

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Agriculture Building
AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

East Edenton Street

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Raleigh

__ VICINITY OF

4th

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

37

COUNTY

Wake

CODE

183

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

__ DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

__ STRUCTURE

__ SITE

__ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

__ PRIVATE

__ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

__ IN PROCESS

__ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

__ UNOCCUPIED

__ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

__ YES: UNRESTRICTED

__ NO

PRESENT USE

__ AGRICULTURE

__ COMMERCIAL

__ EDUCATIONAL

__ ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

__ INDUSTRIAL

__ MILITARY

__ MUSEUM

__ PARK

__ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

__ RELIGIOUS

__ SCIENTIFIC

__ TRANSPORTATION

__ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

State of North Carolina

Mr. Nat Robb, State Property Officer

STREET & NUMBER

116 West Jones Street

Department of Administration

Raleigh, North Carolina

CITY, TOWN

Raleigh

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Wake County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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

The Agriculture Building is sited on the northwest corner of Edenton Street and the Bicentennial Mall (formerly Halifax Street). The south or Edenton Street facade is the short side of the rectangular block, with the long side facing the Mall on the east. The building forms the west wall of the vista between the nearby capitol, a National Historic Landmark of architectural and historical significance, and the relatively recent legislative building. Designed by the local firm of Nelson and Cooper, and constructed in 1921-1923 in the Neo-Classical Revival style in warm yellow stone, this imposing structure evokes the period in North Carolina's history when the relative simplicities of nineteenth century state government became the ponderous administrations of the twentieth, and the modest structures of those early days gave way to the lithic masses of monumental classicism, the official style of public bureaucracy. Unlike other classically inspired government buildings around the square, most of which are of considerably later date, the Agriculture Building is well detailed and well executed and of a period when Neo-Classicism was still an historically legitimate mode for artistic and architectural expression in government architecture, a conservative genre in any age.

What gives the building special interest in addition to its qualities as a regionally significant beaux arts exercise is the subtlety of the overall composition. The architects conceived the final version of the building as a symmetrical facade featuring a blind octastyle loggia separated from similar tetrastyle loggias by simple intervening bays. Rather than displaying this rather straightforward theme on a single wall, the architect made the facade turn the corner, so that the long, dominate wall of the structure is asymmetrical, but the two visible sides of the building when viewed obliquely form a single symmetrical composition (with minor exceptions). The north and west walls of the building are unadorned, because they were meant to abut adjacent office buildings.

The ground floor of the building features a massive, ashlar veneer, in which blocks of stone are cut to form wide, horizontal strips in relief alternating with the shadows of narrow, incised strips. These rest on a heavy base with heavy, simple water table. Centered below each of the tetrastyle loggias are entrances. On the south side the door is framed with a crosseted architrave flanked by paneled pilasters strips. These support elongated, foliated consoles upon which rest a scrolled frontispiece in low relief. The seal of the Department of Agriculture is incised on the shield between the scrolls. Below, in the frieze, between the consoles, a lapidary inscription "AGRICULTURE" identifies the building. Egg-and-dart moldings decorate both the frieze and consoles. On the opposite side of this L-shaped facade is a similar entrance. In place of the curvilinear frontispiece, however, is a simple triangular pediment. This latter door is flanked by round arched windows; the former by rectilinear windows cut severely in the striated wall without frames, sills, or keystones. Metal, double hung sash is recessed.

Under the octastyle center bay, like the east entrance, are round arched windows around which the courses of stone veneer break to suggest voussours and keystones.

Above the horizontal lines and shadows of the ground floor is a heavy molded combination beltcourse and base. Upon this rest the four upper floors. Within the loggias, recessed in the plane of the wall, are monumental, fluted Ionic three quarter columns. These handsome columns, rising through the second, third, and fourth stories, feature heavily molded bases and elaborate Greek style capitals. Anthemia, acroteria, egg-and-dart, water leaf, and reel-and-bead molding are part of the ornamental pattern.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE one

Sections of full entablature occur between the third and fourth floors within the area defined by the Ionic columns. These are supported by Doric pilasters with simply molded capitals. Panels fill the space below the second and third floor windows.

Between the loggias are simple bays framed by Doric pilasters with bases and capitals. The latter feature decoration similar to the Ionic capitals. The windows of the upper floors have sills but no frames. On the east side these intervening sections are of two bays, but on the south facade they are one. A full, unbroken entablature unites the building.

The fifth floor is set back from the entablature, except at the corners, where it is pulled forward in a pavilion effect. Capping these are simple, cornices ornamented with rows of water leaf moldings. Between the pavilions on the Edenton Street side is a classical balustrade.

The 1950s addition gives the building an L-shape as it wraps around the Labor Building. The facade of this addition, fronting Salisbury Street, is a severe abstraction of the classical elements of the opposite structure. The entrance has a wide, flat marble frame.

The interior of the Agriculture Building is fairly restrained though the ceiling heights, particularly on the ground floor, are dramatic. The lobby, the only embellished space, is basically cruciform. Piers and paneled pilasters with molded capitals and bases support a heavy entablature. The floor and baseboards are marble. In the vestibule the walls are ornamented with flat panels. Elsewhere they are struck to imitate masonry.

The dog leg staircase is steep with marble steps. The molded wooden handrail terminates in a bronze newel square in section with molded base and cap. The simple balusters alternate with an oval pattern. Also notable is the brass letter box manufactured by the Cutler Mail Chute Company of Rochester, New York. This handsome design features elaborate moldings, egg-and-dart, water leaf, fasciae, and reel-and-bead designs, and an American eagle.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input 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 1921-1923

BUILDER/ARCHITECT /Nelson and Cooper

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Civil War and Reconstruction left North Carolina's agriculture industry crippled and considerably changed from its antebellum traditions. The plantation system had been replaced by tenancy crop-liens and furnishing systems. Annual production of most crops declined, real value of land fell, farm size decreased, soil fertility became depleted, farm population became unstable, transportation facilities were inadequate, prices for crops fell, prices for industrial goods such as farm equipment rose steadily. It became clear that early efforts to deal with these new problems and revitalize the farming industry, such as the North Carolina Land Company (incorporated 1869) and the establishment of the Granges (incorporated 1875) failed to provide the farmer with real gains in efficiency and productivity. Even the Bureau of Immigration, Statistics, and Agriculture (established 1874) was ineffective.

Efforts to found a Department of Agriculture began in 1875. On March 12, 1877, "An Act to Establish a Department of Agriculture, Immigration, Statistics, and for the Encouragement of Sheep Husbandry" was passed, and the Department of Agriculture was born. It sought to regulate the increasing complexities of farming, marketing, and resource management. Among the duties of the Board of Agriculture were the control of animal diseases, and insect pests, soil research, collection of statistics, management of fish and hatcheries, and regulation of seed and fertilizer. Colonel Leonidas Polk (1837-1892) politician, editor, and advocate of progressive agriculture, was appointed first Commissioner of Agriculture. He served until 1880, but continued to be a leader in the Farmer's Alliance, founder of what became North Carolina State University, founder of The Progressive Farmer, a highly influential agricultural journal, and a near presidential candidate on the Populist Party ticket in 1892.

Sixteen years after its founding, the department, allowing some hyperbole for polemic purposes, was pleased to report a substantial degree of success in the venture:

'It has saved the State thousands of dollars annually; it has induced investments of large amounts in the mines, forests and agricultural lands of the State, and has developed the phosphate beds, the oyster grounds, and the mineral deposits and coal fields of the State; it has gathered statistics and published valuable books descriptive of the whole state, and distributed them so widely that this is among the best advertised States; and has, as its last and greatest effort, the organization of the successful College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts.' In its relation to the former it has been, and continues to be, of inestimable value to the farmer. For as in the advancement of agriculture into the ranks of a science, so was there enormous application of the presumably scientifically compounded fertilizers. Here was opened a wide and gaping door to fraud, which the Department was empowered to step forward and close.¹

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

Though it had modest beginnings, the Department of Agriculture has increased responsibilities, a multi-million dollar budget, and an extraordinary range of services and functions. Farming has always been an industry of critical importance in North Carolina. Today it is the second largest in the state, after textiles. North Carolina is said to be proportionately the most rural state in the nation, ranking fourth in absolute number of farms, seventh in farm workers, and tenth in sales of farm commodities. North Carolina leads the nation in tobacco, and is exceeded only by Washington in farm forestry products. Other important crops are peanuts, poultry, and soybeans.

The Eagle Hotel (later known successively as the Guion Hotel and the National Hotel), constructed on the northwest corner of Edenton and Halifax streets in the second decade of the nineteenth century, was the first permanent home of the Department of Agriculture. Until 1879, when the hotel was purchased by the state, the department had been temporarily located in Chapel Hill. It was a prominent site, just north of the Capitol, but not a profitable business location because Raleigh's commercial district moved to Fayetteville Street on the opposite side of the square. Photographs show that it was an enlarged three-story brick structure with a low hipped roof and two-story gallery across the front, apparently a mid-nineteenth century style addition. ". . . The Department," wrote the State Board of Agriculture, "occupies a building in the city of Raleigh, originally large and convenient, but now arranged so as to be specially adapted to its many uses. . . ." ³

By the second decade of the twentieth century the bureaucracy had outgrown its quarters and it became apparent that a new structure was needed. The governor suggested that the Agriculture Department move to the old buildings of the Blind Institute. This proposal, made to the State Board of Agriculture, ". . . provoked quite a discussion, every member of the Board 'having his say.'" The request of the Governor was respectfully declined. ⁴ Though it seemed to meet the approbation of the department forty years earlier, by the 1920s it had become hopelessly antiquated. "Twice the Insurance Department has condemned the old building," complained the Raleigh News and Observer, "and for ten years the State has been about to build a new one. Finally all things have been made ready. By next March 1923 the new building will be ready, and then Major Graham W. A. Graham, Commissioner of Agriculture says he can die happily. He has lived in hopes of a new building for 25 years, he says. He says he is ashamed to die in the old place." ⁵

The Biennial Report of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture of 1920-1922 explained that "when the Department of Agriculture was reorganized in 1877 it was housed in, perhaps, the worst public building in Raleigh, an old, condemned and abandoned hotel. This old hotel, a fire trap for our Museum and records, was the home of the Department till a few months ago, when it was torn down to make room for the magnificent new structure that is now going up." ⁶

An appropriation of \$325,000 for a new building and \$100,000 for equipment and

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE two

furnishings was made and work proceeded on a new structure.⁷ Raleigh architects G. Murray Nelson and Thomas Wright Cooper were retained as consultants, with engineer H. A. Underwood. Working drawings made by the firm of Nelson and Cooper for the building were dated January 18, 1922, and the building was completed in 1923.

Thomas W. Cooper (1897-1957), the younger of the two partners, was an important local architect principally known for residential design, though he was involved in buildings for the North Carolina State University and local hospital design. He received his training through apprenticeship with Raleigh architect James A. Salter. The firm was dissolved in the early years of the Depression, but Cooper found employment in later years supervising the construction of the Raleigh Army Air Support Command Base (1942), as assistant to the university architect (1943-1944), and later as a partner in the firm of Cooper and Haskins. In 1952 he served as president of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.⁸

Little is known of G. Murray Nelson, his architectural career, or professional affiliations.⁹ He practiced architecture alone until 1940, at which time he either died, or moved away.

The Agriculture Building was the second large Neo-Classical building erected around the square for government offices. Its size and style typified the official academic architecture favored for government office buildings in the period, particularly in Washington, D. C. Its monumental character, well executed detail, and strategic site between the Capitol and contemporary Legislative Building, make it one of Raleigh's most prominent architectural landmarks, perhaps the outstanding twentieth century building in the government complex. The wing that was added in the rear in the 1950s is unobtrusive. The building has symbolic value as well as aesthetic significance, the capstone of one of North Carolina's most historically and economically important industries.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

FOOTNOTES

1. Handbook of North Carolina, Raleigh: State Board of Agriculture, 1893, p. 63.
2. "Farm Fact Sheet", Raleigh: State Board of Agriculture, 1975.
3. Handbook of North Carolina, p. 63.
4. Minutes of the State Board of Agriculture, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, May 5, 1921, p. 37.
5. News and Observer, Raleigh, March 19, 1922.
6. Biennial Report of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, December 1, 1920 to November 30, 1922, Raleigh: Department of Agriculture, 1923, p. 11.
7. Ibid, December 12, 1923.
8. News and Observer, Raleigh, July 28, 1935; September 4, 1948. Papers of the North Carolina Chapter, American Institute of Architects, Raleigh. Lapsed membership file.
9. City Directory, Raleigh, 1939, 1940.

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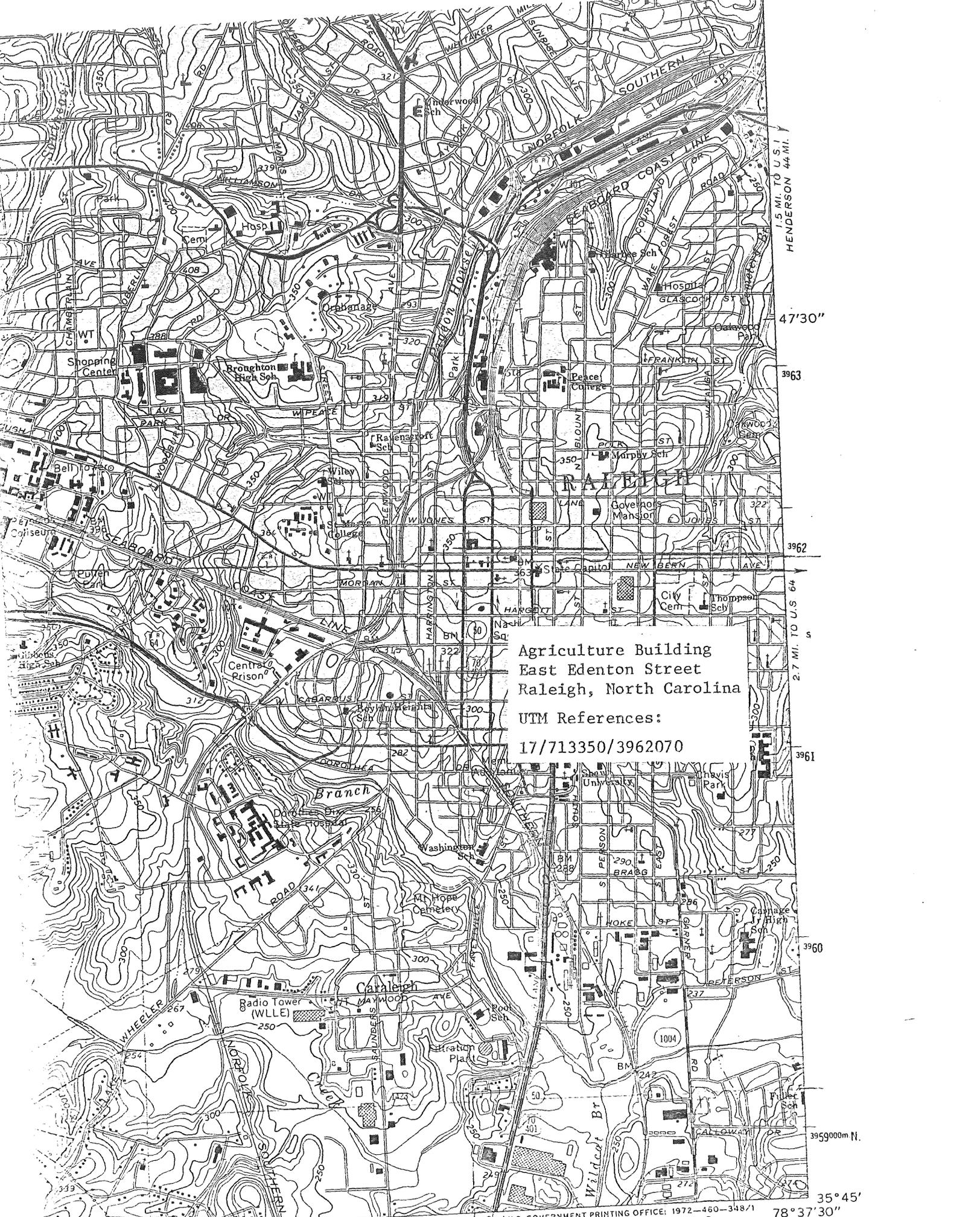
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE one

News and Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Papers of the North Carolina Chapter, American Institute of Architects, North Carolina
Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.



Agriculture Building
 East Edenton Street
 Raleigh, North Carolina

UTM References:
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