

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

**1. Name**

historic      W. J. Little House

and/or common    Little House

**2. Location**

street & number    109 North Main Street      (southwest corner of North Main and West Academy streets)       not for publication

city, town      Robersonville      vicinity of

state    North Carolina      code    037      county    Martin      code    117

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name      Mr. and Mrs. Thomas B. Brandon III

street & number    410 North Smithwick Street      919/792-6537

city, town    Williamston      vicinity of      state    North Carolina    27892

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.    Martin County Governmental Center, Register of Deeds

street & number    East Main Street

city, town    Williamston      state    North Carolina    27892

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title      N/A      has this property been determined eligible?       yes    X no

date       federal     state     county     local

depository for survey records

city, town      state

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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

Built in 1913-14, the W. J. Little House is a large Classical Revival style residence. It is a two-story, three-bay, double-pile frame house with wings at the rear. It has a hipped slate roof, a two-story entrance portico, a one-story wrap-around porch, and a porte cochere.

The house faces North Main Street, on the east, and its porte cochere is entered from West Academy Street, on the north side. Directly across North Main Street is a similar Classical Revival style residence, the Roberson House. A two-story frame house with a wrap-around porch is across West Academy Street, to the north side, and a two-story brick house painted white, also with a wrap-around porch, is a diagonally across the intersection.

The Little House is approached up a short concrete walkway from the street. It has a short flight of curved concrete steps, with the bottom steps curving outward more than the top ones, and concrete caps on the outward-curving common-bond brick parapets which flank the walkway. The porte cochere drive is concrete and there is also a concrete cap on the brick parapet wall which supports the columns of the porte cochere. Low concrete pedestals flank the walkway as it leaves the sidewalk and also are located at the front corners and one other location across the front of the property. These are connected by a narrow strip of concrete embedded in the ground. The use of concrete in 1913-14 indicates a desire for modernity and permanence.

The truncated, hipped, slate roof is topped by a Chippendale-style balustrade. A balustrade also occurs above the one-story, wrap-around porch, and the porte cochere. This balustrade has substantial, square-in-section balusters with a Chippendale-derived motif occurring in the center of each section of the balustrade. There is a hipped-roof dormer in the center of the front elevation of the house. In the rear, the roof configuration is irregular. Four brick chimneys pierce the roof: one on the south, two on the north, and one on the west (rear) side of the house. These are all original and in good condition. A grand, two-story portico is located in the center of the front elevation superimposed over the one-story, wrap-around porch. Two pairs of two-story, unfluted columns with Classical, leafy capitals and molded bases originally supported the front of the portico. One of the columns, which is hollow barrel-and-stave construction, survives. The single pilasters at the rear of the portico match the columns. The portico has a full entablature which contains both modillions and dentils. The one-story porch has paired Tuscan-order columns at the entranceway, behind the paired columns of the two-story portico, and single columns elsewhere. Matching Tuscan-order pilasters occur where the porch returns against the house at the projection of the second rooms beyond the first. The porch balustrade is similar to the one above the porch but does not contain the Chippendale-derived motif, just the heavy, square balusters. The tops of the handrail and footrail are beveled. The porch has a flat-paneled soffit between the columns and a full entablature on the exterior with no modillions or dentils. On the interior there is a frieze. The porch has single-bead ceiling boards, approximately three inches

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wide. The original porch flooring is approximately three-inch yellow pine, with some two-inch replacement boards. The house has unmolded wood siding and approximately four-inch corner boards, rounded at the corner. A one-inch cyma reversa molding occurs at the junction of the house with the porch ceiling. This breaks outward above the corner boards.

The windows on the front elevation contain eight-over-one sash; the remainder contain six-over-one sash. The original, moveable-louver blinds are in place on the two front rooms at both first and second story levels. There are pintles for blinds at the remaining windows. The blinds are divided vertically into three sections of moveable louvers.

The entranceway to the house is comprised of double doors, each with three raised panels arranged vertically, flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a fanlight transom, which are leaded and contain beveled glass. There are raised, wooden panels below the sidelights. The remainder of the exterior doors each has three panels arranged vertically, with the center panel being beveled glass. The transoms above these doors are three panes wide by two panes high.

The roof of the porte cochere is supported by four Tuscan-order columns like those on the one-story porch. The only variation in the columns is that the two which flank the entrance onto the porch from the porte cochere have a band of molding around them just above the intersection with the porch balustrade. There is a narrow concrete landing in the porte cochere between these columns and two steps are cut into the porch here.

The Little House basically has a center hall plan. At first floor level the front part of the hall has mahogany double sliding doors leading into the two front rooms which are parlors. In this part of the hall there is a full entablature at the cornice and a small, three-tier, teardrop crystal chandelier. The interior of the sidelight frames and panels is mahogany, as are the double entrance doors. There is a radiator just inside the doors on the left. Approximately one-third of the distance from the front of the hall to the back is a screen behind which is the staircase. The screen consists of a five-panel dado which serves as a base from which the fluted Tuscan column and pilaster rise to the left of the opening. Between the column and the pilaster, which is against the wall, there is a balustrade comprised of slender, turned balusters which rest on the dado and are capped by a molded mahogany handrail. To the right of the off-center opening, there is a dado which supports a column and pilaster but no balustrade. The open-string stair rises against the left wall from a landing behind the screen. Three balusters rest on each tread. Below the end of each tread is a scroll bracket. Two steps turn into the hall from the landing. An approximately twelve-inch-square, flat-paneled, mahogany newel rests on the landing and terminates the ramped stair balustrade. A staircase to the basement goes down from the back of the hall beneath the staircase just described. There is no cornice molding and no ceiling light fixture in the rear

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part of the hall. At the back of the hall a three-panel mahogany door, flanked by sidelights, leads onto the rear porch. One single door leads from the rear hall into the dining room to the right; another single door leads into a bedroom to the left. The entire hall is presently carpeted.

The interior woodwork is the same throughout the house with the exception of the chimneypieces. The unmolded window and door surrounds are approximately four inches wide and have an approximately one-inch-wide backband molding which has slightly rounded corners. Above each doorway and window opening the surround is topped by a cyma reversa molding. There is a picture molding used as a cornice in each room. The baseboards are deep and are topped by a shallow, somewhat Greek Revival molding. All of the interior doors are six-panel, solid mahogany doors, except in the kitchen wing, and have their original brass or glass pulls or knobs. The floors throughout the house are narrow, white oak boards, approximately one-and-a-half inches wide, except in the kitchen wing where they are three-inch-wide yellow pine. The dining room and bedroom above it are wallpapered. There are plaster walls in the remainder of the house.

The chimneypiece in the right parlor is mahogany and mahogany veneer. Elongated scroll brackets on bases support a frieze and shelf, above which is a mirror. The entire piece is curvilinear and slightly reminiscent of Art Nouveau. There is a white, glazed-tile hearth and firebox surround. The firebox and door are ornamental cast iron. The chimneypiece in the left parlor is similar to the one in the right parlor except for a slightly simpler frieze and a variation in the contour of the mirror. The tile and firebox are the same. Both parlors have small, single-tier, crystal ceiling light fixtures. The chimneypiece in the bedroom behind the left parlor is comprised of Tuscan columns on high bases and a curved frieze which supports the shelf. There is an approximately six-inch high unmolded panel above the shelf. There is no mirror. Medium bluish-green tile is used for the hearth and firebox surround. The firebox is the same as those in the parlors. Some shelving has been added beside the chimney and against the hall wall in this room. To the rear of the bedroom is a large, walk-in closet and a bathroom, both of which are original to the house. The bathroom was completely remodeled in 1945 and now has medium-blue and white tile. All of the fixtures date from 1945.

The dining room is different from the other rooms and is somewhat Craftsman style. It has six-foot-high paneling topped by a deep cove cornice which returns at all door and window openings. The paneling has narrow, vertical panels at the bottom and square panels of the same width above. The chimneypiece is heavier than the others in the house having squarer lines. The white glazed-tile hearth and surround are the same in the parlors as is the cast iron firebox. The ceiling has paneled wooden beams with four original globe light fixtures at intersections of the beams in the center of the room (over the dining room table). There is a horizontal, stained-glass window between the other, standard, windows on the north wall. The unsigned stained-glass window has a yellow background with brown grapevine stems, bunches of purple grapes,

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and green leaves. Above the paneling there is wallpaper with roses in a diamond motif on a grayish background. Directly behind the dining room is a butler's pantry and behind that is the kitchen. The butler's pantry and kitchen have five-foot-high single-bead board paneling (vertical) and yellow pine doors stained to look like mahogany. The pantry has built-in counters with drawers and cabinets below and glass-door cabinets above. The kitchen has cabinets on the right (north) side of the room. Two sections of cabinet have built-in flour bins and sifters. It has its original porcelain sink, but the counter tops were replaced in the 1945 remodeling.

The upstairs floor plan is like that of the first floor, except there is nothing above the kitchen wing. The upstairs hall is also divided into two parts with the staircase rising into the rear part. A staircase from the second floor to the attic rises above the main staircase. There are double, French doors with sidelights at the front of the hall. There are four bedrooms upstairs. The closets of the two front bedrooms, above the parlors, project into the front part of the hall and are connected by an arch. There is a ceiling light fixture in the front of the hall like those in the dining room. There is a single, glass-panel door at the rear of the hall which opens onto a small sunporch. All of the bedrooms on this floor have picture molding at the cornice and all have lighter, more delicate, Colonial Revival style chimneypieces, without mirrors above them. The hearths and surrounds are all glazed tile and the fireboxes are all alike but are plainer than those on the first floor. The left rear (southwest) bedroom has the same closet and bathroom to its rear as does the bedroom below. The right rear (northwest) bedroom has a dressing room, with a lavatory, over the north end of the butler's pantry. A storage room with built-in shelves opens from the right side of the hall near the rear and is located over the remainder (south) of the butler's pantry. Here the woodwork is grained to resemble golden oak - even the inside of the mahogany door.

A stairway goes down from the rear of the hall to the rear porch below. The rear porch is enclosed with original latticework. There is a two-bay brick garage directly behind the porte cochere and a rectangular, frame outbuilding immediately beside it to the south.

## 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/				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation				
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)				

Specific dates 1913–14

Builder/Architect John C. Stout ? (from Rocky Mount)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The W. J. Little House is one of the two largest and finest Classical Revival style houses, which face each other across North Main Street, in Robersonville. It has remained nearly unchanged since its construction in 1913–1914 for William Joseph Little, a large scale tobacco farmer and stockholder in one of Robersonville's several tobacco companies. The house is a visible example of the prosperity generated by the tobacco economy in the early twentieth century and the desire to own a stylish and conspicuous symbol of that prosperity. The exterior of the house with its Classical balustrade, columns, and other detailing is more up-to-date and uniform in style than the interior, which includes an elegant Classical Revival stairway and solid mahogany doors throughout, as well as a stained glass window and some brass hardware and mantle details reminiscent of Art Nouveau. The house is a fine example of eastern North Carolina's early-twentieth-century tobacco palaces.

### Criteria Assessment:

- A. The house recalls the flourishing tobacco economy of Robersonville and surrounding Martin County in the early twentieth century and the upsurge in prosperity which accompanied it in this agricultural area.
- B. Associated with William Joseph Little, prominent Martin County and Pitt County tobacco farmer and Robersonville tobacco businessman.
- C. Exemplifies the influence of the Colonial Revival style on fashion-conscious entrepreneurs of the 1910s in eastern North Carolina and its execution in a small commercial center.

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The W. J. Little House is located on North Main Street in the town of Robersonville. It was built in 1913-14 by William Joseph Little, a tobacco farmer and businessman, and was occupied by his family until 1975.

William Joseph Little was born in 1875 and was a son of Ichabod Harris Little. William Joseph Little and his wife Azella Mayo Little, who died in 1916, had two children, a son, Ichabod Mayo Little, and a daughter, Margaret Lee Little.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1880s the production of tobacco in North Carolina reached its prewar volume. By 1890 36 million pounds were produced in the state and in the decade from 1890 to 1900 production more than tripled to 128 million pounds in 1900.<sup>2</sup> Robersonville's first tobacco market, the first in Martin County, opened in 1900 with its first season's sales around 3 million pounds.<sup>3</sup>

Spurred by the growth of the tobacco economy the town of Robersonville grew rapidly. Its population in 1900 was 275, in 1910 616, and in 1920 1,199.<sup>4</sup> In October 1913 W. J. Little purchased two<sup>5</sup> adjoining half-acre lots, at the corner of North Main and West Academy<sup>6</sup> streets,<sup>7</sup> and soon began constructing his large, Classical Revival style house. Although Little had previously purchased lots in Robersonville, one in 1904 at Broad and Academy streets and four in 1909 bounded by Roberson and Pecan streets and College Avenue in the new West-End development,<sup>8</sup> he was still living at his family's homeplace near Flat Swamp Church in Pitt County in 1913 when he purchased the lots at Main and Academy.<sup>9</sup>

In February 1913 Little purchased 600 acres, which was partly in Carolina Township of Pitt County and partly in Robersonville Township of Martin County, near Flat Swamp Church, for \$2,000.<sup>10</sup> 600 acres was a large farm for the 1910s, since the average size of a farm declined from 101.3 acres to 65.6 acres between 1900 and 1925.<sup>11</sup>

Little extended his interest in the tobacco industry beyond tobacco farming and was one of eleven stockholders of Robersonville Tobacco Redrying Company when it was chartered in 1920. The company's objectives were to buy and sell leaf tobacco wholesale and retail, to redry and rehandle tobacco in all forms and market at will, and to engage in the leaf tobacco business generally. Its authorized capital stock was \$100,000.<sup>12</sup>

William Joseph Little continued to live in the house which he built until his death in 1942. After that his son and daughter-in-law, I. M. Little and Ethel Bailey Little, lived there. I. M. died in 1961 and Ethel in 1975.<sup>13</sup> In 1979 the present owners, Thomas B. Brandon III and his wife Jane B. Brandon,<sup>14</sup> purchased the house from I. M. and Ethel Bailey Little's son and daughter.<sup>15</sup>

At the present time the W. J. Little House is being offered for sale by the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, Inc., on behalf of the owners. The house will be sold subject to protective covenants to be

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administered by the foundation. The restrictions will allow the buyer flexibility in the use of the property while protecting the structure from demolition, inappropriate exterior alterations or insensitive additions.

Architecturally the W. J. Little House is part of a collection of ambitious Classical Revival style houses born of eastern North Carolina's early-twentieth-century tobacco economy. In Robersonville the Roberson House facing it across North Main Street is similar, but there are others scattered throughout the eastern part of the state, mostly in towns but some in rural settings as well.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information provided to The Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, Inc. by Doris Little Wilson, a granddaughter of William Joseph Little. Verified in telephone interview by Doris Little Wilson to Margaret Long Stephenson, 9 July 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, The History of a Southern State: North Carolina, third edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 521.

<sup>3</sup> Francis M. Manning and W. H. Booker, Martin County History, vol. 2 (Williamston, N.C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1979), 116.

<sup>4</sup> Francis M. Manning and W. H. Booker, Martin County History, vol. 1 (Williamston, N.C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1977), 139.

<sup>5</sup> Martin County Deed Book XXXX, p. 409 and Martin County Deed Book E-1, p. 304.

<sup>6</sup> Doris Little Wilson telephone interview.

<sup>7</sup> Martin County Deed Book KKK, p. 437; Martin County Deed Book YYY, p. 155; and Martin County Plat Book 1, p. 266.

<sup>8</sup> Martin County Deed Book E-1, p. 42. See also Martin County Deed Book E-1, p. 448.

<sup>9</sup> Lefler and Newsome, 577.

<sup>10</sup> Manning and Booker, v. 2, 265-66.

<sup>11</sup> Doris Wilson Little telephone interview.

<sup>12</sup> Martin County Deed Book M-10, p. 44.

## **9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet

## **10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property approx. 1 acre

Quadrangle name Robersonville West

Quadrangle scale 1 : 24,000

UTM References

A	1   1   8	2   9   6	3   4   0	3   9   6   6	7   0   0
Zone	Easting	Northing			
C					
E					
G					

B					
Zone	Easting	Northing			
D					
F					
H					

Verbal boundary description and justification

See copy of deed and map with property outlined in red.

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

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state		code	county		code

## **11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Margaret Long Stephenson, Architectural Historian

organization Architectural Conservation Associates date July, 1985

street & number 301 East Broad Street telephone 919/398-3554

city or town Murfreesboro state North Carolina

## **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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date July 11, 1985

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

date

Attest:

Chief of Registration

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Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Newsome, Albert Ray. The History of a Southern State: North Carolina, third edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

Manning, Francis M. and Booker, W. H. Martin County History, vol. 1. Williamston, N.C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1977.

Manning, Francis M. and Booker, W. H. Martin County History, vol. 2. Williamston, N.C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1979.

Martin County Records. Deed Books. Martin County Governmental Center. Williamston, North Carolina.

Wilson, Doris Little. Telephone interview with Margaret Long Stephenson, 9 July 1985.

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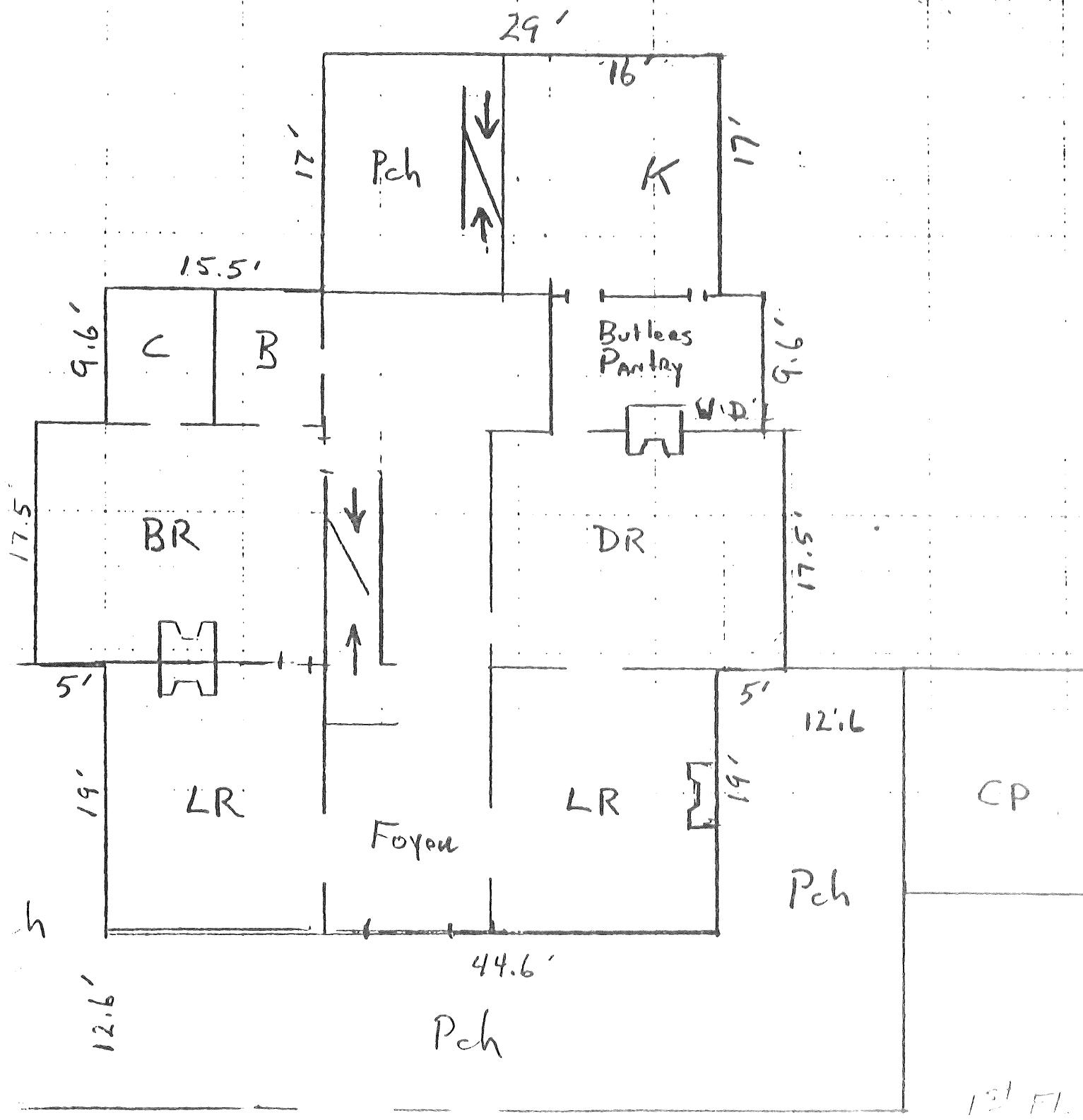
That certain tract or parcel of land and all improvements thereon located on the southwest corner of North Main Street and West Academy Street, in the Town of Robersonville, Robersonville Township, Martin County, State of North Carolina; bounded on the north by West Academy Street or U.S. Highway Nos. 64 and 13; bounded on the west by the residence lot of Linwood M. Purvis; bounded on the south by Southern Bank and Trust Company; and bounded on the east by North Main Street.

The above boundary description is from the current deed for the parcel of land which surrounds the house. It is approximately the same as the parcel purchased by W. J. Little in 1913 on which he built the house.

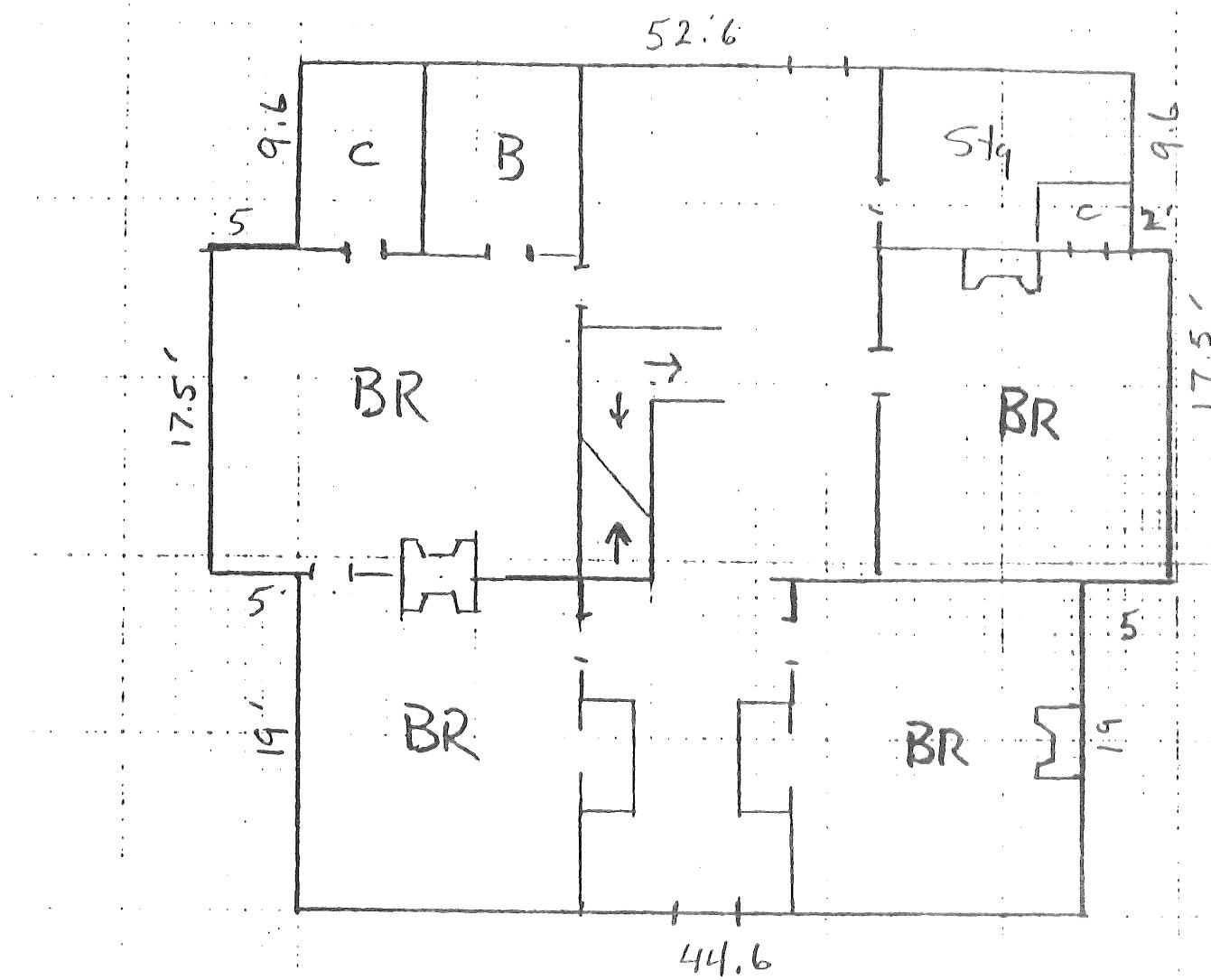
Little House  
Robersonville, NC  
5/3184

JP

not to scale



Little House  
Robersonville, NC  
5/3/84  
not to scale J.P.



2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

# TOWN OF ROBERSONVILLE

MARTIN COUNTY  
NORTH CAROLINA

1982

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000  
SCALE IN FEET

PREPARED BY RIVERS & ASSOCIATES, INC. GREENVILLE, NC

