

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

|                  |
|------------------|
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Flora Macdonald College

AND/OR COMMON

Robeson Country Day School

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Bounded by College St., 2nd Avenue, and Peachtree St.

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Red Springs

\_\_ VICINITY OF

7th

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

North Carolina

37

Robeson

155

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

\_\_ DISTRICT

\_\_ PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_ MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_ PARK

\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_ BOTH

\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_ SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_ OBJECT

\_\_ IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_ NO

\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_ OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Vardell Hall Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Lumberton

STATE

North Carolina

\_\_ VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Robeson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Lumberton

STATE

North Carolina

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_ STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                |                                       | CHECK ONE                                   | CHECK ONE   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT       | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR            | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |   |   |

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Flora Macdonald College, set amid towering long-leaf pines on a forty-three acre campus in the Sandhills area of southeastern North Carolina, contains the large main building of vernacular Neo-Classical Revival style constructed in six stages between 1900 and 1910, a 1909 laundry and heating plant, a 1938 gymnasium, and a 1959 chapel. The campus is bounded by College Street, which the main building faces, Second Avenue, and Peachtree Street. A nine-acre informal garden of native plants, including live oaks, pine, dogwood, cypress and sweet gum trees and many azaleas, stretches between the main building and College Street.

Main building is composed of six sections: Conservatory Hall, the east wing, 1900; East Hall, the east hyphen, 1902; South Hall, the south wing, 1904; West Hall, the west hyphen, 1905; Administration Hall, the center domed section, 1906; and Long West, the west wing, 1910. Conservatory Hall, the earliest section, is a three story brick building, four bays wide and seven deep, laid in one-to-five common bond, and covered with a hip roof whose overhanging eaves shelter exposed rafters. Structural tie rods with S-shaped cast-iron heads strengthen the walls. The main entrance, in the front center bay, is a double paneled door with sidelights and transom, protected by a one-story hip roofed porch supported by slender Doric columns with a plain railing. Rectangular two-over-two sash pierce the first two stories; two-pane casements with flat brick panels beneath pierce the third story.

Beginning with the construction of East Hall, the stages were built according to a master plan; they form a homogenous whole with identical decorative treatment. Together with Conservatory Hall, the sections compose a dominant center block with flanking wings connected by hyphens. The main block is four stories high and the remaining sections are three stories high with the exception of the one story kitchen at the rear of the main block. The windows consist, in the first story, of round-arched window openings each containing paired two-over-two sash, and, in the second story, of segmental-arched openings with identical sash. The main block, six bays wide and nine deep, has a Palladian entrance and a three-story Doric tetrastyle portico and is surmounted by a cupola. The main entrance, in the center bay of the main (north) facade, is a double door, each leaf paneled and glazed, with a fanlight and sidelights with matching panels beneath, set within a heavy wooden surround with applied turned colonnettes and a molded dentil course with keystone. The main facade corners of the first three stories have brick quoins, and between the third and fourth stories is a corbeled brick stringcourse. The parapetted eaves are ornamented with an arcaded brick corbel cornice. A concrete deck, a later twentieth century addition, with a low wooden balustrade, extends out from the portico and wraps around to the hyphen on each side. The polygonal frame cupola has a round-headed window with eight lights beneath a fanlight in each face, and is surmounted by a tin-covered dome with a finial.

The west wing (three bays wide and seven deep), the south wing (four bays wide and ten deep), and hyphens (each five bays wide), are treated identically to the main block. The west wing, like the main facade of the main block, has quoined corners and a simpler central Palladian entrance with a single paneled and glazed door. The rear center entrance of this section is sheltered by a three-bay, one-story brick porch with arched openings, decorative flat brick panels and a corbeled brick cornice. With the exception of this section, the rear elevations lack the string course and corbel cornice.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

The interior is essentially unaltered. The most striking feature of the entire complex is the rotunda which occupies the center of the main block. The circular well, open through four stories to the cupola, is supported at the first level by flat-paneled wooden Doric posts resting on round splayed wood-sheathed bases. A round wooden seat encloses each base. The remaining levels are supported by chamfered wood posts with plain capitals. The rim of the opening at each level is covered with narrow vertical sheathing and a simplified dentil course, and is encircled by a plain railing with rectangular balusters. The large, fanlighted cupola windows, separated by Doric pilasters, flood the well with light.

*Craftsman - style*

The main block has a wide center hall extending longitudinally through the block, with transverse hall, intersecting at the rotunda, which opens into the halls of the hyphens on each side. The front hall is divided from the rotunda by a screen formed by two flat-paneled Doric posts and by two built-in high backed benches which project at right angles into the hall beside the posts. The front hall is finished entirely with wood, with a sheathed wainscot, a flat-paneled pilaster wall treatment, and exposed flat paneled ceiling joists. The doors have simple molded surrounds. The rotunda has a parquet floor, a high vertically sheathed wainscot, and plaster walls banded by thin vertical wood strips. The ceiling joists of the first floor of the rotunda are boxed, and the intervening ceiling areas covered with narrow flush sheathing, crating a coffered effect. A pair of stairs flanks the rotunda, in the northeast and northwest corners, each rising in two flights with a landing to the second floor and continuing through each floor to the cupola. The first-floor stair has massive newels similar to the supporting posts of the lobby and railings like that surrounding the wells. The railings of the upper stair levels consist of turned balusters and newels. The reveals of the first flight of each stair are ornamented with wood strips applied to imitate flat panels, in character with the general rotunda treatment. On each side of the front hall is a pair of visitors' parlors, reached through double sliding paneled doors, with plaster walls and ceilings and plain opening surrounds. The upper stories of this block, which contain classrooms and laboratories, have vertically sheathed wainscots, plaster walls, plasterboard ceilings, and paneled doors with transoms.

The east and west hyphens and the west wing each contain a center hall flanked by classrooms on the first floor and by dormitory rooms on the upper floors. The sections are finished with wainscots, some vertically sheathed, some finished like the rotunda stair reveals with applied wood strips, plaster or plasterboard walls, and plastered or wood sheathed ceilings. Paneled doors with transoms open from the halls into the rooms. The east wing has a stair at both the north and south ends, with railings composed of turned newels and balusters. The west wing stair, located in the north end, is very similar to the rotunda stairs. The east wing contains a wide center hall with flanking classrooms on the first floor, and an auditorium occupies the second and third floors. The auditorium, a perfectly preserved room with exposed timber roof rafters and with lateral iron cross ties extending from large decorative wooden brackets, is a valuable survival of the late Victorian era. The room has a vertically sheathed dado, plaster walls, and a low stage at the north end with a dressing room on each side. Turned wooden posts support a rear balcony with a vertically sheathed balustrade. The original row

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE TWO

seating, consisting of wooden seats and backs supported within a decorative cast-iron frame, is intact, and seats over 900.

The first floor of the south wing contains a dining room, and dormitory rooms occupy the upper floors. The unaltered dining room has a vertically sheathed wainscot, plaster walls, and a ceiling coffered like that of the first floor of the rotunda. Two rows of five cast-iron columns support the ceiling.

Southeast of the main building is the 1909 laundry and heating plant building, a two-story rectangular brick structure, nine bays wide and three deep, with a one-story, one-bay brick appendage on the south end. The building has segmental-arched, two-over-two sash windows, a corbel brick cornice, and a flat roof. Behind the east wing is a 1938 gymnasium, a two-story gabled frame building covered with German siding. At the rear of the center section of the main building is a small, freestanding brick chapel constructed in 1959.

The well-maintained campus is composed of grassed grounds, shaded by large oaks, which slope gently from the main building to the gardens, designed and laid out by Dr. Vardell, the college president, in the early 1930s. Opposite the main entrance of the main building, a rough hewn stone bridge over a small branch serves as the garden entrance. Near the bridge is a semicircular stone bench with the inscription "Class of 1917." The garden is actually a cultivated woodland with narrow meandering dirt paths. In the garden is a stone monument commemorating two of Flora Macdonald's children, whose remains were moved from unmarked graves in Richmond County and reinterred on the college grounds in 1937.

# SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD  | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC          | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING     | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION           | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW                    | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS              | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION   | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                  | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY             | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-     | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY               | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |  |

SPECIFIC DATES 1900-1910

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Flora Macdonald College, a Presbyterian college for women founded in 1896 as the successor of nearby Floral College (established in 1841 and one of the first women's colleges in the South), was one of the leading women's colleges in southeastern North Carolina until its closing in 1961. The main college building, an imposing vernacular Neo-Classical Revival structure built between 1900 and 1910, and the well-maintained nine-acre informal campus garden form the chief landmark of the town of Red Springs. The campus is a monument to the nineteenth century devotion to women's education in the Upper Cape Fear River Valley. The remarkably unchanged main building with its skylighted four-story rotunda now functions as a private day school.

Flora Macdonald College was founded at Red Springs, Robeson County, by the Fayetteville Presbytery of the Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina. Originally known as Red Springs Seminary, it opened its doors to female students on September 30, 1896.

Flora Macdonald College's first president was Charles Graves Vardell (1860-1958), a native of Charleston, South Carolina. He was a graduate of Davidson College and later received his degree in divinity from Princeton College. He served as pastor of a Presbyterian church in New Bern from 1891 until 1896, when he resigned in order to help found the Red Springs Seminary. He served the institution with distinction until his retirement in February, 1930.

The choice of Red Springs as the site for the new seminary apparently met with some resistance from a group of Presbyterians who wished to see the school built on or near the site of the old Floral College campus near Maxton. This institution was established in 1841 as one of the earliest colleges for women in the South. It remained in existence until 1878, when indebtedness forced it to close. From that time on, "there was no girls' school within a radius of over a hundred miles . . ." of the predominantly Scottish settlements in the Upper Cape Fear Valley and there soon existed a need for an educational facility to fill the void left by the defunct Floral College. Although the new Presbyterian girls' school was erected on a four-acre tract at Red Springs and not at the old Floral College site, it was said to be the "natural successor" to its antebellum predecessor.

The school apparently began operations in more than one building. An 1896 newspaper advertisement extolled the "new buildings, well equipped and adapted to all departments of college work." It boasted that the new seminary was "fully abreast of the leading Southern Colleges for Women." In the initial year of operation, student enrollment numbered 112, ranging from the first grade through college and including boarders and town students. One of the students who attended Red Springs Seminary's first session

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

declared that "Fayetteville Presbytery has reason to be proud of this Institution. It is well equipped and in good hands."<sup>3</sup>

During its early years, the school was plagued by a constant shortage of funds. Within a decade, however, physical facilities had been expanded to include five additions to the original campus. Throughout its early years, the seminary had as its declared goal the task of providing "the very best Christian Education at the very lowest cost."<sup>4</sup>

One of the seminary's most successful academic programs was in the field of music. Upon President Vardell's recommendation, the school's board of trustees voted in 1903 to change the institution's name to the Southern Presbyterian College and Conservatory of Music. In 1905 Vardell reported to the board a total enrollment of 353 students from fourteen states.

In October, 1915, the trustees voted to accept President Vardell's recommendation to rename the institution Flora Macdonald College in honor of the Scottish heroine who lived in nearby Fayetteville from 1774 to 1779 and in recognition of the support given to the school by local citizens of Scottish descent. The institution retained the name Flora Macdonald College throughout the remainder of its existence.

A promotional leaflet distributed by the college in 1920 reveals the growth enjoyed by that institution during its first twenty-four years. The college's teaching staff grew from six to thirty instructors, its number of boarding students increased from forty to 260, and by 1920 the school was compelled by lack of space to refuse admission to 200 applicants. Furthermore, by 1920 the college had produced over 2,800 alumnae engaged in forty-five different professions. Attendance at Flora Macdonald remained high throughout the 1920s and 1930s: an average of about 300 students were enrolled there annually. The 1920-1940 period was Flora Macdonald College's golden era.

The Second World War was blamed for a general decline in attendance during the 1940s. "The average annual enrollment for the 1940-1949 period was about 260 students and the resulting loss of income caused a severe reversal of forward progress."<sup>5</sup> Continuing declines in the early 1950s compelled the trustees to resolve to phase out Flora Macdonald College and to combine its resources with those of Peace and Presbyterian Junior colleges into a single four-year coeducational institution to be known as St. Andrews Presbyterian College. Against the wishes of many of the townspeople of Red Springs, St. Andrews was constructed in nearby Laurinburg, Scotland County, and occupied in 1961. Flora Macdonald College, of course, went out of existence and its sixty-five-year-old campus was abandoned.

The 1961 closing ended a tradition in the Scottish sections of North Carolina and particularly in the town of Red Springs. Students at Flora Macdonald College responded favorably to the small-town atmosphere of Red Springs and to the emphasis upon the Scottish heritage of the college and its surroundings. Students there often cited the unique atmosphere of Flora Macdonald and credited it with making the school different from any other.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

In addition to the prevailing small-town and Scottish influences, the campus grounds themselves have been described as "commodious and vine covered" and "one of the beauty spots of the Carolinas."<sup>6</sup> The husband of a former student recalled that the Flora Macdonald campus of the mid-1940s "was a wonderfully romantic setting. Going there was like being received in a fine, old southern home. All the girls were ladies and all were treated that way. . . ." His wife expressed the following sentiments regarding her college days at Flora Macdonald:

College was to me a happy and rewarding experience. It may have been a small school, and in many ways old-fashioned, but we had close personal attention, and we studied and learned. . . .

There was reverence for tradition there, an emphasis on the Scottish culture of this region which no other school has ever had.

We had a good time too. There was never much money to do things with, and we were thrown on our own resources and we loved it. The community of Red Springs was very warm and close knit around us.

I would wish for my children the same sort of happy memories I have of Flora Macdonald--which will never be forgotten as long as any of its alumnae are alive.

In 1964 the old Flora Macdonald campus was resurrected by the establishment there of Vardell Hall, a non-profit, non-sectarian junior college and preparatory school named in honor of Flora Macdonald College's first president. By 1968, however, the new institution was operating only as a prep school. Today the campus serves as the home of the Robeson County Day School.

<sup>1</sup>Untitled manuscript (c. 1938) of a sketch of Charles Graves Vardell (possibly a speech), Survey Branch, Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History.

<sup>2</sup>Advertisement, North Carolina Presbyterian (Wilmington), October 8, 1896, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Eva McLean to the editor, Red Springs, N. C., n.d., in North Carolina Presbyterian (Wilmington), October 29, 1896, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Advertisement, North Carolina Presbyterian (Wilmington), September 2, 1897, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>William Richard Bracey, "A History of Flora Macdonald College" (unpublished master's thesis, Appalachian State Teachers' College Boone, 1962), p. 59.

<sup>6</sup>"Flora Macdonald College Founded by Fayetteville Presbytery in Year 1896," The Pilot (Southern Pines), March or May 20, 1936.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE three

<sup>7</sup>"Mrs. McPhaul, Person of Many Talents 1,7 Regrets Flora Macdonald College Loss,"  
The Pilot (Southern Pines), August 31, 1961.

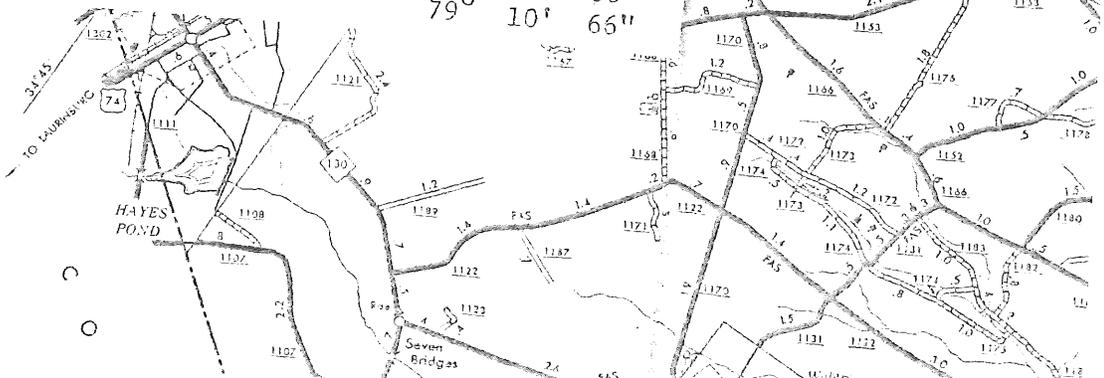
<sup>8</sup>Ibid.





Flora Macdonald College  
 Red Springs  
 North Carolina  
 N.C. Highway Map  
 Scale: 1/2" 1 mile  
 Date: 1961

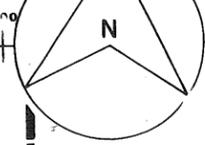
|    | Latitude |     |     | Longitude |         |
|----|----------|-----|-----|-----------|---------|
| NW | 34°      | 45' | 53" | 79°       | 10' 45" |
| NE | 34°      | 45' | 30" | 79°       | 10' 45" |
| SE | 34°      | 45' | 30" | 79°       | 10' 66" |
| SW | 34°      | 45' | 53" | 79°       | 10' 66" |



# TOWN of RED SPRINGS

Red Springs, North Carolina 28377

1 1/2" = 1680 feet no date



3200

4880 FT.

