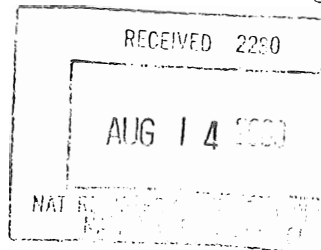


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mitchell House  
other names/site number Mitchell Cottage

2. Location

street & number 411 Biggs Ave., Mills Home Campus  not for publication  
city or town Thomasville  vicinity  
state North Carolina code NC county Davidson code 057 zip code 27360

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Jeffrey J. Crow SHPO 8/4/00  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State of Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet. Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
 determined eligible for the National Register. Ma J M. W. J. 9/20/00  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain):

Mitchell House  
Name of Property

Davidson Co., North Carolina  
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	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		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)

DOMESTIC/institutional housing

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof TIN

other WOOD

**Narrative Description**

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

See Attached

Mitchell House  
Name of Property

Davidson Co., North Carolina  
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.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

**Period of Significance**

1885-1950

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Peace, L.E. (builder)

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Baptist Children's Home, Thomasville

Mitchell House  
Name of Property

Davidson Co., North Carolina  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	7
---	---

5	8	1	8	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	7	0	5	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

  
Zone Easting Northing

3 

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

  
Zone Easting Northing

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 Dr. Elizabeth Dull, Associate Profes ors  
organization High Point University date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number University Station, Montlieu Avenue telephone 336-841-9298  
city or town High Point state NC zip code 27262-3598

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Dr. Michael Blackwell, President, Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina  
street & number P. O. Box 338 telephone 336-474-1200  
city or town Thomasville state NC zip code 27360

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Mitchell House, built in 1885, was the first structure on the campus of the Mills Home (originally Thomasville Baptist Orphanage), the first orphanage of what is now Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina. The building housed girls and was named for Rev. John Mitchell, who along with his brother, W. W. Mitchell, had given much of the money to construct the building. The Mitchell House is located on the 100-acre campus the Mills Home on the outer edge of western Thomasville, North Carolina. The campus is located just west of a residential neighborhood, yet separated from it by a wide set of railroad tracks, making the orphanage a distinct neighborhood unto itself. It is on the north end of rolling timberland and farmland of approximately 343 additional acres owned by the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

As one enters the Mills Home grounds, Mitchell House is the second building on the left on Biggs Avenue, which curves in a horseshoe shape according to the original layout of the campus streets. Even with the growth of Mills Home over its 112-year history, Mitchell House retains its large, grassy lawn of approximately one acre and many of its original trees are still standing. The building remained a child care facility until 1979, always housing girls. Although later cottages and other support buildings were constructed on the campus, the Mitchell House is the original structure built specifically for childcare on the former Thomasville Baptist Orphanage campus. Several other early buildings on the campus—including Downing Cottage, Simmons Cottage, and the parsonage—have been demolished precluding the campus's eligibility for listing.

The Mitchell House faces west and the original section is a symmetrically organized, brick rectangle roughly 90' x 24' with front and end gables and return cornices. A forty-two-foot long porch, approached by four steps, covered with a shed roof extends across the west façade. L.E. Peace built this section of the building with bricks made on the orphanage campus. In the mid-1920s, brick wings approximately 19' x 15' extending north and south from the ends of the east side of the building were added. The space between the wings on the rear is enclosed with a wood-sided addition that extends about five feet farther east than the wings.

The original center section features solid brick walls and an inset front porch. The front porch is built with turned columns or posts and a sawnwork balustrade. In the original plan, the west or front side of the building was divided into a long central section, and two end sections with a six foot set-back forming a porch between the two end sections. The ends of the rectangle have gables with return cornices on two sides, the west front and each end (facing north and south). The return cornices on the north and south faces are longer than those on the west face and are especially impressive. Long, louvered vents are placed just below the peaks of the west gables.

---

<sup>1</sup> When Thomasville Baptist Orphanage was originally founded, its location in rural, central North Carolina was unusual. Oxford Orphanage in the eastern part of the state was closer to North Carolina's primary population base, and orphanages in most other states had been established near or in urban centers with higher concentrations of orphaned and dependent children.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

The building sits on a low, brick water table, one course deep, that varies in height from eleven courses on the southwest corner to three on the northeast corner as the land slopes from north to south. Today the water table extends to the ground on all sides, but old photographs show the center section of the west front unscreened and supported by brick piers on either side of the front porch. According to tradition, and supported by a structural assessment in 1981, the bricks for the original structure were made at the orphanage.<sup>2</sup> Although the exact date is not known the exterior has been painted white to prevent deterioration of the soft, handmade bricks. A pleasant aesthetic feature of the brick is the coursework: every sixth row is a row of headers as is the top row of all the windowsills.

Photographs taken when the building was new and in 1910, show that the center door opening onto the porch had an operating transom. On each side of the front door, one tall 6/6-sash window was centered on the wall between the door and the ends of the porch. A similar tall window was centered in each of the gable ends; the off-center windows are later additions. In addition to window treatments, the old photographs showing details of the porch reveal that it was originally six feet longer than it is now. The earlier of the two photographs shows four relatively narrow steps leading to the porch, which had no railing. All exterior trim appears to have been painted white. In the 1910 photograph, shutters have been added to the windows in the front gable ends, and railing has been added to the porch.

Currently, a center door and four, tall, 6/6 sash windows (two single and two double) open onto the porch. From an examination of the current placement of the windows and the brickwork between them, it appears that the original windows were bricked up and new windows cut on either side of the original openings. The north and south wall each contain two; tall 6/6 windows evenly spaced on the wall. The 1981 structural survey, undertaken to assess the building's soundness for use as a museum, uncovered evidence of two east-facing windows.<sup>3</sup>

Originally the interior was divided into three sections, as described by Dr. Bernard Spilman in his book, *The Mills Home*<sup>4</sup>. The long central section, 50' x 18', was a "sleeping room" opening onto the porch, which extended the length of the room. The sleeping room was intended to house twenty-four girls. The space on the south end of the building contained the schoolroom. A similar space on the north end served as the residence for the teacher and matron. There were doors from the sleeping room, school room and matron's room onto the porch, but curiously there was no door from either the school room or the matron's room into the central sleeping room. (See Appendix A—plan of Mitchell House as described by Spilman) One of the first recommendations made by the Female Visiting Committee of the North Carolina Baptist Orphanage Association

---

<sup>2</sup> First page of a letter from W. J. Adams, Professional Engineer to Dr. W. R. Wagoner, President, Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc. dated April 22, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Spilman, p. 59.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

was to add doors from the matron's room and the schoolroom into the sleeping room.<sup>5</sup> Construction materials for the original section of the building consist of hand hewn floor girders, sawn timbers, and wood stud interior walls with plaster finish. An undated, but apparently early change to the interior, was the division of the large sleeping room into three spaces: a center hallway with sleeping rooms to the north and south, each to house twelve girls.

In 1923 or 1924, brick additions, approximately 19' x 15', using windows and details matching the original building, were made to the east façade of each the north and south ends of the structure. It is likely that the original windows were bricked up and the outside painted white at this time. With the new additions, the building formed a "U" shape, with an enclosed hallway running along the east side of the original building, connecting the new extensions. The hallway of the new addition had built-in storage boxes for the girls on three sides and a long row of lavatories on the fourth. In the center of the long hallway was a short passageway leading to the dining area. A kitchen with pantries continued to the east.<sup>6</sup> The south wing of the new addition contained a matron's room and bathroom. In the north wing were another bedroom and a storage area for the girls' clothing. In the original section of the building, the old schoolroom became a study hall, which opened directly into the new matron's room. The original matron's room became the teacher's room, with a bathroom and closet for the teacher, and a bathroom for the girls. The girls' clothing storage area and the bedroom opened into the hallway; the bathroom opened into the bedroom. (See Appendix B—interior plan mid-1920s to late 1930s/early 1940s).

By the late 1930s or early 1940s, the earlier dining hall had been torn down and the north and south wings had been filled in, the exterior wall of the addition extending east almost five feet beyond the older brick wings. The new, larger interior space, approximately 53' x 19', became a study hall/living room and opened directly into the dining area through a doorway centered in the space. In 1947, the original schoolroom was a playroom but in 1948, became a bedroom. The playroom was moved to the location of the bedroom.<sup>7</sup> The number of beds in each of the front bedrooms was changed from six double beds to ten or twelve single beds. The storage boxes were removed from the hallway, and the number of lavatories was reduced. (See Appendix C—diagram of interior from late 1930s/early 1940s, based on personal recollections of residents).

Other changes were made to the building in the 1950s, with the addition of three bathrooms (one of which included a small closet), the renovation of the bathroom in the matron's room, removal of the lavatories from the hall, and renovation of the space in the teacher's room. Enclosing three feet from each end of the porch and six feet from the adjacent front rooms, two small, narrow bathrooms, 5' x 9' were built between the girls' bedrooms and each of the end rooms. These bathrooms were long, narrow and L-shaped. A sink, two small toilets, and a

---

<sup>5</sup> Spilman, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur E. Fink, "Changing Philosophies and Practices in North Carolina Orphanages", The North Carolina Historical Review, Vol. XLVII, No. 4, p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> Based on personal recollections of Elizabeth Smathers Johnson.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

tub form a row along one wall, with the shower forming the L in the space taken from the front porch. Of these two bathrooms, only one remains. Across the hallway, the matron's bathroom was made smaller and narrower. It included an open storage space, the sink and toilet in a row with the tub across the back of the room under the window. A similar bathroom was built at the opposite end of the cottage, taking part of the girls' clothing and storage area. The two older bathrooms, one for the teacher and one for the girls, were removed. Other changes included the building of individual closets in all bedrooms. At the same time the house was rewired and the kitchen was outfitted with modern equipment.<sup>8</sup>

The last year Mitchell House was used as a child care facility was 1979. In 1981, the structural condition of the building was assessed before it could be renovated for use as a museum.<sup>9</sup> Following the recommendations made in this assessment, the eastern-most section of the building containing the wood frame kitchen and other noncontributing additions dating from the 1920s were torn down. The frame construction wall between the two brick wings was rebuilt, four windows were added on the rebuilt wall, and a handicapped accessible ramp was added to the east entrance. In addition, the structure's electrical, HVAC, and plumbing systems were upgraded. The most recent reconfiguring of the interior space was based on the premise that the museum was to have a live-in curator/manager. (See Appendix D for current configuration of the interior.) The primary changes were made in the area that had been the original matron's room. The bedroom and bathroom from the previous renovation were retained, but the bedroom was made smaller. The enlarged space on the front of the structure became the living room. The small, L-shaped bathroom was eliminated and an additional 3 feet were taken from the left front bedroom to create a small eating area/kitchenette, large closet, and small entranceway into the curator's quarters. In this area ceilings were lowered to eight feet, the floor in the eating area/kitchenette was tiled and the remaining covered with wall-to-wall carpeting.

---

<sup>8</sup> Weston C. Reed, Love in Action, Baptist's Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc. Thomasville, NC. 1973, pp. 43-44. Dr. Reed's book summarizes the information in Dr. Spilman's book and updates information on BCH through the 1960's.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from W. J. Adams to Dr. W. R. Wagoner.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

### Summary

Mitchell House was the first building on the campus of the Thomasville Baptist Orphanage (now Mills Home), the first child-care facility of what is now Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina. Built in 1885, Mitchell House, named for donor, Rev. John Mitchell, is the oldest standing building associated with the care of dependent and orphaned children in North Carolina. Eligible for the National Register under criterion A in the area of social history, Mitchell House represents the important role denominational organizations played in the care of orphaned and dependent children throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in North Carolina. In spite of concerned citizens and a mandate from the 1868 state constitution, the construction, operation, and funding of orphanages had been left almost exclusively to private groups such as fraternal orders and religious denominations throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. Mitchell House and Thomasville Baptist Orphanage were originally developed through the efforts of a small group of dedicated Baptist men who formed the Baptist Children's Home Association in 1885 for the purpose of founding a facility for the care of dependant and orphaned children. (Thomasville Baptist Orphanage is now Mills Home, named for John Mills, former owner and editor of the Biblical Recorder who was the driving force behind the founding of the institution.) By the late 1890s, Thomasville Baptist Orphanage became the second largest Baptist orphanage in the southeast. Consequently, the Mitchell House represents the beginning of a 112 year-old network of child-care facilities now known as Baptist Children's Homes, which has provided significant leadership in North Carolina in the care of dependent and orphaned children. The period of significance for the Mitchell House begins in 1885, the date of construction of the building, and ends in 1950, a year that marked the beginning of the modern era of institutional childcare in North Carolina during which Mitchell House and other orphanages in North Carolina began servicing nonorphaned children, placed more emphasis on outreach to families, and began basing educational programs in the greater community rather than within the institution.

### Historical Background and Social History Context

During the colonial period in North Carolina, apprenticeship was the most common method of dealing with dependent and orphaned children. Girls were apprenticed until they were eighteen and boys until they were twenty-one.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the southern colonies and later the United States territories, apprenticeship or "binding", as the practice was called in some areas, was the most common practice for caring for dependent and orphaned children until the period following the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

Although complaints about the mistreatment and neglect of children were common throughout the southeast, it was not until 1738 that the first permanent orphanage in the region was founded outside of Savannah, Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur E. Fink. "Changing Philosophies and Practices in North Carolina Orphanages", The North Carolina Historical Review. Vol. XLVII, No.4, p. 334, 335, and Spilman, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wisner, Social Welfare in the South, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Press, Baton Rouge, (1970), p. 19

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   8   Page   6  

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

Later throughout the eighteenth century, orphanages were generally associated with large cities, especially in the northeast. They were also founded sporadically in the southeast following outbreaks of cholera.

As late as 1860, without a large population base, North Carolina remained one of only eight states without an orphanage.<sup>3</sup> Attempts had been made in the state to found institutions for child-care prior to 1860, but for various reasons they had all failed.<sup>4</sup> Among those operating the longest was the Female Orphan Asylum of Fayetteville, incorporated in 1813. The organization became the Female Benevolent Society of North Carolina in 1822, but closed in 1830.<sup>5</sup> It would be after the Civil War before orphanages with enough private support to remain in operation were founded.

Even though the 1868 North Carolina Constitution mandated the establishment of an orphanage, it became increasingly clear to those concerned about the care of dependent and orphaned children that the state was not going to act, and the need for an orphanage would have to be filled by private organizations. Two of these institutions, Oxford Orphanage, founded in 1873, and Thomasville Baptist Orphanage, founded in 1885 were associated with John Mills, a graduate of Wake Forest College and the foremost advocate of care for dependent and orphaned children in North Carolina during the mid-1860s. Receiving widespread support from the Baptist Convention of North Carolina, Thomasville Baptist Orphanage was one of only thirty-nine Protestant orphanages in the United States founded between 1880 and 1890 still in existence in 1910.<sup>6</sup>

Under the direction of John Mills, the first group to establish a successful and continuously operating orphanage was the Grand Lodge of North Carolina Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of which Mills was a member. The orphanage was opened in Oxford, North Carolina, in 1873, in a building which had originally been constructed by the Lodge and used for a seminary known as St. John's College for Men. John Mills served as superintendent from 1873 until 1884, when he resigned the position. Before the founding of Thomasville Children's Orphanage in 1885, concerned members of Baptists worked to establish two other institutions, one which failed and one which is still operating. In 1874, the French Broad Baptist Association, with the support of John Mills, attempted to open a western branch of the Oxford Orphanage on the grounds of what is now Mars Hill College. Shortly after its opening, the orphanage was moved to Asheville where it soon closed.<sup>7</sup> Opened in 1883, and still operating today as a child-care facility, is the Central Children's Home in Oxford, founded as the Colored Orphan Asylum. Early support for this institution came from such Baptist organizations as the Baptist State Sunday School Convention.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Hasci, Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America, Harvard University Press, (1997), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Spilman, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Fink, p. 336.

<sup>6</sup> Hasci, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Spilman, pp. 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Fink, p. 337.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

Following his resignation at Oxford, Mills and a number of other men from some of the prominent eastern Baptist associations sought support from the Baptist State Convention to open a Baptist orphanage. When the effort to obtain support from the Convention failed, Mills and his group formed the Baptist Orphanage Association. This group raised the funds, located the site and oversaw the construction of Mitchell House and other necessary buildings for the opening of Thomasville Baptist Orphanage. This was accomplished by the end of 1885 without state funds.

As laid out by John Mills, the overall plan for Thomasville Baptist Orphanage with its park-like setting and separate small living units or cottages, anticipated the general use of the cottage system for child-care facilities by a number of years.<sup>9</sup> In the original plan of the orphanage, two houses for girls were to be located on the east side of Biggs Avenue and two for boys on the west side of Watson Avenue. The kitchens and dining areas, referred to as "eating places" were detached and located across the street facing the cottages.<sup>10</sup> Each of the four residences was to have the same plan, and each residence with its "eating place" was thought of as a unit. Each unit housed a small number of children, usually twenty four, and had two house mothers: one to care for the physical needs of the children and one to care for their intellectual and social needs. With the cottage as the heart of the unit, Mills sought to make life at the orphanage as home-like as possible.

The 1890s through the 1920s saw tremendous growth not only in the orphanage's physical plant but also in its response to the needs of dependent and orphaned children. In 1903, the separate eating places were abandoned, reflecting the idea that the children should be brought together on a regular basis for socialization. From 1905 to 1932 Iredell County native Rev. Martin Luther Kesler served as director of the orphanage and under his direction the facility was renamed Mills Home in 1919. Kesler enjoyed a national reputation in the child welfare field serving on the board of the Child Welfare League of America and as a delegate from North Carolina to two of the first White House Conferences on Children and Youth. During his tenure, the Mills Home returned to a policy of each cottage serving its own meals. By 1925, individual dining rooms, attached to the cottages had been reinstated to provide a more family-like atmosphere. The separate dining room was abandoned.<sup>11</sup> Under Kesler's directorship Mills Home became the first institution in the South to employ a social worker. In the 1920s the Mills Home became a regular high school, elementary school, and, in 1924, a kindergarten.

As the Thomasville Baptist Orphanage flourished in Davidson County, the denomination opened another facility for dependent children in Lenoir County in eastern North Carolina. In 1912 Mr. and Mrs. William L. Kennedy donated their home, an antebellum mansion called Cedar Dell, and 1,200 acres to the trustees of the Thomasville Baptist Orphanage. Kennedy Memorial Home contains eight historic buildings, as well as modern structures.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the criticisms of orphanages, especially large ones, in the last few years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1910's, see Hacsí, pp. 37-40 and pp. 163-171.

<sup>10</sup> Spilman, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Fink, p. 353; from 1925 until the present the individual dining rooms have been used in each of the cottages.

<sup>12</sup> Little, p. 373.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

Following Kesler's death in 1932, Watauga County native Dr. Isaac Greer served as superintendent at the Mills Home from 1932 to 1948. Under him, the Mills Home began a foster care program and enlarged the social work department. Dr. Isaac is credited with decreasing overcrowding in the orphanage's cottages from twenty-four to thirty-six children per cottage in 1936 to an average of twenty children per cottage by 1948.<sup>13</sup>

Following Dr. Greer's resignation in 1948, Dr. Zeno Wall served as director of Mills Home until 1950. During his tenure, the institution made major changes including sending the juniors and seniors to Thomasville High School. By 1951 all children at the Mills Home were educated in Thomasville's public schools.<sup>14</sup>

The year 1950 marked the end of an era in institutional childcare and the enactment of modern methods of service. By the mid twentieth century in North Carolina nonorphaned children began to receive services; entire families received counseling and services resulting in abbreviated periods of institutional care for children; more small cottage units and group homes appeared; houseparents had to possess higher qualifications and began receiving better salaries, and education became based in the community instead of institution based.<sup>15</sup>

The Mitchell House is the only one of the original four cottages on the Mills Home campus that remains standing. It is significant as the oldest house standing in North Carolina built expressly for the care of children using what later became known as the cottage system for the care of orphaned and dependent children. Although many of the relatively early child care cottages at Mills Home have been torn down and replaced with more modern, energy efficient buildings, the Mills Home Alumni Association has established an endowment to maintain the Mitchell House indefinitely.

---

<sup>13</sup> Keith-Lucas, p. 31-35.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.37.

<sup>15</sup> Fink, p. 357-358.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

Section number 9 Page 9

---

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, W. J. , Professional Engineer, Letter to Dr. W. R. Wagoner, President, Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc. dated April 22, 1981.
- Downs, Susan Whitlaw and Michael Sherraden. "The Orphan Asylum in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century", *Social Service Review*. 57 (June 1983), pp. 272-290.
- Fink, Arthur E. "Changing Philosophies and Practices in North Carolina Orphanages", *The North Carolina Historical Review*. XLVIII, Number 4, (October (1971) pp. 333-358.
- Hacsi, Timothy. *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*. Harvard University Press (1997).
- Keith-Lucas, Alan. *A Hundred Years of Caring: The Story of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc., 1885-1985*. BCH: Thomasville, N.C. (1985).
- Little, M. Ruth. *Coastal Plain & Fancy: The Historic Architecture of Lenoir County and Kinston, North Carolina*. Kinston: Lenoir County Historical Society, Inc. (1998).
- Personal recollections of former Mills Home residents.
- Reed, Weston C. *Love in Action*, Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Thomasville, N.C. (1973).
- Spilman, Bernard, W. *The Mills Home, A History of the Baptist Orphanage Movement in North Carolina, 1885-1932*, Mills Home, Thomasville, N.C. (1976).
- Wisner, Elizabeth, *Social Welfare in the South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 10

Mitchell House  
Davidson County, N.C.

---

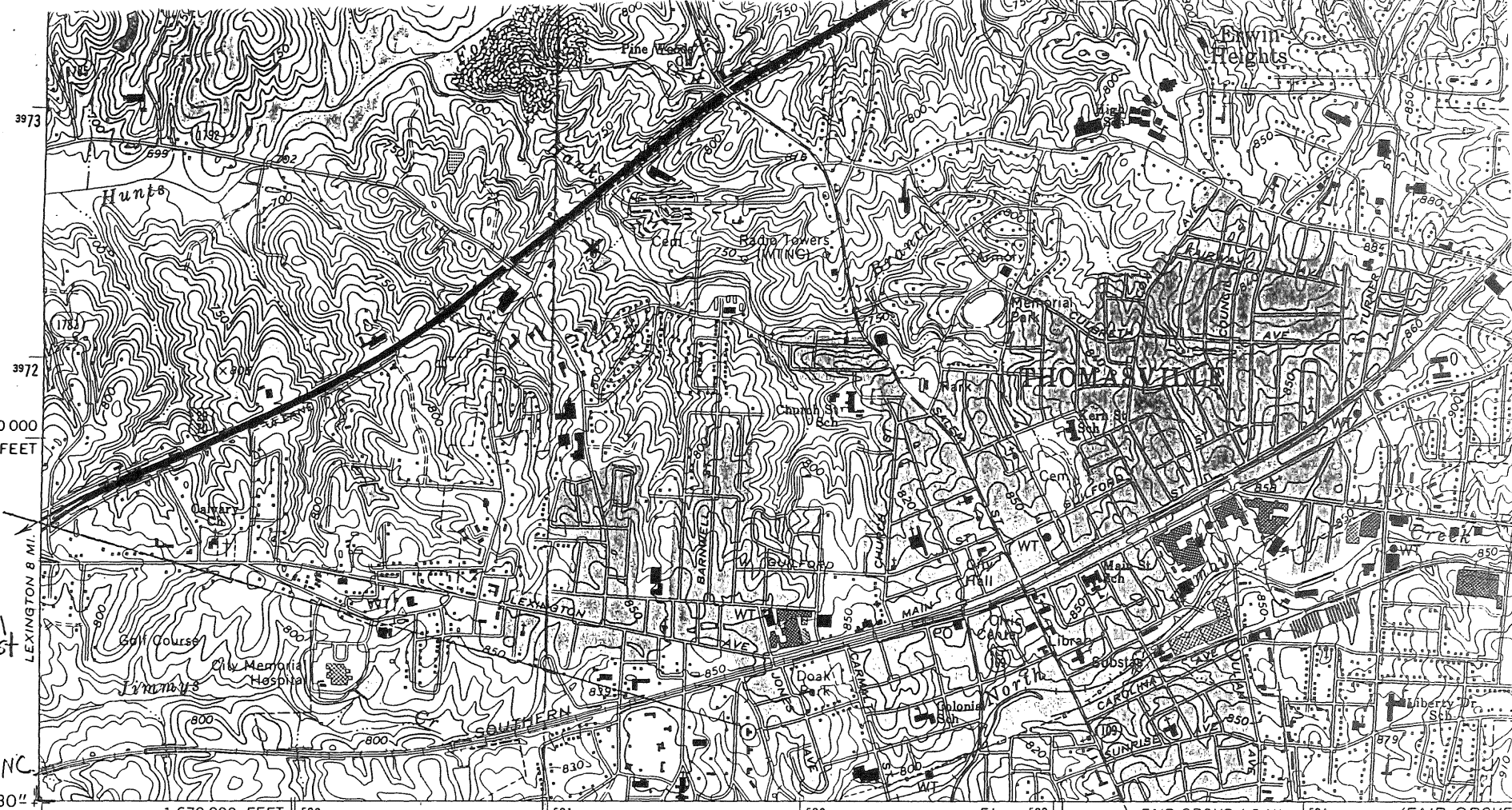
### Verbal Boundary Description

Mitchell House is located on a one-acre parcel in the upper center portion of parcel B on Davidson County tax map number 106 drawn at a scale 1"=200'.

### Boundary Justification

The nominated one-acre parcel provides adequate setting for the Mitchell House and has been associated with the property since 1885.

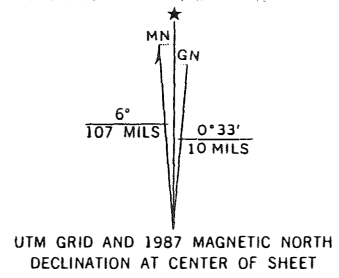
DV 691  
 Mitchell House  
 ZONE 17  
 581800  
 3970540  
 High Point West  
 QUAD  
 Davidson Co., NC



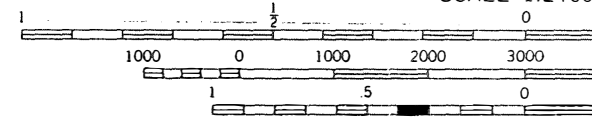
(LEXINGTON EAST)  
 4955 1 SW

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
 Control by USGS, USC&GS, and North Carolina Geodetic Survey  
 Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
 taken 1965. Field checked 1969  
 Supersedes map dated 1949

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system.  
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17,  
 shown in blue  
 To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
 move the projection lines 10 meters south and  
 19 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks  
 Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



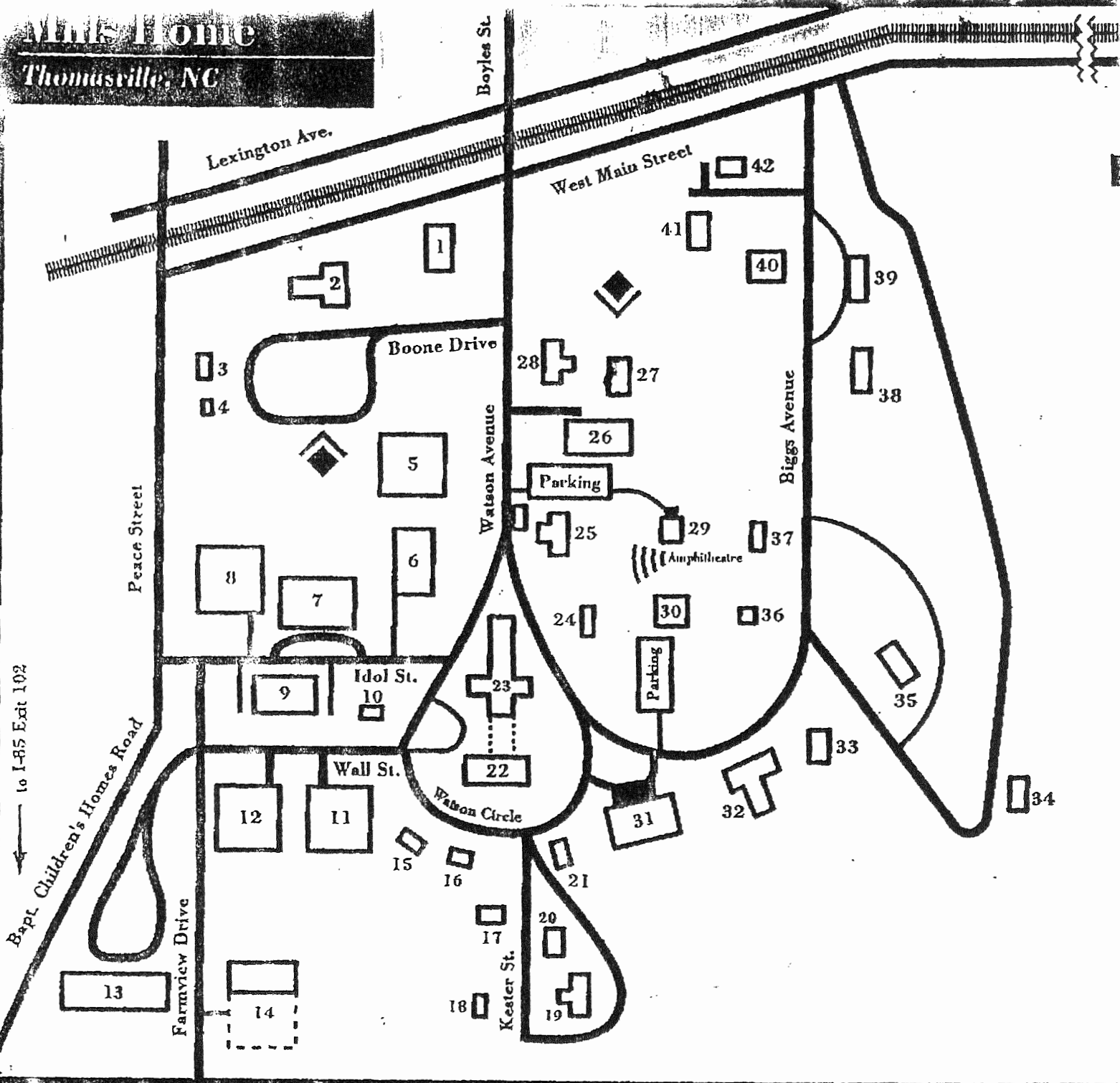
UTM GRID AND 1987 MAGNETIC NORTH  
 DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACT  
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
 DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT OFFICE  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS

# Wills Home Thomasville, NC



NC 109

## LEGEND

- 1 Johnson Cottage
- 2 Culler Cottage
- 3 Staff Residence
- 4 Staff Residence
- 5 York Cottage
- 6 Alumni Cottage
- 7 McFarland General Adm. Bldg.
- 8 Bright-Drown Cottage
- 9 Alternative Learning Center/  
Thrift Store
- 10 Staff Residence
- 11 Stokes Cottage
- 12 Craver Cottage
- 13 Fleslunan-Pratt Early Childhood  
Education Center
- 14 Farm Bldg.
- 15 Staff Residence
- 16 Staff Residence
- 17 Staff Residence
- 18 Gregg After School Center
- 19 Food Locker Bldg.
- 20 Staff Residences
- 21 Staff Residences
- 22 Child Development Center
- 23 Wills Home Baptist Church
- 24 Parsonage
- 25 Wills Home Adm. Bldg.
- 26 Gymnasium
- 27 Swimming Pool
- 28 Simmons Cottage
- 29 Staff Residence
- 30 Sadler Library/Half Day Program
- 31 Family Resource Center
- 32 Development/Communications Bldg.
- 33 Staff Apt. Bldg.
- 34 Old Vehicle Shop
- 35 Little Cottage
- 36 Home Shelter
- 37 Family Reception Center
- 38 Mitchell Museum
- 39 Staff Residence
- 40 Downing Cottage
- 41 Hoffman Cottage
- 42 Staff Residence

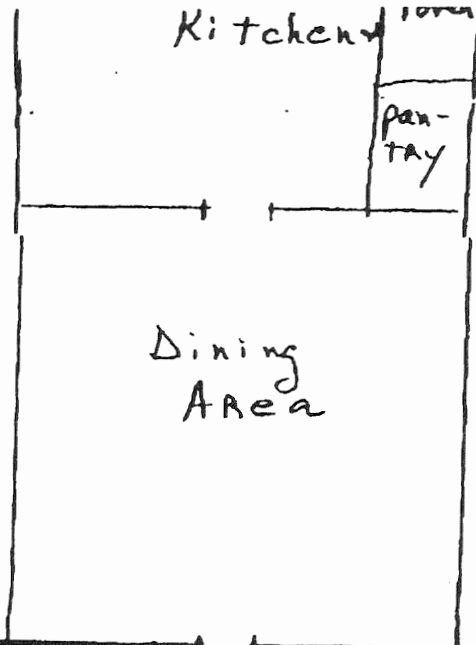


### MITCHELL HOUSE OR COTTAGE

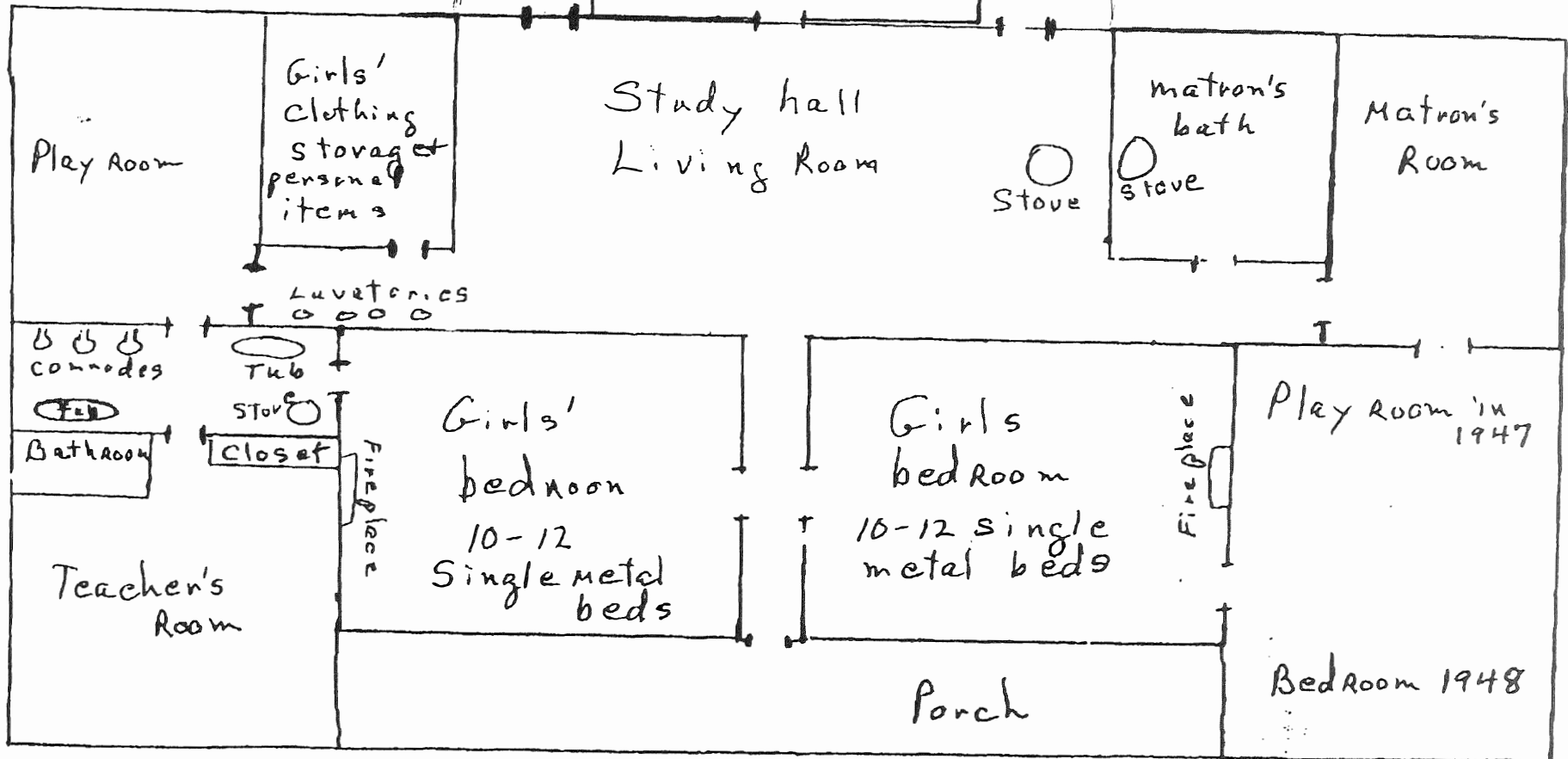
Late 1930's or early 1940's until late 1950's.

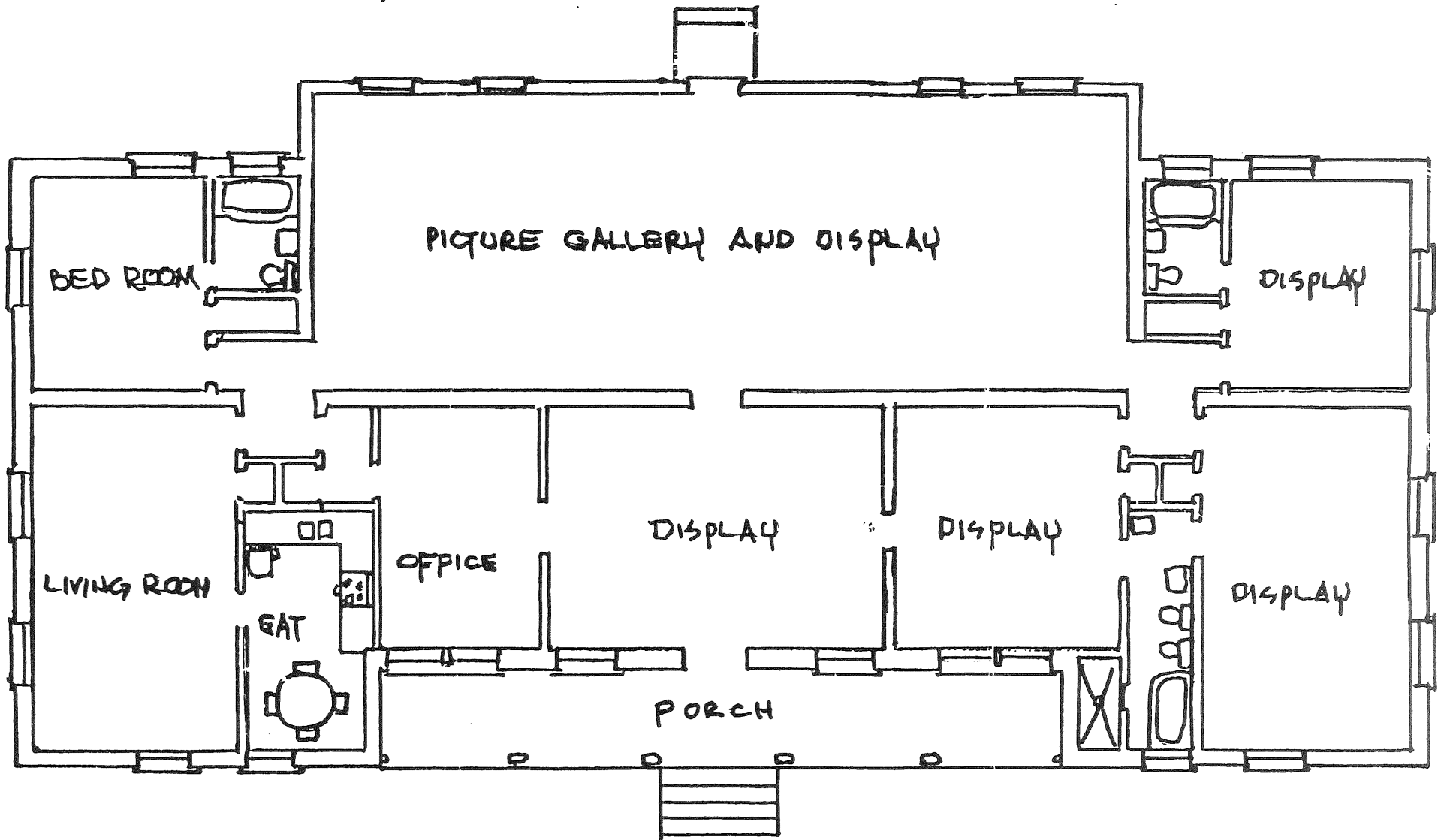
This was the floor plan when Lib Smathers Johnson, Marie Phillips Johnson, Martha Hunt Pridden and others resided there from 1947-1948.

Notice change in utility of some rooms.



Not to scale





PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN  $1/8" = 1'-0"$

AREA: 5772 SQ. FT.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

DV0691  
NR 2058

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 00001121

Date Listed: 9/20/00

Mitchell House  
Property Name

Davidson NORTH CAROLINA  
County State

N/A  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for* Mr. J. M. Way  
Signature of the Keeper

9/20/00  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to add Criteria Consideration A, since the property is owned by Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, a religious organization.

This amendment has been confirmed with the North Carolina SHPO.

-----  
DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)