

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

West Martin School

Oak City, Martin County, MT1088, Listed 01/25/2018
Nomination by Heather M. Slane & Cheri Szcodronski, hmwPreservation
Photographs by Heather M. Slane, hmwPreservation, October 2016



Main building, looking north



Main building – classroom, looking north

**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 West Martin School
other names/site number _____

2. Location

Street & number 402 South Cherry Street (South NC 125) **N/A** not for publication
city or town Oak City **N/A** vicinity
State North Carolina code NC county Martin code 117 zip code 27857

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 for 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.)
Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State or 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 or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other,
(explain:) _____
Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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 count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	0	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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education: school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education: education-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Brick

roof Rubber
other _____

Narrative Description

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

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** moved from its original location.
- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____
 Ethnic Heritage: African American _____
 Education _____

Period of Significance

1951-1970 _____

Significant Dates

1951, 1952, 1956, 1957 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

n/a _____

Cultural Affiliation

African American _____

Architect/Builder

Griffith, J. W. (architect) _____
 Hardison, J. T. & Son (contractor) _____

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

West Martin School
Name of Property

Martin County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 8.35 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

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 Heather M. Slane & Cheri Szcodronski
organization hmwPreservation date January 27, 2017
Street & number P. O. Box 355 telephone 336.270.1502
city or town Durham state NC zip code 27702

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 Martin County Board of Education
Street & number 300 North Watts Street telephone 252.792.1575
city or town Williamston state NC zip code 27892

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 listing. 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 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 1

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

Narrative Description:

The West Martin School is located on the east side of Oak City, in northwestern Martin County, approximately eighteen miles northwest of the county seat of Williamston. The school stands just south of the intersection of South Cherry Street (NC-125) and East Sixth Street. (Oak City is laid out on a grid that is rotated approximately 45-degrees west of due north. For the sake of description, the buildings and site will be described using the north-south and east-west orientation of the street grid, rather than true cardinal directions.)

The West Martin School complex includes four buildings: a 1951 high school building with 1956 addition, 1952 gymnasium, 1957 elementary building, and 1970 cafeteria. The 1951 high school building stands parallel to South Cherry Street and is accessed via an elongated circular driveway off of South Cherry Street with parking along the east and south elevations of the building. To its north, at the northeast corner of the parcel, stands the 1952 gymnasium with service spaces that wrap the west elevation of the building and connect to the north wing of the high school building. The 1957 elementary school building stands west of the gymnasium, parallel to East Sixth Street, and is accessed via an elongated circular drive on East Sixth Street. It is connected to the gymnasium via a metal-covered walkway. The 1970 cafeteria stands southwest of the elementary school building and west of the high school building, separated by a large grassy area. It is connected to both classroom buildings by metal-covered walkways. A driveway at the west edge of the parcel leads to the rear of the cafeteria building for deliveries.

The 8.35-acre parcel is level terrain, cleared of trees except for a row of trees east of the high school building, screening the school and parking area from South Cherry Street, and a similar row of trees south of the high school building, screening the parking areas adjacent to the south elevation of the building. A large grassy field occupies the space within the U-shape created by the four-building complex and extends across the entire south half of the parcel. It was likely used as play and athletic fields though no physical elements remain to indicate any specific use. A small paved area south of the cafeteria served as an outdoor basketball court. The school complex retains its semi-rural small-town context with low-density, single family housing to the north and west and open farm fields to the east and south.

1. West Martin School

1951; 1952; 1956

Contributing Building

The description begins with the 1951 high school building, describing the exterior, then the interior before proceeding in the same fashion to describe the 1956 agricultural addition and the 1952 gymnasium. Because there are multiple components to this building, the different areas are labeled with letters in the description and on the attached map.

1a. High School Building (1951)

The earliest portion of the West Martin School, the 1951 high school building, is a one-story, flat-roofed building that is five bays wide with the bays separated by projecting brick pilasters that support the deep

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 2

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

overhang of the roof. The building has a five-to-one common bond brick veneer with brick header-course sills beneath the metal-framed windows. Each of the five bays has a group of five original, four-light windows with the lower two lights being operable, hopper windows. The windows fill the entire width of the bay between the pilasters and extend all the way up to the roof overhang, occupying more than one-half of the wall surface. The east side of the building is further lit by a monitor that extends the full width of the roof, though with windows only on the façade (east elevation). The windows, five two-light windows in each bay, separated by projecting brick pilasters that align with those on the main level, have been painted over, partially to accommodate dropped ceilings on the interior that intersect the windows. The roof is covered with rubber roofing and has metal flashing, soffits, and fascia.

The south elevation is fully obscured by the 1956 agricultural addition. The west elevation is eleven bays wide and like the east elevation, bays are separated by projecting brick pilasters. Windows on this elevation are paired six-light windows with the bottom two lights being operable, pivoting sashes. Like the east elevation, the windows fill the entire width of each bay between the pilasters and extend all the way up to the roof overhang, with the six-light windows occupying approximately two-thirds of the wall surface. Larger windows on this elevation compensate for the lack of monitor windows.

A small office and restroom wing on the north elevation of the high school building is recessed from the façade of the high school and has a slightly lower roofline. It has the same five-to-one common bond brick veneer, flat roof with rubber roofing, and metal soffits and fascia. In lieu of grouped windows, it has six individual four-light, metal-framed windows, each with operable lower sashes and header-course brick sills. On the north end of the seven-bay-wide wing is a slightly recessed entrance bay with paired metal one-light doors with a one-light transom. The entrance is further sheltered by a projecting, flat-roofed canopy that is supported by the wall of the 1952 gymnasium on the north side and by angled metal poles on the south side.

The north and south elevations of the office wing are fully obscured by the high school building and gymnasium respectively. The west elevation is seven bays wide with the south four bays aligning with the east elevation of the wing and the north three bays extending to the north, resulting in an L-shaped wing. The south four bays feature two inset entrances, each with paired metal one-light doors with one-light transoms flanking the restrooms, each with replacement two-light metal casement windows replacing the original metal framed windows, which were closer in size to the classroom windows. The north three bays are utility and boiler rooms and include a four-light metal-framed window with brick sill on the south end, a louvered metal door in the middle, and an opening (likely a coal chute) on the north end that is covered with plywood.

The interior of the high school building features a double-loaded corridor that is aligned parallel to South Cherry Street with five classrooms on the east side of the hall, a classroom, library, and home economics room on the west side and restrooms and offices in a small wing that extends from the north elevation. The building features vinyl tile flooring, exposed concrete-block interior walls, and later dropped acoustic tile ceilings. Doors from the hallway to the classrooms are three light doors with two-light transoms and each classroom has at least one additional borrowed-light two-light window with pivoting sash and brick sill between the hallway and classroom to help transfer light and air through the building. Classrooms also have vinyl flooring, concrete-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 3

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

block walls, and dropped ceilings, though the original exposed roof decking and beams, and monitor windows in the east classrooms, are visible in some rooms where the dropped tiles have been removed. Metal-covered radiators extend along the exterior walls and original chalkboards and bulletin boards remain with wood trim and chalk rails. Several classrooms on the west side of the building have had some of the later floor tile removed, exposing original wood flooring below. The home economics room retains original wood wall and base cabinets, laminate countertops, and enameled sinks on its east wall and a stove with cabinetry on the north wall.

The north wing of the high school building was constructed in 1951, concurrent with the classroom portion of the building, and contains a teachers' lounge, office, bathrooms, closets, and a boiler room. The main hallway extends through this wing with the teachers' lounge, office, and short hall to the front entrance on the east side of the hall and three closets, flanked by short hallways that lead to boys' and girls' restrooms and exterior entrances on the west side. The wing extends the floor, wall, and ceiling treatments of the classrooms and hallways with vinyl tile floors, exposed concrete block walls, and later dropped acoustic tile ceilings. Bathrooms retain original terra cotta tile on the floors and lower two-thirds of the walls and original wood stall partitions.

1b. Agricultural Addition **1956**

Constructed in 1956 to provide more classroom space for agricultural, technical, and business classes, the south wing of the high school building includes a shop, two classrooms, a small office, and two closets, arranged asymmetrically, and increased the footprint of the school building by about one-third. The addition extended the design and finishes of the high school building with a five-to-one common bond brick veneer and metal-frame windows. The addition is three bays wide on the east elevation with each bay containing five four-light windows separated by projecting brick pilasters and a monitor roof extending the width of the addition with windows only on the east side. The windows have brick sills and fill the entire width of the bay between the pilasters and extend all the way up to the roof overhang, occupying more than one-half of the wall surface. Monitor windows have been painted over and the roof is covered with rubber roofing and has metal flashing, soffits, and fascia.

The south elevation of the addition is asymmetrical with the west side projecting approximately two-thirds as far as the east side. There is no fenestration on the east side of the elevation, but a pair of four-light windows is on the left, recessed side of the elevation. A later half-light metal door with matching sidelight and two-part transom is located on the west elevation of the south end of the addition, accessing the former shop classroom. The door is accessed by a concrete ramp and is sheltered by a low-pitched, metal-roofed gable supported by round metal posts. Fenestration on the four-bay-wide west elevation of the addition matches that on the original west elevation with paired six-light metal windows with operable bottom sashes. However, the windows are not separated by projecting brick pilasters. Instead the roof overhang is supported by metal braces. An entrance on the north end of the west elevation is inset and features paired metal doors with single vertical lights and a one-light transom.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 4

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

The interior of the addition continues the dimensions of the main hallway of the original building, with classrooms on the east and west sides of that space, though the space is divided into storage closets and an office instead of being an open hallway. A hallway that extends from the main hallway to the west elevation provides access to the business classroom on the west side of the building and to a single classroom on the east side of the building. The shop, office, and storage spaces are then accessed by going through either the business or the other classroom.

Finishes in the addition match those in the original building with three-light doors from the hallway with two-light transoms. Two-light borrowed light windows provide light from the classrooms to the interior storage spaces. The addition features tile floors in the classrooms and concrete floors in the shop area that have been covered with later carpeting. It has exposed concrete block walls, except in the hallway and east classroom where brick walls represent the original south wall of the main high school building, a dropped acoustic tile ceiling in the east classroom and shop and original exposed ceiling beams in the west business classroom. Classrooms retain metal-covered radiators on the exterior walls and wood-framed chalkboards and bulletin boards in each room. A low, carpet-covered portion of a wall remains between the south two bays of the shop, though the space was always a single open classroom.

1c. Gymtorium 1952

The large, front-gabled gymtorium is located on the north end of the original high school building, facing South Cherry Street to the east. So named because it included a combination gymnasium and auditorium space (namely a stage on one end of the gymnasium), the gymtorium also includes a kitchen and locker rooms. Nestled within the L-shape created by the boiler room on the north wing of the high school building, these additional service spaces, flush with the one-story boiler room, extend along the west elevation and wrap around the northwest corner of the gymtorium.

The exterior of the gymtorium is stylistically very similar to the adjacent high school building constructed only one year earlier. It has a five-to-one common bond brick veneer and projecting brick pilasters between the bays that support the deep overhangs of the roof. The façade has three pairs of metal doors, each with a two-light transom, separated by full-height brick pilasters, and sheltered by a flat-roofed metal canopy that shelters the concrete entrance stoops. Paired metal doors on the south elevation, sheltered by the canopy at the main entrance to the high school building, likely serve as the main exterior entrance to the gymtorium, as there is no sidewalk leading to the entrance doors on the east elevation.

The gymtorium is four bays deep on the north and south elevations with each bay containing groups of three windows in a six-twelve-six-light configuration. Windows are metal-framed windows with operable, pivoting lower sashes, like those in the high school building, have brick sills, and are covered with green fiberglass panels on the exterior. The west two bays of the north elevation have the lower two lights of each window obscured by the brick construction of the service wing that wraps the northwest corner of the gymtorium. The roof is covered with asphalt shingle and has deep overhangs with metal soffits and fascia.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 5

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

A one-story, flat-roofed service wing wraps around the northwest corner of the gymtorium, terminating at the boiler room at the northwest corner of the north wing of the high school building. This wing is six bays wide on the north elevation and four bays wide on the west elevation. It has a five-to-one common bond brick veneer and a flat rubber roof with metal soffits and fascia. Windows on this wing are two-light metal-framed windows with brick sills on the west elevation and the west three bays of the north elevation (lighting the locker rooms). The east three bays of the north elevation, lighting the kitchen, are three-light metal-framed windows. On the east elevation of this wing is a single metal door sheltered by a flat-roofed metal canopy on metal posts on a concrete slab that serves as a loading area for the kitchen. Paired metal doors on the north side of the gymtorium also open to this covered loading area.

The interior of the gymtorium features a 4050 square foot space on the east with a stage on its west end and service spaces wrapping around the west and northwest elevations. The gymtorium is accessed from the entrance hall of the high school building via a pair of metal doors, each with a single vertical light. The doors open to a small transverse hallway that leads to a stair to the stage on the west and to the open gymtorium on the east. The main gymtorium space has a tile floor, exposed concrete-block walls, and dropped ceiling, though original roof decking and trusses are visible above the ceiling. The stage stands approximately two-and-a-half feet above the floor level of the main gym floor and is accessed by wood steps on each side of the stage (as well as steps from adjacent halls that lead to the rear of the stage). The stage area features exposed brick walls where it abuts the original north wing of the high school (the boiler room) and concrete-block in the other areas. It has a tiled floor and metal-covered radiators along the rear (west) wall of the stage.

To the right (north) of the stage, paired doors open to a kitchen. The metal doors are located in an opening that has been partially infilled with wood, but likely originally allowed for a counter for serving lunch and receiving dirty dishes. The kitchen in turns opens to a hallway that accessed boys' and girls' locker rooms as well as a stair to the right rear corner of the stage. The kitchen has a vinyl-tiled floor, plaster-covered walls, and a plaster ceiling with later grid for a dropped ceiling. The rear hallway has a vinyl-tiled floor, exposed concrete block walls, and plaster ceilings. The locker rooms have terra cotta tile floors matching the bathrooms in the main building, exposed concrete block walls, plaster ceilings, metal doors, and metal-covered radiators on the exterior walls. The door to the stair of the stage is a three-light door that matches the classroom doors in the main building.

2. Elementary School Building

1957

Contributing Building

West of the gymtorium and fronting on East Sixth Street, the one-story, flat-roofed, elementary school building is seven bays wide with exterior details and interior finishes matching those on the original high school building. The façade is symmetrical with three bays on each side of a recessed entrance, the bays separated by projecting brick pilasters that support the deep overhangs of the flat roof. The building has a five-to-one common bond brick veneer, metal-framed windows, and a flat roof with rubber roofing and metal soffits and fascia. Six-light windows are arranged in groups of seven with operable lower sashes. Windows have concrete sills and occupy the full width between the pilasters and extend all the way to the roof, occupying nearly three-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 6

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

fourths of the wall surface. The entrance is recessed and sheltered by a lower, flat-roofed metal canopy on metal pole supports. It features paired metal doors, each with a single vertical light, and a four-light transom. Projecting brick pilasters flank the entrance and on each side are paired six-light metal-sash windows that light the principal's office and teachers' lounge. The upper portion of each window is sheltered by aluminum awnings.

The west elevation has a centered inset entrance that matches the main entrance with paired metal doors, each with a single vertical light, and a four-light transom. The south elevation is nine bays wide with narrow bays on the east and west ends, where the restrooms are located, typical classroom bays extending through the middle of the elevation, and an entrance bay located in the third bay from the west. Bays are separated by projecting brick pilasters that support the deep overhangs of the roof. The narrow bays on the east and west ends each feature three two-light windows at the top part of the wall, extending up to the roofline. Classroom bays have seven six-light windows with operable lower sashes, matching those on the north elevation. An entrance bay near the west end of the building features a single solid metal door with two-light transom and six-light sidelights, together occupying the full width of the bay between the pilasters. The east elevation matches the west elevation with a centered inset entrance that matches the main entrance with paired metal doors, each with a single vertical light, and a four-light transom.

The interior of the elementary school building is arranged along a double-loaded corridor that extends parallel to East Sixth Street. The corridor has exterior entrances on the east and west ends and a transverse hall that leads to the main entrance on the north elevation. It has six classrooms on the north side of the hall, three on each side of the central entrance hall, which is flanked by a principal's office and teachers' lounge. The south side of the hallway also has six classrooms with boys' and girls' restrooms on the west and east ends respectively. An exterior entrance between the west two classrooms leads to small hallways and two individual bathrooms, likely for younger grades that may need access to restrooms directly from their classroom or exterior play area.

The interior was not accessible, but was visible through the windows and transoms. It features exposed vinyl tile floors, some of which have been removed to expose concrete subfloor beneath, concrete-block walls, and exposed metal roof trusses throughout with fiberglass roof decking above. Classroom doors match those in the high school building and are solid wood doors with three lights at the top and operable two-light transoms. Each classroom also has a two-light borrowed light window between the hallway and classroom that allows for additional transfer of light and air through the building. Office doors are solid wood doors with two-light operable transoms. Classrooms have original wood-framed partitions along the hallway side of the classroom. The partitions have wood paneling on the bottom with chalkboards or bulletin boards above and coat storage on the rear. Other chalkboards and bulletin boards in the building also have wood frames and wood chalk rails. Metal-covered radiators extend along the exterior walls of each classroom.

3. Cafeteria

1969-1970

Contributing Building

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 7

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

The one-story cafeteria is located southwest of the elementary school building and west of the main high school building. The building has a running bond brick veneer and a low-pitched side-gabled roof with rubber roofing and metal soffits and fascia. Windows are one-over-one metal-framed windows with brick header-course lintels and soldier-course sills. Projecting brick pilasters flank each bay and support the shallow roof overhang. At the base of the exterior wall is an inset header course that rests on a slightly projecting brick base that, in turn, rests on the brick foundation.

The north elevation, which has the main entrance, is five bays wide with four windows on the east end and the entrance near the west end. The entrance features paired metal doors, each with a single vertical light. It has a single-light blind transom and is flanked by two-light windows over a solid metal panel. The upper pane of each window is a large fixed window with an operable hopper window below. The east elevation is four bays wide with two windows in the center of the elevation and exterior doors on the outside bays. The doors are solid metal doors with one-light transoms. The south elevation has four bays that align with the east four bays of the north elevation. Each contains a single one-over-one, metal-framed window, but the west bay has a single metal door with one-light transom and one-light sidelight over a solid metal panel. The two-bay west elevation is largely obscured by a brick lattice that screens the dumpster, but has a single metal door on the south end and a metal door with blind metal transom and sidelight on the north end.

The interior of the cafeteria features a large dining area on the east end with kitchen and service spaces on the west end and a small lobby on the north side. It has vinyl-tiled flooring in the lobby and dining area with terra cotta tile in the kitchen and service areas. It has exposed concrete block walls throughout, dropped acoustic-tiled ceilings, and metal-covered radiators on the north and south exterior walls. A solid wood door on the west wall of the dining space leads to the kitchen. Just south of the door is a solid-panel window with metal apron that opens to access the dishwashing area. The same wood doors access restrooms and dry storage.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 8

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

Statement of Significance:

The 1951 West Martin School is significant under National Register Criterion A for education and ethnic heritage as a segregation-era high school in Martin County constructed to serve the African American population of the county, providing education in grades one through twelve. West Martin School served the western, rural part of Martin County including residents of Oak City, Hamilton, and Hassell and the surrounding communities, all the way to the north and west county line. As a result, it was one of only three African American high schools in Martin County and is the only extant African American high school in the western region of the county. The school represents an era of African American school construction in the 1950s through the desegregation period of the late 1960s.

The school is also significant under National Register Criterion C for architecture as a highly intact Modern-style brick school complex for African Americans. West Martin School was the first and only school complex to be constructed for African American students in the northwest part of Martin County, replacing earlier one- and two-room frame schools throughout the region. Further, the use of the Modern style is illustrative of statewide trends in school design during the mid-twentieth century and is representative of the work of architect J. W. Griffith Jr. who designed numerous schools, gymnasiums, and school additions in Martin County in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1951 main building, the 1956 addition, and the 1957 elementary building were all constructed with low-profile flat roofs and large, grouped metal-framed windows. The 1952 gymnasium features a front-gabled form with projecting brick pilasters on the façade that emphasize the verticality of the gymnasium in contrast to the horizontality of the classroom buildings.

The period of significance extends from the school's construction in 1951 to 1970, when the last class of high school students graduated from the school.

Historic and Educational Context:

When Martin County was founded in 1774, there were no schools located within its borders, and education was obtained only through private tutors or boarding schools.¹ Private schools became available for white students in the early 1800s. Private schools for African American children followed much later; the Butler Institute opened in 1873, the Higgs' Industrial Institute (later Parmele Industrial Institute) opened in 1909, and the Roanoke Institute (later Roanoke Seminary) operated around this time as well, closing its doors in 1911.²

Public schools were first established when the state's common school law passed in 1839. The law established joint state and local funding for public schools and required counties to be divided into school districts "containing not more than six square miles, but having regard for the number of white children in each."³

¹ Francis M. Manning and W.H. Booker, *Religion and Education in Martin County, 1774-1974* (Williamston, NC: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1974), 182.

² The opening date for the Roanoke Institute/Seminary is unknown. Ibid, 205-206, 249, 265-266.

³ Ibid, 213; E. Michael Latta, "Department of Public Instruction," *NCpedia*, 2006, www.ncpedia.org/public-instruction-department (accessed January 2017).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 9

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

However, public education did not gain much traction until after the Civil War. North Carolina's Constitution of 1868 called for a "general and uniform" public school system, and an 1875 amendment mandated their segregation.⁴ Records of the earliest schools were lost in an 1884 courthouse fire, but, by that time, there were thirty-seven white and twenty-four African American public schools operating in Martin County.⁵ Colored District No. 19 served Goose Nest Township. Although the exact location of this first building is unknown, it was located in Oak City. There were 125 school age children (ages 6-21) in the district in 1885, and the school was allocated \$141.25 to operate that year.⁶ Since there was no transportation provided, there were numerous schools to ensure they were located within walking distance of their student populations.⁷ The number of schools grew to fifty-one white and thirty-three African American by the early 1900s.⁸ These early schools were one-room, ungraded schools in which one teacher taught reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and arithmetic during a three-month term.⁹

Although the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision reinforced the concept of "separate but equal," equality was never actually achieved by this decision and clear disparities between white and black schools remained. After the turn of the twentieth century, state regulations began to improve education in Martin County by lengthening terms to six months, providing transportation to school as roads were improved, consolidating one-room schools into graded schools, and adding high schools.¹⁰ In 1912, a local newspaper reported twenty-three students attending high school, and that number increased to 400 by 1926. However, only ten of the 400 high school students were African American, and they attended the only black high school in the county, Parmele Colored School.¹¹ During this time, Martin County's African American population also benefitted from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which provided grants for at least seven Rosenwald Schools throughout the county, including the county's second black high school, Williamston Colored School, completed in 1931.¹²

By the 1923-1924 school year, there remained significant disparities between African American schools and their white counterparts. There were thirty-one rural white schools and twenty-six rural African American

⁴ Benjamin R. Justesen and Scott Matthews, "Public Education - Part 3: The First Graded Schools, the State Constitution of 1868, and Legal Segregation," NCpedia, 2006, www.ncpedia.org (accessed July 19, 2016); Jeffrey J. Crow, et al, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, revised second edition (Raleigh, NC: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2011), 156; John E. Batchelor, *Race and Integration in North Carolina: From Segregation to Desegregation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 8.

⁵ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 213, 243-265.

⁶ Ibid, 260.

⁷ Ibid, 217.

⁸ Ibid, 243-265.

⁹ Ibid, 214-215.

¹⁰ Ibid, 217, 280-282; Martin County Board of Education Minutes, July 3, 1919, Martin Memorial Library, Williamston, NC.

¹¹ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 280; "Financial Report for 1923-1924," Martin County Board of Education Minutes; "Preliminary Statistical Report, Martin County, Colored Schools, 1926-27," Martin County Board of Education Minutes.

¹² Manning, *Religion and Education*, 266; Joanna McKnight, "Williamston Colored School," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, 2012.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 10

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

schools throughout the county. Although the number of schools was relatively equal, white schools totaled 110 classrooms for 3367 students while black schools had only fifty-four for 3244 students. African American schools were also severely underfunded compared to white schools. The school board allocated \$698.78 for supplies and \$133.83 for twenty libraries for white schools, but only \$86.65 for supplies and \$8.00 for one library for African American schools. Likewise, the county built three new white schools (a total of twenty-four classrooms) at a cost of \$71,000, while only \$3000 was spent on one new black school with three classrooms. Three white schools were repaired for \$2800, and six black schools were repaired with just \$73.64. Twelve white schools had a term of eight months or more, while only two African American schools did, and eight white schools included high school grades, while only one African American school did.¹³

In 1923, the Martin County Board of Education purchased land from “Mr. Daniel” for a new school for African American children in Oak City.¹⁴ In March 1924, the school board discussed an application for a three-room school at Oak City, for which the local community would pay \$500.¹⁵ Later that year, Board of Education member B.M. Worsley and Superintendent Pope were appointed to secure the lowest bids for the school.¹⁶ The Board approved the purchase of land for the school for \$600.00 in 1924 and directed the superintendent to seek a loan for the remaining funds needed in 1925.¹⁷ J.C.H. Johnson served as the builder for the school.¹⁸

To counteract lingering challenges to public education following the Great Depression, the 1931 and 1933 School Machinery Act transferred funding and control of schools from the counties to the state. As a result, Martin County’s fifty-one white and thirty-two African American school districts were reorganized into six districts, centered around the high schools.¹⁹ District No. 3 was centered around Oak City in Goose Nest Township. The white schools were reorganized relatively quickly, with all the Goose Nest Township schools consolidated. Meanwhile, the African American consolidations took much longer, with Bower No. 17 reassigned to Oak City in 1935, Jones No. 21 in 1952, and Salsbury No. 18 in 1965.²⁰

A 1935 report from the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction found that only about forty percent of African American children in North Carolina had access to a high school. Additionally, none offered a full four years of high school education, and most children could not attend because transportation or boarding to

¹³ “Colored Committeemen for 1923-1924,” Martin County Board of Education Minutes; “Financial Report for 1923-1924,” Martin County Board of Education Minutes.

¹⁴ It is not known why the earlier school serving Colored District No. 19 was replaced with a new building in the 1920s or how the Board of Education disposed of the original building. The deed for this purchase or Mr. Daniel’s full name could not be found. Manning, *Religion and Education*, 260.

¹⁵ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, March 3, 1924.

¹⁶ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, August 4, 1924.

¹⁷ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, September 1, 1924, and February 2, 1925.

¹⁸ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, July 13, 1925.

¹⁹ Benjamin R. Justesen and Scott Matthews, “Public Education: Part 4: Expansion, Consolidation, and the School Machinery Act,” *NCpedia*, 2006, www.ncpedia.org/public-education-part-4-expansion (accessed January 2017); Manning, 283.

²⁰ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 283-284.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 11

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

attend the school were cost prohibitive.²¹ By 1949, Parmele Colored School and Williamston Colored School remained the only high schools serving the county's African American population.²² High school students in the Oak City, Hassell, Hamilton, Robersonville, Everetts, and Parmele communities were transported to Parmele Colored School, a distance of up to twelve miles. With only one bus to collect all the students, long commutes often kept students away from home until late into the night. Concerned about long bus rides, safety, and the education of their children, a group of parents, community leaders, and citizens formed a coalition to establish a high school in the northwestern region of the county. The group approached the County Superintendent of Schools, Mr. James C. Manning, but were initially met with resistance. Manning directed them to the State Board of Education where their petition for a high school received a public hearing. The group pleaded their case before the state, eventually gaining approval and support for an additional high school to be constructed.²³ At a November 2, 1949, special meeting to discuss high school education for black residents in the northwestern section of the county, the Board of Education elected to add an additional black high school at Oak City and to request state funding for its construction.²⁴ At the January 1951 meeting, they appointed a committee including the Superintendent and a board member, Mr. Edmonson, to seek the purchase of five acres for the school. The board also authorized the architect, J.W. Griffith, to prepare plans for the school at a cost of no more than \$94,000.²⁵ In March, they purchased land adjacent to the existing Oak City Colored School at the corner of NC Highway 125 and East 6th Street from Eva and Fernando "Nan" Council.²⁶ The Councils were prominent local African American farmers who had eight children.²⁷ Bidding took place at the April meeting, and J.T. Hardison & Son was awarded the general contract for \$68,796, Fountain and Patterson was awarded the electrical contract for \$3975, Corey Plumbing Company was awarded the plumbing contract for \$4824, W.E. Bolton and Sons of Raleigh was selected for the heating contract for \$9500.²⁸

A new brick high school was constructed alongside the 1920s frame elementary school in time for the 1952-1953 school year.²⁹ The new school included six classrooms, a coal boiler room, two bathrooms, administrative offices, and storage spaces.³⁰ The school operated on a nine-month term, although the school days were shortened to end at 1:30 pm during the harvest season so students could help bring in the crops on their family

²¹ N.C. Newbold, et al., "Report of the Governor's Commission for the Study of Problems in the Education of Negroes in North Carolina" (Raleigh, NC: State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1935), 30-42.

²² Manning, *Religion and Education*, 290-291.

²³ Study List Application.

²⁴ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, November 2, 1949.

²⁵ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, January 9, 1951.

²⁶ "Eva and Nan Council to Martin County Board of Education," Martin County Register of Deeds, Williamston, NC.

²⁷ Ancestry.com, *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002), www.ancestry.com (accessed January 2017).

²⁸ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, April 2, 1951, and April 20, 1951.

²⁹ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 260.

³⁰ Study List Application.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 12

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

farms. It served students in grades nine through twelve from Oak City, Hassell, and Hamilton.³¹ That December, the school board approved the addition of a combined auditorium and gymnasium to the school, which included a kitchen, locker rooms, and storage.³² In February 1953, J.W. Griffith presented his plans for the addition, and bids opened for the project in March. J.T. Hardison & Son was again selected for the general contract for \$45,708, Fountain and Patterson were again awarded the electrical contract for \$2000, and D.R. Suggs was awarded the heating contract for \$3596.³³ The school's first graduation took place that spring and included at least seven students.³⁴

Around the same time the Oak City Colored School was being built, racial tension began to increase in Martin County. Herman Taylor, an attorney from Raleigh, submitted a petition to the Board of Education in 1951 "asking that the race discrimination practiced in the schools be discontinued." The Board of Education directed the Superintendent to discuss the matter with the county attorney and advise the board at a future meeting.³⁵ A few months later, the Superintendent read the response to the petition, the details of which were not included in the meeting minutes. However, as no changes were made, it can be deduced that the board elected to continue racial segregation in the schools at that time.³⁶ The following year, the Hamilton Colored School's Parent Teacher Association submitted a petition requesting the same course of study for both white and African American students, as well as a list of building improvements. Since the superintendent was directed to answer the petition, and it is not mentioned again in future meeting minutes, it was likely denied.³⁷

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to end legal segregation in public schools did not immediately impact Martin County. Most of the white population of North Carolina strongly opposed the idea of desegregation, and the Supreme Court did not include a mandate for implementation of school desegregation in its decision. Therefore, for many years, North Carolina's governors carefully navigated between the opposing sides.³⁸ The Martin County Board of Education also struggled with the idea of ending segregation in schools. At their May 1954 meeting, they "discussed at length the problem of what to do about the Robersonville building in the face of the condition, with the elimination of segregation." The minutes note that no decision was reached, and at the time no changes were made.³⁹ When Frank Everett, Martin County's representative to the NC General Assembly, asked that the board appoint a Study Committee "to study the segregation issue" at the

³¹ A 1941 mandate by the NC General Assembly extended school terms to nine months and added the twelfth grade to high schools. Martin County Board of Education Minutes, August 2, 1952; Manning, *Religion and Education*, 289-290; Study List Application.

³² Martin County Board of Education Minutes, December 3, 1951; Study List Application.

³³ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, February 4, 1952, and March 4, 1952.

³⁴ Study List Application.

³⁵ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, August 6, 1951.

³⁶ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, October 1, 1951.

³⁷ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, February 4, 1952.

³⁸ John E. Batchelor, *Race and Integration in North Carolina: From Segregation to Desegregation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 30-39; Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, 2nd ed. (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2011), 169-170.

³⁹ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, May 24, 1954.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 13

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

urging of Attorney General W.B. Rodman, the board agreed to consider the request, but it doesn't appear that a committee was ever actually formed.⁴⁰

In August 1954, Governor Thomas Umstead established the Governor's Special Advisory Committee on Education, known as the Pearsall Committee after Thomas Pearsall, its chairman and a former member of the North Carolina House of Representatives.⁴¹ The committee reported that "the mixing of the races in the public schools cannot be accomplished and should not be attempted."⁴² In response, the Pupil Assignment Act allowed local school boards the authority to assign pupils to specific schools, which effectively ensured a lengthy desegregation process without outright defiance of the *Brown* decision.⁴³ The Martin County Board of Education adopted the pupil assignment plan outlined in the Pearsall Plan.⁴⁴

In 1955, the Martin County Board of Education elected to add a Commercial Department at the West Martin School, as well as building an agricultural wing with two classrooms and a shop for automotive classes and woodworking.⁴⁵ Bids were taken for the addition at the July 1955 meeting. East Carolina Construction Company from Dunn was awarded the bid for \$22,137, and J.W. Griffith again served as the architect.⁴⁶ The previous year, the board had sent a list of long-range improvements to the state's education office that included a new elementary school building in Oak City.⁴⁷ In September 1956, the board held a special meeting to review bids for the new twelve-classroom building. J.W. Griffith remained the architect, East Carolina Construction Company received the general contract for \$88,139, Dick's Electric Company from Wilson received the electrical contract for \$3831, Cauley and Pitt from Kinston received the plumbing contract for \$5470, and W.M. Wiggins from Wilson received the heating contract for \$16,670.⁴⁸ Later that year, the Oak City Colored School was renamed the West Martin School.⁴⁹

The United States Supreme Court passed its implementation decree for desegregation of the schools in 1955, and North Carolina complied by continuing its voluntary desegregation processes.⁵⁰ Many requests for reassignment were initially denied by the Martin County Board of Education, and it wasn't until 1965 that

⁴⁰ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, 1955.

⁴¹ Batchelor, *Race and Education*, 30-39; Crow, *African Americans*, 169-170.

⁴² Batchelor, *Race and Education*, 39.

⁴³ Ibid, 41-42; Crow, *African Americans*, 170.

⁴⁴ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 292; "Assignment Policy, Martin County Board of Education," Martin County Board of Education Minutes.

⁴⁵ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, May 2, 1955; Study List Application.

⁴⁶ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, July 11, 1955.

⁴⁷ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, April 12, 1954.

⁴⁸ Martin County Board of Education, September 26, 1956; Study List Application.

⁴⁹ Renaming the school followed a trend of renaming "colored" schools in the county. The previous year, Robersonville Colored School was renamed East End School and Everetts Colored School was renamed North Everetts School. Martin County Board of Education, August 22, 1955, and November 19, 1956.

⁵⁰ Batchelor, *Race and Education*, 43-44; Crow, *African Americans*, 172.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 14

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

applications for twenty-two African American students to attend previously all-white schools were approved.⁵¹ As a result of similar activity statewide, the Pearsall Committee recommended repeal of state mandated public schools and compulsory attendance requirements, the establishment of state grants for private school tuition assistance and a legal assistance fund to support school boards engaged in integration lawsuits, known as the Pearsall Plan – all in an effort to maintain voluntary desegregation by providing white citizens an opportunity to avoid attending school with African American students.⁵² The Martin County Board of Education discussed the Pearsall Plan and unanimously decided, “the Board of Education of Martin County, after much thought and study, endorses the Pearsall Plan and believes that it is in the best interest of all the children in Martin County.”⁵³

In 1965, elementary students from Salsbury Elementary School were sent to West Martin School as part of a consolidation plan in the county.⁵⁴ By the following year, overcrowding led to the use of four mobile classroom trailers to house the seventh and eighth grades.⁵⁵

In spite of desegregation being ordered in the 1950s, it was the 1970s before changes came to Martin County schools. The county’s total desegregation plan was adopted by the Board of Education at their February 16, 1969, meeting and was implemented during the 1970-1971 school year.⁵⁶ The fifty-five students in West Martin’s last segregated high school class graduated in 1970.⁵⁷ Desegregation took several years, beginning with black students in selected grades being sent to white schools in the county. By 1974, West Martin School was in operation as a fully integrated elementary and junior high school.⁵⁸ The elementary building continued to serve elementary-age students, while the high school building was used for sixth through eighth grades.⁵⁹ To help accommodate desegregation, the West Martin School also received funding for cafeteria improvements in 1972 and additional renovations in 1974.⁶⁰

The elementary school building remained in use until 2001 when students were transferred to Edna Andrews Elementary School in Hamilton. Around that time, a new junior high school was built in Robersonville, so the high school building was converted for use as the Project Success Academy, an alternative high school. The West Martin School was permanently closed to students in 2007 when the Project Success Academy moved to the Williamston school district. It has been a community center since 2013.

⁵¹ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 293; Martin County Board of Education Minutes, 1955-1965.

⁵² Batchelor, *Race and Education*, 44-45, 51-54; Crow, *African Americans*, 172-173.

⁵³ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, September 4, 1956.

⁵⁴ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 284.

⁵⁵ The mobile classrooms have since been removed. Study List Application.

⁵⁶ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 293.

⁵⁷ Study List Application.

⁵⁸ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 290.

⁵⁹ Study List Application.

⁶⁰ Manning, *Religion and Education*, 288-289.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 15

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

Architectural Context:

School design and construction in Martin County was representative of statewide trends in the early and mid-twentieth century. Early schools for both white and black students, constructed from the mid-1800s through the early 1900s, tended to be small one- or two-room frame structures. These included a number of frame schools constructed with money from the Rosenwald Fund, including the 1914 Hamilton School (203 E. Waldo Street, Hamilton) and the c. 1926 Burrough School (2386 Bonnie Best Road, Williamston).

However, by the 1920s, with school consolidation and construction taking place throughout the state, brick became the preferred material for schools and school design itself became more formalized with the State Department of Public Instruction reviewing school plans and encouraging county boards of education to utilize architects who could create clear plans and specifications.⁶¹ Architect Eric G. Flanagan, a native of Henderson, North Carolina, “became a well-known and favored school architect in northeastern North Carolina,” designing a number of schools in Martin County including the 1925 Bear Grass School, the 1929 Robersonville High School, the 1929 Williamston High School, the 1930-31 Williamston Colored School, 1936 Jamesville High School, and the 1936 Robersonville Graded School.⁶² His preference for Colonial Revival forms and details dominated the institutional architecture of the county in the 1920s and 1930s.

Flanagan’s designs for both white schools in the 1920s employed Colonial Revival elements. The 1925 Bear Grass School (6344 East Bear Grass Road) (NR 2005), a one-story, U-plan brick school has Colonial Revival details including double-hung windows, parapeted gables topped with limestone, and arched entrance bays. The 1929 Robersonville High School (601 W. Academy Street, Robersonville) and Williamston High School (600 N. Smithwick Street, Williamston), are nearly identical, indicating that they may have been constructed from the same plans. Each is a two-story brick building with a ten-bay-wide façade and classical detailing including a cast concrete cornice, pilasters between the center four bays, and cast concrete door surrounds and decorative panels on the projecting entrance bays.

Also constructed in the Colonial Revival style, Flanagan’s designs for the 1930-31 Williamston Colored School and the 1936 Robersonville Graded School are smaller in scale and less decorative in ornamentation than the white schools constructed just a few years earlier. The first brick school constructed for African Americans in the county, the Williamston Colored School (705 Washington Street, Williamston) (NR 2014) is a one-story, H-plan Rosenwald School that utilized Spanish Revival and Colonial Revival elements, including a sculpted parapet on the projecting entrance bay and decorative brick panels on the side wings. The National Register nomination for the Williamston Colored School notes that the school “reflects the trend of designing educational institutions in the neoclassical mode, however, when compared with school buildings historically constructed or used by black children, it is larger in size and more distinguished in detail and material.”⁶³ The Robersonville Graded School (1121 Third St. Extension, Robersonville) is a one-story T-plan school with restrained Neoclassical detailing, characteristic of early twentieth-century public schools in the state. It has a

⁶¹ Bear Grass School National Register Nomination, 3.

⁶² Bear Grass School National Register Nomination, 13.

⁶³ Williamston Colored School National Register Nomination, 19.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 16

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

double-loaded corridor with the auditorium extending from the rear to create the T-plan. Classical details include a projecting entrance bay with arched, recessed entrance featuring a double-leaf door and deep transom.

Architect J. W. Griffith, Jr. began work in Greenville, North Carolina about 1930 and by the late 1940s had prepared plans for a number of commercial buildings and school additions in and around Greenville.⁶⁴ During the same period, in 1949, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the School Plant Construction, Improvement, and Repair Fund, under which the state authorized the use of state bonds to fund public school construction, “an action that led to a significant wave of school construction during the decade that followed.”⁶⁵ Under the new legislation, “money allocated to counties could not be used to build additions to structurally unsafe schools. The board also directed that ‘there shall be a just and equitable expenditure of funds within the counties as between the races.’”⁶⁶ Thus, African American schools throughout the state, including those in Martin County, were updated and expanded, “complete with the amenities that white schools already had, such as indoor plumbing and rooms dedicated to specialized use.”⁶⁷

In 1951, Griffith was authorized by the Martin County School Board to prepare plans for the West Martin School, his assignment coinciding with a preference for the Modern style in educational buildings. Nationally popular for the clean lines and unadorned facades that were able to provide light-filled interiors, the Modern style often utilized steel framing or load-bearing concrete-block construction, which led to lower construction costs than previous load-bearing brick structures. In North Carolina specifically, the School of Design at N. C. State University played an integral role in the promotion of Modern Architecture as the most appropriate style for new school construction. In October 1949, the school joined with the State Board of Education to hold a workshop for architects focused on the upcoming statewide school-building campaign.⁶⁸ “At these workshops, architects were encouraged to use glass for improved natural lighting, reduce ornamentation, and integrate the landscape, site, and building, principles that formed the foundation of modernism.”⁶⁹ Further, in 1949, Edward “Terry” Waugh of the School of Design became supervisor of the state’s Office of School House Planning, thereby reinforcing the architecture school’s connection to educational building design in North Carolina.⁷⁰

Griffith’s design for the West Martin School was typical of Modern school construction of the era with a brick veneer over steel frame construction, a flat roof, and large groups of metal-framed windows that provided the maximum amount of light from the northeast and southwest elevations. A partial monitor roof provided additional light to the classrooms that faced northeast. Transoms above the doorways and borrowed light windows between the classrooms and hallways furthered the transfer of light and air throughout the building.

⁶⁴ East Carolina University Libraries Collection Guides. James W. Griffith, Jr. Architectural Records, 1930-1967. <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0803#container>. Accessed 24 January 2017.

⁶⁵ Mitchell, “Hillside Park High School”, 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 20.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 20.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 17

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

The 1956 agricultural addition and the 1957 elementary school building, both also designed by Griffith, repeated these conventions. Griffith's design for the 1952 gymnasium breaks with the tradition of flat roofs on Modern-style structures and instead employs a front-gabled form. While the grouped metal-frame windows on the side elevations of the gymnasium are typical of front-gabled and flat-roofed gymnasiums alike, the façade of the front-gabled building features projecting brick pilasters that separate the entrance bays and extend all the way to the roofline, lending a verticality to the building that is reminiscent of religious buildings.

Members of the Martin County Board of Education were no doubt pleased with Griffith's designs as he was commissioned to prepare plans for additions to schools throughout the county in the 1950s and 1960s. School board minutes indicate that in 1956, the same year he designed the agricultural addition to the West Martin School, he was responsible for the addition of a stage and dressing rooms to the Hayes auditorium (the Williamston Colored School was renamed E. J. Hayes School), as well as the addition of a home economics room to the Robersonville High School and a foyer and storage rooms for the Robersonville Gymnasium.⁷¹

Records at East Carolina University libraries indicate that Griffith also created drawings for a gymnasium at Bear Grass (dated 1954) and for the Rodgers Elementary (dated 1961), both of which continue his Modernist aesthetic. The 1955 Modern-style gymnasium at the Bear Grass School is less decorative than his gymnasium for the West Martin School, a flat-roofed, concrete block box faced with five-to-one common bond brick and obscured by a one-story, entrance wing that extends the full width of the façade and wraps around the left elevation. The 1962 Rodgers Elementary School is very similar in design to the West Martin School with the façade featuring grouped metal windows that cover nearly the full surface of the wall and are separated by projecting brick pilasters that support the deep overhangs of the flat roof. School offices are located between the classrooms and gymnasium, which is perhaps more overtly Modern in design than the West Martin School gymnasium. It features grouped metal-framed windows on the upper portion of the walls, several of which serve as transoms for the paired entrance doors below. The flat roof has deep overhangs supported by heavy purlins.

In addition to the Bear Grass Gymnasium and Rodgers Elementary School, records indicate that from 1949-60 Griffith designed additions to schools throughout the county including Oak City School; Robersonville Elementary, High School, and Colored High School; and Williamston White Elementary School, Colored Elementary School, and High School, though it is unclear whether all of the additions were constructed.⁷² It is clear however, that school design in Martin County shifted from a Colonial Revival aesthetic that dominated school construction in the 1920s and 1930s to the Modern style, and specifically the work of J. W. Griffin Jr., in the 1950s and early 1960s. The West Martin School is illustrative of both the shift to and the continued use of the Modern style throughout mid-century and through the period of desegregation.

⁷¹ Martin County Board of Education Minutes, September 4, 1956.

⁷² East Carolina University Libraries Collection Guides.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9 Page 18

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

Bibliography

Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002. www.ancestry.com.

Batchelor, John E. *Race and Integration in North Carolina: From Segregation to Desegregation*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015.

Crow, Jeffrey J., Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley. *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, 2nd ed. Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2011.

East Carolina University Libraries Collection Guides. James W. Griffith, Jr. Architectural Records, 1930-1967. <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0803#container>. Accessed 24 January 2017.

Justesen, Benjamin R. and Scott Matthews. "Public Education: Part 4: Expansion, Consolidation, and the School Machinery Act." *NCpedia*. 2006. www.ncpedia.org/public-education-part-4-expansion.

Latta, Michael. "Department of Public Instruction." *NCpedia*. 2006. www.ncpedia.org/public-instruction-department.

Manning, Francis M. and W.H. Booker. *Religion and Education in Martin County, 1774-1974*. Williamston, NC: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1974.

Martin County Board of Education Minutes, Martin Memorial Library, Williamston, NC.

Martin County Register of Deeds, Williamston, NC.

McKnight, Joanna. "Williamston Colored School." Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. 2014.

Newbold, N.C., et al. "Report of the Governor's Commission for the Study of Problems in the Education of Negroes in North Carolina." Raleigh, NC: State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1935.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 10 Page 19

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

Additional UTM references:

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

1. Latitude: 35.960716 Longitude: -77.299212

Verbal Boundary Description:

The National Register boundary is shown by a black line on the accompanying map, drawn at a 1"=200' scale, which is all of tax parcel #1001065.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated parcel is the 8.35 acres historically associated with the school.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number PHOTOS Page 20

West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

PHOTOGRAPHS:

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Property Name: West Martin School

County and State: Martin County, North Carolina

Photographer: Heather M. Slane

Date: October 2016

Location of Negatives: State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina

1. West Martin School – Main Building
facing north
2. West Martin School – Main Building
facing southwest
3. West Martin School – Main Building
facing west
4. West Martin School – Gymtorium
facing west
5. West Martin School – Gymtorium
facing southeast
6. West Martin School – Main Building
facing east
7. West Martin School – Main Building
facing northeast
8. West Martin School – Main Building
facing north
9. West Martin School – Elementary Building
facing southwest
10. West Martin School – Elementary Building
facing east

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number PHOTOS Page 21 West Martin School
Martin County, North Carolina

11. West Martin School – Elementary Building
facing west
12. West Martin School – Elementary Building & Cafeteria
facing south
13. West Martin School – Cafeteria
facing west
14. West Martin School – Main Building - Hallway
facing south
15. West Martin School – Main Building – Typical Classroom
facing southeast
16. West Martin School – Main Building – Library
facing north
17. West Martin School – Main Building – Home Economics Room
facing north
18. West Martin School – Main Building – Hallway
facing west
19. West Martin School – Main Building – Classroom
facing north
20. West Martin School – Gymtorium
facing northeast
21. West Martin School – Gymtorium
facing west
22. West Martin School – Elementary Building - Classroom
facing north
23. West Martin School – Cafeteria
facing southeast

West Martin High School
402 South Cherry Street (NC 125)
Oak City, Martin County, NC

- 1a. Main Building
- 1b. Addition
- 2. Gymnasium
- 3. Elementary Building
- 4. Cafeteria

Site Plan and National Register Photo Key
Not to Scale

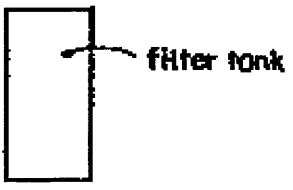
1 < Photo View

N

344'
PROPERTY LINE

507'
PROPERTY LINE

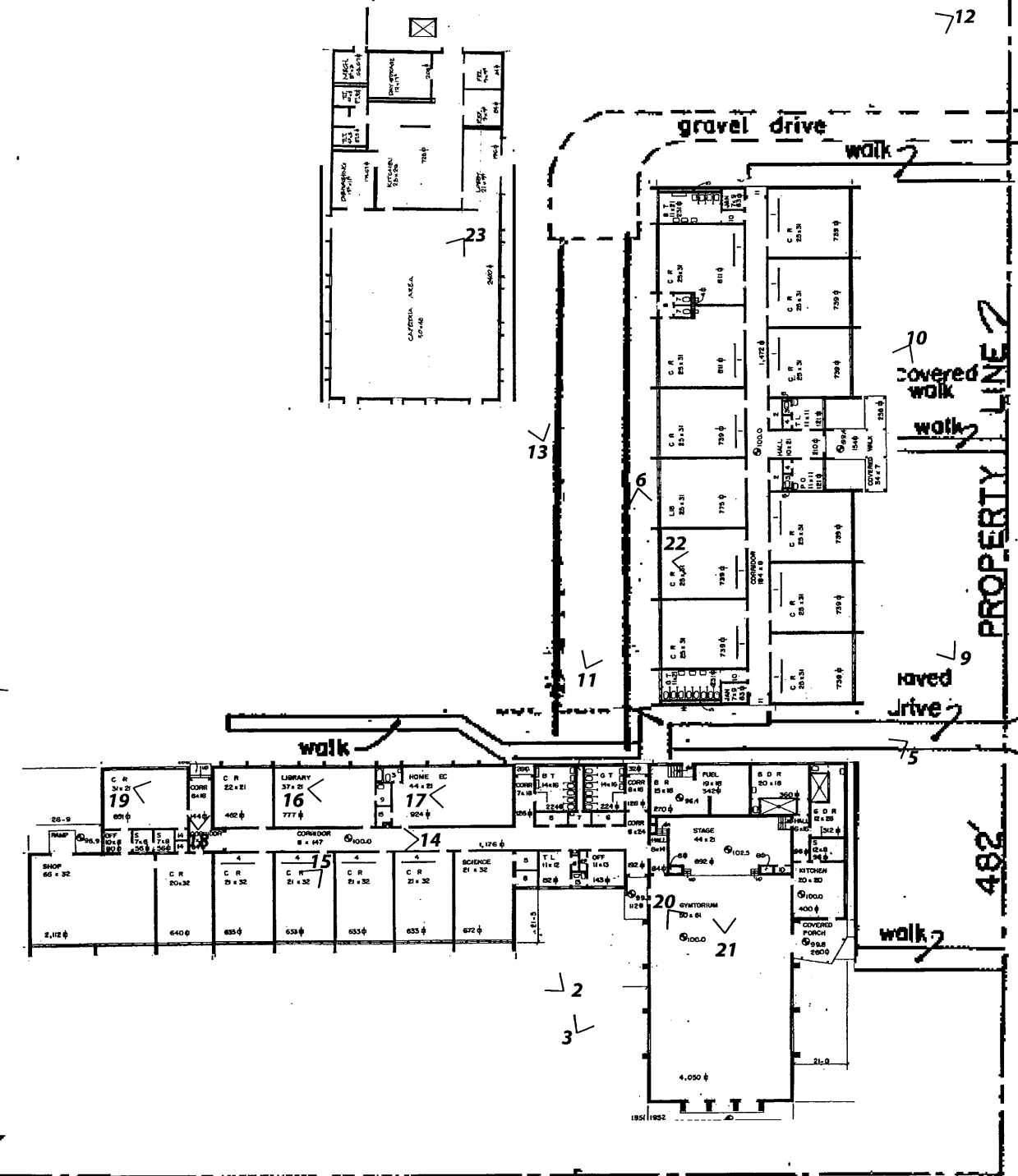
1924 1950
7.59 ACRES



300'
PROPERTY LINE

PROPERTY LINE 797'

N. C. No. 125 (PAVED)



SCHOOL STREET (PAVED)