

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Gaston School**

Gaston, Northampton County, NP1128, Listed 4/11/2012

Nomination by Ellen Turco

Photographs by Ellen Turco, November 2010



Front entrance view



Rear view

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 Gaston School  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

Street & number 200 School Street N/A  not for publication  
city or town Gaston N/A  vicinity  
State North Carolina code NC county Northampton code 131 zip code 27832

## 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 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

<p>I hereby certify that the property is:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Signature of the Keeper</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Date of Action</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
1	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)

VACANT  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

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

Modern Movement  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls CONCRETE  
BRICK  
roof WOOD  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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### 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.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### 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 \_\_\_\_\_

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Architecture

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### Period of Significance

ca. 1950-1962

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### Significant Dates

Ca. 1950, ca. 1952; 1955, ca. 1962

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### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

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### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

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### Architect/Builder

Boney, Leslie N., architect

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#### Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

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Gaston School  
Name of Property

Northampton, North Carolina  
County and State

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 12.13 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u>	<u>262800</u>	<u>4042240</u>	3	<u>18</u>	<u>263020</u>	<u>4042000</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>18</u>	<u>263000</u>	<u>4042240</u>	4	<u>18</u>	<u>262800</u>	<u>4042000</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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Name/title Ellen Turco and Susan H. Daniel  
organization Circa, Inc. date December 31, 2011  
Street & number PO Box 28365 telephone 919-834-4757  
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27611

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### Additional Documentation

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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.)

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### Property Owner

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

Name Grover and Lucy Edwards  
Street & number PO Box 239 telephone 252-308-3132  
city or town Henrico state NC zip code 27842

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**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  

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

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## Location/Site

The Gaston School is located at 200 School Street in Gaston, Northampton County, North Carolina. Gaston is a small town on the north side of the Roanoke River one mile north of the city of Roanoke Rapids, a major industrial center in northeast North Carolina. The intersection of NC 48 and NC 46 is the approximate geographical center of town, and Gaston School is located one block southwest of this intersection in a residential area.

The Gaston School campus consists of a 12.13-acre parcel on the south side of School Street. The façade (north elevation) is approximately twenty-five feet from the road. A concrete sidewalk is situated between the building and the street. At the sidewalk's east end is a metal flagpole secured by a concrete base. The parcel slopes from north to south toward the Roanoke River. The school is sited in the north central part of the lot.

The acreage surrounding the school buildings comprises a contributing site and includes several features. South of the school buildings is an approximately one-and-a-half acre athletic field comprised of a football field and running track. The field retains small wooden bleachers, a metal scoreboard and metal goal posts at the north and south ends; the dates for these structures are unknown. East of the school is another cleared field which was formerly the location of the 1929 elementary school building, demolished in the 1990s. A concrete walkway, covered with a metal canopy, and a set of poured concrete steps that linked the two buildings remains.

A paved driveway is located on the school's west side. West of the driveway is the raised brick and concrete foundation of the circa 1929 teacherage, which was demolished ca. 1990. A concrete walkway leads from the teacherage foundation to the sidewalk along School Street.

## Inventory List

The school building itself occupies approximately one acre of land and contains approximately 50,000 square feet. It is a brick-clad, flat-roofed Modernist building constructed in five stages: ca. 1950, ca. 1952, 1955, ca. 1962 and ca. 1968. The school is one-story, except for the gymnasium's double-height, arched roofline. The campus is unified visually by its brick exterior, metal hopper windows, and a heavy, pleated cornice of poured concrete with an exposed aggregate surface on the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 additions. The school is attributed to the Wilmington, North Carolina, architecture firm of Leslie N. Boney. See the attached aerial view showing the building footprint and phases of construction.

The earliest surviving part of the school is the east side of the building. It contains the original entrance and a central hallway flanked by classrooms. The home economics and auto shop, a building south of the main school building, was constructed ca. 1952. The home economics and shop building is linked to the ca. 1950 building by an L-shaped, flat-roofed covered walkway supported by round metal posts. The gymnasium, oriented east to west, is connected to the west side of the ca. 1950 building. It is located north of the home economics and auto shop building, and was completed in 1955. A basement containing the school's massive boiler equipment is located under the locker room on the south side of the gymnasium. The double-height gym became the section around which subsequent additions were constructed. A ca. 1962 U-shaped addition, containing a lobby, library, classrooms, an L-shaped hallway, and a cafeteria/kitchen, wraps around the north, west, and south sides of the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   2  

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

ca. 1950 school and gym building. Around 1968, the third and final addition was constructed abutting the west wall of the ca. 1962 addition. This L-shaped structure also runs parallel with School Street. It wraps around to the west side of the complex creating an outdoor courtyard between the cafeteria and the south exterior wall of the ca. 1968 addition. This addition also includes an entryway and a bus loading area covered by a concrete canopy on the west end. Lastly, in 1968 or slightly thereafter, the home economics and auto shop building was enlarged on the west side with an addition to create a woodworking and metals shop.

**Main School Building**                      **ca. 1950, 1955, ca. 1962, ca. 1968**

**Contributing Building**

Original High School Building

*ca. 1950*

The original high school building was constructed ca. 1950. A documentary photo from the 1958 yearbook shows a single-story building, which contains classrooms, an interior hallway, and a small office space at the north end. It is constructed of concrete block and faced with a 5:1 bond brick veneer. Built on a north-south axis, the building has a flat-roof with projecting eaves faced with wood. The eaves project approximately eighteen inches on the east elevation and approximately six inches on the others. A brick header course breaks up an otherwise plain frieze. The topography of the site slopes from north to south, and the south half of the wing sits on a raised basement, accessible from a wood foundation entry hatch on the west side.

The original entrance on the (north) facade of the ca. 1950 high school building was incorporated into the ca. 1962 addition. The rear (south) elevation has a central recessed entrance with double-leaf glazed and paneled wood doors, multi-pane sidelights over plain panels, and a large twelve-light transom. Simple square brick pilasters capped with a lintel flank this entry, which is accessed by a brick stair stringer with cast-concrete steps and landing. A pipe railing runs up the stairs and around the landing.

There are eighteen windows on the east elevation lighting six offices and classrooms. The sixteen classroom windows are paired six-horizontal-light aluminum awning windows. The window openings of the north two bays, originally an administrative area, are shorter than the others, consisting of paired five-horizontal-light awning windows. All windows have projecting header-course sills; the administrative section windows have soldier-course lintels. The west elevation has eight six-light metal awning window units. The north half of this elevation is obscured by the gymnasium. There is a recessed entry between the classrooms and the gym that is sheltered by an eave.

Gymnasium (gym) and Boiler Room

*1955*

The gym was the third section of the current school complex to be completed. (The detached shop building described below was the second, built ca. 1952.) The gym's arched roofline is visible from the long north and south elevations. The gym is of concrete block and brick construction. The exterior walls are faced with a 5:1 bond. Its two-story height accommodates the cavernous interior space. The east and west end walls, with stepped parapet rooflines topped by plain concrete coping, have a

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 3Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

metal fifteen-light awning window at each corner. The north and south side walls are made up of six window bays separated by projecting square brick piers. Each window opening has a large multi-light metal awning sash.

On the gym's south side is a one-story flat roofed section containing the boy's locker room. The locker room is the length of two bays of the gym. The exterior brick walls are 5:1 bond and there are two eight-light metal windows in the south wall. Below grade under the boy's locker room is the boiler room. The entryway is accessed by concrete stairs and a concrete landing. The massive boiler equipment remains extant inside the room. A square brick chimney is located at the southeast exterior corner of boiler room.

Classroom/Cafeteria Addition

ca. 1962

Abutting the north, west, and south walls of the gym is the flat-roofed, U-shaped ca. 1962 addition, containing an entry lobby, library, classrooms, interior L-shaped hallway, and cafeteria/kitchen. The east two bays on the façade (north) hold the school's main entrance leading to the lobby. Under metal letters spelling out "Gaston School" the next-to-last bay contains a set of glazed, double-leaf doors flanked by two rectangular, fixed, plate-glass windows. Above the door is a transom of three fixed rectangular windows. East of the entry bay is a windowless bay of decorative projecting bricks set into a running bond. A second similar set of entry doors is located on the northeast corner of the building. A flat-roof canopy on square posts covers a concrete walkway leading from the northeast doors to the site of the ca. 1929 elementary school building (demolished).

The library and classrooms on the façade have eight window bays separated by square running bond brick piers. Within each window bay are four sets of five horizontal-light windows. Below each window opening is a metal panel with a beige baked enamel coating. The panels have been painted white. The window units rest on a concrete sill above the brick foundation.

The cafeteria/kitchen portion of the ca. 1962 addition is located on the west side of the gymnasium. Six bays separated by brick piers comprise the west cafeteria wall. From north to south the bays contain: a typical window unit, two subsequent double-leaf doors surmounted by single-pane transoms, another window unit, a brick-infilled bay with a transom window, and lastly, a three-part glass and metal door and window unit. A concrete raised landing and concrete stairs with a pipe rail are also featured on this elevation.

The south side of the ca. 1962 addition contains seven bays. The bays of the west end, which contain the kitchen, are comprised of a central bay with a twelve-light metal window, flanked by two solid brick bays. An entrance bay with a half-glazed metal double-door and a concrete staircase with a pipe rail is east of the kitchen bays. Three classroom bays, located to the east of the entryway, contain three sets of four horizontal-light windows. The classroom bays abut the west end of the south elevation of the 1955 gymnasium.

Classroom Addition

ca. 1968

The ca. 1968 addition is L-shaped with a flat roof. It connects to the northwest wall of the ca. 1962 addition. The bottom of the "L" wraps around to the south, creating a grassy, partially enclosed courtyard. The construction of the eight bays of the ca. 1968 addition brought the façade to its present-day appearance. The ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 additions, totaling eighteen bays

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 4Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

(sixteen library/classroom and two lobby), are unified by a wide, poured concrete cornice with an exposed aggregate surface, which was added in ca. 1968. The eight window bays of the ca. 1968 classroom addition are identical to those of the ca. 1962 addition to which it connects.

The west elevation of the ca. 1968 addition faces the bus driveway. It is a windowless brick wall with a recessed central entry. The double-leaf, half-glazed entry doors are set within single-pane sidelights and a transom. Sheltering the entry is a flat-roofed porch with a concrete slab roof supported on four stocky brick piers. The porch roof is finished with a wide concrete aggregate cornice. The south wall has four bays of window-over-panel units as on the front elevation.

The cafeteria courtyard is a partially enclosed outdoor space created by the west wall of the cafeteria and the "L" form of the ca. 1968 addition. A raised concrete deck with pipe rail accessed by two sets of concrete steps runs along the north and east sides of the courtyard. Also on the north side of the courtyard, a three-bay section of wall has typical window bays flanking a double-leaf entry surrounded by seven glazed panels. The west wall enclosing the courtyard is blind and is without a deck.

Interior of ca. 1950, ca. 1952, 1955, ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 sections  
(Excludes ca. 1952/ca. 1968 shop outbuilding which is described below)

Although the main school building was built in five stages, its interior is interconnected. While the ca. 1950 building retains older materials such as wood floors and doors and plaster ceilings, the architect used more "modern" materials in the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 additions, such as concrete and terrazzo floors, acoustical tile drop ceilings, and tiled walls. With the exception of a slight difference in the color of the blue tiles in the two 1960s sections, it is virtually impossible to visually distinguish the differing stages of construction.

The ca. 1950 school building is oriented north-to-south on the site. It is located on the east end of the present school complex. A double-loaded corridor flanked by classrooms and administrative rooms runs the length of the building. Dark blue metal lockers line the corridor walls. Administrative offices were located at the north end, and to the south were classrooms. Rooms are accessed via wood doors with nine-lights over a single panel; each doorway has a three-light transom. Most of the classrooms retain original chalkboards set in wood frames, original hardware, and original stylized florescent light fixtures. The floors in the hall and classrooms are darkly stained oak. The original rough, stippled plaster ceilings can be seen through damaged areas of the acoustical tile drop ceilings. Load bearing walls are exposed concrete block and plastered partition walls divide the classrooms. At the north end, on the east side of the corridor, bathrooms and a teacher's lounge with original moldings and fixtures are extant.

The 1955 gym addition is located off the northwest end of the ca. 1950 corridor and is accessed through two sets of double doors with small square lights. A similar set of doors in the west gym wall leads to the hall between the gym and cafeteria. A boy's lavatory and locker room with square beige wall tiles and smaller grey floor tiles is located south of the east gym entrance. Wooden benches and metal lockers remain in the changing area. The gym is one voluminous space lit by fourteen large windows. Wood bleachers are positioned along the north and south walls. Four basketball goals are suspended from the ceiling, one at each end and on each long side. Light oak covers the floor. When viewed from the interior, the gym's construction is evident. The east and west end walls are brick up to the bottom of the window openings. From there the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

building material changes to concrete block. The north and south walls are brick, with the exception of either side of the window openings between the structural piers, which is also concrete block. Walls are painted white; blue Gaston Hurricanes murals are painted on the east and north walls. The roof is a series of five steel bowstring trusses tied to the top of the side walls at each pier. A series of rafters are laid perpendicularly across the truss system. The rafter ends overlap at each truss. Between each truss span the rafters are strengthened with wood X-braces. Wood roof decking is nailed to the rafters.

The main lobby of the school, at the northeast corner, is part of the ca. 1962 addition and obscures the original ca. 1950 entrance to the school. The earlier entrance appears in a photograph in the 1960 NO-HA-GA yearbook showing the ca. 1950 high school building with a short one-story wing that extended the length of two gymnasium bays. This small wing was removed to build the ca. 1962 addition. The addition contains the lobby, the library located west of the lobby, an L-shaped hallway, a cafeteria, and several classrooms. The ca. 1962 lobby consists of glazed walls on the north and east entry walls, and library (west) wall. The lobby's south wall is covered with narrow green Formica panels covering the original entry wall. A glass and Formica display case hangs on the Formica-paneled wall. Terrazzo flooring is used throughout the lobby and the corridors of the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 additions.

The library is a large rectangular room with two entrances and a small workroom at the west end. The library has a poured concrete floor, partially covered by low-pile carpet. The east wall consists of a set of double-leaf metal doors, with elongated rectangular windows. The doors to the lobby are surrounded by fixed glass panels on the top portion and solid wood panels on the bottom. The south interior wall of the library is solid concrete block with a band of clerestory windows at the top. The west wall is comprised of concrete block and fixed glass panes with a doorway accessing the work room. The north wall of the library consists of the exterior wall of the school. It contains a wide continuous slate sill under sets of metal windows.

West of the lobby and south of the library, is the school's main east-west corridor; the ca. 1962 corridor flows directly into the ca. 1968 one. The outline of the gym's projecting brick wall piers is visible at the east end of the corridor's south wall. The point of attachment between the two additions is evident by a patterned vertical wall tile border and a slight hue change in the five-inch-by-five-inch light blue ceramic wall tiles. A series of square recessed skylights runs the full length of the east-west hall. In places where the acoustical tile drop ceiling has been damaged the exposed steel I-beam roof structure is visible. The interiors are also united by the metal lockers in both the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 corridors. About halfway down the east-west corridor the ca. 1962 hallway turns south and runs between the gym and cafeteria, terminating at a glazed double-leaf exit door with a single-pane transom in the south wall of the ca. 1962 addition.

Six spacious classrooms are located on the north side of the hall in the ca. 1968 addition, and two additional classrooms are at the southwest corner of the addition, just west of the courtyard. Classrooms are entered through interior glazed doors with two-light sidelights. Bands of fixed windows surmount the hall-side classroom walls, allowing light to pass between the two areas. Walls dividing the classrooms from the hall, and the classrooms from one another, are exposed concrete block on the classroom interiors. Asbestos tiles cover the concrete classroom floors. Many classrooms retain chalkboards in wood frames.

The cafeteria and kitchen is situated in the southwest corner of the ca. 1962 addition. Walls are exposed concrete block and cafeteria floors are terrazzo. Fifteen recessed skylights arranged in five rows of three provide an abundance of natural light. The skylights give the ceiling a coffered effect. The cafeteria's north wall is solid concrete block, with a doorway to the east-

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

west corridor at its west end. The east wall consists of eight large, vertically arranged, three-foot-by-seven-foot fixed glass windows set into aluminum frames. Above the windows are four horizontal panes of the same width. At the center of this transparent partition wall is a double door with a narrow vertical lights in each door inset into a flat green and blue painted plywood surround. The west exterior wall features two sets of paired fully-glazed doors with sidelights and transoms, which lead to the exterior courtyard west of the cafeteria. The kitchen is separated from the dining space by a door at the room's south side. The kitchen walls are tiled with five-inch-by-five-inch ceramic tiles. Terracotta tiles cover the kitchen floor.

## Home Economics and Auto Shop

ca. 1952; ca. 1968

## Contributing Building

The home economics and auto shop building is a separate building built ca. 1952 and located south of the main school building. It is linked to the west side of the ca. 1950 school building by an metal L-shaped covered walkway on the east side. It is a single-story, flat-roofed concrete block structure with a brick veneered exterior. The roof has wide overhanging eaves. The home economics portion of the building is located at the building's east end, and the auto shop is at the west end. The roofline of the auto shop section on the west side is approximately two-and-half-feet higher than that of the home economics section.

On the interior, a partition wall divides the home economics area into two rooms, a kitchen demonstration room to the south and a classroom to the north. In both rooms the walls are exposed concrete block and asbestos tiles cover the concrete floor. The classroom has two bays of vertical metal sash windows on the north wall. Built-in cabinets with shelves and closets line the east wall. The kitchen demonstration room retains three "kitchens" with original blonde plywood cabinetry and red Formica countertops and back splashes with metal trimmed edges. On the west wall are blonde plywood built-in storage wardrobes. A small yellow partially-tiled bathroom is located in the southeast corner of the room. Skylights provide light in addition to the two bays of vertical metal sash windows on the south wall.

West of the home economics area is the auto shop. A partial-height drywall partition, running east-west, divides the auto shop into two equally sized spaces. The date of this wall is unknown, but it does not appear to be original. A door opening at the partition's east end links the two interior spaces. Both spaces have concrete block walls, a roof system of exposed metal trusses, and poured concrete floors. There is a bank of window units on the north wall, and the south space is lit by large metal window units, which flank a garage door.

Around 1968, the home economics and auto shop building was expanded with a brick addition to the west wall. This utilitarian space provided open bays for woodworking and metals shops. On the interior, the roof trusses were left visible, as were the concrete block walls and the poured concrete floor. The exterior north wall faces the courtyard and is windowless with a door and one sidelight at the west end. Along this wall is a covered walkway with a cornice of poured concrete with an exposed aggregate surface supported by square brick posts. The cornice treatment is repeated on the west and south sides of the shop addition and matches that on the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 school additions. The west wall has three sets of paired five-light metal awning windows. The four-bay south elevation of this addition faces the athletic field and includes a solid brick bay at the west end, followed by a garage door bay infilled with plywood. The two subsequent window bays have paired metal awning sashes of six horizontal lights.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   7  

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

## Integrity Statement

Gaston School retains original building materials from the period of significance between ca. 1950 and ca. 1962, such as brick, concrete block and poured concrete. Also notable are the number and good structural condition of metal period windows, although many of the glass panes are broken. The integrity of the school's interior remains intact, with the materials and plan conveying information about mid-century school design in general, and about Gaston School's particular physical evolution and the various uses of interior space. While the ca. 1968 classroom addition post-dates the period of significance, it was constructed using a form and materials similar to that of the ca. 1962 addition on both the exterior and interior. Therefore, the 1960s additions read as a unit rather than separate sections on both the exterior and interior, causing the later addition to have little visual impact beyond the extension of the facade. The impact of the ca. 1968 addition to the home economics and auto shop building is also minimal due to its small size and similar materials and form to those used on this building and elsewhere on the campus. Gaston School remains on its original site, and the site contains historic features that contribute to school's setting such as walkways, a flagpole, and an athletic field. The property as a whole retains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The Gaston School is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological remains, such as trash pits, wells and other structural remains in addition to the teacherage site, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning land use patterns site evolution, ethnicity, as well as structural details, is often only evident in the archeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to document the remains of the teacherage or any other archeological remains, but it is likely that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

## Statement of Significance

Gaston School is locally significant in Northampton County and meets National Register Criterion A for Education and Criterion C for architecture. The period of significance is ca. 1950, when the original high school building was constructed, to ca. 1962, with the construction of the third of four additions to the campus. These additions include a ca. 1952 home economics and auto shop building, the 1955 gymnasium, and ca. 1962 classroom addition, followed by a second classroom addition in ca. 1968. Although Gaston School campus continued to expand and function as a school through ca. 1990, its post-1962 use is not of exceptional significance.

The school is significant in Northampton County's educational history because it represents the county's efforts to expand and modernize its public school facilities. Due to the inherent ease of expandability and contemporary appearance of Modernist architecture, it was a popular architectural idiom for schools in North Carolina at the midpoint of the twentieth century. Gaston School is one of the earliest erected as part of a larger building campaign in the county begun around 1950 to build new facilities for both black and white students. The school is a good and intact example of a Modernist institutional building in a primarily rural and architecturally conservative county. The school displays Modernist design elements such as low building profiles and flat roof planes; large banks of metal awning windows, outdoor connectivity via covered walkways and courtyards, and modularity of design. Due to its abandonment as a school around 1990, its setting remains intact and does not contain intrusive modern buildings like those that have been built at the county's other remaining historic school campuses.

## Historic Background and Education Context

The minimal system of public education in North Carolina in the nineteenth century was dismantled by the Civil War. Post-war, the State Constitution of 1868 allowed counties to levy new taxes for local schools. The constitution also created the State Board of Education to oversee local school districts and establish standards for curriculum development and teacher training. However, during Reconstruction, public education throughout the state continued to suffer due to poor infrastructure and a lack of government funds. Private schools and subscription schools were available to those few students whose families could afford to pay. In 1880, only one-third of the state's school-age children attended school, and even then only for an average period of nine weeks. (Spanbauer 78; Keane 8.10).

Schools on Northampton County farms continued through private efforts until the 1880s to 1900s, when towns throughout the county began collecting taxes to again fund the creation of public schools. Northampton's schools were a loose confederation receiving small amounts of money from the county and towns. In the early 1900s, the school system flourished with new schools established across the county, enabled by the funds provided by local taxes. P. L. Long served as Northampton County's first school superintendent from 1897 to 1939 and oversaw a period of tremendous growth and improvement of facilities made possible by the school tax (Spanbauer 99). However, this growth mostly benefited white students, a minority in Northampton County, as the school system was racially segregated and there was little by way of public education available for black children (Spanbauer 102-105). The county's population also increased roughly thirty percent during this period from 21,150 residents in 1900 to 28,299 residents by 1940.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

State-mandated school “consolidation” began in the 1910s and was a movement to build centrally-located, multi-use school complexes where resources could be concentrated most economically and rural and town-dwelling white children could be educated together (Bishir 395). Spanbauer states, “Every town in the (Northampton) county at one time had a consolidated school, but most were replaced in the mid-to-late twentieth century to make way for modern schools as further consolidation continued (104).” This was what occurred in Gaston.

The first consolidated school in Gaston, as well as a separate teacherage, was built in the late 1920s at the current Gaston School site. The teacherage was demolished in the 1980s, and the school building in the 1990s, but both were used for educational purposes until then (Wray interview).<sup>1</sup> The teacherage was used as a staff residence until the 1950s when the building was converted to classrooms. The 1958 edition of the “No-Ha-Ga,” the school’s annual yearbook, shows a one-story U-shaped brick elementary school building with a flat parapet roofline, gabled parapet entry bay, and bands of double-hung wood windows. Images of the teacherage have not been found. The consolidated school served Gaston’s white children as well as white children from southwest Northampton County. A new Gaston School building, containing classrooms and administrative area was built around 1950 west of the now-demolished elementary school. The school in Gaston is one of the earliest of several erected during a 1950s building campaign to improve and expand the county’s facilities. Around 1952 a separate home economics and auto shop building was built southwest of the “new” school building, illustrating the importance of gender-based skills and trades. On October 15, 1954, the winds of Hurricane Hazel knocked down the partially completed gymnasium. Former student W. J. Wray recalls principal George R. Autry organizing male students to clear the debris, and clean and stack the bricks so they could be reused. The gym was completed a few months later in 1955 and the school was converted from a combination elementary-high school to a high school around this time.

In addition to the standard North Carolina high school curriculum, which included math, science, history, and literature, Gaston High School offered French, music, business administration, home economics, shop, agriculture, and physical education. The school also had a football team, a baseball team, and girls and boys basketball teams. A student council, debating team, the 4-H Club, and a glee club open to seniors, were among the extracurricular activities available to students.

Gaston School played a notable role in race relations in Northampton County. In 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional. This ruling had an impact on schools throughout the country, but racial integration took decades to achieve. Despite passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, Gaston County schools remained segregated. In 1969, U. S. District Judge for the Eastern District of North Carolina, John David Larkins Jr., ordered the school systems of Edenton, Chowan County, and Northampton County, North Carolina, to integrate. Larkins’s order required, in part, the transfer of 100 black students from Gumberry High School to Gaston School, and twenty-five percent faculty integration at all of the county’s high schools (“Three More”; “Chairman Jones”).

As the county’s population grew, a new high school was constructed in Gaston (Northampton County High School - West) around 1990, and Gaston School was closed by the county (Wray interview; Edwards interview). The school sat vacant until local residents Grover and Lucy Edwards purchased it from the Northampton County Board of Education in early 2009. The

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<sup>1</sup> The Town of Gaston was incorporated in 1949. It is named after the small village that developed around Gaston depot, the north terminus of the Raleigh-Gaston Railroad, completed in 1840. The original site of Gaston depot is now submerged under Lake Gaston (Footprints 94).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

Edwards will renovate the school for use as the Gaston Center for Business, a proposed mixed-use complex which will house small businesses and non-profit organizations.

## Architecture Context

The basic tenets of Modernism, in art, literature and architecture, were conceived early in the twentieth century. This new school of thought broke with the past, specifically the traditions of the Enlightenment. Modernism was seen as a better way in light of new technologies and scientific discoveries, and represented the coming of a new world order after two world wars. The phrases “form follows function” and “ornament is a crime” came to embody the philosophy of the style. The movement gained popularity after World War II and became the dominant architectural idiom for institutional and corporate buildings in the United States for three decades. It was an appropriate design choice to mark the coming of a new era (Turco 12).

Modernist architecture was commonly used for North Carolina public schools in the 1950s and 1960s due to its low cost and simplicity (Fayetteville Survey 22). Compared to many of its predecessors, it lacked expensive ornamentation such as Colonial Revival details, exterior stylized columns, and large wood multi-light wood sash windows. Gabled rooflines were replaced with flat ones, often with projecting eaves, and continuous brick veneered facades and ribbons of metal windows lent the buildings a contemporary appearance.

The Northampton County architectural survey identifies very few Modernist buildings in the mostly rural county. With its historically agrarian economy, utilitarian and agricultural building types and residences are the most common. In architecture, Modernism expresses itself--in modest fashion--on the plain, flat-roofed commercial buildings of the county's small towns. In Woodland, two slightly more articulated examples are the Fire Station and National Guard Armory, ca. 1950 and ca. 1965, respectively. The Woodland Fire Station is a tripartite form building of concrete block construction with a central two-story, parapet-roof portion flanked by one-story parapet roof garage bays. The central section has two garage bays on the lower level and steel casement windows in the upper story. All of the garage bays have modern replacement lifting doors. The National Guard Armory is a one- and two-story brick building with Modernist features, such as a flat roof, ribbons of steel-frame windows and long, horizontal lines. A windowless two-story section on the rear, which likely houses a gymnasium or cafeteria, has a clerestory of steel-frame windows and a square, brick chimney stack rising on the southwest corner.

Schools are the building type in which the Modernist idiom is most fully embraced (Spanbauer 120-121) within Northampton County. Eight Modernist school buildings were erected within its borders. All survive and are in good condition, with integrity of setting and design but varying degrees of original building materials. All appear to have been built in phases during the 1950s and 1960s, and four have had additions in recent years. Although finish details vary somewhat, Northampton County's Modernist schools are characterized primarily by their flat-roofed and sprawling forms, made up of smaller functional units connected by paths, flat-roofed covered walks, and grassy courtyards. Buildings are constructed of load-bearing masonry and faced with brick. Bands of large metal window units light the interiors. Skylights are often used in the main corridors and/or cafeterias, to increase the flow of natural light into the interior spaces. Entrance bays are often sheltered by broad masonry canopies. Gaston School is a good example of a brick-veneered, flat-roofed one-story Modernist building with a double-height gymnasium with an arched roofline and a campus unified visually by its brick exterior, metal

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

awning windows, and a heavy, pleated, cornice of poured concrete with an exposed aggregate surface on the ca. 1962 and ca. 1968 additions. It compares well with other mid-twentieth-century schools in the county.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Northampton County school board contracted Wilmington-based architect Leslie N. Boney, who specialized in Modernist institutional structures, to design several schools. Boney was a graduate of North Carolina State College, now University, who began practicing architecture in 1918. He was a prolific designer of schools, from the elementary to the university level, as well as other public and commercial buildings in eastern North Carolina. His son Leslie N. Boney Jr. joined the practice in the late 1940s. By 1958, the firm of Leslie N. Boney, Architect, had designed 1,000 North Carolina school buildings (The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects). Some Northampton County schools retain bronze plaques identifying the architect, although Gaston School is not one of them and Boney's involvement in the ca. 1950, ca. 1952, 1955 and ca. 1962 sections is not confirmed through primary documentation. However, the school's appearance and school board records strongly suggest a connection to Boney. The similarity in design among the county's Modernist schools also points to a Boney connection, although at least one other architect adept at Modernist design, J. J. Rowland, is known to have designed the 1952 Gumberry High School west of Seaboard. A plaque at this school identifies Rowland as the architect. Further research may confirm Boney as the designer of Gaston School and six other county schools: Squire School, located at 4671 NC Highway 46 west of Gaston, ca. 1960; W. S. Creecy School, a school for African Americans in Rich Square, ca. 1955 (NC Study List 2010); Garysburg Elementary School on NC Highway 46, ca. 1955 (NC Study List 2010); Northampton County (East) High School at 750 NCHS East Road near Galatia, 1964 (NC Study List 2010), Coates Elementary School at 4023 Park Street, Seaboard, ca. 1955, and ca. 1950 Willis Hare School located at 479 Wills Hare Road near Pendleton.

In Gaston, Gaston School, a modern, flat-roofed brick classroom building with administrative offices was erected around 1950. It is one of the county's first Modernist schools. The building was oriented on a north-south axis, perhaps to contrast it from the adjacent 1920s school still in use. The ca. 1950 school was attached to the west elevation of the 1920s elementary school by a covered walkway. The walkway remains although the 1920s building is no longer extant. A flat-roofed brick home economics and auto shop building was built a few years after the 1950s high school was completed, around 1952. The arched-roof gymnasium was completed a few years later in 1955, the year after Hurricane Hazel. Since original plans have not been found, it is not known if the three 1950s sections of the school were part of a larger campus plan. Regardless, the boxy forms of Modernist-style schools easily lent themselves to horizontal expansions, especially where lot size was not an issue, as in the case of Gaston School.

A second classroom wing, U-shaped in form, with a lobby, classrooms, and a cafeteria, was built ca. 1962. The school's expansion continued to the west with an L-shaped classroom wing, built ca. 1968. The plans for this addition survive and identify Boney as the architect. His documented work on the 1968 section suggests that it was a continuation of his previous work on Gaston School. In order to unify the building's façade, Boney added a projecting cornice of exposed aggregate concrete. The cornice is similar to that on the Reid Ross Classical Middle and High School in Fayetteville, also designed by Boney in 1968. Also around 1968, the ca. 1952 home economics and auto shop building was expanded to include a metals and woodworking shop, and the distinctive Modernist cornice was used on that addition as well. Although executed over an eighteen-year time period, each of the Gaston School additions is unified stylistically through thoughtful massing and consideration of materials.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

Today, Gumberry High School, built in 1952, is used as a private community center. The brick complex is comprised of classroom wings on the west side and a two-story barrel arched-roofed gymnasium on the east side. A projecting flat-roofed canopy on brick piers leads to the main entry. This building has a wide flush cornice faced with metal. Windows consist of a small, rectangular, awning pane surmounted by a large fixed pane. Some of the windows have been altered to accommodate air conditioning units, or replaced altogether with large fixed panes.

Garysburg Elementary School is a one-story, flat-roofed, red brick school built around 1965. The classrooms are arranged around a square outdoor courtyard with the gym and cafeteria on the east side of the complex. The building has interconnecting covered walkways and interior skylights. This school has a wide projecting cornice and retains pairs of five-light metal awning sashes within each window bay. A large one-story brick annex, slightly smaller than the ca. 1955 classroom section, has been built in recent years on the school's north side.

Coates Elementary School is a one-story, flat-roofed, red brick school built ca. 1955. Two classroom wings are placed perpendicular to each other parallel to Park Street and with entries to each wing facing each other. A covered walkway connects the two buildings. The buildings have banks of large metal awning windows. There are no other buildings on the small campus but they are intact.

W. S. Creecy School was built in ca. 1955. It is a flat-roofed, red brick school built in a U-shape with a two-story section at the bottom of the "U", which forms the façade. Large one-story additions to the rear extend the classroom wings and a separate one-story classroom building is connected to the front section by a covered walkway.

Large, new additions or buildings have also been erected at the county's three schools still owned by the school system. Northampton County High School (East), built in 1964, has the prevalent flat-roof modular design, but is rendered in yellow brick. It is the only other Northampton County school to have a version of the exposed aggregate cornice seen on Gaston School. The metal windows are paired four-lights-over-panel units. A bronze plaque at the school's entry identifies Leslie Boney as the architect. Two large classroom buildings have been erected on the campus in recent years. Willis Hare School and Squire School, ca. 1955 and ca. 1960, respectively, are very similar in design and most resemble the 1950s-era sections of Gaston School. The ca. 1955 section of Willis Hare School features two classroom wings arranged in an "L" form with banks of original paired, six-light metal awning windows. A two-story gym and a cafeteria dating from the 1950s or 1960s are at the north end of the complex; at the south end is a classroom addition from approximately the same time. A gabled, metal-roofed classroom addition was recently added to the rear of the complex. Squire School's façade is dominated by a massive, windowless, flat-roofed two-story gymnasium and an attached one-story cafeteria. The subservient red brick classroom wing is attached to the northeast corner of the gym and connected by a poured concrete canopy on brick piers. The classroom wing is a long brick building oriented north-south on the site. East of it two, one-story rectangular additions, built at an undetermined date, are connected by covered walkways.

Gaston School stands out as the most intact of the county's eight Modernist schools. It is also one of the first uses of modern school design in the county, and the building compares well in terms of stylistic expression and material integrity when compared with the very few Modernist buildings in Northampton County.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 13

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   9   Page  14 

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

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

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 15

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

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## Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of Gaston School is marked in a heavy, black line on the accompanying Northampton County tax map drawn to a scale of 1"=200'. The parcel is 12.13 acres.

## Boundary Justification

The National Register boundary includes the 12.13-acre legal parcel 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 16

Gaston School  
Northampton County, North Carolina

## Photo Key:

**Name of Property:** Gaston School

**Town:** Gaston

**County:** Northampton      **State:** NC

**Photographer:** Ellen Turco

**Date Photographed:** November 2010 and December 2011

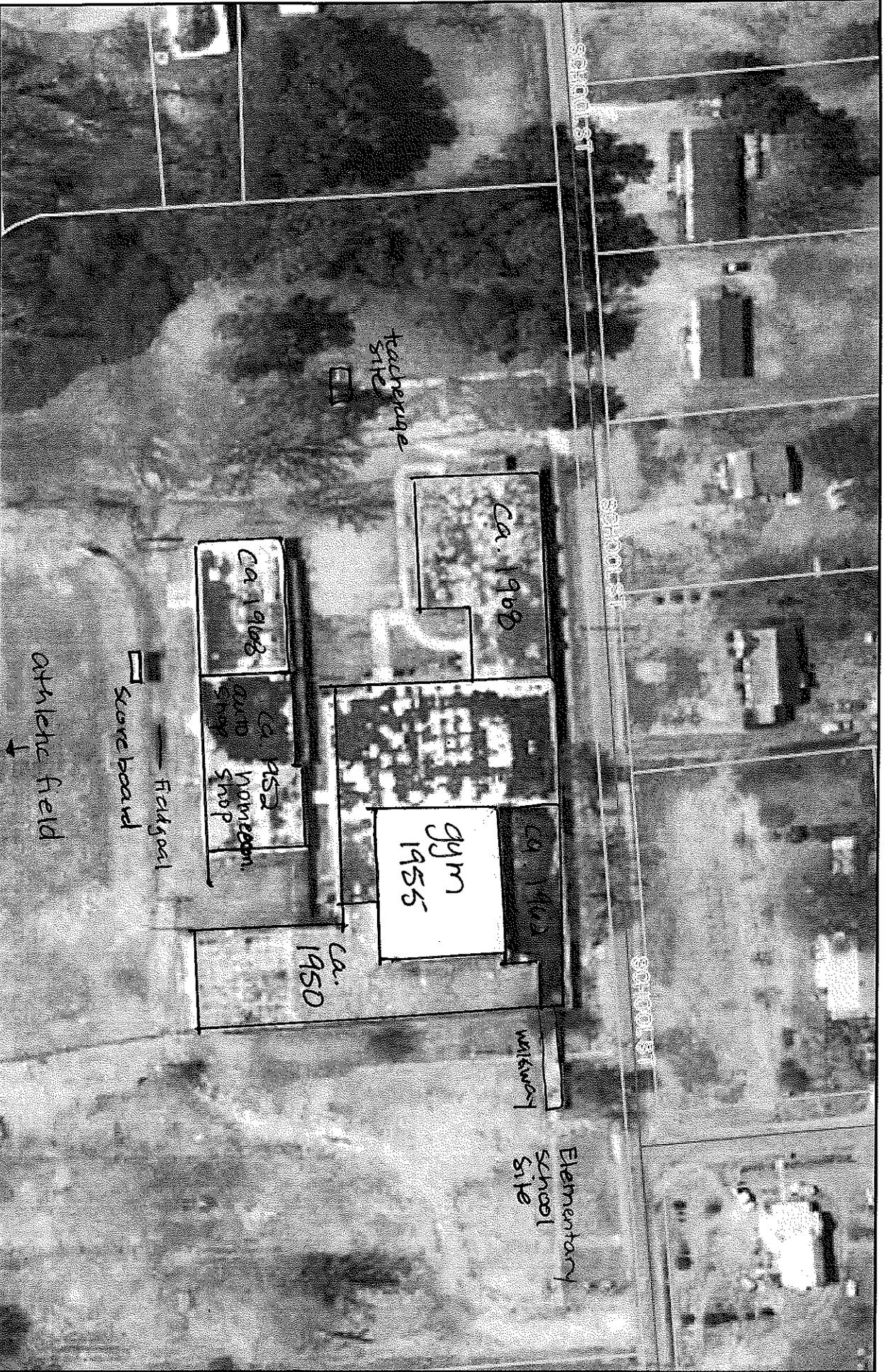
## Description of Photographs and number:

- 1 of 18: Facade/north elevation
- 2 of 18: Typical window bay with showing metal windows over enamel panels
- 3 of 18: West and south (with windows) elevations of ca. 1968 addition
- 4 of 18: South elevation of ca. 1968 addition (foreground), west elevations of cafeteria and gym
- 5 of 18: West elevation of cafeteria showing concrete deck with metal pipe rail
- 6 of 18: North elevation of ca. 1968 shop addition to home economics and auto shop building
- 7 of 18: South elevation of home economics and auto shop building with ca. 1968 addition to left (west)
- 8 of 18: South elevation of school complex
- 9 of 18: West elevation of ca. 1950 school building
- 10 of 18: South elevation of ca. 1950 school building with entry
- 11 of 18: East elevation of ca. 1950 school building and gym
- 12 of 18: Main school entry at east end of ca. 1962 addition
- 13 of 18: Formica covered wall in lobby of ca. 1962 addition. Formica covers original entry to ca. 1950 school building
- 14 of 18: Library looking east
- 15 of 18: Typical classroom in ca. 1950 school building showing entry, chalkboard, and wood floors
- 16 of 18: Gym looking northwest
- 17 of 18: East-west corridor looking east from ca. 1968 addition to ca. 1962 addition. Note clerestory classroom windows (left) and exit to cafeteria courtyard (right)
- 18 of 18: East-west corridor looking west from ca. 1962 addition to ca. 1968 addition. Note tiles covering gym buttresses.



# NORTHAMPTON COUNTY TAX MAP

Disclaimer:  
The data provided on this map are prepared for the inventory of real property found within Northampton County, NC and are compiled from recorded plats, deeds, and other public records and data. This data is for informational purposes only and should not be substituted for a true title search, property appraisal, survey, or for zoning verification.



Gaston School  
200 School Street  
Gaston, Northampton County  
North Carolina

Site Plan



One Inch = 80 Feet