



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

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Roy Cooper

Secretary D. Reid Wilson

August 3, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Katherine Husband klhusband@ncdot.gov
N.C. Department of Transportation
Environmental Analysis Unit, Historic Architecture Group

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley *RGE for Ramona M. Bartos*
Environmental Review Coordinator

SUBJECT: Historic Structures Survey Report, R-5911, Construct Right Turn Lane from
US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound, PA 21-03-0006, Avery County, ER 21-1628

Thank you for your June 23, 2021, memorandum transmitting the report for the above-referenced undertaking. We have reviewed the report and concur with the assessment that the Cranberry High School (AV0107) is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in the area of education and under Criterion C for its local architectural significance. We agree with the recommended boundary shown on page 48 of the report.

There are no known archaeological sites within the proposed project area. Based on our knowledge of the area, it is unlikely that any archaeological resources that may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by the project.

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.

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

Historic Structures Survey Report
Construct Right Turn Lane from US 19E northbound to NC 194 Eastbound
Avery County, North Carolina
TIP# R-5911
WBS# 48466.1.1
PA# 21-03-0006

Prepared for:
Environmental Analysis Unit
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1598

Prepared by:
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May 15, 2021

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May 15, 2021

Jennifer F. Martin, Principal Investigator
MdM Historical Consultants Inc.

Date

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

Date

Historic Structures Survey Report
Construct Right Turn Lane from US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound
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TIP# R-5911
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Management Summary

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to construct a right turn lane from US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound in Avery County, North Carolina. This project is subject to review under the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA/USFS 2015).

An NCDOT architectural historian defined an Area of Potential Effects (APE) and identified and assessed all resources of approximately fifty years of age or more within the APE. Following this initial review, NCDOT staff identified one resource within the APE that warranted an intensive evaluation of individual eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). NCDOT requested MDM Historical Consultants (Mdm) evaluate the NRHP eligibility of Cranberry High School and Gym (AV0107). As part of the project, Mdm intensively evaluated the school and gym as well as two other education-related historic buildings on the property and provided a written report that included photographs of the resource and landscapes; an historic and architectural context; an evaluation of NRHP eligibility; comparisons to similar types of resources; and carefully delineated and justified NRHP boundaries, as appropriate. During the course of the project, Mdm renamed the property Cranberry High School to reflect the presence of two additional historic buildings and historic landscape elements on the campus.

The APE is roughly T-shaped and encompasses the intersection of US 19E and NC 194, also known as Elk Park Highway. The project area extends approximately 975 feet from the intersection southward on US 19E and approximately 600 feet in both directions on NC 194 from where it intersects with US 19E. The project area extends approximately 150 feet on both sides of the US 19E and NC 194. The APE corresponds to the study area defined for the project.

In April and May 2021, architectural historian and principal investigator Jennifer F. Martin conducted fieldwork and research then authored this report. The following table identifies the resources evaluated and summarizes the recommendations regarding their eligibility.

Property Name and Survey Site Number	Address and PIN	NRHP Eligibility Recommendation and Criteria
Cranberry High School AV0107	5215 Elk Park Hwy. 182800561871	Eligible under Criteria A and C

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Project location at intersection of US 19E and NC 194, view to the east with Cranberry School in the right background, April 2021

I. Project Description and Methodology

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to construct a right turn lane from US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound in Avery County, North Carolina. The project area, which contains about eighteen acres, is located in the unincorporated community of Cranberry in northwest-central Avery County, North Carolina. The town of Elk Park lies one mile to the northwest and Tennessee is two-and-a-half miles to the northwest. The TIP number is R-5911 and the WBS number is 48466.1.1.

This project is subject to review under the *Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects* (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA, 2015). An NCDOT architectural historian defined an Area of Potential Effects (APE) and identified and assessed all resources of approximately fifty years of age or more within the APE. Following this initial survey, NCDOT staff identified Cranberry High School and Gym (AV0107) located within the APE as warranting an intensive evaluation of its individual eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

The subject property was initially identified and documented during the 1985-1986 intensive-level survey of Avery County. At that time, Ted Alexander, the survey's principal investigator, named the property Cranberry High School and Gym for the two historic buildings standing on campus. The investigator did not include two other campus buildings because neither was fifty years old. The following evaluation and report include the two additional buildings: the 1948 agricultural building and the 1959 science building. As a result of the inclusion of the two additional buildings and historic landscape elements, the property is identified in this report as Cranberry High School.

This project is subject to review under the *Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects* (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA, 2015). The historic architectural survey within the APE associated with the construction of a right turn lane from US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound in Avery County, North Carolina was carried out 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; and the NCDOT document entitled *Historic Architectural Resources: Survey Procedures and Report Guidelines* (2003). This evaluation meets the guidelines of NCDOT and the National Park Service.

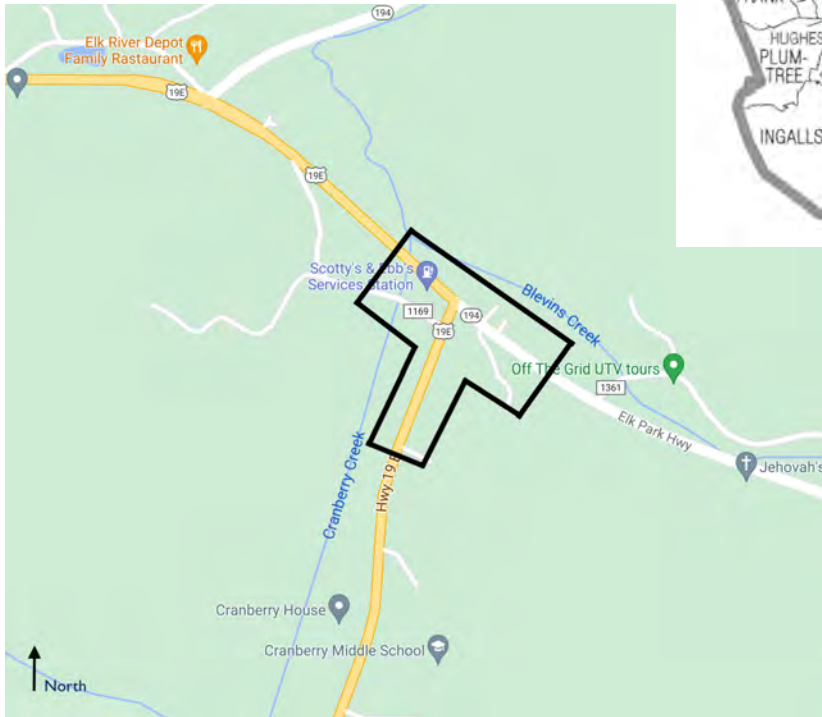
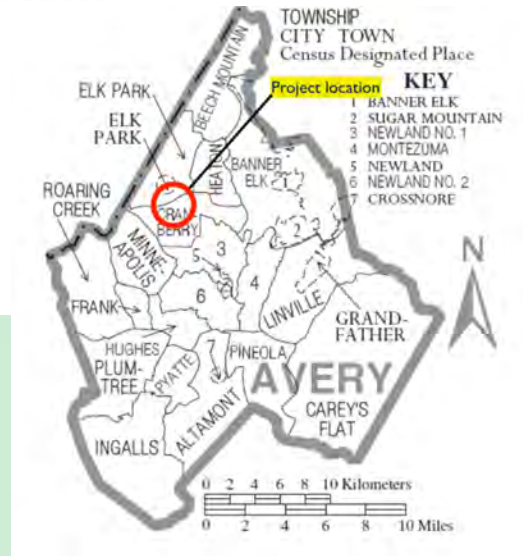
In order to meet the requirements of the above laws, regulations, and guidelines, the work plan for the intensive-level survey included the following items: (1) conducting general historical and architectural background research in order to develop contexts within which to evaluate the potential National Register eligibility of the resources located within the APE; (2) an intensive-level field survey of the APE, including surveying, describing, evaluating, and proposing specific National Register boundaries for any resources believed to be eligible for the National Register; (3) specific historical and architectural research on the resources inventoried at the intensive level; and (4) preparation of a report developed pursuant to the above-referenced laws, regulations and guidelines. The report is on file at NCDOT and is available for review by the general public.

From April to May 2021, MdM evaluated the Cranberry High School as required, in compliance with the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, other state and federal regulations, and NCDOT's current Historic Architecture Team Procedures and Work Products and the NCHPO Report Standards for Historic Structure Survey Reports/Determinations of Eligibility/Section 106/110 Compliance Reports in North Carolina. As part of the project, MdM intensively evaluated the Cranberry High School and provided a written report that included photographs of the buildings and landscapes; historic and architectural contexts; evaluations of NRHP eligibility; comparisons to similar types of resources; and carefully delineated and justified NRHP boundaries, as appropriate.

MdM project manager and architectural historian Jennifer F. Martin, who meets the Secretary of Interior's qualifications for architectural history (CFR 36 CFR Part 61), conducted the fieldwork and research, analyzed the resources, and drafted this report from April to May 2021. As part of this effort, she contacted the owner of Cranberry High School to obtain access to the property and gather historical information about the buildings. On April 19, 2021, she interviewed a group of alumni at the historic campus and toured all the buildings, except the agriculture building, which was closed to the public. She also contacted owners of comparable buildings in Avery County in order to gain access to those properties. The historian relied heavily on the Avery County Board of Education meeting minutes, both in the collection of the Avery County Board of Education and on microfilm at the State Archives in Raleigh. The historian consulted numerous articles from newspapers in North Carolina and east Tennessee that document the history of Cranberry High School. Department of Public Instruction records at the State Archives proved invaluable in providing information about the history of all the schools in Avery County, including Cranberry High School.

The project to construct a right turn lane from US 19E Northbound to NC 194 Eastbound in Avery County, North Carolina is located entirely within Avery County. Its project area and location of the evaluated resource (Cranberry High School) in relation to the APE is depicted on the following maps.

Project location maps





Map showing location of evaluated properties in relation to the APE, created from HPOWeb

II. Historical Background: A Brief History of Cranberry, North Carolina

The community of Cranberry became well known in the late nineteenth century for its rich supply of subterranean titaniferous magnetite, or titanium and iron oxide. Mining of the magnetic ore began much earlier but on a small scale. In the 1780s, Ruben White became the first white man to mine iron ore at Cranberry. By 1860, Jordan C. Hardin operated an iron forge called Cranberry Iron Corporation located on Cranberry Creek. During the Civil War, the confederate army needed iron to make cannons, swords, and guns so forty to sixty workers mined ore and forged it to make the equipment.¹

¹ "Cranberry Iron Mine: Iron for the Confederacy," Civil War Trails, Inc., 2011. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p15012coll8,10772>.

Beginning in 1879, the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina (ET & WNC) Railway extended its line that ran from Johnson City to Elizabethton, Tennessee to Cranberry in order to transport iron ore from the community. The railroad tapped Col. Thomas E. Matson of Philadelphia to supervise the construction of the narrow-gauge line into western North Carolina.² The railroad to Cranberry opened on July 2, 1882. In 1913, the ET & WNC Railway took over the Linville River Railroad that connected Cranberry and Pineola, eventually continuing the line to Boone. The line connecting western North Carolina to Tennessee started as a freight line with one passenger car attached to the rear. Over time, the railroad added more passenger cars, including open air observation cars so tourists could visit the scenic mountains.³

As the Cranberry mines attracted more men, some with families, businesses opened to support the growing population. In 1882, the same year the ET & WNC Railway finished its line to Cranberry, Mike and Sam Banner of Banner Elk supervised the construction of the Cranberry Store. The men brought in a portable sawmill and milled oak, ash, and wild cherry to construct what was reported to be the first frame building in this part of western North Carolina. The Cranberry Store sold a variety of goods but also contained offices for several companies operating in the community, including the ET & WNC Railway, Cranberry Iron and Coal, Cranberry Furnace Company, and Linville River Railway.⁴ Around the same time, the ET & WNC Railway “built on a high hill overlooking a beautiful piece of scenery, one of the coziest, sweetest little hotels.” Operated by Wallace Hawn (or Hahn), the inn accommodated railroad employees and their families during the summer months.⁵ A visitor in 1887 remarked that “the ceilings and walls are finished in natural woods of various colors, and the entire house is as elegantly and luxuriously furnished as a parlor.”⁶ In 1889, William Crowder operated a hotel at Cranberry, while a woman identified as Mrs. Phillips ran a boarding house.⁷

In the late nineteenth century, Peter Hardin (1838-1916), a former slave, became one of the most prosperous and well-known figures in Cranberry.⁸ Initially he worked in the iron ore mines but rose to prominence through his civic and business achievements. In January 1881, Postmaster General Horace Maynard appointed him postmaster of Cranberry.⁹ Hardin also worked as a tanner, merchant, and inn keeper. Hardin’s hotel became well-known for the delicious meals Peter and his wife, Charity, served. A traveler’s recounting of an 1878 trip

² A narrow-gauge line’s rails were three feet apart as opposed to a standard gauge railway whose rails are set four feet 8 ½ inches apart.

³ “Tweetsie: The Little Train with the Big Heart,” *The Knoxville Journal*, June 29, 1941; “The Onliest Train,” *The Tennessean* (Nashville), September 12, 1948; “Important Railroad Link Changes Hands,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, April 14, 1913.

⁴ “Store Built in 1882 Still Stands at Cranberry, N.C.,” *Johnson City (Tennessee) Chronicle*, December 8, 1935.

⁵ “High Up in Cranberry: Popular Hotel Which Must Be Enlarged to Accommodate Guests,” *The Journal and Tribune* (Knoxville), August 29, 1895.

⁶ “Among the Clouds: Meeting of the Tennessee Press Association at Cloudland Hotel,” *Southern Standard* (McMinnville, Tennessee), July 23, 1887.

⁷ Branson’s North Carolina Business Directory, 1889.

⁸ Hardin is often identified as a Creek Indian but historic census records consistently provide “black” as his race.

⁹ Mallory Hope Ferrell, *Tweetsie Country*, Self Published, 1979 and 1991.

through far western North Carolina referred to “Peter, a gentleman of color...the best hotel man we came across in all of our journeyings.”¹⁰ In 1887, black minister Rev. G.W. Kincaide, who penned the “Colored Citizens’ Column” in a Jonesboro, Tennessee newspaper, detailed an encounter with Hardin during his travels to western North Carolina. Rev. Kincaide called Hardin “one of wealthy colored gentlemen of the State of N. C.” He went on to describe Hardin’s “fine two-story building,” which he identified as a dwelling, the nearby tannery, and a fifty-ton frame barn, all on the 700 acres Hardin owned at Cranberry.¹¹

The industries of Cranberry experienced financial ups and downs from the late nineteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth century. This appeared to be the case for one local industry. In 1893, the Cranberry Furnace Company shut down citing “no market for their product.”¹² At the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of investors in Philadelphia re-opened the Cranberry Furnace Company to mine magnetic ore to create low phosphorous pig ore used in the production of steel castings and other high tension metal products. The company shut down again for a time, but by April 1916, the Cranberry Furnace Company was back open and advertised raises for all its workers in attempt to attract prospective drill men and muckers, the workers who shoveled rocks.¹³ In 1920, the plant closed for two years due to a downturn in the market for iron and steel.¹⁴ It reopened briefly in 1922 but closed for good in 1929. One local business suffered a devastating loss in the early part of the century. In April 1905, the Cranberry Inn was destroyed after a blaze in a fireplace became out of control. Strong winds intensified the fire leading to the deaths of two men.¹⁵

In the 1930s, the locomotive running between Johnson City and Cranberry became known as the Tweetsie, named by a schoolgirl traveling over the narrow gauge from Johnson City to Banner Elk to attend summer camp. By extension, the line itself became known as the Tweetsie Railroad with several steam locomotives pulling passenger, freight, and baggage cars between Tennessee and Cranberry.¹⁶

Along with those seeking to profit from mining, the little community attracted other business interests in the first decades of the new century. In 1936, Fisher-Beck Hosiery Mill leased a building from Cranberry Iron and Coal Company to establish a finishing and dyeing plant.¹⁷ In 1938, Cranberry Knitting Mill, a manufacturer of socks for children, women, and men opened.¹⁸ During the 1930s and 1940s, many women and men living in Cranberry worked for New Deal agencies including in sewing programs, forestry projects, and highway construction

¹⁰ “The Switzerland of America 55 Years Ago,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 30, 1933.

¹¹ “Colored Citizens’ Column: Devoted to the Advancement and Welfare of Colored People,” *Herald and Tribune* (Jonesboro, Tennessee), February 17, 1887.

¹² “Business Troubles,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, August 4, 1893.

¹³ Advertisement, *The Newton Enterprise* (Newton, North Carolina), April 7, 1916.

¹⁴ “Repair Plant at Cranberry,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 12, 1922.

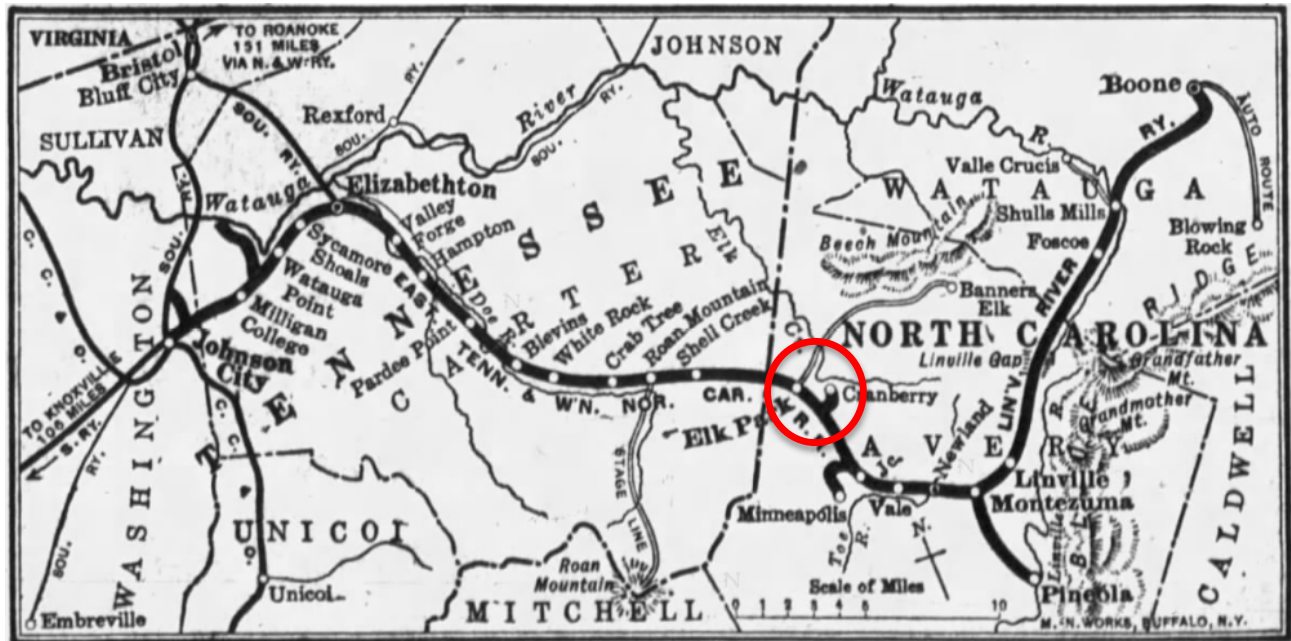
¹⁵ “Cranberry Inn Burned,” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 18, 1905; “Two Cremated in Hotel Fire,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, April 18, 1905.

¹⁶ “The Onliest Train,” *The Tennessean*, September 12, 1948.

¹⁷ “Dyeing Plant Opened at Cranberry, N.C.,” *Johnson City Chronicle*, December 29, 1936.

¹⁸ “Hosiery Mill to Open at Cranberry, N.C.,” *Johnson City Chronicle*, May 8, 1938.

undertakings funded through the Works Progress Administration, renamed the Works Projects Administration in 1939 (WPA).¹⁹



1940 route map for the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railway from carolana.com. Cranberry circled in red

In 1940, following a devastating flood, the ET & WNC Railway abandoned the line from Cranberry to Boone. The Tweetsie Railroad continued its run from Tennessee to Cranberry, carrying mostly logs, lumber, mine products, and sightseeing passengers including fishermen wishing to try their luck on the area's rivers. In April 1941, a Delaware newspaper remarked, "the Doe River Gorge through which the Tweetsie twists and turns on her daily round trip is still in its primeval state and is so narrow there is no room for a highway. The only way tourists can see it is by riding Tweetsie which makes many unscheduled stops so passengers may pick wildflowers and view the scenery."²⁰

After at least two decades of declining profits, in 1950, the ET & WNC Railway requested permission from the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the line from Elizabethton to Cranberry. The railroad contended that the main impetus for the line's construction, hauling iron ore, no longer happened on a large scale. At a hearing at the John Sevier Hotel in Johnson City in the summer of 1950, several residents from communities along the rail line expressed support for the idea of closing the railroad and constructing a highway along the route where the Tweetsie operated. With approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Tweetsie ceased operations on October 16, 1950. Soon afterward, the company removed the steel rails starting at Cranberry.²¹ In 1957, one of the Tweetsie railroad

¹⁹ The manuscript 1940 Avery County population census for Cranberry indicates the large number and variety of relief agency jobs held by Cranberry residents.

²⁰ "Tweetsie Still Hauls Tourists," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), April 16, 1941.

²¹ "Witnesses Say: Good Road Preferable to 'Tweetsie,'" *Johnson City Press*, June 15, 1950; "Say Good Bye to 'Tweetsie'—And to An Era Gone Except in Realm of Nostalgia," *Johnson City Press*, September 17, 1950.

steam engines became the focal point of the Tweetsie Railroad tourist attraction near Boone, an amusement park still operating today.²²

Since the closing of the mines and removal of the railroad tracks, Cranberry has remained a distinct community containing residences, churches, and small local businesses. Two relatively new schools—Freedom Trail Elementary and Cranberry Middle—lie at the heart of the community. The four-lane NC 194 (Elk Park Highway) gives residents easy access to the county seat of Newland. Little evidence of the community’s heyday as a small industrial railroad hamlet remains.



A nineteenth century brick building (AV0114) stood on the Cranberry High School parcel close to the US 19E and NC 194 intersection until the late 1980s or early 1990s. It served as a dwelling, store, post office, and housing for principals and custodians after Cranberry High School opened in 1924 (photograph from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation survey file produced circa 1975)

²² “Little Tweetsie is Running Again,” *Kingsport Times-News* (Kingsport, Tennessee), August 4, 1957.

III. Property Description and Evaluation

Resource Name	Cranberry High School
HPO Survey Site Number	AV0107
Location	5215 Elk Park Highway, Elk Park, NC
PIN	182800561871
Construction Date	1924, 1937, 1948, 1959
Recommendation	Eligible under Criteria A and C
Period of Significance	1924-1968



Cranberry High School classroom building from 1924 (left) and 1959 science building (right), view to the southeast

Description

Cranberry High School, including the main classroom building, a gymnasium, and science and agriculture buildings, occupies 9.28 acres at the southeast corner of the intersection of Elk Park Highway (NC Highway 194) and US Highway 19E in the unincorporated community of Cranberry. The town of Elk Park, the nearest incorporated place, lies about one mile to the northwest. The school stands at the northern end of Cranberry, a settlement known historically for its rich iron ore deposits and the extraction industry that operated in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The community and school occupy an elongated valley through which Cranberry Creek flows. The Cranberry High School setting is rural with some commercial development and scattered residential properties located mainly along US 19E to the south of Cranberry High School.



Site plan, created from Avery County GIS website

The four buildings at Cranberry High School stand on a grassy hilltop on the eastern side of the parcel. Together they occupy a little less than three acres of the entire 9.28 acres. A gravel-covered lane travels from the south side of NC Highway 194 through a pair of flanking stone walls and winds its way up a gradual hill where the right fork leads to the center of campus and the left fork runs along the south side of the agriculture building then back down a hill to NC Highway 194. The classroom building faces west with the science building positioned only about thirty-five feet to the south and the gymnasium sitting approximately 110 feet to the rear or east of the classroom building and science building. Located almost 100 feet to the northeast, the agriculture building stands downhill and on the south side of the right-of-way for NC Highway 194. Immediately to the west of the classroom and science buildings, the parcel slopes downward to the level and grass-covered athletic fields that border the east side of the US 19E right-of-way. Large deciduous trees planted in a neat row shade the west side of

the gravel entrance lane between NC 194 and the classroom building and on both sides of the gravel lane on the south side of the agriculture building. A pair of the deciduous trees frame the front of the classroom building. These trees were likely planted around the time the classroom building was constructed during the period when the North Carolina Division of Schoolhouse Planning provided guidance about landscaping to local school boards. Small sporadically spaced evergreen trees border the west side of the property along US 19E. A thick line of trees borders the south and east property lines. A small billboard along NC Highway 194 just east of the stone walls reads, "Historic Site of Cranberry High School (Fighting Wildcats), Owned and Operated by the Cranberrian Corporation." A single random stone battered pillar with part of a metal post sticking out of it stands at the northeast corner of the parcel along the south side of NC Highway 194. It likely held a sign of some type.

Classroom Building (1924)

Cranberry High School, an impressive two-and-a-half-story, red-brick veneer building with understated Colonial Revival-style details, is banked so that the south end reveals two levels and the north end stands a full three stories. A pair of front-gabled and slightly projecting pavilions with rounded louvered vents with white masonry keystones and wood purlins just below the rake bookend the broad thirteen-bay façade. Paired windows pierce the façade of each stair tower on the building's north and south ends. Eyebrow louvered attic vents grace each elevation of the hipped roof while a single brick chimney rises from the interior near the building's north end. The portico is raised and reached by a set of graduated concrete steps with stepped brick sidewalls. Originally, a flat-roofed, one-story portico with Tuscan pillars and a crowning balustrade sheltered the double-leaf front doors framed by a multi-lite transom and paneled and multi-lite sidelights. A front-gabled vinyl-clad portico with vinyl wrapped columns replaces the original. This is the most substantial alteration to the exterior. Original wood pilasters with simple caps and bases, an original dentil cornice, and a paneled ceiling are intact beneath the portico. The original paired nine-over-two wood windows remain intact on the first and second levels, while the original six-over-one windows remain on the basement level. A lintel of soldier-course bricks with a white masonry block at each end surmount the first and second level paired windows while a course of rowlock bricks form the sill beneath them. The basement level windows lack lintels and sills. Canopies with rafter tails and knee braces shelter the double leaf door on the façade of each stair tower. Windows on the stair tower are nine-over-two and topped with six-lite transoms. An additional entrance to the basement is located beneath the portico. Two openings topped with segmental arches with masonry keystones pierce the north and south sides of the portico foundation and lead to a boarded-up double-leaf entrance. A sign over the doorway is painted white directly on the brick and reads, "Vocational, Home Economics, and Agriculture."

The south end features two large brick panels outlined in slightly projecting brick with white masonry accent blocks at the corners. A recessed ground level entrance is between the panels. Above, an open porch contains the upper stair landing. The north end is identical to the south end except a brick stair leads from the ground to the first story recessed opening. Also on this end, a set of double wooden doors leads to the basement. The center of the rear side

containing four bays on each level projects to break up the long elevation. A shed roof with knee braces and rafter tails shelters wood paneled and four-lite doors.

A small vestibule is located just inside the front doors. An opening with a transom and sidelights, identical to those at the main entrance, separates the vestibule from a short entrance hall. Classical paneled pilasters at the corners mark the transition from the short entrance hall into a long double-loaded transverse corridor. Ceiling, wall, and floor finishes on the main level and throughout the building remain intact or have been faithfully restored. Classrooms are typical for the 1920s with banks of windows on one side and a chalkboard on one end. A pivoting window at the top of the interior wall allowed for the free flow of air through the corridor and into the classrooms. Throughout the interior, some walls between classrooms have been removed to create larger rooms. An auditorium with a stage dominates the center of the upper level. Classrooms are located on each side of this gathering space. The basement was not accessible.

Despite the removal of some interior walls, the classroom building's interior remains remarkably intact with a high degree of integrity. The property owners, alumni of the school, have demonstrated great attention to maintaining the building and restoring elements that were lost during the nearly two decades it stood empty or subjected to inappropriate use as a tobacco barn.

Gymnasium (1937)

The highly intact WPA gym measures 80 feet by 120 feet and stands on a slope east of the classroom and science buildings. The frame building with original wood shingles rests on a stone foundation and displays an original stone chimney on its north elevation. The stone on the northeast corner of the foundation has been replaced with concrete block in order to stabilize the building. The building's pent roof is topped by a higher roof structure meant to increase the interior height and because it had windows, help to provide additional light to the interior. Due to leaking issues, the upper roof was clad in metal within the last several years, but windows remain on its east side. A gabled entrance reached by a set of concrete block stairs is centered on the west elevation. Similar entrances are located on the south and east elevations. Windows throughout are original six-over-six wood sash. Inside, the gym remains mostly unchanged. In the 1960s, a balcony was added to the south side of the main level. The basement contains dressing rooms and a concession stand. The only alteration in this space is the addition of paneling on the walls.

Science Building (Ca. 1959, 1966)

Standing due south of the classroom building, the concrete block with red-brick veneer, one-story science building contained primarily the library and home economics classroom. The eastern half stands on a slope with a tall basement below. Windows throughout are original metal casement with poured concrete sills. Originally, a flat roof topped the building, but a hipped roof replaced it in 1966 after leaks occurred. On the east elevation, a flat roofed porch

with brick wing walls shelters the double metal doors with a wide transom. An identical entrance is located on the north elevation. Inside, the former library occupies the east end, while the large home economics class takes up the building's northeast corner. Classrooms and a restroom line the south side of the L-shaped corridor. Interior walls are concrete block and floors are original linoleum.

Agriculture Building (1948)

The two-story, gable-roofed building stands to the northeast of the classroom building. Asbestos shingles sheathe the exterior and original eight-over-eight windows remain intact. Brick flues rise from each gable end, while a metal staircase on the east end leads to an upper level door. A set of double doors on the west end of the north elevation open into a basement. According to Cranberry High School alumni, the building originally served as a barracks at Fort Bragg. It was moved to the site in 1948 and functioned as the vocational agricultural education building. Vocational agriculture at Cranberry High School was part of a statewide curriculum established after the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act created such programs in rural schools across North Carolina. The Department of Public Instruction administered the program on the statewide level.

Stone Entry Walls (1932)

A pair of random coursed mortared stone walls flank the gravel drive leading from NC Highway 194 to the buildings. The walls stand about 150 feet southeast of the intersection of NC Highway 194 and US Highway 19E and about twelve feet from the edge of NC Highway 194. Each of the two sections is approximately fifteen feet long and identical in construction with a tall square pillar with a flat-topped cast concrete cap nearest the entry road. Each wall is stepped and terminates on the opposite end in a shorter square pillar with a flat concrete cap. The east wall includes a square concrete plaque inscribed by hand with the letters "Y.T.H.F." and the date 1932. The initials stand for the Young Tar Heel Farmers, the school's vocational agricultural club, whose members constructed the wall in 1932.

Stone Pillar (Date unknown)

A single battered stone pillar stands approximately 440 feet to the southeast of the stone entry walls and just south of the southern edge of NC 194. Approximately five feet tall, the mortared river rock post retains a broken off portion of a metal pipe that likely held a sign. Although the date is unknown, the pillar appears to date to the period when the school operated.



Classroom building facade, view to the east-northeast



Classroom building rear elevation (east elevation) and south end, view to the northwest



Classroom building's north end, view to the south-southwest



Classroom building main level, main entrance to the right looking down north-south corridor, view to the south



Upper story corridor looking into auditorium, view to the south



Upper story auditorium with stage to the left, view to the south-southwest



Original water fountain in main level corridor, view to the south-southwest



Classroom, view to the west



Classroom building portico (left) and arched openings under the portico leading to basement classrooms (above)



1937 gymnasium, view to the northeast



Gymnasium, view to the south-southeast



Gymnasium interior, view to the southeast



1959 Science building, view to the southeast



Science building, view to the west-northwest



Science building (foreground) with classroom building in background (view to the north-northeast)



Science building corridor, view to the east



Agriculture building, view to the southeast



Agriculture building, view to the west-northwest



Stone entry walls (1932) on the south side of NC 194, view to the southeast



Young Tar Heel Farmers plaque in stone entry wall



Gravel entry lane from NC 194 with view to classroom and science buildings and gymnasium, view to the south-southeast



Tree-lined gravel entry lane as seen from classroom building toward NC 194, view to the north-northwest



Stone pillar on the south side of NC 194, view to the west-northwest



Athletic fields as seen from classroom toward the intersection of US 19E and NC 194, view to the northwest



Baseball field at the southwest corner of the property with commemorative marker in foreground, view to the southwest

History of Cranberry High School:

The Avery County Board of Education formed the same year as the county, 1911. In the early years of the county's school system, the board worked to fund and administer the small one and two-teacher schools scattered around the rural mountainous county.

The early work of establishing a consolidated school in Cranberry started in May 1921, when the Avery County Board of Commissioners and the board of education called for a vote in Cranberry township to levy a tax for schools. Of the 103 registered voters, 87 voted for the tax and none against, an indication of the need and desire for better educational opportunities among area residents.²³ The Avery County campaign to build Cranberry High School was part of an effort to construct three high schools in Avery County in the 1920s, an active period of school consolidation across North Carolina. Following World War I, local and state officials across the state worked to improve education by combining small districts and building schools that offered students a wider variety of courses, including vocational education, and the opportunity for students to play on sports teams. With school consolidation came the challenge of transporting students from their often-isolated mountain homes to the nearest school, an issue that endured in Avery County for decades after the consolidation movement of the 1920s.

²³ Avery County Board of Education (BOE) minutes, May 10, 1921, microfilm, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

The towns of Newland, Crossnore, and Elk Park were chosen as the locations of the county's consolidated high schools. In May 1922, the Avery County Board of Education awarded the contract to design the high school in Newland to James F. Gause Jr., a Wilmington architect whose numerous commissions included churches, schools, and dwellings across the state. Among his projects in Wilmington are Delgado School (1914), Fire Station No. 2 (1915), and Immanuel Presbyterian Church (1922). Gause enjoyed a brief partnership with James B. Lynch in the 1910s during which the two worked on several Wilmington projects. Around 1920, Leslie N. Boney Sr., a native of Duplin County, joined Gause and together they received commissions for Ghent Elementary School and Riverside Elementary School, both completed in New Bern in 1922.²⁴

The Avery County Board of Education voted to pay James Gause \$1,600 to design what the school board minutes from May 1, 1922 refer to as a "Moyock Type" of school, a reference to Moyock High School (CK0229) in Moyock, Currituck County, a two-story brick building designed by Gause and begun in February 1922. Apparently, the plans for the modern Colonial Revival-influenced high school in Moyock impressed the Avery County board to the extent that they wanted a version of that building for Newland High School. On February 24, 1922, the Elizabeth City *Daily Advance* newspaper described the two-story school planned for Moyock as "of brick construction, with a front of 136 feet and depth of 60 feet." The newspaper depicted the then-under-construction school as having "ten classrooms, capable of accommodating 300 to 400 pupils, with other rooms devoted to the music, laboratory, manual training, agriculture and home economics departments."

Tragically, thirty-seven-year-old James F. Gause Jr. died on June 2, 1922, just one month after receiving the contract to design Newland High School.²⁵ After Gause underwent stomach surgery in a Wilmington in late May, complications arose and he spent two weeks in the hospital before dying.²⁶ Following his death, Leslie N. Boney Sr., Gause's partner in the architectural practice, took over Gause's projects, including Newland High School. As indication of this, the July 3, 1922 Avery County Board of Education minutes identify Boney as the school's architect. Newland High School was completed in 1923. In the state high school inspector's report dated April 12, 1924, he noted it was a "new high school building costing about \$50,000."²⁷

While Newland High School was under construction, the board of education made plans for the construction of what they referred to as Cranberry Consolidated District High School, which initially was to be located in Elk Park. Early on in the process the location for the school became a bit of a controversy with some wanting the school built in Elk Park but others preferring a site in Cranberry. In October 1922, the board invited John J. Blair, State Director

²⁴ Catherine W. Bishir, "James F. Gause Jr.," *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, Copyright & Digital Scholarship Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

²⁵ "Remains of Young Man Interred in Oakdale: Funeral of James F. Gause Held Saturday Afternoon," *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 5, 1922.

²⁶ "Funeral Services for J.F. Gause Today," *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 3, 1922.

²⁷ Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Elementary and Secondary Education Section, High School Inspectors' Reports, 1922-1923, Avery County, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

of Schoolhouse Planning, to travel from Raleigh to Avery County to review the proposed sites and to make a recommendation. The board declared that they would “be governed largely in locating said site by recommendation of Mr. Blair.”²⁸

On November 7, 1922, John J. Blair visited the proposed sites and declared his first choice, “an eight-acre site at or near the ‘brick house’ so as to include it as part of the school, if possible.” The brick house referenced in the board of education minutes was a pre-Civil War brick building (AV0114) that stood at the northwest corner of the property now occupied by Cranberry High School. During its history, it served as a post office and store. Blair made a sketch of the proposed site and wrote a report about his visit and the reasons for recommending the property. He also visited a site in Elk Park but declared it the second-best option. On his visit, he told members of the school board that the State of North Carolina could contribute money to build a school at Cranberry, which the board estimated would cost \$43,000. Following Blair’s advice, the board of education chose the “brick house site” as the location for Cranberry High School.²⁹

The donation of the preferred site likely increased its desirability among county and state officials. Cranberry Iron and Coal Company, the Linville Railway Company, and the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina (ET & WNC) Railway, which together owned almost 4,000 acres in and around Cranberry, donated the land for school to the Avery County Board of Education.³⁰

At its December 5, 1922 meeting, the board of education formally contracted with architect Leslie N. Boney Sr. to design a school identical to Newland High School but with room for some small alterations if desired by the local officials. Boney proposed “to furnish plans and specifications necessary for the erection of a school building for Cranberry Consolidated District #6 White for the sum of \$500, it being understood that the said building is to be a duplicate of the Newland School building with certain minor changes made in the plans to suit the said board and Frank A. Edmonson, county superintendent.” For an additional \$100, Boney agreed to visit the construction site periodically in order to supervise and inspect the building’s construction.³¹

At its final meeting for the year 1922, the board of education awarded the \$34,000 construction contract to Beeler and Ray. The board gave the C.O. Biddle company of Johnson City, Tennessee the heating and plumbing contract and W.S. Thompson was chosen to install the wiring and lighting. The board accepted the three companies’ bids on the condition that Cranberry High School be completed by August 1, 1923 so that the school year could begin on time. The board also informed the three contractors that if the ET & WNC Railway built a spur

²⁸ Avery County BOE Minutes, October 16, 1922.

²⁹ Avery County BOE Minutes, November 11, 1922.

³⁰ “Companies Elect new Officers and Board,” *Johnson City Chronicle*, October 4, 1938.

³¹ Avery County BOE Minutes, December 5, 1922.

to the construction site, which it did, each contractor's bid would be reduced slightly since transportation of materials would no longer be his responsibility.³²

By May 12, 1923, one of the days Leslie N. Boney Sr. inspected the work, Cranberry High School was under construction. Later that month, the Avery County School Board met at the "brick house school site," to check on the building's progress and to look at the overall property. At that on-site meeting, the board decided that the highway in front of "the new building under construction," presently identified as US Highway 19E, needed to be straightened and moved to the west. The board declared that the Cranberry Iron and Coal Company would deed the extra land freed up once the road was moved to the board and that Cranberry Furnace Company furnish the rock necessary for the highway authorities to construct the road. The board also declared that the ET & WNC Railway deliver the rock to the site where the road would be built. In its final decision at the May 1923 meeting, the board of education hired W.H. Hughes to excavate and level the field situated between the new school building and US Highway 19E where the athletic fields would be located.³³

In a letter dated September 27, 1923, Superintendent B.D. Franklin requested advice from John J. Blair, Director of School Planning, in renovating the old brick house on the site. Franklin wrote "I want to work over the brick house at Cranberry school so that the principal can live in it. We want to add to it later. I would like to have suggestions from you as to how to repair this building so as to add to it later. The building is about 30 x 40." Blair replied that he remembered the exterior of the building but not the interior and suggested, "next time Mr. Boney makes you a visit get him to sketch off an arrangement of rooms for you."³⁴

Anticipation among residents, educators, and students increased as construction of the commodious brick school on the hilltop continued into late 1923, missing the August deadline imposed by the board of education. On December 3, 1923, a Bristol, Tennessee newspaper reported that "Prof. Sunsford, supervisor of the Cranberry school district, moved Friday to the old brick house which has been recently remodeled in order to be near the new high school which will soon be ready for occupancy."³⁵

The *Johnson City Staff* newspaper of Johnson City, Tennessee announced Cranberry High School opened to great fanfare on August 25, 1924, a year behind schedule. The festive occasion included speeches by several dignitaries and the new principal, Adam Phillips. With its opening, Cranberry High School consolidated schools in Elk Park, Toe River, Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, and Cranberry. The newspaper estimated total enrollment at 185 students, including elementary grades, which attended until 1939. Its first year, fifty students in grades

³² Avery County BOE Minutes, December 20, 1922.

³³ Avery County BOE Minutes, May 31, 1923.

³⁴ Letter to John J. Blair, Director of Schoolhouse Planning, from Superintendent B.D. Franklin, September 29, 1923, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, August 1923-1925.

³⁵ "Cranberry N.C.," *The Bristol Herald Courier*, December 3, 1923.

nine through eleven enrolled at Cranberry High School. Twelfth grade did not exist. Six seniors graduated at the end of the first academic year.³⁶

In the first years after its completion, Cranberry High School staff worked to improve and expand their facilities, often appealing to county and state officials for assistance and funding. While the new building boasted a commodious auditorium, it lacked an adequate space for teaching physical education. On October 21, 1925, principal D.C. Butler sent a telegram to John J. Blair, North Carolina Director of Schoolhouse Planning, asking him to supply plans for a gymnasium and to come to the school to consult with him. "WANT YOU CRANBERRY IMMEDIATELY TO GIVE PLANS FOR GYMNASIUM TO BE STARTED AT ONCE EVERY DAYS DELAY IS SERIOUS AND WE ARE BUILDING BY SUBSCRIPTION AND WE CANNOT GET ANY MORE UNTIL BUILDING IS STARTED BUILDING IS WANTED FOR USE THIS YEAR COME AT ONCE WIRE WHEN YOU WILL ARRIVE."³⁷ Blair, who held responsibility for public school buildings across the state, replied by letter on October 27 and included blueprints of gymnasiums in Waynesville and Cary. He added that he and John H. Bonitz, his assistant director, expected to visit the next week. True to his word, on November 4, 1925, Blair and Bonitz visited Cranberry as part of a tour of western North Carolina schools. Blair reported, "the principal was very desirous of a new gymnasium, but due to the fact that the community had not raised additional money, and that there was no appropriation for it, we advised against starting the work of excavation until they were assured of funds with which to complete the building."³⁸

In 1930, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction inspected the classroom building and noted 230 high school and 314 elementary students, a huge increase in enrollment from just six years before. Eight teachers taught high school and eight taught elementary grades. The report noted eighteen standard and two non-standard classrooms plus three laboratories for the sciences, home economics, and agriculture. The library contained 681 books. The auditorium on the building's upper floor held up to 750 students and was used weekly, according to the report.³⁹

Avery County received much assistance from New Deal programs during the Great Depression, especially for school construction and improvement. In the 1930s, W.M. Bagby, Superintendent of Cranberry Schools, worked to secure federal relief funding for the construction of the gym for Cranberry High School, an effort that he told W.F. Credle, the Director of Schoolhouse Planning, took four years. After much delay, in an April 8, 1937

³⁶ "Auspicious Opening of Cranberry School," *The Johnson City Staff* (Johnson City, Tennessee), August 31, 1924; Jesse Wood, "Resurrecting Old Cranberry," *High Country Magazine*, August/September 2013, pages 33-34.

³⁷ Western Union Telegram from D.C. Butler to J.J. Blair, Director of Schoolhouse Planning, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, August 1923-1925, September 1925-August 1927.

³⁸ "Monthly Report to Supt. A.T. Allen," by J.J. Blair, Director of Schoolhouse Planning, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, August 1923-1925, September 1925-August 1927.

³⁹ School Building Information Report, 1929-30, Cranberry, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, Schoolhouse Plans and Standards, 1930, County Building Reports, 1929-1930.

telegram, Bagby informed Credle that the school had “adopted frame gymnasium plans by Simpson.” The Simpson Bagby referenced was architect Frank B. Simpson.⁴⁰ With funding from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the county built the gymnasium at Cranberry High School in late 1937. The construction employed sixty workers and cost \$12,000. Just before work began, a Johnson City, Tennessee newspaper described the planned 80’ by 120’ shingled building with a native stone foundation as containing a coach’s office and dressing rooms for girls and boys.⁴¹ The gymnasium was one of 277 recreational buildings constructed in North Carolina by the WPA by the spring of 1942.⁴²



Entrance under classroom building portico to original vocational classrooms, view to the southeast

From its opening, Cranberry High School offered agriculture classes to high school students in order to prepare them for farm work after graduation. Initially, students received instruction in one of the basement classrooms. On March 4, 1941, Principal Wesley M. Bagby wrote to Roy H. Thomas, State Supervisor of Vocational Agriculture in Raleigh, to request a loan to construct a building for these classes. Bagby wrote, “we are planning to erect an agricultural building at Cranberry High School under the supervision of Mr. George W. Nesbitt, our agriculture teacher. This is a WPA project and has been approved by local, state, and federal authorities. We are anxious to begin work as soon as possible.” The state provided the loan information in a letter to Avery County School Superintendent George M. Bowen on March 25, 1941. The building Bagby wanted never got built, likely due in part to the United States’ entry into World War II in December of that year.⁴³

Beginning in 1946, vocational agricultural education teacher George Nesbitt, who began teaching agriculture at Cranberry in 1935, supervised a veterans-on-the-farm training program at Cranberry High School. The

⁴⁰ W.M. Bagby, telegram to W.F. Credle, April 8, 1937, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, July 1935-June 1936, July 1936, June 1937.

⁴¹ “Cranberry High School Will Have Gymnasium,” *Johnson City Chronicle*, January 14, 1937.

⁴² “WPA Has Been Waging Conflict for Almost Seven Years to Make North Carolina Strong and Her People Safe,” *The Charlotte Observer*, April 19, 1942.

⁴³ Correspondence, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, State Loan Fund Applications: Literary Loan Fund, Rural Rehabilitation Fund, and Special Building Fund, 1938-1942.

curriculum provided hundreds of World War II veterans in Cranberry and the surrounding area training in soil testing, soil improvement, farm forestry, livestock raising, crop production, and home beautification. The veterans received instruction on operating tools and power equipment and making farm implements, furniture, and hardware. They also received books about agriculture and watched films and slide shows in order to learn “the most progressive farming methods.”⁴⁴

In March 1948, Nesbitt told the *Johnson City Press* newspaper that “all trainees have pledged their support toward erection of an agricultural building on the Cranberry High School campus.” In early 1948, Nesbitt gathered several veterans-on-the-farm students and travelled to Fort Bragg in Fayetteville. There, the War Assets Administration sold government owned surplus to the public. The Cranberry group purchased and disassembled a decommissioned barracks and trucked it to the school site in two parts.⁴⁵ Back at the school property, they

reassembled the building and added asbestos shingles to the exterior. It was in full operation by December 1951. Containing a woodworking shop, auditorium, and classrooms, it served as the agricultural and vocational education building for nearly two decades.⁴⁶ That building remains on the north side of the campus.

The campus’s final expansion occurred in 1959 when the county school system constructed the one-story brick science annex just south of



The Katydids, pictured on the classroom building’s front steps with their leader Kay Wilkins, won two national square-dancing championships for the school. Photo on display at Cranberry High School.

⁴⁴ “North Carolina Schools of Vocational Agriculture, 1935-1936,” Department of Public Instruction, Division of Vocational Education, General Correspondence of the Director, 1918-1953; “132 GI On-Farm Trainees Enrolled at Cranberry,” *Johnson City Press*, March 18, 1948.

⁴⁵ Doris and Jerry Turbyfill, interview with Jennifer F. Martin, April 19, 2021, Cranberry, North Carolina; The May 3, 1948 board of education minutes refer to “the New Agriculture Building...at Cranberry.”

⁴⁶ “Cranberry High School Vocational Building Now in Full Operation,” *Johnson City Press*, December 5, 1951.

the classroom building. The science building contained the large home economics classroom and the library. In 1966, the original flat roof was replaced with a hipped roof to prevent leaks.

In 1965, at the request of the Avery County Board of Education and the superintendent, the state's Division of Schoolhouse Planning conducted a study and analysis of the county's school buildings and the system's overall operations. The study focused on the physical condition of each school, daily and projected future attendance, transportation, educational funding, and proposed curriculum. At the time of the survey, Cranberry High School, the county's largest high school, enrolled 425 students in grades nine through twelve. Of the classroom building, the Schoolhouse Planning report found "the old combustible high school" with "many defects and inadequacies." Further, the report concluded that the "wood frame combustible gymnasium is a very poor building in nearly all respects" and recommended against renovation based on its state of repair. The report declared the "two-story, wood frame, combustible agriculture building violates the present N. C. building code by the fact that it is two-story and wood frame. It is a cheaply constructed building in fairly good condition." Only the science building, which the report cited as "a fire-resistive structure in good condition" met with approval.⁴⁷

The Division of Schoolhouse Planning's 1965 study found that all three high schools had fewer students per school than generally acceptable by state standards and that the school population, like the county population, was likely to continue to decrease in the coming decades. The state's recommendation was that a central high school be built "in the general vicinity of Newland." In order for such a school to be accessible however, the study advised that "every effort be made to improve the road network" to make such a school accessible to all county children.⁴⁸

In 1968, the Avery County Board of Education, following the state's recommendation, closed Cranberry High School, along with Newland and Crossnore High Schools. The brand-new Avery High School in Newland became the county's only high school in 1968.

From 1968 to 1985, Wall Lumber Company and Keyes Building Supplies owned Cranberry High School. They used the science building as offices and a showroom, but rented the classroom building to a tobacco farmer who grew the crop on the athletic fields and used the 1924 building for curing. The gymnasium became a storage building.

On September 17, 1985, a group of alumni bought Cranberry High School for \$150,000 and formed a non-profit called the Cranberrian Corporation in order to spearhead its restoration. The group raised over \$500,000 through fund drives and appeals to former students for donations in order to pay off the loan used to buy the property and to fund restoration of the

⁴⁷ "Avery County School Survey, March 16, 1965," in North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Survey Files, 1935-1974, unprocessed records, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

⁴⁸ "Avery County School Survey, March 16, 1965," in North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Survey Files, 1935-1974, unprocessed records, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

four buildings. Over the last thirty plus years, the corporation members have shown great creativity in order to preserve and restore the buildings. In 1988, a film company paid for restoration of the gymnasium in exchange for using it in the filming of the movie *Winter People*. By hosting fairs, dances, concerts, family reunions, and bingo, the Cranberrian Corporation has been successful in restoring the integrity of the historic campus and preserving a significant community landmark in Avery County.⁴⁹



Cranberry High School in September 1950. The school was the scene of a company picnic for the Mountain Electric Cooperative picnic. From the *Johnson County News* (Mountain City, Tennessee), September 21, 1950

Historic School Buildings in Avery County

In 1968, the board of education consolidated the county's three high schools and transferred all students to the new Avery County High School in Newland for the 1968-1969 academic year. Of the three high school buildings closed in 1968, only Cranberry High School remains.

Newland High School opened in the 1923 in the county seat of Newland. The school occupied a two-story-on-basement, side-gabled brick building with intersecting front-facing gabled wings at each end. A one-story, flat-roofed portico marked the entrance. The building was nearly identical to Cranberry High School, except the dormers were gabled instead of the eyebrow form found at Cranberry High School. In 1965, the North Carolina Division of Schoolhouse Planning found the school "a combustible building with many defects and inadequacies though structurally sound." The

⁴⁹ Jesse Wood, "Resurrecting Old Cranberry," *High Country Magazine*, August/September 2013, pages 38-39; Doris and Jerry Turbyfill, interview with Jennifer F. Martin, April 19, 2021, Cranberry, North Carolina.

report noted “it is similar to the old building at Cranberry.” After closing in 1968, the Newland building was demolished in the 1970s.⁵⁰



Documentary photo of Newland High School (gone), from Avery County Historical Museum



The 1939 stone WPA gymnasium is all that remains of Newland High School, which was demolished in the 1970s

While the Newland High School building no longer stands, the campus’s 1939 WPA gym remains.⁵¹ In April 1938, the Avery County Board of Commissioners appropriated \$2,000 to add to the \$600 pledged by local citizens in order to match almost \$8,000 contributed by the WPA for the building’s construction.⁵² Random cut amphibolite, a mineral found locally, forms the exterior of

⁵⁰ Tim Gardner, “Then and Now: Avery High School at 50 Years,” *High Country Magazine*, December 2019; “Avery County School Survey, March 16, 1965,” in North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Survey Files, 1935-1974, unprocessed records, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

⁵¹ Note: Works Progress Administration was renamed the Works Projects Administration in January 1939. When construction began on the Newland High School Gym, the former name was still in use. By the time the building was completed, WPA stood for Works Projects Administration.

⁵² “Funds for Newland Gym Appropriated by Board,” *Johnson City (Tennessee) Chronicle*, April 1, 1938.

the one-story building.⁵³ Granite pilasters with pointed poured concrete caps flank a Gothic Revival-style arch on the east gable end that marks the recessed main entrance. Soldier-course cut granite blocks set at a slight angle form flat arches with poured concrete keystones that crown the paired replacement windows. A poured concrete parapet surmounts each gable end. Gabled dormers on the roof slopes appear to be later additions. The interior retains its overall form including braced wood supports although the ceiling has been lowered and enclosed with wood framed panels. The Newland and Cranberry High School gyms are the only WPA gyms remaining in the county.



Documentary photo of Crossnore High School (gone), from Avery County Historical Museum

Crossnore High School, one of the three high schools in the county in 1968, occupied a one-story, hipped-roof frame building constructed by the WPA in 1937 in the southern part of Avery County. The North Carolina Division of Schoolhouse Planning’s 1965 assessment noted the “combustible high school building is cheaply constructed. Interior wall, floor, and ceiling finishes are poor. Rest rooms are poor. Lighting and electrical as renovated are fair. The building is structurally sound but major renovation would be difficult to justify economically.”⁵⁴ It graduated its final class in 1968 and the building was torn down in the early 1970s.

Several older buildings remaining in Avery County chronicle the development of education in the county beginning in the early twentieth century when small schools stood in the many settlements scattered across the mountainous terrain.

⁵³ Material identified by North Carolina Geological Survey’s Swannanoa Office, Nick Bozdog, email to Jennifer F. Martin, May 10, 2121.

⁵⁴ “Avery County School Survey, March 16, 1965,” in North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Survey Files, 1935-1974, unprocessed records, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.



Old Riverside School (AV0112), now a dwelling, view to northwest

Old Riverside School (AV0112, Study List 1986) is a two-story former school built of handmade rusticated concrete block in 1919 and featuring gable ends with original stucco and exposed timber frame. The former school, now a residence, stands at 5315 US 19E on the north bank of the North Toe River between Spear and Plumtree in western Avery County. By 1929-1930, five

teachers worked at the school. It served students until 1936, when the new Riverside School was built to the south with funding from the WPA. Soon after closing, Friel Vance, whose wife taught at Old Riverside School, bought the building. During World War II, a local mica company used it for processing in order to supply the mineral for use in the war. In the 1950s and 1960s, it became a

community center. By the mid-1980s when the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office's county-wide survey documented the school, vandalism had hastened the building's disrepair and deterioration. In the early 1990s, owners Linda and Ed Hamby hired Bobby McAlpine Architecture of Alabama to develop restoration plans that would respect the original building's



overall form and character during the process of converting it to a residence. The former school retains six-over-six double-hung windows, although they are re-creations of the original. A stonework porch has been added to the riverside elevation and the original interior stone chimney is

gone and replaced with a massive native-stone exterior chimney on the east elevation. The grand classical doorway on the east elevation and the garage door on the west elevation date from the early 1990s. The current owners purchased the building in 2000.⁵⁵



New Riverside School, view to the southeast

With assistance from the WPA, the county built the new Riverside School in 1936 for elementary students in the small community of Spear. It consolidated Henson Creek, Mullen Hill, Powder Mill, and Riverside schools. Daniel R. Beeson Sr. of Johnson City served as architect.⁵⁶ In 1938, the

Plumtree Women’s Club helped pay for a two-room rear addition.⁵⁷ In 1951, a cafeteria and two classrooms were added to the building’s rear. Another addition dates to 1956. The school, located less than a mile south of Old Riverside School (AV0112), is built of locally harvested stone. It closed in 1987 and stands in a deteriorated condition. A chain link fence currently surrounds the building, which is for sale.

The WPA helped to build four additional schools in Avery County in the 1930s. Constructed between 1935 and 1938, the hipped-roofed Elk Park School (AV0083, NR 2005), built with a protomylonitic granitic gneiss veneer, follows an E- shaped plan with a gymnasium extending from the rear.⁵⁸ An assessment of the building’s condition by the school board in 1951 concluded that “the Elk Park School is the best equipped and best kept up school in the entire county.”⁵⁹ In 1957, the county added a one-story, flat-roofed concrete block cafeteria to the north end of the west

⁵⁵ Gail Laughlin, owner of the Old Riverside School, email correspondence with Jennifer F. Martin, April 17, 2021.

⁵⁶ “Schools Expanded,” *Johnson City (Tennessee) Chronicle*, August 1, 1936.

⁵⁷ “Clubs Sponsor Play at Riverside School,” *Johnson City (Tennessee) Chronicle*, May 22, 1937.

⁵⁸ Material identified by North Carolina Geological Survey’s Swannanoa Office, Nick Bozdog, email to Jennifer F. Martin, May 10, 2021.

⁵⁹ “Avery Officials Tour County School; Find Many Repairs Needed,” *Elizabethton (Tennessee) Star*, June 7, 1951.

wing.⁶⁰ The school closed in 1999 and was renovated for use as apartments in 2004. That same year, the east wing was extended with a two-bay, stone-veered addition. A free-standing, three-story multi-family building has been added to the property. The three-story apartment



Elk Park School (AV0083, NR 2005), view to the northeast

building and athletic fields stand on the legal parcel but were not part of the 2005 nomination. Elk Park School retains its integrity and eligibility for the NRHP.

In July 1939, the WPA announced an allotment of \$39,710 to build stone schools at Beech Mountain and Banner Elk. The undertaking also included “the operation of quarries in and near Banner Elk and Beech Mountain townships to provide materials for use on this project.”⁶¹ Begun in September 1939 and completed in 1940, the Beech Mountain School stands at 60 Flat Springs Road in the small rural community of Whaley in Beech Mountain Township in northern Avery County. Frank Clarke of the Minneapolis community served as construction foreman of the eight-room school with an auditorium.⁶² In April 1957, Beech Mountain School was expanded with a low, flat-roofed cafeteria wing that projects beyond the building’s original façade.⁶³ More recently, the original windows have been downsized and the surrounding space sheathed in vinyl siding. The school stood in an isolated location but enjoyed great support from community members. In 1941, the library had 600 books and a new radio in the auditorium, which gave students “much pleasure and instruction.”⁶⁴ In May 1952, the community held a chicken supper to raise money to buy a mimeograph machine.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ “Five Schools in Avery Co. Are Improved,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 28, 1957.

⁶¹ “Mecklenburg Fund Improved,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 7, 1939.

⁶² “School Houses Being Built in Avery County,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 20, 1939.

⁶³ “Five Schools in Avery Co. Are Improved,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 28, 1957.

⁶⁴ “Beech Mountain Has Deepest Well in Avery,” *Johnson City (Tennessee) Press*, October 26, 1941.

⁶⁵ “Beech Mountain News,” *Elizabethton Star*, May 14, 1952.



Beech Mountain School, view to the northeast

Over time, enrollment declined and by 1989, only seventy-seven students grades kindergarten through eighth grade attended Beech Mountain School.⁶⁶ In 1990, when enrollment was so low that the county school system no longer provided funding, the state legislature appropriated

\$25,000 to the school for capital improvements.⁶⁷ Beech Mountain School closed in 2011 and now serves as a meeting hall for the still-isolated mountain community. While the building's association with the WPA and the history of education in Avery County makes it significant, the alterations to the windows negatively impact its historic and architectural integrity.

Powell Williams of Banner Elk served as the construction foreman of Banner Elk School (AV0100, NR 2017), which, when completed, was nearly identical to the eight-classroom Beech Mountain School. Construction began in September 1939 and concluded in 1940. In 1945, a stone cafeteria addition was built and a Modernist, brick, rear classroom wing was added in 1951. A freestanding frame classroom building was built to the rear in 1985. The one-story, granite-veneered building with a hipped roof includes an off-center entrance topped with a front gable. All historic windows throughout the building have been replaced, an alteration that compromises the former school's integrity. The county board of education, which closed the school in 2011, sold it to the Town of Banner Elk in 2014. The town continues to renovate the former school, which serves as a business incubator.

⁶⁶ "Avery Board Asks for Public Input on School Issues," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 15, 1989.

⁶⁷ General Assembly of North Carolina, Session 1989, House Bill 2127, "Beech Mountain School Funds," May 25, 1990.



Banner Elk School (AV0100, NR 2017), view to the north



Minneapolis School, view to the southeast

The ten-teacher Minneapolis School at 47 Minneapolis School Road in the Minneapolis community dates to 1932. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's 1965 survey labeled the building "structurally sound but many defects and inadequacies exist including a badly warped

cafeteria floor, poor rest rooms and poor lighting in the auditorium and corridors.”⁶⁸ After the school closed in 1998, a nearby church purchased the building and clad it in weatherboard. The hipped roof school includes two intersecting end gable front wings. All windows have been replaced. The building’s integrity has been compromised by alterations.

National Register Criteria Evaluation

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Cranberry High School is recommended eligible for the NRHP on the local level under Criterion A for Education and Criterion C for Architecture. The period of significance extends from 1924, the year the school was completed and opened for students, to 1968, when it closed upon consolidation of the county’s three high schools and the opening of Avery County High School in Newland.

Integrity

Cranberry High School retains the seven aspects of integrity needed for NRHP eligibility. The school occupies its original nine-acre site on US 19E in the rural community of Cranberry and therefore retains its integrity of location and setting. Three of the school’s buildings remain on a hilltop overlooking athletic fields, while the agriculture building stands on the north side of campus close to the south side of NC 194 giving the property the historic feeling and association of a rural public school campus developed from the 1920s to 1950s. The buildings’ forms, character-defining exterior materials, plans, structure, style, and spatial relationships to one another are intact, providing Cranberry High School with a high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, and materials.

Criterion A

Cranberry High School is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Education. To be eligible under Criterion A, the property must retain integrity and be associated with a specific event marking an important moment in American prehistory of history or a pattern of events or historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, state, or nation. Furthermore, the property must have existed at the time and be documented to be associated with the events. Finally, the property’s specific association must be important as well.

Cranberry High School holds significance in the history of education in Avery County. The classroom building is the only historic high school remaining in the county associated with the statewide school consolidation movement of the 1920s. The two other consolidation high schools at Newland and Crossnore were demolished soon after they closed in 1968. Cranberry High School is a visible reminder of the campaign by the North Carolina legislature and local school boards to consolidate rural public schools after the end of World War I. Educators and public officials, recognizing that students in one- and two-teacher schools could not attain the educational opportunities afforded urban students in large schools with diversified curriculums, pushed for

⁶⁸ “Avery County School Survey, March 16, 1965,” in North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Survey Files, 1935-1974, unprocessed records, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

combining small underpopulated rural districts into larger districts. During the consolidation movement, larger, mostly brick schools sprung up in substantial numbers across the state in response to the important initiative of the 1920s aimed at improving educational outcomes for students. Like Cranberry High School, these institutions became focal points for rural communities and small towns whose citizens rallied around the faculty, sports teams, and clubs. The pride conveyed upon Cranberry High School by its faithful alumni fostered the historic preservation movement that saved the school in 1985 and continues to protect the important community landmark.

Substantial schools like the one built at Cranberry offered students new courses and important vocational opportunities like home economic and agriculture education. The vocational agriculture building at Cranberry High School is a rare surviving resource associated with vocational programs designed to teach farming and farm-related classes to high school students beginning in the late 1910s. Free-standing buildings devoted to vocational agricultural and home economics classes were built across the state in the twentieth century, but few remain standing or identified and documented as to their significance in the history of education in North Carolina. The agriculture building holds individual significance in the area of Education and is an integral component of the historic campus at Cranberry.

The 1937 gymnasium at Cranberry High School is significant as only one of two WPA gymnasiums in Avery County. The other is at the former site of Newland High School. Construction of the gym provided jobs to local residents and gave high school students a venue for sports and other activities such as dancing. Like the agriculture building, the wood shingled and stone gym is eligible for the NRHP individually and as part of the Cranberry High School campus.

Criterion B

Cranberry High School is not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion B. For a property to be eligible for significance under Criterion B, it must retain integrity and be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past and be associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when that person achieved significance.

Over its almost one-hundred-year history, many individuals have been associated with Cranberry High School. Principals, teachers, staff, and students interacted with the school building and its landscape, but none of those individuals gained importance within a specific profession or field that can be documented by historical research.

Criterion C

Cranberry High School, a complex of four historic education buildings, is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C for Architecture. For a property to be eligible under this criterion, it must retain integrity and either embody distinct characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, possess high artistic value, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Cranberry High School, containing highly intact institutional buildings from the 1920s through 1950s, stands as Avery County's most significant and intact complex of public educational buildings. The Colonial Revival-influenced classroom building designed by Leslie Boney Sr., along with the Rustic Revival-style WPA gymnasium, modernist science building, and utilitarian agricultural building reflect architectural trends in school-building and campus design from the early to mid-twentieth century in North Carolina. Nestled on a nine-acre designed landscape complete with historic athletic fields, the school embodies the practices and principles of educational architecture on the local, state, and federal levels during a period when national ideas about school design combined with state funding and administrative oversight helped shape rural school campuses across North Carolina.

Criterion D

Cranberry High School is not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D. For a property to be eligible under Criterion D, it must have or have had information that contributes to our understanding of human history or prehistory and the information must be considered important.

Cranberry High School is not eligible under Criterion D because it is not likely to yield any new information pertaining to the history of education or building design not obtainable through above ground resources.

National Register Boundary Description and Justification

The National Register Boundary for Cranberry High School is drawn according to the guidelines of National Register Bulletin 21, *Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties*.

The proposed NRHP boundary encompasses the current 9.28-acre tax parcel and extends to trace the pavement edge along US 19E and NC 194 on the west and north sides of the parcel in order to include the 1932 stone entrance gates and the entirety of the gravel drives on the east and west sides of the agriculture building. The proposed boundary contains the school's four original buildings, the tree-shaded setting, hillside running north to south through the property, athletic fields, and gravel drives and parking areas historically associated with the function of the school.



NRHP Boundary map, created from HPOWEB

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