



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

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Roy Cooper

Secretary D. Reid Wilson

May 17, 2021

Clay Griffith
Acme Preservation Services
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Asheville, NC 28804

cgriffith.acme@gmail.com

RE: Historic Structures Survey Report for Lees-McRae College to Renovate five campus facilities, landscaping, roadwork, & accessible pathways, Lee-McRae College, Banner Elk, Avery County, ER 20-1367

Dear Mr. Griffith:

Thank you for your April 26, 2019, transmittal of the above-referenced report. We have reviewed the report and offer the following comments.

We concur that Lees-McRae College is eligible for listing as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significant contributions to the development of higher education in Avery County and under Criterion C for its collection of architecturally significant buildings, constructed from the 1920s through the 1960s and forming a cohesive campus environment. While the report does not address the contributing/non-contributing status of the buildings within the district, we have concluded, based on the contents of the report, that the buildings constructed more than 50 years ago should be considered contributing to the historic and architectural character of the campus.

North Carolina Building (1921-23)

The North Carolina Building is a contributing resource on the campus. Though the windows have been replaced (report pg. 10), the new windows and doors proposed in the scope of work have the potential to adversely impact the building's character. Features installed to make the building ADA compliant should also be reviewed.

Pinnacle Dining Room (1932) & North Carolina Annex (1956-1957)

Built in two phases, the Pinnacle Dining Room and North Carolina Annex are a contributing resource on the campus. The Pinnacle Dining Room is proposed to be rehabilitated, with restoration/preservation of certain features. The project proposes demolition of the North Carolina Annex. After removal, the documentation of June 2020 states that "the space will be restored to again serve as a historical highlight, replicating the function of the original Pinnacle Room terrace." Illustrations in the application materials of last June suggest that new construction will occur in place of the North Carolina annex, though not entirely clear if the work will be limited to landscape features or will include more substantial enclosed space. If demolition is approved, the new construction should be reviewed to ensure it does not adversely impact the character of the surrounding historic buildings.

Tennessee Residence Hall (1925)

The Tennessee Residence Hall is a contributing resource on the campus. Though the windows have been replaced (report pg. 16), the new windows and doors proposed in the scope of work have the potential to adversely impact the building's character. Features installed to make the building ADA compliance should also be reviewed.

Virginia Residence Hall (1926)

The Virginia Residence Hall is a contributing resource on the campus. Though the windows have been replaced (report pg. 17), the new windows and doors proposed in the scope of work have the potential to adversely impact the building's character. Features installed to make the building ADA compliance should also be reviewed.

Cannon Classroom Building (1956-1957)

The Cannon Classroom Building is a contributing resource on the campus. The building is proposed for demolition. If removal is approved, the new construction that will take its place should be reviewed to ensure that it does not adversely impact the character of the surrounding buildings.

We agree with the boundary, shown on page 88 of the report, which includes most of the historic resources associated with the college.

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 919-814-6579 or environmental.review@ncdcr.gov. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above referenced tracking number.

Sincerely,



for Ramona Bartos, Deputy
State Historic Preservation Officer

HISTORIC STRUCTURES SURVEY REPORT

Lees-McRae College Banner Elk, Avery County, North Carolina

**Prepared for:
Lees-McRae College
191 Main Street
Banner Elk, NC 28604**

**Principal Investigator and Author:
Clay Griffith**

**Prepared by:
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April 2021

Historic Structures Survey Report – Lees-McRae College

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Acme Preservation Services, LLC (APS) has completed a Historic Structures Survey Report for the campus of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina, a property approved for the Study List for the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. APS conducted the survey and evaluation on behalf of Lees-McRae College, which plans to rehabilitate five buildings located in the college's Historic Commons. The college seeks a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development direct loan to fund the campus projects. The purpose of the survey and report is to identify and evaluate historic resources present within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) in order to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

The project is located on the campus of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk in the northeastern section of Avery County. The project area consists of the five adjacent buildings to be rehabilitated under the proposed undertaking. The buildings to be rehabilitated include three of the first permanent buildings erected for the school and two classroom and office annexes constructed in the 1950s that visually link the structures. The APE for the project is defined as the block containing the five buildings, bounded by College Drive, Pinnacle Way, and Chestnut Way. As such, the APE is entirely circumscribed by the approximately 375-acre campus of Lees-McRae College.

Architectural historian Clay Griffith of APS completed a survey of the APE and campus buildings in December 2020, photographing and mapping the properties, and authored the report. APS conducted the survey and prepared this report in accordance with the provisions of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological and Historic Preservation (48 FR 44716); 36 CFR Part 60; 36 CFR Part 800; the HPO's *Standards for Historic Structure Survey Reports*, effective September 30, 2019. As a result of the assessment documented in this report, APS recommends that Lees-McRae College is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C in the areas of education and architecture. The eligible boundary for the campus encompasses 53 of the 55 primary resources documented in this report, including academic and administrative buildings, dormitories, other student and staff housing, and the mill pond and dam on the Elk River, which bisects the college's property.

The resources to be rehabilitated as part of the proposed undertaking include three of the college's earliest buildings: North Carolina Building (1923), Tennessee Residence Hall (1925), and Virginia Residence Hall (1927). Two buildings erected in 1957—Cannon Classroom Building and an annex to the North Carolina Building—visually connect the earlier buildings and are proposed for demolition. While the Cannon Classroom Building is a standalone structure, the North Carolina Building annex connects to that structure's west elevation and is built atop the Pinnacle Inn dining room, which was built in 1932. The project calls for removing the portions of the annex added in 1957 and rehabilitating the dining room and outdoor stone terrace that

formed its roof. Each of the structures noted contributes to the eligible campus of Lees-McRae College, but in the opinion of the author the proposed undertaking will have no adverse effect on the eligible property. The two, relatively undistinguished Modernist buildings from 1957 lack individual distinction within the campus district and simply reflect the continuum of development college facilities through the 1950s and 1960s. Removal of the Cannon Classroom Building will have no direct physical impact on the flanking North Carolina and Virginia buildings, while the proposed alterations to the annex wing will remove the 1957 additions and allow for rehabilitation of the 1932 Pinnacle Inn dining room and outdoor terrace. Reclaiming the dining room and outdoor terrace has the potential to enhance the connection between the North Carolina and Tennessee buildings and reassert the original spatial relationships between three original buildings. Removal of the two modern structures from among the core historic buildings does not substantially detract from the overall integrity of the campus and its historic significance.

SSN	Property Name	Eligibility Determination	Criteria
AV0110	Lees-McRae College	Eligible	A, C

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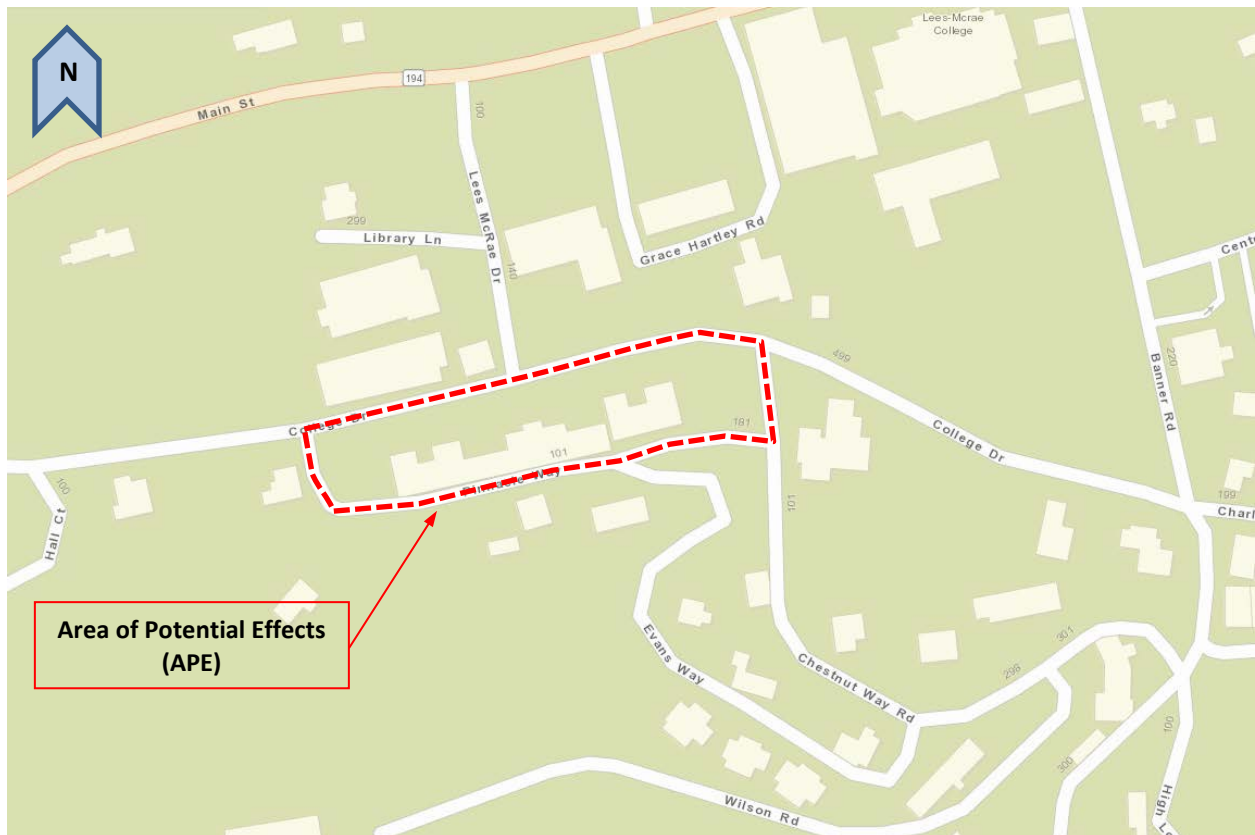
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I. Property Description

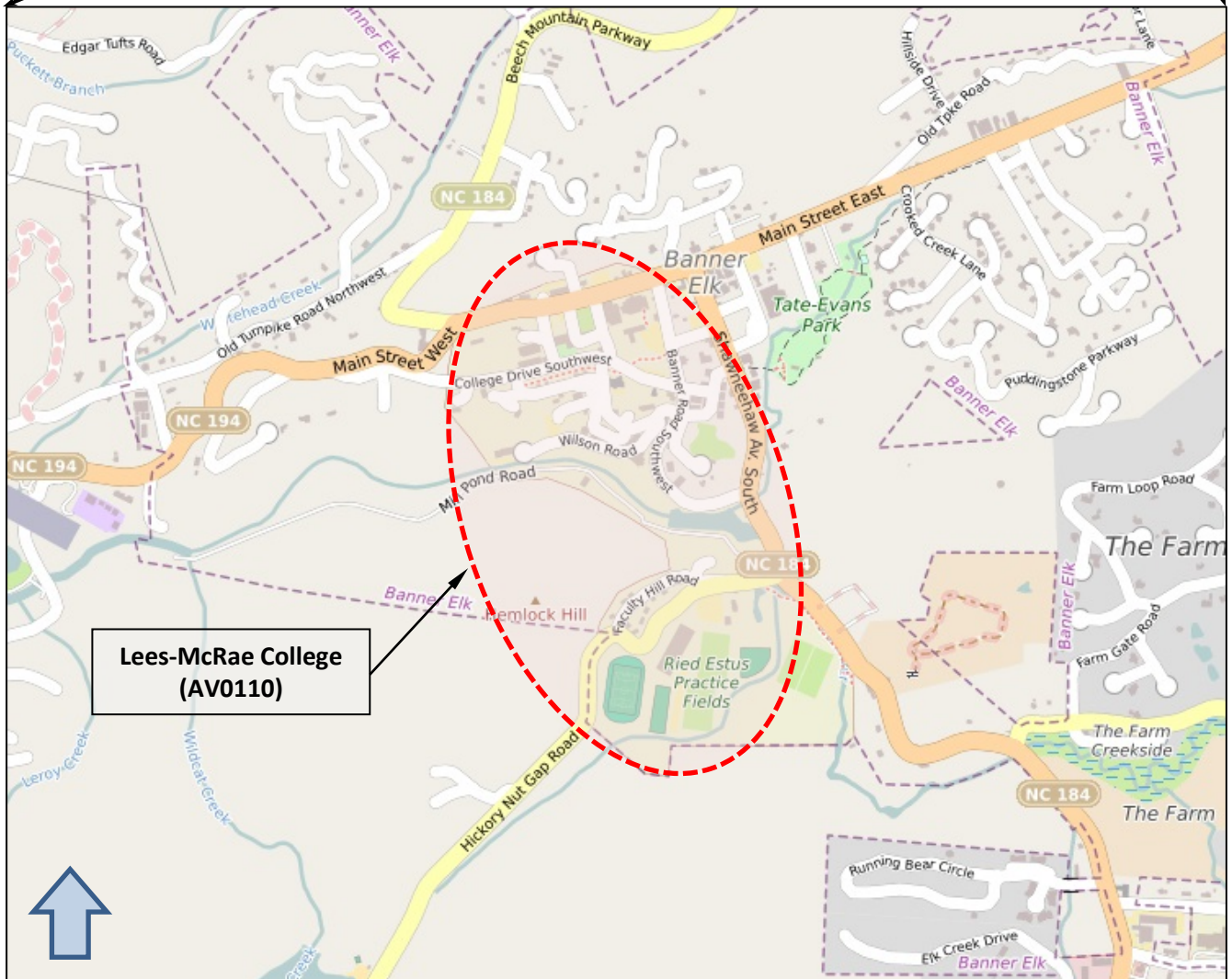
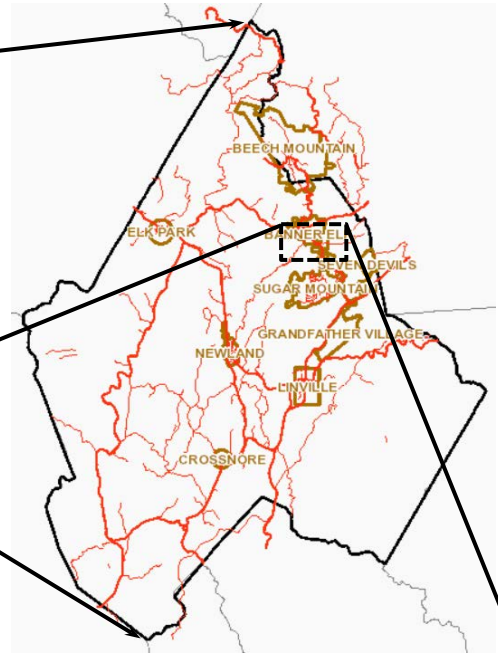
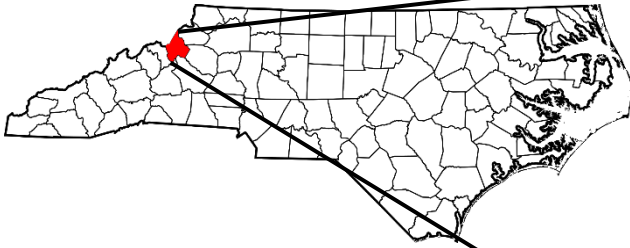
Lees-McRae College is seeking to rehabilitate five of its campus buildings built in the 1920s and 1950s. The majority of the proposed work is to be internal renovations, with additional work addressing deferred maintenance, landscaping, and handicap accessibility. The five adjacent buildings are located in the college's Historic Commons and occupy a ridge on the south side of College Drive. Lees-McRae College (AV0110) was added to the Study List for the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

The Area of Potential Effects (APE) for the project is defined as the block formed by College Drive, Pinnacle Way, and Chestnut Way that contains the five buildings. The APE, which covers approximately three acres, is entirely circumscribed by the college's approximately 375-acre campus.

The campus of Lees-McRae College is located in Banner Elk in the northeastern section of Avery County. Comprising a considerable portion of the small mountain town, the campus generally lies to the south of NC 194 (Main Street) and west of NC 184 (Shawnee Avenue). The Elk River bisects the campus with the main classroom and administration buildings located on the north side of the river. The school's athletic facilities, along with some staff and student housing, are located on the south side of the river.



Project Location Map



**Lees-McRae College
(AV0110)**

II. Purpose of Survey and Report

The purpose of this survey and report is to evaluate the potential eligibility of Lees-McRae College in order to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The college seeks funding from USDA Rural Development to finance the proposed renovation of five campus buildings. The school, which was approved for the Study List in 1986, is the only property located within the APE for the subject project. APS conducted the survey and prepared this report in accordance with the provisions of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological and Historic Preservation (48 FR 44716); 36 CFR Part 60; 36 CFR Part 800; the HPO's *Standards for Historic Structure Survey Reports*, effective September 30, 2019.

III. Methodology

APS conducted a search of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (HPO) survey files to acknowledge that Lees-McRae College (AV0110) was previously recorded and approved for the National Register Study List in 1986. A further search of HPO survey files revealed one other previously recorded property—Banner Elk Presbyterian Church (AV0101)—located adjacent to the college campus. The properties were documented by Ted Alexander as part of a multi-county reconnaissance survey to identify historic properties in the mid-1980s.

Architectural historian Clay Griffith of APS completed a survey of the APE and campus buildings in December 2020, photographing and mapping the properties, and authored the report. In addition to research conducted through Avery County GIS, additional information and documentation was made available by Lees-McRae College from its archive and facilities maintenance department. A substantial amount of material available in the HPO survey files was completed by graduate students at Appalachian State University in 2014 under the supervision of historic preservation professor Kristen Baldwin Deathridge. The students' research proved valuable in organizing the inventory of campus buildings. Extensive research was undertaken using the school's yearbook, *Ontaroga*, to determine the dates of construction for campus facilities and view documentary photographs of the buildings through the years.

IV. Property Evaluation – Lees-McRae College

Resource Name	Lees-McRae College
HPO Survey Site Number	AV0110
Location	191 Main Street, Banner Elk
PIN(s)	185805180388, 185917008614, 185917102442, 185917104512, 185805097696
Date(s) of Construction	1920s-1960s
Eligibility Recommendation	Eligible (A, C) – education, architecture



Lees McRae College, Historic Commons, College Drive, view to southeast (www.lmc.edu)

Description

Lees-McRae College comprises the campus buildings and grounds of this four-year private college located in Banner Elk in northeastern Avery County, North Carolina. The small mountain town of Banner Elk is organized around the intersection of NC 194 (Main Street) and NC 184 (Shawneehaw Avenue), and the campus, which occupies a large area to the south of Main Street and west of Shawneehaw Avenue, encompasses a substantial portion the town. The heart of campus is the Historic Commons located on College Drive, Lees-McRae Drive, and Chestnut Way, which includes several of the earliest buildings on campus arranged along a ridge. The Elk River flows in a westerly direction through the center of campus and separates the main academic and administrative buildings on the north side of the river from staff and student housing and the athletic facilities on the south side. Lees-McRae College consists of approximately 375 acres, including extensive woodlands along the Elk River and covering Hemlock Hill. The developed areas of the campus, however, only account for approximately 50 acres of the college’s property.

The northern portion of the Lees-McRae campus contains the school’s earliest buildings including a historic core of buildings designed by Johnson City architect Donald R. Beeson (1881-1983) and constructed in the 1920s. These main buildings forming Lees-McRae’s Historic Commons emulate the rustic stone architecture of the neighboring Banner Elk Presbyterian

Church (AV0101) at 420 College Drive SW, which was envisioned by Rev. Edgar Tufts, founder of the school and pastor of the church. Renowned Asheville architect Richard Sharp Smith designed the gable-front church building in an English-inspired picturesque mode to replace an earlier frame building and, with Rev. Tufts' encouragement, incorporated native stone as the principal building material. The rough-cut stone buildings that Beeson designed for the college echoed the visual character of the church and established a distinct architectural style on the nascent Lees-McRae campus. The regionally unique style drew on a strong tradition of local craftsmanship, along with naturalistic design principles, and relied heavily on abundant native stone and wood building materials.

The visual aesthetic established by the first buildings on campus carried through the twentieth century as the college expanded. Many of the facilities erected during various building campaigns in the middle decades continued to emphasize local materials, especially native stone, even as the forms and massing reflected Modernist trends. The new buildings were increasingly geometric in form with flat roofs, minimal surface planes, and restrained embellishment, but the prevalence of stone, brick, and timber for exterior walls and accents interweaves the new and old structures defining the physical character of the campus. Following the initial flurry of building activity in the 1920s, which saw the construction of six principal buildings on campus, the pace continued with another five or six structures erected in each of the next three decades as the college grew. The 1960s saw the greatest number of new buildings erected for the school in any decade with approximately 20 structures. From the 1970s forward, Lees-McRae has typically added two or three new buildings each subsequent decade and engaged in extensive renovations and physical improvements to its facilities.

The surrounding landscape and manmade elements within the campus contribute equally the physical character of Lees-McRae. While the Elk River stitches together the northern and southern portions of the campus, the forest-covered silhouette of Hemlock Hill provides a scenic backdrop for the buildings of north campus. Stone walls and steps can be found throughout campus, bordering the narrow, serpentine roads and extending the material connection of the school buildings to the landscape. In recent years, the Class of 1959 raised money to replace the stone walls and steps in front of the North Carolina Building and restore a wrought-iron entryway created by renowned artisan and former Lees-McRae instructor Daniel Boone VI. Local sculptor Wayne Trapp created the Roots and Wings statue that stands in front of the Chaffee Administration Building in 1986, as part of a campus-wide improvement program of the same name initiated by Lees-McRae President Bradford Crain.¹ A central area of campus known as Swank Park lies at the rear of the Chaffee Building and in front of the buildings forming the Historic Commons. The natural greensward was further developed between 2005 and 2011 with the installation of brick sidewalks and new planting beds, a wooden gazebo, two statues by William and David Turner, and a Veterans' Memorial.

The following inventory catalogs the buildings and resources of Lees-McRae College evaluated as potentially contributing campus resources for the subject project. This includes the vast majority of resources associated with the college save the athletic facilities located

¹ *Ontaroga* (1987), 2-5.

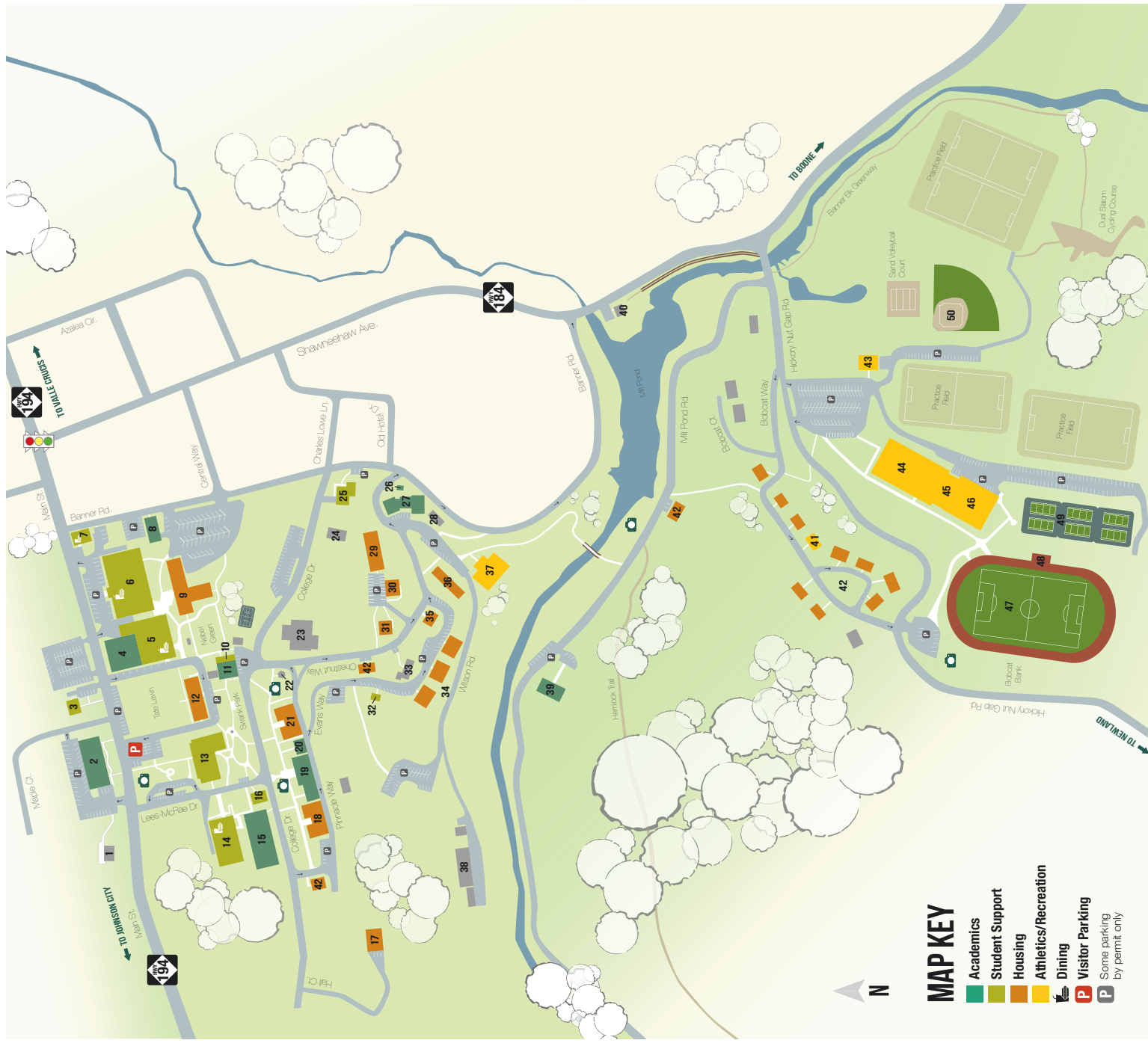
south of Hickory Nut Gap Road (SR 1342). The complex of training facilities, practice fields, tennis courts, and running track are all less than 50 years of age. The small number of other resources not evaluated in this report includes Hemlock Hall, the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, and the Facilities Service Building. With the exception of Hemlock Hall, the other buildings are less than 50 years of age, with the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center having been erected in the past ten years. Hemlock Hall, a two-story wood-shingled residence that belonged to the Hall sisters, was acquired by the college and restored for the president's home in the late 1980s.² Hemlock Hall is located a short distance off campus and separated by other privately owned land.

The inventory of resources is organized beginning with the earliest buildings on campus that form the Historic Commons and are the subject of the proposed rehabilitation work. This includes the block bound by College Drive, Pinnacle Way, and Chestnut Way. From the Historic Commons the inventory generally moves north along Lees-McRae Drive to Main Street (NC 194) before moving east and south to Banner Road. The inventory proceeds through a series of residence halls and cottages on Chestnut Way, Evans Way, and Wilson Road before rejoining Banner Road and continuing south to the Mill Pond and Dam. All of the inventoried resources described on the south side of the mill pond include a cluster of student and faculty residences located on Bobcat Way and Bobcat Court, an area once known as Faculty Hill. The resources are listed with their current names as cataloged in Lees-McRae's register of facilities and on campus maps. The numbers in parentheses following the resource names reflect the keyed numbers on the official campus map, which is included with this report (<https://www.lmc.edu/admissions/visit/files/lmc-campus-map.pdf>). Of the 55 primary resources documented in this report, 45 resources are considered to contribute to the historic significance and integrity of Lees-McRae College. The remaining ten resources are considered to be non-contributing due to their age or loss of integrity following extensive alterations or additions. Two of the documented resources located on the periphery of campus were ultimately excluded from the proposed boundaries of the potentially eligible college historic district.

² *Ontaroga* (1989), 21, 32.

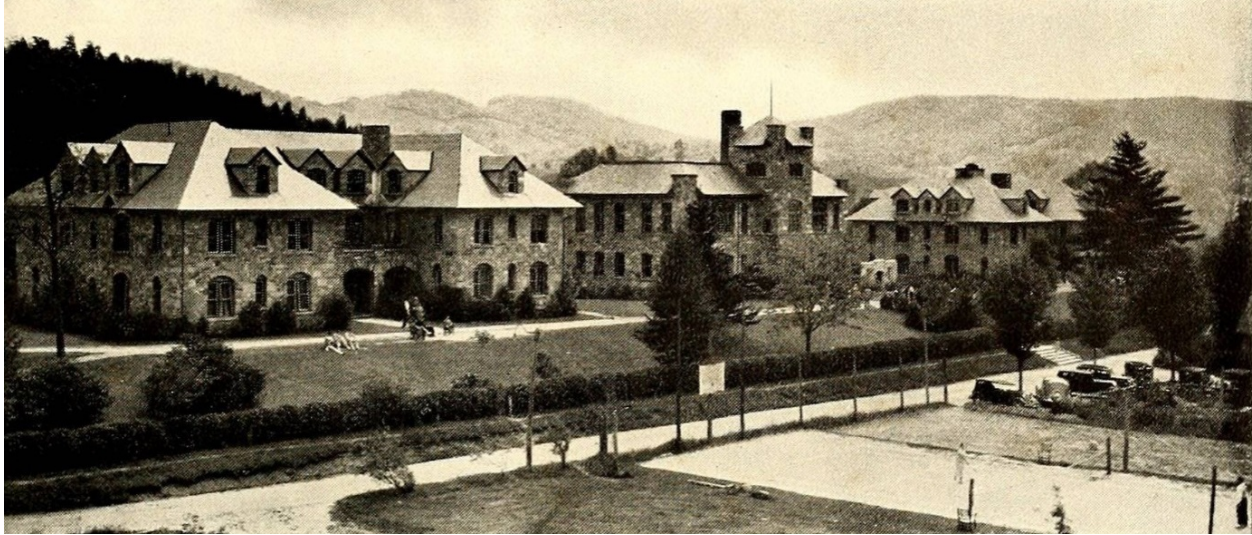
1. Robb Center (Campus Safety and Security)
2. May School of Nursing and Health Sciences
3. Business Affairs Building
4. Hayes Auditorium
5. MacDonald Dining Hall
6. Miller Commons
7. Cannon Student Center
8. Willy's Bar & Grill
9. The Exchange Bookstore
10. Einstein Bros. Bagels
11. Lauritsen Technical Theatre and Design Studio
12. Avery Residence Hall
13. Office of Health Services
14. Theatre Arts Building
15. Tate Residence Hall
16. Chaffee Center
17. Office of Admission
18. Shelton Learning Commons
19. Burton Center for Student Success
20. Bowman Building
21. Rock House (*President's Office*)
22. Hemlock Hall
23. Tennessee Residence Hall*
24. North Carolina Building*
25. Cannon Classrooms
26. Virginia Residence Hall*
27. Tufts Tower*
28. Banner Elk Presbyterian Church
29. Banner Elk Methodist Church
30. Needham Alumni House
31. Kiln Building
32. Whitesell Art Building and Costume Shop
33. Carriage House
34. McMillan Residence Hall
35. Bentley Residence Hall
36. Baldwin Residence Hall
37. Stephenson Center for Appalachia
38. Daniel Boone VI Cottage
39. Hemlock Village
40. Cannon Honors Cottage
41. Student Apartments
42. Facilities Complex
43. May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
44. Athletic Office Annex
45. Student Houses
46. Hagler Athletic Center
47. Williams Physical Education Center
48. Rhea-Lyons Indoor Swimming Pool
49. Chesley Indoor Tennis Courts
50. Tate Field
51. Arthur-Lauritsen-Sanders Track
52. Outdoor Tennis Courts
53. Softball Field

*Historic Commons



MAP KEY

- Academics
- Student Support
- Housing
- Athletics/Recreation
-  Dining
-  Visitor Parking
-  Some parking by permit only



Lees-McRae College Historic Commons, 1930s (*Ontaroga* (1937), p. 29)

North Carolina Building (#19), 304 College Drive, ca. 1921-1923, 1932, 1957

Begun in 1921 and completed in 1923, the North Carolina Building was the first in a series of new, more permanent buildings for the Lees-McRae Institute. The monumental two-story hip-roof building was constructed of randomly coursed rubble masonry by local rock masons. A projecting three-story central tower dominates the façade and is capped by a pyramidal roof with crenellated corners. The building features similar crenellated corners with first-story buttresses, arched window openings, and a round, stone chimney rising at the southeast corner. The original windows have been replaced and around 1957, a one-story hip-roof entrance vestibule was constructed at the front of the building, covering the original entrance at the base of the tower. The vestibule is finished with irregularly coursed ashlar masonry, and the entrance is composed of two single-leaf glazed-and-paneled wooden doors flanked by sidelights and surrounding a wood paneled center bay. The rear elevation is three stories tall, with a daylight basement exposed at the rear of the building. An exterior metal fire stair is attached to the rear elevation, and a central round-arch entry door accesses the basement.

The building has been enlarged twice since its construction. The first addition, in 1932, expanded the basement level to contain a rustic dining room with an open stone terrace above. The terrace featured an entrance vestibule with an arched entry door and stairs to the dining room below, an open stone fireplace, and rustic railings and balustrades of unpeeled logs. The dining room was displayed heavy timber frame construction, a large stone fireplace, stone fountain set within an arched niche, dark stained wood walls and floors, and wrought iron light fixtures crafted by Daniel Boone VI. The exterior wall of the dining room, visible at the rear, remains covered in wood shingle siding, although the windows have been replaced with one-over-one double-hung sash. The facility served the college from its construction until the 1960s.

The second addition to the North Carolina Building was built on top of the Pinnacle Inn dining room and terrace in 1957. Designed by Ormond and Vaughan Architects of Shelby, North Carolina, the office annex is a one-story flat-roof addition to the west elevation of the North

Carolina Building. The annex is concrete block construction with a façade of irregularly coursed stone veneer, although the outline of original vestibule remains visible along with the original double-leaf arched entry doors and an twelve-light wood-frame window. A recessed bay adjacent to the original vestibule contains entrance to the annex and is reached by concrete steps. A flat-roof canopy on metal pipe columns shelters the entrance bay and original vestibule. Large windows groups are located to either side entrances and consist of two pairs of six-light metal-frame sash topped by aluminum fascia and resting on cast-concrete sills. The rear elevation is a thin brick veneer with bays divided by channel iron. The aluminum-frame windows are typically vertical five-light sash, but four replacement double-hung sash have been installed at the west end. The annex overhangs the rear elevation of the Pinnacle Inn dining room below and the projecting wall is supported by steel I-beams.

Planning for the North Carolina Building began in the late 1910s. Rev. Tufts appealed for financial support and approached architect Donald R. Beeson of Johnson City, Tennessee, to design the school's central buildings. Tufts wanted the building to be constructed of native stone, which could be found in abundance throughout the area. Beeson considered the design work to be straightforward, but the construction process carried out by local farmers with limited rock masonry experience was tedious. Ground was broken for the North Carolina Building in 1921 and construction continued until early 1923. Rev. Tufts passed away on January 6, 1923, just as the North Carolina Building reached completion. The building opened in April for the 1923 school term.



(#19) North Carolina Building (1923), façade, view to south from Lees-McRae Drive



(#19) North Carolina Building (1923), façade, view to south



(#19) North Carolina Building (1923), oblique view to southwest



(#19) North Carolina Building Annex (1957), oblique view to southwest



(#19) North Carolina Building Annex (1957), entrance, view to south



(#19) North Carolina Building Annex (1932 and 1957), rear elevation, view to northwest



(#19) Pinnacle Inn Dining Room (1932), interior view to northwest



(#16) Rock House (ca. 1920), oblique view to south

Rock House (#16), 174 Lees-McRae Drive, ca. 1920

Built around 1920, the Rock House was given to the school by Sue Hall and her sisters, Jane and Jessie, of Wilmington, North Carolina. The one-and-a-half-story stone bungalow is capped by a gambrel roof and constructed of local stone. The dwelling has an exterior stone end chimney, board-and-batten siding in the gambrel ends, and nine-over-nine and six-over-six double-hung wood sash windows. The engaged full-width porch is carried on square stone posts. It shelters a central single-leaf entry door flanked by paired windows. The solid wood door displays original hardware including oversized iron strap hinges.

The Hall sisters were summer residents in Banner Elk, and Sue Hall served as one of the early instructors at Lees-McRae. The Rock House, which now houses the office of the president, originally served as a place for meetings and social gatherings before it became the school's weaving shop. Under the school's work program, students were required to work two days a week with a number of opportunities in the handicrafts department including woodwork, wrought iron work, and hand weaving. The handicraft products were used in the college buildings, sent to the Grandfather Home orphanage, and sold in the school's gift shop during the summer. During the summer the building functioned as a gift shop and tea room.³ In 2000, the centrally located building became the college president's office.

³ "Handicrafts for Both Boys and Girls Feature Lees-McRae Educational Method," *Watauga Democrat*, July 7, 1938; Margaret Tufts Neal, *And Set Aglow a Sacred Flame: History of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association, 1895-1942* (Banner Elk, NC: Pudding Stone Press, 1983), 112.



(#18) Tennessee Residence Hall (1925), façade, view to south

Tennessee Residence Hall (#18), 272 College Drive, ca. 1923-1925, 1943, 2002

Built on the site of Lees-McRae's early frame buildings, the Tennessee Residence Hall is a two-and-a-half-story nine-bay building on a full basement that is exposed at the rear. Constructed of randomly coursed stone masonry around a concrete frame, the edifice is designed in a "U" shape with a recessed three-bay central block flanked by three-bay wings. The building has a hip roof with gabled wall dormers piercing the eave in the interior of "U" and front-gable dormers on the other roof slopes. An interior stone chimney rises from each wing, and a one-story three-bay stone portico shelters the façade of the recessed central block. The portico has segmental arch openings and a crenellated parapet. The rear and five-bay side elevations have a combination of gabled wall dormers and front-gable roof dormers. The windows, which typically appear in pairs, are replacement two-over-two double-hung sash with horizontal muntins that are set within segmental arch openings.

The Tennessee Residence Hall opened as a girls' dormitory in 1925 with 46 bedrooms and a dining hall located in the basement. Beginning in 1926, the school opened the building as a hotel known as Pinnacle Inn during the summer months rather than let it sit idle. In March 1943, a fire severely damaged the west wing of the building, which was being used as the library. The wing was rebuilt and the first floor remodeled for offices.⁴ The interior was completely renovated in 2002.

⁴ *Ontaroga* (1968), 61; "Flames Destroy Large Dormitory at Lees-M'Rae," *Asheville Citizen*, March 23, 1943.



(#21) Virginia Residence Hall (1926), façade, view to south

Virginia Residence Hall (#21), 334 College Drive, ca. 1925-1927

Virginia Residence Hall was the last of the school's three principal buildings to be erected on a ridge at the center of campus. Opened in 1927, the two-and-a-half-story nine-bay edifice is constructed of randomly coursed stone masonry around a concrete frame. The building is designed in a "U" shape with a recessed three-bay central block flanked by three-bay wings. The hip-roof building has gabled wall dormers piercing the eave in the interior of "U" and front-gable dormers on the other roof slopes. An interior stone chimney rises from each wing, and a one-story three-bay stone portico shelters the façade of the recessed central block. The portico has segmental arch openings and a crenellated parapet. The rear and five-bay side elevations have a combination of gabled wall dormers and front-gable roof dormers. The windows, which typically appear in pairs, are replacement two-over-two double-hung sash with horizontal muntins that are set within segmental arch openings.

Virginia Residence Hall opened as a girls' dormitory with administrative offices, a laundry, and a swimming pool. In the early 1930s, a science laboratory was created in the basement. In 1936, Virginia Residence Hall became a boys' dorm but switched back in the mid-1940s after a fire damaged the Tennessee building. Female residents displaced by the fire were moved to Virginia and the boys relocated to other men's residences on campus.⁵

⁵ *Ontaroga* (1968), 68.

Cannon Classroom Building (#20), 318 College Drive, ca. 1957

The Cannon Classroom Building is a freestanding Modernist structure located between the North Carolina Building and Virginia Residence Hall. Designed by Ormand and Vaughan Architects of Shelby, North Carolina, and built in 1957, the building, containing two classrooms, is concrete block construction with a veneer of irregularly coursed ashlar masonry and is capped by a flat roof. The façade presents a central stone-veneer bay with two single-leaf glazed entry doors sheltered by an attached, flat-roof metal canopy supported by metal pipe columns. The façade window groups on either side of the entrance bay consist of four 6-light metal-frame industrial awning sash with cast-concrete sills and an aluminum fascia below the roof eave. The rear elevation displays a continuous bank of windows, subdivided into four groups of three 6-light metal sash. An exterior metal stair is attached to the rear elevation and accesses a walkway of metal grating. A stone archway links the façade of the classroom structure and the adjacent North Carolina Building, while the walkway passing between the two buildings provides handicap accessibility to the North Carolina Building. A partition wall divides the interior into two large classrooms, which are finished with concrete block walls, carpeted floors, and acoustical tile ceilings.



(#20) Cannon Classroom Building (1957), façade, view to south



(#20) Cannon Classroom Building (1957), façade, view to south



(#20) Cannon Classroom Building (1957), rear elevation, view to northeast

Tufts Bell Tower (#22), Chestnut Way, ca. 1924

The striking stone tower situated on a rise between the first stone buildings of Lees-McRae and the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church is a fifty-foot-high hexagonal structure with reinforced concrete columns. The tower is clad with randomly coursed local stone and features corner buttresses, a crenellated parapet with cast-concrete copings, and round-arch window openings on the base level. A single-leaf entry door framed by weatherboards occupies the north face of the structure. On the upper level of the tower, each segmental-arch opening is filled with a unique pattern of brick and stone. Stone mason Finley Townsend called the pattern infill his “colored windows.”⁶

Construction of the tower was one of the first projects organized by Edgar H. Tufts as administrator of Lees-McRae following the death of his father. The school’s water supply was piped from a spring on Beech Mountain, but Tufts rejected the idea of a typical metal tank on a steel frame to use for storage. He proposed a stone covered tower to match the proposed new school buildings and enhance the campus aesthetic. The tower, which now houses chimes and electrical communications antennae, was dedicated and named Tufts Bell Tower in 1992.

McRae House (#42), 236 College Drive, ca. 1920

Situated just west of the Historic Commons, the one-story frame dwelling likely predates the earliest stone buildings associated with Lees-McRae College. The hip-roof house rests on a stone foundation and is covered with wood shingle siding. The engaged full-width porch features stone corner piers and a shingled balustrade. Two tapered wood posts covered with wood shingles and resting on stone piers mark the porch opening, which is accessed by concrete steps with stone cheek walls. A hip-roof side wing extends from the west elevation. Now used for student housing, an exterior stone chimney has been removed from the west elevation and the windows are replacement one-over-one sash.

Chaffee Administration Building (#13), 149 Lees-McRae Drive, 1954-1955

Located on a rise above Main Street and oriented north toward Beech Mountain, the Chaffee Building is a one-story stone building erected to house an auditorium, the school’s library, and administrative offices. The building is finished with irregularly coursed ashlar block masonry. The front section of the building has an asphalt-shingle-clad hip-roof parapet, a front-gable entrance pavilion, and a front-gable bay at the west end of the façade. The entrance bay, which frames replacement double-leaf glazed doors and plate-glass sidelights and transoms, features a peaked parapet and corner piers with concrete copings, a vertical vent in the gable end, and a flat concrete slab entrance hood supported by projecting stone wall sections. The entrance is flanked by replacement window groups—three to the east and four to the west—consisting of four-light metal sash with two awning windows topped by a metal transom panel. The front-gable bay at the west end of the façade is blind. The front section of the building

⁶ Neal, 114-115.

adjoins a one-story flat-roof section forming an “L” shape at the rear of the building and wrapping around the west elevation. A recessed bay in the interior angle of the “L” at the rear of the building forms a covered entrance, which contains replacement double-leaf glazed doors. The windows are typically six- and eight-light metal-frame casements set on cast-concrete sills.

Considered the culmination of a productive building campaign for the college that began at the end of the Depression, the Chaffee Building was named in honor of A. C. Chaffee of Morganton, North Carolina, who served on the school’s building committee. A retired industrialist, Chaffee was a trustee of the college and former president of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association. Chaffee and his wife contributed generously to the cost of the \$150,000 building, which contained a 600-seat auditorium, the Alison B. Stirling Library, conference rooms, and all of the school’s executive and business offices.⁷

Bowman Science Building (#15), 285 College Drive, ca. 1963

The science building is a two-story-plus-basement Modernist-influenced edifice constructed of buff-colored brick and local stone from Beech Mountain. The façade and rear corners of the building are covered with irregularly coursed ashlar blocks, while the side elevations and the rear elevation are brick veneer. The building is capped by a flat roof with overhanging eaves. The façade, accessed from a brick walkway connecting to Lees-McRae Drive, has a vertical central panel of brick with two single-leaf glazed entry doors on the lower level surmounted by a large window divided by patterned muntins. An attached timber frame entry porch with a shed-roof and square wooden posts on stone piers shelters the entrance. The side elevations are 20 bays long and pierced by six-over-six double-hung sash windows with brick sills. An inset corner entrance bay is located on the upper level of the building and accessed at grade from College Drive. The entrance consists of double-leaf glazed entry doors framed by plate-glass sidelights and transoms.

The new science building, named for Adam Bowman, former chairman of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association Board of Trustees, was completed in 1963. The facility contains classrooms and laboratory space for chemistry, physics, biology, and zoology. It was built at a cost of approximately \$300,000.⁸

Greenhouse, ca. 1970 – A freestanding gable-roof greenhouse stands at the rear (west) of the science building. The metal-frame structure has translucent panels covering the walls and roof and a single-leaf metal-frame entry door on the west elevation.

⁷ *Ontaroga* (1968), 95; Philip Clark, “Lees-McRae College Serves Mountain Area,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 28, 1954; “A.C. Chaffee Dies at 86,” *Asheville Citizen*, October 22, 1962.

⁸ *Ontaroga* (1964), 21.



(#22) Tufts Bell Tower (1924), view to west



(#15) McRae House (ca. 1920), oblique view to southwest



(#13) Chaffee Administration Building (1955), façade, view to south



(#13) Chaffee Administration Building (1955), oblique rear view to east



(#15) Bowman Science Building (1963), façade, view to west



(#15) Bowman Science Building (1963), oblique view to northwest

Dotti M. Shelton Learning Commons (#14), 150 Lees-McRae Drive, 1969, 2016

Formerly known as the James H. Carson Library, the three-story brick building with stone accents was renovated in 2016 and reopened as the Dotti M. Shelton Learning Commons. The metal-clad front-gable roof is offset to create a clerestory facing Beech Mountain to the north. The façade consists of irregularly coursed ashlar blocks with three projecting walls that screen the main entrance and support two new metal-roof canopies added during 2016 renovations. The architect intended the slanting roof of the façade to reflect the surrounding mountain terrain, while the large windows on the side elevations behind the façade flood the entrance and stair vestibules with natural light. The south elevation, which faces Bowman Science Building, is typically blind brick veneer walls with a central five-bay section defined by brick piers and relieved by two- and three-light plate-glass windows with aluminum-clad spandrels and fascia. The lower level of the south elevation is recessed to form an open walkway with metal railings. The interior is organized around an open, central reading room.

The library, which had been located in the Chaffee Administration Building since 1955, moved into its new modern home in 1969. At 33,000 square feet, the new facility offered nearly ten times the amount of storage, study, and work space as the previous library. Architect Crawford Murphy of the firm of Holland and Reviere designed the new building at a cost of nearly \$750,000. It was dedicated in honor of James H. Carson, a Charlotte realtor and trustee of Lees-McRae for 30 years. In 2016, the building underwent a \$2.5 million renovation spearheaded by Ed and Dotti Shelton of Dobson, North Carolina, longtime supporters of the school.⁹

Robb Center for Career Exploration (#1), 350 Main Street W, ca. 1934, ca. 2013

The two-story side-gable stone building sits on the north side of Main Street opposite the entrance to campus on Lees-McRae Drive. The building is nestled against the hillside with its lower story accessed on the south elevation and the upper story accessed from the north. It is constructed of randomly coursed rubble masonry and features an exterior stone chimney, metal-clad roof, and flat-arch window openings with cast-concrete sills. The windows are typically six-over-six replacement sash. The three-bay façade has two single-leaf entrances, one of which is sheltered by an attached front-gable canopy supported on curved wooden brackets.

Built around 1934, the building was extensively renovated around 2013 to house the college's Career Exploration Center and campus security and safety office.

May School of Nursing and Health Sciences Building (#2), Main Street W, 2013-2014

Located on the north side of Main Street across from the Chaffee Administration Building, the two-story hip-roof edifice was constructed in 2013-2014 to house the School of Nursing and was designed by the architecture firm of McMillan Pazdan Smith. The façade is nine bays wide and the brick building is capped by a metal-clad hip roof with hip-roof pavilions at either end

⁹ *Ontaroga* (1970), 20-25.

and the pavilions are enlivened with stone veneer corner pilasters and paired wooden brackets under the eaves. Attached one-story hip-roof porches shelter the entrances at the front and rear of the 18,000-square-foot building.

Tate Residence Hall (#12), 269 Main Street W, ca. 1932, 1962

Tate Residence Hall is a four story, hip-roof rectangular edifice of randomly coursed stone masonry using local pink granite. The building is fourteen-bays wide with three-story one-bay wings at either end. Four interior stone chimneys rise from the building. A projecting one-story entrance bay has a stepped parapet roof and double-leaf entry doors surmounted by an elliptical transom. Three low-relief bays rise against the façade and terminate in gabled parapets. The center pavilion is two bays wide and framed by pilasters with decorative stone work. The two bays at the ends of the façade are framed by stone pilasters. The window openings on the façade have segmental arches with articulated stonework, while the windows on the side wings are flat-arched. The original six-over-one double-hung windows have been replaced with one-over-one sash. The end wings are capped by flat roofs that served as open balconies with metal railings. Exterior metal stairs attached to the wings access the roof-top balconies.

Built in 1931 to replace an earlier 25-bed hospital, the building originally served as Grace Hospital and was funded through gifts from Miss Helen Jenkins and the Duke Foundation. Rev. Edgar Tufts established the hospital in 1907 and placed it under the direction of Dr. W. C. Tate in 1910. As need for the hospital grew, Dr. Tate oversaw a nurses training program operated in connection with Lees-McRae College. After a new regional hospital was constructed in 1961, the building became a women's residence hall for the college named in honor of Dr. Tate.¹⁰

Business Affairs Office (#3), Main Street W, ca. 1948

Built as a residence around 1948, the one-story side-gable building is constructed with irregularly coursed ashlar masonry. It features a gable-front wing, attached front-gable entry porch, an interior stone chimney, and a one-bay gable-roof side wing to the west that is clad with aluminum siding. The windows are typically six-over-six double-hung sash. The entry porch, which is supported by slender wooden posts, has an open gable roof and shelters a single-leaf wooden door. A wooden handicap-accessible ramp attached on the east elevation provides access to a secondary side entrance. The building occupies a relatively level lot with an open grass lawn in front of the house extending down to Main Street.

¹⁰ *Ontaroga* (1962), 169.



(#14) Dotti M. Shelton Learning Commons (1969), façade, view to west



(#1) Robb Center for Career Exploration (ca. 1934), oblique view to northwest



(#2) May School of Nursing and Health Sciences (2014), façade, view to north



(#12) Tate Residence Hall (1932), façade, view to south



(#12) Tate Residence Hall (1932), oblique rear view to northeast



(#13) Business Affairs Office (ca. 1948), façade, view to north

Hayes Auditorium (#4), 235 Main Street W, 1975, ca. 2015

Located adjacent to Main Street (NC 194), the two-story theater building is a brick veneer box with a flat parapet roof. The square shaped building features a recessed and canted entrance at the northwest corner overlooking Main Street. The entrance consists of two sets of double-leaf glazed metal-frame doors with single-light transoms and plate-glass side panels surmounted by two metal panels. A single brick corner post supports the cantilevered corner of the building above the entrance bay.

The auditorium, with seating for 850 people, was erected in 1975 as part of a campus-wide building campaign that included the dining hall and new physical education complex.¹¹ It was renovated in 2015 with new lighting, stage flooring, and seating.

MacDonald Dining Hall (#5), 145 Grace Hartley Road, 1974

Located at the rear of Hayes Auditorium, MacDonald Dining Hall opened in 1974 as part of the same building campaign as the auditorium.¹² The one-story modern institutional building is brick veneer with a flat parapet roof. An inset corner entrance is located on the southwest portion of the building, facing the Historic Commons. The windows are typically single-light fixed sash set within recessed openings.

Cannon Student Center (#6), 191 Main Street W, 1987-1988

The Cannon Student Center is a large rectangular building of steel frame construction and finished with brick veneer and stone accents. The building has an asphalt-shingle hip roof, exterior stone chimney on the east elevation, and five projecting front-gable wings on the façade. The largest of the front wings contains a glazed entryway with two sets of double-leaf doors, stone steps, and a brick ramp extending to the west. A rear entrance wing with a gabled roof projects at an angle onto a brick courtyard.

Ground was broken for a new student activities center in 1987 on the site of the tennis courts in front of Avery Residence Hall. The Cannon Foundation spurred a fundraising campaign for the new \$1.9 million facility. The 22,000-square-foot student center contains an auditorium, gallery, snack bar, post office, various recreational rooms, study lounges, offices for student clubs and organizations, and student development offices.¹³

The Exchange Bookstore (#7), 159 Main Street W, ca. 1964, ca. 2017

¹¹ *Ontaroga* (1975), 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ontaroga* (1987), 5; *Ontaroga* (1988), 10-11; *Ontaroga* (1989), 14-17.

The one-story hip-roof commercial building containing the college's bookstore stands at the corner of Main Street and Banner Road. The substantially rehabilitated building has an asphalt-shingle hip roof, irregularly coursed ashlar masonry walls, corner window groups with transoms, and a projecting hip-roof wing with a recessed corner entrance bay. A square wooden post on a stone pier supports the overhanging corner of the recessed bay, which shelters a glazed entrance vestibule with a single-leaf metal-frame door. The east elevation of the building is clad with synthetic siding and the rear two bays of the building are brick veneer with four-over-four windows.

The commercial building that occupies this corner lot on Main Street was originally built around 1964 as the North Carolina National Bank. Over the years, the building, also known as the Lauritsen Building, has served as a snack bar and student gathering place. The Exchange Store, which had operated near the center of campus since the 1950s, was relocated to the building in 2017, following a thorough renovation.¹⁴

Lauritsen Technical Theatre and Design Studio (#8), 146 Banner Road, 2014

The one-and-a-half-story frame building was erected in 2014 to be used for building sets and supporting the college's performing arts and summer theater programs. The building has a metal-clad front-gable roof with two shed dormers on either side, board-and-batten siding, and weatherboards on the gable ends and dormers. An attached front-gable entry porch is timber frame construction and shelters double-leaf glazed-and-paneled wooden doors. An exposed truss in the porch roof is echoed by a decorative truss in the upper gable end of the building.

Avery Residence Hall (#9), 176 Banner Road, 1965

The four-story flat-roof Modernist residence hall has concrete and steel frame construction clad in brick laid in running bond. The façade is fourteen bays wide, while a three-story wing at the rear is six bays deep. The bays typically consist of paired or single replacement one-over-one windows separated vertically by raised panels of stacked soldier-course brick that provide some texture to the exterior walls. A tall, one-story entrance pavilion positioned off-center on the façade is clad with irregularly coursed stone masonry and capped by a flat roof. The entrance pavilion is three bays wide with full-height window bays and a single-leaf metal-frame glazed entry door. Concrete steps rise to access the entrance.

Plans for a new men's dormitory began in the early 1960s, and the school acquired a pasture adjacent to campus from Eva Banner, widow of R. O. Banner, in 1964 (DB 61:468). Morrison Construction Company of Shelby, North Carolina, served as contractors for the building, which opened in 1965 with 216 residents. Some of the masons who had worked on the Tennessee and Virginia dorms, as well as the Rock House, worked on the new brick building.¹⁵

¹⁴ *The Pinnacles*, Spring 2018, 9.

¹⁵ *Ontaroga* (1968), 26.



(#4) Hayes Auditorium (1975), façade, view to south



(#5) MacDonald Dining Hall (1974), oblique view to northeast



(#6) Cannon Student Center (1988), oblique front view to southwest



(#7) The Exchange Bookstore (Lauritsen Building) (ca. 1964), oblique view to southeast



(#8) Lauritsen Technical Theatre and Design Studio (2014), façade, view to west



(#9) Avery Residence Hall (1965), façade, view to southeast

Old Laundry Building, Grace Hartley Road, ca.1946

Located behind Tate Residence Hall and at the rear of the Theatre Arts Building, the laundry is a one-story stone structure built into a grassy bank. The building is uncoursed stone masonry with a tall, stepped parapet, stone copings, and a three-bay façade, which is composed of central double-leaf entry doors flanked by replacement six-over-six windows. The façade parapet screens an asphalt-shingle front-gable roof capping the building. An attached metal-clad gable-roof canopy shelters the entrance and is supported by diagonal wooden brackets. The side elevations are five bays deep and punctuated by two-light windows with cast-concrete sills. Although it originally served as the laundry facility for Lees-McRae, it does not appear to be in use at present.

Theatre Arts Building (#11), 375 College Drive, ca. 1952, ca. 2000

Built in the early 1950s to house the student-run Exchange Store, the one-story frame building faces College Drive and presents an irregularly coursed stone façade with a low stepped parapet. The tall front-gable roof with applied half-timbering and the attached front-gable entry porch with an exposed truss were added around 2000. A smaller, attached front-gable entry porch with an exposed truss at the east end of the façade was added at the same time. The main entry consists of a single-leaf glazed entry door flanked by sidelight and topped by transoms and a group of three plate-glass windows surmounted by four-light transoms. A horizontal window band on the façade is framed wooden members that divide the solid panels and multi-light windows. The secondary porch shelters double-leaf multi-light entry doors. Due to its sloping site, the building increases to two stories at the rear with a concrete block foundation, synthetic siding, and applied half-timbering. A section of stone veneer frames the lower-level entrance on the west elevation, which has an attached gable-roof entry porch sheltering a replacement single-leaf entry door.

The Exchange began in the 1930s as part of the school's work program. A faculty member managed the store, which was staffed by students. The Exchange originally sold a wide variety of goods including farm supplies and gasoline, as well as groceries and school supplies. The new centrally located store building was built around 1952 at the intersection of College Drive and Chestnut Way, right on the edge of campus. The store originally featured a recessed entrance and storefront at its center. The building was remodeled in the late twentieth century, but continued to house the Exchange Store until 2017, when it moved to the renovated bank building on Main Street.¹⁶

Student Residence House 1, 168 Chestnut Way SW, ca. 1964

The one-story side-gable Ranch house was built around 1964. The frame dwelling is capped by a metal-clad roof and covered in board-and-batten siding with a brick veneer apron on the façade. The house has an exterior brick end chimney, two-over-two double-hung sash windows with horizontal muntins, and a single-leaf glazed-and-paneled entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop. A partially exposed basement of concrete block is visible at the rear,

¹⁶ *Ontaroga* (1953), n.p.; *The Pinnacles*, Spring 2018, 9.

and a basement garage bay on the north elevation is entered through a replacement metal overhead door.

Daniel Boone VI Cottage (#33), 184 Chestnut Way SW, 1935, 2010-2012

The one-story stone and frame cottage is a long, horizontal dwelling with a projecting wing at the west end of the residence gives the building an L-shaped plan. The residence has an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, stone façade chimney, and an attached front-gable entry porch supported by square wooden posts. It rests on a stone foundation, which reveals a full lower level at the rear. While the façade is finished with irregularly coursed stone masonry, the side and rear elevations are covered with weatherboards. The end wing, however, terminates with a front-gable block clad in chestnut bark shingles. The porch, which displays curved post brackets and decorative purlin brackets in the gable end, shelters a single-leaf solid wood entry door with iron strap hinges and key plates. The windows are typically fifteen-light wood-frame casements with cast-concrete sills, although the original façade windows are twelve-light casements. On the rear elevation, a central single-leaf solid wood door with iron strap hinges is flanked by replacement casement windows and projecting one-story polygonal bays. A one-story shed-roof sun porch is located at the east end of the dwelling. The projecting end wing has a recessed single-leaf entrance bay and group of three replacement windows. The side and rear elevations are covered with weatherboards. The interior of the cottage retains a prominent stone fireplace, wood paneled walls, and hardware and decorative ironwork crafted by Daniel Boone VI, who served as an instructor at Lees-McRae.

Originally known as the Practice House when it was constructed in 1935, the building was used a practice setting for the home economics department. It was built under the director of the school's woodworking department.¹⁷ The house provided space for students to learn housekeeping, cooking, home planning, and management. The dwelling was also known as the Jenks Cottage for part-time residents Anna B. Jenks and Alice Southworth, who resided variously at Southern Pines, North Carolina; Miami, Florida; and Deer Isle, Maine. Beginning in 2010, Deborah Buxton, wife of Lees-McRae President Barry Buxton, undertook a thorough rehabilitation of the cottage, earning an award from Preservation North Carolina in 2012.¹⁸ It is now used as a guest house for the college.

Cannon Honors Cottage (#35), 210 Chestnut Way SW, 1927, 1952

The two-story stone dwelling is constructed of randomly coursed rubble masonry and capped by a metal-clad hip-roof. A one-story side-gable wing extends to the northwest and terminates in a decorative archway. The three-bay façade of the house is dominated by an attached one-story entry porch entered through a monumental stone archway with articulated keystones, voussoirs, and impost blocks. A peaked parapet with a concrete coping shields the

¹⁷ Margaret Neal, "Lees-McRae College Rendering Service to Young People of Mountains," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 19, 1936.

¹⁸ Megan Hall, "The Buildings of Lees-McRae: Mystical Power," *High Country Magazine*, June 2013, 37-39.

wood-frame gable roof of the porch, which shelters the single-leaf round-arch wooden door. The house features interior stone chimneys, a second-story oculus window on the northwest elevation, and a stone patio built above a one-car garage attached at the rear. The gable ends of the side wing are covered with smooth stucco and visible rock aggregate. Original six-over-one double-hung windows have been replaced with one-over-one sash throughout.

The residence was built in 1927 for President Edgar H. Tufts and his family, who had resided in the Presbyterian manse after taking charge of the school following the death of his father, Rev. Tufts. Two of Edgar Tufts' children were born in the house and his wife Eugenia dedicated herself to the landscaping and gardens surrounding the cottage. It was later converted to a small men's dormitory. James M. Cannon Jr. of Charlotte generously funded the renovation of the building in 1952. Today it serves as a dormitory for honors students.¹⁹

Hemlock Village I (#34), 135 Evans Way, 2003

One of three similar suite-style housing units built for students in 2003, the one-story frame residence occupies a steeply sloping site with a full lower story exposed at the rear. The building is capped by a tall side-gable roof, gable-on-hip side wings, and an attached shed-roof entrance wing with a decorative front gable. The entrance wing, which opens into a central passage with stairs to the lower level, is clad with stone veneer, while the remainder of the building has wood shingle siding. The building has double-hung and four-light fixed-sash windows and attached decks on the rear.

Hemlock Village II (#34), 145 Evans Way, 2003

One of three similar suite-style housing units built for students in 2003, the one-story frame residence occupies a steeply sloping site with a full lower story exposed at the rear. The building is capped by a tall side-gable roof, gable-on-hip side wings, and an attached shed-roof entrance wing with a decorative front gable. The entrance wing, which opens into a central passage with stairs to the lower level, is clad with stone veneer, while the remainder of the building has wood shingle siding. The building has double-hung and four-light fixed-sash windows and attached decks on the rear.

Hemlock Village III (#34), 155 Evans Way, 2003

One of three similar suite-style housing units built for students in 2003, the one-story frame residence occupies a steeply sloping site with a full lower story exposed at the rear. The building is capped by a tall side-gable roof, gable-on-hip side wings, and an attached shed-roof entrance wing with a decorative front gable. The entrance wing, which opens into a central passage with stairs to the lower level, is clad with stone veneer, while the remainder of the building has wood shingle siding. The building has double-hung and four-light fixed-sash windows and attached decks on the rear.

¹⁹ *Ontaroga* (1968), 59.



Old Laundry Building (ca. 1946), façade, view to southwest



(#11) Theatre Arts Building (ca. 1952), façade, view to north



Student Residence House (ca. 1964), 168 Chestnut Way, oblique view to southwest



(#33) Daniel Boone VI Cottage (1935), façade, view to southwest



(#33) Daniel Boone VI Cottage (1935), rear elevation, view to northwest



(#35) Cannon Honors Cottage (1927), oblique view to southeast



(#35) Cannon Honors Cottage (1927), oblique rear view to north



(#34) Hemlock Village I-III (2003), oblique view to west

Stephenson Center for Appalachian Studies (#32), 189 Evans Way, ca. 1934

The one-and-a-half-story frame dwelling rests on a randomly coursed stone foundation, is covered with wood shingle siding, and is capped by an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof. The compact structure features a first-story stone-veneer façade, exterior stone end chimney, and two gabled wall dormers. The windows are typically replacement eight-light casements that appear as singles or in pairs. An enclosed front-gable entrance bay clad in wood shingles was added later.

Physical Plant Operations Building, 211 Evans Way, ca. 1992

Located below Pinnacle Way as it passes at the rear of the Historic Commons, the utilitarian building is a tall, one-story metal-frame building with a concrete block foundation, metal siding, and a low-pitched front-gable roof. A single-leaf metal entry door and tall garage bay with a metal overhead door are located on the front of the structure, which stands at the west end of a gravel parking area off Evans Way. The physical plant for the college, built in the 1940s, stood immediately to the east before it was removed in 2019, leaving only remnants of its foundation walls visible.

Baldwin Residence Hall (#31), 215 Chestnut Way SW, 1938

The two-story hip-roof residence hall is constructed of randomly coursed rubble masonry and has a metal-clad roof, exterior stone chimney, and replacement one-over-one windows. The original attached one-story hip-roof porch and stone balustrade has been replaced with new square wooden posts and railings. The porch shelters a replacement single-leaf entry door. The window openings have flat-arch lintels with articulated voussoirs and stone sills.

In the late 1930s, Janet M. Reid of Orlando, Florida, gave money to construct a men's dormitory in memory of her husband, W. W. Reid, a significant supporter of the college. When completed in 1938, the W. W. Reid Memorial Cottage was the first structure of a notable building campaign for the college. The dormitory was later known as Old Reid, after the Reid family donated money for a new dorm in 1943, named in honor of Janet Reid and known as New Reid (present-day Bentley Residence Hall).²⁰

Bentley Residence Hall (#30), 196 Chestnut Way SW, ca. 1947

The two-story rectangular dormitory building has an asphalt-shingle hip roof and is constructed of randomly coursed stone masonry. The building is four bays wide and three bays deep with gabled wall dormers piercing the roof eave. Front and rear entrances are recessed and framed by ashlar masonry surrounds. The window openings have flat-arch lintels with articulated voussoirs and stone sills, and the windows are typically one-over-one replacement sash.

²⁰ *Ontaroga* (1968), 53, 55; "Lees-McRae College Gets New Dormitory," *Watauga Democrat*, November 25, 1943.

Annie J. Reid of Orlando, Florida, donated money for the construction of a new dormitory, which began in 1943. Construction was halted until after World War II due the shortage of materials and manpower. Completed around 1947, the new dorm was named the Janet M. Reid Memorial Cottage, in honor of Annie Reid's mother. It was commonly known as New Reid to distinguish it from another older dormitory given by the Reid family in 1938 (present-day Baldwin Residence Hall).²¹

McMillan Resident Hall (#29), 199 Chestnut Way SW, 1959

Situated on a hillside behind the Banner Elk United Methodist Church, the two-story Modernist-influenced dormitory features a flat roof with an overhanging concrete slab eave and a partially exposed basement at the rear. The building is constructed of irregularly coursed ashlar masonry on the exterior and has an attached one-story flat-roof entrance vestibule on the west elevation. The windowless façade of the vestibule is relieved by a recessed entrance bay containing replacement double-leaf entry doors. The side elevations are eight bays long and pierced by paired, replacement one-over-one windows. The window openings have flat-arch lintels with articulated stone voussoirs and keystones, cast-concrete sills, and recessed spandrels between the first and second stories. Visible windows at the basement level appear to be original metal-frame six-over-six sash.

Construction on the dormitory began in 1958 with a \$100,000 grant from the Amelia Upshur Foundation. Executors of Amelia McAlister Upshur's estate dedicated the building in September 1959 in memory of William H. McAlister and his daughter Amelia. Due to its siting, McAlister Hall earned a reputation as a boisterous men's dorm as noise from its residents carried and echoed across the back of campus.²²

Needham Alumni House (#25), 310 Banner Road SW, ca. 1958

The rambling one-story frame Ranch house occupies a corner lot with a grass lawn sloping down to the intersecting streets. The building rests on a concrete block foundation with a veneer of irregularly coursed stone masonry. The house is capped by a metal-clad gable- and gable-on-hip-roof and covered with unpainted weatherboards. Two stone chimneys rise from the interior of the building, which is arranged, in plan, as two intersecting squares. An attached shed-roof porch carried on square wooden posts shelters a single-leaf entry on the east elevation. The windows throughout appear to have been replaced with paired single-light casements.

From the 1950s to the late 1980s, the dwelling served as the college president's primary residence. It was subsequently used as the home of the vice-president and a meeting center. In

²¹ *Ontaroga* (1968), 55.

²² *Ibid.*, 45.

the early 2000s, the building became the Alumni House and serves as headquarters for the alumni association.²³

Whitesell Art Building and Costume Shop (#27), 276 Chestnut Way SW, ca. 1943, 2018-2019

Originally built as the woodworking shop, the rambling one- and two-story Rustic Revival style building is constructed of irregularly coursed stone masonry. The building is defined by two sections with the two-story hip-roof block at the north end being the principal section. The north block is four-bays wide with an asphalt-shingle roof, exposed rafter tails, an exterior stone chimney, and six-over-six double-hung windows. The frame second story is covered with weatherboards. An attached one-story front-gable entry porch is timber frame construction and carried by square wooden posts. It shelters a single-leaf glazed-and-paneled wooden entry door. The porch has decorative timber purlin brackets in the gable end. The window and door openings on the first story have stone sills and heavy timber beam lintels. The group of four windows to the south of the entrance bay is topped by a continuous timber lintel with a carved lower edge and timber mullions. On the rear elevation, a wooden ramp accesses a single-leaf entry door at the back of a gable-roof ell.

The southern section of the building is T-shaped with a side-gable roof and a front-gable end wing. The section is similarly finished with an asphalt-shingle roof, exterior stone chimney on the rear elevation, exposed rafter tails, and six-over-six double-hung wood sash windows. The windows generally appear in pairs with stone sills. A single-leaf solid-wood entry door at the north end of the façade is framed by a heavy timber lintel and accessed by stone steps. The façade of the front-gable end wing is embellished with triangular eave brackets, weatherboards in the gable end, and a continuous timber lintel with decorative carvings spanning a group of four windows. The south side elevation displays three picture windows consisting of a central 20-light fixed sash flanked by six-over-six double-hung sash. On the rear elevation, a wooden ramp from the sidewalk along Banner Street accesses a single-leaf entry door in the gable end.

Kiln Building (#26), West side Banner Road SW at intersection with Chestnut Way, ca. 1943, ca. 2018

The kiln building, a tall, one-story masonry structure located behind Whitesell Art Building, was recently renovated with a metal-clad front-gable roof and an overhang supported on square wooden posts. The kiln is constructed of stone backed by clay tile covered with concrete. The exterior stone walls have been recently restored. Original wooden doors attached with iron hinges to a concrete frame on the façade have been replaced with infill panels and replacement double-leaf doors although the hinges remain.

²³ Hall, 42.



(#32) Stephenson Center for Appalachian Studies (ca. 1934), oblique view to northwest



Physical Plant Operations Building (ca. 1992), view to west



(#31) Baldwin Residence Hall (1938), façade, view to north



(#30) Bentley Residence Hall (ca. 1947), façade, view to northeast



(#29) McMillan Residence Hall (1959), faced, view to east



(#29) McMillan Residence Hall (1959), south elevation, oblique view to northeast



(#25) Needham Alumni House (ca. 1958), façade, view to west



(#27) Whitesell Art Building and Costume Shop (ca. 1943), façade, view to east



(#27) Whitesell Art Building and Costume Shop (ca. 1943), oblique view to north



(#26) Kiln Building (ca. 1943), façade, view to north

Carriage House (#28), Banner Road SW, ca. 1890s, ca. 1943

Resting on an exposed concrete block foundation, the tall, one-story, front-gable frame building was originally built in the late nineteenth century for the Methodist congregation. The building has an asphalt-shingle roof, weatherboard siding, and entrances and windows at either end. The windows appear to be typically six-over-six double-hung wood sash although there are replacement and missing sash. The northeast elevation has a central single-leaf wooden entry flanked by single windows and accessed by a wooden ramp. A second entrance on this elevation contains a single-leaf four-panel wooden door. A single window is positioned in the upper gable end. The northwest elevation is blind, while the southeast elevation near Banner Road has double-leaf wooden loading doors. The southwest elevation, which is not accessible from the exterior, is organized with a central, single-leaf, two-panel wooden door flanked by six-over-six windows. A replacement window is located in the gable end. Double-leaf wooden doors enter the basement from the southwest elevation.

In the late nineteenth century Lute Banner offered to buy the frame structure and build the Methodist congregation a new church. Banner moved the building a short distance and converted it to a store. Oriented with the gable end facing Banner Road, John Henry VonCanon later established a Ford dealership in the building, which was enlarged with a service wing to the south. He later opened an evergreen nursery and shipped winter greenery from the building.²⁴ At some point, likely in the 1940s, the building was reoriented parallel the road and has served as storage for the woodshop in the Whitesell Building.

Student Apartments (#36), Wilson Road, ca. 1965

Constructed around 1965, the apartment building is a two-story brick and frame structure containing twelve units and resembling a motel. The building, which overlooks the old gymnasium with a view of the Elk River below the dam, was originally constructed to house faculty members.²⁵ The structure has a metal-clad side-gable roof, plywood sheathing on the upper level, single-leaf six-panel entry doors, and six-over-six double-hung windows. An engaged two-tiered portico extends the full width of the south elevation, providing exterior corridors for all the apartments. The portico is supported by metal posts with a thin metal railing on the second story. A central, exterior, double-run of stairs rises to access the portico's upper level. The metal stairs are reinforced by a timber-frame base and sheltered by a shed-roof extension of the main roof slope.

²⁴ Michael Hardy, "Early Methodist Churches in Avery County, *The Avery Journal*, October 19, 2016; "Original Methodist Church," Historic Downtown Banner Elk Tour (<https://pocketsights.com/tours/place/Original-Methodist-Church-33503>; accessed January 6, 2021).

²⁵ *Ontaroga* (1968), 94.



(#28) Carriage House (ca. 1890s), oblique view to southwest



(#36) Student Apartments (ca. 1965), façade, view to northwest

Carol and Glenn Arthur Student Recreation Complex (#37), 144 Wilson Road, 1937-1938, 2008

The original Reynolds Gymnasium, which was largely built with student labor to reduce costs and offset their tuition, was substantially remodeled and renamed in 2008. The one-story rectangular gym with a tall side-gable roof and front-gable entrance wing was rehabilitated with an enlarged entrance wing, replacement windows, and new siding on the side and rear elevations. The stone veneer façade of the original building appears to remain intact.

The Reynolds family of Winston-Salem contributed \$25,000 to the construction of the facility, which was originally named the William N. Reynolds Gymnasium. Holding 400 spectators, the building was the site of many college and community events. The gym was not only used for athletic events, but also for dances and as a movie theater. A small number of male students resided in basement of the building.²⁶

Mill Pond and Dam, East side of NC 184 (Shawneehaw Avenue), south of intersection with Banner Road, ca. 1912, ca. 1997

Samuel Banner originally dammed the Elk River below its confluence with Shawneehaw Creek in the 1870s and built a log dam to power a two-story grist mill. In 1912, Rev. Tufts hired an engineering professor from the University of Tennessee to build a hydroelectric plant to serve the school and Grace Hospital. Prof. J. E. Switzer chose the site of Banner's dam for a new stone and concrete structure and oversaw the construction of a 1,000-foot flume to deliver water to a powerhouse downstream.²⁷ The hydroelectric plant, which eventually supplied electricity to much of Banner Elk, closed in the 1950s. The original stone and concrete dam was repaired around 1997 as a result of damage sustained during Hurricane Opal in 1995.

Historic Cheese House (#40), 630 Shawneehaw Avenue, ca. 1917, 2003

Situated at the east end of the mill pond, a one-story front-gable frame dwelling known as the Historic Cheese House occupies an area of land at the confluence of the Elk River and Shawneehaw Creek. Built around 1917, the building is capped by a steeply pitched metal-clad roof and covered with weatherboards. A gable-roof wing projects to the north, with an attached shed-roof entry porch supported by a single square wooden post. An enclosed shed-roof bay is located on the south side of the side wing. The windows appear to be one-over-one double-hung replacement sash with decorative wood shutters. A shed-roof extension projects at the rear.

The Cheese House was constructed by local residents who belonged to the Shawneehaw Cheese Cooperative. The community-based operation produced high quality cheese until it closed during the Depression. A Lees-McRae chemistry professor, who also managed the school's dairy, subsequently lived in the modest structure. The building later served as an office

²⁶ Ibid., 51.

²⁷ Neal, 42-45.

for the local fishing warden. After standing vacant for a number of years, the Greater Banner Elk Heritage Foundation renovated the Cheese House in 2003 for its headquarters. Lees-McRae College currently uses the Cheese House as a small event facility.

Staff Residence 1 (#42), 110 Bobcat Way, ca. 1961

One-story frame Ranch house occupies an elevated site overlooking Hickory Nut Gap Road to the south. The house rests on a raised concrete block basement that contains a garage. The house features an exterior brick end chimney, aluminum siding, a façade picture window, and replacement one-over-one sash. A wood deck wraps around the southeast corner of the house and provides access to a raised concrete stoop and single-leaf entry door. Originally constructed for student or staff housing, the residence is currently used for faculty housing.

Staff Residence 2, 148 Bobcat Court, ca. 1969

The one-story-plus-basement frame Ranch house rests on a continuous concrete foundation with a one-car basement garage on the façade and has an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof. Clad with aluminum siding, the house features a front-gable wing, dentil molding, a façade picture window, and eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows. The main-story windows of the front wing are positioned over decorative wood panels. An attached wooden deck on the façade is reached by wooden steps to the front entrance.

Staff Residence 3, 152 Bobcat Court, ca. 1969

The one-story-plus-basement frame Ranch house rests on a continuous concrete foundation with a one-car basement garage on the façade and has a metal-clad side-gable roof. Covered with aluminum siding, the house features a front-gable wing, interior brick chimney, vinyl soffits, and replacement one-over-one windows. The main-story windows of the front wing are positioned over decorative wood panels. An uncovered concrete stoop accesses the single-leaf front entry and is reached by concrete steps with metal railings.

Staff Residence 4, 160 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house occupies a relatively level lot at a curve in the road. The house has a metal-clad side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, replacement one-over-one windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with replacement wood railings.

Garage, ca. 1963 – A freestanding one-car garage is located at the rear of the house and oriented to face the curving road. The frame structure is capped by an asphalt-shingle front-gable roof and covered with German siding. A glazed-and-paneled wooden overhead door provides access to the interior.



(#37) Carol and Glenn Arthur Student Recreation Complex (1938), façade, view to southwest



Elk River Dam (ca. 1912), view to southeast



Mill Pond above Elk River Dam (ca. 1912), view to east



(#40) Historic Cheese House (ca. 1917), oblique view to south



Staff Residence 1 (ca. 1961), 110 Bobcat Way, oblique view to east



Staff Residence 2 (ca. 1969), 148 Bobcat Court, façade, oblique view to southeast



Staff Residence 3 (ca. 1969), 152 Bobcat Court, façade, oblique view to south



Staff Residence 4 (ca. 1963), 160 Bobcat Way, façade, view to north

Student Residence 2 (#42), 193 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house sits on a slightly elevated site that allows for a partially exposed basement level with a one-car garage. The house has an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, replacement one-over-one windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with metal railings. The garage is entered through a glazed-and-paneled wooden overhead door.

Student Residence 3 (#42), 207 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house sits on a slightly elevated site that allows for a partially exposed basement level with a one-car garage. The house has an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, replacement one-over-one windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with metal railings. The garage is entered through a glazed-and-paneled wooden overhead door.

Athletic Offices (#41), 225 Bobcat Way, ca. 1938

Originally built as staff housing, this one-story Period Cottage rests on a stone foundation and is constructed of frame covered with a stone exterior and vinyl siding. The house has an exterior stone chimney, projecting gable-roof side bay, vinyl siding on the gable ends and rear elevation, and three-over-one double-hung sash windows. The façade features a central round-arch entry door framed by an asymmetrical gable entrance bay. The solid wooden door is pierced by two small lights and accessed by stone steps in a semicircular fan shape. A gable-roof rear ell and shed-roof side extension project at the rear of the house and are clad with vinyl siding. Attached wooden steps access the rear entry door. The dwelling has primarily served as a campus residence since its construction, but currently houses athletic department offices.

Garage, ca. 1960s – A freestanding front-gable garage is located at the rear of the dwelling. The concrete block structure is capped by an asphalt-shingle roof with plywood sheathing in the gable ends.

Student Residence 9, 248 Bobcat Way, ca. 1969

The one-story-plus-basement frame Ranch house rests on a continuous concrete foundation with a one-car basement garage on the façade and has a metal-clad side-gable roof. Clad with aluminum siding, the house features a front-gable wing, interior brick chimney, dentil molding, and eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows. Wooden steps rise to access a small stoop and single-leaf entry door. The main-story windows of the front wing are positioned over decorative wood panels.

Student Residence 8, 262 Bobcat Way, ca. 1969

The one-story-plus-basement frame Ranch house rests on a continuous concrete foundation with a one-car basement garage on the façade and has a metal-clad side-gable roof. Covered with aluminum siding, the house features a front-gable wing, interior brick chimney, vinyl soffits, and eight-over-eight and twelve-over-twelve double-hung sash windows. The main-story windows of the front wing are positioned over decorative wood panels. An uncovered concrete stoop accesses the single-leaf front entry and is reached by concrete steps with metal railings.

Staff Residence 5, 280 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house occupies a slightly elevated site overlooking Hickory Nut Gap Road to the south. The house has a metal-clad side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, replacement one-over-one windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with a metal railing.

Garage, ca. 1963 – A freestanding one-car garage immediately east of the house is frame construction and displays an asphalt-shingle front-gable roof, vinyl siding, and a replacement metal overhead door in the garage bay.

Student Residence 7 (#42), 290 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house occupies a slightly elevated site overlooking Hickory Nut Gap Road to the southwest. The house has a metal-clad side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, six-over-six double-hung sash windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with metal railings. A gable-roof side wing on the south elevation forms an open one-bay carport with a frame storage room at the rear covered in German siding.

Student Residence 6 (#42), 300 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

One-story brick Ranch house occupies a slightly elevated site overlooking Hickory Nut Gap Road to the southwest. The house has a metal-clad side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, façade picture window, six-over-six double-hung sash windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with metal railings. A gable-roof side wing on the south elevation forms an open one-bay carport with a frame storage room at the rear covered in German siding.



Student Residence 2 (ca. 1963), 193 Bobcat Way, façade, oblique view to northwest



Student Residence 3 (ca. 1963), 207 Bobcat Way, rear elevation, oblique view to south



Athletic Offices (ca. 1938), 225 Bobcat Way, façade, view to north



Student Residences 8-9 (ca. 1969), 248 and 262 Bobcat Way, oblique view to west



Student Residence 8 (ca. 1969), 262 Bobcat Way, oblique view to north



Staff Residence 5 (ca. 1963), 280 Bobcat Way, façade, oblique view to northwest



Student Residence 7 (ca. 1963), 290 Bobcat Way, façade, view to northeast



Student Residence 6 (ca. 1963), 300 Bobcat Way, rear elevation, view to south

Student Residence 5 (#42), 306 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

The one-story brick Ranch house occupies a relatively level lot located on the south side of a loop road encircling a small greensward and dog park. The house has an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, a façade picture window, six-over-six double-hung sash windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with a metal railing. The façade, which overlooks the college's athletic facilities on the south side of Hickory Nut Gap Road, features a decorative roof gable above the entrance bay. A gable-roof side wing on the east elevation forms an open one-bay carport with a vinyl-clad frame storage room at the rear.

Student Residence 4 (#42), 320 Bobcat Way, ca. 1963

The one-story brick Ranch house occupies a relatively level lot located on the south side of a loop road encircling a small greensward and dog park. The house has a metal-clad side-gable roof, exterior brick end chimney, a façade picture window, six-over-six double-hung sash windows, and a single-leaf entry door accessed from an uncovered concrete stoop with metal railings. The façade overlooks the college's athletic facilities on the southwest side of Hickory Nut Gap Road.

Garage, ca. 1963 – A freestanding front-gable frame garage is located northeast of the north-facing house. The frame structure is capped by an asphalt-shingle front-gable roof and covered with German siding. The building has a relatively narrow garage opening on the north elevation. A single-leaf opening is located at the rear of the west elevation.



Student Residences 4-5, 306 and 320 Bobcat Way, façades, oblique view to southwest



Student Residence 5 (ca. 1963), 306 Bobcat Way, rear elevation, view to southeast



Student Residence 4 and Garage (ca. 1963), 320 Bobcat Way, rear elevation, view to southeast



“Campus Scene, Lees-McRae Institute, Banner Elk, N. C.,” in North Carolina Postcard Collection (P052), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

Historic Background

Nestled in a valley along the Elk River, the town of Banner Elk in northeastern Avery County sits at approximately 4,000 feet above sea level. The town, located at the crossroads of two local highways, is surrounded by mountain peaks topping 5,000 and 6,000 feet. Martin and Mary Banner settled along the Elk River in 1849, and became the first permanent white residents. The couple raised ten children, and four of Martin Banner’s brothers joined him in the area in the 1850s, which was then known as Banner’s Elk.²⁸ A post office was established in 1875. Rugged terrain and geographic isolation persisted until the late nineteenth century when a narrow-gauge railroad from Tennessee to the town Cranberry encouraged greater trade and travel and opened the region to increased tourism, mining, and timber extraction.²⁹

The history of Banner Elk in the twentieth century is closely entwined with the history of Lees-McRae College, which was founded in 1900 by Reverend Edgar Tufts. The school began as a small summer day school under the mission programs of the Concord Presbytery of North Carolina. The Presbytery sent Tufts and two other seminary students to Banner Elk in 1895 for

²⁸ Cooper, Horton, *History of Avery County, North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: Biltmore Press, 1964), 32. Banner’s Elk was part of Watauga County until the creation of Avery County in 1911.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

summer work, when construction began on a wooden building that became the first Presbyterian church in the area. After graduating from Union Theological Cemetery in Virginia, Tufts returned to Banner Elk in 1897 as an ordained minister and soon recognized the need for improved educational opportunities among the local population, especially for girls. Tufts married Mary Elizabeth Hall in 1898, and by 1899, he began offering lessons at his home. As the fireside school grew, Tufts appealed to the community and friends for donations of materials, labor, and funds to erect a two-room school building.³⁰

The impetus for Tufts to create a community school belongs to a common trend across the southern Appalachian region of North Carolina, where the local population remained separated geographically, economically, and politically from the central and eastern sections of the state. Nineteenth-century settlers in the mountains of western North Carolina were hardy people, independent and hardworking, but frequently lacking access to basic health care and educational opportunities. The first tax-supported public school in what is now Avery County opened in 1879. The Office of County Superintendent of Schools was created in 1881, and the county built a few log schoolhouses. For the next 30 years, however, the majority of schools were church-supported and taught in church buildings. The mountain region was primarily an agrarian society made up of subsistence farms, and children helped their families work the land most of the year, only attending school when farm work was light. The constraints of geography and transportation hindered the development of public schools throughout the mountains, so education was often limited to private schools, frequently associated with the major religious denominations.³¹

Rev. Tufts' new school formally opened in 1900 as the Elizabeth McRae Institute. He was inspired to name the school for Elizabeth McRae (1825-1907), a passionate Presbyterian educator and activist from Robeson County in southeastern North Carolina. She was nearly 70 when she began her work in the mountains, teaching summer mission programs and establishing Sunday schools.³² Tufts met McRae while she was teaching in Cranberry and was inspired by her commitment to Christian service. Admiring her advocacy of a place for women in the church and community service, Tufts decided to name his new boarding school for mountain girls after McRae.³³

Mrs. S. P. Lees' name was added in 1903. Born in Frankfort, Kentucky, Susanna Preston Lees (1824-1902) was a friend of Tufts from New York who took a great interest in the work he was doing in Banner Elk. Lees became a widow soon after the Civil War, leaving her wealthy,

³⁰ Ina W. Van Noppen and John J. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1973), 162; Neal, 118-119.

³¹ Van Noppen and Van Noppen, 78-82; Cooper, 37-38.

³² William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, Volume 4 L-O* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 190-191.

³³ Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Architectural History of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 229-230; Michael Hardy, "Our Avery County: Early Founders of Lees-McRae College," *The Avery Journal*, October 3, 2018.

childless, and sympathetic to relatives in the South who had lost their possessions during the war. She adopted several children and provided for their education. She became a well-known benefactor to a number of institutions in the southern Appalachians and generously supported Rev. Tufts by donating money for the boarding school's first dormitory. In appreciation for her generosity to the school, Tufts added her name. In 1907, the Lees-McRae Institute was formally chartered by the state.³⁴



Lees-McRae Institute Dormitory, ca. 1910 (l) and Academy Building (r) (Margaret Tufts Neal, *And Set Aglow A Sacred Flame*, p. 38)

When Rev. Tufts opened the Elizabeth McRae Institute in 1900, the school served girls in first through twelfth grades, and he erected a frame building for fourteen girls and one teacher on 25 acres of land he had purchased the previous year. Another frame structure, the Academy Building, opened in 1902 with classrooms, music rooms, and an auditorium. As the school gained popularity, the dormitory was enlarged with two wings around 1910. In 1903, a boys department overseen by Rev. J. P. Hall opened in Plumtree, fifteen miles southwest of Banner Elk. Initially the school term at Lees-McRae ran from April until December to avoid the harshest weather of the winter months. The school provided boarding for its students due to the difficulties of travel and because enough of them were orphaned or homeless. Without effective heating systems in the wood-frame dormitories, it was too expensive to board and feed students during the winter.³⁵ Boarding these students during the four month break between terms continued to be a problem until Rev. Tufts acquired a nearby farm and established an orphanage in 1914.³⁶

In preparing for the school's future, Tufts purchased another 25 acres in 1905 and two more acres in 1912. Around the same time he acquired six acres along the Elk River near Samuel Banner's mill pond in order to construct a hydroelectric plant that would supply electricity to both the school and the community.³⁷ Banner originally dammed the river below its confluence

³⁴ Hardy; "The Growth and Development of a Great Work," *The Pinnacle*, February 1924, 1, 3; "History of Lees-McRae College," Lees-McRae College website, <https://www.lmc.edu/about/history.htm>; accessed January 6, 2021.

³⁵ "Facts About The Lees-McRae Institute In A Nutshell," *The Pinnacle*, August 1916, 3.

³⁶ "The Growth and Development," 3.

³⁷ "The Growth and Development," 3.

with Shawneehaw Creek in the 1870s and operated a grist mill. Tufts hired J. E. Switzer, an engineering professor from the University of Tennessee, to survey and oversee construction of the hydroelectric plant. Switzer determined the site of Banner's dam would suffice and constructed a stone and concrete structure. Water was delivered to the downstream power house by way of a 1,000-foot flume, and the plant began producing electricity in 1912.³⁸ Severe flooding in July 1916 destroyed the dam, but members of the community and the school worked together to rebuild it by the fall.³⁹

In addition to establishing the school and broadening its reach, Tufts addressed the lack of health care in the area by organizing a hospital in 1907. The community helped build a frame residence for a doctor with an office wing attached, which included two patient rooms and a small operating room and laboratory. Dr. Charles Reed, a retired medical missionary to China, served as the first doctor, and after two years was replaced by Dr. William C. Tate, whose commitment to serving the people of the region rivaled Rev. Tufts. Dr. Tate was originally assisted by his wife, who also cooked for the patients and did the laundry. The small facility was later served by two trained nurses. While many patients were treated at home by Dr. Tate, who traveled the mountains on horseback, by the early 1920s, the hospital averaged five patients a night and more space was needed. Rev. Tufts had contacted D. R. Beeson, an architect from Johnson City and avid outdoorsman, to design a larger up-to-date facility. Helen Hartley Jenkins, a friend of Dr. Tate's from New York, donated \$22,000 for the construction of a 25-bed hospital to benefit mountain residents. Completed in 1924, the Grace Hartley Memorial Hospital had running water, electricity, and a coal furnace. It was equipped with operating rooms, patient rooms, living quarters for the nurses, and a kitchen. As the hospital grew a second physician, Dr. Rhonda Hardin of Boone, was hired and a formal program of nurses' training was established in coordination with Lees-McRae Institute. By the end of the decade, the hospital again operated above its capacity and plans were initiated for a new building. Along with funding from the Duke Foundation, Helen Jenkins contributed generously to the construction of a new four-story, 60-bed facility, which opened in 1932. The earlier building became home to the Grace Hospital Nurses Training School.⁴⁰

While the school and the hospital addressed inadequacies in education and health care, Rev. Tufts also focused his attention on caring for orphaned children in the region. Tufts secured the Lybrook Farm, located approximately one mile southwest of the school, and established the Grandfather Orphans' Home (present Grandfather Home for Children) in 1914. The farmhouse was remodeled and enlarged to contain 15 rooms and within a few years the

³⁸ Neal, 42-45.

³⁹ "The Electric Light Dam," *The Pinnacle*, September 1916, 2.

⁴⁰ Phoebe Ann Pollitt and Kathy McNeely Moore, "Appalachian Health Care: The Grace Hospital School of Nursing," *American Presbyterians*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Winter 1992), 239-246; Avery County Historical Society, *Avery County Heritage, Volume II: Biographies, Genealogies and Church Histories* (Banner Elk, NC: Pudding Stone Press, 1979), 250-253.

orphanage housed nearly 40 children.⁴¹ The orphanage expanded significantly in the 1930s and 1940s when several permanent stone buildings were erected. After the death of Rev. Tufts, the Grandfather Home became one of the three principal institutions, along with the school and hospital, administered by the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association.

Rev. Tufts took seriously his mission to improve the lives of mountain residents while working to expand opportunities in education, health care, and child care, but he remained equally dedicated to his calling as pastor of the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church. After helping erect a frame sanctuary in the late 1890s, Tufts envisioned a new church building constructed of native stone. Beginning in 1912, Tufts engaged noted Asheville architect Richard Sharp Smith to design the church, while the congregation and community members donated materials and labor for its construction.⁴² Completed in 1915, the picturesque stone church provided inspiration for the construction of new, permanent stone buildings at Lees-McRae Institute to replace the overcrowded and unheated frame buildings and dormitories.



“Presbyterian Church, Banner Elk, N. C., Elevation 4,000 Ft.” in North Carolina Postcard Collection (P052), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

⁴¹ “Edgar Tufts,” *Watauga Democrat*, March 5, 1914; Edgar Tufts, “Thanksgiving Day and the Orphans,” *Watauga Democrat*, November 22, 1917.

⁴² Tim Gardner, “Banner Elk Presbyterian Church: ‘We are the Hands of God,’” *High Country Faith Magazine*, (Spring 2019), 38-43.

As early as 1918 Rev. Tufts began planning to improve and expand the school's campus with fundraising efforts aimed at erecting three permanent stone buildings. The new buildings would be named for the three states—North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—served by school and the area covered by the Synod of Appalachia. Tufts asked Beeson to design the new buildings using native stone with Tufts arguing that the abundant stone and rocks in the region had been placed by God for the people to use. His fundraising appeal claimed that every donation of \$4 would provide for one ton of stone to be acquired and set.⁴³ Although enough money and stone had been promised by September 1918 to begin construction, school administrators decided to postpone construction until after World War I. Workers broke ground for the North Carolina Building on June 6, 1921.⁴⁴ Beeson designed the North Carolina Building as the central academic building with an auditorium, classrooms, and offices, while the Tennessee and Virginia buildings were planned as dormitories. Students in grade school (first through eighth grade) would be assigned to the Tennessee building and the Virginia building would house high school students.⁴⁵

The 1920s were a pivotal decade in the development of Lees-McRae. Planning for the new facilities continued and construction began on the North Carolina Building. In 1920, the school's industrial department opened in the Rock House, completed that same year and given to the school by teacher Sue Hall and her sisters, Jane and Jessie. Industrial classes taught the girls skills and crafts to become well-rounded women. The boys department at Plumtree officially split from Lees-McRae Institute and created its own charter in 1922, operating as the Plumtree School for Boys under the auspices of the Presbyterian church.⁴⁶ A letter written in April 1922 and published in *The Pinnacle* called for the establishment of a junior college in Banner Elk. While this would not have made sense 20 years earlier, Lees-McRae Institute now produced enough college-ready students who had to leave the region to continue their education, unless they wanted to become teachers and attend Appalachian Teachers College in Boone, seventeen miles away. Banner Elk remained isolated enough in the 1920s that sending students out of the area was a challenge, both physically and financially.⁴⁷

Rev. Tufts passed away on January 6, 1923, just as work on the North Carolina Building was being completed. The school's trustees asked Tufts' son, Edgar H. Tufts, to assume leadership of the institute, and the younger Tufts, a recent graduate of Davidson College, agreed, putting plans on hold to continue his education at Columbia University. Like his father, Edgar Tufts possessed an active mind and was a gifted administrator. He fulfilled the building program begun by father and implemented plans for the institute to become a state accredited high school, which meant adding science classes and a small library. The North Carolina Building

⁴³ Neal, 46-47.

⁴⁴ "North Carolina Building Started," *The Pinnacle*, July 1921, 1.

⁴⁵ "Carolina-Tennessee-Virginia," *The Pinnacle*, June 1918, 3.

⁴⁶ "The Re-Organization of the School at Plumtree," *The Pinnacle*, January 1922, 1.

⁴⁷ "A Junior College Needed," *The Pinnacle*, April 1922, 1-2.

opened for the new term on April 12, 1923.⁴⁸ Lees-McRae grew steadily through the mid-1920s as enrollment climbed from 12 students in 1900 to 83 students by 1924. When the Tennessee Residence Hall opened in 1925, admissions jumped to 104. The number of students more than doubled the following year, reaching 210 in 1926, with a long waiting list. The school's reputation had clearly spread beyond Avery County.⁴⁹

As the school grew, the campus infrastructure became inadequate. Water for the school, which was originally supplied from a small well and later from a spring on Beech Mountain, was piped into the community. Not wanting an unsightly metal water tower on campus, Edgar Tufts opted to encase the cistern in a stone tower that would complement the stone buildings already completed or under construction. The false window designs in the tower were created by local builder and stone mason Finley Townsend, who also worked on the other three stone buildings. Construction on the residence hall, Tennessee, was halted to focus work on completing the water tower as soon as possible. The tower, completed in 1924, quickly became a campus landmark. The forested hill on the south side of the river that served as a backdrop to the Lees-McRae campus was put up for sale that same year, and Edgar Tufts circulated an appeal for donations so the institute could purchase the land. J. M Knox of Salisbury responded with a \$1,000 check that allowed the school to preserve the twenty-acre hillside known as Hemlock Hill.⁵⁰

Beginning in 1925, the Lees-McRae Institute trustees decided to have the academic term start in September and end in May, a drastic change from the school's previous April-December schedule. The new stone buildings, with their central heating and thick walls to withstand the elements, gave the school an opportunity to switch to this more conventional schedule.⁵¹ The Tennessee building opened on August 22, 1925, in time for the new term, and was soon filled to capacity.⁵² Workers broke ground for Virginia Residence Hall on November 30, 1925, and began construction with materials left over from the Tennessee building.⁵³

Under the new term schedule, the school buildings stood empty during the summer months. Edgar Tufts took the opportunity to capitalize on the campus infrastructure during summer vacation, which coincided with the local tourist season, and opened the Tennessee building as an inn. Banner Elk, at the time, had only two other hotels to support their growing seasonal tourism industry. Pinnacle Inn opened for business in the summer of 1926, with a staff composed of Lee-McRae students, who were required to participate in a work-study program

⁴⁸ Neal, 109-112.

⁴⁹ "Opening of L.M.I.," *The Pinnacle*, September 1926, 1.

⁵⁰ Neal, 111-112 and 115-116.

⁵¹ "Get-To-Gether Meeting of Trustees and Workers," *The Pinnacle*, December 1924,1.

⁵² "Tennessee," *The Pinnacle*, September 1924, 1.

⁵³ Neal, 118.

to help pay for tuition and other school expenses. After a successful first summer, Pinnacle Inn grew in popularity as word of the inn spread throughout the state and region.⁵⁴

Virginia Residence Hall opened its doors in time for the 1927 term, a school year that brought unexpected change. The main building of the Plumtree School for Boys burned down in February 1927, and while the school operated independently from Lees-McRae the two remained connected by their association with the Presbyterian Church. Following the fire, a decision was made to move the boys' school to Banner Elk rather than rebuild in Plumtree. Although both residence halls were filled to capacity, Lees-McRae Institute opened the 1927 school year with co-ed students. A wooden, barrack-like structure, known as the South Barn (no longer standing), was built on the south side of the Elk River to house 25 boys. The start of term was delayed a few weeks until the building was completed.⁵⁵

The arrival of male students at Lees-McRae, who brought their football team from Plumtree, required an expanded athletic department. Physical education classes previously met only twice a week in the auditorium and the school did not participate in intercollegiate sports. The expanded athletics program resulted in the formation of women's basketball and volleyball teams, as well as a men's basketball team although Lees-McRae did not have facilities for them. In the 1930s, the students initiated a self-imposed \$5 athletics fee to help fund a new gymnasium.⁵⁶

By the late 1920s, Edgar Tufts and the school trustees were working to establish Lees-McRae as an accredited junior college, which had been a long-held dream of Rev. Tufts. In pursuit of that goal the trustees renamed the school Lees-McRae College in 1929. Part of the accreditation process necessitated improvements to the library, which was located in a corner room on the first floor of the Tennessee building. Alison Stirling, in the latter part of her life, took a library science course at Lees-McRae before becoming the college's librarian in 1929. She wrote countless letters to people and foundations asking for donations, either books or money for books, and under her supervision, the library expanded from 1,849 volumes in 1930 to 4,500 volumes in 1931. By 1935, the library contained 6,000 volumes.⁵⁷ In becoming a junior college, the trustees elected to keep the high school department open for four years, closing one grade every term, to allow the freshmen class to complete their high school education. Virginia Residence Hall became the college dormitory, and Lees-McRae College opened in the fall of 1930 as an accredited state junior college, although its accreditation did not become official until April 1931.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Neal, 119; "The Boy's Department," *The Pinnacle*, July 1927, 1. Thirty-four boys enrolled for the Lees-McRae's first co-ed term with fourteen day students who did not live in the South Barn. "Boy's Dormitory," *The Pinnacle*, August/September 1927, 2.

⁵⁶ Neal, 137.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 130 and 135.

⁵⁸ "Lees-McRae College is Given Standard Rating," *The Pinnacle*, September 1930, 1.

The Depression of the 1930s and its many hardships did not diminish the popularity of Lees-McRae College. The school, in fact, became more popular as students were unable to pay for more expensive four-year colleges. Tuition at Lees-McRae remained relatively inexpensive, only 50 cents a week, and the school offered extensive work-study programs, which let students work for their tuition and expenses. The school allowed students and their families to barter for tuition with goods ranging from molasses, apples, cabbage, and sweet potatoes to livestock, sheep, and even a mule. During the Depression, approximately fifty percent of students paid for tuition—either fully or partially—through work-study or a barter agreement. The campus became increasingly self-sufficient during this time, something that the school had strived for since its creation in 1900. The campus farm supplied much of the needed food for students, and the construction of a dam to form Wildcat Lake supplemented the school’s water and electricity supply. The school created a student-run grocery and general supply store, The Exchange, which traded food and farm products from the community for manufactured goods from the school’s industrial department.⁵⁹



Pinnacle Inn Dining Room, 1930s, John C. Hemmer photograph (Lees-McRae College archive)

Pinnacle Inn continued to grow in popularity through the 1930s, advertising Banner Elk’s cool summer temperatures, mountain scenery, and proximity to fishing and outdoor activities. Nearly 100 students helped run the inn during the summer months. In the early 1930s, a new dining room was needed to serve guests so a wing connecting the North Carolina and

⁵⁹ Neal, 123 and 192-130; “Whipping the Depression,” *The Pinnacle*, December 1932, 1-2.

Tennessee buildings was constructed that had a dining room located below grade with a stone terrace and fireplace located above. “Finished in Old English, with hewen [*sic*] timbers and rustic paneling,” the dining room had a large stone fireplace, exposed chestnut beams, wrought iron fixtures and equipment from the industrial department, and a moss-lined pool with live mountain trout in it.⁶⁰ All of the chairs and tables, as well as the linens, including the curtains and chair backs, were produced by students.⁶¹



“Grace Hospital, Banner Elk, N. C.” in Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

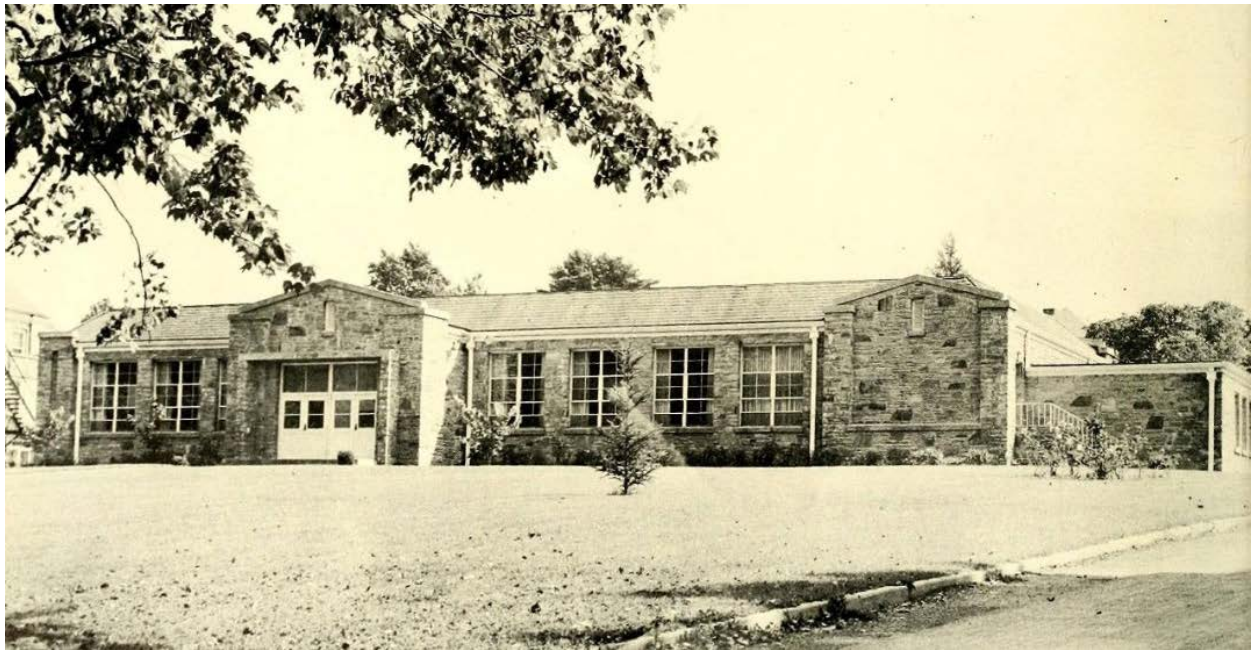
At the height of Depression, the trustees of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association, which had been created to oversee the administration of the three institutions founded by Rev. Tufts, approved an ambitious \$1,500,000 building program for the college, hospital, and orphanage. The school’s funding priorities included a permanent boys’ dormitory to replace the overcrowded South Barn, a new administration building, science labs, a gymnasium, library, home economics practice house, and five faculty houses.⁶² The building campaign stretched over the next two decades, culminating with the completion of the Chaffee Administration

⁶⁰ “Pinnacle Inn One of Fine Resort Hotels of Carolina,” *The Charlotte Observer*, May 22, 1932; “Students Given Work at Hotel,” *Asheville Citizen*, June 15, 1933; *Watauga Democrat*, July 12, 1934.

⁶¹ Neal, 122.

⁶² “Lees-McRae Adopts Expansion Program,” *Watauga Democrat*, June 15, 1933.

Building in 1955. The new, centrally located administration building, which contained an 650-seat auditorium, dedicated library, and campus offices, marked the successful navigation of a period of growing pains for the college and the prelude to an ambitious future. Beginning in the late 1930s, the school gradually added a substantial new gymnasium built with the help student labor, two stone dormitory buildings, a practice house, woodshop, a new building for the Exchange Store, and two faculty houses. The campus expanded across the mill pond to a low ridge that became known as Faculty Hill.⁶³



A. C. Chaffee Center (*Ontaroga* (1962), n.p.)

Growing steadily through the 1930s, the college faced new challenges in the early 1940s. Edgar H. Tufts died in 1942, leaving behind an admirable legacy. He was succeeded by Dr. William C. Tate, who continued to serve as director of Grace Hospital in addition to his new role with the college. Nearly a year later, in March 1943, the Tennessee Residence Hall caught fire. The top floor burned completely and the second floor was badly damaged. Since Banner Elk did not have a fire department, firefighters from Boone, Newland, and Elk Park responded to the blaze and arrived within 30 minutes. Students, teachers, and townspeople rescued more than 11,000 books from the Tennessee building's first-floor library.⁶⁴ World War II brought further changes to the college as young men were called into military service. The college ceased publishing its yearbook, *Ontaroga*, in 1944 and 1945, and discontinued the boys' athletic department entirely until the fall of 1947.⁶⁵

⁶³ "Lees-McRae Campus Shows Up In Growth," *The Charlotte Observer*, May 2, 1955.

⁶⁴ *Asheville Citizen*, March 23, 1943.

⁶⁵ *Ontaroga* (1943), n.p.; "Physical Improvement," *The Pinnacle*, October 1947,1.

Lees-McRae College rebounded following the war with more transformational changes beginning in the late 1950s. Dr. Tate resigned from his position at Grace Hospital and the college to focus on the broader work of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association. A substantial new dormitory was constructed with funds from the McAlister family, while the Cannon family of Charlotte gave generously for the rehabilitation of the three main stone buildings—North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—as well as the former President’s House. The Cannon funds were also designated for the construction of two new structures to link the three historic buildings. Built in 1957, the Cannon Classroom Building is a stand-alone structure that visually links the North Carolina and Virginia buildings. An annex of faculty offices was constructed between the North Carolina and Tennessee buildings atop the open terrace and dining room used by the Pinnacle Inn, which ceased to operate after the 1961 summer season. The college was able to acquire the four-story Grace Hospital building for a dormitory in 1962, after a new regional hospital was completed. The converted hospital was named Tate Residence Hall in honor of Dr. Tate, who had served the Banner Elk and Lees-McRae community for more than four decades.⁶⁶

Col. Max Chapman became president of Lees-McRae College in 1961, initiating a period of relatively rapid growth and expansion. A freshmen class of 290 students in 1963 pushed the school’s facilities to capacity, while the faculty increased to 30 teachers. In 1965, Richard Browning of Woodruff, South Carolina, became the first African American student enrolled at Lees-McRae. A member of the concert choir and drama club, Browning was elected treasurer of the freshman class.⁶⁷ The school completed work on a modern science building in 1963, along with new houses and apartments for faculty members and broke ground for a new men’s dormitory. A modern library building erected in 1969 marked a significant investment in the future. Designed to hold more than 100,000 volumes, the split-level 33,000-square-foot John H. Carson Library (present Dottie M. Shelton Learning Commons) offered a completely up-to-date facility for the college, exceeding all accreditation standards at the time.⁶⁸

Facility improvements were important as Lees-McRae increasingly competed for students with like-minded institutions such as Montreat College and Warren Wilson College, as well as other two-year junior colleges across the mountains. The Montreat and Warren Wilson schools began as missions of the Presbyterian Church, offering educational opportunities to impoverished areas of the mountain region. Warren Wilson College became a four-year college in 1967, while Montreat expanded to a four-year curriculum for the second time in the 1980s. In the 1960s, two-year schools such as Asheville-Biltmore College sought to become four-year state-supported senior colleges before eventually joining the University of North Carolina system in 1969.⁶⁹ Teacher training colleges like Appalachian State in Boone and Western

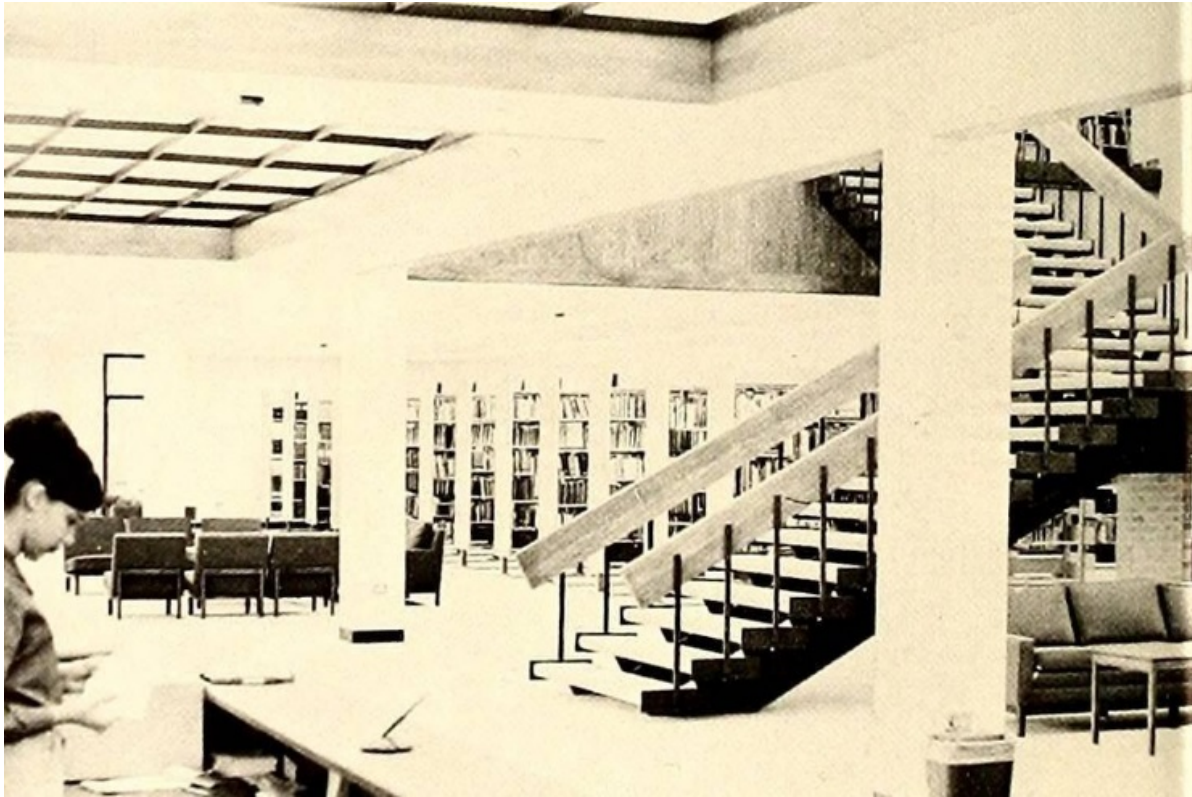
⁶⁶ *Ontaroga* (1968), p. 75.

⁶⁷ *Ontaroga* (1966), 28-29, 43 and 128.

⁶⁸ *Ontaroga* (1970), 20-25.

⁶⁹ William E. Highsmith, *The University of North Carolina at Asheville: The First Sixty Years* (Asheville, NC: The University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1991), 40-46.

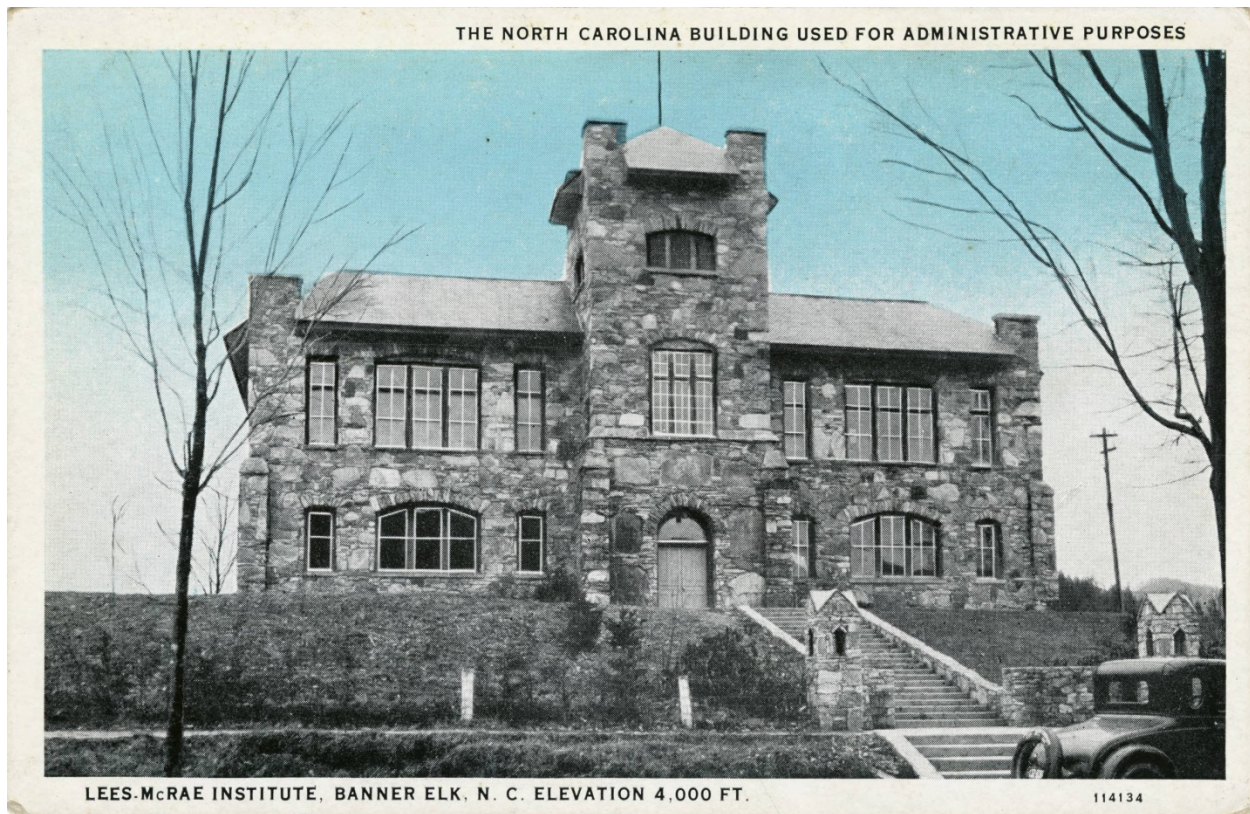
Carolina in Cullowhee came under increasing pressure to expand their programs of study in the 1960s. Both schools were designated regional universities in 1967, before joining the state university system in 1972.



John H. Carson Library, Lees-McRae College (*Ontaroga* (1970), p. 20)

Beginning in the 1970s, Lees-McRae undertook several major projects to improve the campus facilities including the construction of the 800-seat Hayes Auditorium and McDonald Dining Hall in 1975. The area south of Faculty Hill on the south side of the Elk River was developed for the school's athletic complex with a track, practice fields, gymnasium, swimming pool, and tennis courts. By the mid-1980s, the college trustees implemented a plan to become a four-year senior college. Lees-McRae College was officially accredited as a senior college in June 1990 by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.⁷⁰ Lees-McRae College continues to honor the vision of Rev. Tufts and extend educational and service opportunities to students from the Southern Appalachian region and beyond.

⁷⁰ "History of Lees-McRae College," Lees-McRae College website, <https://www.lmc.edu/about/history.htm>; accessed January 6, 2021.



“Lees-McRae Institute, Banner Elk, N. C., Elevation 4,000 Ft.” in Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

Architectural Context

The buildings of Lees-McRae College neatly reflect the school’s motto—“In the Mountains, Of the Mountains, For the Mountains”—through their architecture, mirroring its growth and development during the twentieth century and reinforcing its identity. The earliest permanent buildings on campus, forming the Historic Commons, date from the 1920s and show deference to the neighboring Banner Elk Presbyterian Church (AV0110), which was completed in 1915 as the early Lees-McRae Institute was still evolving. Drawing on local building traditions and native stone and wood materials, the rustic style employed on the college’s early buildings provided a template that influenced the design and materials of later structures as the campus expanded through the mid-twentieth century.

The Banner Elk Presbyterian Church, where Rev. Edgar Tufts had been active since the 1890s, was designed in 1912 by prominent regional architect Richard Sharp Smith, who had served as the supervising architect for George Vanderbilt’s Biltmore Estate. The English-born Smith designed the gable-front church with a double-aisle nave and corner bell tower to be executed in rough-cut irregularly coursed stone on the exterior. According to church history, Rev. Tufts envisioned the stone church built with rocks gathered from the river and surrounding hillsides and local men executing the masonry work. Rock masonry had previously been used for foundations and chimneys, but the church was the first building in the area to be built

entirely of stone. Church members and neighbors contributed to the construction of the sanctuary by donating money, labor, and materials.⁷¹

Architect Donald R. Beeson (1881-1983) of Johnson City, Tennessee, began his association with Edgar Tufts in 1917, when Beeson was engaged to design a new, modern hospital in Banner Elk. Along with the hospital, Beeson designed the first buildings for Lees-McRae in a rustic stone idiom that emulated the architecture of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church. Beeson, who was born in Pennsylvania, worked as a draftsman in the steel industry and for the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway before completing a correspondence course in architecture. Relocating from Bristol, Tennessee, Beeson moved to Johnson City in 1912 to open his architectural practice. His practice grew in prominence over a long career, and he remained active in the Presbyterian Church and with the Boy Scouts.⁷² Beeson first encountered the work of Rev. Tufts in 1913 on a ten-day hike around Roan and Grandfather mountains. Impressed with the man and his service to the community, Beeson designed a number of buildings for Tufts over the next decade despite the tedious travel schedule required to cover the 40 miles between Johnson City and Banner Elk. Like Tufts, Beeson recognized the ready availability of stone for construction but lamented the lack of “experienced mechanics” in the region. Many local farmers knew basic carpentry and elementary masonry but required regular supervision to execute the buildings according to Beeson’s plans. The stone masonry initially suffered due to poor local sand, so Beeson arranged for a rock crusher to be brought to Banner Elk and using the abundant, easily gathered rocks of the area ground his own sand. Construction of the hospital and stone college buildings often moved slowly, but Beeson was generally pleased with the results.⁷³

While the use of stone construction for the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church directly influenced the rustic expression of the college buildings, a similar technique had been employed for the construction of the Grove Park Inn (BN0010) in Asheville. Designed in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, the resort hotel drew inspiration from the western lodges of the National Park Service in combining naturalistic materials and organic forms. The simple forms incorporated massive granite boulders and uncut stone, undulating dormers, and a red clay tile roof. The rough character of the exterior visually connected the Grove Park Inn with its mountain setting but belied the luxurious interior of rich wood finishes, warm lighting, comfortable furniture, and massive fireplaces.

⁷¹ Gardner, 38-43.

⁷² “D.R. Beeson Sr., Civic Leader, Established Local Architect, Dead,” *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*, January 18, 1983.

⁷³ D. R. Beeson, “Banner Elk,” D. R. Beeson, Sr. Papers, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University. Copy in “Lees-McRae College (AV0110)” survey site file, North Carolina Department of Cultural and Natural Resources Western Office, Asheville, NC.



“Grove Park Inn, Asheville, N. C.” in Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

The use of rustic architectural styles found favor at resort developments throughout the mountain region. While a variety of styles complemented the picturesque beauty of the mountains, a preference for rustic designs and natural materials became popular. Beginning in the 1890s the MacRae family of Wilmington developed a resort in Linville (AV0001) comprised of sophisticated vacation cottages, elegantly rendered with chestnut bark shingle exteriors. Nationally prominent architect Henry Bacon, a friend of the MacRaes, designed at least three cottages and All Saints Episcopal Church between 1895 and 1910 using chestnut bark shingles accented with round logs for structural and decorative elements.⁷⁴

While rustic architecture lent itself to resort settings and seasonal dwellings, the style was frequently applied to tourism-related commercial buildings and occasionally for schools and churches. The use of stone, in particular, gave regional flavor to the architecture based on the types of rock available in a particular area of the mountains. The rough stonework at Lees-McRae bears some resemblance to a small collection of stone buildings at Mars Hill College in Madison County. Smooth, rounded river rock appears on the buildings of Montreat College and in town of Canton along the Pigeon River in Haywood County. The traditional form of the Crossnore Presbyterian Church (AV0073) exhibits Craftsman style influences with a rock exterior. The water-smoothed stones were taken from the Linville River. Eustace and Mary Sloop established a Presbyterian mission at Crossnore, where they built the church, opened a

⁷⁴ Bishir, et al, 59 and 223-225.

boarding school, and founded a hospital. The Crossnore School's weaving program, founded in 1920, moved into a new one-and-a-half-story Rustic Revival style rock building in 1936. Built to replace an earlier log cabin, the Weaving Room at Crossnore School (AV0074) has an exterior of rocks taken from the Linville River, various gabled dormers, and bark shingle siding in the gable ends. Sloop Chapel was erected in 1954 on a prominent hillside site. The rustically modern gable-front church is constructed of river rock with buttressed walls, Gothic-arch windows, and dark-stained weatherboards in the gable ends and on the steeple.⁷⁵



Crossnore Presbyterian Church (AV0073), 1924-26 (l) and Weaving Room of Crossnore School (AV0074), 1936 (r)



Grandfather Home for Children, Douglass Cottage, 1939 (l) and Cannon Administration Building, 1939 (r)

When Rev. Edgar Tufts first established the Grandfather Orphans' Home in 1914, the orphanage made use of an existing farmhouse, which was remodeled and enlarged to accommodate the children and staff. As the orphanage grew, Tufts employed an architectural style similar to Lees-McRae for the institution's new buildings including the Baby Cottage designed by D. R. Beeson in 1922. The use of native stone and timber continued through the mid-twentieth century with construction of additional buildings. The Adelaide Douglass Cottage, erected in 1939, is a one-and-a-half-story stone building with a tall side-gable roof, eave brackets, and a projecting entrance porch supported by heavy timber posts and beams.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 59 and 227-228; Michael C. Hardy, *Avery County* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 19.

The Cannon Administration Building presents a more formal Colonial Revival-style composition with a two-story side-gable main block, symmetrical façade, and hip-roof side wings. Prominently sited at the end of a broad entrance drive, the administration complex is rendered in irregularly coursed stone masonry.

The Lees-McRae College buildings certainly influenced later development in Banner Elk including the construction of the third Grace Hospital, which now serves the college as Tate Residence Hall. Designed by Beeson in the late 1920s, the four-story stone hospital displays restrained Gothic Revival elements but has a more institutional feel than the college buildings. In a similar manner, the Banner Elk School is representative of restrained Colonial Revival style architecture executed in stone for educational buildings in the 1930s. During the Depression, the Avery County School Board pursued funding from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to build several new public schools. The WPA agreed to fund a new gymnasium at Newland and three new schools designed by D. R. Beeson. The Elk Park School (AV0083) was completed in 1939, while the Banner Elk and Beech Mountain schools opened the following year. The one-story hip-roof Banner Elk School (AV0100) is constructed of irregularly coursed stone masonry and features large window openings and an auditorium wing at the south end of the building.⁷⁶



Banner Elk School, 1940 (l) and United States Post Office at Banner Elk, 1962 (r)

Through the early twentieth century, the architecture of North Carolina's mountain counties often reflected the need for practical buildings that made use of available local materials and traditional building methods. The popularity of tourism across the mountains introduced new architectural styles and new wealth that created elegant, naturalistic buildings based on romantic notions of mountain life. Rustic Revival style architecture imbued native materials and traditional building practices with greater sophistication in the manner of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the design of schools, colleges, churches, and hospitals reflected the important role of those institutions in mountain communities. Sweeping societal changes following the Depression and World War II, however, brought about a post-war population and building boom, materials shortages, and an increasing demand for higher education with the introduction of the G.I. Bill. Colleges in the post-war period frequently adopted more utilitarian building styles to accommodate growing student populations and expanding curriculum

⁷⁶ Stewart Gray, "Banner Elk School" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Davidson, NC, 2016.

requirements. A regional mode of design adapted Modernist architecture to western North Carolina, giving rustic character to modern buildings by combining natural materials with the geometric forms of Modernism. The United States Post Office in Banner Elk, built in 1962, neatly illustrates this rustic Modernism with its irregularly coursed stone exterior walls contrasting the flat-roof massing, exposed concrete roof beams, and inset bays with floor-to-ceiling glass walls.

The buildings of Lees-McRae erected in the second half of the twentieth century similarly represent this change towards more utilitarian buildings executed in the Modernist idiom and yet retaining a connection to the earliest buildings on campus. The McAlister Residence Hall (present-day McMillan) completed in 1959 and the ca. 1963 Bowman Science Building effectively exemplify these stylistic shifts. The dormitory has a simple rectangular form with a flat concrete slab roof, deep overhanging eaves, and an attached entrance vestibule and common space. The exterior walls are irregularly coursed stone masonry with low-relief panels framing the paired windows. Similarly, the Bowman Science Building, which sits partially below grade, features a flat concrete slab roof, simple geometric massing, and repeated fenestration patterns. The brick walls are accented with low-relief veneer composed of irregularly coursed local stone from Beech Mountain. The facility contains the science department's classrooms, laboratories, and faculty offices. The Cannon Classroom Building and annex to the North Carolina Building were built in 1957 in the Modernist style with flat roofs, large multi-light metal-frame windows, and stone veneer exteriors. While the Cannon Classroom Building is a stand-alone structure, the North Carolina Building annex awkwardly encapsulates the open terrace and entrance vestibule above the Pinnacle Inn dining room, which undermines its otherwise clean lines and simple form.

Lees-McRae College comprises a good collection of historic architectural resources that have created and defined an identity for the school while reflecting the changing nature and role the buildings play in campus life. The rustic stone architecture of the Historic Commons has filtered down through the years and helps document the history and evolution of the college through the twentieth century. The spirit of Rev. Tufts resides among the stones and continues to shape the school's future as place of learning and service in the mountains of Avery County.

Evaluation

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, Lees-McRae College is **eligible** for the National Register of Historic Places. The campus contains a good collection of rustic stone and Modernist-influenced educational buildings dating from the 1920s through the 1960s located on a ridge above the Elk River and lying at the edge of the town of Banner Elk. The school evolved from an early boarding school for mountain girls into a coeducational junior college and later a private four-year college. Rev. Edgar Tufts, a Presbyterian minister, organized the school in response to the lack of educational opportunities in the region. Lees-McRae College, like many institutions of higher learning in western North Carolina, grew out of the mission work of the mainline religious denominations. The Lees-McRae campus generally retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While the campus has added new classroom buildings, student residences, and athletic facilities over the years, the original core buildings and campus layout remain largely intact with the newest buildings generally located around the perimeter of campus.

Lees-McRae College is **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion A (event). *To be eligible under Criterion A, a property must retain integrity and must be associated with a specific event marking an important moment in American pre-history or history or a pattern of events or historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, a state, or the nation. Furthermore, a property must have existed at the time and be documented to be associated with the events. Finally, a property's specific association must be important as well.* Lees-McRae College is a significant component of educational development and opportunities in Avery County during the twentieth century, specifically the expansion into higher education. Begun in 1900 to educate mountain girls, the Lees-McRae Institute gradually transformed itself from a single-sex boarding school to a coeducational junior college by 1930. The school became an accredited four-year college in 1990. To provide opportunity to underserved mountain youth, Lees-McRae College offered a work-study program, and the ability to work or barter for tuition made the college attainable for a great number of students from the mountain region. Lees-McRae College is eligible under Criterion A for its significant contributions to the development of higher education opportunities in Avery County.

Lees-McRae College is **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion B (person). *For a property to be eligible for significance under Criterion B, it must retain integrity and 1) be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, i.e. individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, state or national historic context; 2) be normally associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he/she achieved significance, and 3) should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions. Furthermore, a property is not eligible if its only justification for significance is that it was owned or used by a person who is or was a member of an identifiable profession, class, or social or ethnic group.* Inspiration for the college arose from the work and ministry of Rev. Edgar Tufts, who came to Banner Elk in the 1890s. Tufts helped establish the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church and several outreach locations and Sunday schools throughout Avery County. Tufts recognized the need for improved educational

opportunities for mountain youth and, beginning in 1900, organized a small boarding school for girls that evolved into Lees-McRae College over the next three decades. Rev. Tufts was also responsible for the creation of Grace Hospital in 1907, the founding of the Grandfather Orphans' Home in 1914, and the generation of electric power for Banner Elk beginning in 1912. Tufts' significant impact and influence on the growth and development of Banner Elk is undeniable and attested by the affiliated organizations and institutions operating under the umbrella of the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association that remain active in the region. The development of Lees-McRae College as a junior college in the late 1920s and subsequent accreditation as a four-year college in 1990 occurred following the death of Rev. Tufts in 1923. While the school is an important legacy of Rev. Edgar Tufts' productive life, the college is not necessarily the best, or only, surviving representative property associated with his significant contributions. As such, it does not appear that Lees-McRae College is eligible under Criterion B.

Lees-McRae College is **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion C (design/construction). *For a property to be eligible under this criterion, it must retain integrity and either 1) embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; 2) represent the work of a master; 3) possess high artistic value; or 4) represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.* The Lees-McRae campus contains a good collection of architectural resources possessing high artistic and design values that represent a significant and distinguishable entity. The architectural character of the Lees-McRae College was established in the 1920s with the construction of three principal buildings designed by Donald R. Beeson of Tennessee. The monumental stone buildings made use of an abundant local material and drew upon masonry techniques utilized by local farmers and builders. While stone was used frequently for foundations and chimneys, the buildings of Lees-McRae, along with the neighboring Banner Elk Presbyterian Church, were among the first buildings in the region to be fully executed in stone. Stone became the predominant building material on campus even as architectural styles and forms evolved through the mid-twentieth century. Whereas the earlier college buildings tend to be more rustic in character with the stone exteriors accented by multi-gabled roofs, variegated wall planes, and timber or wood shingled surfaces, the school's new structures became increasingly modern with building campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s. The newer construction embraced Modernist elements such as geometric forms, flat roofs, large metal-frame windows, and low-relief embellishments. Many of the modern buildings continued to use stone as a principal exterior material, increasingly in tandem with brick. The use of stone provides a sense of continuity to the campus, visually linking the buildings from the 1920s to the 1960s despite changes in architectural style. Lees-McRae College is eligible under Criterion C for its collection of architecturally significant buildings and cohesive campus environment.

Lees-McRae College is **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion D (potential to yield information). *For a property to be eligible under Criterion D, it must meet two requirements: 1) the property must have, or have had, information to contribute to our understanding of human history or pre-history, and 2) the information must be considered important.* Construction of the earliest buildings on the college campus began in the 1920s and it is unlikely that the site could contribute significant information pertaining to building

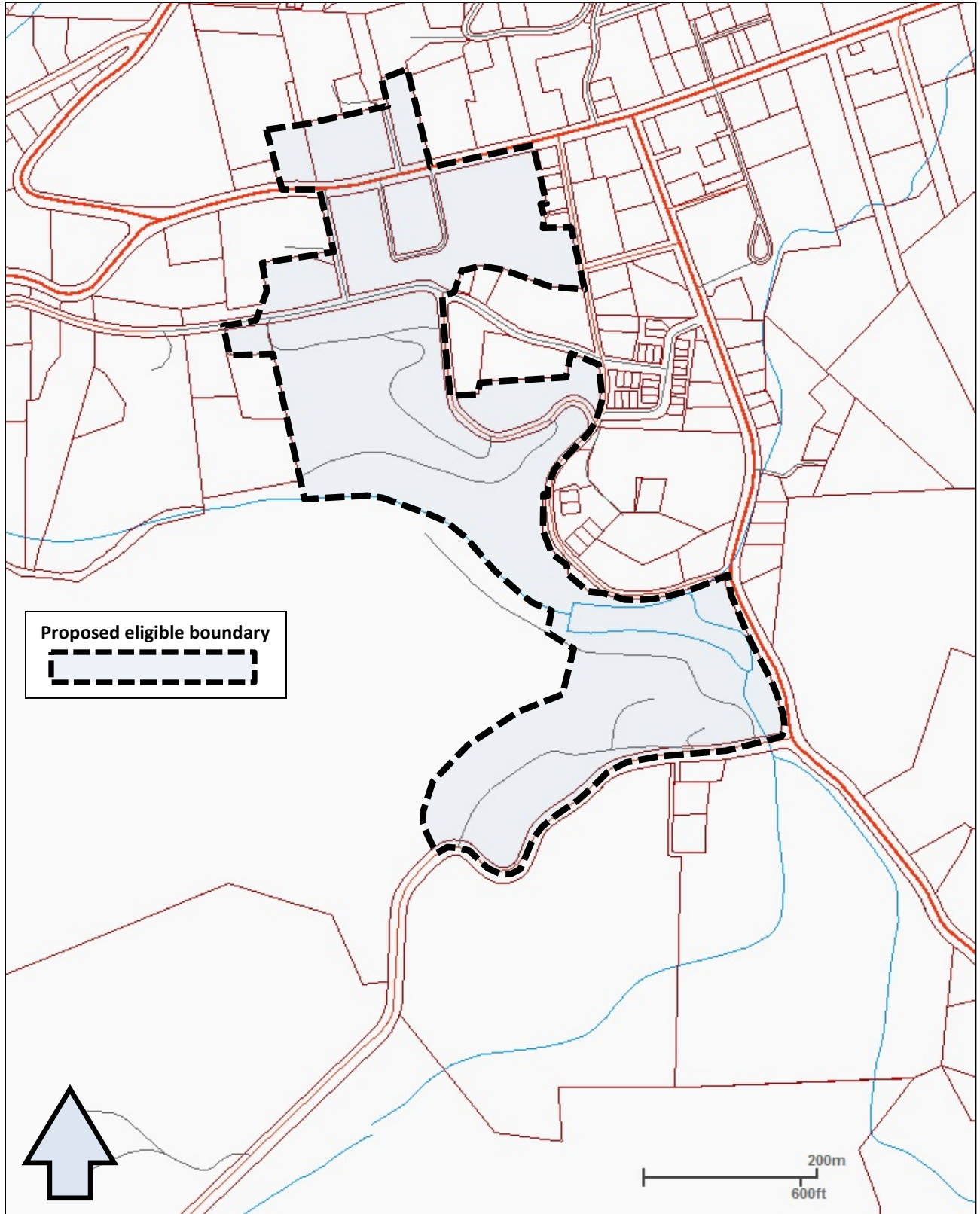
technology or historical documentation not otherwise accessible from other extant resources and written records.

Boundary Description and Justification

The proposed boundary of Lees-McRae College encompasses all or part of five tax parcels covering approximately 49 acres [PINs 185805180388, 185917008614, 185917102442, 185917104512, and 185805097696]. The boundary generally includes all of the campus buildings on the north side of the Elk River and staff and student housing on the south side of the river. The boundary follows property lines, existing streets through and around campus, and the Elk River. All of the land within the proposed boundary is owned by Lees-McRae College Inc.

The proposed boundary includes the north portion of the Lees-McRae campus, as well as Faculty Hill on the south side of the Elk River. The two area of campus contain all of the historically significant buildings and landscape features associated with the college. A small number of new or rehabilitated university buildings are located within the proposed boundary but do not substantially diminish the overall historic integrity of the campus. Additional modern buildings, maintenance facilities, and parking lots associated with the university are located outside the boundary. The college's athletic facilities located on the south side of Hickory Nut Gap Road (SR 1342), which were developed primarily within the past 50 years, are excluded from the boundary.

Fifty-three of the 55 primary resources documented in this report are included within the proposed boundary. The two excluded resources are located in the northeast corner of campus adjoining Banner Road. The Lauritsen Building, which houses the Exchange Bookstore, and the Lauritsen Technical Theatre and Design Studio were not included within the boundary due to their peripheral location and, in the case of the ca. 1964 Lauritsen Building, extensive renovation work. The Lauritsen Technical Theatre and Design Studio, opened in 2014, is new construction.



Boundary Map – Lees McRae College Campus, 191 Main Street, Banner Elk, NC
(Source: Avery County GIS)

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