

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 The John Blue House

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Southeast side of SR 1108, 0.3 mi. west of jct. with SR 1105

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

West Laurinburg

X VICINITY OF

8th

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

North Carolina

37

Scotland

165

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Scotland County: c/o Dick Brown, Chairman

STREET & NUMBER

Scotland County Historic Properties Commission, P. O. Box 787

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Laurinburg

VICINITY OF

North Carolina 28352

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Scotland County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Laurinburg

NC

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

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

Built on a part of the farm owned by his family for several generations, the John Blue house is one of the most richly decorated frame country residences built in Scotland County in the late nineteenth century. Its picturesque appearance derives largely from the lace-like two tier porch which completely encircles the house's two-story block giving it the appearance of a small resort hotel; the porch repeats the angles of the house's polygonal gable ends and three story octagonal tower. Its supports are composed of bracketed turned posts connected by a balustrade of turned balusters and a spindle frieze, from which hangs delicate sawnwork. This galleried effect acts as a veil for the weatherboarded elevations of the house. Rising above the porch roofs are a quartet of ornamental gables decorated with intricately sawn and cut spandrels. The roof is also interrupted by these gables and banded brick chimneys. The central front tower is engaged to the roofline of the house and then rises free in a third story capped by a polygonal conical spire.

The house follows a Greek cross plan with the east arm of the cross doubled in length and a one-story block (containing the kitchen and dining room) set at the end of the south arm. On the front (north) elevation the entrance is contained in the first story of the three story octagonal tower. The door, with a large glazed panel above a pair of molded panels, is flanked by round headed sidelights and surmounted by a semi-circular fanlight in a rectangular frame. This same composition is used on the other first and second story entrances (on the east and west arms of the cross) and the entrance from the second story stair hall onto the porch. The house's fenestration two over two sash--repeats the arch headed motif and molded rectangular frames; sawnwork ornament occupies the spandrels above the top of the arch. These windows are centered on nearly all the elevations of the house and are set in the several faces of the third story of the tower. The north east and west gable ends--projecting from the core of the building--have polygonal (or clipped) ends; entrances at both levels are set on the east and west gable ends. On the house's rear elevation the first story of the arm of the cross extends southward and connects to a one-story block set parallel to the seemingly rectangular mass of the house. The block, containing the kitchen and dining room, is two bays wide and covered with weatherboards and a gable roof; a brick chimney rises through the center of the building. A pantry with a flanking addition is set on the kitchen's south elevation.

The interior of the house, repeating the asymmetricality of the exterior, is richly decorated with the eclectic carved and molded woodwork typical of substantial houses of the late nineteenth century. The entrance/stair hall, located behind the tower, extends the depth of the main block and is the most elaborately treated of the interior spaces. Molded grooved sheathing is applied vertically below a molded chair rail and diagonally above the rail. The stair, rising against the west wall, has robust, turned balusters and newels which together with the woodwork in the rest of the house retains its original stained finish. In the northwest corner of the hall a door gives into the guest bedroom located behind the projecting bay on the front elevation. The parlor, located behind the projecting bay on the east elevation, is reached by a door in the center of the hall's east wall. A third door, set at the back of the hall's west elevation, provides access into Mr. Blue's bedroom which in plan is directly behind the guest bedroom. A small closet (to the west of the interior chimney providing fireplac to both rooms) contains a water tank--another of Mr. Blue's innovations. Blue's bedroom connects with his office--located in the bay projecting on the house's west elevation;

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fenestration and an outside entrance occur on the room's west elevation, and the fireplace is located on the south wall.

Each of the first story rooms is finished with symmetrically molded surrounds with corner blocks, grooved wainscoting below the chair rails and variously designed mantels with either bracketed shelves or engaged turned columns. The walls above the chairrails are plastered and covered with wall paper. The interior doors feature molded lower panels with pairs of glazed panels above. The fireplaces on the first floor have coal grates while those on the second floor are wood-burning. The floor plan of the second floor repeats that of the first story with the stair rising to the attic; the woodwork, repeating the patterns found on the first floor, is however, simpler in execution. Access to the kitchen and dining room in the house's rear one-story block is by way of porches carrying along both sides of the hyphen connecting the blocks.

Located to the west of the house is a one story frame building, one bay wide, four bays deep, covered with patterned tin shingles and a gable roof which houses the Delco machinery for electricity in the northern end with the dairy in the south portion. The Scotland County Historic Properties Commission, the overseers of the John Blue house, have moved a log construction building onto the site from a farm some miles away. The log house, thus saved from sure destruction, is to be maintained as a part of the educational/museum facility which the commission anticipates as the future use for the John Blue House. The one story with loft house, using V-notch construction, is covered with weatherboards and has a two-bay front elevation sheltered by a full facade shed porch protecting flush sheathing. The interior, following a two room plan with an enclosed stair to the loft, is sheathed with flush boards. The house is now undergoing restoration to its original appearance.

# 8 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The John Blue House, built on a tract of land acquired by the Blue family in the 1830s, was the seat of John Blue, a Scotland County farmer who through his research and invention of agricultural machinery made substantial contributions to the economy of the cotton-growing regions of the South. Development of the first cotton stalk cutter was important, and urged him to the consideration of other devices to benefit the farmer, but his invention of the Rex Guano Fertilizer Distributor and the John Blue Cotton Planter were most notable and somewhat revolutionized the cotton economy. The shop where he developed these inventions and others was enlarged into a factory for their manufacture; that structure, enlarged during the course of the twentieth century under the family's direction, was destroyed by fire in 1945 after which the plant was re-located near Huntsville, Alabama, where it continues operation. This impressive two-story frame cross plan house with a wealth of turned and molded woodwork on its encircling two tier porch and gables--said to have been designed and partially executed by Blue himself--recalls Blue's genius and contributions to the agricultural economy of the south.

Criteria Assessment:

- B. The house was the residence of John Blue (1861-1935) whose pioneering research and development, and patented invention, of agricultural machinery made important contributions to the revitalization of the cotton economy in the South.
- C. Remaining unaltered since construction in the 1890s the house, with its richly ornamented exterior and interior woodwork is one of the finest examples of late nineteenth century architecture in Scotland County.

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On November 26, 1883, just before his twenty-second birthday, John Blue paid his father Angus Blue \$2,000 for one hundred acres of land located a couple of miles west of Laurinburg in Richmond (later Scotland) County, on the east side of Crawford's Branch and the west side of Bridge Creek. Less than two weeks later, the young man married Flora Jane McKinnon, also a native of the area. It was about this time also that he moved away from the family farm and into a house on his own newly-acquired farm. During the remainder of the 1880s, he added to his holdings in the area of the original tract. In the 1890s, when success came to John Blue, he would build on his land what one writer would call "one of the beautiful and typical homes of the Southland."<sup>1</sup>

John Blue's family had been in the area a long time. His great-great-grandfather, Angus Blue (who died in 1823 or 1828 at ninety years of age) came to the Upper Cape Fear region from his native Scotland in the middle of the eighteenth century. Angus settled near what is now Aberdeen, in present-day Moore County. His son Daniel Blue (1768-1844) became a prosperous and well-known figure in the area of Aberdeen, and it seems to have been Daniel's son John (1793-1861) who, in the 1830s, became the first member of the family to move into southern Richmond (later Scotland) County near what was to become the town of Laurinburg.

One of the elder John Blue's sons was Angus Blue (1826-1890), who sometime in the decade of the 1850s moved away from his father's farm to one of his own. He married Mary Ann McLaurin (1841-1917) of South Carolina, and on November 28, 1861, John, the first of their nine children, was born. (Lauchlin M. Blue [1865-1939], a second son, became a state senator.)<sup>2</sup>

During the Civil War, Angus Blue was a member of Company E of the Fortieth North Carolina Infantry, under the command of Colonel William Lamb. This unit was known as the Scotch Grays and was recruited primarily from Richmond and Robeson counties. During the defense of Fort Fisher, Angus was seriously wounded in an explosion, captured, and imprisoned at Point Lookout, New York. But before the war's end he was able to return home and resume farming. In the 1870s and 1880s, he accumulated about five hundred acres of land. He died in 1890.

John Blue grew up on his father's farm. He received little formal education, because times were hard in the era of Reconstruction and he was needed to help with the farm work. But he seems to have been gifted with a keen mind with a streak of practical inventiveness. Even before he moved to his own farm in 1883, he had spent time in the small blacksmith shop on his father's land, especially when the weather prevented work outside. The tools in this shop were crude ones, used mainly for horseshoeing. Nonetheless, it was here that John Blue invented the first cotton stalk cutter.

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Once he had moved to his own place, he continued his efforts at inventing and improving farm implements. In 1886, he and his father established a business on the son's land as "Expert Repairers of Cotton Gins, Engines, etc." John Blue soon turned his attention to two problems in particular--the need for more efficient methods of distributing fertilizer and planting cotton seed. The result was the invention of the Rex guano fertilizer distributor and the John Blue cotton planter, both of which were soon used widely throughout the cotton-growing regions of the South, particularly in the Carolinas and Georgia. Since he took care to obtain patents for his inventions, Blue was able to gain considerable profit from them.

The small repair business soon grew into a large plant where the implements were manufactured and came to include a foundry in which metal parts for them were cast. In time Blue also opened a retail merchandising and distributing business which dealt mainly in farm implements, tools, machines, hardware, and supplies. He became an agent for the International Harvester Company and in 1922 won the prize for selling the largest amount of International Harvester implements in the Carolinas.

In addition to his business and manufacturing interest, he also continued to farm, operating an increasingly large farm of several hundred acres, which primarily produced cotton and corn. He became a director and major stockholder in several business enterprises in Laurinburg and Scotland County. For example, he was a director of several cotton mills, including the Scotland, Dickson, and Waverly Mills; the Laurinburg State Bank; the Scotland County Savings Bank; and the Laurinburg and Southern Railroad.

The rise of John Blue somewhat paralleled the development of Laurinburg and Scotland County. Development of the county's textile industry began in the 1870s, and Laurinburg was incorporated in 1877. From the early years of his success, he was well known in the town and something of a community leader.

It was sometime in the 1890s when Blue directed the construction of the handsome Victorian residence just west of Laurinburg near his plant. Local tradition claims that he designed the house and did much of the work himself, including the ornaments which decorate the porch railings and the eaves. The doors of the house have decorative stained glass, a feature Blue is said to have been especially fond of.

John and Flora Blue had two children--a daughter, Edna E., and a son, John, Jr.,--who worked in the business and carried it on after his father's death on March 21, 1935. Blue's obituary declared him to have been "a man of outstanding character and rugged honesty" who was admired for his success at a variety of enterprises but also well-liked. A special editorial in The Laurinburg Exchange said that he had been "for half a century a substantial and leading farmer and businessman of Scotland County." After he achieved his success, the element of his biography that was always most remarked on was his lack of formal education. As one writer put it, "His life made like a

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romance, and did not the facts support his accomplishments it would seem almost impossible that an unlettered youth could travel so far without any outside help." By his will, the house passed to his son John Blue, Jr. It seems likely that Flora Jane Blue lived there until her death in 1944.

A severe fire destroyed much of the plant in 1945, and in its aftermath the John Blue Company began a search for a site closer to the heart of southern industry. As a result, they purchased an abandoned cotton mill near Huntsville, Alabama, and after the necessary preparations, production began there in 1946. The enterprise has expanded steadily since.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1970s, John Blue, Jr. died in an automobile accident, and leadership of the corporation passed to his son, John Blue III. As for the house, in 1976 it was turned over to Scotland County by John Blue III, his brother James, and their sisters Jean Blue Lewis, and Katherine Blue Bohon, all of whom were grandchildren of the builder of the house and were residing outside the borders of North Carolina. In the years prior to this transaction, the house had been rented to several different families. At the time of its gift to the county, the Scotland County Historic Properties Commission envisioned the complete restoration of the house and its eventual development into a center with exhibits on the area's agricultural heritage.<sup>11</sup>

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richmond County Deeds, Book 00, p. 326; Book DDD, p. 577, microfilm copies, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Richmond County Deeds; Robert D. W. Connor, North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, 1584-1925, III (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1929), 337-338, hereinafter cited as Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth; Laurinburg Exchange, September 6, 1976; Fayetteville Times, December 13, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>Copy of printed matter on Blue Family history in National Register Nomination File for John Blue House, Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as John Blue House File; Works Progress Administration, Cemetery Index, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 255.

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<sup>3</sup> Copy of printed matter on Blue Family history in John Blue House File; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 112, 135; Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 337; Richmond County Deeds, Book 2, p. 380; Book BB, p. 555; Book GG, p. 87; Book MM, p. 125; Book PP, p. 321; Richmond County Record of Wills, Book 6, pp. 409-411, microfilm copy, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>4</sup> Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 337; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, Stewartsville Township, 1; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, Stewartsville Township, 23-24; "A Short Resume of the John Blue Company," John Blue House File; "John Blue Passes Thursday, March 22," Laurinburg Exchange, March 28, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 337-338; "John Blue Passes Thursday March 22," Laurinburg Exchange, March 28, 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Souvenir Program for Scotland County Golden Jubilee Celebration, 1949; Bill Sharpe A New Geography of North Carolina, IV (Raleigh: Sharpe Publishing Company, 1965), 2051-2070; Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 337-338.

<sup>7</sup> Laurinburg Exchange, September 6, 1976; Fayetteville Times, December 13, 1976; Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 338.

<sup>8</sup> Copy of printed matter on Blue Family history in John Blue House File; "John Blue Passes Thursday, March 22," and "John Blue," Laurinburg Exchange, March 28, 1935.

<sup>9</sup> Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, III, 338.

<sup>10</sup> Scotland County Record of Wills, Book 2, pp. 200, 407, microfilm copies, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; undated copy of The Alabama Agricultural Engineer and "A Short Resume of the John Blue Company," John Blue House File.

<sup>11</sup> Laurinburg Exchange, September 6, 1976; Fayetteville Times, December 13, 1976.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Connor, Robert D. W. North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, 1584-1925.  
Chicago: American Historical Society, 1929.

Fayetteville Times. December 13, 1976.

Laurinburg Exchange. March 28, 1935. September 6, 1976.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.95

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>17</u>	<u>637390</u>	<u>3846950</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See attached deed of transfer between Blue Investment Company, Inc. and Scotland Count

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Architectural description prepared by Davyd Foard Hood, Survey Specialist  
Significance prepared by John Easterley, Researcher

ORGANIZATION

Division of Archives and History

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

109 East Jones Street

TELEPHONE

(919) 733-4763

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

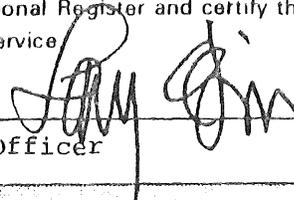
NATIONAL

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 13, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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National Register Nomination File for John Blue House. Office of Archeology and Historical Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History. Raleigh, North Carolina.

Office of the Census. Fifth Census of the United States, 1830: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Richmond County, North Carolina, Population Schedule.

Richmond County Records. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).

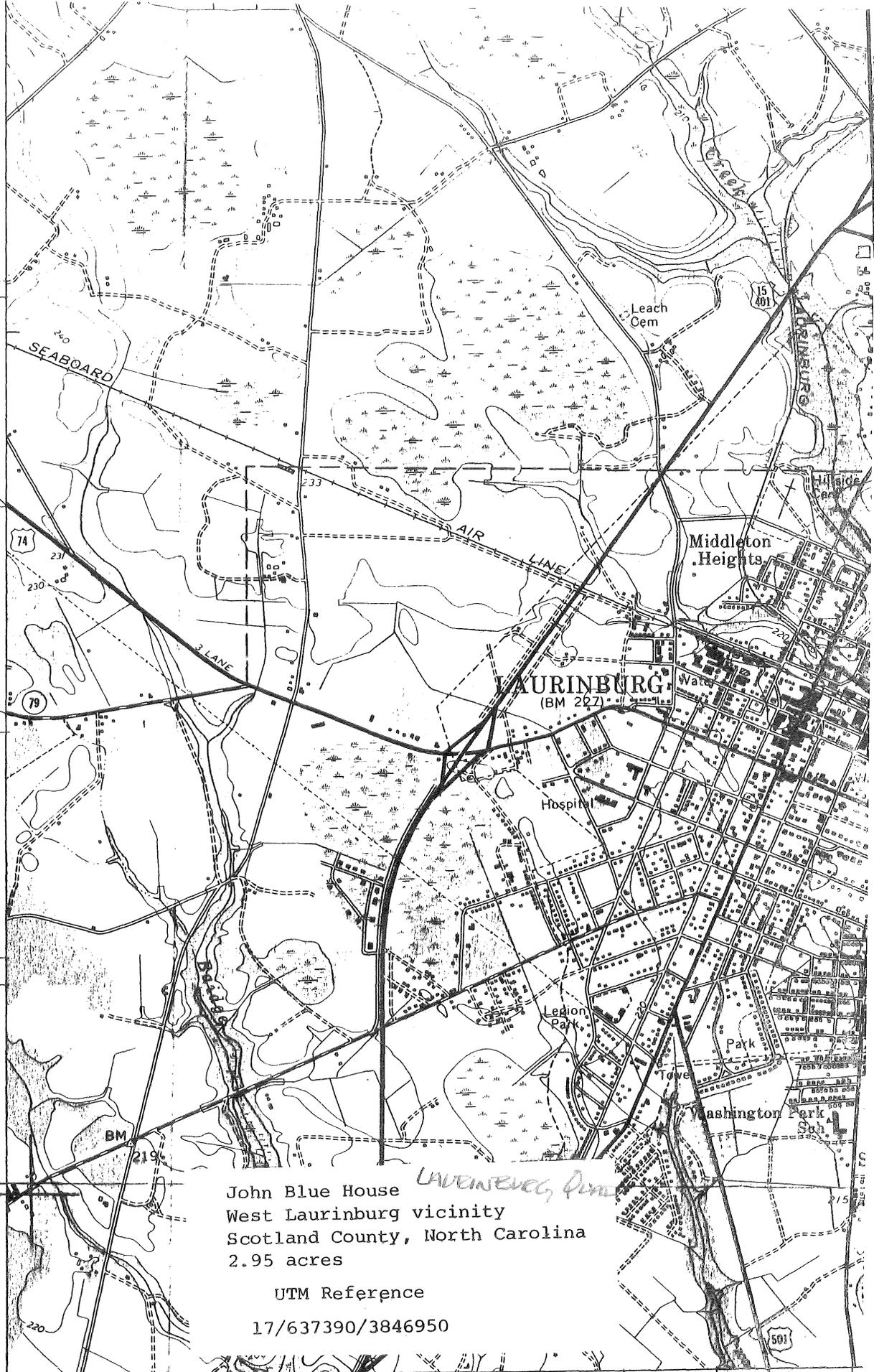
Scotland County Records. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Subgroup: Wills).

Souvenir Program for Scotland County Golden Jubilee Celebration, 1949.

Works Progress Administration, Cemetery Index. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

3851  
47°30'  
3850  
3849  
3848  
3847

HAMLET 14 MI.  
LAUREL HILL 3.3 MI.  
GIBSON 7 MI.  
SPRINGFIELD 1.8 MI.



*LAVINSEVIG, P...*  
John Blue House  
West Laurinburg vicinity  
Scotland County, North Carolina  
2.95 acres

UTM Reference  
17/637390/3846950

34°45'  
79°30' MC COLL, S. C. (JUNC. S. C. 381) 8 MI.  
BENNETTSVILLE, S. C. 17 MI.  
186000 FEET  
JOHNS 3.3 MI.  
ROWLAND (JUNC. U.S. 301) 19 MI.

Mapped by the Army Map Service  
Published for civil use by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE  
Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods

639

640

2150

