

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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 Jesse R. Siler House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 115 West Main Street

not for publication

city, town Franklin

vicinity of

congressional district

Eleventh

state North Carolina

code 37

county Macon

code 113

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. Richard Jones, Sr.

street & number 115 West Main Street

city, town Franklin

vicinity of

state North Carolina 28734

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Macon County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Franklin

state North Carolina 28734

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

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 Jesse R. Siler House stands on a 13 acre tract off West Main Street at the base of the hill upon which the county seat of Franklin is situated; this location has given it the local sobriquet "the house at the foot of the hill." The residence shows three major stages of construction, reflecting the progress of a pioneer western North Carolina family through the course of the nineteenth century. The exceptional interior woodwork of the ca. 1820-1830 expansion of the house is of a character unknown elsewhere in the mountain region of North Carolina.

In its present form, the double-pile house rises two stories under a gable roof, with pairs of exterior chimneys at the gable ends. Aluminum siding now covers the weather-boarded elevations. A monumental tetrastyle portico fronts the asymmetrical six-bay south facade, and late nineteenth and twentieth century one-story additions are attached to the west and rear sides of the house.

The original portion of the house was a two-story log dwelling of uncertain date, though tradition holds that it was standing when Jesse R. Siler acquired the property about 1820. It was probably of a simple two-room plan originally. Today its presence is identified only in the thickness of the walls enclosing the center hall and east parlor of the front section of the house.

Siler expanded this original dwelling with frame additions, probably within just a few years of his acquisition of the property, adding a west parlor and a tier of rooms across the back, and creating a center hall plan, two rooms deep. The center hall and flanking parlors have separate exterior entrances; second floor doors and windows of six-over-six (replacement) sash on both levels are asymmetrically disposed across the facade. Pairs of exterior chimneys stand at the gable ends, all of brick with single, stepped shoulders. The northeast chimney is laid in irregular Flemish bond. Its companion on the east side and the two chimneys of the west gable end, though of identical form, are of 1:5 common bond; it is uncertain if all are original, or if the common bond chimneys are later rebuildings of the originals.

The most astonishing features of Siler's ca. 1820-1830 improvements are the highly individualistic mantels found on both floors of the house; these are of a late Georgian-to-Federal transitional character, executed in a vigorous vernacular interpretation unusual for the western quarter of the state. One can only surmise that Siler, a successful merchant with business connections across a wide region, was able to draw on the talents of a builder of a caliber generally not accessible to other western North Carolinians, or perhaps acquired the pieces at a distant market for installation in his mountain residence.

The most elaborate mantel is found in the southeast parlor. This is composed of a wide mitred frame with deeply molded and multi-layered bands surrounding the fire opening. The narrow frieze above the opening is embellished with applied rows of dentils, a scallop-like motif, and chain ornament. The molded shelf running across the top of the composition is faced with five projecting plates, each molded like the shelf, placed symmetrically across the shelf and increasing in size from the ends to the center plate.

While less elaborate, the other mantels are of no less unusual form, and no mantel is duplicated. These either repeat, in simplified form, the mitred frame motif of the

**United States Department of the Interior
 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
 National Register of Historic Places
 Inventory--Nomination Form**

For NCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Item number 7 Page one

principal mantel, or are composed of flat pilasters with wide molded caps flanking the fire opening, with molded shelves between; all have friezes treated with a variety of panel arrangements, molded bands, and other ornament.

Other evidence of Jesse Siler's 1820-1830 overbuilding is seen primarily in an occasional six panel door and some early sheathing.

A number of alterations and improvements were made after 1880 by George A. Jones, and still others later by his son Richard A. Jones, Sr., that give the house much of its present character. The principal change to the exterior was the addition of the monumental portico added around the turn of the century; this is supported by massive fluted columns, behind which is placed an intervening second floor balcony with a balustrade of turned balusters and molded rail. A six-over-six sash window is centered in the tympanum of the portico. A one-story, gable roof rear T was added in the late nineteenth century to house a kitchen and dining room. This was expanded in the twentieth century with flat roof additions along the rear and west sides of the house for a modern kitchen and additional rooms.

A number of interior features were added or altered during the Jones family occupancy. Late nineteenth century wainscoting of narrow, vertical boards occurs in several rooms. The front central hall was completely covered with narrow horizontal sheathing, and the present stair--a handsome closed-string stair with turned newels and balusters--also dates from around the turn of the century. Second floor rooms are similarly finished with fabric of that period, though the early mantels remain in place. Most interior doors are of the four-or five-panel, turn-of-the-century type.

One early outbuilding remains standing behind the house. This is a simple frame gable roof structure, called the "wood house" by the family but perhaps some type of store-house originally, with entrance in the south gable end. The door is faced with diagonal sheathing and is heavily studded with nails on the exterior side. A late nineteenth or early twentieth century board and batten shed that now serves as a garage is the only other structure on the property.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
<input 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 ca. 1820; ca. 1900 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Located in the far southwestern corner of North Carolina in the town of Franklin, county seat of Macon, the Jesse R. Siler House is an exceptional early residence for the region and an important reminder of one of the area's most distinguished pioneering families.¹ Originally a two-story log structure described as "an improved Indian cabin," the dwelling was expanded in the 1820-1830 period and again around the turn of the century, and it stands today as an imposing two-story frame house with a monumental front portico. The interior woodwork of the first major expansion is of a vigorous Georgian-to-Federal transitional character and remarkable for the westernmost section of the state.² Prior to 1819 the land upon which the house stands laid within the Cherokee Indian nation; unfortunately whether the builder of the original log portion of the house was a Cherokee or a frontiersman remains unknown. In 1821 Jesse R. Siler, a young and energetic merchant from Asheville, acquired the property, and it has remained in the possession of his descendants to the present.³ Successful merchant, planter, and businessman, Siler was one of Macon County's most prominent citizens in the nineteenth century and the patriarch of a distinguished family.⁴ Substantially enlarged over the years, the Siler House reflects the progress of a mountain family over the course of the nineteenth century.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Associated with the settlement and early development of the far western mountain region of North Carolina.
- B. Associated with the life of Jesse R. Siler, prominent settler, planter, and businessman of Macon County.
- C. Embodies characteristics of three major stages of construction and improvement, reflecting the course of architectural development in the region through the nineteenth century. It began as a log dwelling typical of the mountains, and received frame overbuilding in the 1820-30 period--including mantels that are particularly distinctive and important. It acquired its final appearance with late nineteenth or early twentieth century improvements, including an imposing portico and good quality interior finish of the period.

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page one

Born at Pendleton, South Carolina, in 1793, Jesse Richardson Siler was the second son of Weimar and Margaret Rafferty Siler and a grandson of the immigrant German ancestors, Plikard and Elizabeth Hartsoe Siler, who came to Pennsylvania in 1741. The Plikard Siler family was one of thousands which migrated south to North Carolina in the 1760s in search of opportunity and better land. Plikard Siler (1719-1784) eventually settled in present Chatham County and raised a large and prosperous family.⁵ In 1787 Jesse's father, Weimar Siler (1755-1831), removed his family to Pendleton District, South Carolina, but he returned to western North Carolina in 1805 and settled in the mountains along Turkey Creek in Buncombe County.⁶ Following a common school education, young Jesse R. Siler began his career in 1814 as a clerk in the store of James McConnell Smith in Asheville and was married four years later to Harriet D. Patton, daughter of prominent Buncombe citizen John Patton.⁷ Siler's connections with Smith and Patton placed him among the leading pioneer developers of the section and doubtless contributed to his success. Seeking to establish a general mercantile business of his own, Jesse R. Siler moved into the recently opened Cherokee territory in the autumn of 1821. Purchasing what he described as an "improved Indian cabin," Siler quickly established a successful trading store, and he was soon joined by many of his brothers and kinsmen, including his mother and father.⁸ Indeed, by the time present Macon County was created in 1828, the Silers were already among her leading citizens.

Jesse R. Siler prospered greatly in the thirty years prior to the Civil War. Along with his general store, Siler founded a conglomeration of agriculturally related businesses, including a large tannery, saddlery, and boot factory, a small tobacco factory, blacksmith shop, and a saw and gristmill.⁹ Siler also acquired large tracts of farm land in the "Tennessee Valley" area of Macon, and his farm on the eve of the Civil War consisted of some 350 improved acres worked by thirty-one slaves.¹⁰ Tobacco was the commercial crop, and large numbers of livestock were raised as well.¹¹ In all, the 1860 census valued the Siler estate at \$62,000.¹²

Undoubtedly soon after acquiring the Indian cabin Siler oversaw the first major expansion of the house, a frame extension on the west and rear sides of the structure; for six children were eventually born to him and his wife.¹³ Moreover, numerous members of the Siler family resided occasionally at "the house at the foot of the hill" (as it was called locally), and Siler took in boarders as well. The 1850 census is particularly revealing of antebellum life at the house, recording a household of eleven which included a blacksmith, clerk, and two laborers (all employed by Siler), as well as Siler and his family.¹⁴

The Civil War was a time of sorrow for Siler's family. Two of his sons served in the Confederate army: eldest son Thaddeus P. was severely wounded in 1862 at Antietam; while the Franklin home ("Dixie Hall") of his second son Julius Thomas was occupied and sacked in 1865 by Union Colonel George W. Kirk.¹⁵ Although he naturally suffered severe economic losses as a result of the war, Jesse R. Siler managed to emerge from the war financially sound; the 1870 census listed Siler as a "retired merchant" and valued his estate at \$9,000.¹⁶

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page two

Following the intestate deaths of Jesse R. Siler and his wife in 1876 and 1877 respectively, the family of Siler's grandson Julius Grady Siler occupied the house until 1882, when he exchanged the house for the farm of his cousin Harriet Sloan and her husband George A. Jones.¹⁷ A prominent district court judge, Jones apparently oversaw the second major expansion and remodeling of the house about the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, and the property has remained since in the possession of his descendants. The Jones' have kept the old dwelling in a state of good repair, and it marks an important site in the history of Macon County.

FOOTNOTES

¹ See John Preston Arthur, Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1914), 173, hereinafter cited as Arthur, Western North Carolina; The Siler Family, Being a Compilation of Biographical and Other Historical Sketches Relating to the Descendants of Plikard and Elizabeth Siler and Read at the Jubilee Reunion of the Siler Family Held in Macon County, North Carolina, August 28, 1901. Addition, August, 1926 (Franklin, North Carolina: Franklin Press, 1926), 6-7, copy in the Genealogical Branch, North Carolina State Library, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as The Siler Family; and Leona Bryson Porter, The Family of Weimar Siler, 1755-1831 (Franklin, North Carolina: Privately printed, 1952), 43-63, copy in the Genealogical Branch, North Carolina State Library, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Porter, Weimar Siler Family.

² Notes compiled by Michael Southern, Jesse R. Siler House folder, Survey and Planning Branch files, Division of Archives and History, Lewis-Smith House, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Survey and Planning Branch files with appropriate folder.

³ The Siler Family, 7; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 45. An extensive search of the Haywood County Deeds (from which Macon was later formed) failed to reveal from whom Siler purchased the cabin; apparently the deed was never recorded.

⁴ Arthur, Western North Carolina, 173; The Siler Family, 6-7; and Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 43-63.

⁵ The Siler Family, 3-4; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 7-9.

⁶ The Siler Family, 3-4; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 10-11.

⁷ The Siler Family, 4-7; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 43-44.

⁸ The Siler Family, 7; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 43-45 (Also see Footnote #3).

⁹ Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Macon County, North Carolina Industrial Schedule, 409, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Seventh Census, 1850, with appropriate schedule, county, and page number; Eighth Census, 1860: Macon County, North Carolina, Industrial Schedule, 1. Siler's saddlery annually produced 75 saddles; his boot factory annually manufactured over 400

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page three

pairs of boots; and his blacksmith shop produced large quantities of farming tools and 3 or 4 wagons yearly. The tobacco factory manufactured plug tobacco worth some \$1,500 yearly; while the sawmill produced approximately 150,000 feet of plank valued at \$1,400. Production figures for the flour and corn mill were not recorded.

¹⁰ Haywood County Record of Deeds, Book B, 330, 361, 445, 460, 491, microfilm copy, State Archives; Seventh Census, 1850: Macon County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, 813; Slave Schedule, 2; Eighth Census, 1860: Macon County, North Carolina, Slave Schedule, 6.

¹¹ Seventh Census, 1850: Macon County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, 813. Agricultural production for the year 1849-1850 included: 60 bushels of wheat; 100 bushels of rye; 2,000 bushels of Indian corn; 1,000 bushels of oats; 2,000 pounds of tobacco; 150 bushels of Irish potatoes; 150 bushels of sweet potatoes; and 30 tons of hay. Livestock on Siler's plantation included: 41 horses; 33 mules; 11 milk cows; 34 cattle; and 125 swine, collectively valued at \$5,400.

¹² Eighth Census, 1860: Macon County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 294.

¹³ For biographical sketches of the children of Jesse and Harriet Siler, see The Siler Family, 6-7; and Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 43-63.

¹⁴ Seventh Census, 1850: Macon County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 327.

¹⁵ Walter Clark, ed., Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions From North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-1865 (Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 5 volumes, 1901), III, 673-673; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 46.

¹⁶ Ninth Census, 1870: Macon County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 314.

¹⁷ Macon County Estates Papers, Jesse R. Siler folder, State Archives; Porter, Weimar Siler Family, 52. Portions of the Siler estate were bitterly fought over by his heirs, with litigation reaching the North Carolina Supreme Court in 1882 (see Walter Clark and Thomas Kenan, North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, Vol. 86 [February, 1882], 535-540).

9. Major Bibliographical References

Manuscript Sources

State Archives, Raleigh
 Federal Census Records, 1790-1880
 Haywood and Macon County Records

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2

Quadrangle name Franklin

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

17

2	8	2	6	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	8	9	5	4	7	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Zone Easting Northing

B

--

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

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

 Zone Easting Northing

C

--

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

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

D

--

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

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

E

--

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

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

F

--

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

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

G

--

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

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

H

--

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

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

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes two acres of the thirteen acre tract owned by the Jones family, including the entire 250' frontage along Main Street and extending northward to a depth of 350', including the house, its two associated outbuildings, and immediate landscaping.

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

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Statement of Significance by Bruce S. Cheeseman, Researcher, Raleigh
Property Description by Michael Southern, Survey Specialist, Asheville

organization Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section date
N. C. Division of Archives and History

street & number 109 E. Jones Street telephone Raleigh: 919-733-4763
Asheville: 704-298-5024

city or town Raleigh, state North Carolina, 27611

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title	date
For NCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	date
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page one

Research Branch Files

Lewis-Smith House, Raleigh
Survey and Planning Branch Files

Secondary Sources

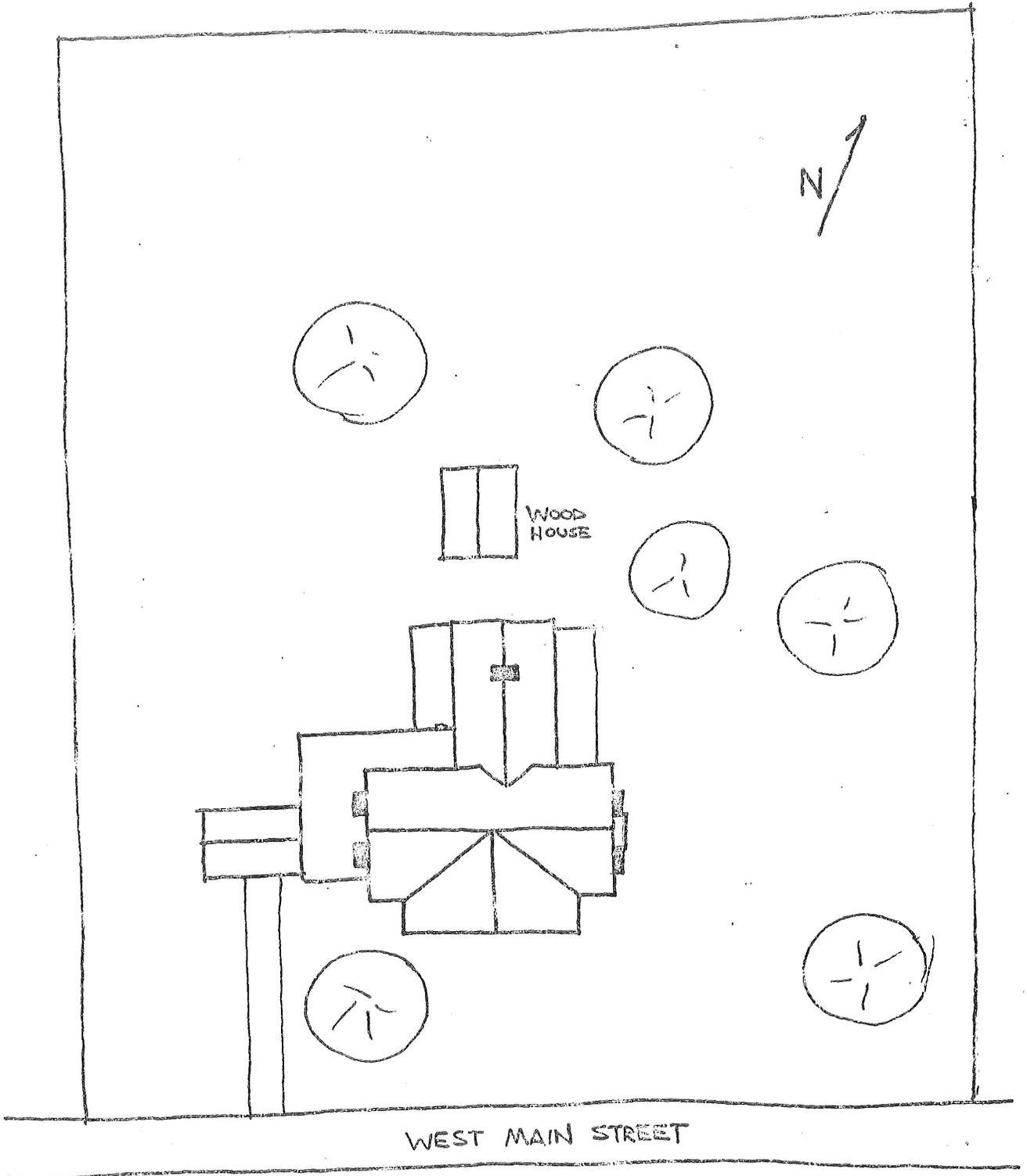
Arthur, John Preston. Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913. Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1914.

Clark, Walter, ed. Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions From North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-1865. Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 5 volumes, 1901.

Clark, Walter and Kenan, Thomas. North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, 86 (February, 1882), 535-540.

Porter, Leona Bryson. The Family of Weimar Siler, 1755-1831. Franklin, North Carolina: Privately printed, 1952.

The Siler Family, Being a Compilation of Biographical and Other Historical Sketches Relating to the Descendants of Flikard and Elizabeth Siler and Read at the Jubilee Reunion of the Siler Family Held in Macon County, North Carolina, August 28, 1901, Addition, August 1926. Franklin, North Carolina: Franklin Press, 1926.



JESSE R. SILER HOUSE
115 WEST MAIN ST.
FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA
MACON COUNTY

2 ACRES
OCTOBER 1980

