

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received NOV 7 1986
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Cooper School

and/or common

2. Location

street & number S. side SR 2143, .5 ml. E. of jct. with SR 2142 not for publication

city, town vicinity of Mebane

state North Carolina code 037 county Alamance code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" 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
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Mary's Grove Congregational Church c/o Mrs. Alma Conley

street & number Rt. 2 Box #360

city, town Mebane vicinity of state North Carolina 27302

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alamance County Courthouse Register of Deeds

street & number Courthouse

city, town Graham state North Carolina 27253

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Alamance County Architectural Heritage
title Carl Lounsbury has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980 federal state county local

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, N.C. Division of Archives & His.

city, town Raleigh state North Carolina 27611

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Cooper School is located on SR 2143 at the eastern edge of central Alamance County. It is one of two remaining early twentieth century one-room schoolhouses built for black students in the county. A gravel driveway leads to the top of a small hill, and the school stands diagonally in the southwest corner of the Mary's Grove Congregational Church property. A grove of oak trees completely surrounds the property. The (second) Mary's Grove Congregational Church and cemetery, as well as the site of the original church, are located east of the school. The site of the Oaks School (1907), demolished in the 1930s, is located northeast of the Cooper School.

The Cooper School is a small, one-story, three-bay, weatherboard-clad structure with a habitable attic, tin gable-front roof and a random-coarsed stone foundation. The roof has wide eaves and exposed rafters. Documentary photographs of early twentieth century Alamance County Schools, both public and private, reveal similar architectural features.

The main elevation features the principal entrance which consists of a white-painted, four-panel door set in a plain wide surround; the door is flanked by two broad ten-pane paired casement windows with wide wooden sills and surrounds that are painted green. An attached shed roof porch supported by rough posts shelters the facade. Rustic planks form a crude balustrade on the right side of the porch. Other features of the main elevation include the small six-pane casement window located in the upper story that illuminates the second floor.

The south, west, and north elevations display a variety of window types and doors that are set in wide plain green-painted surrounds. Like the main elevation, the south elevation features two large ten-pane paired casement windows. The west elevation displays two long narrow eight-pane paired casement windows and a single six-over-six sash window. The small casement window on the second floor of the west elevation is identical to the one on the main elevation. Exterior features on the north elevation include two six-over-six sash windows that flank two four-panel doors. The school has separate entrances, one for girls and another for boys, a typical feature of many surviving early rural schoolhouses.

The interior of the Cooper School is sheathed in green-painted two-inch tongue-and-groove paneling. Flowered wallpaper, faded and yellowed with age, covers most of the paneling and conceals the crown molding. A support beam has been installed on the first floor to prevent the sagging ceiling from collapsing. A vertical board door leads to the enclosed staircase that rises parallel to the partition

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates c. 1900 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Cooper School is one of two remaining early twentieth century schoolhouses built for black students in rural Alamance County. It is the only surviving structure of a small educational complex located on the grounds of the first Mary's Grove Congregational Church, established in 1883 by the American Missionary Association in the Oaks community. Constructed c. 1900, the Cooper School continued to operate until 1907 when a larger educational facility, the Oaks School, was built nearby. The Cooper School was used as a parsonage for the ministers of the Mary's Grove Congregational Church until the early 1930s. The site is currently unoccupied.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. The Cooper School is associated with the American Missionary Association which helped finance the Mary's Grove Congregational Church and its various associated schools. It represents a tradition of private education for black students that began at Mary's Grove in 1883 when the Association established the church which also served as the community's first school.

- C. The Cooper School embodies some architectural features commonly associated with one-room schools in Alamance County and North Carolina, including a rural location, a gable-front roof, a plain exterior, and twin entrances for male and female students.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"See Continuation Sheet Item #9"

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.5

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UTM References

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6	5	5	7	8	10
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3	9	8	4	2	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification The property being nominated is shown on Alamance County tax map, Township 9, sheet 9-37. Property is outlined in red. This 1.5 acre tract is part of the original 15 acre tract that has been associated with the Mary's Grove Congregational Church since 1883 and the Cooper School since its construction ca. 1900.

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Shelia Bumgarner / Preservation Consultant

organization date

street & number 233 Rader Street telephone (919) 226-5400

city or town Burlington, state North Carolina 27215

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 William J. King, Jr.

title State Historic Preservation Officer date October 15, 1986

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

Amy Schloegel date 12/15/86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Description: Cooper School Item number 7

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separating the main room from a small room that later served as a kitchen. At the back of the enclosed staircase, another vertical board door leads to the cellar below. The green-painted interior doors are set in wide plain surrounds. Similar surrounds enframe the nearly full-length casement windows.

Coat hooks along the north wall suggest this area was once used as a cloak room, but the hooks are too high for children and may not be original. Two-by-fours separate this space from the main room. Physical evidence such as nail holes and traces of paint discoloration along the ceiling indicates the closet was originally enclosed.

According to local residents, the interior of the Cooper School was originally sheathed in wide green-painted flush planks. A central fireplace divided the first floor into two rooms. The chimney and the sheathing were removed at an undetermined date.

On the second story, log rafters support a ridgeboard. The ceiling is covered with wide twelve-inch boards that may resemble the original interior sheathing. Currently, church pews are stored on this floor, as well as a trunk containing books belonging to the late Reverend Matthew McCrae (b. 1874), a former minister of the Mary's Grove Congregational Church and founder of the Oaks School.

The Cooper School is in a state of disrepair. The second floor sags and the tin roof is deteriorated. Vandals have broken most of the windows, removed all but a few of the louvered shutters, and stripped the wallpaper in some places. Despite these conditions, the Cooper School is a representative example of early twentieth century Alamance County schoolhouses and one of two still extant.

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Continuation sheet Significance: Cooper School Item number 8 Page 1

The Cooper School is one of two remaining black one-room schools in Alamance County. It is located in the Thompson Township on the eastern edge of the county in an area local residents refer to as the "Oaks".¹ The Cooper School has an early twentieth century appearance and was probably built about 1900. The exact construction date cannot be ascertained. It was part of a small educational complex, composed of the Cooper School and Oaks School, located on the grounds of the original Mary's Grove Congregational Church (destroyed) built in 1883 by the American Missionary Association. (A second Mary's Grove Church was constructed in 1976.) The church also served as the first school in the Oaks community.² The American Missionary Association, established in 1846, was affiliated with various religious denominations, primarily the New England Congregational Church. The Association organized over five hundred black schools in the south between 1861 and 1884. Esther Douglas, an American Missionary Association missionary from Boston, organized the Mary's Grove Congregational Church and school in 1883.³

The land for the Mary's Grove Church, the Cooper School and the Oaks School (destroyed), built in 1907, was purchased by the American Missionary Association from four local farmers and founding church members, George Thompson, William Turrentine, James Hunter, and Alvis Wilson (1839-1918). According to local tradition, Green Oldham, a local farmer, and Alvis Wilson donated the land for the church, but Oldham's name does not appear on the 1883 deed. Additional property was purchased by⁴ Esther Douglas in 1887 from William Turrentine and George Thompson.

By 1884, many of the primary schools for black children established by the American Missionary Association were closing, but the Mary's Grove School continued to operate.⁵ Some of the missionaries who taught at Mary's Grove included Miss Robinson, Miss Littlefield, and Miss Farrington. The last of the American Missionary Association missionaries who served Mary's Grove had departed by the late 1890s.⁶ Esther Douglas was residing in Black County, Iowa by 1900.⁷ The tradition of private education for black children continued at the Cooper School as⁸ the various succeeding ministers assumed the teaching duties there.

Little is known of the Cooper School's early history; all of the original church and school records are missing. Cooper School closed and was converted to a parsonage in 1907 when the Reverend Matthew McCrae (b. 1874), pastor of the Mary's Grove Congregational Church between 1906 and 1910, established the Oaks School that same year. The new school was a three-story structure, located approximately

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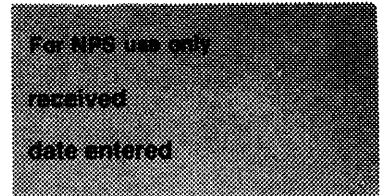
fifty feet northeast from the Cooper School. The legacy of private black educational facilities ended at Mary's Grove when the Oaks School was closed in the 1930s. The students in the area were then sent to Morrows Grove (destroyed),⁹ a public school located three miles southeast from the Oaks community.

The existence of educational facilities at Mary's Grove probably facilitated a dramatic rise in the literacy rate among both black adults and children in the Thompson Township from 1880 to 1910.¹⁰ Between 1880 and 1900, the literacy rate of the black residents, ranging from age six to ninety-nine, increased from 18 percent to 60 percent.¹¹ By 1910, the literacy rate grew to 72 percent; twenty-nine adults, between the ages of thirty-three and sixty-five were enrolled in school.¹² According to the 1880 census, there were eighty-six school age children in Thompson Township and 30 percent were enrolled in school.¹³ By 1900, there were 102 children in the township, but only 38 percent attended school.¹⁴ Three years after the Oaks School opened, the 1910 census recorded a marked increase in the number of children enrolled in school: of the 102 children living in the township, 85 percent attended school there for at least three to four months a year.¹⁵ (This was the average school term for most North Carolina students, black as well as white, between 1870 and 1918.)¹⁶ Many of the students worked as farm laborers during the remainder of the year.¹⁷

The Cooper School was used as a parsonage for Mary's Grove church until the late 1930s. Various other members¹⁸ of the congregation lived in the building during the 1940s and 1950s. The Cooper School has been unoccupied for several years. It survives as a reminder of the type of rural school that was an outgrowth of the pioneering educational efforts of the American Missionary Association during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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¹The Oaks community does not appear on any Alamance County map. Local residents may have adopted the name of the adjacent Orange County community or the name may refer to the large number of oak trees in the area. Geological Survey, "Saxapahaw Quadrangle, 1974" (Reston, Virginia: The United States Geological Survey, the same date.) Kathryn Turrentine Stanley to Bertha Thompson, 10 November 1970, Alma Conley's Residence, Mebane, North Carolina.

²Stanley to Thompson; and Carl Lounsbury, Alamance County Architectural Heritage (Graham, North Carolina: Alamance Historic Properties Commission, 1980), p. 44.

³Clifton Johnson, compiler, American Missionary Association Archives as a Source for the Study of American History (New York: Division of Higher Education and American Missionary Association of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, ca. 1958), p. 1; W.D. Weatherford, American Churches and the Negro: A Historical Study From Early Slave Days to the Present (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1957), pp. 199-200, 216; and Stanley to Thompson.

⁴Alamance County Register of Deeds, Volume 8, pp. 572-573; and Volume 12, pp. 424-425. In 1900, Esther Douglas sold the land she purchased in 1887 to the American Missionary Association. The Association sold all of the church property to the Trustees of the Mary's Grove Congregational Church in 1946. Alamance County Register of Deeds, Volume 21, p. 558; and Volume 160, p. 105.

⁵By 1884, the American Missionary Association reported that 433 of the 503 schools operated by the Association had closed. The Association did not want "to compete with the state in public education." Weatherford, American Churches and the Negro, p. 216. Many of the common or elementary schools were "surrendered to local school boards." Johnson, American Missionary Association Archives, p. 1.

⁶Little is known about the female missionaries who served at Mary's Grove. Stanley to Thompson.

⁷Alamance County Register of Deeds, Volume 21, p. 558.

⁸Seven ministers served the Mary's Grove Church between 1883 and 1905, including the Reverends Ray, Curtis, George Steele, Newkirk, Anthony Peder, Jones, and Adams. Although it could not be determined if any of these men actually taught at Mary's Grove, it is very likely that they were involved with the schools. Stanley to Thompson.

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⁹ Located in Thompson Township, the Morrows Grove School was built at an undetermined date in the southeastern Alamance County community of Morrows Grove. The school first appears in the minutes of the Alamance County Board of Education in 1921. Stanley to Thompson; Interview with Alma Conley, Residence, Mebane, North Carolina, 22 January 1986; Graham (North Carolina) Alamance County Board of Education Minutes, 1877-1925, meeting of 21 July 1921.

¹⁰ The rise in the literacy rate in the Thompson Township may not be attributable solely to the educational facilities at Mary's Grove; the number of public schools for black children in the township prior to 1910 could not be ascertained. By 1919, there were two public schools for black students in the township. Minutes, 1877-1925, meeting of 7 April 1919.

¹¹ There were 217 blacks ranging from age six to ninety-nine in the Thompson Township in 1880. Thirty-nine individuals were fully literate, and twenty-six residents could read but not write. By 1900, there 260 residents and 155 were literate. The majority of the literate citizens were in their twenties and thirties. The highest rate of illiteracy was among older residents and children between age six and ten. Tenth and Twelfth Census of the United State, 1880 and 1900: Alamance County, Population Schedule. The illiteracy rate for both blacks and whites dropped considerably between 1880 and 1900. Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, The History of a Southern State, North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 536.

¹² Excluding the town of Saxapahaw, there were 254 black residents in the Thompson Township and 183 of these residents were fully literate. Many of these people are buried in the Mary's Grove Church Cemetery. Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Alamance County, Population Schedule. It could not be determined whether or not the adults who were enrolled in school attended private or public schools. The Oaks School was a three-story structure, and adult classes were held on the second floor. Interview with Alma Conley.

¹³ Although there were a number of six year old children enrolled in school, most children began school at age seven and left by age sixteen. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Alamance County, Population Schedule. Secondary education for blacks in Alamance County was nonexistent until 1928. Walter Whitaker, Centennial History of Alamance County 1849-1949 (Burlington, North Carolina: Alamance County Historical Association, 1949), p. 207.

¹⁴ Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Alamance County, Population Schedule. Low enrollment figures were common in most North Carolina public schools in 1900. Lefler and Newsome, The History of a Southern State, p. 535.

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¹⁵Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Alamance County, Population Schedule.

¹⁶Although the average public school term in North Carolina was four months, many school systems could not afford to operate schools for that length of time. The minimum school term was extended to six months in 1918. Lefler and Newsome, The History of a Southern State, pp. 534, 590-592.

¹⁷Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Alamance County, Population Schedule.

¹⁸Interview with Alma Conley.

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Geological Survey. "Saxapahaw Quadrangle, 1974." Reston, Virginia: The United States Geological Survey, the same date.

Graham (North Carolina) Alamance County Board of Education Minutes, 1877-1925.

Mebane, North Carolina, Alma Conley's Residence. Kathryn Turrentine Stanley's Letter.

Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. Alamance County, Population Schedule.

Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. Alamance County, Population Schedule.

Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Alamance County, Population Schedule.

Secondary Sources:

Johnson, Clifton, compiler. American Missionary Association Archives as a Source for the Study of American History. New York: Division of Higher Education and American Missionary Association of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, ca. 1958.

Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Newsome, Albert Ray. The History of a Southern State, North Carolina. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

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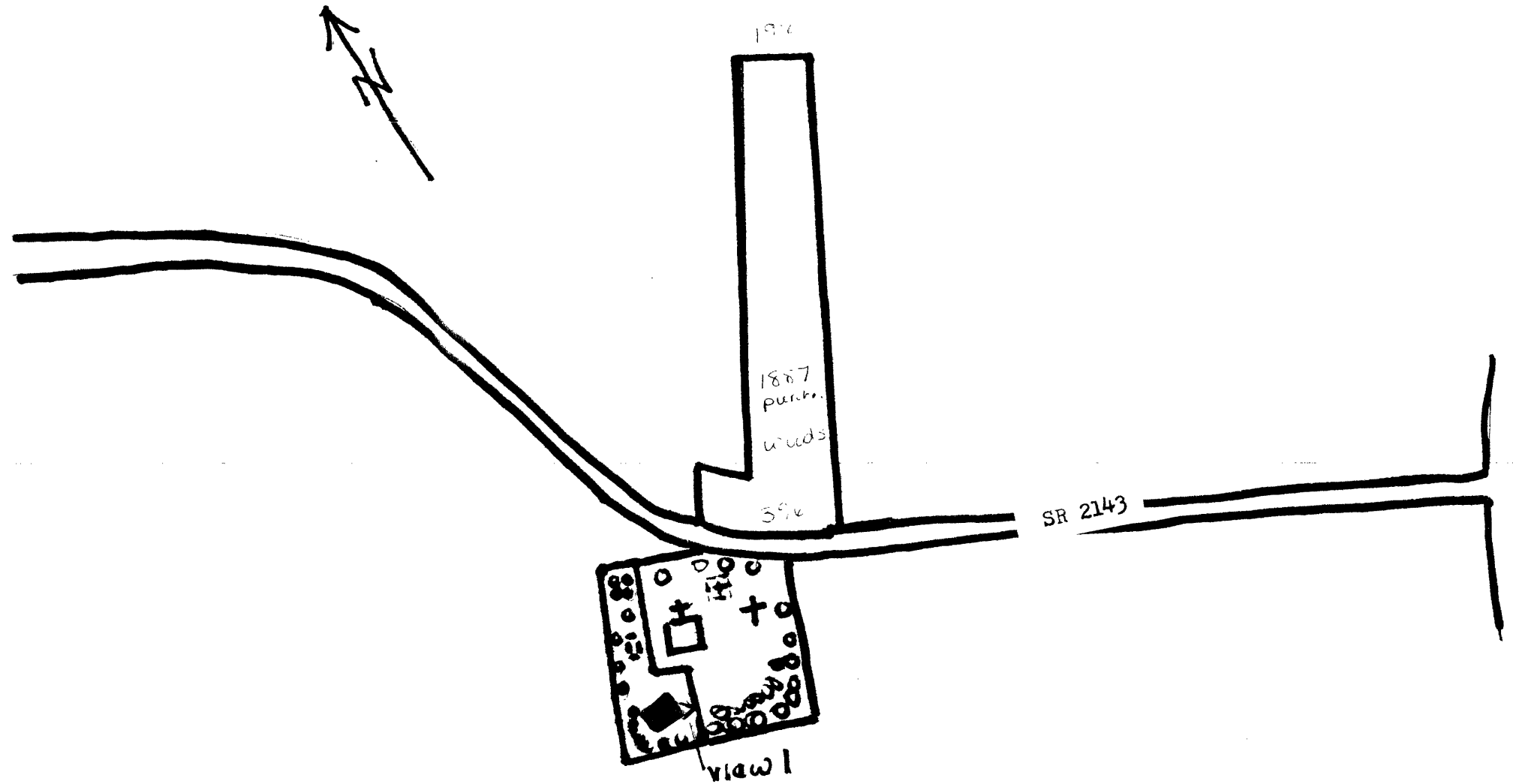
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Whitaker, Walter. Centennial History of Alamance County 1849-1949.
Burlington, North Carolina: Alamance County Historical
Association, 1949.

Cooper School

Scale: 1" = 400'

Buildings not drawn to scale.



- Cooper School
- Oak Trees
- ⊠ (1st) Mary's Grove Church
- ⊞ (2nd) Mary's Grove Church
- + Cemetery
- Site of 2nd School 1907