

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Red Oak Community House

Red Oak, Nash County, NS0430, Listed 4/19/2006
Nomination by Nancy Van Dolsen
Photographs by Nancy Van Dolsen, January 2005



Façade view



Rear view

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 any 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 **Red Oak Community House**
other names/site number **Red Oak Community Building**

2. Location

street & number **E. Side, Church Street, approx. .1 mi N of junction with NC 43** not for publication **N/A**
city or town **Red Oak** vicinity **N/A** state **North Carolina** code **NC** county **Nash** code **127** zip code **27868**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 forth 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

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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====
4. National Park Service Certification
=====

I, hereby certify that this 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 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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register **N/A**

Name of related multiple property listing **N/A**

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: **Social** Sub: **Clubhouse**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: **Social** Sub: **Clubhouse**

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Rustic Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation **STONE**
roof **ASPHALT**
walls **WOOD: log**
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)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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. |

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance **1935-1956**
Significant Dates **1935**
Significant Person **N/A**
Cultural Affiliation **N/A**
Architect/Builder **Unknown**

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

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

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(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: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property **1.09 acre**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting		Northing		Zone Easting		Northing	
1	18 238230	3991860	3	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	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 **Nancy Van Dolsen** date **6 January 2006**
street & number **1601 Highland Drive**
city or town **Wilson** state **NC** zip code **27893**

=====
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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name **Town of Red Oak** Street & number **P.O. Box 8** city or town **Red Oak** state **NC** zip code **27868**
=====

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Narrative Description

The Red Oak Community House, a one-story, side-gable, Rustic Revival log building, stands on the east side of Church Street in the small community of Red Oak in Nash County, North Carolina. The community building sits north of the Red Oak Methodist Church and across the street from the Red Oak Baptist Church. Behind the building is a small (approximately six feet by eight feet), prefabricated, metal storage shed, too insubstantial to be counted as a resource. Sitting in the middle of the approximately one-acre lot, the building is surrounded by lawn. A narrow poured, concrete walk leads from the sidewalk to the front entrance.

A photograph of the Red Oak Community House taken shortly after its completion in 1935 shows that the building has had only minor exterior alterations.¹ The saddle-notched, round log building with cement chinking has three sections: a central main block with two small flanking wings set back from the façade and slightly lower in height than the main block. The building has a side-gable asphalt roof with exposed rafter ends covering all three sections. The foundation is stone on the north, west, and south elevations; the rear (east) elevation is brick. Two large, tapered, random coursed stone chimneys are located on the north elevation of the main block and the south elevation of the south wing. The chimney for the main block is massive, and rises west of the gable peak. The south chimney is centered on the gable peak. A small brick chimney is located just west of the gable peak on the south end of the main block; this chimney serves the heating system added ca. 2000.

The three-bay façade of the main block has a central entrance with a four-foot wide, vertical beaded board door hung on strap hinges. A small, stoop with a stone floor and topped with a gable-front roof covers the central entrance. Three concrete steps flanked by wood handrails lead up to the stoop. A set of three, wood, fifteen-light casement windows each flank the front entrance. All of the windows in the building are fifteen light sash except for one nine-light sash window on the west elevation of the south wing. A vertical board door with a single light is located on the rear elevation of the south wing, and a vertical board door on the north elevation of the north wing provides access into that portion of the building. On the rear elevation, two vertical steel I-beams were added in the early 1980s about mid-way across the elevation to add support.

Interior

The main block is one open space. The log walls are exposed. Five logs serve as joists across the plate logs; these are supported with an iron rod. Two wagon wheel lights hang from these joists. There is no attic floor; narrow board sheathing is nailed to the base of the roof collars and rafters.

¹ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, *Emergency Relief In North Carolina: A Record of the Development and the Activities of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1932-1935* (Raleigh, N.C.: Presses of Edwards & Broughton Company, 1936) 120. A small brick chimney was added to the south wall of the main block and two I-beams added to the rear of the building.

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The floors are narrow pine boards. Running the length of the east and west elevation are wood benches that also serve as storage boxes. The benches are built with tongue-and-groove boards and are topped with hinged lids; these appear to be original. The large random course stone fireplace on the north wall dominates the room. The fireplace opening is five feet high, five-and-half feet wide, and four-feet deep, and there is a stone hearth.

The north wing is finished identical to the main block but without storage benches. A bathroom—made with unpainted boards—was created in the northeast corner ca. 1945-1950. The south wing serves as the kitchen and has original unpainted pine cabinets on the east, west, and south walls. Linoleum covers the floor. The chimney is only decorative. A small pass-through is located to the west of the door leading from the main block into the kitchen.

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Summary

The Red Oak Community House, a Rustic Revival log building constructed under the auspices of the Emergency Relief Administration in 1935, meets National Register Criteria A and C in the areas Social History and Architecture. The building features exposed saddle-notched log construction with massive stone chimneys. The interior is also exposed log, and has exposed joists and unpainted woodwork. The local community constructed the building using local materials and labor under the direction of the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) to serve as the home of the Red Oak Home Demonstration Club. In North Carolina, the ERA supervised the construction of twenty-two community buildings between 1932 and 1935, and urged that the community centers be built of native materials, such as stone or log. The Home Demonstration Club was a North Carolina Extension Office program that aided rural women through education and social activities. The Red Oak Community House also functioned as a community center, and is still used for church gatherings, family reunions, social events such as bridal and baby showers, receptions, wedding anniversary parties, scouts and 4-H club meetings. Although the building still serves as a center for community events, its use since 1956 does not meet Criterion G for exceptional significance; the period of significance begins with the date of construction in 1935 and ends in 1956.

Historical Background, the Social History of Home Demonstration Clubs in Eastern North Carolina, 1935-1956 and the Role of the Emergency Relief Administration in Nash County, 1932-1935

During the opening years of the twentieth century, there was a growing national concern with the plight of farmwomen. Social scientists and public policymakers believed that the quality of life for rural women was much lower than their counterparts in towns and cities due to lack of modern conveniences such as plumbing and electricity and the great amount of work demanded of farmwomen. Policymakers were concerned that unhappy rural women meant unhappy families; they believed this cycle of unhappiness would lead to an even greater migration of families from farms to urban places. To counteract the trend of dwindling rural population, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 that (among other directives) provided money for programs led by home demonstration agents to help farmwomen better organize their work.³

In 1915, a Woman's Club was organized in Red Oak, a small crossroads community of approximately 1,200 people, in central Nash County, five-and-a-half miles northeast of the county seat of Nashville. This Woman's Club was merged with the Red Oak Home Demonstration Club under Nash County's first Home Agent, Miss Allie Strubling.⁴ Home Demonstration Clubs were founded as Girls Tomato Clubs, a counterpart to Corn Clubs for boys

³ See Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 14-15.

⁴ Red Oak Community Club Building History. N.P., N.D. Collection of the Red Oak Community Club, Red Oak, N.C.

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which promoted new agricultural methods to school age boys in hopes that crops grown by the boys would have better yields than their fathers, therefore shaming older farmers into improving their farming methods. Tomato Clubs targeted farm girls, teaching them modern gardening methods and new canning techniques that they would share with their mothers.⁵

With the creation of the Home Demonstration Clubs, home demonstration agents made it their duty to influence private aspects of family life—including how a woman prepared food, grew her garden, arranged her kitchen, clothed herself and her children, and her décor.⁶ Obviously farmwomen could chose to reject or accept home demonstration but in North Carolina the program proved immensely popular. In the state, membership grew from just under 3,000 in thirty counties in 1916 to over 20,000 in sixty-six counties in 1932. Home demonstration was the largest women’s voluntary association in the state.⁷

In keeping with federal and state policy to improve the lives of rural residents, and as part of a work-relief program during the economic depression of the early 1930s, the North Carolina Emergency Relief Program constructed “Community Houses” throughout the state. In Red Oak, the management of the Red Oak Community House (as it was originally named) was under the Home Demonstration Club. According to the bylaws of the Home Demonstration Club (known by the 1960s as the Red Oak Community Club) any home-maker of Red Oak was eligible to be a member, and as a member they were able to use the community building for a much-reduced fee. The Home Demonstration Club, Ruritan Club, the two churches in town, and the boy and girl scouts could use it for free. All other clubs or individuals would have to pay to use the building.⁸ The building was the only public meeting space in town.

The Emergency Relief Administration was created by congressional appropriation as a “temporary means of relief” for “persons in rural areas or stranded populations” and to provide work in conservation, public works and professional services not in competition with private industry.⁹ By November 1932, 107 public works projects of “permanent value” that would not have been completed except for the availability of federal funds were undertaken in North Carolina. Projects included highway and road construction and maintenance; repair, beautification and improvement of school grounds and other public buildings; drainage work; water and sewer extensions; geodetic surveys; lunches for school children; and “other work benefiting communities at large.”¹⁰

⁵ Jones, 17.

⁶ Jones, 14.

⁷ Jones, 22.

⁸ Red Oak Community Club, By-Laws, Jan. 1966. Collection of the Red Oak Community Club, Red Oak, N.C.

⁹ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission. *Emergency Relief In North Carolina: A Record of the Development and the Activities of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1932-1935* (Raleigh, N.C.: Presses of Edwards & Broughton Company, 1936) 18.

¹⁰ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, 24.

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A vital part of the ERA program was the construction of community houses—places where rural residents could meet for educational, religious, and social programs. In North Carolina the ERA supervised the construction of twenty-two community buildings between 1932 and 1935.¹¹ The program urged that the community centers be “built from native materials, such as logs or native stones” and that the people of the community “furnish the necessary material.”¹² Some of the community buildings were constructed of brick and frame, rather than the rustic materials suggested.¹³ The ERA considered the community building in Scotland Neck, Halifax County, to be the finest one in the state. The Scotland Neck Community House was built of cypress logs, and the main hall was forty feet wide and eighty feet long and was to be used as a gymnasium. The building also included a ladies’ lounge, men’s lounge, shower facilities, kitchen, pantry, library and a second floor with an interior balcony overlooking the gymnasium. Other noteworthy community buildings constructed with ERA funds were the Black Mountain Community House in Buncombe County and the Roxboro Community House in Person County.¹⁴ In the ERA’s official record of its efforts, the Red Oak Community House is one of the ones pictured in its publication—the Scotland Neck Community House, the Greensboro Community House, the Middleburg Community House (Vance County), the Waccamaw Community House and gymnasium in Brunswick County, and the Smithfield and Selma Community Houses in Johnston County, are some of the others depicted in the book. The Scotland Neck, Middleburg, Waccamaw, Smithfield, and Selma buildings were also of exposed log construction.

The Red Oak Community House consists of one large assembly room, an attached kitchen, and a small wing that served as a lounge, and later as the location of a bath and storage. As urged by the ERA, the building was constructed of local materials, on land donated to the county by C.D. and A.F. Jones. The logs were donated by W. F. Woodruff of Hillardston. The logs were debarked and finished by Sele Mitchell. Tom Taylor took some of the logs (via mule and wagon) to Walker’s Mill at Gold Rock to be sawed into floorboards and roof sheathing. Local men, under the direction of ERA employee Mutt Stephenson, did the work. The head carpenter for the job was Joe Arnold. The stone for the chimneys and foundation came from the J. L. Cornwall Farm. R.U. Reges worked on the masonry.¹⁵ The building was completed in 1935.

Upon its completion, the building was used by the Home Demonstration Club. The club taught members how to can vegetables, how to preserve food for use during the winter months, and even how to make mattresses. Members in the 1930s and 1940s included Mrs. Henry Jones, Mrs. Jack Fisher, Mrs. Fred McIntyre, Mrs. Jack Jones, Mrs. G.E. Beal, Mrs. Nero Bass, and Mrs. C.D. Jones.

¹¹ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, 229.

¹² North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, 84.

¹³ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, 225.

¹⁴ North Carolina Emergency Relief Commission, 225.

¹⁵ Red Oak Community Club Building History.

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Since its construction in 1935, and into the present, the building has been used for club meetings, homecomings, family reunions, boy and girl scout meetings, and as meeting rooms for both the Red Oak Baptist and Methodist churches.

Architecture Context: Rustic Revival Log Community Buildings in eastern North Carolina, 1932-1935

Although log buildings are known to have stood in northeastern North Carolina since the seventeenth century, by about 1800, log construction for primary dwellings and large structures had mostly been supplanted by timber frame construction. Some log buildings, especially for secondary agricultural buildings or for temporary housing, continued to be constructed throughout the nineteenth century, but it was no longer the primary method of construction.¹⁶

Interest in log construction as a revival method of building emerged in the late nineteenth century but peaked during the late 1920s and 1930s. Spurred by the same impulse as the Colonial Revival to celebrate our nation's past, the interest in log construction and rustic stone construction also appealed to those who wished to honor the perceived self-sufficiency of the first settlers both in the initial phase of settling the nation and also as the frontier moved west. Log cabins were promoted in 1934 as the "backbone of American life, the headquarters of that important unit, the home. It provided shelter, protection, and a foundation upon which to build a great empire."¹⁷ In addition, log construction was a frugal method since it used local materials with little technology needed to transform the tree into a building material. Rustic architecture built with stone and log also tapped into the growing interest in nature and wildlife of the United States (another notable aspect of our nation's uniqueness in an era of troubled times) that was being celebrated and promoted by the National and State Park systems; rustic architecture was seen as being the ideal style for park buildings.¹⁸ Popular publications such as *How to Build Cabins, Lodges, and Bungalows* (1934) taught anyone how to cut logs, hew the bark, and make saddle-notched corners so they too could have a log house.¹⁹

In North Carolina, federal and state agencies such as the National Park Service and the Emergency Relief program encouraged log construction for both financial and philosophical reasons. Many of the community buildings, park buildings, scout huts, and other publicly financed structures were built with log and stone. The Red Oak Community House falls squarely within this tradition. The celebration of the rustic construction is evident in the exposing of the interior and exterior log walls, the construction of the rustic stone chimney on the south wall, and the massive stone chimney and fireplace on the interior wall. It is the only Rustic Revival log building in Red Oak, and it demonstrates a reverence for handcraftsmanship. The building's

¹⁶ See Catherine Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 3-4.

¹⁷ Popular Science Monthly, *How to Build Cabins, Lodges, and Bungalows* (New York: Popular Science Publishing Company, Inc., 1934) 5.

¹⁸ Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture & the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 236-237.

¹⁹ Popular Science Monthly.

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small scale and domestic character emphasize its initial role as a place for teaching the art of homemaking to rural women.

Some of the other rustic revival log community houses built in eastern North Carolina by the ERA still stand, most notably the Smithfield Community House in Johnston County. This community house also features exposed saddle-notched logs and a large central section flanked by two much smaller wings. The Smithfield building, however, has a large wraparound porch, while the Red Oak building has only a small central portico. A rustic revival log community building also still stands in Trenton, the county seat of Jones County.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The historic boundary is Nash County Tax Parcel Map 3923.14.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the land historically associated with the community house.