United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 The Williams-Powell House

and/or common

2. Location

West side SR 2256, approximately 1.0 mile South

street & number junction with SR 2255

not for publication

state North Carolina code 037 county Robeson code 155

3. Classification

Category Ownership Status Present Use

X district public X occupied museum

X building(s) private unoccupied commercial

structure both unoccupied educational

site both work in progress entertainment

Public Acquisition in process government

Accessible X yes: restricted industrial

N/A being considered military

no

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. Sydney Clarence Waldecker

street & number 3946 St. Johns Avenue, Box 156

city, town Jacksonville

vicinity of Orrum

state Florida code 32205

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Robeson County Courthouse

street & number P. O. Box 1388

state N. C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date

federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state
The Williams-Powell House, a two-story weatherboarded frame plantation house sitting in a grove of planted and natural trees and shrubs, is finished with a program of transitional Federal-Greek Revival woodwork which remains remarkably intact to the present. It is one of the oldest known houses in Robeson County and is contemporary with the nearby Humphrey-Williams House (National Register, 1973). It also enjoys a family connection to the house as Warren Williams, who owned it from 1859 until 1908, was a cousin of Giles Williams, the builder of this house. Unlike the Humphrey-Williams House, the Williams-Powell House has two architectural qualities which set it apart from mainstream traditional building of the period in North Carolina. The first feature is the free-standing two-story portico on the east front elevation which shelters the first and second story porches. Its columns rest on individual brick stacks unattached to the porch's present brick foundation which replaced the earlier, original brick pier arrangement. This portico/porch arrangement appears in North Carolina only in those counties which carry along the state's border with South Carolina. One other known example in Robeson County appears on the Col. Murdoch MacRae House.

The second significant architectural feature of the house is the two-room first story plan with the stair to the second floor rising not from either room but from the open rear porch room. (The second story follows a center hall plan.) This arrangement appears to be unique to southeastern North Carolina and can also be seen in neighboring Hoke County at Puppy Creek Plantation (National Register, 1976) and Millprong (National Register, 1979).

Although a number of later outbuildings survive in use—the slave houses, and other principal 19th century outbuildings are lost—the house retains its important associations with the antebellum plantation culture which prospered in southeastern North Carolina and more particularly in Robeson County. It is also interesting that in its near 150 years of existence it has had but three owners, the builder Giles Williams, his daughter Ora Williams Powell (1856-1944) and her husband Benjamin Franklin Powell (1853-1931), and the present owner, his granddaughter, Voncile Powell Waldecker who was born in the house on 23 July 1900. For much of this century the house has been infrequently occupied by members of the family.

The present appearance of the house owes to three major periods of construction. The first was, of course, the construction of the original house which consists of the two-story double pile main block with its front portico/porch arrangement. In the mid to late 19th century a one-story ell was added behind the house. Its north elevation is flush with the north gable end of the main block. A shed porch extending from the porch room of the earlier block carries along the south elevation of the ell to a pantry-like projection at the west gable end of the ell. Documentary photographs show that the well shed was engaged in the above porch; however, it was removed and the well covered over (about 1958) in the third phase of construction which has occurred intermittently during the present ownership when the ell's porch was enclosed. However, a frame shed supported by free columns—not unlike the front porch arrangement—carries along the south side of the above porch and wraps the southwest corner of the ell and connects with the later porch on the west gable end of the ell. The two other principal changes have been the replacement of the first story window sash with the present two over two horizontal pane arrangement by Harry Powell (1884-1981) and the replacement of the chimney on the south gable end and the construction of a full brick
foundation for the house. These last changes were made in large part due to the
deterioration of the original brick, with their high-sand composition, and to insu­
late the house. A deteriorating (original?) 19th century brick chimney with its
later free-standing stack still stands on the north gable end of the main block.
Harry Powell, the brother of Voncile Powell Waldecker, occupied the first story of
the house until his death and made various minor repairs.

The east front elevation of the house has a four bay division on the first
story and a three bay arrangement on the second story. The doors onto the first and
second story porches are unrelated in their placement. The door on the first story
opens into the north room and is located in the second bay from the right (facing).
The other three symmetrically placed openings are windows and contain replacement
sash. The door immediately to the left (south) of the door is also sheltered under
the porch. On the second story the door which opens into a small central hall is
placed in the near center of the elevation and is flanked by symmetrically disposed
windows. In a rather curious arrangement the frieze band of the portico joins the
main block over these windows and abuts the window surrounds. The finish of the
portico and the house is simply molded; some of the cornice woodwork has been replaced.
The plain square columns rise to an unmolded frieze band. The eaves of the portico's
gable roof have a slight return on the front. The gable end is sheathed with weather­
boards. The lattice railing on both stories repeats the original arrangement seen in
documentary photographs. The door and window surrounds have transitional Federal­
Greek Revival moldings. A single nine-over-nine sash illuminating the northwest room
remains in place on the first story of the north gable end. The six over six sash
arrangement on the second story is original. The original six panel front door on
the first story is surmounted by a four pane transom. The door on the second story
is modern.

As noted earlier, chimneys stand on each gable end. They are not placed in the
center of the gables but rather closer to the front of the house so as to be in the
center of the north and south end walls of the two large front rooms. The shallow
rear rooms of the double pile arrangement are engaged under the single gable roof.
Window openings flank the chimneys on both levels at both ends and there are single
windows on both stories near the western end of the elevation to illuminate the back
rooms. Most of the house's rear (west) elevation is occupied by the latter one story
ell. A one story bathroom has been added to the rear elevation in the space south of the
ell. Its south elevation is flush with the south gable end of the main block.
There is one original window opening on the second story illuminating the shallow south­
west corner room. A later smaller window, also holding six-over-six sash is set in the
center of the west elevation. This arrangement causes one to wonder if perhaps the
second level here was at one time a sleeping porch.

Although changes to the exterior of the house have somewhat compromised its
appearance, the handsome interior finish of the house remains intact. In the pair
of first story front rooms—a parlor in the north end and a bedroom in the south end—
molded Federal woodwork including six panel doors, chair rails and baseboards, door
and window surrounds, and mantels remain intact.

The door opening on to the front porch from the parlor is mirrored by a door
in the west wall opening onto the rear porch room. Near the center of the south wall
is a third door connecting the parlor with the south bedroom. It retains its original hardware. There is a fourth door opening (cut in the 1970s) connecting the parlor with the small northwest corner bedroom behind it. The walls above the chair rail are covered with sheetrock. The ceiling has been replaced with an inexpensive board and batten. The floor is original.

The mantels in the parlor and in the bedroom to the south are nearly identical, transitional Federal-Greek Revival in character, and consist of molded pilasters rising to a molded full entablature. The rise of the stair is enclosed in the northwest corner of this south bedroom. A closet fitted with a two panel door occurs beneath it. There are two doors in the bedroom's west wall, one near the center of the wall which opens into the small (southwest) bedroom behind it and a second (modern replacement) door which opens the rear porch room. It is surmounted by a three pane transom. The walls of the small southwest bedroom were covered with sheetboard when the bathroom was added behind and west of it. A modern door connects the bathroom with the southwest bedroom and a second door, in the bedroom's north wall, opens into the large enclosed porch along the south side of the ell. The walls of the small northwest bedroom were also sheathed with sheet board in the 1970s when a closet was fitted into its northwest corner. A five panel, horizontal panel turn-of-the-century door set in the room's west wall connects to the room at the eastern end of the ell.

The rooms of a two room ell have traditionally been used as (1) the kitchen and (2) the dining room; however, here the room nearest the main block is used as a bedroom. The room at the west end of the ell—which would normally have been the kitchen—and now is—was the dining room during the Powell ownership in the later 19th century. The kitchen was in a separate building to the west of the ell and connected by a walkway. The finish to the two room ell is simple. The walls are now covered with manufactured sheet boarding, either sheetrock or plywood. The wall between the two rooms is partially formed by a brick chimney. There is a flue opening into the east room and a fireplace opening into the present kitchen in the west end of the ell. The door connecting the two has a five horizontal panel arrangement. There is a simply bracketed mantel shelf above the fireplace in the kitchen and beside it, to the north, a closet.

The present kitchen is L-shaped with the top of the ell being what from the outside of the house would appear to be—and originally was—the pantry. The partition forming the pantry was removed and the space is now considered the breakfast room. A modern door flanked by windows in its east wall opens onto the enclosed porch carrying along the south side of the ell. At the east end of the enclosed porch are a pair of fully glazed doors—having fifteen panes each—which open into the original rear porch room with the center door marked by a pair of risers opening onto the stairs to the second story. As noted earlier, the door to the north connects with the parlor and its pendant to the south opens into the large south bedroom. All are Federal six-panel doors.

The stairs rise to a hall which separates the north and south bedrooms. The stair opening is encircled by a railing. Doors at the eastern end of the hall open into the large front bedrooms and a third door in the west end of the hall opens into the central one of three rooms which occupy the space across the rear elevation behind
The finish of the front bedrooms is very similar, as are the mantels made up of board pilasters. The original pine floors remain uncovered; however, the plaster walls have been mostly covered with sheetrock or particle board. As noted earlier, the present owner maintains the second story of the house for her own use. In 1957-1958, the long room across the rear of the house was partitioned into three rooms. The north bedroom is used as a sitting room while the south bedroom is her bedroom. A door in its west wall in the southwest corner of the room connects with the southernmost and largest of the three rooms which carry across the back of the house. It is used as a sun room. To the north and mostly behind (west of) the hall is a small kitchen. The third room, in the northwest corner of the house, is a bathroom.

There are four outbuildings to the west/southwest of the house which were all constructed in this century. They are of simple vernacular construction and have been repaired as necessary. Perhaps the oldest of the group is the one story gable roof frame smokehouse thought to have been erected in the 1920s by Benjamin Franklin Powell. Its gable front faces south and the roof projects to shelter the entrance. Mrs. Waldecker has had a poured-in-place concrete floor put in it. It stands closest to the house and is now used for household storage. Also dating from the 1920s is a two-story board and batten covered pack house. It has doors on both levels on its east gable front elevation. A simple shed carries along its full north elevation. The shed and pack house are covered with sheet metal. Standing nearby is a large sheet metal covered equipment shed also erected by Mr. Powell before his death in 1931. The fourth building, another equipment shed, was erected in the 1930s or 1940s by Mrs. Waldecker—then Mrs. Young. The only other structure of note on the 115 acres of the original tract which remain with the house and are included in this nomination is a small one story frame rental house some distance to the south of the farm seat on the west side of SR 2256. It has always been a rental property.
8. Significance

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Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Williams-Powell House, set in a large lawn shaded by cypress, pine, and other trees and shrubs, is one of the oldest surviving houses in Robeson County and a distinguished example of transitional Federal-Greek-Revival domestic architecture. According to family tradition the house was built for Giles Williams, Jr. by an, as yet unidentified, local black carpenter. Williams (1809-1894), at the age of twenty-one acquired an estate of some 1,285 acres from his father in December 1830 which was increased to 1500 acres at the death of his father making him one of the largest plantation owners in Robeson County. While the size of the plantation was large, his cultivation of but 250 acres in 1860 was perhaps more representative of the second rank of plantation operations in the region. The house served as the seat of his plantation and was the childhood home of his thirteen children, twelve of whom lived to adulthood. The house remained the home of his children into the twentieth century, and in 1905 the homeplace of 254 acres came into the possession of Williams' youngest daughter, Ora Williams Powell Waldecker (1856-1944) and is now the property of her daughter Ora Voncile Powell Waldecker (1900- ) who maintains the second floor of the house for her use while the first floor is occupied by caretakers. Although modest changes have been made to the house it has been well-maintained by Col. and Mrs. Waldecker and survives as a unique instance in Robeson County where a family has owned and occupied their family seat (although in a less frequent fashion in recent years) for about 150 years. Where the normal practice of absentee ownership of family lands has resulted in the loss of many fine houses the care bestowed on this house is noteworthy.

Criteria Assessment:

B. The Williams-Powell House is associated with the life of Giles Williams, Jr. (1809-1894) and served as the seat of his plantation from the time of its construction about 1830 until his death. The operation of Williams' plantation was representative of the larger plantation in Robeson County. The house has remained the seat of his descendants and is now the property of his granddaughter, Ora Voncile Powell Waldecker. Thus during its 150 year history the house has been owned by but three people in as many generations although it has been home to numerous children and members of the prominent Williams family.

C. The Williams-Powell House embodies the distinctive characteristics of transitional Federal-Greek-Revival houses in Southeastern North Carolina and has a handsomely finished interior as fine as any which is known to survive in Robeson County. Particularly significant here are two architectural features representative of regional vernacular construction. The two room plan with an enclosed stair rising from a rear engaged porch room—flanked by shed rooms—is a regional characteristic appearing in houses in Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Hoke, and other counties in southeast North Carolina. Further, the configuration of the porch with the columns of the two story portico set in front of the two-tier porch is associated with similar forms in South Carolina and appears in North Carolina in the counties forming the State's boundary with South Carolina.
The Williams-Powell House appears to have been built about 1830 for Giles Williams, Jr., and once served as the centerpiece of his 1,500 acre plantation. According to local tradition, the actual construction was carried out by an unidentified black carpenter who was also responsible for three other houses in Robeson County. One of the said houses, the Humphrey-Williams House, was listed in the National Register in 1973. An examination of the architectural detail of the two houses serves to neither confirm or deny the association.

Giles Williams, Jr. was born in Robeson County on October 21, 1809. His father, Giles Williams, Sr., had begun acquiring land around Ashepole, Coward and Indian swamps in 1801 and by 1830 owned over 2,000 acres. On December 6 of that year he sold to his son eleven separate tracts totaling 1,285 acres for $1,000. The transaction took place about the same time that Giles, Jr., married Mary Nichols and the two events may have been connected. In any event the house now standing was erected on this large estate either just before or just after the marriage and land transfer. The presence of both Federal and Greek Revival features clearly indicates that the structure was constructed during the transition period between the dominant architectural styles.

For over a decade, the two Giles Williamses lived on adjoining tracts. Giles, Sr. died in 1844 leaving 200 acres, "Including may Houses of Every description," to his son. Giles after first granting a life estate for his widow, Sarah. This 200 acres plus an additional purchase brought Giles, Jr.'s total landholdings to 1,500 acres, which made him one of the largest plantation owners in the county.

By 1860 Giles Williams, Jr., had become a successful and wealthy man with real estate valued at $3,000 and personal property worth $15,430. Two slavehouses and fifteen slaves were listed in the 1860 census, but the age range, one to ninety-four, tells that not all were field hands and probably not all lived in the slave quarters. The will of Giles Williams, Sr., indicates that certain named slaves given to his wife and children were probably personal servants who lived in the main house.

Giles Williams, Jr.'s plantation was a working farm but one fairly well balanced between livestock and agricultural production. Livestock, valued at $890, included 75 swine, 25 sheep, 11 (non-milk) cattle, and 8 milkcows; leading farm products included 7,200 lbs. of ginned cotton, 600 bushels Indian corn, and 250 bushels sweet potatoes. While Williams's cotton production was significant, the lack of a clear cut cash crop is made more interesting when compared to statewide statistics in 1860. Cotton production had nearly doubled in the previous decade (73,845 bales to 145,514 bales), and the region from the South Carolina line in Robeson County to Mecklenburg County was one of the prime growing areas. Much of Williams's property, however, was swampland and not suited for cotton production as evidenced by the fact that he cultivated only 250 of 1,500 acres. The inability to produce cotton on a larger basis probably spared him the financial woes that beset many of his fellow Robeson County residents in the postwar years.

When the war brought an end to the institution of slavery, Giles Williams, Jr. did not appear to feel the loss as heavily as many others. About half of his slaves in 1865 were either too old or too young for field duty anyway, and with twelve living children (one girl died in her pre-teen years), some of whom were married, he
had plenty of hands to tend the crops. As the years passed, however, the older children began leaving the farm, and as Giles and Mary Williams grew older, maintenance became a problem. The dwelling house and original outbuildings had begun to deteriorate even before Giles Williams, Jr. died on July 15, 1894, in his eighty-sixth year.

Williams's will directed that the home tract be divided between two of his children, Benjamin Pemberton and Penelope Eliza Williams. Penelope E. Williams died on March 10, 1905, and in the ensuing litigation, the home tract containing the dwelling house became part of the land sold at public auction. On March 5, 1906, H. P. Williams put in the highest bid ($1,410) for three tracts totaling 254 acres and immediately transferred his bid to his sister, (Ora Williams) Powell, who took title to the property.

Ora Williams was born in 1856, the thirteenth and last child of Giles Williams, Jr. and Mary Nichols Williams. She had married Benjamin Franklin Powell of Columbus County in 1879 and by 1900 seven children had been born. On July 23, 1900 Ora Williams Powell gave birth to her last child, Ora Voncile Powell, in the downstairs bedroom of the house. With a child on the way, and her husband away on business, Ora Williams Powell had moved in with her sisters Annie and Penelope Williams to await the birth of the baby. She then returned to Columbus County where she was residing at the time she acquired title to her father's home.

Less than ten years later, B. F. and Ora W. Powell moved to Columbia County, Florida. On January 5, 1915, they issued a deed of gift to their fourteen year old daughter, Ora Voncile, for 115 acres in Robeson County, North Carolina, that included the old Williams home. Ora Williams Powell reserved for herself a life estate in and to the property. Later transfer shows that the transfer to a minor and the reservation of a life estate was designed to insure that Ora Voncile would become owner of the property free and clear after her mother's death.

Following the death of Penelope Eliza Williams (1849-1905) on 10 March 1905 and the removal of her sister Ora Williams Powell (1856-1944) and her husband Benjamin Franklin Powell (1853-1931) to Florida, the house remained a family residence. A third sister Ann Etta Williams (1845-1929) and her nephew Harry Alexander Powell (1884-1981) maintained their residence here although a considerable part of the year was spent at their other land holdings or in Florida with the Powells. It was only after the death of Harry Powell in 1981 that the first story of the house—until then reserved for his use—was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. H. Lee Walters, who live there without fee in exchange for their caretaking of the property. The current owner, Mrs. Waldecker, reserved the use of the second floor to herself. Various members of the Walters family had earlier served as caretakers of the property at different intervals.

Ora Voncile Powell remained a resident of Florida where she married an architect named Chandler Young. Ora Voncile Powell Young and her husband continued to make periodic trips to her birthplace, and it was Chandler Young, who also designed a number of buildings still standing in Florida, that drew up plans for fitting the house with an apartment on the second floor. Young died in 1957 before all his plans were implemented. Ora Voncile married Colonel Sydney Waldecker in 1963 and he supervised the
finishing touches and has continued to have the house repainted every three or four years. The first story of the Williams-Powell House is currently occupied by the H. Lee Walters family, but Colonel and Mrs. Waldecker retain rights to use the second story as a retreat; thus, Ora Voncile Powell Waldecker maintains a link with her heritage by spending some time each year in the home built by her grandfather.
1Davyd Foard Hood, interview with Ora Voncile Powell Waldecker, May 26, 1981. Tradition was repeated in interview with Colonel Sydney Waldecker by Jerry L. Cross, August 11, 1983, hereinafter cited as Colonel Waldecker interview.

2Tombstone in Spring Hill Cemetery. See photographs in Williams-Powell House file, Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Williams-Powell file.

3Robeson County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Robeson County Courthouse, Lumberton, Deed Book U, 613, hereinafter cited as Robeson County Deed Book. See index for other deeds to Giles Williams with particular attention to Deed Book L, 100; Book N, 272; Book O, 221; and Book P, 15.

4No marriage record was found but the oldest child in the 1860 census was born in 1835 and the two oldest were not listed in the census. That would indicate a marriage about 1830. See Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: North Carolina - Robeson County, Population Schedule (South Division), 71. Census records hereinafter cited by number, date, schedule, and page. See also Williams-Powell file.

5Robeson County Records, Original Wills, State Archives, Raleigh, arranged alphabetically by surname, will of Giles Williams, 1844, hereinafter cited as Original Wills with name and date.

6Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule (South Division), 71; Slave Schedule (South Division), 14-15; and Original Wills, Giles Williams, 1844.

7Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule (South Division), 17.


9Eight Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule (South Division), 17. See also descriptions of tracts in deed from Giles Williams, Sr. to Giles Williams, Jr., Robeson County Deed Book U, 613.

10Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule (South Division), 71; Slave Schedule (South Division), 14-15; and Original Wills, Giles Williams [Jr.], 1894.

11Williams-Powell file.

12Original Wills, Giles Williams [Jr.], 1894.

13Robeson County Deed Book 5H, 218.
14 Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule (South Division), 71; and Mrs. Sydney C. Waldecker to Catherine W. Bishir, February 13, 1982, in Williams-Powell file.


16 Twelfth Census, 1900, Population Schedule, Enumeration District 118, Sheet 4, line 33; and Robeson County Deed Book 5H, 218.

17 Robeson County Deed Book 6J, 568.

18 Colonel Waldecker interview.

19 Colonel Waldecker interview.

20 Mrs. Sydney C. Waldecker to Renee Gledhill-Earley, May 9, 1981, in Williams-Powell file; and Colonel Waldecker interview. See also Voncile Waldecker interview.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: 115

Quadrangle name: Fairmont and Fair Bluff

UTM References:

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Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

Verbal boundary description and justification:
The property being nominated consists of parcel number 2 on Tax Map Number 17, Sterling Township, Robeson County, as outlined in red on the attached map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries:

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11. Form Prepared By

Architectural description, criteria assessment, and statement of significance prepared by: Davyd Foard Hood; historical research report by Jerry L. Cross

Organization: Division of Archives and History

Date: September 1, 1983

Street & number: 109 East Jones Street

Telephone: 919 733-6545

City or town: Raleigh

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: William S. Priest

Date: October 20, 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration
Cross, Jerry L. Interview with Colonel Sydney C. Waldecker, August 11, 1983.

Hood, Davyd Foard. Interview with Ora Voncile Powell Waldecker, May 26, October 19, 1981.


Robeson County Records
- Deeds
- Estates Papers
- Wills

- 1860 Population, Slave, Agricultural Schedules
- 1900 Population Schedule

Waldecker, Mrs. Sydney C. to Catherine Bisher, February 13, 1982. Williams-Powell House file, Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Waldecker, Mrs. Sydney C. to Renee Geldhill-Earley, May 9, 1981. Williams-Powell House file, Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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<th>Fairmont Quadrangle</th>
<th>Zone 17  Scale 1:24000</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>A 17 678680/3805435</td>
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<td>C 17 679645/3805325</td>
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Williams-Powell House
Robeson County
Fairmont Quadrangle
Zone 17 Scale 1:24000
A 17 678680/3805435
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C 17 679645/3805325

Road Classification
- Medium-duty
- Light-duty
- Unimproved dirt
- State Route

This map complies with national map accuracy standards.
A folder describing topographic maps and symbols is available on request.

Fairmont, N.C.
N34°22'30"-W79°00'7.5"
1962
AMS 5152 I NE—Series V842
Williams-Powell House
Robeson County
Fair Bluff Quadrangle
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