**NAME**

**HISTORIC**

Bingham School

AND/OR COMMON

**LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER**

NE corner N.C. 54 and SR 1007

**CITY, TOWN**

Oaks

**STATE**

North Carolina

**CITY, TOWN**

**VICINITY OF**

**COORDINATE OF**

**COUNTY**

**CODE**

**CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT**

2nd

**CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

**NAME**

Mrs. Evelyn M. Brownscombe (also, see attached list)

**STREET & NUMBER**

408 Hermitage Court

**CITY, TOWN**

Charlotte

**STATE**

North Carolina 28207

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

**COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**

Orange County Courthouse

**STREET & NUMBER**

**CITY, TOWN**

Hillsborough

**STATE**

North Carolina

**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

**TITLE**

**DATE**

**FEDERAL**

**STATE**

**COUNTY**

**LOCAL**

**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**

**CITY, TOWN**

**STATE**
Owners, cont.

Mr. Charles W. Stanford  
c/o Mrs. Evelyn M. Brownscombe  
408 Hermitage Court  
Charlotte, NC  28207

Mr. Harmon M. Greene  
c/o Mrs. Evelyn M. Brownscombe  
408 Hermitage Court  
Charlotte, NC  28207

Mr. Johnny P. Greene  
c/o Mrs. Evelyn M. Brownscombe  
408 Hermitage Court  
Charlotte, NC  28207
DESCRIPTION

ConditiON

- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR

-Deteriorated
- RuINS
- Unexposed

CHECK ONE

X- UnALTERED

CHECK ONE

- Original Site
- Moved

Date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bingham School complex includes a number of buildings from several eras: a large, expansive, multi-stage house, a contemporary smokehouse and well house, and several later outbuildings. The L-shaped house is composed of three main sections: the large two-story block, facing northeast, of vernacular Greek Revival character; a small board-and-batten office attached at the southwest (rear) corner; and a long one-and-one-half-story ell at the southeast (rear), itself composed of three stages of construction. Uniting the main block and ell is an impressive L-shaped colonnade or porch facing a pleasant courtyard created by the L-shaped arrangement.

The oldest portion of the house is the rear ell, which antedates Bingham ownership and appears to date from the early nineteenth century. This consists of a log structure to the northeast and a frame structure to the southeast, linked by a common massive interior chimney and united by weatherboarding and a gable roof with shed dormers. The log structure appears to be the oldest. Fenestration is irregular, with both four-over-four sash (probably the original) and six-over-six sash present. The log construction is visible from a kitchen later attached to the east side of the structure. The exterior finish is like that of the entire ell, with mid-nineteenth century doors with four panels, plain weatherboarding, and a simple molded box cornice. (Doors throughout this section have two or four panels and rather narrow mid-nineteenth century moldings.)

Within, the single room on the first floor is finished with flush sheathing with remnants of a chair rail. An enclosed stair rises in the northeast corner. On the southwest wall a square fireplace opening is framed by a large mantel, which is composed simply of a three-part molding topped by a shelf. Flanking the mantel are doorways, each with a two-light transom, framed by a two-part molded frame. In the corners are built-in corner cupboards with glazing above and a paneled door below. The second-story room is finished with flush sheathing and lit by the shed dormers.

The rearmost section of the ell is of frame construction, and its age relative to the log section is uncertain; it seems to be also of early nineteenth century origin and may have been a freestanding structure for a time or may have been constructed originally as an addition to the log structure. The exterior finish is like that of the log structure. The west facade of this section, facing the courtyard, features a single four-over-four sash window and, at the south end, two doors side by side, each having four panels, but with slightly different configuration and slightly different moldings. The north door leads into the first-floor room, the south one up the stair. This section has a brick foundation over a basement which is reached by brick steps leading down from the rear (east) porch. Unfinished massive posts said to be crepe myrtle carry the rear porch roof. On the east facade there are two four-over-four sash windows and no door. Similar windows occur on the south side, and the gable is finished with a beaded tapered rake board.

Within, this section is plastered upstairs and down, except for the stair, which is finished with flush sheathing. Narrow, plain baseboards occur. The mantels are of simple Georgian form but the moldings are narrow Federal style ones. The first-floor mantel features a molded frame and four rectangular flat panels beneath a shelf, and that one the second floor is similar but has only three panels. A number of curious features occur, which will bear further investigation if the house is renovated.
of these is the presence of what appears to be brick nogging in the south wall at the first level. It does not extend to the second level, and it cannot be determined whether it occurs anywhere else at the first level.

The front section of the house, the two-story Greek Revival block, was probably built for the Binghams. It follows a center-hall plan one room deep, and the finish is a curious combination of rather elegant paneling on doors and some wainscots and beautiful marbleizing, and other features—mantel, stair, and other elements—of very plain vernacular character. Whether this reflects the work of different craftsmen, the combination of some elements brought into the house and others made on the site, or what, is not known, but the variation in sophistication is marked.

The house, three bays wide and two deep, is covered with plain weatherboards and carries a gable roof. It rests on brick piers, a brick foundation, and a partial basement. Doors and windows are framed by simplified Greek Revival moldings, consisting of boards grooved to resemble symmetrical molding or fluting, accented by plain cornerblocks. Windows are unusually large, with twelve-over-twelve sash at the first level and eight-over-twelve at the second. The double doors centrally located front and back are very handsome, with a simple transom and three plain raised panels on each leaf of the door, expertly woodgrained. A front shed entrance porch lacks base and columns. Exterior chimneys of brick laid in one-to-five common bond, with single stepped shoulders rise at either end. At the east end, the house has been extended a few feet, reusing old materials, so that it is flush with the chimney.

The interior is essentially unchanged, and features sheathed ceilings and walls plastered above a wainscot. In the hall and west first-floor parlor, the wainscot is quite handsome, with a double range of flat panels outlined with a heavy molding. The panels are subtly arranged to fit precisely the length of each wall, and in the parlor a single range only appears beneath the large windows. Wainscots in the other rooms are flush sheathed. Doors, too, are quite handsome, with the same rich moldings around their six flat panels, which are expertly wood-grained. Door and window frames are plain symmetrically grooved ones with plain cornerblocks, and at the windows descend to the baseboard to frame the panels beneath the window. The baseboard, which is marbleized, is absolutely plain. Mantels without exception are unsophisticated post-and-lintel compositions with simple shelves, of vaguely Greek Revival character. Some marbleizing is present. The stair, which rises back-to-front in the hall, features slim balusters square-in-section and square posts with molded cap, which carry a robust rounded handrail, an inverted U-shaped in section. Risers are marbleized.

The office, featuring board and batten walls, has a broad frieze beneath the heavy overhang of the hip roof. Details are of typical mid-nineteenth century character, including two-panel, woodgrained doors.
One of the most interesting and unusual features of the house is the beautiful shaded courtyard bordered on two sides by the colonnaded porch that carries along the rear of the two-story section and the front of the ell. A shed roof is carried on sturdy columns of Doric character, constructed of wedge-shaped bricks and stuccoed; these unusual masonry columns are seen also at the rear porch of the Ruffin-Roulhac House in Hillsborough. The raised floor of the porch is surfaced with square paving bricks, and the ceiling of the porch is lathed and has traces of plaster. The enclosed feeling of the porch and courtyard is intensified by the presence of the office and by a wooden partition linking the front section of the house and the ell.

To the rear of the house is a small well-house, a frame gable roof structure of mid-nineteenth century date whose gabled overhang, sheltering the well, is carried on round brick columns like those of the porch. To the east of the house is a smokehouse of traditional heavy timber frame construction. Several other outbuildings of uncertain or later date exist as well.
The Bingham School at Oaks, North Carolina, is an interesting complex of buildings from several eras located in a pleasant rural setting in the rolling Piedmont farmland of western Orange County. The complex includes an L-shaped house composed of small early nineteenth century buildings and the more ambitious mid-nineteenth century Greek Revival house probably built for the Binghams, plus several outbuildings. This was the site of the Bingham School from 1845 until 1864, one of a series of North Carolina locations of a school established by William J. Bingham in Hillsborough and continued by his sons and grandsons, which gained a statewide reputation for academic excellence.

According to his grandson Robert, writing in Ashe's *Biographical History of North Carolina*, the Reverend Bingham left the University about 1806 and reopened his private school in Hillsborough because the boys who came to the University were so poorly prepared. He thus afforded his sons and grandsons an opportunity to participate in what the Asheville *Citizen Times* of 1921 referred to as "the only institution of learning of any grade in the United States which has been administered continuously from grandfather to grandson by three successive generations of headmasters so as to touch three centuries." 3

The Bingham School property at Oaks, North Carolina, is a group of buildings used by William James Bingham and his sons as a school for boys prior to and during the Civil War. Bingham was the son of the Reverend William James Bingham of Glasgow, the founder and first headmaster of the first Bingham School, located in Pittsboro in 1793. The Reverend Bingham gave up his school from 1801 to 1805, when he taught Latin and Greek at the new University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where William James was born.

The school was relocated at Mt. Repose, eleven miles northwest of Hillsborough, about 1810, where it remained until the Reverend Bingham's death in 1826. His son William James administered the school in Hillsborough until 1845, when he moved the school to yet another location twelve miles southwest of Hillsborough in an area known as Oaks. 4 It is on this site that the only buildings associated with the school at any of its many locations are still in existence.

William James purchased the Oaks property, including approximately 370 acres bounded by Cane Creek and the Hillsborough Road, from Alexander Morrow in 1844. He paid Morrow twenty-five hundred dollars ($2500) for the property, which suggest that there may have been at least one structure already on it. New arrivals to the area in 1845 recalled that they "reached the small cluster of frame buildings at the Oaks community, passed the Binghams' newly acquired farm and academy buildings on the left
and crossed the road that led to the University at Chapel Hill."6

Bingham's purpose in moving the school to Oaks from Hillsborough was to rear his sons and teach his students away from the distractions of a town.7

The Bingham circular of the 1850s said little of the Oaks environment except that boys were to go to church on Sundays and not make accounts at business houses. However, students had the run of God's great gymnasium in their free hours, and they engaged in a variety of vigorous enterprises: hunting, fishing, trapping and games, including skinny, a rustic version of field hockey. Bingham's was an outdoor school.

Charles Lee Raper, in his Church and Private Schools in North Carolina, wrote that the second headmaster of Bingham School raised both the nobility of the teaching profession and the reputation of his school in a short time: "He increased tuition fees from $20.00 to $150.00 a year. He limited his number to 30 students and his school had such a reputation all over the country that he had to refuse admission to 300 pupils in a single year."8 The esteem in which Bingham and his school were held by North Carolina families was remarkable, since tuition had to be paid in gold, never paper money, and the discipline was strict. Sawney Webb remembers from his days at the Oaks school that "Old Bingham" did not spare the rod: "When a boy missed declining a word, he thrashed him... He wasn't mad. He thrashed a boy, all the time looking nice and sweet like he was doing the nicest job he ever did in his life."9

In 1857, William James's sons, Robert and William, joined their father in running the school, which then became William J. Bingham and Sons. They increased the facilities and accepted up to 60 students.10 Many of these students were boarded with nearby families, since there were no living quarters at the Oaks location.11 Robert's tenure with the school was interrupted by the Civil War, and in 1861 he raised a company and left the operation of the school to his aging father and elder brother William. With his group of recruits, Company G of the Forty-Fourth North Carolina Troops, Robert saw continuous service until the surrender and was present at Appomatox Courthouse.12

William, unlike his brother, could not fight in the war because of frail health but served with distinction in the local militia. It was under his leadership that the school continued during the difficult years of the war, because his father virtually retired from the principalship in 1863. In deference to the war effort, William incorporated the school as a military academy in 1864, and that was the character of the school at its subsequent locations at Mebanesville and Asheville. One distinguished North Carolinian has written of the school following the transition: "Colonel Bingham introduced the military discipline at Oaks while I was in school. The boys were drilled every evening, and a regular guard was maintained at night. He
had the commanding presence of a soldier, and every boy instinctively felt his influence." Each principal thereafter was given the rank and title of Colonel by the state. William became headmaster in 1865, and his famous father died in February, 1866.13

The move of the school to Mebanesville came in December, 1864. The war had made it increasingly difficult to obtain provisions at Oaks, which was ten miles from the railroad at Hillsborough. The school was moved to a site which lay on a spur of the Southern Railroad at Mebanesville station, in the northwestern corner of Orange County. Old William James Bingham was violently opposed to the move and ordered the family slaves to disregard his son's requests to prepare for the move. His will, written in August, 1864, stipulated that if his sons did not continue the school at Oaks, the academy buildings and grounds should become the sole possessions of his widow and not be jointly owned by William and Robert.16

Nevertheless, the Bingham School was moved from Oaks and prospered at its new location. In 1873, the principalship of the school passed to Robert Bingham upon the death of his brother William. In 1891, Robert decided to move the school to Asheville following two destructive fires that swept the Mebanesville buildings in 1882 and 1890. The school continued in Asheville until 1928, one year after Robert's death.18

After the removal of the Bingham School to the Mebanesville location, William James' widow Eliza Alves Bingham continued to live at the house at Oaks and maintain the lands surrounding it. She also inherited other property in the county, Chapel Hill and Hillsborough which William James Bingham had acquired during his long and prosperous life. She made several sales of land over the years 1871 to 1881. Included in these transactions were two parcels that had been part of the original tract which Bingham purchased from Alexander Morrow in 1844. The first parcel of 46 acres directly in front of the Bingham house was sold to D. F. Morrow in 1874 for twelve hundred and fifty dollars ($1250). The second parcel was sold to S. S. Webb in 1880 in a complicated exchange that included a third party, Abner Conklin, to whom Eliza A. Bingham had promised to sell 20 and ½ acres during his lifetime. This parcel was bordered by Caterpillar Creek and the lands of Lizzie Morrow and Sarah Crawford.19

Eliza Bingham died in 1885 and her will, written in 1877, stipulated that all of her property was to go to her daughter Mary Bingham with bequests of books to be made to her other daughters Mrs. J. W. Montgomery, Mrs. P. T. Penick, their husbands and children. There is a local tradition that Mary Bingham maintained a school in the old home until the 1880s, however, this is not substantiated by any existing records. There are deed transactions by Mary which show her selling land just north of the Bingham house to William G. Stafford as late as 1888.20 One written statement made in 1954 by Mrs. Emma Harvard Monk gives the history that her cousin Lucy Weathersbee "who had conducted a private school in Chapel Hill for some years, moved to Oaks, N. C. and opened a school in the old Bingham home." She further states that "June Webb was farming the Bingham land."21
In 1893 the property containing 316 2/3 acres and meeting the description in the original deed of Morrow to Bingham, was sold by Sarah C. Stroud, wife of Weldon M. Stroud, to W. G. Careathers for "twelve hundred and sixtysix dollars ($1266) cash and twelve hundred and thirty three dollars to be left by will of last testament of said second part." It is not known how Sarah C. Stroud obtained the Bingham property to sell to Careathers. She was the daughter of Alviss Durham and W. G. Careathers was her brother-in-law by marriage to her sister Nancy.

Careathers sold this same piece of land to Harmon McIver in 1910. The McIver family which is closely related to the families in that area of Orange County have maintained part of this land including the site and surrounding 9.98 acres which contains the old Bingham home and several outbuildings. The property--extant buildings which date from the 1840s--is an historic architectural monument to the efforts of one of the nineteenth century's most notable educator families.

FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., p. 68.

3 "Bingham Occupies Honored Place Among the Educational Ranks of Western Carolina's Institutions," Asheville Citizen Times, November 30, 1921.

4 Ashe, pp. 67-68.

5 Orange County Records, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C., (Subgroup: Deeds, Book 31, p. 139).


7 Ashe, p. 69.

8 McMillin, p. 23.


10 McMillin, p. 22.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Bingham Occupies Honored Place Among the Educational Ranks of Western Carolina's Institutions." Asheville Citizen Times. November 30, 1921.


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 9.98 acres—see attached survey sheet, present house site

LATITUDE LONGITUDE

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME/TITLE Description prepared by Catherine W. Bishir, Head, Survey & Planning Branch
Significance prepared by Diane Lea, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Division of Archives and History

STREET & NUMBER 109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh

STATE North Carolina

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE July 14, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
11 Ashe, p. 75.


14 Ashe, p. 84.

15 Ashe, pp. 76, 77, 79.

16 McMillin, p. 40.

17 Orange County Records, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C.: (Subgroup: Wills, Book G, p. 482).

18 Ashe, pp. 84, 85.

19 Orange County Records, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C.: Grantors Index, Deed Book 49, pp. 313, 315.

20 Ibid., Will Book H, p. 374; Deed Book 52, p. 48.


23 Ibid., Deed Book 63, p. 108.


Bingham School
Orange County
North Carolina
NE corner NC-54 & SR-1007

Latitude
Longitude
35° 57' 14"
79° 15' 12"

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