

**Survey and Research Report
On The
Nevin School and Auditorium**

December 12, 2018



Source: Mecklenburg County (iLookAbout)

1. **Name and Location of the Property.** The property known as the Nevin School, is located at 3523 Nevin Rd, Charlotte, NC 28269.
2. **Name, Address, And Telephone Number Of The Present Owner And Occupant Of The Property.**
Nevins Inc., A North Carolina Corporation
3523 Nevin Road
Charlotte, NC 28269
3. **Representative Photographs Of The Property**
This report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. **A Map Depicting The Location Of The Property.**



5. **Current Deed Book Reference To The Property.** The current deed to the property is recorded in Deed Book 25392 Page 955. The tax parcel numbers of the property are (?)
6. **A Brief Historical Sketch Of The Property.** The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Mariel Hamer.
7. **A Brief Physical Description Of The Property.** The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Mariel Hamer.
8. **Documentation of Why And In What Ways The Property Meets The Criteria For Designation Set Forth In N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.**
 - a. **Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance:** The Nevin School, represented by the 1923 brick, four-room school

building and the 1940 auditorium, is the most important and the most prominent artifact of the Nevin Community. Additionally, the Nevin School remains as one of the oldest schoolhouses standing within the Charlotte Township - acting and as a tangible reminder of the city's waning rural past and as a symbol of the close-knit communities, like Nevin, that once encompassed it.

- b. Integrity of Design, Setting, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association:** The commission contends that the physical and architectural descriptions included in this report demonstrate that the Myrtle Square apartments meet these criteria.
- 9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal.** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property that becomes a designated "historic landmark."
- 10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation.** The exterior of the original schoolhouse and the exterior of the auditorium.

Date Of The Preparation of This Report: December 16, 2018

Prepared By: Mariel Hamer

HISTORICAL ESSAY

The Nevin School, represented by the 1923 brick, four-room school building and the 1940 auditorium, is the best and most prominent artifact of the Nevin Community. Additionally, the Nevin School remains as one of the oldest schoolhouses standing within the Charlotte Township - acting and as a tangible reminder of the city's waning rural past and as a symbol of the close-knit communities, like Nevin, that once encompassed it.

The Nevin Community

The Nevin Community emerged in the late-nineteenth century alongside numerous other agrarian communities within Mecklenburg County. The New South campaign following the Civil War ushered the rapid development of Charlotte as a crucial cotton-trading and textile manufacturing center. Charlotte's industrial development was paralleled by the prosperity of Mecklenburg County's rural communities well into the early-twentieth century with cotton as the

major cash-crop. The railroad enabled many communities to sprout on the periphery of Charlotte. Nevin, however, was located several miles from the nearest railroad forcing the area to rely on the prosperity of wealthy families who operated farms or stores like the Hunters and Wardins, and through community organizations.¹ The lasting implications of Nevin's proximity to the railroad is evident in its present-day residential composition. Nevin remained largely rural until single-family housing subdivisions carved away its farmland as the city of Charlotte sprawled outward in the middle of the twentieth century.

The rural community likely began to collectively identify itself as "Nevin" in the late 1880s. According to Jean Davis Burris, former Nevin Community Organization President, the name "Nevin" was designated by Mollie Wardin to pay homage to the location in Ireland where her ancestors lived.² The Nevin Academy, later the Nevin School, was the first recorded institution to bear the community's name and was founded by Squire John Porter Hunter and his wife Sallie E. Hunter.³ Squire Hunter was born in the Mallard Creek Township in 1852 and eventually became one of the 10 citizens that formed the community known as "Section House," renamed Derita in 1882. Hunter was a significant member of the community acting as the magistrate for over sixty years. While living on Nevin Road, he was a member of the District No. 28 Committee for the Mecklenburg County Board of Education. Around 1889 he and his wife donated a half acre of land and 63 books to the district in order for the Nevin Community to build the Nevin Academy. Two years later, the Hunter family established the Nevin post office

¹ Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina" (Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1997)

² Davis, Jean E. *NEVIN SCHOOL - WELL REMEMBERED*. 1989. Nevin Community Organization Essay, Charlotte.

³ SMITH, GAIL. "FOLKS FROM FAR, NEAR SHARE MEMORIES OF PAST SCHOOL DAYS." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, October 14, 1992: 14. *NewsBank*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy141.nclive.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/0EB6CA1DEC810695>

at the old family store - designating James C. Hunter as postmaster.⁴ The Nevin post office ceased operations in 1902 when new rural routes made it obsolete leaving the Nevin School as the only public institution bearing the Nevin name.⁵



Figure 1 Statesville Avenue Baptist Church, Nevin Community. Personal photograph by Pete McGraw. Ca. 1920s.

The Nevin School

The Mecklenburg County Board of Education was formed in 1885 as a response to high illiteracy rates in North Carolina. The Board was primarily responsible for children in rural, unincorporated parts of the country through the early-twentieth century. However, during that time most decisions like hiring teachers and building schools were left up to committees and organizations of the rural communities.⁶ The Nevin Academy was a single-teacher school, one of the 67 white public schools within the Mecklenburg County school system. The first school

⁴ "School Entertainment." *Weekly Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), December 5, 1892.

⁵ Davis, Jean E. *NEVIN SCHOOL - WELL REMEMBERED*. 1989. Nevin Community Organization Essay, Charlotte.

⁶ Stewart Gray, "Caldwell Station School" (Charlotte- Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1996).

was said to be a frame building with a hipped roof.⁷ As of 1889, there were a total of 6,352 white children in the county and only 2,885 of them were enrolled according to the Mecklenburg County Board of Education.⁸ At this time, children of rural communities were often expected to stay home and help cultivate their family's farm - causing the low participation rate.

The Mecklenburg County Board of Education did not begin to gain power until compulsory attendance policies were mandated in the 1910s - causing the demand for a larger, more standardized school system. The increased attendance coupled with the development of the school busing system enabled the consolidation of the many rural one-teacher schoolhouses across the county in the 1920s. These rural schools either expanded to become multi-teacher institutions or closed. By 1921, the original wooden Nevin schoolhouse had expanded to accommodate a total of two teachers but that was not enough for the community. A Nevin civic group, the Help-One-Another Club, pressed the Board of Education to allocate funds to build an entirely new school building with room for four teachers. The Board agreed to build a new brick-veneer school building for a \$6,000 contract with W. W. Hawkins - who was also the Board's school commissioner at the time.⁹ Unfortunately, the new school building burned to the ground on the afternoon of December 7th, 1922 due to a furnace malfunction - forcing students to return to the old schoolhouse temporarily.¹⁰

⁷ See 2.

⁸ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, February 1889, UNC Charlotte Manuscript Collection, Book 1, Minutes July 6, 1885 THRU May 31, 1895, Special Collections and University Archives, Charlotte.

⁹ "CONTRACT IS LET FOR NEW NEVIN SCHOOL." *THE CHARLOTTE NEWS* (Charlotte), July 5, 1921.

¹⁰ "NEVIN SCHOOL HOUSE IS BURNED TO GROUND." *The Charlotte Observer*, December 8, 1922.



Figure 2 Oil painting portraying the Nevin School in the 1930s as remembered by former student Pete McGraw. Roberts, Nina Mae Gibbons. *Nevin School*. Ca. 1989. Pete McGraw Residence.

The four-teacher, brick-veneer schoolhouse that stands today (Figure 2) was erected in 1923 over the site of the burned schoolhouse with a capacity of 125 students.¹¹ In order to accommodate each elementary grade level in a four-room building, two consecutive grades would share the same teacher. As of 1925, the elementary schoolhouse served an entire district with a total of 103 pupils - while many of the rural elementary schoolhouses on the periphery of the county were serving less than 50 students. The boundaries of the Nevin district were practically synonymous with the boundaries of the Nevin Community. *The Charlotte News* cites that the Nevin Community “centers about the Nevin school house.”¹² Pete McGraw, who attended Nevin in the early 1930s, remembers the majority of his classmates living between Irvin Creek on Statesville Road up to the north of Nevin Road. According to McGraw, the community was poor but acted “like a family” in the years following the Depression. He and his

¹¹ "NEVIN SCHOOL TO BEGIN WORK FOR TERM MONDAY." *Charlotte Sunday Observer*(Charlotte), September 16, 1923.

¹² See 8.

eight brothers and sisters lived only a block away from the school and were able to go back home to eat a meal prepared by their mother during lunchtime.¹³ With the help of local artist Nina Mae Gibbons Roberts, McGraw recaptures the Nevin schoolhouse as he remembers it in the early '30s (Figure 2).



Class portrait on the front steps of the Nevin School. Personal photograph by Pete McGraw. ca. 1930.



Figure 3 Nevin School and Auditorium. Folk, Chris. *Nevins School*. Chris Folk Papers, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte.

¹³ McGraw, Pete. "Nevin School and Community Interview." Interview by author. November 2, 2018.

An Auditorium was added to the Nevin School in 1940 and connected to the schoolhouse via brick breezeway. Charlotte architect Lucian Dale designed the new auditorium and Ernest Foard was awarded the contract for \$5,329.¹⁴ Dale is known for designing the Walgreens Drug Store at Fifth and North Tryon and for designing the nearby Derita High School Gym. The new auditorium provided the school with its first set of indoor bathrooms as well as a stage. Bre Stewart, niece of Pete McGraw who attended Nevin in the early 1950's, fondly remembers performing a Tom Thumb wedding and once dressing up in Dutch costume for a performance when she was studying world cultures. The auditorium also served as the cafeteria for some time. Stewart recalls going to auditorium and receiving sandwiches or soup made by moms volunteering which she would take back to the schoolhouse and eat at her desk.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, April 1940, UNC Charlotte Manuscript Collection 2, Box 4, Minutes 1938-42, Special Collections and University Archives, Charlotte.

¹⁵ Stewart, Bre. "Nevin School and Community Interview." Interview by author. November 15, 2018.



Final fifth grade class portrait at the Nevin School. Personal photograph by Brenda Stewart. ca. 1955.

The Nevin Community remained largely rural well into the 1950s, despite the significant expansion of Charlotte, whose center is only four miles away. Stewart remembers a dentist would occasionally come to the school to give dental exams due to how isolated the community was. The seclusion of the Nevin Community may have allowed the teachers to develop strong relationships with their students and students' families - making them admired members of the community. These teachers often taught several generations of some families like the McGraws who had at least two generations attend Nevin.¹⁶ This isolation would eventually lead the Mecklenburg County Board to assess the viability of maintaining the Nevin School toward the end of the 1940s as rural schools began to be consolidated into schools capable of sustaining hundreds of children. However, the people of Nevin were not ready to give up the school. In

¹⁶ See 23.

1949, a delegation from the community met twice with the Board to plea for a cafeteria and for two additional rooms to be added in order to keep the modest-sized Nevin School from being consolidated.¹⁷

The pleas for a new cafeteria were eventually met by 1952. The Board agreed to erect a “temporary” quonset hut cafeteria for the Nevin School to satisfy its community members - clearly with the intention of later consolidating the school. Quonset huts were typically used for schools as storage - making a cafeteria quonset hut a unique design. The Berry Hill Elementary school, another county elementary school on the periphery of Charlotte, had plans for a quonset hut cafeteria drawn by architect Louis H. Asbury in 1946.¹⁸ It is likely that the Board would have implemented the same or similar plans for the Nevin School cafeteria. Bre Stewart attended the school when the cafeteria was erected and recalls it as a strange, metal building.¹⁹ The “temporary” structure remained on the school grounds for at least two decades. The building’s use as a school cafeteria, however, was temporary. In January of 1955, three years after the cafeteria was built, the students of the Nevin School were consolidated into the new Statesville Road Elementary School. The new school received a total of 341 students including all of Nevin’s teachers and students, and the Nevin School was abandoned.²⁰

Nevins Vocational Training Center

The Nevin School remained empty until the Fall of 1959 when the old school buildings were adapted to be used as a vocational school to educate and provide developmentally disabled adults of Mecklenburg County with job training and job opportunities. The center is the first

¹⁷ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, October 1949, UNC Charlotte Manuscript Collection 2, Box 4, Minutes 1949-1951, Special Collections and University Archives, Charlotte.

¹⁸ Berryhill School Quonset Hut (Mecklenburg County, N.C.)

[Louis H. Asbury Papers, 1906-1975 \(UNCC MC00145\)](#)

¹⁹ See 23.

²⁰ "New Schools Are Opened In County." *The Charlotte Observer*(Charlotte), January 4, 1955.

direct service training center of its kind in the Carolinas.²¹ C.E. Williams and J. D. Ramsey representing the North Carolina Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Retarded Children first appeared before the County Board of Education in 1956 with interest in securing either the abandoned Nevin School or Paw Creek School to establish an organization to provide special classes for approximately 400-500 children.²² It was not until 1959 that the group was able to establish the Nevins Center to serve adults over the age of 16 - the 's' was added to Nevin by mistake.²³

The center was serving a total of 41 students by 1964 and by 1967, the center was expanded in order to accommodate over 100 students with a new workshop space, cafeteria, and 6,300 square-foot addition added to the back of the auditorium. A federal grant covered 90% of the \$65,000 expansion cost.²⁴ The facility expanded again in the late seventies to include a warehouse and an additional classroom building. Today, known as Nevins, Inc., the organization continues its commitment to the community through providing developmentally disabled adults with the tools and education to find meaningful job opportunities.

Conclusion

As the city of Charlotte continues to expand, the Nevin Community's rural identity has almost entirely dissolved into suburbia. The Nevin schoolhouse and Auditorium survives as the most significant and as the last surviving physical manifestation of the Nevin Community's rural beginnings. Additionally, the Nevin School remains as one of the oldest schoolhouses standing

²¹ "The History of Nevins." Accessed December 17, 2018. <http://nevinsinc.org/the-history-of-nevins/>.

²² Mecklenburg County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, February 1956, UNC Charlotte Manuscript Collection 2, Box 4, Minutes 1954-1955, Special Collections and University Archives, Charlotte.

²³ See 2.

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina) 82, October 12, 1967: 18. *NewsBank*.

within the Charlotte township - acting and as a tangible reminder of the area's rural past and as a symbol of the close-knit communities, like Nevin, that once encompassed it.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Site Context

The Nevin School is located approximately 100 ft off of Nevin Road in the Nevin Community of Charlotte, North Carolina. The lot features landscaping with trees and shrubbery, a paved parking lot, and four main structures. The Nevin Community exists roughly four miles north of Charlotte's central business district. The Nevin Community serves primarily as residential with limited commercial buildings, several churches, and the Nevin Community Park which bisects the entire community - spanning approximately one and a half miles across. Surrounded by suburban neighborhoods erected in primarily in the 1950s and 60s with new neighborhoods continuing to be constructed, the Nevin schoolhouse and Auditorium at Nevins Inc. is the most significant non-residential building from the early twentieth-century in the area.²⁵

²⁵ <http://gis.ncdcr.gov/hpoweb/>

Nevin Schoolhouse



Nevin schoolhouse west-facing facade, Nevins, Inc. Personal photograph by author. October 25, 2018.

The Nevin schoolhouse is a one story, brick-veneered building with a mansard roof covered in asphalt shingles. The building features a brick veneer of stretcher bond with a sill band articulated by a single row of vertically-oriented bricks wrapping around the entire building below the windows. The steeply-pitched mansard roof features low-hanging eaves. The schoolhouse sits upon its original continuous-brick foundation, with non-dimensional lumber girders spanning across the length of the building. There is a small basement for mechanical with a bulkhead entrance slightly left of the chimney on the west elevation.

The east and west elevations both feature an off-center, exterior brick smokestack and two banks of three, tall windows on either side of chimney for a total of four banks of windows

on either side of the building. The original sash windows have been replaced with muntin-less windows.

The north and south elevations both feature a centrally-aligned entryway with no window opening. The south facade (Figure 4), facing Nevin Road, features a recessed entryway covered with an asphalt-shingle hipped roof. The original entrance bay has been replaced with a single glass door and same-height windows on either side. A porch extends from the south entry bay with concrete steps protruding from east and west sides. The north entry bay features an automatic sliding door. A covered-brick breezeway extends from the north entry bay to the auditorium entrance.



Figure 4 Nevin schoolhouse south, street-facing facade, Nevins, Inc. Personal photograph by author. October 25, 2018.

The integrity of the interior of the Nevin schoolhouse has been severely altered and conceals many original building characteristics. The plaster ceiling has been concealed with a

drop ceiling and the median bearing partition wall was removed. The original roof structure, however, remains intact.

Similarity to Rosenwald Schools

The African American schools built in the 1920s were constructed using professionally organized, cost-effective plans unlike the most of the white rural community schools of Mecklenburg County that preceded them. The Julius Rosenwald Foundation allocated funds for at least 26 African American schools to be constructed in the county between 1917 and 1930. The main criteria for the construction of Rosenwalds schools is white frame construction, long banks of windows, and multiple classrooms centered around a hall or coat room.²⁶ The first *Rosenwald School Bulletin*, a collection of plans and rules for building Rosenwald Schools, was published in 1920 and was likely circulated among the Mecklenburg County Board of Education - inspiring the designs for the new rural white schools in addition to the new black schools.

Through demolition plans and witness testimony, the original floor plan of the Nevin schoolhouse can be reconstructed (Figure 5) and articulated as one strikingly similar to a Rosenwald four-room school design (Figure 6).²⁷ Both of these plans are rectilinear and elongated along the north and south axis with long banks of windows on the east and west-facing facades to maximize sunlight and natural ventilation. Both plans feature a median bearing wall that extends along the north and south axis with entrances on either end of of the axis. Among other similarities, each bay features a cloak room bordering the north and south-facing facades. A Rosenwald school in Scotland County, NC (Figure 7) features a brick veneer facade that bears

²⁶ Frances P. Alexander, "The Billingsville School" (Charlotte- Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1994).

²⁷ See 23.

strong resemblance to the Nevin schoolhouse's elevation - with long banks of windows extending uninterrupted into the roofline.

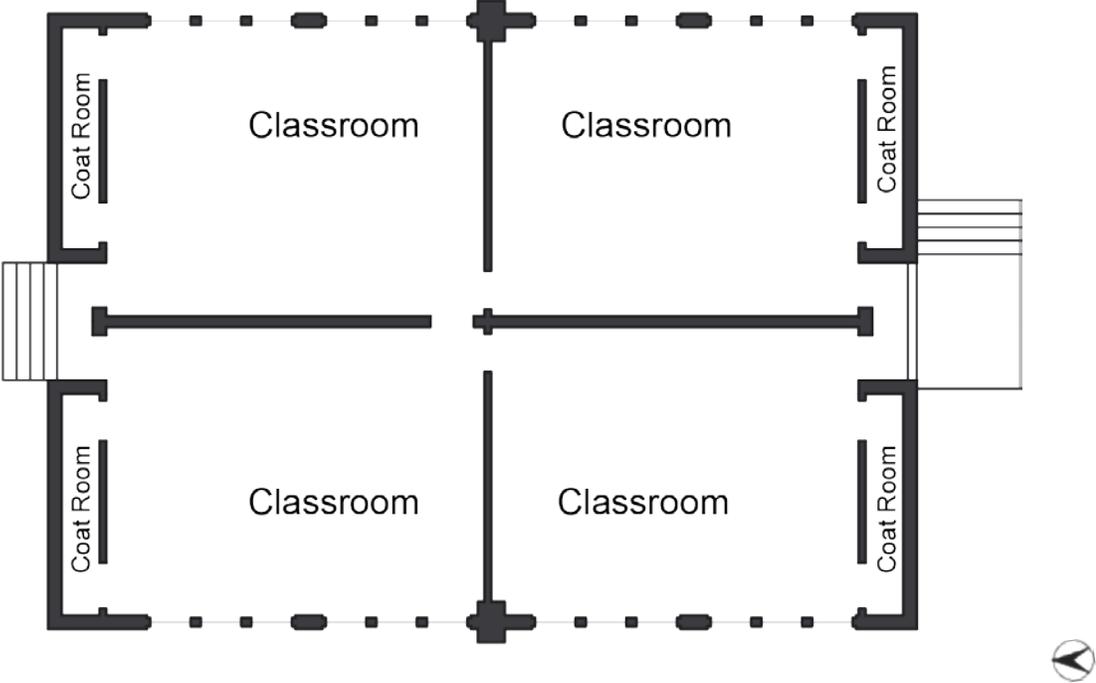


Figure 5 Reconstructed Nevin schoolhouse original floor plan according to witness testimony and architectural drawings. By author.

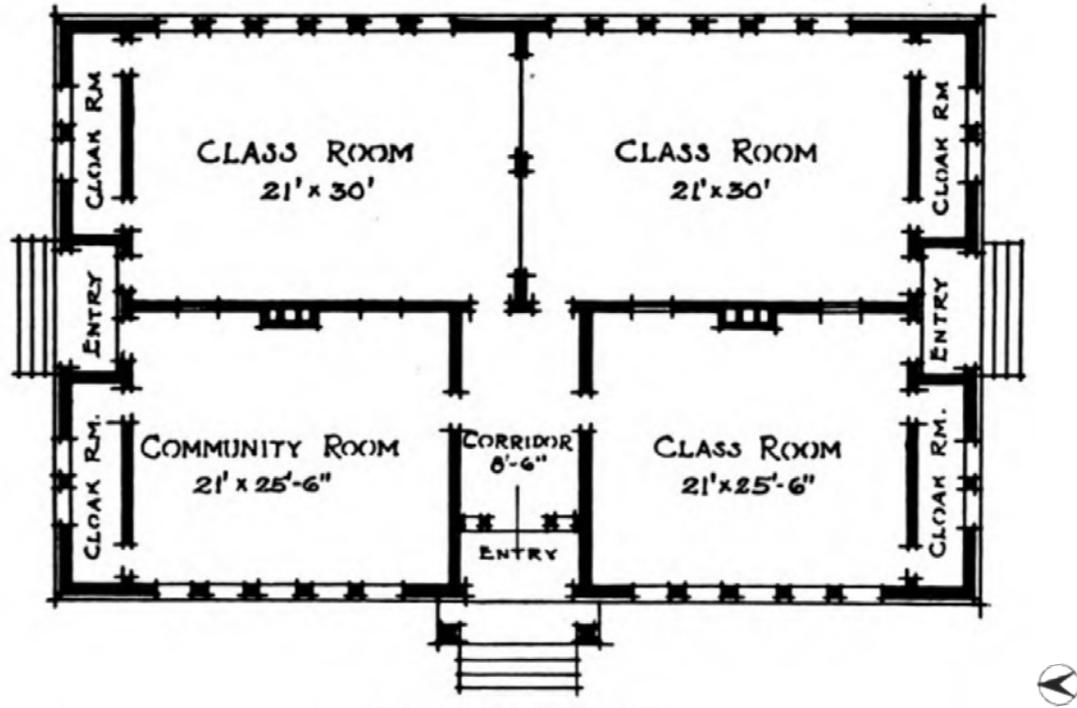


Figure 6 Rosenwald School Floor Plan No. 30, a three teacher community school designed to face east or west shares many similarities to the Nevin schoolhouse floor plan. Julius Rosenwald Fund. *Community School Plans*. Nashville, Tenn, 1931.



Figure 7 A brick Rosenwald school in Scotland County, NC with a similar facade to the Nevin School. *Rosenwald Fund Schoolhouse*. Division of Negro Education. Public Instruction Records, State Archives of North Carolina, Scotland County, North Carolina

The most distinguishable difference between these two plans is that the Nevin schoolhouse does not feature a significant point of entry along the east or west-facing facade like in the Rosenwald school's plan. Both the Mallard Creek schoolhouse and the Caldwell Station schoolhouse (Figure 9) feature a main point of entry along the east or west facade but the Nevin schoolhouse is oriented with its south facade facing a road running east to west - making a main entrance along the east or west facade arbitrary. The Mallard Creek schoolhouse and the Caldwell Station schoolhouse are both oriented facing a road running north to south.

The Nevin schoolhouse shares many similar characteristics with the Mallard Creek School building and the Caldwell Station (Figure 9) - schools both constructed in the 1920s to serve white, rural communities within Mecklenburg County. All of these structures were erected as two to four-classroom schoolhouses with a steeply pitched roofline, low-hanging eaves, and long banks of tall, sash windows on the east and west-facing facades.²⁸ Like the Nevin schoolhouse, the Mallard Creek schoolhouse and the Caldwell Station schoolhouse strongly resembles plans for Rosenwalds schools. The numerous parallels between these rural community schools of Mecklenburg county and Rosenwald schools suggests that the Nevin School's design, among other rural white community schools commissioned by the county schools in the 1920s, was planned by the county borrowing inspiration from the efficient design framework outlined in the *Rosenwald School Bulletin*. As the county was erecting Rosenwald schools, the same design typologies were borrowed for rural white schools.

²⁸ Emily D. Ramsey, "Mallard Creek" (Charlotte- Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2000).



Figure 9 The Caldwell Station is another example of rural schoolhouse design within Mecklenburg County in the 1920s. Caldwell Station, NC. Stewart Gray, “Caldwell Station School” (Charlotte- Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1996).

Nevin Auditorium



The Nevin Auditorium’s entrance faces west and connects to the Nevin schoolhouse via brick breezeway. Personal photograph by author. October 25, 2018.

The Nevin auditorium was erected in 1940 using modernist design language with brick and concrete masonry construction. The auditorium strongly differs from the schoolhouse in both design and orientation but both share the same brick exteriors which allows for the cohesiveness between the two structures. The auditorium runs along an axis perpendicular to the schoolhouse and its main entrance faces the west, away from the road. Local architect Lucian J. Dale, who designed the auditorium, was known for his modernist designs. Although the auditorium represented a newer style, it was designed to be hierarchically unobtrusive to the existing schoolhouse - sitting behind the schoolhouse's tall mansard roof.

The auditorium features a rectilinear plan 3 by 6 bays deep with the significant entry point on the west facade. The main entrance features two tall, industrial style windows on either side of a double door and an asphalt-shingled portico over the doors. The south elevation features a door adjacent to the schoolhouse's door under the breezeway, three tall windows, an additional entry point, and a half-sized window. The integrity of the north facade was significantly altered during a building addition in the late 1960s. The windows that lined this side of the building, symmetrical to the ones on the opposite facade, were sealed and several parts of the wall were removed to allow the construction of doors to provide circulation into the new attached building. The east elevation is blank.

The integrity of the interior of the auditorium has been significantly altered when it was converted to serve as office space and the space was divided into cubicles - however the existing interior structural systems remain largely intact. Opposite of the main entrance would have been a the stage - the CMU letterbox opening which framed the stage is partially hidden due to the addition of office cubicles and drop-down ceilings.

The auditorium connects to the existing schoolhouse through a brick breezeway. A brick parapet running along the schoolhouse-facing facade of the auditorium creates an imaginary division between the breezeway and the auditorium. The addition of the brick breezeway altered the auditorium-facing facade of the schoolhouse and is the only significant alteration to the exterior of the schoolhouse since it was built in 1923.
