

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Elkland School Gymnasium

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 10279 Three Top Road (SR1100, at intersection with NC Hwy 194) not for publication n/a

city or town Todd vicinity n/a

state North Carolina code NC county Ashe code 009 zip code 28684

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Brown SHPO 5/4/04
Signature of certifying official Date
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

____ entered in the National Register
____ See continuation sheet.

____ determined eligible for the
National Register
____ See continuation sheet.

____ determined not eligible for the
National Register

____ removed from the National
Register

____ other (explain): _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION: gymnasium

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: woodshop / storage

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete block

walls Wood

roof Metal

other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Education
- Politics/Government
- Recreation/Entertainment
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

c. 1934 – 1954

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

N. C. Emergency Relief Administration

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office.
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

NC Archives & History Western Office

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.7 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>17</u>	<u>446150</u>	<u>4018880</u>	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
					See continuation sheet		

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sherry Joines Wyatt

organization _____

date February 20, 2003

street & number 102 Junkin Street

telephone (540) 381-8268

city or town Christiansburg

state VA

zip code 24073

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Tom Sternal and Martha Enzmann

street & number 10279 Three Top Road

telephone (336) 877-5016

city or town Todd

state NC

zip code 28684

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division,

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Elkland School Gymnasium
Todd, Ashe County, North Carolina

7. Description

The Elkland School Gymnasium is located in the village of Todd in the southeastern corner of Ashe County, North Carolina, near the Ashe-Watauga county line. The village is situated on the South Fork of the New River, which flows northward through the Blue Ridge region of northwestern North Carolina and into Virginia. The circa 1934 gymnasium is located on the old Elkland School property, which is a short distance west of the business section of Todd.

The original school building (now demolished) was located immediately west of the gymnasium and the two buildings were sited about three-quarters of the way up a steep hill in a narrow cove. The replacement school was built in 1956 at the foot of the hill, close to Three Top Road, southwest and outside of the nomination boundary. It is a long one-story, flat-roofed, brick and concrete block building typical of 1950s Modernist-inspired schools, which has been altered and now serves as a residence and art center. The grading that was necessary to build the newer school significantly altered the topography of the school property, leveling the terrain around the gym. Consequently, the open space under the front of the building, which was tall enough for children to play under the gym, was closed off as the ground was raised and the foundation underpinned between the piers.

Despite changes to the topography, the building itself is remarkably intact. The gym faces southwest and is composed of a one-and-a-half-story, gable-roof center section with a one-story, gable-roofed entrance pavilion in the front gable end and, at the opposite end, a full-width wing with a low-pitched gable roof and a tall cinderblock foundation. The northeastern elevation of the rear wing has a centrally located five-panel door flanked by double-hung, six-over-six, sash windows. Both the northwestern and southeastern elevations of the rear wing have two fixed, six-light windows. A one-story shed wing runs along the entire southeastern side of the main, one-and-a-half-story block and wraps around the front corner as a hip-roofed bay abutting the side of the entrance wing. This is complemented on the opposite side of the entrance pavilion by a small shed-roof ell that seems to be original or an early addition. The shed-roof ell has a fixed six-light window on both its southwestern and northwestern elevations. The hip-roofed bay also features a fixed, six-light window on its southwestern elevation and an eight-over-eight, double-hung sash window on its southeastern elevation. The remainder of the long southeastern elevation of the shed is unbroken except for two pairs of five-panel doors, one pair near the middle of the façade and the other at the north end.

The entire building is sheathed in its original weatherboards and topped with a standing seam metal roof. Details are minimal and include exposed rafter tails; six gable-roof dormers evenly spaced on

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each side of the central section roof. The dormers are fitted with fixed, six-light wood windows. At the gym's double-leaf entries, three-light transoms surmount each pair of five-panel doors. Between the two entries is a small, square, four-pane ticket window. Each end of the central section is adorned with six small, wood, four-light windows that follow the roof slope along the legs of the gable. The window and door surrounds on the exterior are simple, unmolded boards.

The gym has two brick flues. The first is located in the hip-roof bay at the southern corner of the building and is a simple running bond construction about one foot square with a concrete cap. The second flue is similar in design to the first although it lacks the concrete cap. It lies in the northern corner of the rear wing.

The interior of the gym is extremely austere. The entry is sheathed in unpainted bead board as is the tiny enclosure that housed the ticket seller. Bead board also sheathes the walls of the gym about three-quarters up; after that the studs are exposed. Much like the exterior, window and door trim features unmolded boards. The floor throughout the gym is wood and reveals many wood patches replacing sections damaged by water entering through the dormers over many years. The hand-painted black court lines and circles are still visible on the floor.

The most remarkable feature of the large gym space is the exposed system of elegant scissor trusses that support the roof structure. The trusses are made of large wood (American Chestnut) members with the lower chords, which cross at the roof's center line, being perhaps eight inches square while the vertical and angled struts that join the lower and upper chords appear to be about two inches by eight inches in dimension. Points of light dot the upper section of the space as sunlight comes in through the dormers and gable-end windows. The original wooden bleachers lie in darkness since they are located outside of the central space in the shed along the southeastern side. Posts and braces support the open east wall at the edge of the bleacher section.

At the north end of the gym is the large stage area with flanking dressing rooms raised above the court floor. Deteriorated when the current owners purchased the property, the stage area has been rehabilitated by replacing the original bead board walls with bead board salvaged from a demolished historic building and new trim around the stage opening. The dressing areas are accessed by steps from the court floor and are connected by a narrow passage in rear of the stage. Mary Risk, who attended Elkland School during the 1930s, recalls that the left hand room was the ladies dressing

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room and the right belonged to the gentlemen. The dressing rooms were used during basketball games as well as during play performances.

The integrity of the gym is excellent with changes being minimal and materials repaired or replaced in kind where necessary. Changes to the gym include the two open sheds added to the southeast side and the open deck and double-leaf doors installed on the northwestern side of the building. The open sheds, which are used for lumber storage, are simply constructed of wood with unhewn log posts, wood rafters, and metal roofs. The deck, which has no balustrade, is constructed of pressure-treated lumber and is about three feet off ground level. The double-leaf entry, although a recent addition, has historic five-panel doors and unmolded trim that is similar to original building entries.

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Elkland School Gymnasium
Todd, Ashe County, North Carolina

Summary Paragraph

Located less than one-half mile northwest of the business section of the village of Todd in Ashe County, North Carolina, the Elkland School Gymnasium is a remarkably intact frame building erected about 1934 by the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration. The building is significant under Criterion A in the areas of education and recreation/entertainment for its role in the history of education in Todd and as an important community center for the entire village. The construction of gymnasiums in Ashe County was encouraged by the increased awareness of physical education after World War I and was part of the overall modernization of public education in the county during the 1920s and 1930s. The Elkland Gymnasium was the venue for high school basketball, a very popular school pastime from the 1920s through the 1940s. The building was also equipped with a stage and dressing rooms and hosted several plays (usually school fund-raising events) each year. Further, the gym was used by the community for meetings and entertainment. The Elkland Gym was one of 190 gyms constructed by the NC-ERA between 1933 and 1935 and one of nine built in Ashe County. Thus, it is also significant as an excellent example of a gymnasium built by the NC-ERA, an important governmental entity that was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. The period of significance begins in circa 1934, the construction date of the gym. Because use of the gym by school children and the community until the early 1980s does not constitute the degree of significance required for meeting Criteria Consideration G for activities within the last fifty years, the period of significance ends in 1954.

Historical Background and Contexts

The village of Todd (NRHD 1999) was settled during the late eighteenth century, but remained only a small, rural trading center during the next one hundred and twenty-five years. It was not until the arrival of the Virginia-Carolina (later Norfolk & Western) Railroad in 1914 that Todd (originally known as Elk Cross Roads) saw an economic, building, and population boom based on its rich timber resources. It was in the midst of this boom that the need for a new school became clear, resulting in a multi-room, gable-roof, frame building being constructed by 1920.¹ Known as the Elkland School, this building (now demolished) served the area school children (living both in Ashe

¹Ruby Trivette, interview by Martha Enzmann, 3 February 2003 and Ashe County Deed Book Y-1, page 446.

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and nearby Watauga counties) until the 1950s when it was replaced by a modern elementary school building, which was used until the 1980s.²

Situated a short distance west of the business section of Todd, the Elkland School was part of the significant advancement of public education in Ashe County during the late 1910s and 1920s. In 1900, there were ninety-four schools in Ashe County with an enrollment of 4,666 students. Yet in 1916, the county had only one public high school, located at Helton, and while the county was meeting the state-mandated six-month term by 1920 with a total enrollment of seventy-eight percent of eligible students, attendance was only forty percent. In 1917, however, the construction of two additional high schools, located at West Jefferson and Grassy Creek, set the stage for the modernization that would occur during the decade of the 1920s.³

The improvement of the county's roads had the largest effect on the school system since with better roads consolidation became feasible. The first consolidated school in Ashe County was Healing Springs, which was built in 1929 after Superintendent R.E.L. Plummer reinforced his belief in school consolidation by donating land for the project. This was closely followed by the construction of the consolidated Nathan's Creek school in 1932.⁴ Altogether, Ashe County had eighty schools in 1933, including forty-seven one-teacher schools and nineteen two-teacher schools. Nine of these were high schools offering classes through at least the tenth grade: Jefferson, West Jefferson, Lansing, Riverview, Virginia-Carolina, Healing Springs, Elkland, Nathan's Creek, and Fleetwood. Consolidation continued during the 1930s and by 1940, the county was home to sixty-three schools, thirty-five of them one-teacher schools. By 1950, there were only thirteen one-teacher schools.⁵

Like most of northwestern North Carolina, self-sufficiency and small-scale agriculture had long defined Ashe County life. The booming years from the coming of the railroad in 1914 through the

²Mary Risk, interview by Martha Enzmann, 7 February 2003.

³Ashe County Heritage Book Committee, *The Heritage of Ashe County North Carolina, Vol. I*, (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company: 1984), 69.

⁴Fletcher, Arthur L, *Ashe County, A History* (Jefferson: Ashe County Research Association, 1963), 191-2.

⁵Ashe County Heritage Book Committee, 69 and *Ibid.*, 192.

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late 1920s had expanded the county's economic system, however, making the onset of the Depression a reeling blow. The boom had rested squarely on timber products and with their rapid clearing, along with the chestnut blight, this source of livelihood was decimated by 1930, and in 1933 the railroad ceased to operate south of West Jefferson, eliminating Todd's role as rail head. The traditional agricultural economy also suffered during these years as the livestock markets plummeted, removing the primary cash product. Additionally, the Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky coal mines, previously sources of "emergency" income, greatly reduced operations as coal prices declined.⁶

Responding to crises like these and worse across the country, a national relief authority was established by the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933, replacing the Reconstruction Finance Corporation that had been established in 1932. Known as the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA), this authority began its programs with 500 million dollars and received an additional 950 million in the coming two years. The federal ERA had two principal objectives: to give direct relief to those in need (including the unemployed and transients) as well as administer a public works program that would employ jobless citizens.⁷ The novelty of these ambitious objectives was recognized at the time. The 1935 North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration report declared: "The operation of the various programs under its regulations has constituted a social phenomenon of a magnitude and significance difficult to appraise with any adequacy at the present time."⁸

While direct relief was a much-needed facet of the ERA, it was the works program, known as Civil Works Administration (CWA), that has left lasting landmarks. The works program supplied workers and other assistance for public projects sponsored by localities. These permanent public projects would not have been financially feasible without ERA aid. Projects included roads, public buildings, school buildings and grounds, parks, drainage and sewer systems, city streets, geodetic surveys, as well as farm and garden work.⁹

⁶Ibid., 322-3.

⁷Kirk, J. S., ed. *Emergency Relief in North Carolina, 1932 - 1935* (Raleigh: Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 14 and 25.

⁸Ibid., 14.

⁹Ibid., 14 and 24.

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The advantage of the works program was two-fold. First, traditionally conservative Ashe County residents resisted "charity" projects, but found the work-for-wages approach of the CWA (and the later Works Progress Administration) more palatable. Further, the projects planned by these agencies, roads and schools in particular, were clearly for the public good and were usually not seen as wasteful or unnecessary.¹⁰

Despite this basically positive attitude within local communities, the Emergency Relief Act met with much skepticism across the state. The Act prescribed state monetary contributions, but North Carolina argued that her expenditures on road construction counted towards that obligation. Thus, North Carolina spent nothing towards the federal ERA relief and localities gave only six and a half percent; only Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia gave less. This situation reflected the generally conservative attitudes of North Carolinians towards relief. Many in the state felt that the ERA programs were too generous.¹¹ Despite this political reality, however, the North Carolina ERA built a large number of projects that were of great importance to the communities that received them.

Throughout the Depression, the federal government struggled to administer relief programs. The politics involved in this unprecedented undertaking are illustrated in the succession of re-designed legislation and complicated bureaucracy. Only four months after its inception, the CWA was discontinued and absorbed into an expanded ERA as the Works Program. Further, just as the Emergency Relief Act had replaced the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in 1933, the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act was passed in 1935 replacing the Emergency Relief Act. Two new agencies were established by this new act to take over the primary programs: the Works Progress Administration (WPA) absorbed the ERA Works Program and the Resettlement Administration took over Rural Rehabilitation.¹² By 1935, the NC-ERA had spent over \$52 million in federal funds, with nearly \$250,000 in Ashe County. Following the ERA, the Works Progress Administration spent an additional 173.7 million dollars in North Carolina from 1935 through 1942. Unlike the ERA, which had been state-operated, the WPA was a purely federal undertaking.¹³

¹⁰Fletcher, 323.

¹¹Badger, Anthony, *North Carolina and the New Deal* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1981), 46-7.

¹²Kirk, 21.

¹³Ibid, 41 and Badger, 41.

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Nationwide, three billion dollars was allocated for public construction by the Public Works Administration and one-sixth of that amount was used for school facilities.¹⁴ Next to road projects, schools were among the most numerous relief construction projects. In North Carolina, 190 new gymnasiums were constructed by the NC-ERA between 1933 and 1935.¹⁵ The most numerous school project was the addition of classrooms to existing buildings. In fact, over three hundred new classrooms were added to North Carolina's public schools by the CWA prior to its dissolution in 1934. Additionally, sixty-one complete school buildings were built by the ERA between 1934 and 1935. In comparison, community projects included twenty-one concrete swimming pools, twenty-two community houses, and numerous public parks.¹⁶

The frequency of school projects was directly related to the lack of available local funding for school improvements. In 1930-1931, 4.1 million dollars was spent statewide on school buildings, but by 1931-1932 this figure had plummeted to 2 million and was only \$800,000 in 1932-1933.¹⁷ The financial situation came together with an increasing recognition of the importance of modern school facilities and the potential for wider community use of the buildings, making schools and gymnasiums ideal candidates for NC-ERA funds. In order to receive funding, a project was required to have a local sponsor. All school-related NC-ERA projects were sponsored by the local school boards. Additionally, one-third of the project cost had to be supplied locally. This local contribution was typically the donation or purchase of materials. In January of 1935, for example, the school

¹⁴The federal PWA was the sister program of the WPA. It focused on capital-intensive rather than labor intensive undertakings. This figure illustrates the interest in school construction projects nationally among all of the various relief programs throughout the course of the New Deal.

¹⁵This includes 107 gyms built by the CWA between 1933 and 1934 and an additional 83 built by the ERA between 1934 and 1935 (see Kirk 104 and 229).

¹⁶C. W. Hackensmith, *History of Physical Education* (NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 435-9 and Kirk, 60, 83.

¹⁷Bell, John Jr., *Hard Times* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1982), 63.

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board in Ashe County sold an unused property, the dormitory building at West Jefferson School, to raise money for their share of the "PWA program."¹⁸

Relatively inexpensive to build, gymnasiums were extremely useful to schools because they served not only for athletic events, but as auditoriums and community buildings as well. Gymnasiums were the most common type of new building constructed on school campuses by the NC-ERA and ranged from \$2,000 to \$20,000 in cost and from simple frame structures to more substantial buildings built in brick or stone.¹⁹ In its final analysis, the North Carolina ERA found that 1.8 percent of the CWA relief funds (1933-1934) had gone towards the construction of school gyms. To give some perspective, similar CWA amounts were dedicated to school sidewalks and playgrounds, city sidewalk construction and repair, and to classroom construction and school building additions. Altogether, 15.4 percent of the CWA budget was invested in a wide complement of school construction projects. This figure illustrates the importance placed on school construction since it falls only slightly behind the agency's two largest expenditures: 23 percent on road repair and construction and 15.7 percent for the construction and repair of sanitary privies.²⁰ The popularity of gyms was addressed in the 1935 final report: "As much interest has been manifested by the North Carolina school authorities in building gymnasiums as in the improvement of schools, and the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration has been especially interested in the projects since they provide opportunities not only for indoor sports, but also for community gatherings, and the promotion of better social life in the community."²¹

While the community benefit of gyms was critical to their popularity during the CWA and ERA programs, the interest in gymnasiums was also part of a sudden growth that occurred in physical education programs in schools after World War I when attitudes towards physical education and sports changed.²² Rather than a way to toughen and prepare men for battle, participating in exercise

¹⁸Kirk, 84 and 103 and *Skyland Post*, 10 January 1935.

¹⁹Kirk, 83-4.

²⁰Kirk, 98.

²¹Kirk, 221.

²²Emmett Rice, et al., *A Brief History of Physical Education* (NY: Ronald Press, 1958), 296-7.

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came to be viewed as rewarding in and of itself.²³ Related movements such as the growth of interest in camping, the expansion of the national park system, and the idealization of fresh air and nature by social reformers during the 1900s and 1910s coincided and contributed to a stronger belief in the importance of physical activity for children. By 1930, thirty-three states required physical education classes in schools and an additional three, including North Carolina, allowed school credit for such classes but did not make them mandatory.²⁴ Gym building did not keep pace with the growth of the physical education programs, yet eighty percent of Ohio and sixty-two percent of New York schools had gyms by 1930.²⁵

The 190 gyms built by the NC-ERA may well have been the state's gym-building boom and no doubt helped bring the state nearer to the larger numbers found in Ohio and New York. North Carolina's new gymnasiums were most often located in rural areas, such as Ashe County, where year-round athletic facilities were unavailable. While road improvements received approximately one-quarter of the NC-ERA funds spent in Ashe County, approximately one-half was spent on school-related projects. In fact, the single most costly ERA project in Ashe County was West Jefferson High School (\$25,447). The construction of sanitary privies for county schools (\$11,452) and the construction of Jefferson High School (\$10,840) also registered high costs. Statewide during the CWA's tenure, road work was the predominant expenditure (less than 18%) with drainage work to control malaria, school projects, and the construction of sanitary privies following closely. After 1935, the Works Program of the ERA focused increasingly on non-highway projects. In fact, highway construction fell to only about 11 percent of the agency's total expenditures. Construction on public property, which included schools, claimed 43 percent of the total budget.²⁶

The scope of the relief fund-assisted school building program in Ashe County was broad, including six new high school buildings and nine gyms, providing a gym at each high school. The majority of North Carolina gym projects cost between \$1,000 and \$3,000 with a large number also falling into

²³Paula Welch and Harold Lerch, *History of American Physical Education and Sport*, (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1981), 176.

²⁴Hackensmith, 449.

²⁵Rice, 297.

²⁶Kirk, 105-107, 166, and 451-3.

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the \$5,000 range. The nine gyms built in Ashe County cost between \$3,000 and \$8,000 each; the Elkland Gym was built for \$4,090.95.

Several types of gyms were constructed across the state depending upon available labor and supplies and all of the gymnasium plans were approved by the State Board of Education and the State Insurance Commission to ensure public safety.²⁷ This factor may have had a large impact on the Ashe County School Board's decision to use nearly identical gym plans at Elkland, Healing Springs, Nathan's Creek, and Fleetwood. It is unclear who prepared the gym design, but the buildings are similar in form to many built by the NC-ERA. The one-and-a-half-story central section with gable (sometimes gambrel) roof surrounded by lower, one-story, shed-roof extensions was a common form easily discernable in the 1935 final report photographs. The use of local materials was encouraged by the ERA administration, resulting in many gyms built of brick and even stone. In Ashe County, however, timber was still easily obtained and doubtless the least expensive material available. Thus, most of the gyms built in the county were of wood frame construction sheathed in weatherboards.

Due to a lack of school board records, little is known about the exact circumstances surrounding the construction of the Elkland gym. The construction dates of the Ashe County gyms are not given in the NC-ERA's final report edited by J.S. Kirk and published in 1936, but they were clearly built between 1933 and 1935. We do know that the Healing Springs gymnasium was completed in 1934, making a similar date for the Elkland gym likely. Additionally, both CWA and ERA funds were utilized in building the gym, pointing to a late 1933 to early 1934 construction period since the CWA was discontinued in March of 1934.²⁸ The circa 1934 date is also supported by the recollections of Mary Risk, who remembered the gym being built by the time she was in the fourth grade in 1934 to 1935.²⁹

Mrs. Risk also provides insight into how the gym fit into the daily life of the Elkland students. Like most of her fellow students, Mrs. Risk lived on a farm near the school building. The school day began at eight o'clock, but many of the students had morning chores to do at home before they

²⁷Ibid, 221.

²⁸Ibid, 452-453 and Ashe County High School Journalism Department, "Mountain Arts - Our Heritage, 2001," privately published, 49.

²⁹Mary Risk, interview.

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walked to school. These might include milking or filling the wood box. At school, the elementary children stayed with one teacher all day. By the early 1940s, Elkland School had three teachers plus the principal. The day was broken by the morning and afternoon recess periods and the half-hour given to lunch. Students like Mrs. Risk who lived near the school walked home for lunch while the other children ate what they had brought with them; there was no lunch room. Many students also had chores after school. As a child, Mrs. Risk was required to find the cows in the pasture and drive them to the barn for their afternoon milking.³⁰

Mrs. Risk's earliest memories of the gymnasium at Elkland School were not of its useful interior, but the area underneath the building. The fall of the terrain required a tall pier foundation that was not enclosed, allowing the dry dirt under the building to form an attractive play place for the school children. The interior of the gym was used by the elementary grades for recess only during bad weather as a place to have recess. Unlike physical education classes, recess was held twice a day for fifteen minutes and was a period of free play. Mrs. Risk does not recall a formal physical education class during the 1930s, but Ruby Trivette remembers that such classes were initiated by the 1940s and taught inside the gym.³¹

During the 1930s, children in the upper grades, especially high school, had "basketball practice" or a basketball play period each day.³² Basketball was a popular school sport in Ashe County. As early as the late 1920s, Ruby Trivette, who attended Elkland School from 1920 to 1930, was a member of the girls' team. Without a gymnasium, the teams played on an outdoor court, built below the school building. "I can well remember even at the time I was in high school there was no gymnasium, but we played a little basketball on an outside basketball court. We girls had our own suits. They were homemade, big, old, wide bloomers. I guess we thought we were really going to town when we got our basketball suits."³³

³⁰Trivette and Risk, interviews.

³¹Ibid.

³²Risk, interview.

³³Cooper, Leland and Mary Lee, *The People of the New River: Oral Histories from the Ashe Alleghany and Watauga Counties of North Carolina* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2001), 97.

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After Ruby Trivette returned to Elkland School as a teacher in 1941, basketball continued to be an important part of school life. "We were a very basketball-oriented school," she recalled, "we fielded some very good teams." Both girls and boys had teams that used the gym during the school day for practice.³⁴ In fact, it appears that basketball may have been the top school sport across the county as it received good coverage in the *Skyland Post* during the paper's first year in 1935. In January of 1935, the county basketball tournament was announced for March 14-16 and during the next two months scores and schedules were published regularly. At least two games were held at Elkland, the first was against Jefferson on February 14 and the second was versus Grassy Creek on February 21, 1935.³⁵

While far superior to the earlier outdoor basketball courts recalled by Ruby Trivette, the gym was still fairly primitive. Eloise Price, who attended Riverview School in 1940, recalled that "the old gyms were so cold that many times we sat with an overcoat on when we weren't playing ball. The old pot-bellied stoves put out heat only to those who sat close by."³⁶ The stoves at Elkland were located at the rear of the building near the stage and at the front, in the entry.³⁷

Equipped with a stage and two dressing rooms, the Elkland gym also served as the school's (and the community's) auditorium. Although the old Elkland School building had a stage in its center (with classrooms flanking it), limited space made it necessary to hold classes within the central area. Thus, play practice and performances required moving the class desks into other rooms.³⁸ In the gym, however, plays could be easily accommodated and the school acquired folding chairs that were an improvement over the bleachers for performances.³⁹

³⁴Trivette, interview.

³⁵*Skyland Post*, 31 January 1935, 7 February 1935, and 28 February 1935.

³⁶Ashe County High School Journalism Department, 50.

³⁷Mary Risk, interview.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*

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On March 2, 1935, "The Scarecrow Creeps," a three-act mystery play, was performed at Elkland School, presumably in the gym. The play admission fees were 15 and 25 cents. The money raised by this performance was for the school. During this period, books and other equipment were often furnished by the individual schools and school fund-raising was a constant in the community social life. Plays and other performances were a major feature of school events as well. For example, the Elkland School graduation, scheduled for April 26, 1935, included a commencement play and operetta, which were probably held in the gym.⁴⁰ Ruby Trivette, who taught the high school English class during the 1940s, was in charge of Elkland's plays. The school would perform three or four plays a year with approximately fifteen students involved in each production.⁴¹ Plays would also be held during the summer and were complete with romantic costumes that enchanted Mary Risk as a young girl.⁴²

Just as the ERA intended, the gymnasium at Elkland School benefited the community as well as the school. Community entertainments included more than the school-sponsored plays. The Home Demonstration Club met in the gym and box suppers and cake walks were held there as fund-raising events for the school.⁴³ By the 1950s, the events had expanded to include roller skating on Tuesday and Thursday nights and an annual Halloween party complete with skating, refreshments, and costume contests that attracted the entire community.⁴⁴

Even after a new, brick elementary school building was completed in the mid-1950s and the high school at Elkland consolidated into Beaver Creek High School, the gymnasium continued to serve the elementary children in Todd. Elkland School closed in 1981 and the school and gym stood vacant until they were purchased by the present owners in 1996. The school has been rehabilitated into an art center and residence. The gym has been stabilized and it currently serves as a wood shop and

⁴⁰*Skyland Post*, 28 February 1935 and *Skyland Post*, 20 April 1935.

⁴¹Trivette, interview.

⁴²Risk, interview.

⁴³Trivette and Risk, interviews.

⁴⁴Risk, interview.

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storage facility while it awaits a complete rehabilitation to make it useful again for public performances.

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Todd, Ashe County, North Carolina

10. Geographical Data

UTM References

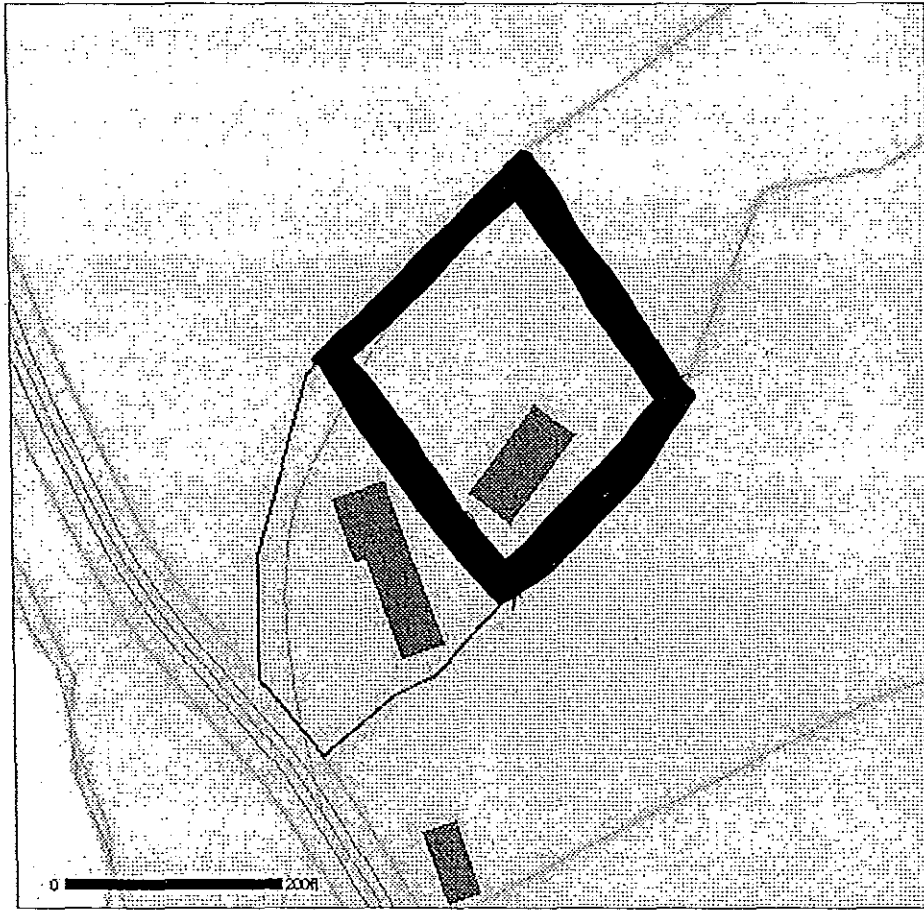
Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Elkland School Gymnasium property is shown as the boldest line on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the property encompasses the land historically associated with the Elkland School Gymnasium that retains historic integrity.

**ELKLAND SCHOOL GYMNASIUM
TODD
ASHE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**



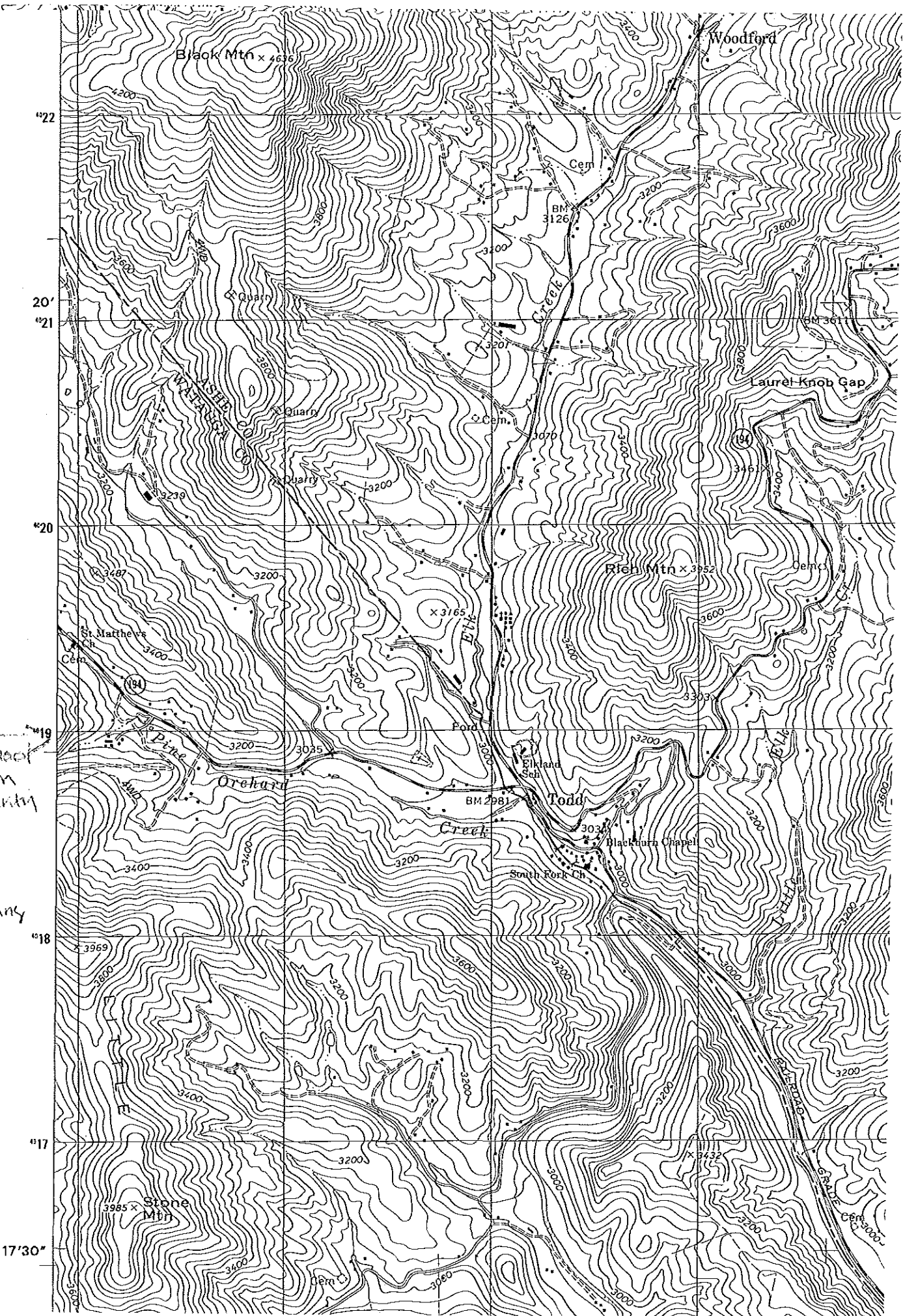
Ashe County Tax Map
available online

scale is 1"=200'



Parcels

Account Number: 29702
Owners Name: STERNAL, THOMAS & MARTHA E
Address 1: _____
Address 2: 10279 THREE TOP RD
City: TODD
State: NC
Zip: 28684
Parcel ID: 04126-052
Pin Map AC: 0
Pin St Rd: 1100
Subdivision:
Map Number: 2934.00
Block Number: 32
Lot Number: 9082
Deed Book: 213
Deed Page: 2057
Plat Book:
Plat Page:
Description 1:
Description 2:
Deed Acres: 2.789
Transfer Date: 1996
Sale Price: 0
Land Value: 108700
Building Value: 91700



Elkland School
Gymnasium
Todd, Ash County
zone 17

446150 Easting
4018880 Northing
Todd Quad