

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Banner Elk School

Banner Elk, Avery County, AV0100, Listed 09/18/2017
Nomination by Stewart Gray
Photographs by Stewart Gray, June 2016, and April 2017



West Elevation



Interior Hallway

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Banner Elk School

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 185 Azalea Circle

City or town: Banner Elk State: North Carolina County: Avery

Not For Publication: N/A

Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>In my opinion, the property <u>___</u>meets <u>___</u>does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/schools

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/civic

COMMERCIAL/business

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Colonial Revival

Modern Movement

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Banner Elk School is a one-story stone building erected in 1939-1940. The school building occupies a prominent site in the historic core of Banner Elk. It is located on relatively flat land near the intersection of Main Street (NC-174) and Shawneehaw Avenue (NC-184). The school faces west and is set back 450 feet from Shawneehaw Avenue, separated from the road by a former athletic field. The school grounds are largely open and grassy. Landscaping is limited to shrubbery and small trees growing close to the building. A paved U-shaped driveway, widened to allow parking, is the primary access to the school and surrounds the former athletic field. A gravel drive along the south side of the school leads to a small gravel lot at the rear of the school. The 5.39-acre site is surrounded by modern one- and two-story commercial buildings, a few one-story commercial buildings from the 1920s and 30s, and early-twentieth-century houses that have been converted to commercial use. The school building is in good condition and has retained a high degree of integrity. Designed by architect D. R. Beeson, the school building is an important artifact of the movement in Avery County to improve education facilities, and of the unprecedented collaboration on public works projects between local governments and the Federal Government during the Great Depression. The original 1939-40 school included classrooms and an auditorium. In 1945, a stone cafeteria addition was

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

constructed at the north end, and in 1951 a brick classroom wing was added east of the cafeteria. In 1985, a separate cafeteria and classroom building was added to the rear of the property. The 1985 building is non-contributing, due to its age, and does not significantly affect the historic character of the school.

Narrative Description

The Banner Elk School is a long, stone building that displays elements of the Colonial Revival style. The principal section of the school is hipped-roofed and two rooms deep, with a double-loaded hallway that runs parallel to the façade. The original section of the building is seven bays wide, each bay containing a doorway or window opening with varying window groupings. Two bays were added to the north end of the building in 1945 for a cafeteria addition, extending the building's footprint and hipped roof without interruption. The stonework is native granite stones laid in irregular courses with roughly concave joints. Most of the stone has been roughly shaped, especially at corners and wall openings where relatively straight edges are achieved. On the façade, the stone walls rise from the grade without a differentiated foundation.

The entrance to the school is off-center and occupies the fourth bay from the north. The entrance bay projects slightly and is topped with a small gable. The doorway contains replacement double-leaf metal single-light doors. A rusticated wooden sign/panel that reads "Historic Banner Elk School" is set above the doorway, either obscuring or replacing the original twelve-light transom. The doorway is spanned by a splayed stone lintel of rough, narrow stones with a roughly triangular keystone. The small gable is covered with vertical metal panels.

On either side of the entrance are wide banks of six windows. Replacement metal window units with six-over-six single-hung sash topped with a six-light transom sit in the original tall wooden window frames that originally contained wood, nine-over-nine double-hung sash. These metal replacement windows are typical throughout the principal building and the cafeteria. Each bank of windows features a continuous, thick cast-in-place concrete sill. In the principal section of the building all the window openings continue to the top of the wall without a visible lintel. The principal section of the building is roughly bisected by a parged brick firewall that projects slightly from the façade and extends through the roof to form a parapet. To the north of the firewall is a narrow window bay that now contains a pair of six-over-six replacement windows. Above the windows the bay is infilled with lap siding. To the south of the firewall the façade is pierced by three wide window openings containing one bank of four windows and two banks of six windows. On the north end, the cafeteria addition is pierced on the façade by two two-window openings. The stonework on the addition is nearly identical to the original but has a slightly different coloration. A rock lintel set between the window openings may identify an infilled doorway. Three gabled attic ventilators are set above the original portion of the principal section but are absent above the cafeteria addition. The original asphalt roofing has been replaced with metal panel roofing, and the parapet firewalls and boxed cornice have been clad with metal.

The south end of the principal section of the school tees into a tall one-story hipped-roof auditorium. The principal section of the school and the auditorium were built concurrently.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

While the stone school building could technically be described as a “T-plan,” the auditorium projects less than 2 feet past the façade of the principal section and extends for two full bays past the rear elevation of the principal section. A stepped and sloping parapet firewall, covered with metal, separates the auditorium from the principal section of the school.

The auditorium is three bays wide, with the entrance centered on the façade. The entrance is accessed by a large concrete stoop with three concrete steps extending from three sides of the stoop. Originally containing a pair of wooden six-light doors topped with a twelve-light transom, the doorway now contains plain replacement double-leaf metal doors topped with a metal twelve-light transom. The doorway is spanned by a splayed stone lintel composed of rough, narrow stones with a roughly triangular keystone. The entrance is flanked by tall paired windows containing replacement metal window units with three six-light sash, each topped with a six-light transom. The replacement windows sit in the original tall wooden window frames that originally contained wood, nine-over-nine double-hung sash topped with six-light transoms. Each window opening features a single thick concrete sill and is topped with a splayed stone lintel. Although built concurrently with the classroom portion of the building, the stonework on the auditorium is not coursed.

The south elevation of the auditorium features an irregularly coursed stone foundation pierced with simple ventilation openings filled with wire screen. Above the foundation the stone wall is not coursed. The elevation is five bays wide. The door and window openings are topped with splayed lintels. From the west, three bays contain two banks of three and one paired set of tall replacement windows like those found on the façade, replacing the original wood double-hung windows and transoms. It is likely the fourth bay originally contained double-leaf doors. The fourth bay now contains a single replacement metal door with a single narrow vertical light, and a fixed panel. The door is topped with a replacement twelve-light transom. The door opens onto an original concrete stoop with five concrete steps. A late twentieth-century concrete ramp with wood and metal handrails descends to the east and terminates just past the southeast corner of the auditorium. The easternmost bay contains a group of three metal replacement windows. The sill of the bay is set higher in the wall than the other windows in the elevation. Two gabled attic vents are set above the elevation. The rear/east elevation of the auditorium is blank.

The north elevation of the auditorium is pierced by two bays topped with splayed lintels. The easternmost bay contains a group of three windows. The other bay contains replacement double-leaf metal slab doors topped with a replacement twelve-light transom. A short shed-roofed masonry-block addition projects from the north elevation below the bank of windows. The addition features asphalt shingles and a single slab door. The addition shelters a formerly exterior stairwell that leads to a basement. The stairwell features stone walls, concrete steps, and original three-light, two-panel, double-leaf doors.

The exposed portion of the rear elevation of the principal section of the building is eight bays wide and is roughly divided by a parged brick firewall. Two gabled attic vents are set on either side of the firewall. From the south, the second bay contains replacement double-leaf single-light metal doors topped with a metal, twelve-light replacement transom. The fourth bay is narrow, containing a pair of replacement windows and partially filled with siding. The fifth bay contains a bank of three nine-over-nine double-hung sash topped with six-light transoms. The northmost

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

bay contains a wooden replacement panel door topped with a splayed lintel composed of flat stones set in a soldier course with a roughly triangular keystone. This doorway is part of the 1945 addition and is screened by a blank brick wall that was added sometime after 1951. The remaining four bays on the rear elevation each contain banks of six nine-over-nine double-hung sash windows topped with six-light transoms.

The north elevation of the stone school building is part of the 1945 cafeteria addition. When the addition was constructed, the north elevation of original building was incorporated into the interior of the cafeteria addition. The north elevation of the addition is five bays wide. From the facade, the first four bays are evenly spaced and contain paired replacement windows. The easternmost bay contains a single replacement window set close to the rear corner.

In 1951, a Modernist-style, one-story, flat-roof, brick, two-classroom wing was added to the rear of the 1945 addition, leaving the rear wall of the 1945 addition intact but partially blocking two tall window bays. The 1951 wing is slab-on-grade construction, and the walls are laid in a variant of one-to-five common bond, with the bonding course alternating headers and stretchers. The wing forms a courtyard at the rear of the school, and the wing's south elevation faces the courtyard. The south elevation is dominated by a flat-roof porch that spans the elevation, upheld by six metal supports. The porch roof is a thin concrete slab, currently covered with a waterproof membrane. The porch shelters an on-grade concrete walkway and two metal flush doors near either end of the elevation, each with a single light. Centered between the doors is a metal two-light hopper window set on a brick sill. Set above the porch are two clearstory windows, each composed of seven short, metal hopper windows. Between the clearstory windows, a single short hopper window is set directly over the window sheltered by the porch. Where the wing attaches to the stone building, the walkway becomes a partially enclosed ramp, sheltered by a higher flat roof supported by a blank brick wall. At the top of the ramp is another doorway containing a single-light metal door and a single short, metal window set high in the wall.

The north elevation of the brick addition features two tall banks of steel-framed windows, each containing thirty-five lights arranged seven wide and five high. The bottom row is composed of hopper sash. The third and second rows of lights are set in awning sash. Each large window sits on a brick sill. Adjacent to the older stone portion of the building, the north elevation is pierced by a ten-light metal window set high in the wall and a metal flush door with a single light. The east elevation of the brick wing is blank. Four fiberglass domed skylights sit on the roof.

Interior

The interior of the principal section of the school has retained a good degree of integrity. The general layout of the building's floorplan has not been altered, and original materials and features have been preserved. A wide hallway extends from the main entrance and tees into a central, wide, double-loaded hallway that runs north to south from the auditorium to the 1945 addition. Four classrooms and a bathroom are found along the west side of the corridor to the south of the entry hall, and a single classroom is located along the west side of the corridor to the north of the entry hall. The library is located on the east side of the corridor opposite the entry hall. The library was expanded at some point to include the space of one of the original eight classrooms. Along the corridor to the south of the library is the original school office, a

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

bathroom, and a classroom. South of the classroom, a short hallway that leads to a rear entrance tees into the central hallway. South of the hallway intersection is a single classroom. The central hallway is interrupted at its midpoint by a parged brick firewall, which is pierced by a set of replacement double metal doors.

The hallways feature narrow-plank oak flooring, wide pine baseboards, and tall pine wainscotings. The millwork in the hallway is unpainted. Above the wainscoting the original bevel-edged fiberboard panels have been covered with modern gypsum wallboards. The original bevel-edged fiberboard panels on the ceiling are obscured by a suspended panel ceiling.

The classrooms feature the same narrow-plank oak floors and wainscoting found in the hallway. In the classrooms, the majority of the original bevel-edged fiberboard panels on the walls and ceilings are exposed. Most of the classrooms have retained the original nine-light, single-panel wooden doors, topped with three-light transoms. Other surviving original millwork includes simple window casing, and black board and bulletin board frames.

The auditorium has retained a high degree of integrity. Currently the space is being used both as an auditorium and a gymnasium. The auditorium features its original open floorplan, with a recessed stage at the east end of the room. Closets set on either side of the stage feature original wooden five-panel-doors. Original woodwork includes narrow-plank wood flooring and tall wainscoting. Plywood paneling has been added to the stage as skirting, and rolling wooden stairs give access to the stage. Basketball goals have been attached to the ceiling at the east and west ends of the room. The original fiberboard wall panels have been covered by wallboard. The ceiling is covered with large fiberboard panels with wooden battens covering the joints.

The northern end of the main hallway of the principal section of the school passes through a wide cased opening that was once the northern entrance of the 1940 building, and then tees into a hallway that serves the 1945 cafeteria addition. The western end of the addition's hallway terminates at a doorway that leads into the former dining area. The eastern end of the hallway terminates at a doorway in the rear exterior wall. A doorway leading into the former kitchen is located on the north side of the hallway. All the doorways in the hallway contain modern replacement doors. The hallway features tall unpainted wainscoting, wide baseboards, and oak flooring. Above the wainscoting the walls are covered with modern gypsum wallboard, and the original ceiling is obscured by a suspended panel ceiling. The dining area and the kitchen were converted into classrooms around 1985. The walls in both rooms are covered with modern gypsum wallboard. The floors are covered with carpet, and the original ceiling is obscured by a suspended tile ceiling.

The interior of the 1951 wing has a high degree of integrity. It is composed of two classrooms and a small nurse's office. Walls are exposed, painted masonry blocks. Metal door and window frames are exposed, set in the masonry walls with mortar joints. Concrete floors are covered with carpet. The concrete ceiling is parged with a textured coating. Each classroom is lit by two square skylights. Large blackboards and bulletin boards with wooden trim appear to be original. Each classroom is accessed by an original exterior slab door in the wing's south elevation. The nurse's office features original exterior doors in both the north and south elevations.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Cafeteria and Classroom Building, 1985, Non-Contributing

Around 1985, a one-story, rectangular-massed, slab-on-grade, frame cafeteria and classroom building was constructed behind the school. The building features an expansive hipped roof with gabled vents set at each end of the roof ridge. The building faces west, and the facade features a partial-width engaged porch. The building is seven bays wide and features metal flush doors, metal windows, and rough-sawn siding. The building contains two classrooms, a cafeteria, and a kitchen. All feature smooth gypsum wallboard on the walls and ceilings. The cafeteria features a vaulted ceiling. Circa 1985 gabled walkways connect the building to the 1951 brick wing and to the original stone section of the school.

Integrity Assessment

Since its opening in 1940, the Banner Elk School has been expanded and has undergone some modifications. Despite these changes the school has retained a high degree of integrity. Windows, doors, and roofing material have been replaced, but no other significant alterations have been made to the exterior design and materials of the school and auditorium, or to the 1945 addition. The 1951 wing is largely unaltered. The Banner Elk School in its current state clearly conveys its historic character as a Great Depression-era stone school building. The additions made in 1945 and 1951 have acquired historic significance and clearly convey the evolution of the building. The integrity of the school is even higher in the interior, with only minimal changes to the historic floorplan, and the significant retention of original finishes. The 1985 frame cafeteria and classroom building to the rear of the Banner Elk School is largely hidden by the older stone school building, and does not significantly impact the historic character of the property.

General Statement of Archaeological Potential

The school complex is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash deposits, wells, and structural remains that may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the Banner Elk School. Information concerning public educational institutions in North Carolina and public works projects during the Great Depression can potentially be obtained through the archaeological record at this location. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the school. At this time, no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is likely that they exist and should be considered in any development of the property.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1940-1967

Significant Dates

1940, 1945, 1951

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Beeson, Donald R., Architect

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Statement of Significance

The Banner Elk School is a one-story stone building erected in 1939-40, with significant additions in 1945 and 1951. It occupies a very prominent site near the town center of Banner Elk in Avery County, North Carolina. The Banner Elk School meets National Register Criterion A in the area of education as the only building in Banner Elk that is a product of the early twentieth-century effort in Avery County to consolidate and improve the public schools with assistance from Federal New Deal programs that helped fund school building projects.

The Banner Elk School meets Criterion C for architecture as a significant WPA-era school building that exhibits elements of the Colonial Revival style in Banner Elk and Avery County. Designed by architect Donald R. Beeson, the school is the most visually prominent public building in Banner Elk, and the use of locally sourced stone in the construction of the exterior walls fits with the school's mountain setting. The school is an intact example of the stone school buildings constructed by the Avery County School Board during the Great Depression with significant funding provided by the Federal Government through New Deal agencies. The school remained in use for educational purposes until the end of the twentieth century, but the years after 1967 do not meet Criteria Consideration G.

Historic Background

Banner Elk was not permanently settled by European-Americans until the middle of the nineteenth century due to the area's rugged topography and relative geographic isolation. The first permanent white settlers were Martin Luther Banner and Mary W. Banner, who in 1849 moved to land near the Elk River, in what was then Watauga County. In 1850 members of Martin Luther's extended family joined them, and the place became known as Banner's Elk.¹ A post office was established at Banner's Elk in 1875, but that part of Watauga County remained isolated until the later years of the nineteenth century when the development of a narrow-gauge railway from Tennessee to the nearby town of Cranberry encouraged tourism, farming, and the extraction of minerals and timber.²

Perhaps no one did more for the development of Banner's Elk at the beginning of the twentieth century than Presbyterian minister Edgar Tufts. He established a girl's high school in Banner's Elk in 1900, and in 1907 the school became the Lees-McRae Institute, the forerunner of Lees-McRae College. In 1908 Tufts established Grace Hospital, which housed the first permanent doctor in Banner's Elk, and the first surgery facility in the area.³ In 1911 Avery County was formed from parts of Watauga, Mitchell, and Caldwell counties. In that same year Banner's Elk was incorporated as the town of Banner Elk.⁴

¹ Horton Cooper, *History of Avery County, North Carolina* (Asheville: Biltmore Press, 1964), 32.

² Horton Cooper, *History of Avery County, North Carolina* (Asheville: Biltmore Press, 1964), 97, 44.

³ Julian Pleasants, "Lees-McRae College," accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.ncpedia.org/lees-mcrae-college>

⁴ "History," accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.townofbannerelk.org/area-history>

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Narrative Statement of Significance

The formation of Avery County in 1911 was a result of a local effort to achieve better services and representation for the citizens of the isolated mountain area. Despite its rugged rural location, the area made significant strides in public education in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1850, there was no public education available in this area of North Carolina, but by 1900, some education was available for all the children in what would become Avery County.⁵

Education in the new county was accomplished with many small one- or two-teacher schools located throughout the area, isolated by bad roads and rough terrain. It appears there were no standard professional qualifications for the teachers. Nina Banner Lowe taught at Banner Elk, having begun her teaching career at Elk Valley when she was 12 years old after she had received just four years of education. While teaching, Lowe went on to augment her education by attending a summer school at the Teacher's College in Boone in 1918.⁶

Dena Wilson Greer began teaching in Banner Elk around 1916 and gave an account of public education in Banner Elk at the time:

I taught at the Academy located in back of Mr. Edd Banner's house. The County Superintendent was Professor (Frank) Edmisten. When he came to visit the school he rode on a horse. The teaching job didn't begin and end at the school house door. They were expected to do various things in the community. If a person died the teacher was expected to go bathe, dress, and lay the body out. This was my first experience in touching a dead person.

The teachers boarded with families in the community. I stayed at Mr. Fred Von Cannon's, Mr. Jim Guignard's, Mrs. Edd Banner's and Mrs. Ada Hayes.

Free school lasted four months, beginning in the fall and going until Christmas. Students had to buy their own books if they were available. The building was a two-story building with an entrance where the children hung their coats. There was one big room downstairs and one upstairs. The building was heated with a stove. I was the only teacher for the seven grades.⁷

As the county developed, the citizens demanded consolidation of the schools, a longer school year, and the development of public high schools. In 1912, the citizens of Elk Park, a town approximately six miles west of Banner Elk, petitioned the state legislature to allow for compulsory education.⁸ This movement for educational improvements was helped significantly by non-native progressives. In 1904, Reverend J. P. Hall came from Austin, Texas to establish a Christian manual training school for boys. It was located to the southwest of Banner Elk in

⁵ Robert E. Woodside, "The Educational Development of Avery County" (Master's thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952), 29.

⁶ Nina Banner Lowe, interview, in the files of the Avery County Board of Education, n.d.

⁷ Dena W. Greer, interview, in the files of the Avery County Board of Education, n.d.

⁸ Robert E. Woodside, "The Educational Development of Avery County" (Master's thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952), 53.

Banner Elk School

Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Plumbtree, and eventually merged with the Lees-McRae Institute.⁹ In 1913 Dr. Mary Martin Sloop and her husband Dr. Eustace Henry Sloop established the Crossnore School (AV 0088), a boarding school for disadvantaged children in southern Avery County. A native of Davidson, North Carolina, Dr. Mary Martin Sloop was a tireless advocate for education, successfully lobbying to make education in North Carolina compulsory until the age of sixteen.¹⁰

In 1922, the newly formed Avery County Board of Education constructed a two-story wood-frame school in Banner Elk near the site of the current school.¹¹ Improvements were made in 1930 with additional “rooms and toilets.”¹² Eventually the school enrolled more than 175 students, employing a principal and five teachers.¹³ In 1932, water was piped to the school from the nearby Lees-McRae College.¹⁴ This larger, improved school facility was a product of the gradual process of school consolidation taking place in Avery County. Despite a growing population and the establishment of high schools, the move toward consolidation in Avery County shrank the number of schools in the county from 34 in 1920 to 30 in 1930. Small schools, whose low enrollment forced the combining of grades, were eliminated because combining multiple grades into one classroom made teaching more difficult and less effective. Bussing was key to consolidation in Avery County. By the time the 1922 Banner Elk school building opened, Avery County operated five busses, one of which was dedicated to Banner Elk.¹⁵

By 1935, the 1922 Banner Elk school had fallen into disrepair and was condemned. Students in grades one through three were educated in the Sunday School classrooms of the local churches. Grades four through seven used a building on the Lees-McRae College campus.¹⁶

Despite the Board of Education’s earlier investments in the property, a lack of funds may have contributed to the premature deterioration and abandonment of the 1922 Banner Elk school building. The early-20th-century trend in Avery County toward educational improvements was accompanied by persistent funding problems. In December 1923, the School Board and the Avery County Commission met in joint session to approve a \$70,000 bond sale that would cover a deficit that had been accrued through 1922 by the school system. In addition to dealing with a past deficit, the school board struggled to pay for on-going operations. The problem in the young county was a lack of revenue. Board of Education minutes from 1924 state that the “sheriff has not collected enough money from the taxes to run the public schools of Avery Co.”¹⁷ That year

⁹ *The Charlotte Observer*, (Charlotte, NC), October 5, 1904, accessed April 20, 2017, http://www.averyjournal.com/news/our-avery-county/article_19e5b721-9869-5364-b092-8d656a78d5c1.html.

¹⁰ John C. Inscoe, “Sloop, Mary T. Martin,” 1994, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://www.ncpedia.org/biography/sloop-mary>.

¹¹ Gail Draughton, “A History of Banner Elk School: Gail Draughton, Student Eight Years, Teacher Thirty Years” (Speech, 2000). Robert E. Woodside, “The Educational Development of Avery County” (Master’s thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952), 61-62.

¹² Avery County Board of Education Minutes, September 9, 1930.

¹³ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, June 22, 1935.

¹⁴ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, July 15, 1932

¹⁵ Gail Draughton, “A History of Banner Elk School: Gail Draughton, Student Eight Years, Teacher Thirty Years” (Speech, 2000).

¹⁶ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, September 1, 1936.

¹⁷ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, December 3, 1923.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

the Board did receive a grant of \$35,000 from the State Board of Education but had to borrow on short term notes the remainder of the amount necessary to run the schools.¹⁸ The onset of the Great Depression greatly exacerbated an already bad situation. In 1929, 1930, and 1931 some teachers were not paid, but continued working with only a promise of payment. Back wages were delayed as much as a year.¹⁹ In 1930 the State increased its payments for education in Avery County to over \$70,000.²⁰ Yet the County Commission was unable to meet its debt payment and in 1931 defaulted on its bonds, including the school bonds.²¹ During the 1930s, the school system accumulated approximately \$136,000 in debt and defaulted on the repayment of \$28,000 in bonds and \$12,000 in interest.²²

While Avery County struggled to pay for its schools, enrolment increased in the 1930s, as did the demand for bigger and better school buildings.²³ The answer in Avery County was to look to the nascent New Deal initiatives coming out of Washington, DC. In November 1933, the Avery County School Board voted to make an application to the “Local Government Commission” in Raleigh for a loan from the “Federal Government” for the construction of new schools in Beach Mountain, Plumtree, Crossnore, Newland, Cranberry, Linville, and Banner Elk.²⁴ In February 1934, the School Board voted to revise its application and apply to the Public Works Administration (PWA) for \$100,000 in loans for construction projects involving just five schools, with \$30,000 earmarked for Banner Elk.²⁵ Well into 1935, the School Board continued to tweak its request for New Deal money, even as the funding agency changed from the PWA to the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It appears that by June 1935, the School Board reached an agreement with the federal aid administrators and voted to request a loan of \$160,000 to fund the construction of seven school buildings including “Banner Elk – Elementary School with Auditorium.” At the same meeting the Board voted to employ Johnson City, TN architect Donald R. Beeson.²⁶

Beeson was born in 1881 in Pennsylvania. He attended Washington and Jefferson College for two years, and then went to work as a draftsman for US Steel in West Virginia. While working as a draftsman, Beeson began studying architecture. In 1912 he moved to Johnson City, TN and established an architecture practice. Beeson was a prolific architect, active in Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina. His work includes the 1922 Montrose Court Apartments (NR 1980) and the 1921 neoclassical house Shelbridge (NR 1995), both in Johnson City, Tennessee. He also designed the 1935 Edward F. Worst Craft Cabin/Craft House (NR 2003) in the Penland School Historic District (NR 2009) in Mitchell County, North Carolina.

¹⁸ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, January 7, 1924.

¹⁹ Gail Draughton, “A History of Banner Elk School: Gail Draughton, Student Eight Years, Teacher Thirty Years” (Speech, 2000).

²⁰ Robert E. Woodside, “The Educational Development of Avery County” (Master’s thesis, Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952), 67.

²¹ Avery County Board of County Commissioners Minutes, November 12, 1938.

²² Avery County Board of Education Minutes, July 7, 1941.

²³ “Schools of County Open,” *Avery Advocate*, (Elk Park, NC), September 9, 1937, 1.

²⁴ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, November 6, 1933.

²⁵ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, February 5, 1934.

²⁶ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, June 3, 1935.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Beeson became intimately acquainted with Banner Elk in 1913 when he and a friend, Charles Hodges Mathes, embarked on the first of several ambitious explorations around the nearby Grandfather Mountain. Their treks took place well before modern roads had been developed in Avery County. The two carried a camera, and their photographs, along with Beeson's journal and maps, are important early records of the area.²⁷ Just four years later, Beeson was employed by Dr. W. C. Tate and Rev. Edgar Tufts to design and manage the construction of a small brick hospital building on the campus of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk. According to Beeson, "From that time on I was engaged in some sort of construction work at Banner Elk for years."²⁸ In the 1920s Beeson designed and oversaw the construction of the Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina buildings on the Lees-McRae campus. The buildings were constructed using local rocks "set by the local farmers who were rock masons in their spare time."²⁹

In August 1935, the Avery County School Board instructed Beeson to produce plans for the eight school projects for the WPA administrator in Asheville, with the understanding that Beeson would be paid if the plans were approved. The School Board authorized an initial payment of \$150 and voted that Beeson be paid 5% of the project costs for his plans and construction supervision. School Board member Dr. R. H. Hardin was appointed to head a committee to select the site of the new school at Banner Elk.³⁰

Work did not proceed quickly, and the scope of the WPA-supported building program in Avery County was reduced to the construction of just four stone school buildings: Newland gym, Elk Park (NR 2005), Beech Mountain, and Banner Elk. It appears that after producing plans, Beeson did not supervise construction. Instead, in 1937 the school board hired E. M. Rawls, a civil engineer based in Asheville, NC, to manage the school projects.³¹ Work began on the Newland gym and Elk Park in 1938 and continued into the summer of 1939.³² It was not until April 1939 that Rawls was instructed to complete the plans for the Beech Mountain and Banner Elk schools.³³ Work began on the Banner Elk School in the fall of 1939, on a site adjacent to the closed 1922 Banner Elk School. In October 1939, a bid was accepted from the Von Cannon Lumber Company for \$9,509.51 for building materials for the Banner Elk School and the Beech Mountain School.³⁴ Work at Banner Elk continued through the summer of 1940, as money was sought from the Debt Service Fund for the installation of heating systems at the Beech Mountain and Banner Elk schools.³⁵

²⁷ Randy Johnson, *Grandfather Mountain: The History and Guide to an Appalachian Icon* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 12.

²⁸ D. R. Beeson, "Banner Elk," (D.R. Beeson, Sr. Papers, located at the Archive of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University).

²⁹ D. R. Beeson, "Banner Elk," (D.R. Beeson, Sr. Papers, located at the Archive of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University).

³⁰ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, August 7, 1935, August 28, 1935, November 21, 1935.

³¹ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, July 12, 1937.

³² Clay Griffith, "Elk Park School," National Register Nomination, 2004, section 8, 9. Avery County Board of Education Minutes, April 12, 1938, June 6, 1939

³³ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, April 11, 1939.

³⁴ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, October 2, 1939.

³⁵ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, July 1, 1940.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

The opening of the new school in 1940 was a dramatic change in the educational experience in Banner Elk. Students who had been shuffled around the community to various temporary classroom locations moved into a spacious, substantial, and well-lit stone school building. The school provided classes for grades one through seven and featured ample in-door plumbing and a central heating system. The community immediately benefitted from the opening of the modern and comfortable auditorium, which was the largest civic space in the history of the town.³⁶

With a town population of just 344, the eight-classroom stone school building was a significant change in the landscape of the small town of Banner Elk. The opening of the school was part of the early twentieth-century transformation of Banner Elk from a rural mountain village into a town with a substantial built environment. The transformation began with the construction of Beeson-designed stone buildings on the Lees-McRae Campus, followed by the construction of the stone Grace Hospital in 1927.³⁷ The Banner Elk School brought this trend into the geographical center of the community with a building that was quickly integrated into the life of the townsfolk.

In the 1930s, while the Avery County School Board was pursuing WPA funding for its ambitious new school building program, the town of Banner Elk was also seeking support from the Federal Government. Beginning in 1935, elected officials pursued financial assistance for the town's first water and sewer systems. Discussions with the WPA began in 1936, and in 1938, voters approved issuing bonds to match WPA funding for the project.³⁸ The construction of the stone school, and the new water and sewer systems, were the first community improvements in Banner Elk that directly involved the Federal Government. This was a phenomenon that was repeated across the county during the Great Depression. The 1940 Banner Elk School is an important reminder in Banner Elk of the paradigm shift in the nation's history, when during the New Deal, even the smallest and most isolated local governments could have significant interaction with the Federal Government.

By the fall of 1941 the school expanded to eight grades. The faculty included Mr. W. R. Fields, principal, and eight teachers.³⁹ Children from the town and the nearby countryside walked to school. Students from far-flung rural areas, and those from the communities of Balm, Elk Valley, and Smith Settlement rode the school's bus, driven by the school's janitor. In 1945, the school was expanded with a two-bay-wide cafeteria addition on the north end of the building.⁴⁰

Having a substantial auditorium allowed Banner Elk in 1947 to host the Little Symphony, a traveling ensemble of the North Carolina State Symphony. The Little Symphony performed two concerts in the auditorium, one during the day for the students and another at night for the

³⁶ Charlie Von Cannon, interview with the author, Banner Elk, NC, October 29, 2015. Von Cannon attended the school from 1944 to 1952.

³⁷ D. R. Beeson, "Banner Elk History, Continued," (D.R. Beeson, Sr. Papers, located at the Archive of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, 1974).

³⁸ Banner Elk Town Board Minutes, January 2, 1934, June 4, 1935, March 3, 1936, September 24, 1937, August 16, 1938.

³⁹ Avery County Board of Education Minutes, August 11, 1941.

⁴⁰ Gail Draughton, "A History of Banner Elk School: Gail Draughton, Student Eight Years, Teacher Thirty Years" (Speech, 2000).

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

townsfolk. It was a community effort to bring the Little Symphony to Banner Elk, with the school children responsible for selling tickets for the evening show. Banner Elk was the smallest town and smallest venue on the tour.⁴¹

In 1950, a war-surplus Quonset hut was set behind the school to serve as a gymnasium. In 1951 a flat-roofed, brick, Modernist-style wing containing two additional classrooms was added to the rear of the cafeteria.⁴² As the school grew, the auditorium space was reduced, with a library occupying the front half of the auditorium. Around 1985, a frame building containing two classrooms and a new cafeteria was erected behind the school. The old cafeteria and kitchen were converted into classroom space. The library moved into the main section of the 1940 building, and the auditorium was converted back into a single large room and used as both a gymnasium and auditorium.⁴³

In the 1980s the school added a kindergarten class and the seventh and eighth grades moved to the Avery County Middle School. They were followed by the sixth grade in the 1990s.⁴⁴ The last classes were held in the Banner Elk School in 2011. Since that time the school was sold to the Town of Banner Elk and is being used as a community center with some rental spaces available for small businesses.

Architectural Context

The Banner Elk School is part of the town's early-twentieth-century efforts to construct large stone institutional buildings. The first of these was the Beeson-designed 1922 North Carolina Building on the Lees-McRae College campus.⁴⁵ The two-story building is a very restrained example of the Collegiate Gothic style. The building is executed in a distinctly rustic fashion with the use of a combination of large cut stones and local river rocks. Around 1924 two stone dormitories, the Virginia Building and the Tennessee Building, were added to the Lee-McRae campus. Like the North Carolina Building, the two-and-one-half-story Beeson-designed dormitories incorporated river rocks and larger cut stones. In 1926, construction began on the Grace Hospital, now known as Tate Hall. The Beeson-designed four-story hospital is the largest of the pre-World War II stone buildings constructed in Banner Elk. A restrained example of the Gothic Revival style, the hospital features roughly cut stone laid in irregular courses, with segmental arches over the door and window openings. The Banner Elk School was the last institutional stone building constructed in Banner Elk before World War II. Like the Grace Hospital it features roughly cut stone laid in irregular courses. Among this small but prominent group of buildings in Banner Elk, the Banner Elk School is the only one-story building, and it is an example of the Colonial Revival style. After World War II the use of stone in large buildings in Banner Elk was limited to the Lees-McRae campus. With its stone-veneer construction, steel windows, and flat-roofs, the 1955 A. C. Chaffee Administrative Building is distinct from the

⁴¹ Charlie Von Cannon, interview with the author, Banner Elk, NC, October 29, 2015.

⁴² Horton Cooper, *History of Avery County, North Carolina* (Asheville: Biltmore Press, 1964), 62.

⁴³ Charlie Von Cannon, interview with the author, Banner Elk, NC, October 29, 2015.

⁴⁴ Gail Draughton, "A History of Banner Elk School: Gail Draughton, Student Eight Years, Teacher Thirty Years" (Speech, 2000).

⁴⁵ D. R. Beeson, "Banner Elk," (D.R. Beeson, Sr. Papers, located at the Archive of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University).

Banner Elk School

Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

earlier stone buildings in Banner Elk. Other post-World War II buildings on the campus mix sections of stone veneer with other wall materials such as brick, concrete, and wood or metal panels.

The work of the PWA and the WPA in Avery County is evident in the surviving New Deal era school buildings. While PWA and WPA projects across North Carolina employed a variety of architectural styles (including Art Deco, Moderne, and International), projects in Western North Carolina frequently employed restrained Colonial Revival designs constructed with local stone.⁴⁶ While the orderly forms of the buildings reinforced the authority of the institutions, the use of stone imbued them with a rustic character appropriate for their rural mountain settings. All four of the stone school buildings cooperatively built by the Avery County School Board and the WPA have survived, and three (the Elk Park School, the Beech Mountain School, and the Banner Elk School) incorporate the Colonial Revival style.

The Elk Park School (NR 2005) is the largest of the buildings and was constructed in an E-shaped plan. The Elk Park School has been adaptively reused as an apartment building, and a three-story apartment building has been added to the property. The Beech Mountain School and the Banner Elk school were nearly identical when they were constructed. The Beech Mountain School was expanded with a low, flat-roofed cafeteria wing that projects past the building's original façade. The Banner Elk School was expanded with a sensitively designed stone cafeteria addition in 1945, and a Modernist, brick, rear classroom wing was added in 1951. A freestanding frame classroom building was built to the rear of the Banner Elk School in 1985. Largely hidden from view by the older stone school building, the 1985 cafeteria and classroom building does not greatly detract from the historic character of the property. The historic interior layout of the Banner Elk School is largely intact. The Newland Gymnasium differs from the other buildings in the group as a single-use, freestanding building with Gothic Revival details. While all the buildings in this small group are architecturally significant in terms of Avery County, the integrity of the Banner Elk School's form and the school's intact interior distinguishes the property.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Jennifer Martin, "Ashe County Memorial Hospital," National Register Nomination, 2013. Catherine Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 498.

⁴⁷ Clay Griffith, "Elk Park School," National Register Nomination, 2004.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

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<http://www.ncpedia.org/lees-mcrae-college>

Von Cannon, Charlie. Interview with the author. Banner Elk, NC, October 29, 2015.

Woodside, Robert Edward. "The Educational Development of Avery County." Master's thesis.
Appalachian State Teachers College, 1952.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): AV0100

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 5.39

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 36.162573 N | Longitude: -81.869928 W |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

AD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property for the Banner Elk School is shown by the heavy solid line on the accompanying Avery County GIS map (Tax Parcel 185918208290).

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property includes the 5.39 acres parcel historically associated with the Banner Elk School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Stewart Gray / Preservation Consultant
organization: _____
street & number: 14550 June Washam Road
city or town: Davidson state: NC zip code: 28036
e-mail: stewart.gray.preservation@gmail.com
telephone: 704-896-4991
date: September 15, 2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Banner Elk School

City or Vicinity: Banner Elk

County: Avery State: NC

Photographer: Stewart Gray

Date Photographed: 6/17/2016, 4/19/2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

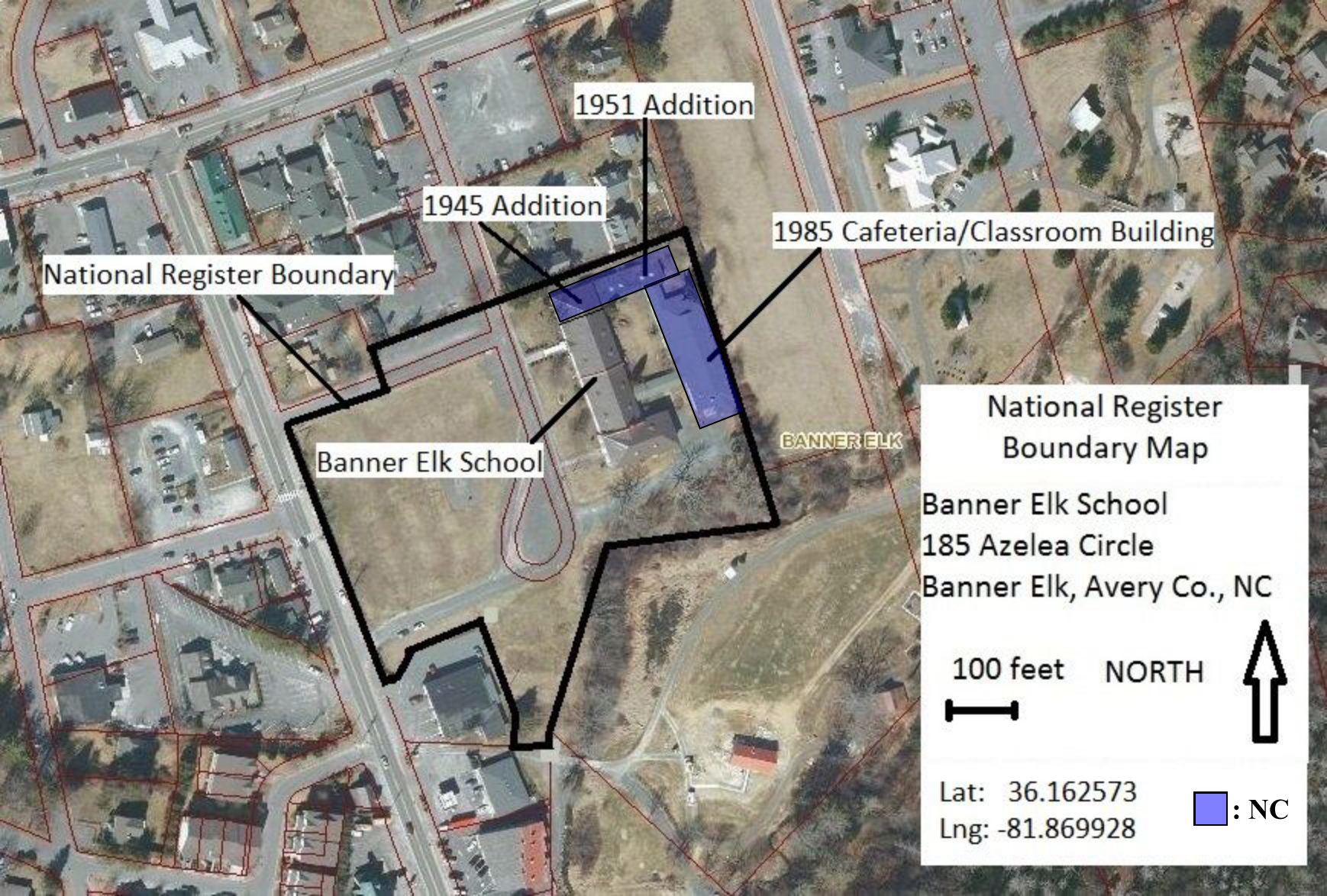
1. West elevation.
2. West elevation of 1945 addition.
3. West and south elevations of the auditorium.
4. South portion of rear elevation.
5. North portion of rear elevation and south elevation of 1951 wing.
6. South and east elevations of 1951 wing.
7. North elevation of 1951 wing.
8. Interior of 1940 portion of the building, looking south.
9. Interior of 1940 portion of the building, classroom, looking north.
10. Interior of 1940 portion of the building, classroom millwork, looking north.
11. Interior of 1945 addition, looking northwest.
12. Interior of 1951 wing, west classroom, looking northwest.
13. Interior of auditorium, looking east.
14. West elevation of 1985 building.

Banner Elk School
Name of Property

Avery, North Carolina
County and State

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



1951 Addition

1945 Addition

1985 Cafeteria/Classroom Building

National Register Boundary

Banner Elk School

BANNER ELK

National Register
Boundary Map

Banner Elk School
185 Azelea Circle
Banner Elk, Avery Co., NC

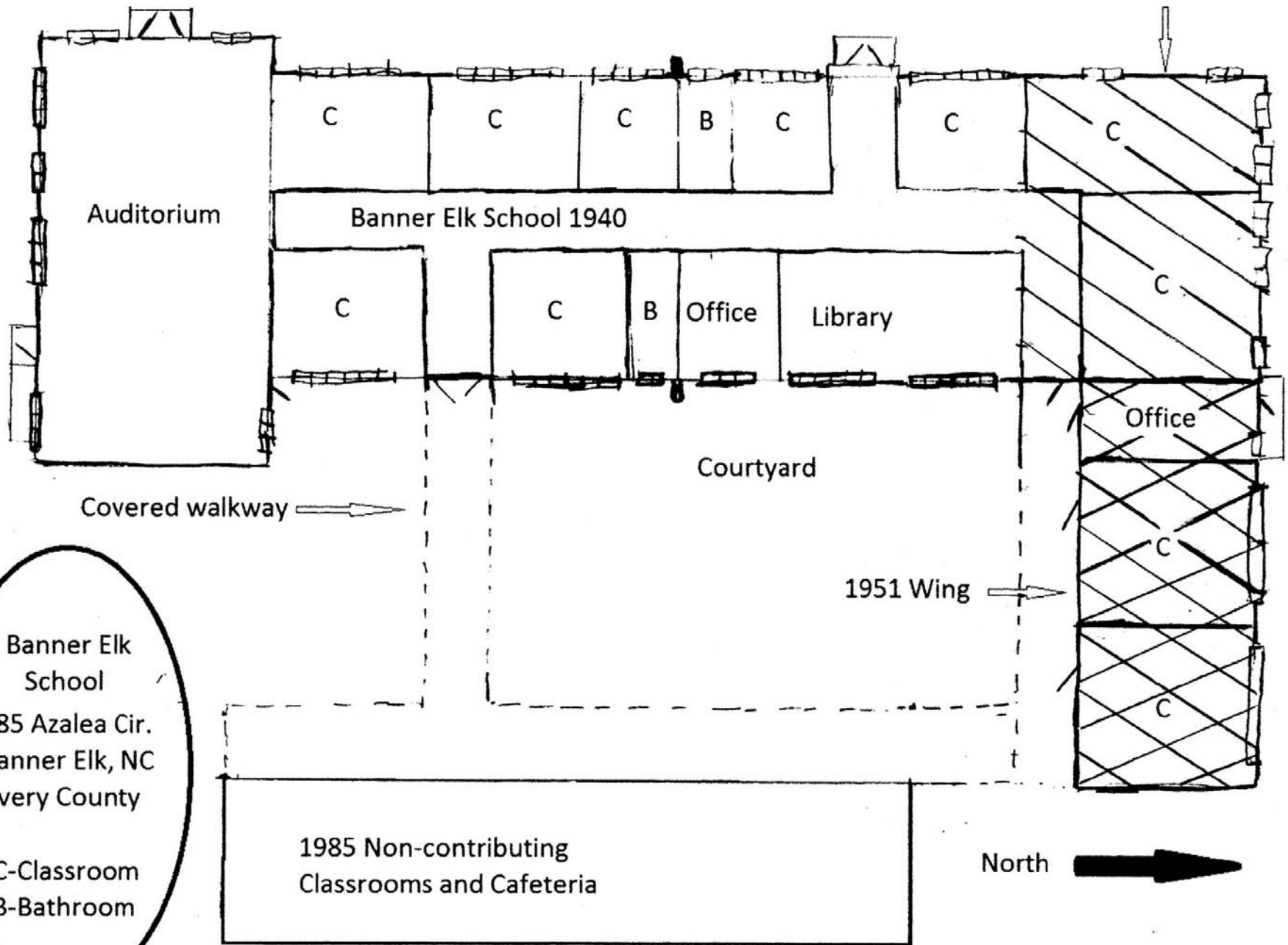
100 feet NORTH



Lat: 36.162573
Lng: -81.869928

 : NC

1945 Cafeteria Addition



Banner Elk School
185 Azalea Cir.
Banner Elk, NC
Avery County

C-Classroom
B-Bathroom

*Not to Scale