

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State Historic Preservation Office

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Pat McCrory  
Secretary Susan Kluttz

Office of Archives and History  
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

June 18, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mary Pope Furr  
Office of Human Environment  
NCDOT Division of Highways

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley *Renee Gledhill-Earley*  
Environmental Review Coordinator

SUBJECT: National Register Evaluation of W. R. Denning Farm, Z-5400FM, Harnett County,  
ER 15-1142

Thank you for your May 21, 2015, letter transmitting the above-referenced evaluation report, which we have reviewed.

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, we **concur that the W. R. Denning Farm is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places** under Criterion C for architecture. While the report states that the house has had almost no alterations, it appears as though a wall has been removed to make an entry hall/foyer part of the large living room. Further, the mantel/fireplace surround in the living room looks to date from the 1950s or 1960s and the coffered ceiling seems an unlikely original feature. These changes, in particular to the floor plan, affect the integrity of house, but not sufficiently to make the complex of buildings ineligible. We also concur that the proposed boundaries appear appropriate.

The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919-807-6579 or [environmental.review@ncdcr.gov](mailto:environmental.review@ncdcr.gov). In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above referenced tracking number.

# **National Register Eligibility Evaluation of the W.R. Denning Farm for Rail Safety Improvements to Intersection of US 301 and Hodges Chapel Road**

Harnett County, North Carolina

TIP No. Z-5400FM  
WBS No. 42007.1.1



NEW SOUTH ASSOCIATES, INC.



**National Register Eligibility Evaluation of the W.R. Denning Farm for Rail Safety  
Improvements to Intersection of US 301 and Hodges Chapel Road**

Harnett County, North Carolina

TIP No. Z-5400FM

WBS No. 42007.1.1

Report submitted to:

North Carolina Department of Transportation, Human Environment Section

1598 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, North Carolina, 27699-1598

Report prepared by:

New South Associates, Inc.

6150 East Ponce de Leon Avenue

Stone Mountain, Georgia 30083

New South Associates, Inc.

408-B Blandwood Avenue

Greensboro, North Carolina 27401



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Mary Beth Reed – Principal Investigator

Ellen Turco – Historian and Co-Author

May 14, 2015 • **Final Report**  
New South Associates Technical Report 2473



## MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to improve the safety of the rail crossing at US 301 and Hodges Chapel Road (SR 1709) in Harnett County (Z-5400FM). The Area of Potential Effects encompasses an approximately 300-foot radius at the junction of the railroad tracks, US 301 and Hodges Chapel Road. In March 2015, NCDOT requested that New South Associates, Inc. (New South) assess the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of the W.R. Denning Farm (HT156) and provide this report.

As a result of this study, for the purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, New South recommends the W.R. Denning Farm eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C recommendation for its design/construction. The proposed NRHP boundary includes 15.3 acres that corresponds with the legal parcel.

Survey Site Number	Resource Name	NHRP Eligibility Recommendation
HT 156	W.R. Denning Farm	Eligible Under C



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## **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is proposing to improve the safety of the rail crossing at U.S. 301 and Hodges Chapel Road (SR 1709) in Harnett County. The project location is approximately 0.3 mile south of the Johnston County line between the towns of Benson (Johnston County) and Dunn (Harnett County) (Figure 1). Pursuant to 36 CFR Section 800.4(b), NCDOT identified one architectural resource, the W.R. Denning Farm (HT156), that might be affected by the undertaking. The Area of Potential Effects (APE) encompasses an approximately 300-foot radius at the junction of the railroad tracks, U.S. 301, and Hodges Chapel Road (Figure 1).

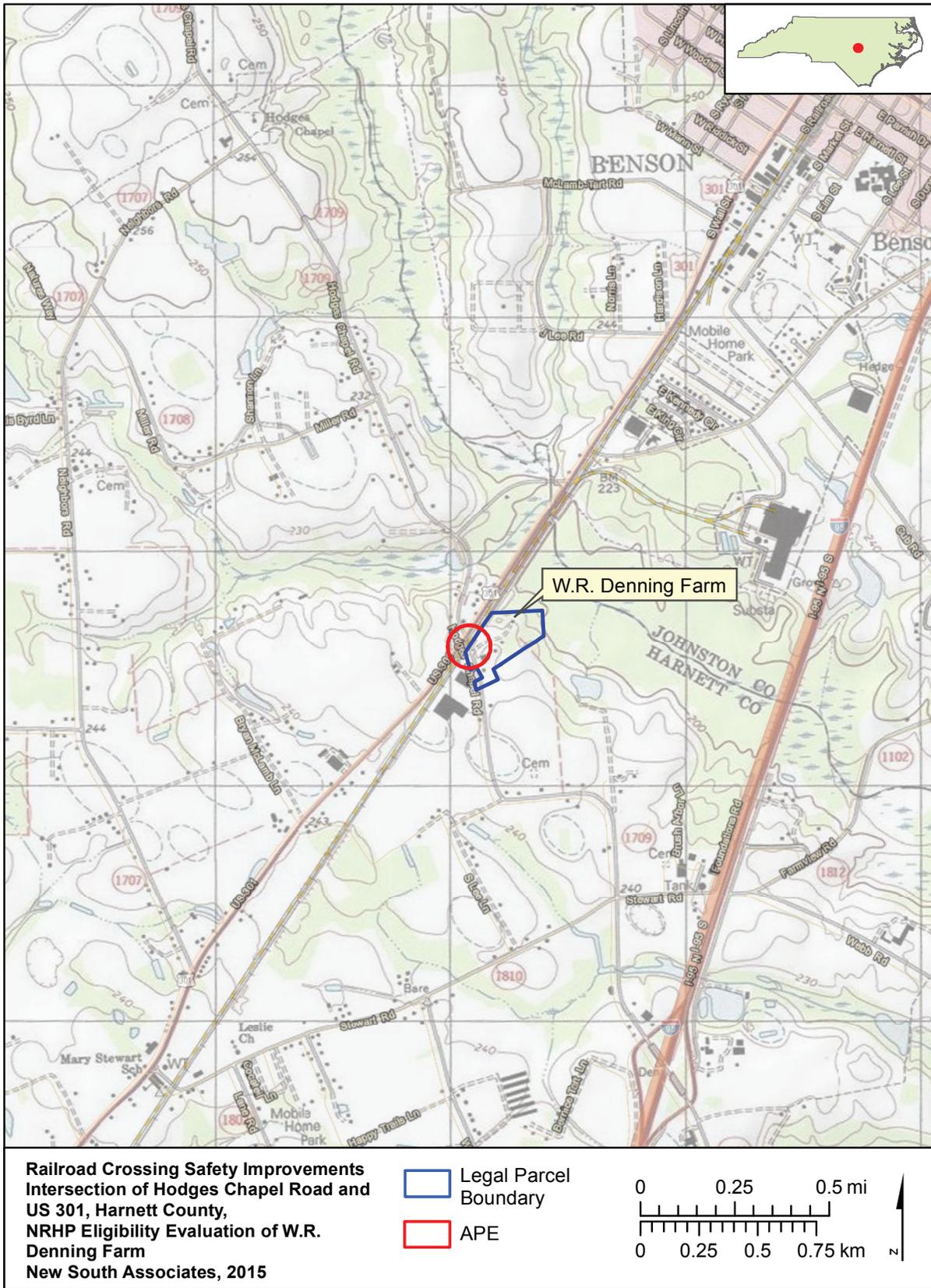
In March 2015, NCDOT requested New South Associates, Inc. to intensively survey the W.R. Denning Farm (HT156) and prepare a report assessing the property's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The W.R. Denning Farm was surveyed in 1982 under survey site number JT1251 during the Johnston County comprehensive architectural survey. At the close of the survey in 1983, the farm was placed on the state study list of properties potentially eligible for the NRHP. The property was included in the Johnson County survey, rather than at its correct geographical location in Harnett County, due to its proximity to Benson and its location 0.3 mile south of the Johnston County line. The W.R. Denning Farm was re-surveyed in 2002 as part of the Harnett County comprehensive architectural survey. During that survey, the property was reassigned survey site number HT156.

New South senior architectural historian Ellen Turco visited the W.R. Denning Farm on March 16, 2015. The property was visually inspected, and the exterior and setting was documented through written notes and digital photographs. An on-site interview was conducted with the current resident and property owner, John Carl Allen, who is also the grandson of W.R. Denning. Site visits were also made to the nearby towns of Benson and Dunn to view other Neoclassical Revival residences.

The historical development, architecture, and cultural significance of the W.R. Denning Farm was assessed and evaluated within its respective contexts according to the established NRHP criteria.

The results of this intensive-level investigation and NRHP evaluation are presented in the following chapters of this report. This report complies with the basic requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, as amended; the Department of Transportation regulations and procedures (23 CFR 771 and Technical Advisory T 6640.8A); the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regulations on the Protection of Historic Properties (36 CFR 800); and NCDOT's Historic Architectural Resources, Survey Procedures and Report Guidelines.

Figure 1. Project Location, APE and Location of W.R. Denning Farm



Source: USGS 7.5 Minute Topographic Quadrangle Map, Dunn, NC 1982

## II. NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION OF THE W.R. DENNING FARM

Resource Name	W.R. Denning Farm
HPO Survey Site #	HT156
Location	2363 Hodges Chapel Road, Benson, North Carolina (Harnett County)
PIN	1528-96-7037.0000
Date(s) of Construction	Circa 1880; 1914
Recommendation	Eligible for NRHP Under Criterion C



### DESCRIPTION

### SETTING

The W.R. Denning Farm faces northwest on a 15.31-acre parcel on the southeast side of U.S. 301, the main road connecting the towns of Benson and Dunn, two miles north and five miles south of the subject property, respectively. The tracks of the North Carolina railroad parallel U.S. 301 and its right-of-way forms the pentagonal parcel's northwest boundary line. The north and east boundary lines abut adjacent tax parcels. Hodges Chapel Road runs along the west side of the property. A 0.5-acre parcel containing a circa 1950 concrete block duplex has been subdivided from the southwest side of the Denning Farm parcel. The south property line abuts a 27.69-acre parcel that is historically associated with the farm and currently leased by the property owner for tobacco and cotton cultivation. The subject parcel and agricultural parcel south of it are both owned by John Carl Allen, the grandson of W.R. Denning (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Site Plan



Source: ESRI Resource Data

The W.R. Denning Farm parcel is level and cleared around the dwelling, which is situated at the west end. A gravel driveway on Hodges Chapel Road currently leads to a parking area on the west side of the house. A historic concrete driveway runs from the railroad right-of-way along the northwest property line to the house (Figure 3). It bisects the front lawn and splits into two paths, one terminating at the front portico and the other at the porte cochere on the southwest side of the house. Both the old and new driveways are marked with pairs of brick piers at the roads.

Seven surviving outbuildings are situated south and west of the dwelling. A concrete block duplex faces Hodges Chapel Road southwest of the main house. Now located on a separate legal parcel, the duplex is historically associated with the farm. The domestic yard south and west of the house contains a circa 1955 garage, a circa 1900 secondary dwelling, and brick wash house/well house. East of the house are a circa 1920 plank shed and a circa 1920 mule barn. Notable site features include a circa 2001 pond at the east side of the parcel, a circa 1955 well cover located behind the garage, the historic driveway and farm paths, the driveway piers, and a chimney ruin.

## INVENTORY LIST

### *House; Circa 1880; 1914; Contributing*

The W.R. Denning House is a Neoclassical-style residence, an example of a style of architecture that was popular among the very wealthy in the first decades of the twentieth century (Figures 4-7). The frame house has three sections: the 1914 two-story; double-pile section with a hipped and gabled roofline; a gabled 1914 rear ell; and a triple-A ell that predates the 1914 sections. The entire house is sheathed in plain weatherboards. The windows are one-over-one sashes, except for the gable ends, which have modified fanlights with keystone surrounds, and the four-over-four sashes of the triple-A ell. The composition shingle roof dates to 2012 and replaced the original metal shingles. Six painted chimneys project from the roof. The house rests on a continuous brick foundation.

The monumental, double-height pedimented portico is the dwelling's most conspicuous feature. It is carried by massive fluted Ionic columns (Figure 8). The frieze and cornices are finished with dentils and modillions (Figures 9-10). The tympanum is finished with pebbled stucco, a treatment seen in other Neoclassical houses in nearby Dunn and Benson (Figure 11). The glazed and paneled front door has a transom and sidelights of beveled art glass in a curvilinear floral motif (Figure 12). The entry assembly consists of Ionic columns on paneled plinths that support a three-part dentilated entablature. The glazed and paneled door to the second story balcony is set within a surround of stained glass sidelights and an elliptical fanlight (Figure 13). The original louvered storm door remains.

A one-story, hipped-roof porch runs under the portico and wraps around to the dwelling's northeast and southwest sides (see Figures 4 and 8). The porch is carried by smooth Ionic columns, and the dentilated and modillioned cornice matches that of the portico and the main block of the house. A

low turned balustrade with paneled square newels runs atop the porch roof (see Figure 10). The porch extends to a porte cochere at the northwest end (see Figure 4). The southwest end of the porch was enclosed at unknown date with weatherboards and a band of one-over-one windows (see Figure 5).

A shed roof connector links the two one-story rear ells (Figure 14). The treatment of the east ell suggests that it was erected in 1914. The current owner has built a deck off the southeast corner of the east ell. Family lore holds that west ell is an earlier two-room, triple-A form dwelling that originally faced west (John Carl Allen, personal communication 2015). The decorative detail of the west ell's wrap-around porch, with its turned posts, sawn work brackets and spindled frieze support this theory (Figure 15). Other supporting evidence is the four-over-four windows and the gable vents, which have sawtooth hoods and are larger than those on the two-story section and the east ell. The integration of the original dwelling and the two-story was carefully planned and well executed.

The two-story section of the house has five rooms on the first floor (Figure 16). Across the front of the house are a large rectangular living room and smaller parlor, on the southwest and northeast sides, respectively. Behind the front two rooms are a dining room and butler's pantry (southwest), stair hall (center), and a bedroom (northeast). The second floor contains four bedrooms, two on either side of a broad center hall. The east ell contains a bedroom, which was not inspected. The west ell houses a modern kitchen, and behind this is the former maid's quarters.

The floors are pine. Walls and ceilings throughout the house are plaster. The walls have tall baseboards with a molded cap and picture rail (Figure 17). The door and window surrounds on both the first and second floors are composed of a flat surround with a plain backband and a flared cap (Figure 18). Notable is the house's original hardware, which includes hinges, doorknobs and escutcheons, and window handles (Figure 19).

Neoclassical Revival-style details are most fully expressed in the "public rooms" of the parlor, living room, dining room, and stair hall. The parlor has a double mantel with curved pilasters supporting a heavy mantel shelf and a mirrored, columned overmantel (Figure 20). The firebox surround is faced with yellow and white tile. The closet door next to the fireplace in the southeast corner of the room has a four-panel door, which is representative of the first floor doors. The living room has a dramatic coffered ceiling and a brick fireplace mantel flanked by window seats (Figure 21). Two sets of massive French doors with beveled glass panes are in the south wall (see Figure 18). One set leads to the stair hall and the other set to the dining room. The dining room mantelpiece is composed of columns and a heavy shelf supported by a pair of modillions (Figure 22). The firebox surround is faced with buff colored tile. The dining room walls are covered by five-foot high raised panel wainscot, which is also found in the stair hall. From the dining room, the stair hall is accessed by a four-panel door with an operable transom in the northeast wall (Figure

23). A grand staircase rises from front to back, diverges at an intermediate landing, and returns along the northeast and southwest side walls of the hall (Figures 24-25). A balustrade of turned, tapered balusters supports a curved stair rail. The square paneled newels posts approximate those on the exterior porch balustrade.

The focal point of the second floor center hall is the stained glass windows surrounding the door to the balcony (Figure 26). Four two-panel doors lead from the hall to each bedroom. Two of the four bedrooms were inspected and both had similar columned mantels (Figures 27-29).

*Figure 3. Concrete Driveway Looking South to House*



*Figure 4. Northwest (Front) Side*



Figure 5. Southwest Side



Figure 6. Southeast (Rear) Side. Circa 1880 Triple A-Form House on Left. 1914 Ell on Right.



*Figure 7. Southeast (Rear) and Northeast Sides.*



*Figure 8. Front Porch Looking Southwest to Hodges Chapel Road*



*Figure 9. Porch Detail, Ionic Columns, Modillion Cornice and Dentilated Frieze*



*Figure 10. Porch Detail, Ionic Columns, Modillion Cornice and Dentilated Frieze*



*Figure 11. Porch Detail, Pebbled Stucco Tympanium*



*Figure 12. Front Entry with Ionic Columns and Art Glass Sidelights and Transom*



*Figure 13. Second Story Balcony Door with Stained Glass and Louvered Storm Door*



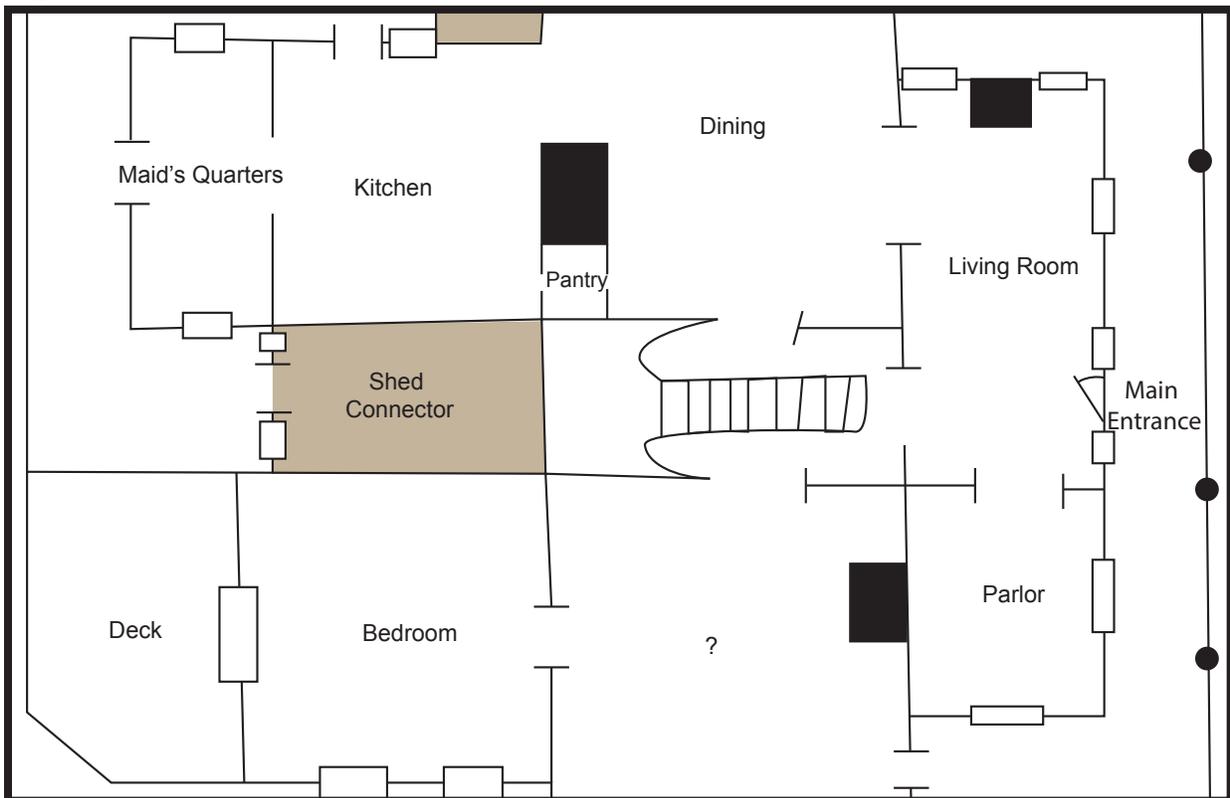
*Figure 14. Southeast (Rear) Side Showing Shed Connector Linking Ells.*



Figure 15. Circa 1880 Section Showing Porch Details



Figure 16. First Floor Plan



*Figure 17. Typical Baseboard*



*Figure 18. French Doors to Stair Hall and Dining Room Showing Typical Surround*



*Figure 19. Door Hardware, Northeast Bedroom*



*Figure 20. Parlor Mantel and Closet Door*



*Figure 21. Living Room Looking Southwest*



*Figure 22: Dining Room Showing Mantel and Wainscot*



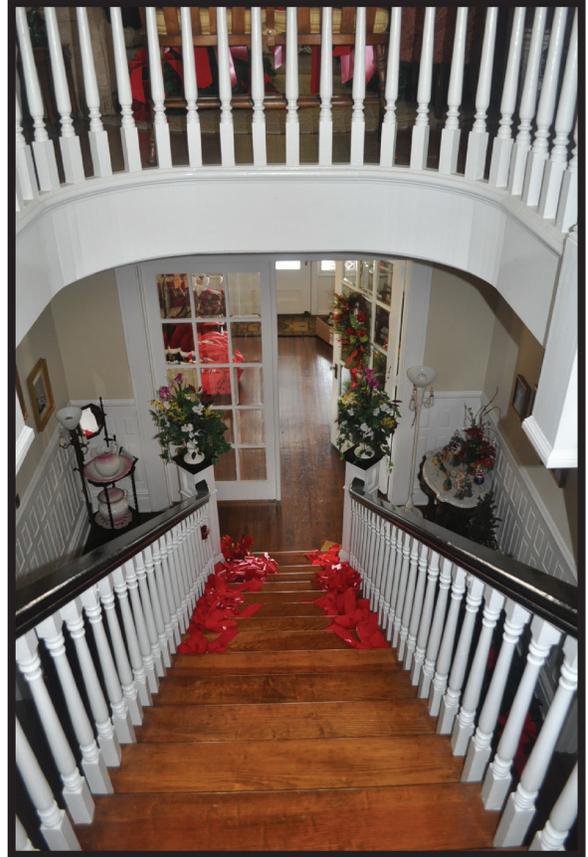
*Figure 23. Dining Room Looking Toward Stair Hall*



*Figure 24. Stair Looking Up*



*Figure 25. Stair Looking Down*



*Figure 26. Second Floor Center Hall Toward Balcony*



Figure 27. Southwest Bedroom

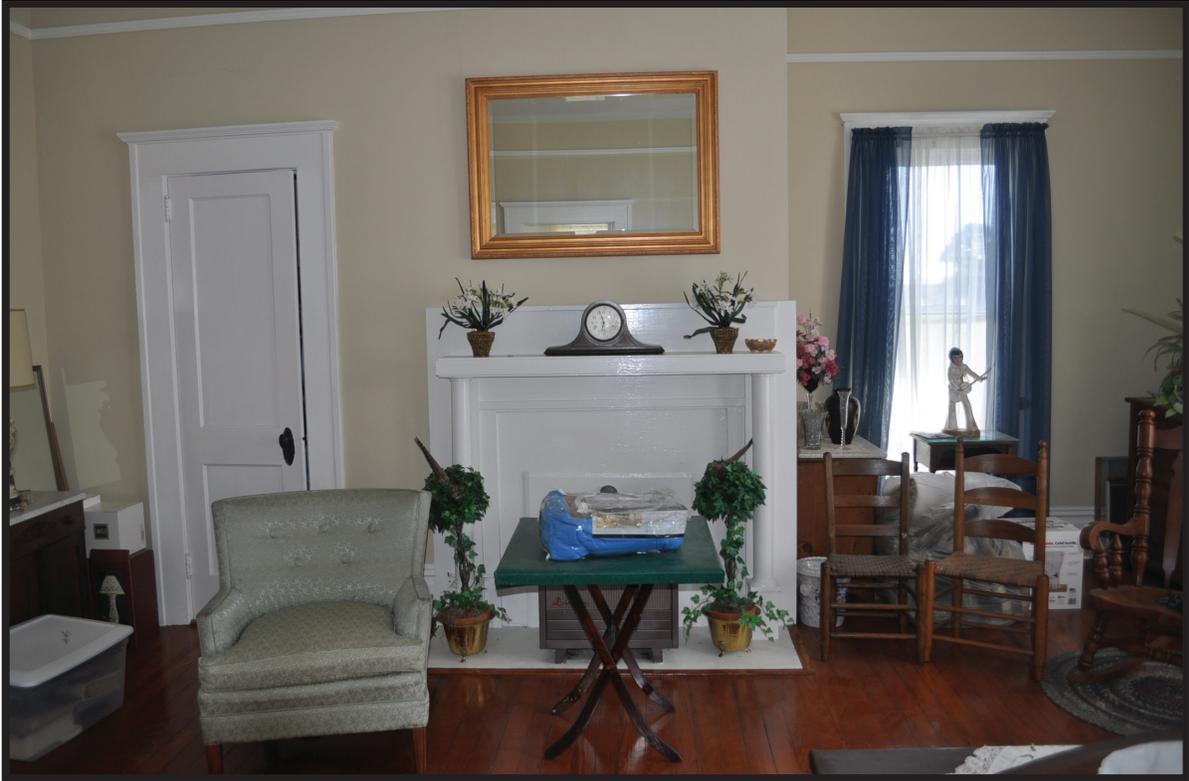


Figure 28. Northwest Bedroom



*Figure 29. Northwest Bedroom*



*Secondary Dwelling; Circa 1900, Contributing*

This modest, weatherboarded, shotgun form dwelling was occupied by domestic servants and is now used for storage (John Carl Allen, personal communication 2015) (Figure 30). A shed-roofed porch supported by turned posts spans the front and shelters a board-and-batten entry door flanked by four-over-four windows. A partially enclosed storage shed has been built on the northeast side. The building rests on brick foundation piers and is covered with a gray composite shingle roof.

*Figure 30. Secondary Dwelling*



*Tenant House; Circa 1900, Contributing*

This one-story, frame, side-gable tenant house has a shed rear addition and a shed-roofed front porch (Figures 31-32). The original board-and-batten doors and four-over-four windows remain. There is a brick chimney flue at east end.

*Figure 31. Tenant House, Southwest Side*



*Figure 32. Tenant House, Rear Shed*



*Historic Driveway and Piers; Circa 1914, Contributing*

Both the front and side driveways are marked with brick and concrete piers (Figures 33).

*Figure 33. Driveway Pier*



*Shed; 1920, Contributing*

This front-gabled shed, constructed of circular sawn planks, has a cantilevered main roof and a planked shed addition, and a partially enclosed shed on the southwest side (Figure 34). There are three board-and-batten doors on the northwest side. The roof is metal.

*Figure 34. Circa 1920 Shed*



*Mule Barn; Circa 1920, Contributing*

This two-story, gabled mule barn has one-story sheds on both sides (Figure 35). The barn is sheathed with weatherboard siding and has a metal roof (Figure 36). The roof projects past the gable ends and is supported by triangular eave brackets. The interior has a center aisle with wood stalls on either side (Figure 37). Each stall has a wood chute where corn and hay could be dropped down from the loft (Figure 38).

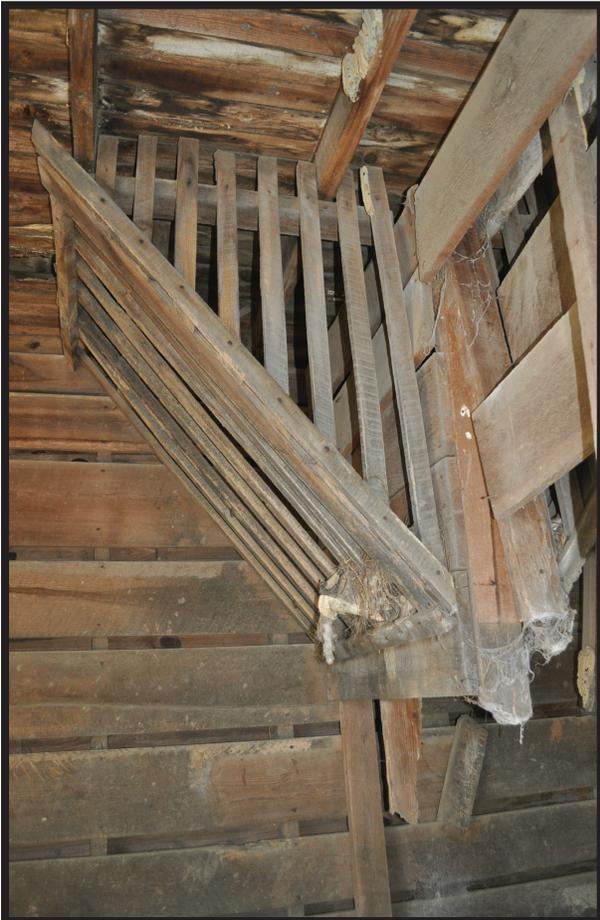
*Figure 35. Mule Barn, Southwest Side*



*Figure 36. Mule Barn, Northwest Side*



*Figure 37. Mule Barn, Stall Door*



*Figure 38. Mule Barn, Feed Chute*

*Wash House/Well House; 1922, Contributing*

Brick piers and curtain walls support the flat, poured concrete slab roof of the Wash House/Well House. The building has two rooms: a washroom and a well room containing the original well, which are no longer in use (Figure 39). The northwest elevation has a brick stepped parapet. On the northeast side is a board-and batten sliding door that accesses the well room and a chimney that heats the built-in washbasin in the washroom (Figures 40-42). The floor is concrete and the interior walls are stuccoed. Etched into the stucco of the well cover are two markings: “WED 7/2 1922” and “EDS 7/2 1922/” (Figures 43-44).

*Figure 39. Wash House/Well House Looking Southeast*



*Figure 40. Wash House/Well House Looking Northwest*



*Figure 41. Wash House/Well House, Well Cover*

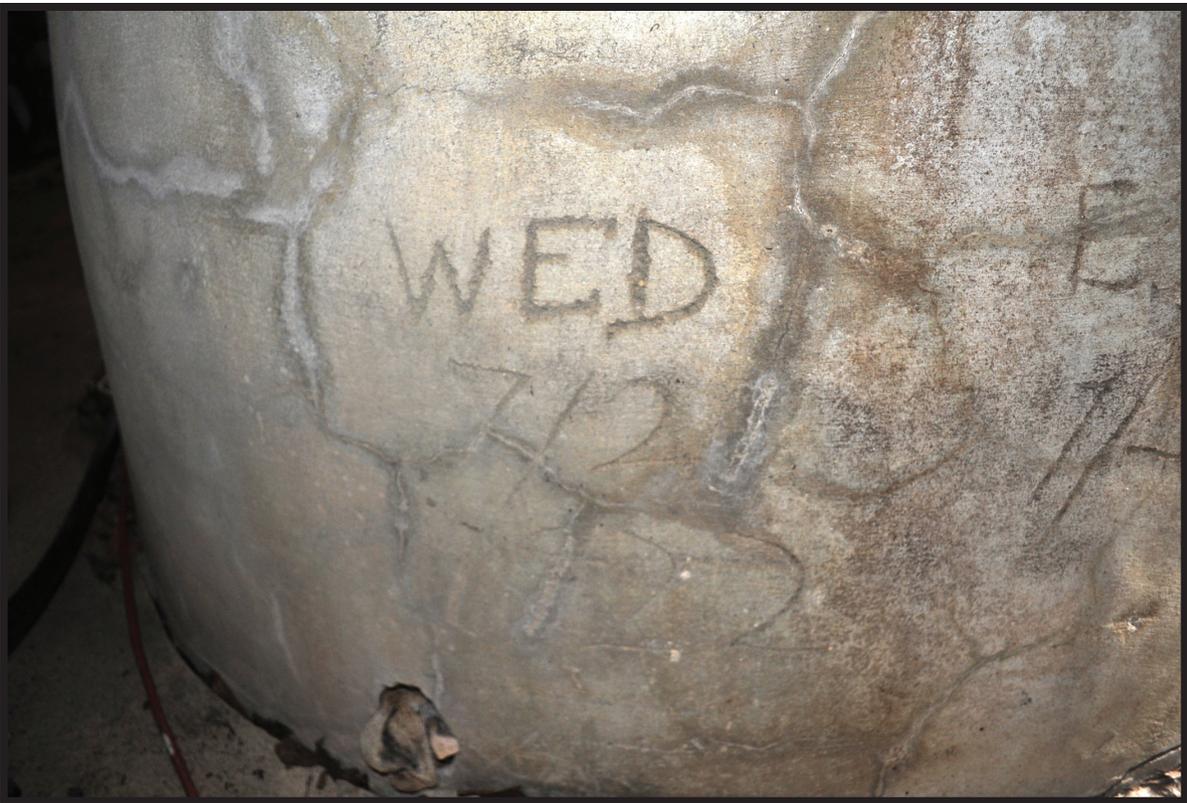


*Figure 42. Wash House/Well House, Wash Basin*

*Figure 43. Wash House/Well House, Initials "E.D.S." Etched into Well Cover*



*Figure 44. Wash House/Well House, Initials "W.E.D." Etched into Well Cover*



*Stone Chimney; Circa 1940, Non-Contributing*

The date and purpose of this chimney is unknown (Figure 45). The chimney is not clearly discernible in historic aerial photographs. The current owner states it has been there since the 1950s, when he was a child. The single-shouldered stone chimney is built of irregular stones mortared with concrete. The top of the stack is decorated by a rectangular stone at each corner, resulting in a crenelated appearance. A metal lintel supports the firebox. Above the lintel is a projecting concrete and stone mantel. Metal damper openers project from the side.

*Figure 45. Stone Chimney*



*Duplex; Circa 1955, Non-Contributing*

The side-gabled concrete block duplex faces Hodges Chapel Road (Figure 46). It has a projecting central entry pavilion and vinyl sided side-gabled wings at each end. The front entry is sheltered by a pent supported by metal scrolls. The six-over-six windows are paired in the main section and placed singly in the wings. The roof is covered with gray composite shingles.

*Figure 46. Duplex*



*Brick And Concrete Well Cover; Circa 1955, Non-Contributing*

This concrete block well cover is partially faced with brick (Figure 47).

*Figure 47. Brick and Concrete Well Cover with Rear of Garage in Background*



*Garage; Circa 1955; Non-Contributing*

The front-gabled concrete block garage is covered with vinyl siding (Figure 48). A set of wood casement windows is centered in the southwest wall. Gray composite shingles cover the roof.

*Figure 48. Garage*



*Modern Shed; 2000, Non-Contributing*

This open frame shed is used as a boat shelter (Figure 49).

*Figure 49. Open Shed*



*Pond; 2001, Non-Contributing*

The recreational pond has an earthen dam at the south end. John Carl Allen constructed the pond in 2001 (Figure 50).

*Figure 50. Pond*



## HISTORY

W.R. (William Robert) Denning was born to David Bryant “D.B.” and Oceana Henrietta (Neighbors) Denning around 1872. Oceana, also known as Osha, was D.B.’s first wife. After her death in 1885, D.B. married Rebecca Florence Strickland. D.B. Denning is reputed to have fathered 29 children in total before his death in 1936 (Smithfield Herald 1936). As a result of D.B.’s robust family life, many Denning descendants remain in the area straddling southwest Johnston and eastern Harnett counties. The W.R. Denning farm occupies land that has been in the family since the nineteenth century.

W.R. Denning married Mary Lenna Smith from Wake County in 1903 (Butchko 1982). Existing records are hazy due to the number of Denning family members in the area. However, census records suggest that the couple had at least six children: Annie, James, William Robert, Jr., Evett, Louise, and Florence. Denning’s grandson, John Carl Allen, states that Denning was an exceptionally successful farmer. His diversified operations included cultivating cotton, lumber, tobacco, wheat, soybeans, and operating cotton ginning and lumber milling facilities (John Carl Allen, personal communication 2015). The gin was a large community gin, processing cotton from Denning’s farm and other area farmers. Denning also had a lawn chair factory on the site, so he was not only mass-producing sawn lumber, but engaged in manufacturing as well (Butchko 1982). Denning constructed a private rail siding so his products could be easily loaded onto the freight cars of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. A 1933 aerial photograph shows the farm, the location of Denning’s cotton gin and sawmill, as well as a number of unidentified farm buildings that are no longer extant (Figure 52).

By the early 1910s, Denning decided to build a new and modern house befitting his social status. The home he envisioned would be commensurate with those of the prominent and successful men of nearby Benson. Denning’s choice of the Neoclassical Revival style projected his social standing and economic success to the surrounding rural community. Denning hired a father and son team of local builders, Nathan Porter and Madison Brosia Porter, and their partner, Hunter Pool (Butchko 1982). Prior to construction, Denning may have occupied the nineteenth-century dwelling that would become the west ell of the new house. According to John Carl Allen (personal communication 2015), the house was built using lumber cut and sawn on site, suggesting that the sawmill facility was already established at this time.

An architect for the house has not been identified. Family tradition holds that Denning based the design on the 1912 home of his brother-in-law, C.T. Johnson, (109 Northwest Railroad Street) in Benson (Butchko 1982)(Figure 53). C.T. Johnson was married to Denning’s sister Georgia, and he is said to have modeled his home on the Henry Hood house in Dunn (Butchko 1982). The Henry Hood house could not be located for comparison during the course of this study. Johnson’s

*Figure 51. Portrait of W.R. Denning that Hangs in Living Room. Date and Artist Unknown.*



house was completed in 1912, which would have given Denning time to visit the home, admire it, and begin planning for his own construction project. Both houses possess virtually identical massing and exterior details, including matching columns, cornices, stuccoed gables with keystone window surrounds, corner pilasters, and paneled porch rail posts on the balcony. Notably, the first and second story entry treatments are flipped, with the Denning House's elliptical window entry on the second floor, where on the Johnson house it is on the first story. The interior of the Johnson House was not inspected. However, descriptions of the property suggests that both houses shared similar floor plans, featuring stair halls with curvilinear stair cases (Mintzer 1985:7.33–7.34). The Denning House is described as “neither as large nor as grandly finished” as the Johnson House (Mintzer 1985:7.33–7.34; Butchko 1982).

After W.R. Denning died in 1946, ownership of the house passed to his son, James David Denning. Denning died in 1987 and left the house to his sister, Annie Lee Denning Allen. After she passed away in 1996, her son and only child John Carl Allen moved to the property. Allen lives there with his second wife. The couple has made very few changes to the property beyond routine maintenance. They created the farm pond in 2001, and built a deck off the 1914 ell around 2011 (John Carl Allen, personal communication 2015).

Figure 52. Historic Site Plan



Source: North Carolina Soil Service Map (Johnston County), 1933

*Figure 53. C.T. Johnson House at 109 Northwest Railroad Street in Benson*



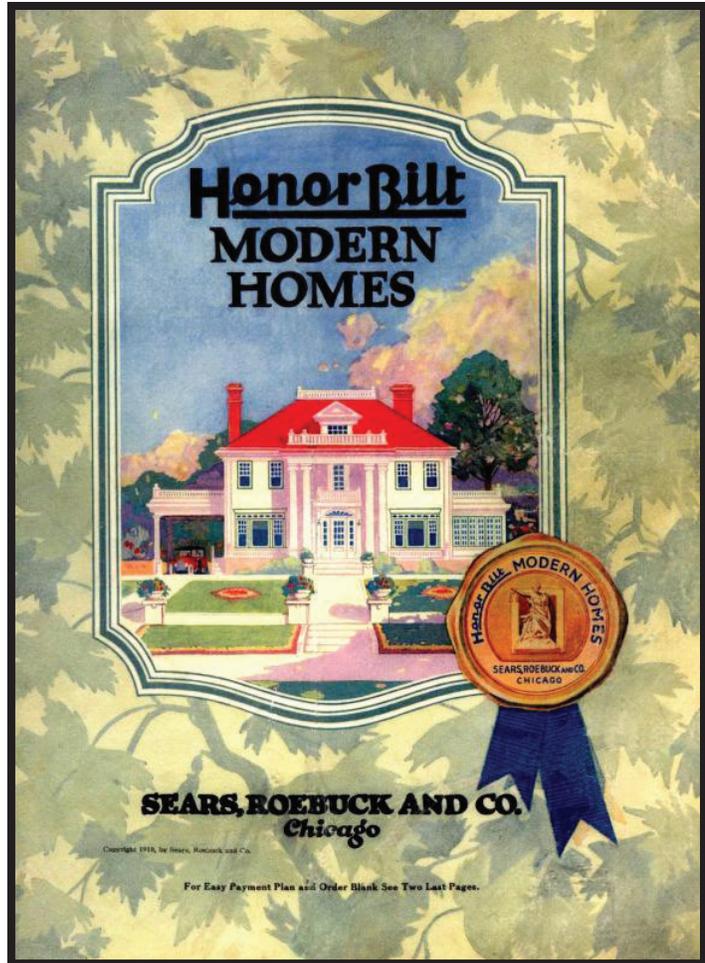
## **ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT**

Neoclassical architecture was a nationalistic design movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. It sought to revive elements of ancient classical architecture and meld it with modern building techniques and up-to-date conveniences. It became a popular style for institutional buildings such as municipal buildings, banks, hotels, churches, schools, and college buildings due to its air of dignity, permanence, and stability.

The Neoclassical Revival, as adapted for Southern residential architecture, was part of a broader revival of the Georgian and colonial modes. Characterized by symmetry, proportion, and classically inspired details such as columns, architraves, and entablatures, the Neoclassical was differentiated from a pure revival--that is, a replication of a past style--by its unrestrained use of decorative embellishments and the prominent placement of oversized porticos. Beginning in 1900, Architects C.C. Hook of Charlotte, North Carolina and Charles W. Barrett of Chapel Hill, North Carolina published house plans that helped to push the style across the state. In 1918, Sears Roebuck and Co.'s "Honor Bilt" line of kit houses proffered the "Magnolia" (Model No. 2089) a robust Neoclassical home that was the largest and most expensive kit produced by the company (Thornton 2011) (Figures 54-55).

In cities and towns across North Carolina, the wealthy and upper middle classes embraced Neoclassicism. The playful and asymmetrical Queen Anne style, seen as the product of jackleg carpenters with "the voracious jigsaw," was abandoned in favor of the stoic, staid and symmetrical

*Figure 54. Cover of Sears Roebuck and Co. Honor Bilt Modern Homes Catalogue, 1918. Magnolia Model Home on Cover*



Source: [www.searshomes.org](http://www.searshomes.org)

*Figure 55. A Documented “Magnolia” Plan House Located at 301 W. Main Street in Benson. Fewer Than Five Such Houses Are Documented in the Country.*



(Bishir et al. 1990:300). This shift in architectural tastes coincided with the emergence the South's newly stabilized economy. Adopters of the style idealized, through architecture, the past antebellum social order as symbolized by the myth of the large, white columned, plantation house.

### *Comparable Houses*

No rural Neoclassical Revival dwellings were identified during the 1982 Johnston County architectural survey (Butchko 1982). The 2008 Harnett County architectural survey identified two rural examples: the circa 1920 Daniel Bayles House (HT 359), which is unlike the Denning House in its decidedly Craftsman flavor; and the J.C. Byrd Farm (HT151), a hipped and gable roofed two-story Neoclassical Revival House with an Ionic portico, which was determined eligible for the NRHP as a contributing resource within the Byrd Rural Historic District in 2013 (van den Hurk et al. 2013) (Figure 56). The house is similar in massing and detail to the Denning House, but it has been covered with aluminum siding. Although the Denning Farm is located in Harnett County, it was closer to Benson than to Dunn, and Denning's social and business ties were stronger to the latter (John Carl Allen, personal communication 2015). For these reasons, the W.R. Denning's house can best be placed within the context of a small group of Benson dwellings.

The Benson Historic District (NRHP-listed in 1982) contains five, two-story Neoclassical Revival dwellings, a small but important group comprising the district's largest homes and ones that belonged to Benson's most prominent citizens (Mintzer 1985:7.1–7.2). This group consists of the 1905-1906 Parrish-Smith House (206 W. Main Street), the circa 1918 Samuel D. Stone House (201 E. Church Street)(Figure 57), the circa 1910 Preston Woodall House (201 E. Hill Street) (Figure 58), circa 1918 William Daniel Boon House (301 W. Main Street) (see Figure 55), and the 1912 C.T. Johnson House (109 N. Railroad Street) said to be the "most impressive" of the bunch (Mintzer 1985:7.33)(see Figure 53). Each dwelling combines Neoclassical Revival elements in various ways, but all have hipped roofs, ornate entry surrounds consisting of sidelights and either a rectangular transom or elliptical light, massive-double height porticoes, and one-story wrap porches (with the exception of the Boon House which was built from Sears's Magnolia plan and lacks a one-story porch). Columns are based on the classical orders, either Ionic or Corinthian-style, and placed singly or in clusters.

Table 1 provides a quick summary of the Neoclassical Revival features common to the Benson houses noted above.

*Figure 56. J.C. Byrd House, Intersection of Byrd's Mill Road and US 401, Harnett County.*



Courtesy of Jeroen van den Hurk, Coastal Carolina Research

*Figure 57. Samuel D. Stone House, 201 E. Church Street, Benson*



Figure 58. Preston Woodall House, 201 E. Hill Street, Benson.



Photo Courtesy of Joel Hurley, Owner, Preston Woodall House Bed and Breakfast

Table 1. Comparison of Benson's Neoclassical Revival Houses

Features	Parrish-Smith House (1905-1906)	Samuel Stone House (circa 1918)	Preston Woodall-House (circa 1910)	William Daniel Boon House (circa 1918)	C.T. Johnson House (1912)
Dormers	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Present (windows)	Present (vents)
Modillion/dentil cornice	Present (house and porch)	Present (porch only)	Not Present	Not Present	Present (house and porch)
Ornate entry surround	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
Art glass or leaded windows	Present	Present	Not Present	Not Present	Present
Elliptical windows	Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Present
Porch column cluster	Present	Present	Not Present	Present	Present
Exterior Alterations	Minimal	Aluminum Siding	Frame additions on side and rear to accommodate present use as a bed and breakfast and event facility	Brick additions on side and rear to accommodate present use as funeral home	Minimal

## **INTEGRITY**

Aerial photographs indicate that the Denning Farm's historic cotton gin and sawmill were demolished sometime between 1971 and 1988. The rail siding was removed at an unknown date. Cotton and lumber processing were the farm's primary revenue generators, and the loss of these features negatively affects the property's integrity as a historic agricultural resource. The main house, however, retains a high degree of integrity since its completion in 1914. The house has been altered very little on both the exterior and interior. Alterations include the replacement of the original metal shingle roof with composite shingles, the construction of a rear deck, and the painting of the interior woodwork. The dwelling's Neoclassical Revival design, materials, and workmanship are strongly evident. The property's rail-side rural setting and the remaining outbuildings provide an appropriate setting and feeling. The farm is owned by W.R. Denning's grandson and therefore retains its historic associations with the Denning family.

## **EVALUATION**

Properties can be eligible for the NRHP if they are associated with a significant event or pattern of events that have made contributions to history at the local, state, or national level. W.R. Denning, and later his son, James David Denning, ran a profitable farming operation from circa 1900 through the 1980s. The Denning's farm was a diversified operation with cotton and lumber as the primary sources of income. The acreage, now significantly reduced in size, does not retain a complement of outbuildings, field patterns, or landscape features that collectively tell the story of agricultural life in Harnett County. Therefore, the W.R. Denning Farm no longer retains its historic agricultural associations and is recommended not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A.

Although W.R. Denning was very successful and socially prominent at the local level, research conducted for this project did not identify him or other members of the family as significant within community, state, or national historic contexts. Therefore, the W.R. Denning Farm is recommended not eligible under Criterion B.

Properties may be eligible under Criterion C if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic value. The Denning Farm is a highly intact example of a Neoclassical Revival dwelling, a type of statement home that was available to socially prominent North Carolinians in the 1910s. The house compares favorably among properties of similar date, size, and style in both Johnston and Harnett counties, and the Denning House is among the most intact. The outbuildings are typical of their time period, intact, and contribute to the property's historic setting. Therefore, the Denning Farm is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C.

It is unlikely that additional study of this property would yield any unretrieved data not discoverable through informant interviews and documentary sources. Therefore, the W.R. Denning Farm is recommended not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D.

*Recommended Boundary*

The recommended NRHP boundary includes the 15.31 acres that corresponds with the legal parcel. The boundary includes the main dwelling, eligible under Criterion C, and a number of historic buildings, which provide an appropriate historic setting.

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