twentieth century.

If it is true that the spring did not always exist at its present location,

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as some sources state, then it is doubtful that the site would have been occupied before the middle of the nineteenth century. Otherwise, if the spring has been flowing at the site since the eighteenth century, then Alum Spring is probably the site of early settlement. Perennial freshwater sources were highly valued in the sandy, brackish country of Onslow County. The spring may have been a factor in the location of the county poor house at the site, which had a population numbering up to fifty inmates during the 1870's and 1880's (Onslow County Official's Bonds and Records).

Alum Spring did serve as the location of a Murrill family farm during the late nineteenth century, the same period the site was used for the "Big August" picnics. The Murrill house stood to the north of the spring and was a two-story, possibly double-pile gable roofed frame dwelling with a front porch. Most informants claim that the Murrill house was the poor house; others say the two were separate noncoexistent buildings (Thelma Langley, Chase Padgett, personal communication). The Murrill house was in ruins by the 1950's and was demolished shortly thereafter (Chase Padgett, personal communication). Associated with the Murrill house were stables, a small frame springhouse for the cooling of dairy products which stood beside the spring's stream, and a large barn and other agricultural structures which stood approximately fifty to a hundred yards to the southwest of the spring (Onslow County Museum Photograph Archive).

✓ Many of the cultural resources associated with Alum Spring lie beneath the ground. Alum Spring is therefore a potentially rich archaeological site that may have components associated with eighteenth through twentieth century domestic occupation and agricultural utilization, with mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century spring and resort facilities, and with the post-Civil War era poor house.

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PHOTOGRAPH KEY

All recent photographs by Daniel Pezzoni, Onslow County Survey.
Historic photographs from the Onslow County Museum Photograph
Archives. Date of photograph follows entry.

1. Reconstructed spring shelter and cascade. View northward. (6/88)
2. Stream flowing from spring. View southward. (6/88)
3. Group of mature oaks near spring. (6/88)
4. Historic photograph (early 20th century). Spring shelter on left, dance pavilion on right, barn and agricultural buildings in middle background. View southwestward.
5. Historic photograph (early 20th century). Spring shelter and cascade. Murrill House (?) in background. View northward.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/ Recreation

Period of Significance

ca. 1850-1933

Significant Dates

ca. 1850
1933

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Alum Spring is significant under National Register Criterion A as a site of importance under the entertainment and recreation area of significance in Onslow County, North Carolina. The boldly-flowing sulphur spring and its formerly park-like surroundings served as the site of the county poorhouse during the post-Civil war period and were the scene of an annual picnic thrown for the inmates of the poorhouse by family and friends. Long after the poorhouse was moved the "Big August" picnic flourished as a county-wide social gathering. The spring waters were believed to have had medicinal properties. Alum Spring and its surroundings are significant for the period ca. 1850 until 1933, spanning the years from the earliest known account of the spring until the date of the last "Big August" held at the site.

No context for recreation was developed in the Onslow County Multiple Property Documentation Form owing to the small number of documented resources associated with this area of significance. Alum Spring exists within the context of the statewide popularity of mineral springs as picnic grounds and spas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nearly every county had at least one mineral spring with waters believed to have medicinal properties. These were privately owned, often associated with swimming ponds or lakes, and were the nineteenth century equivalent of the present-day public park system.

The early history of Alum Spring is complicated by the fact that originally there were two mineral springs in northwestern central Onslow County known as "Alum Spring". The spring most often referred to in early records was located on Chapel Run approximately one mile north of the community of Catherine Lake and was referred to in deeds as "Alum Spring" in 1792 and "the mineral spring" in 1838 (Onslow County Deed Book R, page 20: Book 22, p. 329). In the early twentieth century this spring was referred to as "Little Alum Spring". The flow from Little Alum Spring is considerably less than that from the main Alum Spring and the water does not have a strong sulphur smell (Percy Brown, Hammond Lanier, personal communication). Little Alum Spring is enclosed by a concrete curb probably dating to the early twentieth century (Ralph Gurganus, personal communication). Both Little Alum Spring and the main Alum Spring are probably

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linked to the same artesian supply which also feeds Chapel Run and a dozen or so ponds in the vicinity, of which Catherine Lake is the largest.

The main Alum Spring lies a mile south of Catherine Lake. The tract including Alum Spring was patented to Matthew Brinson in 1761 (Onslow County Deed Book A, page 590). The spring passed through a number of owners between 1761 and 1839, when it was purchased by John Cook (Onslow County Deed Book 24, page 2). By 1839 the spring tract had been reduced to approximately its present size of fifteen acres. Later in the nineteenth century Alum Spring belonged to the Murrill family, who sold it in 1904 to Catherine Lake lawyer Rodolph Duffy (Onslow County Deed Book 79, page 394).

Alum Spring was never developed commercially and nineteenth century references to it are few, but one account, which describes the spring as it was in the late ante-bellum period, is particularly detailed. In his book The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War (1901), James Battle Avirett described an excursion he and a company of young friends made to the spring during the early 1850's. Avirett's description of the spring reads in part as follows:

"Reaching the rendezvous, at the foot of quite a declivity for this flat country, we find in this spring one of the very strongest fountains of medicinal water in this state. It breaks out from the side of a hill, in a volume of crystal water, about ten feet deep and as many in width, forming a deep basin, in which might float with perfect ease two or three pilot boats... On the east bank of the purling little stream, which flows away from this bay of water, is a space cleared of all undergrowth, around the semi-circular rim of which are lined the fifteen or twenty carriages and a number of Concord wagons. In the center of this space there has been erected a platform about twenty-five feet square, while at one end is a stand with seats for the 'musicianers'." (Avirett: 100)

Avirett also noted that the spring had formerly issued at a spot a quarter of a mile away and that in the course of one night it had changed location - a story also circulated during the early twentieth century. The basin Avirett described is no longer present, and could only have been formed by a dam across the stream. Today many handmade bricks lie below the spring (some under the roots of mature trees) that may have been a part of a mid-nineteenth century basin wall or other improvements.

The Avirett account makes no mention of the county poor house which stood at Alum Spring during the middle of the nineteenth century. The principal reference to this poor house was made by Byron Ford in a 1924 Raleigh News and Observer article on Onslow County. Although he was a staff reporter

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unfamiliar with the county, Ford drew on the memories of such long-time Catherine Lake residents as Simon B. Taylor in the preparation of his article. Ford wrote:

"Not the least interesting feature of this vicinity is a large mineral spring situated on the property of Rodolph Duffy little more than a mile eastward [sic] of Catherine Lake. The spring grounds were formerly the site of the county home, where, annually on Tuesday after the first Sunday in August, the country-side gathered for the purpose of conveying presents of food and clothes to the inmates. It has been more than half a century since the county home at this place was discontinued".

It was likely that the poor house was not located at Alum Spring when Avirett was familiar with the site. The only records to survive relating to the county overseer of the poor date to the 1870's and 1880's and provide only oblique references to the poor house. It is probably not coincidental, however, that the overseers of the poor in 1877 were Elijah Murrill and Simon B. Taylor, residents of the Catherine Lake vicinity, and in 1884 the overseer was Christopher Stephens, who lived three miles from the spring. One reference to the poor house in 1884 noted that it had been in disrepair for a year - a possible indication that the poor house of that period was soon to be abandoned and the institution moved (Onslow County Official's Bonds and Records).

In his article Ford went on to write, "But the habit of the annual gathering [at the poorhouse] became too strong to be discontinued; and so on every annual return of that day, Mr. Duffy is the host of the 'Big August'; as it is called by the thousands who there foregather." The "Big August" picnics continued until 1933, long enough to figure vividly in the memories of many older Onslow County citizens.

"Big August" provided the county's residents a respite from summer toil and an opportunity to socialize with neighbors and kin from throughout the section, from Wilmington, and from other southeastern North Carolina towns. Transplanted Onslow County natives came from as far afield as Georgia and Florida on occasion (Alvin M. Fountain, personal communication). Picnic-goers arrived at the spring in carriages and covered wagons and (by the 1930's) in automobiles; some lodged overnight before the one-day picnic at the homes of local people (Carl Boggs, personal communication). At their largest, the "Big August" crowds are estimated to have numbered between three- and four-hundred persons (less than the "thousands" Ford claimed) (Carl Boggs, Percy Brown, personal communication).

Picnic-goers chose the largest watermelons from their melon patches, carved their initials on them, and placed them in the cold spring water to cool. Refreshments were sold from booths. The local Ladies Aid Society sold

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lemonade, various local churches (such as Gum Branch Methodist Church and Union Chapel Christian Church) sold ice cream, and a local Coca Cola distributorship sold cola and gave away souvenir pencils (Taylor. Carl Boggs, personal communication). In the evening dances were held to the accompaniment of fiddle, banjo and autoharp on some occasions and a brass band at other times in the dance pavilion above the spring (Taylor). One informant recalls a procession from Catherine Lake to the spring that featured a beauty queen (Woodrow Wilson Cox, personal communication). Another informant notes that a hunter from the Richlands vicinity brought a bear in a cage to the picnic and charged a nickel admission to see it (Alvin M. Fountain, personal communication).

The last "Big August" picnic was held in 1933 (Carl Boggs, personal communication). Although the site was less well maintained during the 1930's and later, Alum Spring continued to be used for informal outings and picnics throughout the warm months and for the courtship of young couples. Most notable of the events occurring after 1933 was a variety show held at the spring during the 1940's, attended by officers and enlisted men from the nearby Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base and featuring a burlesque act and an appearance by Tyrone Power, then stationed at Morehead City (Albert Potts, Percy Brown, personal communication). After the 1940's the site was visited infrequently; at present Alum Spring is closed to the general public.

In his description, James Battle Avirett noted that the Alum Spring waters had medicinal properties. The fact that Dr. Charles Duffy, Sr. settled at Catherine Lake near the spring in the 1830's may have been a reflection of this belief. A local man is said to have bathed in the spring during a "Big August" picnic, claiming that the water killed body lice (Thelma Langley, personal communication). Local people bottled the spring water for home consumption, and on one occasion before World War I and possibly on other occasions later unknown parties drove trucks to the spring to carry off bottled water (Alvin M. Fountain, Percy Brown, personal communication). No large mineral water bottler is known to have bottled Alum Spring water during the first half of the twentieth century (N.C. Board of Health. Mineral Water Papers).

The "Big August" picnic at Alum Spring was not the only summer event to take place in Onslow County and adjacent counties in the past. Fourth-of-July picnics were held at Catherine Lake and large August picnics with bands were held in 1908 at Chinquapin and in 1909 at Blaylock, both in Duplin County (Percy Brown, personal communication. Eastern Carolina News). These picnics were important in the social life of rural communities. They might be considered the secular descendants of the camp meetings and later association meetings of traditional religion ("Big August" was also the term used for the White Oak Association Meeting held at Southwest Primitive Baptist Church several miles south of Alum Spring on the first Sunday of August (Alvin M. Fountain, personal communication). The demise of Big August in particular may have resulted from the greater mobility created by increased automobile ownership, and the

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corresponding enhanced accessibility and development of nearby beaches. The socializing and community solidarity that played a large role in "Big August" has found other channels in local events such as the Fourth-of-July Hargett-Humphrey beach party held at Emerald Isle, organized and largely attended by citizens of northern Onslow County, and the "Farmer's Day" held in Richlands every October.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Avirett, James Battle. The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin before the War. New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1901.

Brown, John Parsons. The Commonwealth of Onslow, A History. New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn, 1960.

(Kenansville)Eastern Carolina News. (August 19, 1908, August 4, 1909).

Ford, Byron. "Modest Onslow possesses many natural advantages and excellent folks, too." (Raleigh) News and Observer v. 119 n. 48 (February 17, 1924).

Interviews. Several of the following informants were interviewed at a "Catherine Lake and Alum Spring Discussion" held at the Onslow County Museum in Richlands, NC, on December 8, 1988. Informants who were interviewed at the discussion have an asterisk by their names.

- *A.K.R. Boggs, Richlands, NC
- *Carl Boggs, Richlands, NC
- *Ikey Brock, Richlands, NC
- *Percy Brown, Jacksonville, NC
- Carl E. Coston, Jacksonville, NC
- Woodrow W. Cox, Raleigh, NC
- Lucille Collins, Jacksonville, NC
- Alvin Fountain, Raleigh, NC
- Ralph Gurganus, Richlands, NC
- Dennis Jones, Richlands, NC
- *Thelma Langley, Jacksonville, NC
- Hammond Lanier, Catherine Lake, NC
- Chase Padgett, Jacksonville, NC
- Albert Potts, Jacksonville, NC
- Hathaway Price, Jacksonville, NC
- Harry Venters, New Bern, NC

North Carolina Board of Health. Mineral Water Papers, 1912-1940. North Carolina State Library, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.

Onslow County Deed Records. Onslow County Courthouse, Jacksonville, NC

Onslow County Map Books. Book 10, page 35. Book 13, page 3.

Onslow County Museum. Photographic Archives. Richlands, NC.

Onslow County Official's Bonds and Records. Overseers of the poor papers. State Library, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC

"Shaffers Township Map of North Carolina." Raleigh: NC.

Taylor, Mrs. Roscoe. "Big August" Typescript: n d.

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Historian Presha Merritt conducted much of the local research that went into the preparation of this nomination.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 14.92 acres

UTM References

A

1	1	8
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2	6	5	0	0	0
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3	8	5	3	6	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

1	1	8
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2	6	5	7	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	8	5	3	6	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	1	8
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2	6	5	2	4	0
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3	8	5	3	1	5	0
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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries appear on the accompanying tax map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries enclose an area containing the spring and its immediate environs and correspond to preexisting property lines.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dan Pezzoni
organization _____ date April 15, 1989
street & number 1214 Campbell Ave SW telephone (703) 343-8431
city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24016

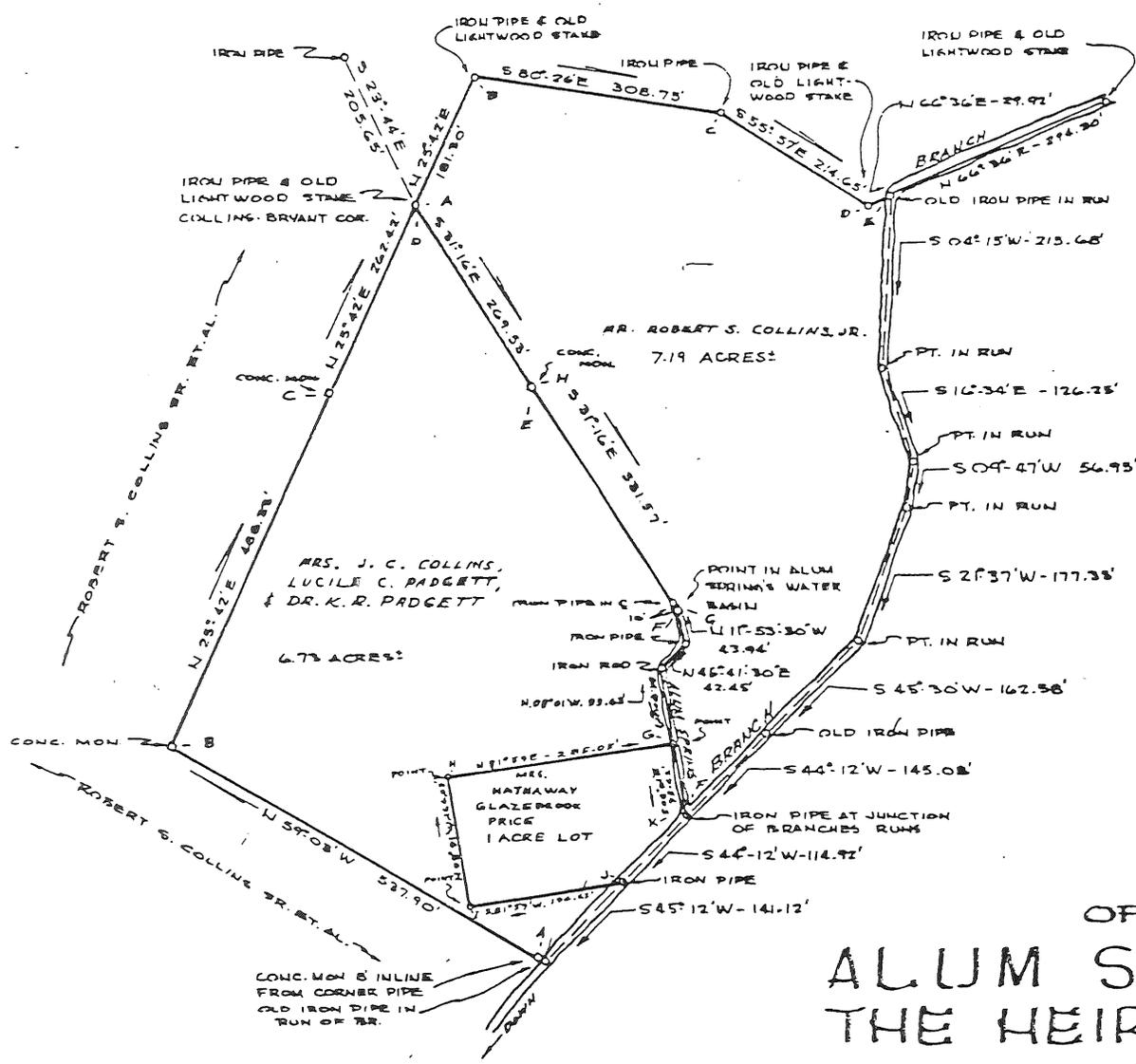
TCH

COLINA

BYOR BEING AT THIS MAP IS SUPERVISED BY MR. OF COURSE ATTITUDES AND (SEE) THAT IN ACCORDANCE BYOR AND Z... THAT IT IS OF HIS BLISS.

Milton P. Walton Jr.
 REGISTERED SURVEYOR
 CRIBED BEFORE
 of August 1971
M. P. Walton Jr.
 STATE PUBLIC
 PRES. 7-30-75

VERNIE BRYANT LANDS



Boundaries of area to be nominated to the National Register correspond to the existing boundaries of the Spring Tract.

MAP
 OF DIVISION OF
 ALUM SPRING TRACT FOR
 THE HEIRS OF MRS. ANNIE TAYLOR
 DUFFY (DECEASED)

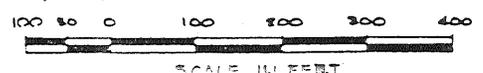
RICHLANDS TOWNSHIP ONSLOW COUNTY, N.C.

14.92 ACRES

SCALE 1" = 100'

JULY, 1971

Milton P. Walton Jr.
 WALTON & WALTON, INC., REGISTERED SURVEYORS, BURGAW, N.C.



- NOTES:
- SURVEY MADE USING MAP ENTITLED "MAP OF A SURVEY FOR ROBERT S. & LUCILLE V. COLLINS, ET AL." (SEE MAP BK. 10 PG. 35 OF THE ONSLOW COUNTY REGISTER)
 - ALL BEARINGS ARE CORRECT IN ANGULAR RELATION.
 - AREA CALCULATED USING PLANIMETER.

19 Jan 1971
 13 Jan 1972
 10 Jan 1972

