



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State Historic Preservation Office

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Pat McCrory
Secretary Susan Kluttz

Office of Archives and History
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

November 21, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Megan Privett
Office of Human Environment
NCDOT Division of Highways

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley *Renee Gledhill-Earley*
Environmental Review Coordinator

SUBJECT: Historic Structures Survey Report for the Mabel Historic District, 16-02-0107,
Watauga County, ER 16-2000

Thank you for your October 25, 2016, letter transmitting the above-reference report. We have reviewed the report and concur that the Mabel Historic District (WT0941) is eligible for listing in the National Register Historic Places under Criterion A for rural community development and under Criterion C for architecture. We also agree with the assessments of contributing and non-contributing resources within the eligible historic district.

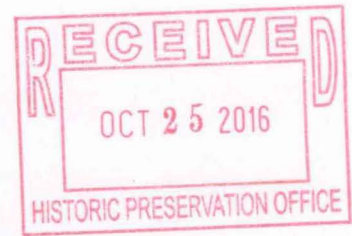
The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919-807-6579 or environmental.review@ncdcr.gov. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above referenced tracking number.

cc: Mary Pope Furr, NCDOT, mfurr@ncdot.gov



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



PAT MCCRORY
GOVERNOR

NICHOLAS J. TENNYSON
ACTING SECRETARY

October 25, 2016

ER 16- 2000

Ms. Renee Gledhill-Earley
Historic Preservation Office
Department of Cultural Resources
4617 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-4617

S. Eple Herb
11/21/16 MSE

Dear Ms. Gledhill-Earley:

Dec 11/16/16

**RE: 16-02-0107, Eligibility Evaluation for Mabel Historic District, WBS #
17BP.11.C.2, Watauga County**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233 (Old U.S. Highway 421) in Watauga County, identified as PA No. 16-02-0107. A project screening and reconnaissance survey identified several properties over the age of fifty years within the Area of Potential Effects (APE); some of them were previously identified surveyed sites. NCDOT determined further study and evaluation for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) was needed for these sixteen resources prior to assessing the project for environmental compliance for historic properties.

NCDOT contracted with Sarah David of CALYX Engineers and Consultants to conduct a field survey and intensive evaluation of the sixteen resources within the community of Mabel for eligibility to be listed to the NRHP. The report, completed in October of 2016, concluded that the Mabel Historic District (WT0941) is eligible for listing to the NRHP under Criteria A and C.

The Historic Architectural Resources Survey Report and survey materials for the Mabel Historic District evaluation are enclosed for your review and comment per 36CFR.800. Please let us know if you have any additional questions regarding this project. I can be reached at (919) 707-6061 or by email at mprivett@ncdot.gov.

Sincerely,

Megan Privett
NCDOT Historic Architecture

Cc:
Mary Pope Furr, NCDOT Historic Architecture

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LOCATION:
CENTURY CENTER, BUILDING A
1000 BIRCH RIDGE DRIVE
RALEIGH NC 27610

HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCE REPORT INTENSIVE EVALUATION FOR THE MABEL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233 (Old U.S. Highway 421)
Watauga County
WBS# 17BP.11.C.2

Prepared for:
Human Environment Section
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina, 27699

Prepared by:
 CALYX
CALYX Engineers and Consultants
6750 Tryon Road
Cary, North Carolina, 27518

OCTOBER 2016

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6750 Tryon Road
Cary, North Carolina, 27518

OCTOBER 2016


Sarah Woodard David, Principal Investigator

October 24, 2016
Date

Mary Pope Furr, Supervisor
Historic Architecture Group
North Carolina Department of Transportation

Date

Management Summary

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes replacing Watauga Pipe 2307 on Old U.S. Highway 421. The NCDOT defines this project's Area of Potential Effects (APE) as 300 feet north and 300 feet south along Old U.S. Highway 421 from the location of Watauga County Pipe 2307, and 300 feet west along North Fork Creek Road. The APE is fifty feet wide on each side of the road's centerline, for a width of 100 feet. NCDOT architectural historians reviewed the properties within the APE and determined that twelve properties greater than 50 years of age warranted further evaluation. Seven of those properties had been documented in an earlier countywide architectural survey. This report documents four properties in addition to the twelve resources originally identified by NCDOT. Collectively, these sixteen properties appear to comprise the Mabel Historic District (WT 941). Therefore, the report is organized as an evaluation of a single resource, the Mabel Historic District.

An architectural survey of Watauga County, overseen by the State Historic Preservation Office, was undertaken in 1977-1978 and updated in 2002. The Mabel Historic District was not included in any past architectural survey as a possible historic district.

This project is subject to review under the *Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects* (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA, 2007). NCDOT architectural historians established an APE for the project and, following preliminary background research and field investigation, ultimately identified one resource, the Mabel Historic District that warranted additional study and eligibility evaluation.

There were no other properties within the APE that are greater than 50 years of age, and none which appear to meet Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years.

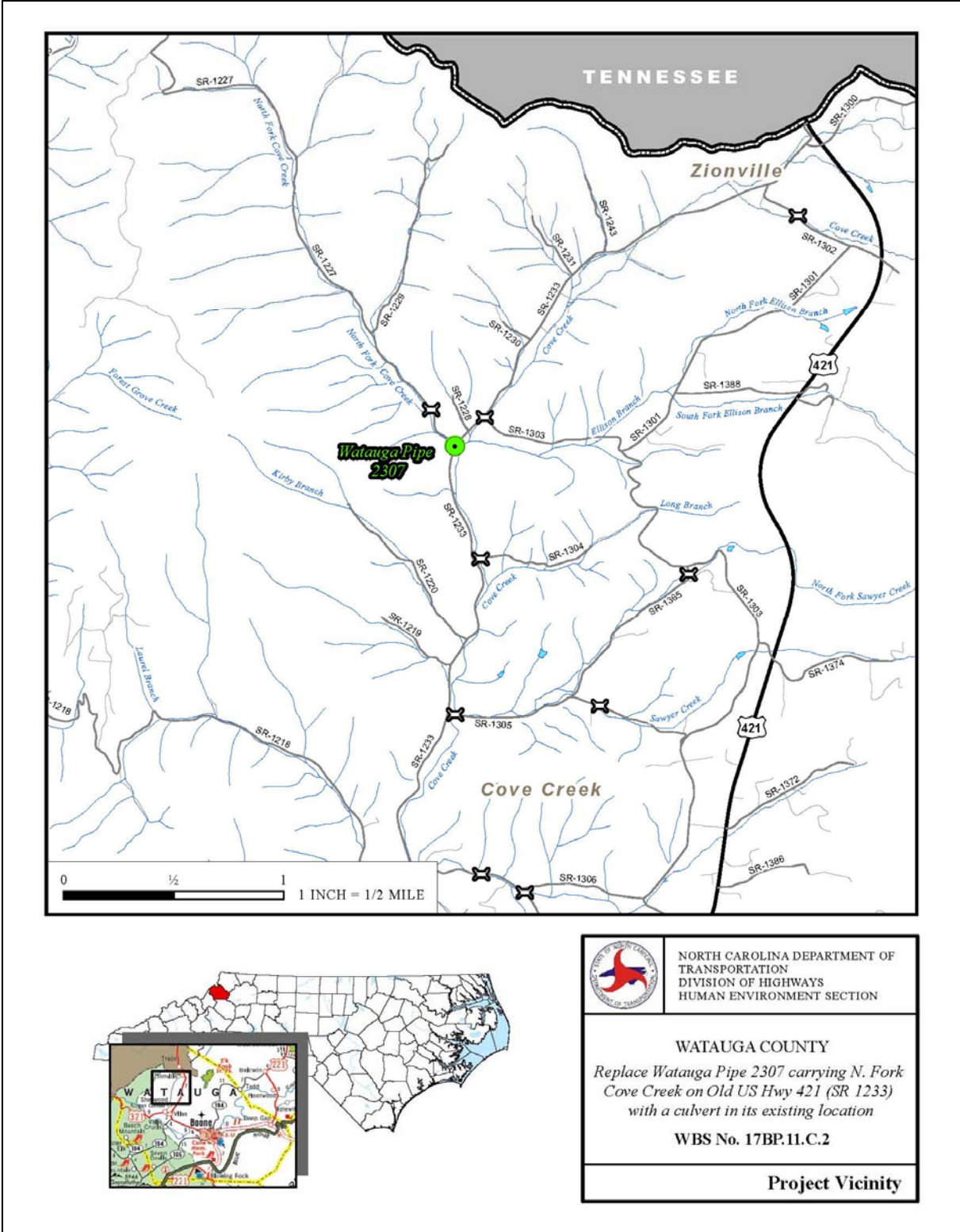
In August 2016, NCDOT requested that CALYX Engineers and Consultants (CALYX) complete research, an intensive-level historic field survey, and a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) evaluation of the community of Mabel.

Based on the field survey, background research, and the evaluation documented in this report, the Mabel Historic District is recommended eligible for the NRHP.

Property Name	NCHPO Survey Site Number	Eligibility Determination	Criteria
Mabel Historic District	WT 941	Eligible	A and C

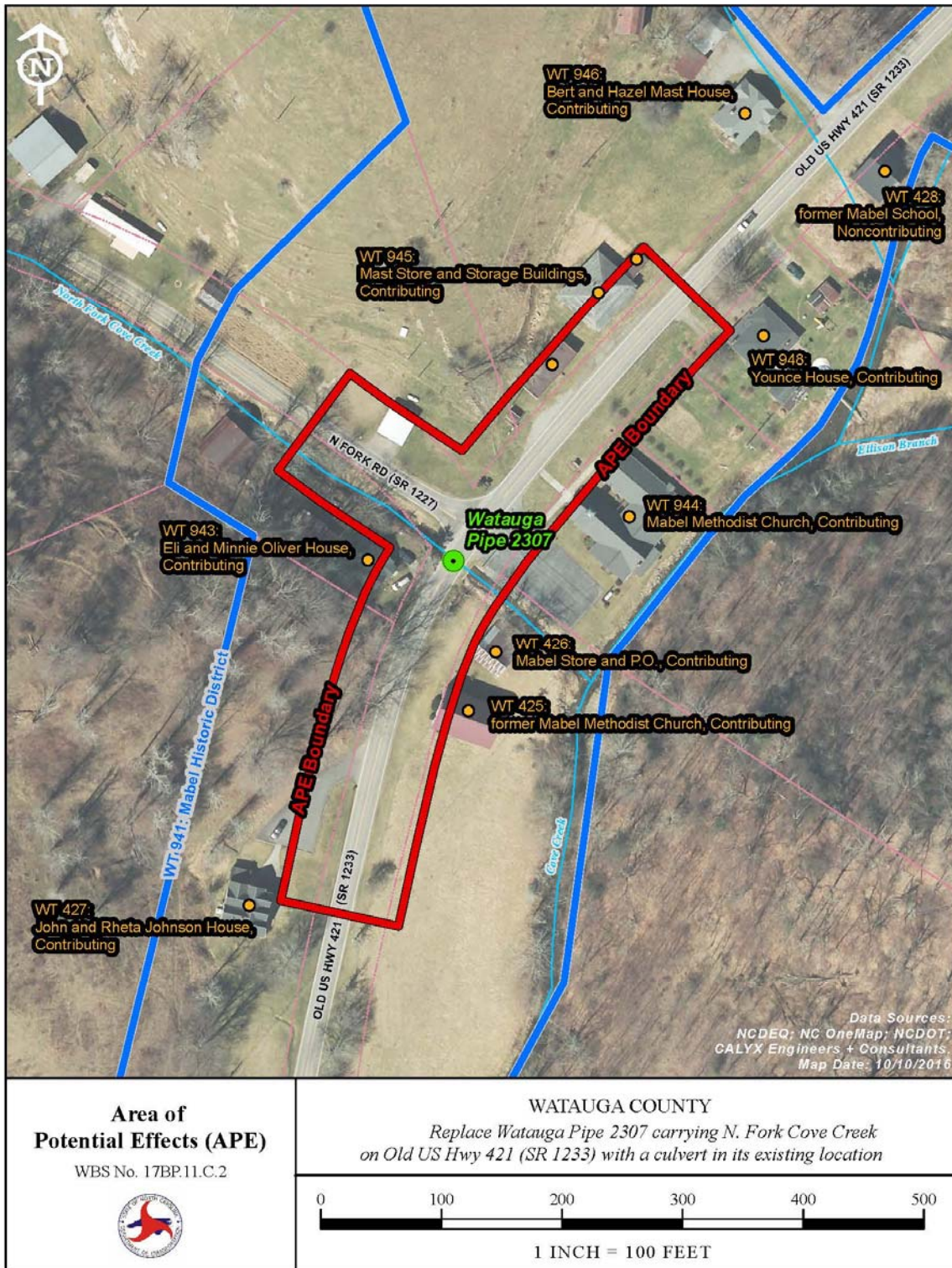
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1: Project Vicinity

Replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233
 Watauga County
 WBS 17BP.11.C.2



2: Area of Potential Effects

Replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233
Watauga County
WBS 17BP.11.C.2

Methodology

On August 23, 2016, CALYX Architectural Historian Sarah Woodard David visited Mabel, N.C., completed photo documentation, and conducted background research at the Watauga County Public Library. The investigator undertook research at the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Offices in Raleigh and Asheville, and at the North Carolina State Archives. The investigator also used online research tools and resources, including the Watauga County Register of Deeds online index, Watauga County GIS Mapping, the website findagrave.com, and the web-based subscription services ancestry.com and newspapers.com. The investigator drove the northern half of the county (north of an east-west line created by US Highways 421 and 321) on August 23 and August 24 in search of comparable communities.

After consulting with NCDOT architectural historian, Megan Privett, and after researching the community of Mabel, the investigator organized this report as an evaluation of a single resource, the Mabel Historic District, which incorporates the twelve individual properties for which NCDOT originally requested evaluations plus four additional properties.

CALYX conducted all fieldwork, research, and evaluations to meet the provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and its implementing regulations, 36 CFR 800, as well as NCDOT's *Guidelines for the Survey Reports for Historic Architectural Resources*.

Evaluation: Mabel Historic District

Resource Name	Mabel Historic District
HPO Survey Site Number	WT 941
Street Address	Flanking SR 1233 (Old U.S. 421) from a point 0.14 miles south of SR 1233's intersection with SR 1227 (North Fork Road) to a point 0.18 miles north of SR 1233's intersection with SR 1303 (Mabel School Road).
PIN	Multiple
Construction Dates	Late 19 th century through the 1950s
NRHP Recommendation	Eligible



Property Description

Mabel is situated in northwest Watauga County, deep in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. The region's rugged landscape dominates the setting, but its creek and river valleys are home to its historic architecture: like all of Watauga County's rural communities, mountains surround Mabel and its houses and roads are built in the bottoms along creeks and streams. While the mountains are the most prominent feature, the creeks dictated and continue to dictate the community's development.

Cove Creek is the primary waterway in Mabel, and it runs roughly north-south; the main road, Old Highway 421, follows it. Three other smaller creeks also cut through Mabel. The North Fork of Cove Creek follows a northwest trajectory with North Fork Road paralleling it. North Fork and Cove Creek intersect behind the Mabel Methodist Church. Ellison Branch is an east-west creek that Mabel School Road follows, and an unnamed branch runs downhill along John Burkett Road, emptying into Cove Creek near Ellison Branch's mouth. These creeks create the valley that gave Mabel's residents farmland and places flat enough to build their homes, schools, churches, and businesses.

Mabel reflects a specific mountain development pattern of rural settlement with scattered one and two-story houses dating from the late-nineteenth century through the early and mid-

twentieth century, and a handful of commercial and public buildings from the same era. This pattern resulted from geography and the continued importance of subsistence farming even as natural resource extraction, such as logging and mining, gained importance in the area's economy. As a result, residents clustered civic and commercial buildings together, and houses, while located in closer proximity than the county's more isolated farmhouses, are scattered at a greater distance than one would expect in a similar rural community where desirable farmland was less affected by landscape. Mabel is a typical example: a feeling of place is created by a concentration of commercial and institutional buildings and houses arranged in this "in-between" landscape, where houses are more densely located than somewhere with less sense of place but farther apart than they might be in a similar community in the Piedmont or coastal plain.



Figure 3: Map of Mabel, keyed to inventory list

Inventory List

A note about contributing and noncontributing designations: In judging whether or not a building or resource contributed to Mabel's historic significance, the investigator placed more weight on the building's contribution to and place in the community's landscape rather than the building's individual architectural merit. Indeed, Criterion C is intended to capture districts whose whole is significant even if its parts are not. In Mabel, this situation is exaggerated because almost every building has undergone some alterations and the introduction of vinyl siding and replacement windows is nearly universal. To eliminate a building because of vinyl siding and replacement windows would eliminate most of Mabel's buildings, and therefore the entire community, from National Register eligibility. Such a judgement would do a disservice to the community as a whole because it is, in comparison to other settlements in the county, a very good example of a late-nineteenth century community in Watauga County.

1. Eli and Louise Church House, WT 942

Ca. 1900

5776 Old U.S. Highway 421

Contributing

This is a one-and-a-half-story, side-gable house with three gable-front wall dormers punctuating the west façade. One-story wings are located on both gable ends of the main block. These appear to be early additions. A full-width porch features a hip roof and turned posts. The southern one-third of the porch has been enclosed. The first floor of the house, including the walls sheltered by the front porch and the exterior of the one-story wings, is clad in weatherboards with cornerboards that are trimmed with a narrow piece of plain, square molding. This trimmed corner board is similar to the trimmed frieze board at the former Mabel Methodist Church (2 in this inventory list) and the cornerboards applied to the former Mabel Store and Post Office (3 in this inventory list). Vinyl drop siding covers the upper half of the house and the porch enclosure. The gable ends of the wings and the shed-roof end of an enclosed rear porch are decorated with a sawtooth sheathing created from downward-facing pickets abutting one another. The front door, centered on the façade, has a plain, narrow label molding that outlines the top of the door and the upper third of the sides of the door. This trim feature is a subtle reference to Greek Revival and Italic designs, and it is also seen on the former Mabel Methodist Church and the Mabel Store and Post Office. Most windows are original four-over-four sashes, but modern replacements occupy the wall dormers and a plate-glass window has been added to the gable end of the southernmost wing. Asphalt shingles cover the roof. The house is situated in the flood plain of Cove Creek at the base of a wooded hill.

The similarities between this house's label molding around the front door and the cornerboards to the trim seen at the former Mabel Methodist Church and Mabel Store and Post Office, as well as the apparent similarity in their ages, suggest that a single carpenter is responsible for constructing all three buildings.

Replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233

Watauga County

WBS 17BP.11.C.2

Behind the house is an unusual outbuilding with a raised stone foundation, below-grade entrance, and a frame upper level clad in wood drop siding. The upper level has four-over-four sash windows while the lower level has four-light windows. A brick chimney flue emerges through the gable roof's southwest corner. The window trim on this building matches the house. The lower level is almost certainly a spring house with possible space for storing food; the upper level's use is less certain. It may have been used as a wash house, indicated by the chimney and numerous windows.

Immediately south of the spring house is a one-story, side-gable barn clad in diagonally-laid weatherboards. A larger, gable-roof, frame barn is situated farther to the south. It is substantial in size with a broad gable roof sheltering a drive-through and a long corncrib along the barn's west side. Two more small barns stand a little farther south. These two barns are in poor condition.

On the west side of the creek is a modern, open-sided, metal carport.

Eli and Louise Church appear to have been in Mabel since the 1860s, and Eli was a postmaster of Mabel. Census records also indicate that he was the first postmaster of Church in the 1880s, and Church may have been the earlier name of Mabel. Eli served as a leader of the community's school, and he and Louise both lived into the late 1920s.



Figure 4: Eli and Louise Church House, west elevation



Figure 5: Eli and Louise Church House, south elevation



Figure 6: Eli and Louise Church House, spring house



Figure 7: Eli and Louise Church House, barn



Figure 8: Eli and Louise Church House, facing south toward group of three barns

2. (former) Mabel Methodist Church, WT 425
Ca. 1895
5889 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

In 1873, a group of trustees purchased a lot in Mabel for the construction of a Methodist church. It is not known what happened to this building, although a former school building (6 in this inventory list) located to the north, may be the original 1870s church building.

The Methodists replaced their earlier sanctuary with this frame church in 1895. Local carpenter, Willett Adams, is credited with its construction, but based on census records, he would have only been about 18 years old in 1895. Based on an 1895 contract published on ancestry.com by Mark Combs, another local carpenter and Mabel resident, John Johnson, was contracted to build Union Baptist Church, about a half-mile away in 1895. That building is no longer standing, but the dimensions given in the contract between Johnson and the trustees are very similar to those at Mabel Methodist Church.

The former Mabel Methodist Church is an austere, gable-front building with two single-leaf, two-panel Greek Revival doors with rectangular transoms. Four four-over-four sash windows on each side of the building illuminate the interior. The doors and windows feature the same, plain label molding seen at the Eli and Louise Church House (1 in this inventory list). Centered on the west façade in the top of the gable end is an empty opening capped by a peaked pediment with a circular opening in the tympanum. This void is approximately the size of the other window openings, but it is unclear if this operated as a window or as a louvered vent. It has been open or boarded-up since the building was documented in 1977. Weatherboards cover the exterior. A small, brick chimney flu pierces the center of the roof ridge. Modern, 5-V crimp metal sheathing covers the roof. The building rests on a combination of concrete blocks and stones.

This building was moved from its original site (the location of the present-day Mabel Methodist Church) in the 1940s.¹ Aside from being relocated and re-roofed, the building appears to be unaltered from its original construction.

¹ Jackie Lee Mast, telephone interview with the author, September 30, 2016.



Figure 9: former Mabel Methodist Church, southwest corner

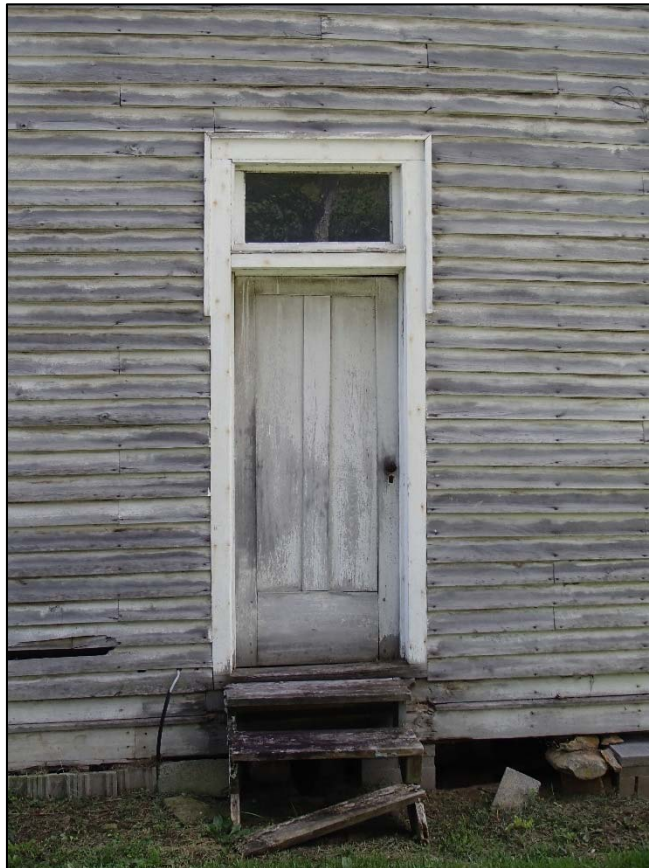


Figure 10: former Mabel Methodist Church, west elevation detail



Figure 11: former Mabel Methodist Church, trim detail



Figure 12: former Mabel Methodist Church, north elevation

3. Mabel Store and Post Office, WT 426

Ca. 1900

5889 Old U.S. Highway 421

Contributing

The Mabel Store and Post Office also appears to have been moved, but its original location is not known. What appears to be the original façade now faces toward Cove Creek and away from the main road.

The store is a one-story, gable-front, frame building typical of the remaining late-nineteenth-century stores in the county. The original façade (now the east rear elevation) features weatherboards, trimmed cornerboards, and two-over-two sash windows with plain label molding. A door opening is centered on the façade and is also trimmed with label molding. On the rear elevation (now the west roadside elevation), the fenestration is repeated, absent the label molding.

A shed addition runs along the entire north elevation and contains batten doors on the front and rear elevations. The south elevation is windowless. The building stands on wooden piers.

The building's trim suggests that it too is the work of the same carpenter that built the former Mabel Methodist Church and the Eli and Louise Church House.



Figure 13: Mabel Store and Post Office, west elevation (original rear)



Figure 14: Mabel Store and Post Office, east elevation (original front)



Figure 15: Mabel Store and Post Office, south elevation

4. Mabel Methodist Church, WT 944

Ca. 1949

5932 Old U.S. Highway 421

Contributing

The present-day Mabel Methodist Church is a brick veneer, gable-front building with a projecting gable and a projecting gabled portico. A round window is located in the peak of the front-facing gable. The rake features modest scalloped trim at the eaves. The portico, clad in vinyl siding and supported with modern, vinyl columns, shelters a multi-light front door and sidelights. Small, one-over-one stained glass windows flank the portico. Additional diminutive stained glass windows are located along the main block's side elevations. The steeple is composed of a square base covered in vinyl siding topped by an octagonal belfry and a tall spike or spire with a ball finial near the point.

A gabled hyphen on the north side of the sanctuary connects the main block to a secondary gable-front wing that probably houses Sunday School rooms or a fellowship hall. This wing also has a vinyl portico and plain one-over-one, vinyl sash windows.

The construction date is based on notes made during the 1978 survey suggesting that the older church building was moved in the 1940s, confirmed by Jackie Lee Mast's memory of this building being constructed in the late 1940s.



Figure 16: Mabel Methodist Church, west elevation



Figure 17: Mabel Methodist Church, west elevation



Figure 18: Mabel Methodist Church, west elevation

5. Younce House, WT 948
1954
5980 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

According to Watauga County tax records, this Ranch house was constructed in 1954. The house was built on land belonging to Olen and Bonnie Younce, who were born in 1905 and 1910 respectively. It is most likely that the house was built for or by one of their four children: Jean, Paul, Jerry, or George, with the mostly likely candidate being George who bought his siblings' interest in the property in 1997.²

The one-story, frame house features a wide brick chimney and partial brick end wall on the southwest corner. The letter Y, created from blonde bricks, is set into the chimney stack. The brick from the chimney extends across the west façade as a knee-wall at the sill-height of the house's large picture window. The picture window is comprised of a single pane of plate glass flanked with one-over-one sash windows. The picture window is a vinyl replacement. The front door is a single-leaf entry centered on the façade between the picture window to the south and a projecting, hip-roof wing to the north. This wing may be an addition. A porch with a low hip roof extends from this wing south across the remainder of the façade. The porch may be an addition or it may be original with replacement materials including pressure-treated posts and balustrade. With the exception of the brick knee wall and the end wall on the south elevation, the remainder of the house is clad in aluminum siding. All windows are vinyl replacements. The hip roof is covered with asphalt singles and the house stands on a concrete block foundation.

Behind the house is a concrete block, side-gable outbuilding with two-over-two sash windows and asbestos siding in the gable ends. This building features a modest flare or scallop on the gable end at the eaves. This is similar to the trim seen at the current Methodist Church building. To the north of the house is a small outbuilding with a garage lean-to. The main block of this building is clad with rustic, wavy-edge siding.

² Jean Y. Henson et al to George Younce, May 5, 1997, Watauga County Deed Book 410, page 554.



Figure 19: Younce House, west elevation



Figure 20: Younce House, west elevation



Figure 21: Younce House, concrete block outbuilding, south elevation



Figure 22: Younce House, wavy-siding outbuilding, west elevation

6. (former) Mabel School, WT 428

Ca. 1880; ca. 1950

5900 block Old U.S. Highway 421; east side of Old. U.S. 421, 0.10 mile south of Mabel School Road

Noncontributing

Originally recorded in the late 1970s as the former Mabel School and Store, the store has been demolished. According to notes in the 1978 survey file, the remaining building is said to have begun as the Mabel School, and it may have been used as the Methodist Church as well. In 1978, it was believed to be over a century old.

The building, however, is altered from its nineteenth century appearance to a point of unrecognizability. The building is a broad gable front structure with its entrance facing toward Cove Creek and its rear elevation facing the main road. The west façade is overgrown, but the 1970s survey photographs show a small gable-front enclosed stoop or vestibule projecting from the center of the façade. Asphalt shingle or tar paper covers the gable end and light-colored asphalt shingles or tar covers the center third of the creek-side west façade. The flanking outer thirds are covered in drop siding, as are the side elevations. On the rear east (roadside) elevation, drop siding covers the entire width of the building, but vertical boards divide the elevation into thirds in the same way that shingles cover the center third on the façade. The change in siding on the façade and the vertical boards on the rear appear to mark the width of the original school building. Windows feature eight-over-eight sash and some six-over-six sash. The eight-over-eight sash probably date from the mid-twentieth century when the roof, asphalt shingles, and drop siding may have been added. That is also likely the time period when additions were made along the north and south side of the original block, all of which was unified with the existing, broad gable roof. Visible portions of the foundation are concrete block.



Figure 23: former Mabel School, southwest corner



Figure 24: former Mabel School, west elevation

7. Mabel School, WT 949
Ca. 1933
1765 Mabel School Road
Contributing

In the early 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Watauga County constructed several consolidated schools around the county. Three of them—Bethel, Valle Crucis, and Mabel—were very similar, with stone exteriors and hip-roofs. The Mabel Elementary School appears much as it did in the 1930s, with the exception of the roof, which is now sheathed in modern, standing seam metal, and the windows which are mid-twentieth-century replacements.

The one-story building stands on a raised basement. The center block is stepped forward slightly and a hip-roof portico with square, stone columns projects forward from this center block. The main west entrance consists of a modern double-leaf door surrounded by wide sidelights and a very tall transom. From the main block, the building spreads to the south and north with banks of five windows. A square cupola crowns the center of the building.

On the north elevation, a low, brick addition probably dates from the 1970s. A mid-century, gabled, brick wing, also on the north elevation, appears to house a gym. Other additions for classrooms and a cafeteria were made to the rear (east) elevation.

In front of the school, a bridge crosses Cove Creek and a substantial piece of steam-powered equipment, a small cannon, and a flag pole are located in the front yard.



Figure 25: Mabel School, west elevation



Figure 26: Mabel School, west elevation detail



Figure 27: Mabel School, west elevation



Figure 28: Mabel School, west elevation



Figure 29: Mabel School, west elevation, additions



Figure 30: Mabel School, northwest corner



Figure 31: Mabel School, north elevation

8. Grant Lawrence House, WT 433
Ca. 1900; ca. 1940
1768 Mabel School Road
Contributing

The Grant Lawrence House is a two-story, side-gable I-house with a one-story, full-width shed-roofed enclosed porch or addition across the rear elevation. Before 1940, a substantial gable-front, asymmetrical wing was added to the west façade. It is unclear if this was an alteration to an existing porch or if the current configuration entirely replaced the original porch. In any case, a full-width, one-story porch with a concrete floor and square columns on brick piers is topped with a gable-front wing with an inset porch at the wing's southwest corner. This second-story porch features a gently arched opening on the front elevation, a square corner post, and a plain square balustrade. Exterior, single-shoulder brick chimneys stand on each of the house's gable ends, but stucco was applied to them after the 1978 survey. Vinyl siding covers the original wood weatherboards. All windows are modern vinyl replacements with false muntins that mimic the earlier, three-over-one sashes.

Behind the house is a concrete block, gable-front, single-bay garage with wooden doors. Also behind the dwelling are two frame shed outbuildings. To the north is a substantial, two-story, weatherboarded, frame barn with sheds attached to each side elevation.

Who Grant Lawrence is or was remains unclear. The survey file compiled in 1978 does not shed light on Mr. Lawrence's history and he could not be located in the census. George and Elizabeth Lawrence were in their 20s and living in Mabel at the time of the 1870 census, while James and Susan or Sarah Lawrence, both in their 30s, also lived in Mabel at that time. In 1880, James and Susan were in Mabel, but by 1900, they lived in the Beaver Dam area with a young son named Grant. It may be that Grant Lawrence is responsible for the 1940s renovations to this house.



Figure 32: Grant Lawrence House, west elevation



Figure 33: Grant Lawrence House, south elevation



Figure 34: Grant Lawrence House, southeast corner



Figure 35: Grant Lawrence House, garage



Figure 36: Grant Lawrence House, shed



Figure 37: Grant Lawrence House, barn

9. Mabel Baptist Church, WT 947
1948
6218 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

Mabel Baptist Church was established in 1948, according to the Three Forks Baptist Association, to which this church belongs. The west-facing building is a cross-gable sanctuary with an enclosed gable-front vestibule attached to the forward facing gable. The building is clad in brick veneer. Modern, vinyl, one-over-one sash windows have replaced the original windows; vinyl-framed transoms fill the window openings above the new windows. A round-arch fanlight tops the front door and is filled with plate glass. The front door is a modern, double-leaf entry. A soldier course of bricks frames the entrance. Above the front door is a segmental arch stained-glass window. A frame steeple clad in vinyl siding tops the building and is capped with a metal-roofed, pyramidal spire. Asphalt shingles cover the roof.

The church stands on the east side of Cove Creek so that parking is located between Old U. S. 421 and the creek, with a bridge linking the parking area to the church yard. Along the creek, the congregation has flanked and floored the creek with concrete, and, a few feet north of the bridge, four concrete steps are set into the wall and lead down to the creek. Presumably, the creek would be dammed up to create a baptismal pool at this location.

A brick, side-gable building, probably used as a fellowship hall, stands behind the church.



Figure 38: Mabel Baptist Church, west elevation



Figure 39: Mabel Baptist Church, southwest corner

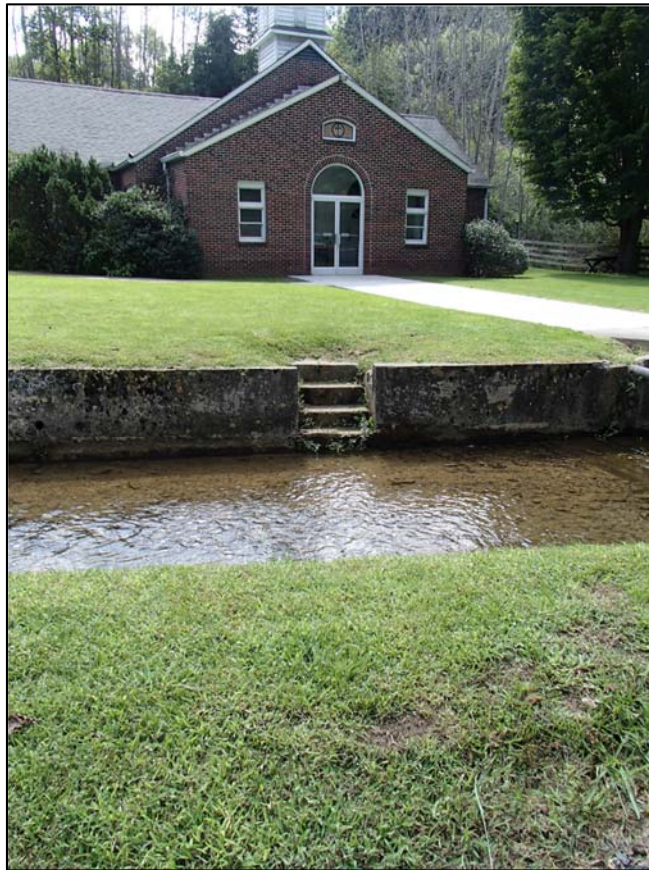


Figure 40: Mabel Baptist Church, baptismal pool in Cove Creek

10. Jack Campbell House, WT 434
Ca. 1880
6252 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

According to the 1978 survey file, Jack Campbell, a captain in the local militia during the Civil War, built this house around 1880. However, Jack Campbell does not appear in the census until 1880 when he is only twelve years old. This may be the home of Jack's parents, Rufus and Margaret Campbell; Rufus did serve in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

The house is a one-and-a-half story, side-gable dwelling with three forward-facing, gabled, wall dormers on the west façade. The configuration is very similar to the Eli and Louise Church House (1 in this inventory). The northwest corner of the first floor is clipped so that it is inset under the corner of the upper level. Originally, a decorative bracket trimmed this corner. The full-width porch is a reconstruction with slender square posts. Centered on the façade under the porch is a bay with angled corners on which the front door is centered. This feature, along with the three forward-facing gables on the façade, is repeated at the John Johnson House (16 in this inventory). Based on photos from a 2002 architectural survey update, the house had simple label molding around the windows as seen at several other Mabel buildings. Original windows were two-over-two sash, drop siding covered the house, vertical siding covered the gable ends, and diagonally-laid drop siding covered the gable end of the central wall dormer. All of these details have been lost: vinyl siding covers the entire house, obscuring all details, and all windows have been replaced with modern one-over-one, vinyl sash. The decorative brackets on the clipped corner have also been removed. A full-width, rear shed-roof porch was enclosed historically, and an addition was made around the northeast corner in the 1960s.

A shed-roof outbuilding, appearing to date from the mid-twentieth century, stands to the south. A shed-roof outbuilding located between Cove Creek and the main road, and pictured in the 2002 survey photographs, is no longer standing.

The investigator was denied permission to the property, and photos from the 1978 survey file are reproduced here.



Figure 41: Jack Campbell House, west elevation



Figure 42: Jack Campbell House, west elevation, 1978 survey photograph



Figure 43: Jack Campbell House, west elevation detail, 1978 survey photograph



Figure 44: Jack Campbell House, northwest corner, 1978 survey photograph

11. Bert and Hazel Mast House, WT 946
1938
5983 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

Watauga County tax records date this house to 1938, and Jackie Lee Mast, Bert and Hazel Mast's nephew, reports that his uncle built it in the late 1930s. This house is a one-story bungalow on a raised basement. The house is clad in stone veneer similar to the masonry at the 1930s Mabel School across the road. The jerkinhead, side-gable roof is covered in asphalt shingles, and a small, gable-front wing on the east façade's north end also features a jerkinhead roof line. A hip roof shelters a stoop entry with stone piers and mid-twentieth-century metal decorative posts. A chimney is situated on the southern gable end. Windows on the main level are modern vinyl replacements, while the attic and basement retain original sash with four-light basement windows, three-over-one attic windows in the gable ends, and a pair of three-light attic windows in the gable end of the forward-facing wing.

A two-story garage stands behind the house. The garage has a jerkinhead roof in a gable-front configuration. A single-vehicle garage bay and a pedestrian door occupy the first floor, while a pair of three-over-one windows are located in the garage's upper level. Asbestos siding covers the garage. A one-story, open, shed-roof addition extends along the garage's south elevation.

A second shed-roof garage is located south of the original garage. This shelter features exposed raftertails and is sheathed in plywood.

Uphill, to the west of the house, is a small, gambrel-roof, frame barn with exposed raftertails, and a flare or kick at the eave.

Bert and Hazel Mast are listed in the 1940 census as a merchant and school teacher, respectively. Bert Mast's obituary notes that he operated Mast Store in Mabel.



Figure 45: Bert and Hazel Mast House, east elevation



Figure 46: Bert and Hazel Mast House, southeast corner



Figure 47: Bert and Hazel Mast House, northeast corner



Figure 48: Bert and Hazel Mast House, garages



Figure 49: Bert and Hazel Mast House, barn

12. Mast Store Storage Building 1, WT 945

Ca. 1910

5983 Old U.S. Highway 421

Contributing

This diminutive building has a shed roof behind a stepped parapet. Weatherboards cover the frame structure and batten doors cover a wide door centered on the east façade. The building does not have windows, and it is likely that it served as a small warehouse. Jackie Lee Mast stated that this was part of the site's original store complex, which predated the Mast family's ownership.



Figure 50: Mast Store Storage Building 1, east elevation



Figure 51: Mast Store Buildings, showing north elevation of Storage Building 1

13. Mast Store, WT 945
Ca. 1910; ca. 1955
5983 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

This one-story, hip-roof commercial building is frame with a brick-veneer east façade and drop siding on the other elevations. Three, four-over-four sash windows occupy the south elevation. The primary front door appears to be an early-twentieth-century door with a two-leaf screen door. A secondary front door, located in the façade's south end, has two vertical panels below a group of six glazed panels. Pairs of plateglass windows flank the primary front door. Across the front elevation, a shed roof added to the front roof slope's edge shelters a full-width, concrete porch floor. The building rests on a concrete block pier foundation, which may suggest that it has been moved.

Jackie Lee Mast, who ran the store in the later 1950s and into the 1960s, stated that his uncle, Bert Mast, ran this as a general store from the time he purchased it in the 1930s until Jackie Lee took over operations.

Jackie Lee Mast believes that the original store burned to the ground in the mid-1950s and that the existing building dates entirely from the mid-1950s. However, the use of four-over-four sash windows on the side elevation, the older doors on the façade, and the overall vernacular configuration of the current building suggest that the brick façade was added as a rehabilitation of the original building. Thus, although it conflicts with Jackie Lee Mast's recollections, the date given in this inventory list reflects both the earlier building and the repairs. Closer examination of the interior, attic, and crawlspace may reveal a more definitive construction evolution.



Figure 52: Mast Store, east elevation



Figure 53: Mast Store, southeast corner

14. Mast Store Storage Building 2, WT 945
Ca. 1950
5983 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

This concrete block building is one-story in height and has a shed roof behind a parapet. Centered on the east façade is a concrete loading dock and double-width door opening now covered with plywood. Small, two-over-two, horizontally-divided-light sash windows flank this loading bay. A single-leaf door is located on the building's north elevation. Jackie Lee Mast reports that he sometimes used this building for produce sales, but its primary use was storage.

A modern metal carport is situated to the west of this building, facing North Fork Road.



Figure 54: Mast Store Storage Building 2, east elevation

15. Eli and Minnie Oliver, WT 943
Ca. 1945
5921 Old U.S. Highway 421
Contributing

This frame cottage features a side-gable roof with a gable-front wing on the east façade. Windows are three-over-one sash with the exception of a multi-light picture window. A gable-front porch with brick piers has replacement posts of modern, decorative metal. Wavy-edge

asbestos siding covers the house, which stands on a full concrete block foundation. A brick chimney flue stands on the north gable end.

Directly behind the house is an outbuilding that appears to be an earlier dwelling or kitchen with four-over-four sash windows, a pressed metal shingle roof, and a boxed cornice. Shed additions are located on the east and west sides with the eastern shed containing a corn crib.

Farther west along North Fork Road is a gambrel roof barn with diagonally laid siding and a shed wing on the east side.

Between 1918 and 1926, Eli and Minnie Oliver assembled the land comprising the tract this house stands on.³ Minnie served as postmistress for many years, and Eli and Minnie died within a few weeks of each other in 1969. The house remains in the Oliver family. The mid-1940s construction date is based on Watauga County tax records as well as the house's stylistic attributes.



Figure 55: Eli and Minnie Oliver House, east elevation

³ H. L. Combs to Eli and Minnie Oliver, July 26, 1918, Watauga County Deed Book 26, page 350; F.M. and Laura Greer to Eli and Minnie Oliver, January 11, 1924, Watauga County Deed Book 31, page 125; F.M. and Laura Greer to Eli and Minnie Oliver, April 4, 1925, Watauga County Deed Book 41, page 569.



Figure 56: Eli and Minnie Oliver House, northeast corner



Figure 57: Eli and Minnie Oliver House, earlier house or kitchen as outbuilding, north elevation



Figure 58: Eli and Minnie Oliver House, barn on North Fork Road, north elevation

16. John and Rheta Johnson House, WT 427

Ca. 1899

5889 Old U.S. Highway 421

Contributing

Like many of Mabel's earliest houses, the John Johnson House has been altered, but it originally shared many of the features common to the community's nineteenth-century structures, suggesting that many of these buildings were the work of a single carpenter. Notes in the survey file for this house attribute its construction to the owner, John Johnson, who is known to have built a local church (no longer standing).

The Johnson House is a two-story I-house with a two-story, side-gable addition to the rear, creating double gables on each end. An impressive, double-tier porch with a triple-A roof extends across the east façade, while an inset, double-tier porch is located in the south gable end of the rear side-gable section.

At the time of the 1978 survey, the house retained weatherboard siding with vertical siding in the gable ends and two-over-two and three-over-one sash windows. Today, square posts have replaced the chamfered porch posts, and a simple, square balustrade has been added to the front porches and side porch. Vinyl siding covers all wood work, including the vertical gable-end siding, and vinyl windows have replaced the original sash. Spindlework in the three gables on the porch remains intact.

Replace Watauga Pipe 2307 on SR 1233

Watauga County

WBS 17BP.11.C.2

John and Martha Loretta Greer "Rheta" Johnson purchased this property in 1899.⁴ According to the 1910 census, the Johnsons had been married twenty-five years, three of their children lived with them, John was a farmer, and Rheta was a dressmaker. John E. Combs, the owner at the time of the 1977-1978 survey, stated that the house was built around 1897. He also reported that he bought the house from his "Uncle Church." He did, in fact, buy it from his mother's brother and his wife, N. M. and Rosa Church, in 1917.⁵

South of the house is a small, gable-roof outbuilding clad in metal. Where portions of metal sheathing are missing, the original exterior indicates this was a corn crib.



Figure 59: John and Rheta Johnson House, east elevation

⁴ F.A. and H.E. Warren to J.B. and Rhetta [sic] Johnson, May 30, 1899, Watauga County Deed Book 16, page 467.

⁵ N.M. and Rosa Church to J.E. Combs, November 20, 1917, Watauga County Deed Book 20, page 321.



Figure 60: John and Rheta Johnson House, east elevation



Figure 61: John and Rheta Johnson House, southeast corner

Historical Background

For most white North Carolinians, the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of prosperity with booming New South industries and expanding railroad service fueling a growing cash-based economy. In Watauga County, timbering, cheese-making, and other agricultural production (namely corn and cabbage production) expanded particularly as railroads connected parts of the county to larger markets. Many farmers were also sawmill operators, timber workers, blacksmiths, or carpenters.⁶

Tourism was particularly important in the southern half of the county, while in the northern half of Watauga County agriculture dominated the economy, with Sugar Grove (the lower Cove Creek area) appearing to be particularly prosperous. In his 1915 county history, John Preston Arthur described the Cove Creek valley “as the Egypt of Watauga County” with “some of the most fertile land in the state. Its people are progressive and co-operate in all public enterprises. Beginning at Zionville, near the Tennessee line, there is a succession of villages, including Mabel, Amantha, Sherwood, Mast, and Sugar Grove.”⁷

Mabel coalesced during this era, but white settlement of the area began in the late 1700s and early 1800s, well before the community was named. Cove Creek, which runs north-south through Mabel, is a major tributary of the Watauga River, and, as noted, its rich bottomlands were a sought-after prize for the region’s earliest European settlers. The primary creeks in the Watauga system, including Cove Creek, “were both the first bottomland areas to be settled and the loci from which succeeding cove settlement would radiate up the adjacent hollows.”⁸ Most of the Cove Creek settlement was concentrated farther south where the valley is wider, but over time, more and more settlers move farther up the creek.⁹

During the Civil War, Watauga County’s loyalties were divided with many Union sympathizers and half-hearted Confederates. Many of the residents who appear to have been most active in establishing Mabel as a community enlisted or were conscripted into the North Carolina 58th Regiment. Those included Eli Church, Noah Isaacs, Richard Isaacs, John Johnson, and Rufus Campbell. John Johnson deserted, and Eli Church was absent without leave at least twice.¹⁰

⁶ Daniel Pezzoni, *The Architectural History of Watauga County, North Carolina* (Boone, NC: Watauga County Historical Society, 2009), 48-49, 76-77.

⁷ John Preston Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina, with Sketches of Prominent Families* (Richmond, VA: Everett Waddey Co., 1915), 210.

⁸ Tony VanWinkle, “Historic and Architectural Resources of Watauga County, North Carolina, ca. 1763-1952,” Multiple Properties Documentation Form, N.C. State Historic Preservation Office, 2003, page E-9.

⁹ VanWinkle, page E-11.

¹⁰ Weymouth T. Jordan, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster*, volume XIV (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 1998), 318, 388, 391, 392.

After the war, agricultural and economic development began a slow recovery. With incremental increases in prosperity and economic security came new investments. At what would become Mabel, a group of farmers, serving as trustees, purchased a small parcel of land on Cove Creek for use as a Methodist church in 1873.¹¹

Although Eli Church was not one of these church trustees, he and his wife, Louise Church, were in the Mabel area, which was served, in 1870, by a post office at Sugar Grove, south of Mabel. The 1880 census lists Eli and Louise heading a household with many children, and one of their neighbors is a twenty-six-year-old school teacher named Newton Combs, which suggests the existence of a school in the area as early as 1880.

Although Eli Church's family appears to have limited literacy, Eli himself could read and write, and he was appointed postmaster for a new office at a place called Church in 1881.¹²

A school ledger from the spring 1882 term documents the children attending an unnamed school in Watauga County School District 27. Eli Church was a member of the school committee, the teacher was N. C. (Newton) Combs, and the children listed are from families associated with Mabel's earlier years.¹³

The second postmaster of Church was the teacher, Newton Combs, who was appointed in early 1886. Newton's father, John Combs, was one of the Methodist trustees from 1873, and Newton went on to marry Hannah Church, Eli's daughter, at some point.¹⁴

The Church post office was discontinued at the end of 1886, and mail was redirected to Zionville, just two miles north of present-day Mabel.¹⁵

Although it remains to be confirmed, it appears the community at or near present-day Mabel was known as Church for at least a few years. Current research also suggests that well before the community was named Mabel, civic institutions, including a church, post office, and a school, were in place.

Most area residents were farm families, but census records from 1880 for other residents who appear to be neighbors of the church trustees include the following: merchant, Benjamin Holsclaw, who employed his brother, Finly, as a clerk; Elijah Greene, gunsmith; Frank Dugger, house carpenter; Joshua Cole, shingle-maker; Jehail Smith, cabinet workman; Silas Dishman, "tending the grist mill;" Newton Matheson, blacksmith; and Harvey Dougherty, who operated

¹¹ Elizabeth Crimson to George Bringham, et al., June 7, 1873, Watauga County Deed Book E, page 596.

¹² Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971, volume 49, page 376, accessed via ancestry.com.

¹³ Mark Combs contributed photographs of the school ledger to ancestry.com, and Mr. Combs described the school as "Mabel School."

¹⁴ Death certificate for Hannah Church Combs, 1942, accessed via ancestry.com

¹⁵ Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971, volume 49, page 376, accessed via ancestry.com.

a dry goods store. The 1880 census also records the Adams family, a farm family living in the area with their three-year-old son, Willett, who would go on to become a local carpenter. No African Americans appear to have lived in this area of the Cove Creek valley.

In 1894, Mabel as a place name made its first known appearance in public records. In that year, McCoy Moretz was appointed as postmaster of the new Mabel Office.¹⁶ Also in 1894, the town's name appeared in the Boone newspaper, the *Watauga Democrat*, for the first known time.¹⁷ That reference notes the closing of a business, while the next reference, in 1895, records the arrival of physician Dr. Frank Greer.¹⁸ In 1896, Branson's *North Carolina Business Directory* included the Mabel Post Office.

In 1896, McCoy Moretz, listed in Branson's Business Directory of the same year, dissolved his business and turned over the entire operation to V. B. Moretz (relationship unknown). The following year, McCoy gave up his duties as post master to Eli Church, who served in that capacity until 1914. Based on notes and advertisements in the *Democrat* throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, other merchants operating in Mabel at the turn-of-the-century were Silas Greene, A. A. Holsclaw, and A. E. Moretz, who bartered for produce.

Aside from the recordation of Newton Combs as a school teacher in the 1880 census and the existence of the 1882 school ledger, it is uncertain what educational opportunities were available in Mabel during the late 1800s. Based on a wedding announcement, Mr. Combs was a minister by 1901, but whether or not he was also teaching school at that point is unclear.¹⁹ Branson's 1896 *Business Directory* does not reference a school or church in Mabel. A note in the *Watauga Democrat* in 1903 mentions a school at Mabel and two teachers: B. B. Dougherty and I. G. Greer.²⁰ A photo believed to have been taken around 1908 shows about fifty students and their teacher, John Eli Combs, who was Newton Combs' brother.²¹ A 1913 article relates that residents had gathered to make "many needed improvements on the school house," and goes on to thank W. M. Reece, "the Prince of Bachelors" for a nice bell and the Reverend N. C. (Newton) Combs for oil to use in painting.²²

¹⁶ Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971, volume 69, page 643, accessed via ancestry.com.

¹⁷ *Watauga Democrat*, July 19, 1894, page 3.

¹⁸ *Watauga Democrat*, July 25, 1895, page 3.

¹⁹ *Watauga Democrat*, November 14, 1901, page 3.

²⁰ *Watauga Democrat*, November 19, 1903, page 3.

²¹ This is not the same building identified as "Mabel School—North Fork" in an undated photo in *The Heritage of Watauga County*; the windows in the two buildings are very different. Additionally, this is not the same building that was being used by the Methodist congregation at that point.

²² *Watauga Democrat*, September 18, 1913, page 3.



Figure 62: Mabel School, circa 1908, published by Mark Combs on ancestry.com; Newton Combs is teacher

Mabel's social and commercial activities also expanded during the early 1900s. At least as early as 1906, the community fielded a traveling baseball team, and A. J. Campbell, listed as a student in the 1882 school ledger and as a photographer in the 1910 census was, by 1918, advertising his portrait services to departing soldiers.²³ Silas Greene was running a jewelry store in Mabel, and a "country singing" at Mabel in 1914 was the scene of "tanking up ... which lead [sic] to the terrible tragedy at Trade, Tennessee."²⁴ What exactly this tragedy was is unclear, but two brothers from Mabel were acquitted of murdering a deputy in Tennessee later that same year.²⁵

Despite the community's apparent willingness to "tank up," revivals and meetings at the Methodist Church and numerous newspaper references to nearby Union Church or Union Baptist Church suggest that religion was a notable component of the community's social life. The still extant, but unused, Methodist Church building in Mabel is dated to 1895, which would make it at least the second of that congregation's buildings, assuming the trustees built a

²³ *Watauga Democrat*, September 19, 1906, page 3, and April 4, 1918, page 3.

²⁴ *Watauga Democrat*, May 14, 1914, page 1, and June 4, 1914, page 3.

²⁵ *Watauga Democrat*, September 10, 1914, page 3.

sanctuary shortly after originally purchasing land in 1873. Branson's 1896 *Business Directory* does not mention any church in Mabel.

By 1910, the population in and near Mabel was still mostly farm families, but, increasingly, men worked in saw mills and timber harvesting while a growing number of women worked as servants in private homes or as laundresses or seamstresses taking in work. The 1920 census records a similar population, but with at least four school teachers in the vicinity.

In 1921, the *Watauga Democrat* applauded the people of Mabel for voting in favor of a special tax collection to fund construction of a new school building.²⁶ It is not known if this building was completed or not.

During the Great Depression, the WPA replaced Mabel's school with a substantial stone building. The Mabel School was one of several WPA schools in Watauga County. The largest and most architecturally distinct was Cove Creek School, several miles south of Mabel, but three of them, including Mabel's, were very similar, one-story, stone buildings.²⁷

Based on the 1940 census, things remained the same in Mabel as the century progressed. Bert and Hazel Mast were enumerated as a merchant and school teacher, respectively. Olen Younce ran a dry cleaning operation, but most residents continued farming. Fewer investments were made in Mabel's architecture after World War II, but four new buildings were constructed during this era. Eli and Minnie Oliver built a house at the corner of Old U.S. 421 and North Fork Road in the mid-1940s, Baptists and Methodists built new sanctuaries in the late 1940s, and the Younce Family constructed a Ranch house in the mid-1950s.

In 1952, Minnie Oliver retired from the post office after thirty-one years of service. Jasper Thomas took her place and was the postmaster until the office was discontinued in January 1956.²⁸ At some point in the mid-1950s, Bert Mast updated his store while the Methodist congregation built a new church during the mid-twentieth century. Generally, however, it appears that Mabel's heyday had come and gone by the 1950s.

Architectural Context

The population in the northern half of Watauga County is scattered across the landscape. Farmhouses are situated at the foot of hills and mountains, along creeks with fields occupying the floodplains, and the slopes used for pasture land. Where communities or rural centers have formed, these farms are slightly more densely arranged around a church or store situated at a

²⁶ *Watauga Democrat*, August 18, 1921, page 3.

²⁷ Pezzoni, 81.

²⁸ Appointment of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971, volume 51, pages not numbered, accessed via ancestry.com.

crossroad. This pattern is repeated all over Watauga County, but is most intact in the northern reaches where tourism had less of an influence on the local economy.

Prospering farm families built two-story I-houses with sawnwork and elaborate porches described in the county's architectural survey publication as "flights of architectural fancy."²⁹ Other farmers opted for one or one-and-a-half-story center-hall houses to which they applied brackets, decorative shingles, and creative gable-end treatments. Local builders and homeowners worked from nationally-popular Queen Anne and Victorian-era designs, but the use of double-tier porches and general adherence to symmetry create a distinctive Watauga County house style.³⁰



Figure 63: label moldings on Mabel Store and Post Office

The use of label moldings was another peculiar Watauga County tendency documented by architectural historians. A label molding is a piece of trim that extends along the top of a door or window opening and drapes partway down the sides. Writing in the architectural survey publication, Dan Pezzoni suggests that "a group of house carpenters or perhaps one prolific carpenter used label moldings in preference to cornices, peaked lintels, and other embellishments of the regional repertoire. Label moldings are found on Victorian houses, mostly in the Bethel vicinity."³¹

Bethel is in the northern half of Watauga County, but it is several miles west of Mabel. Local tradition holds that at least two carpenters, Willet

²⁹ Pezzoni, 54.

³⁰ Pezzoni, 54-57.

³¹ Pezzoni, 53.

Adams and John Johnson, worked in Mabel during the late nineteenth century, and the census records another builder, Frank Dugger, living in the Mabel vicinity during this period. This suggests that the use of label moldings was a local preference used by many carpenters rather than the work of a single craftsman.

Willet Adams is credited with building the Mabel Methodist Church in 1895, but he would have been only about eighteen years old at the time.³² John Johnson is credited with building the John Combs House, also known as the John Johnson House. An 1895 contract documents Johnson's agreement to build Union Baptist Church, which was only about a half-mile away from Mabel.³³ What Union Baptist looked like is unknown, but its dimensions were the same as Mabel Methodist. One member of Union's building committee was Eli Church. Given the family relationship between the Church and Combs families, the similarities among the late-nineteenth century buildings in Mabel, and John Johnson's known association with the John Combs House and the Union Baptist Church, it seems likely that John Johnson was the builder of choice among Mabel's community members.

John B. Johnson was born in the Mast community, south of Mabel. When he was about forty-two years old, and about four years after building Union Baptist Church, Johnson purchased the land on which the John Johnson House stands. In 1913, he sold the property and it appears he may have moved to Blowing Rock.³⁴

As the twentieth century progressed, Craftsman influence crept into the repertoire of local builders. The use of native stone sometimes differentiated these houses from national bungalows, but overall, the county's architecture shed most of its local idiosyncrasies during the 1920s and 1930s. In Mabel, Bert and Hazel Mast built their stone-veneer bungalow in 1938.

Rural churches and schools were often indistinguishable from one another in the late nineteenth century, with most of them being frame, gable-front structures. Commercial buildings were, most commonly, gable-front, frame structures also, although some examples incorporated false-fronts or parapets to hide the gable roof form.

Schools, however, became a focus of concerted architectural study during the 1920s. The state began producing designs for larger, consolidated school buildings as road improvements and buses made consolidation feasible. The goal was reducing the number of one-room schools and providing students with clean, well-lit, well-maintained, and modern learning environments.

³² John Johnson House, WT 427, State Historic Preservation Office Survey File, Raleigh, N.C.

³³ Mark Combs contributed a photograph of a contract for the construction of Union Baptist Church, dated 1895, between John Johnson and church trustees, accessed via ancestry.com.

³⁴ U.S. Census records, 1900, 1910, and 1920, accessed via ancestry.com, and J.B. Johnson and wife, to N.M. Church, October 13, 1913, Watauga County Deed Book 16, page 468.

Mabel followed these patterns. Its layout and density is similar to other rural settlements in Watauga County, while its stock of buildings reflects the county's trends and tendencies. The community's nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century houses have lost many distinguishing characteristics over time, but, originally, they featured the enriched and ornamented gables and porches common on many houses of the time in Watauga County. The John Johnson House has been renovated, but its original, double-tier porch was an outstanding example of the county's tradition of elaborate porches.

The village's oldest commercial and church buildings are also good examples of the gable-front frame buildings used in communities across the state, and five of Mabel's six late-nineteenth- or twentieth-century buildings (the Eli and Louise Church house, the accompanying springhouse, the former Mabel Methodist Church, the former Mabel Store and Post Office, and the Jack Campbell House) feature the distinctive label molding described in *The Architectural History of Watauga County*.

Mabel has two buildings from the 1930s: the Bert and Hazel Mast House and the Mabel School. Both buildings' basic design could be found anywhere in North Carolina: the Mast House is a bungalow and the school is a one-story design with banks of large windows, but stone exteriors on both buildings place them firmly in Watauga County. Additionally, the school's use of stone reflects the WPA's emphasis on native materials in construction.

Like the rest of the county, Mabel's buildings became less regional over time. Two mid-century houses and both churches are typical designs that could have been built anywhere in North Carolina during the 1940s and 1950s. At the Mast Store in Mabel, a brick façade was installed on an earlier building to update the edifice and make it appear more like the stores being built all over the state in the 1950s and 1960s.

Comparable Examples

Valle Crucis is likely Watauga County's best-known rural historic district. It is located in southern Watauga County and is listed on the National Register. It retains late-nineteenth-century commercial buildings and houses, as well as a stone WPA school building very similar to Mabel's. Valle Crucis' commercial buildings are more substantial and more architecturally significant than Mabel's, and it retains an excellent concentration of late-nineteenth-century houses with high architectural integrity. Valle Crucis, however, is located in the fertile Watauga River valley, and the community's architecture reflects its citizens' wealth, which Mabel's residents did not enjoy in the narrower Cove Creek valley. Furthermore, Valle Crucis has a unique history with an influential association with the Valle Crucis Episcopal Mission which dates from the 1840s.



64: Valle Crucis School

Similarly, Clark's Creek Rural Historic District, also in the southern region of the county, was determined eligible for the National Register in a 2015 environmental review, but its association with the revival of handicrafts during the 1930s and its strong historical ties to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church set this district apart from Mabel.

Northern Watauga County is dotted with settlements such as Mabel. Very few of them, however, have each of the features Mabel possesses: houses, one or more church buildings, commercial buildings, and a school.

Sweetwater, Forest Grove, and Beaver Dam, are all located in the same general vicinity of Mabel but to its southwest, and all retain some elements of a larger community. Each retains a small number of scattered houses centered on either an old store building (or cheese factory in the case of Beaver Dam) or a church, but none of these places retain all of three institutions seen at Mabel: church, commercial building, and school.



Figure 65: Beaver Dam Cheese Factory

Bethel retains its WPA school, which is very similar to Mabel's, but its commercial buildings and church are all later twentieth-century structures, while the remaining farmhouses are scattered too widely to create visual cohesion.



Figure 66: Bethel School



Figure 67: Bethel, 20th-century commercial buildings

Specifically in the Cove Creek valley, six communities were distributed along the creek from its headwaters near Tennessee to its mouth at the Watauga River.

At the south end of the valley, the Sugar Grove community retains only two houses and one store building. Just north of Sugar Grove is the imposing Cove Creek High School building, which is listed in the National Register, but it is located about three-quarters of a mile away from the original nucleus of Sugar Grove with no community fabric between the two locations.

Sherwood, the next community north of Cove Creek, is marked only with an unremarkable and altered turn-of-the-twentieth-century commercial building.

Continuing north along the valley is Amantha, which presents a neat cluster of buildings including the remarkable, Gothic, brick Henson Chapel Methodist Church and its predecessor, a frame, gable-front building. Amantha also retains several late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century houses, but it does not have commercial buildings or a school.

Mast is the next community moving north, but nothing remains to represent that settlement.



Figure 68: House in the Mast community area

Mabel is north of Mast, and two miles north of Mabel is Zionville, the northern-most community in the Cove Creek valley. Zionville was one of the larger communities in the Cove Creek valley, but it retains only a turn-of-the-twentieth-century church and a small number of altered early twentieth century houses. No historic commercial buildings or schools are extant.

National Register Evaluation

The architectural integrity of Mabel's individual buildings has been negatively affected by the addition of modern replacement materials, and three buildings have been moved, affecting their integrity of location. These deficits, however, affect every other valley community the investigator visited in northern Watauga County: vinyl siding is ubiquitous across the entire county, and in a region with limited level space for buildings, moving buildings is common practice. Mabel retains a strong sense of place with a high degree of integrity of feeling, setting, and association. Although some individual building's integrity of design, workmanship, and materials has been diminished by alterations, when taken as a whole, the larger community retains a substantive level of integrity in these areas that is necessary for National Register eligibility.

The Mabel Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with rural community development in Watauga County. Mabel is one of six communities that dotted the Cove Creek valley from its mouth at the Watauga River to its headwaters near Tennessee. Of those communities, Mabel retains the most architectural and

historic integrity with a concentration of buildings creating a recognizable community with commercial, religious, educational, and residential buildings. Rural Watauga County's agricultural development coincided with the creation of small rural communities that provided goods and services for local farm families. Some farmers and families concentrated their efforts at or near specific locations, such as crossroads or water crossings, and small communities developed. The farmers and these small communities were mutually dependent, with the latter typically offering limited shopping, professional services, churches, educational facilities, and social and cultural outlets.

The Mabel Historic District is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B for its association with the lives of persons significant in our past.

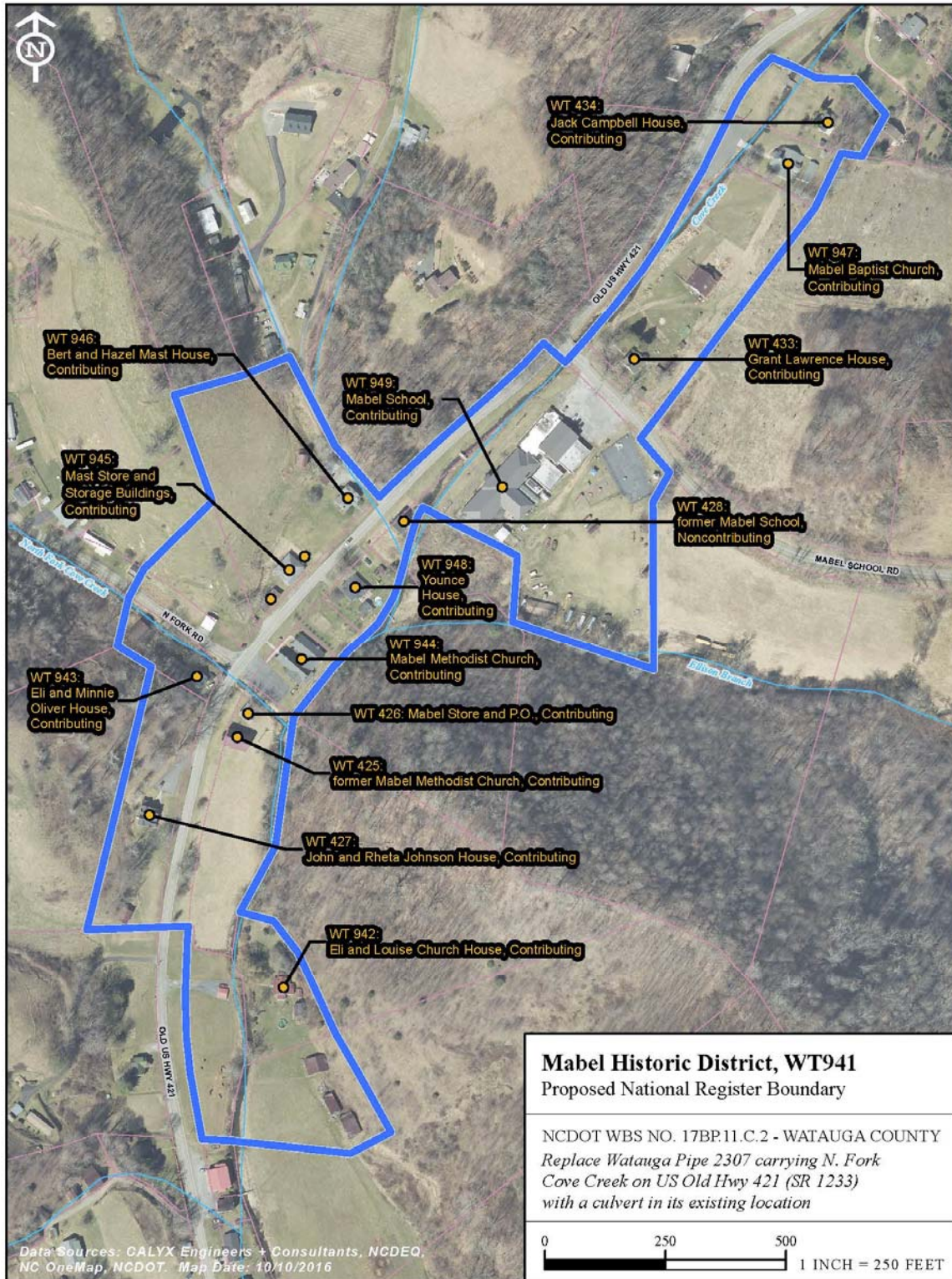
The Mabel Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics and spatial relationships of a North Carolina mountain valley community: a collection of loosely concentrated houses, a small group of commercial buildings, one or more churches, and a school building. Mabel's components lack individual distinction, and examples of Victorian-era houses and commercial buildings with far greater architectural integrity remain throughout the county, but concentrated community collections of houses, churches, commercial buildings, and a school are uncommon. Six such settlements are located in the Cove Creek valley, but only Mabel retains intact examples of each type of building that each of these places would have had: residences, churches, a school, and commercial buildings.

The Mabel Historic District is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D because it has not yielded nor is it likely to yield information important to prehistory or history.

Mabel's proposed period of significance begins in 1880, the earliest estimated construction date of the district's buildings, and ends in 1966, the National Register's fifty-year cut-off.

Boundary Description and Justification

The Mabel Historic District Boundary encompasses the greatest concentration of historic resources in the community of Mabel. The district is narrow and linear, following Cove Creek, and the east and west boundaries generally follow rear property lines or the edge of the valley floor.



69: Proposed National Register Boundary

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