

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 an 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 Mary's Grove

other names/site number Rabb House

2. Location

street & number 2121 Harper Avenue SW N/A not for publication

city or town Lenoir N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Caldwell code 027 zip code 28645

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO 3/6/01
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State of 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

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): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Mary's Grove
Name of Property

Caldwell County, North Carolina
County and State

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 | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 2 | | buildings |
| | | sites |
| 2 | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 4 | | 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

-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
DOMESTIC/secondary structure
AGRICULTURE/processing
AGRICULTURE/storage

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional
VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
walls Stone
Wood
roof Asphalt
other Terra Cotta
Glass

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet

Mary's Grove
Name of Property

Caldwell County, 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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1932-1934

Significant Dates

ca. 1932

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Lyons, Leslie McDonald--stonemason

Lyons, Clarence Manleth--stonemason

Lyons, Earl Jones--stonemason

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC

Mary's Grove
Name of Property

Caldwell County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.231 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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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 Davyd Foard Hood

organization _____ date 18 August 2000

street & number Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road telephone 704/462-4331

city or town Vale state N.C. zip code 28168

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Tyrone R. and Eliza Frazier Bishop

street & number Riverside, 5335 Grandin Road telephone 828-758-8619

city or town Lenoir state N.C. zip code 28645

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 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, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 1

Narrative Description

Mary's Grove, comprising a two-story-with-attic Colonial Revival stone house and three stone outbuildings on a lot of 2.231 acres, is the residual portion of the fifty-six-acre farm owned by Nellie Miller Rabb and operated as Mary's Grove Dairy from the early-mid 1930s until shortly before her death in 1949. The house stands in the near center of its triangular-shaped lot and faces north across a tree-shaded lawn to Harper Avenue SW (Business N.C. 18), which carries northeasterly into the city of Lenoir and southwesterly to the nearby junction with Morganton Boulevard (Bypass U.S. 18/64). In the 1930s when the house and outbuildings were erected for Mrs. Rabb by the Lyons brothers on the ancestral Miller lands, this area was rural and mostly open farmland. During the second half of the twentieth century, houses were built nearby on Harper Avenue, and the area retained a residential but open character. In recent years the new multi-lane Morganton Boulevard, down grade and to the south of the house and this tract, has become a commercial artery and the scene of commercial development.

Because of its location in an old grove of evergreen and deciduous trees, its orientation to the north away from the commercial development, the spacious openness of the lot, and the repetition of the stone on all its buildings, Mary's Grove retains the feeling and character of an old country place. A gravel drive exits south off Harper Avenue near the tract's east boundary and follows a generally straight path past the house to a gravel parking area on the north side of the dairy. On the west side of the house, a board fence, virtually parallel with the east boundary, encloses the house yard and separates it from a down grade triangular-shaped grass-covered patch of former pasture; the fence rises with the grade to a point near the present south boundary where it turns east and carries to the stone silo (#3). The grass-covered house lawn is mowed and maintained while the former pasture is in tall grass. The grounds are open with occasional small plantings and some naturalized spring bulbs. The only formally-ordered plantings are the mostly evergreen mixed shrubs forming the foundation plantings around the house.

1. The Rabb House
ca. 1932-1934
Contributing building

The Rabb House is a two-story-with-attic double-pile Colonial Revival-style stone house covered with a side-gable roof of asphalt shingles. The grey stone elevations are laid up in random ashlar with pointed joints; the source of the stone is not known at present but is similar to stone known to have been quarried near Grandfather Mountain and used during the period. The exterior appearance of the house has changed little except for the enclosure of the one-story porch in its rear, southwest corner, and it retains its original molded woodwork and all other

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 2

architectural finish except the wood blinds. There is some family tradition that the house represents a dramatic overbuilding and stone-veneering of an earlier house on this site, and it is possible that the frame of an earlier Miller house exists within the stone walls, but if so, there is no visible evidence of fabric that predates the early 1930s. That tradition, however, does lend credence and justification for the slightly asymmetrical façade and the consequent off-center appearance of the two-story portico for which there is no other plausible explanation.

The north façade of the house has a slightly asymmetrical five-bay arrangement with center-bay entrances opening on each level onto the two-story classical portico. The molded window openings hold six-over-six sash and are fitted with screens; the sills are cast-in-place cement. Pins that once held blinds remain in place at each window. The portico shelters the entrances on each level, the bay to the west, and, rather peculiarly, one-half of the window to the east of the doorways. The portico rises from a rectangular terrace carrying across most of the façade and paved with Ludowici-Celadon terra cotta tiles. Paired, fluted Tuscan columns rise to a molded architrave below the pedimented gable finished with rough-coat/pebble dash cement; a demi-lune ventilator occupies the center of the gable. The second-story porch is inset behind the columns and has a wood floor and railing. The Federal-style entrance has tracery sidelights and an arched fanlight. On the second story a fifteen-pane glazed door is set below a three-pane transom.

The east and west side elevations are similar in appearance. The four-bay wide east gable end is essentially symmetrical and has paired chimneys rising just inside the outer bays and framing the centered, smaller attic window. A one-story hip-roof porch with a tile floor and fluted Doric columns shelters a doorway opening into the living room in the northeast corner; the doorway is fitted with a fifteen-pane glazed door under a three-pane transom and its original screen door. The west gable end has a like symmetrical four-bay arrangement with consistent openings on each story and a slightly smaller six-over-six sash window in the attic. The single chimney on this side rises between the northern pair of windows; it, like the east chimneys, has a slightly tapering stack typical of the 1930s.

The rear elevation of the house has an asymmetrical arrangement on each level. The first story is occupied by a near-full width hip-roof block with stone walls enclosing the center and east third while the west third, originally an open porch supported by a stone pier, is now enclosed with inset sheathed walls. A bank of three six-over-six windows in the near-center of the first-story illuminates the kitchen. Immediately to the east is a door below a three-pane transom which opens onto the service porch. The easternmost window here illuminates the stair that descends from the service porch to the basement. On the second story the area above the off-center kitchen bay, originally a sleeping porch, is enclosed as an ell with frame sheathing, with paired

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 3

windows on the east and west sides, and a trio of windows on the south. In the main body of the house a single window is positioned west of the ell and two windows are to its east.

The intact interior of the house follows an asymmetrical center-stair-hall plan and has the good Colonial Revival finish typical of better houses of the 1930s. The floors are all of narrow oak, the walls and ceilings are painted plaster, the doors and windows are enframed with well-proportioned, but simple moldings of the period, and the walls of each room rise from molded baseboards. The doors are fitted with either a single large molded panel or fifteen-pane glazing typical of the 1920s and 1930s. The stair, rising to the south, has a shaped handrail above turned balusters. The five-light brass chandelier in the hall appears to be original. Paired replacement six-panel doors on the east side of the hall open into the living room while a glazed door opens from the hall into the kitchen at the south end of the hall, and a third door, at the foot of the stairs opens into the northwest corner room. The living room is the most elaborately finished in the house and has a paneled wainscot below a chair rail and a paneled ceiling. The fireplace is fitted with a post-and-lintel Colonial Revival mantel. Paired fifteen-pane doors link the living room and the dining room in the southeast corner of the main block; its Colonial Revival mantel has columns rising to the molded shelf. Doors in the south wall of the dining room open into a first-story bathroom in the absolute southeast corner of the house and the service porch, while a swing-hinged door in the west wall beside the glazed-front china cabinet opens into the kitchen. The large rectangular kitchen retains its original service cabinets with stainless steel counter along the south wall, well-detailed, glazed built-in china cabinets, and a mirror-backed serving shelf at the north end. On the west side of the hall is the northwest corner room, with a replacement mantel, which communicates with the bedroom in the southwest corner of the main block. It is en suite with a small bathroom, which is partially located under the staircase and retains its original fixtures, fittings, and green-and-white ceramic tile floor.

The second story has a central hall at the top of the staircase and four bedrooms of unequal size in each of the four corners of the house. The finish is the same as that of the first story. The largest room, above the living room, was fitted up as Mrs. Rabb's bedroom with a molded chair rail and cornice molding; it has a Colonial Revival mantel and cedar lined closet. Its bathroom, above the first-story entrance hall, was also accessible from the front northwest bedroom and has been somewhat reconfigured and fitted with new fixtures. The other bathroom, accessible from the hall, retains its original two-tone green tile wainscot and tub enclosure; lilac, pink, and green tile floor; and its original fixtures and fittings. A ceiling-mounted pull-down stair in the hall provides access to the attic, which is essentially one large room sheathed with beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling. The partial basement has brick walls and a poured cement floor.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 4

2. Well-house
ca. 1932-1934
Contributing structure

The well house is an elegant structure, square in plan, and covered by an asphalt-shingle hip roof with shaped-end rafters. It has a poured concrete floor. Stone piers at each corner, measuring fifteen inches on each side, rise from the floor to the wood roofing; each pier is enhanced with low abutments, in the form of an equal L, which have concrete caps and provide seating or space for flowerpots. The stone well-head, in the center of the structure, has a wood cover and windlass for drawing water.

3. Silo
ca. 1932-1934
Contributing structure

This tall open-top stone cylinder was built with the same care and attention given to the other buildings. Ghost marks on its sides as well as a modern site plan show that it was originally engaged with a large frame barn which stood at the rear of the house and on the crest of the hill overlooking the bottomland pastures. A tier of metal-bound openings on its east side allowed for access into the silo and were fitted with wood doors that could be removed as the silage was fed out. The interior wall of the silo is constructed of concrete. The silo roof structure no longer exists.

4. Dairy
ca. 1932-1934
Contributing building

The dairy is a two-story stone building that incorporates garaging and accommodations for staff. The original two-story block is essentially rectangular in plan except for an original one-story ell at the west end of its rear (south) elevation. A long, rectangular one-story cement block addition, which appears to date to the 1940s, was erected along the east side of the stone building and it extends southward in a fashion parallel to the stone ell. The elevations of the dairy are well finished and asymmetrical in appearance. The north side has two unequal-sized garage openings on the first story and four window openings holding six-over-six sash on the second story. The west side of the building has a doorway opening into the actual dairy rooms at the rear of the first story, two windows, and a door into the stone ell. A wood stair rises to a second-level deck porch where two doors open into the staff living quarters. The south elevation, also asymmetrical, has three openings which were later infilled with stone and boards over other windows. The east elevation has asymmetrical fenestration on both levels. The processing and

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 5

bottling operations of the dairy were housed in three rooms across the south side of the building and in the ell; they retain significant portions of their original finish. The original walk-in refrigerator remains in place in the near center of the building. The second-story living quarters include a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. The painted wood floors and five, horizontal panel doors are original; however, the other finishes are replacement.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 6

SUMMARY

Mary's Grove, comprising a Colonial Revival-style stone house and three stone outbuildings dating to the early to mid-1930s on a residual tract of 2.231 acres, holds local significance in the area of architecture and satisfies National Register Criterion C. The property derives its name from Mary Perkins (1762-1827), the wife of the well-known Episcopal missionary priest Robert Johnstone Miller (1758-1834), who received lands here from her father, "Gentleman" John Perkins about 1787-1790. Mary's Grove plantation descended to their son and grandson in the nineteenth century. In 1922-1923, during the settlement of her father's estate, Eleanor Boone Miller Rabb (1877-1949) reassembled a farm of fifty-six acres and operated the Mary's Grove Dairy here until shortly before her death. About 1932-1934, she engaged the Lyons brothers of Boone to build the imposing stone house, well-house, silo, and dairy. These four intact buildings are the most important known surviving domestic commission completed by Leslie (1900-1957), Clarence (1903-1981), and Earl Lyons (1912-1984), who had earlier worked at Duke University and Duke Chapel and subsequently worked on the Blue Ridge Parkway and other residential, institutional, and public buildings in Watauga and Caldwell counties for which they gained acclaim for their skills as stonemasons. The four contemporary stone buildings comprising Mary's Grove embody the distinctive characteristics of the best stone construction of the interwar period and through their survival as the most important surviving domestic work by the Lyons brothers represent their work as master craftsmen. Mary's Grove remained a Rabb family residence until 1999; it has subsequently been acquired by a great-great-great-granddaughter of Mary Perkins Miller and returned to family ownership.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 7

Historical Background

Although the resources nominated at Mary's Grove date to the 1930s, the history of the larger plantation of the same name, of which this 2.231-acre parcel is the residual tract, dates to the late eighteenth century and the marriage in 1787 of Mary Perkins (1762-1827) to Robert Johnstone Miller (1758-1834). Mary Perkins was the daughter of "Gentleman" John Perkins (1733-1804), a wealthy planter and land-owner who resided on the Catawba River in what is now Catawba County. Mr. Perkins conveyed to Mary a tract on Lower Creek, then in Burke and now in Caldwell County, either at the time of her marriage or in 1790; the actual conveyance cannot be verified since many of the pre-Civil War public records in the Burke County Court House were destroyed in a fire. Robert and Mary Miller are said to have lived here until 1792 when they relocated to Lincoln County. In 1806 they returned to Mary's Grove and lived here until their deaths. They are buried in the family cemetery, on the knoll on the north side of Harper Avenue, which is not included in the nomination.¹

At the death of his parents, Elisha Perkins Miller (1796-1861) came into possession of the family's Mary's Grove Plantation, by inheritance and through purchase. His wife Sidney Caldwell (1795-1875), the daughter of Robert Caldwell, was a wealthy heiress, and life at Mary's Grove in the antebellum period was lavish and hospitable. Mr. Miller represented both Burke County and Caldwell County in the General Assembly and has been described as the "father of Caldwell County," which was formed out of Burke in 1840. Mr. Miller's health failed in 1860, he died on 31 July 1861, and he was buried in the family cemetery with his parents. The settlement of his estate was a long and difficult process, complicated by a series of investments which had not paid off and by the events of the Civil War; an inventory of his real estate, as of 22 September 1869, indicated ownership of over 2,200 acres in seventeen tracts in Caldwell, Burke, and Watauga counties. Mary's Grove, the home tract with 285 acres valued at \$7,000, was his most important holding.² In 1870/1871 the home plantation was divided into four tracts and sold at auction. Elisha Perkins Miller II, a nephew of the deceased, purchased the home lot of 100 acres for \$2,265; the other three tracts, totaling 220 acres, more or less, were sold for a total of \$3,710.00 (E. P. Miller Estate Record, State Archives).

Elisha Perkins Miller II (1840-1905) was the second child and first son of Horatio Nelson Miller (1805-1876), the youngest son of Parson Robert Johnstone and Mary (Perkins) Miller, and his wife Caroline Vannoy of Wilkes County. He enlisted in the Confederate Army and served throughout the Civil War during which he contracted a chronic dysentery that plagued the remainder of his life and eventually proved fatal. On 31 March 1868 he was married to Susan Virginia Hartley (1849-1930), the daughter of Levi Hartley. The couple occupied Mary's Grove

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 8

as a successful farm and raised a family of nine children here, the eldest of whom was Eleanor Boone Miller. Elisha Perkins Miller II died at Mary's Grove on Thursday afternoon, 26 October 1905; in a departure from tradition he was buried in Lenoir's Belleview Cemetery rather than the ancestral burying ground. His obituary, published in the Lenoir Weekly News (3 November 1905), noted that he was "a highly esteemed citizen of the community and his loss will be keenly felt." His widow lived on at Mary's Grove; in the early 1920s her eldest son Albert Sydney Johnstone Miller (1884-1974) and his family came to live with her. Mrs. Miller subsequently purchased a house on North Main Street in Lenoir, beside the home of her eldest daughter where she died on 27 December 1930 (Lenoir News-Topic, 29 December 1930).

The Miller family's commitment to Mary's Grove was renewed in the person of Eleanor "Nellie" Boone Miller Rabb (1877-1949), for whom the stone house and outbuildings were erected in the early 1930s. She was educated at Davenport College, Lenoir, and in 1903 she was married to Logan Elisha Rabb (1865-1929). Mr. Rabb was a successful businessman with investments, including the Caldwell Furniture Company, in Lenoir's prosperous furniture industry. The couple acquired the David Bowers House on North Main Street in Lenoir and were occupying it when Mr. Rabb died in 1929 (Lenoir News-Topic, 21 November 1929). In the early 1920s the Mary's Grove property was finally divided among the Miller heirs. On 22 November 1922 Mrs. Miller and her children sold the twenty-two-acre house tract of Mary's Grove to Mrs. Rabb for \$2,570 (Caldwell County Deeds, 111/535-538). In January 1923, Mrs. Rabb bought two further lots, assigned to her brothers, to create the fifty-six-acre estate which remained home to her descendants until the 1990s. On 4 January 1923 Horace R. Miller sold her his eighteen-acre apportionment (Caldwell County Deeds, 115/74). Two days later, on 6 January, Louis K. Miller sold his sixteen-acre tract to his sister (Caldwell County Deeds, 111/596).

According to family tradition Mrs. Rabb sold certain of her husband's business holdings and invested the proceeds in the rebuilding of Mary's Grove and the establishment of Mary's Grove Dairy. The dairy, with its own bottling plant (#4) and herd of Guernsey cows, was one of at least four that operated in the Lenoir area in the interwar period and beyond: J. C. Eller's dairy included a herd of Jersey cows; Mr. Presnell had a herd of Holstein cows; the breed of Mr. Triplett's dairy is not known. All trace of those three operations is now lost; the former Triplett dairy lands on U.S. 321 are now occupied by the corporate offices of the Broyhill Furniture Company. Milk, in half-pint, pint, and quart bottles, and cream were sold and delivered in the dairy truck to Lenoir area houses, restaurants, and businesses (mainly drugstores). While the fields and pastures associated with the dairy have been separated from the residual house tract and the large frame barns lost to commercial development, the processing plant and garage (#4) and a stone silo (#3) survive.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 9

Nellie Rabb operated the dairy until shortly before her death on 21 April 1949. Her obituary, identifying her as a "prominent Lenoir resident and widow of a furniture manufacturer," also noted her agricultural interests:

"Mrs. Rabb owned and operated for several years a dairy farm known as Mary's Grove Dairy. In recent years she has devoted her interests principally to farming operations and real estate" (Lenoir News-Topic, 21 April 1949).

Her private funeral was held at Mary's Grove.

The Rabbs were the parents of one child, John Perkins Rabb (1909-1961), who inherited Mary's Grove from his mother.³ He and his family moved to Mary's Grove, which he occupied until his death in 1961; his funeral was held at Mary's Grove (Lenoir News-Topic, 2 October 1961). On 30 November 1937 he had married Katherine Babb (1910-1991), the daughter of the well-known regional civil engineer Cyrus Cates Babb. After John Perkins Rabb's death in 1961 Mrs. Rabb continued to live at Mary's Grove and to own and operate the radio station for the next thirty years; in 1972 she relocated the station and its transmission tower from downtown Lenoir to Mary's Grove (Lenoir News-Topic, 18 October 1991). John Perkins and Katherine Rabb were the parents of two children: John Perkins Rabb, Jr. and Mary Grace Rabb Robinson Stewart who inherited Mary's Grove and the family's other holdings.

During the settlement of Katherine Babb Rabb's estate and later through the 1990s, the Mary's Grove farm was broken up, for reasons that were not entirely by choice and reflected other changes in the area. For much of its 200-plus-year history, the road (now Harper Avenue SW) onto which the house at Mary's Grove faced was the main road linking Lenoir, the seat of Caldwell County, with Morganton, the seat of Burke County. The farm fields and pastures that stretched from the house southward to Lower Creek were bisected by a new multi-lane bypass road, Morganton Boulevard (Bypass U.S. 18/64), which effectively severed the house and buildings from its supporting lands. In time the pressures for commercial and industrial development of the acreage lining the road became too difficult to resist. On 15 January 1999, a 9.062-acre tract on the north side of Morganton Boulevard, including the house, was sold by John Perkins Rabb, Jr., to the Crisman Corporation (Caldwell County Deeds, 1249: 0591). Seven months later, on 10 August 1999, the Crisman Corporation conveyed a tract of 2.231 acres, including the Mary's Grove house, three stone outbuildings, its lawn, and immediate house grounds, to Tyrone R. and Eliza Frazier Bishop (Caldwell County Deeds, 1272: 1771-1773). The other part of the property, down grade from the house and between it and the boulevard, has been developed for commercial purposes. Mrs. Bishop, the daughter of John Alexander Frazier (1894-1991) and the granddaughter of Daniel Robert Steele Frazier (1847-1919) and his wife

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 10

Eliza Catherine Miller (1860-1932), is the great-great-great-granddaughter of Robert Johnstone Miller and his wife Mary Perkins, whose name continues to define the grove which shades this house. Mary's Grove is now used as the business offices of Western Carolina Surveyors of which Mr. Bishop is president.

Architectural Significance

The architectural significance of Mary's Grove, comprising a stone Colonial Revival-style house and three contemporary stone outbuildings dating from the early- to mid-1930s, derives from their status as the most extensive and important surviving domestic commission executed by the Lyons brothers (Leslie, Clarence, and Earl) who achieved local acclaim as craftsmen in the interwar period. The career of the Lyons brothers formed part of the flourishing of stone construction in North Carolina, mostly in the Piedmont and western North Carolina, in the first four decades of the twentieth century. To date, most of the scholarly attention on the subject has focused on the use of stone for summer houses in resort areas of western North Carolina, including Brevard and Transylvania counties; the development of important quarrying operations in Rowan County and Mt. Airy that provided granite for buildings in the state and throughout the eastern United States; the use of stone construction in a series of projects (schools and institutional buildings, walls, bridges, park improvements, and other public works) supported by the Works Progress Administration and/or erected by the Civilian Conservation Corps; the brilliant utilization of stone in the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway; and the use of stone in exceptional building programs of the period, the most important of which was the construction of the Gothic Revival-style campus of Duke University and its chapel.⁴ However, in important instances throughout central and western North Carolina, smaller groups of stone buildings associated with particular quarries, talented stonemasons, or regional efforts exist, and they, too, are a significant part of the history of stone construction in North Carolina in this period. This body of work is somewhat more diverse, and it includes buildings erected from the quarry of W. K. Troy at Balfour, in Henderson County, who supplied stone to George Vanderbilt for use at Biltmore; those built from the granite quarried on the property of the Edwards family on the Cleveland/Lincoln County line, including the complex of residences and medical offices comprising Edwards Clinic at Toluca; groups of houses, cottages, and churches built of river rock by largely anonymous stonemasons in the period and region; and work by individual stonemasons or families of stonemasons, such as the Lyons brothers, who are only now receiving attention. This assessment is the first known study of their work and is based on interviews with Ernest Lyons (b. 1932), the son of Clarence Lyons, and Wiley Gordon Hartzog, Jr. (b. 1932), whose father was postmaster in Boone when the Lyons brothers laid up the stone walls of its new post office in 1939.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 11

In the event, the Lyons brothers, while as yet little-known beyond the confines of Caldwell and Watauga counties, gained experience on important projects of the period and brought it to bear on the buildings they erected in the interwar era. They were the most accomplished stonemasons in Watauga and Caldwell counties in the 1920s and 1930s, and they enjoyed a high reputation like that of the Wright brothers who were the masons for some of the most important stone buildings in Brevard during the same period. According to local tradition, the Lyons brothers were hired for the more important projects, where entire buildings were to be of stone, whereas other local masons including Midas Wheeler and the Hayes brothers of Blowing Rock built stone chimneys, wells, porch piers, and other stone features of frame or brick buildings. The brothers worked as stonemasons at Duke University in the late 1920s and specifically on the construction of Duke Chapel in the early 1930s. About 1932 they returned to their home base in Boone. The Colonial Revival house at Mary's Grove and the three stone outbuildings are the first known commission to follow on their work at Duke, and the workmanship here reflects the high degree of craftsmanship and skill they exhibited in that institutional work. The brothers also honed their skills working on the Blue Ridge Parkway for Joseph Troitino who also demanded a high level of craftsmanship from his stonemasons. Important local recognition of their abilities came in 1939 and 1940 when they received the commissions to erect two important public buildings in Watauga County. The new United States Post Office in Boone (NR, 1996) was originally to have been constructed in brick; however, Wiley Gordon Hartzog (1885-1976), the Boone postmaster, argued in favor of stone construction, citing the recent construction of Appalachian High School/Chapell Wilson Hall, other stone construction on the Appalachian State University campus, and the indigenous stone building traditions. Samples of stone from the local Anderson quarry were sent to Washington for testing, approved, and wall sections were erected by applicant stonemasons. The test wall erected by the Lyons brothers won them the commission for the coursed stone building. Their success at the post office no doubt influenced their selection as the stonemasons for Cove Creek High School (NR, 1998) at Sugar Grove erected in 1940-1941, also under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration. The brothers' career as stonemasons would likely have continued through the 1940s had World War II not dramatically halted construction. After the war, when construction was renewed, the brothers found diminished interest in stone masonry, and they utilized their long experience as masons in new brick buildings.

The Lyons brothers were the sons of William McCoy Lyons (1871-1956), a native of Wilkes County, and his wife, Martha Victoria Hodges (1877-1953) of Watauga County. After marriage the couple settled near the Mrs. Lyons's childhood home in the Oak Grove community just west of Boone, the Watauga County seat, where they raised their family. Leslie McDonald Lyons (1900-1957), born on 19 July 1900, was the first-born of the three. Clarence Manleth Lyons (1903-1981) was born on 5 June 1903. Earl Jones Lyons (1912-1984) was born on 28 May

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 12

1912. The question of what prompted the Lyons brothers to take up stonework cannot be answered at present, nor can the circumstances of their earliest, pre-Duke University work be confirmed. The three brothers are said to have usually worked on projects as employees of contractors in the Asheville, Boone, and Lenoir area, including Wiley Gordon Hartzog and Perry Green in Boone; Rathmel Wilson, Lee Wornack in Blowing Rock; Troitino & Brown of Asheville; and Taylor Construction of Lenoir. Their patterns of work varied over the years; all three worked together on some larger projects while on others one or two of the brothers worked alone or as a team. The brothers kept no known record or accounting of their work, and the projects noted hereafter are based on the Lyons and Hartzog interviews and attributions by descendant property owners. In nearly every known project with which they were associated, they were engaged on a single building at each site. Their work at Mary's Grove for Nellie Rabb, producing a house, a well house/gazebo, the dairy, and a stone silo, is the largest known group of their buildings to have been built at a single location. The stone dairy and stone silo are among the very few such examples of their type known to have been erected in North Carolina.

The stone buildings erected by the Lyons brothers in Caldwell and Watauga counties include domestic, institutional, and commercial buildings. In addition to the Rabb house at Mary's Grove and the stone veneer added to the Rabb house on North Main Street, the brothers erected an English manorial one-and-a-half-story stone house for Ervin Smith at 1002 S. College Avenue in Lenoir which survives, a second house for Mr. Smith at Smith's Crossroads which is lost, the Austin house at 2185 Valway Road in Lenoir, and the Edgar Dobbin House in Happy Valley. In Boone the brothers built a (surviving) two-story dressed stone building for Herman Wilcox which served as the town bus station, and in Blowing Rock they did the stonework on the Blowing Rock Public Library on Main Street. The brothers were also engaged as stonemasons on the Valle Crucis School in Watauga County. A number of other stone buildings including the Smithey Department Store at 912-91_ Harper Avenue and an appealing Colonial Revival-style house at Whitnel, are possibly their work but have not been confirmed. The brothers' last major stone building, erected in the employment of Taylor Construction Company of Lenoir, was the Lenoir Country Club in 1956-1957, now the office of Paul Broyhill. Two of the brothers, Clarence and Earl, built two-story stone houses at Oak Grove as their residences which survive but are now outside family ownership.

World War II interrupted the careers of the brothers as stonemasons. Clarence Lyons moved to Churchill, Tennessee, and worked as a carpenter on the Holston Ordinance. After the war, the brothers worked mostly as brick masons and for Taylor Construction Company of Lenoir.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 13

Among those projects were a Ford dealership/showroom for Ervin Smith at Smith's Crossroads (lost); a nurses quarters for Banner Elk Hospital; Parkway Elementary School, Boone; an addition to First Baptist Church, Lenoir; and an educational building at Lower Creek Baptist Church. The brothers left the profession of masonry at different times; however, on their death certificates all three are identified as brick masons. Earl Lyons, alone, was noted as a "Brick & Stone Mason" (Watauga County Death Certificates). That same pattern applied in their obituaries. Leslie Lyons left the profession first, in the early-mid 1950s, and was operating Lyons Motel at Boone when he died in 1957 (Watauga Democrat, 17 January 1957). Clarence Lyons retired as a brick mason from Taylor Construction Company about 1970, and he did some small private work in the years before his death in 1981 (Watauga Democrat, 19 October 1981). Earl Lyons left the profession and operated a retail furniture store; he died in 1984 (Watauga Democrat, 19 March 1984). All three brothers were buried at Mountlawn Memorial Park in Boone.

Endnotes

1. Robert Johnstone Miller was born 11 July 1758 near Dundee, Scotland, emigrated to Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1774 to join his brother then engaged in trade with the East and West Indies, and later migrated to North Carolina. He occupies a unique place in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century religious history in the western Piedmont as a minister of both the Lutheran and Episcopal churches. Ordained in the Lutheran Church in 1794 and as a priest of the newly-rejuvenated Episcopal Church in 1821, Mr. Miller became widely known as "Parson Miller"; he was responsible for Episcopal missionary efforts in the 1810s and 1820s in the western Piedmont. Parson Miller and his wife were the parents of ten known children, seven sons and three daughters, of whom Elisha Perkins Miller was the eldest surviving son.
2. Nearly all of the property, except the home tract, was sold at public auction on 12 April 1870. Five months later, on 12 September, commissioners laid off Mrs. Miller's dower allotment "including the dwelling house in which the said deceased was accustomed most generally to reside next before his decease, commonly called the mansion house together with the offices, out houses, buildings and other improvements thereunto belonging or in any wise appertaining" (E. P. Miller Estate Record, State Archives). Either Mrs. Miller subsequently released her dower interest, or some other arrangement was made on her behalf.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 14

3. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in electrical engineering and returned to Lenoir where he opened an electrical contracting company and appliance store in the 1930s. During World War II he served as a pilot and communications officer with the Flying Tigers. His pre-war experience with a short-wave radio station, operated from the Rabb property on North Main Street, found success after the war, in 1947, when he established Caldwell County's first radio station, WJRI.
4. For an analysis of stone construction in Brevard see "Property Type 12, Stone and Rock Masonry in Brevard and Pisgah Forest," an addendum to the Multiple Property Documentation form for Transylvania County, City of Brevard, Town of Rosman prepared by this author in conjunction with his completion of the National Register nominations for the Godfrey-Barnette House and the Brevard College Stone Walls and Gate.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 9 Page 15

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number 10 Page 16

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description: The property included in this nomination is the tract of 2.231 acres, delineated on the enclosed survey of the property by Western Carolina Surveyors, P.A., dated 11 August 1999. It is the property conveyed by the Chrisman Corporation to Tyrone R. and Eliza Frazier Bishop by deed on 10 August 1999.

Boundary Justification: The property included in this nomination is the residual tract of Mary's Grove comprising the site and setting of the stone house and three stone outbuildings erected ca. 1932-1934 by the Lyons brothers for Eleanor Boone Miller Rabb.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Mary's Grove, Caldwell County, North Carolina

Section number Photographs Page 17

Photographic Schedule

The following information applies to all of the photographs submitted with this nomination.

1. Name of Property: Mary's Grove
2. Location: Caldwell County, North Carolina
3. Name of Photographer: Davyd Foard Hood
4. Date of Photographs: 7 March 2000
5. Location of Original Negatives: Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
6. and 7.
 - A. Overall view of Mary's Grove, looking east from Harper Avenue, SW
 - B. The house, west elevation, looking east
 - C. Entrance, looking southeast
 - D. East, fireplace wall in living room, looking east/northeast
 - E. View of kitchen cabinetry, looking from the kitchen, north, into the entrance hall
 - F. Well house, looking north
 - G. Silo, looking west
 - H. Dairy, looking southeast

