

Landmark Designation Report for the



Caldwell-Bradford School 16401 Davidson-Concord Road Davidson, North Carolina*

***within the sphere of influence and extra-territorial
jurisdiction of Huntersville, North Carolina**

Prepared by:
Susan V. Mayer, Principal
July 2024

SVM
**HISTORICAL
CONSULTING**

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General Information

Historic Names of Property:	Caldwell-Bradford School, Caldwell School
Address of Property:	16401 Davidson-Concord Road Davidson, NC 28036*
PIN:	01108107
Deed Book & Page:	Mecklenburg County Deed Book 34787, Page 866
Amount of Land/Acreage to be Designated:	1.680 acres
Ad Valorem Tax Value:	The 2023 assessed real estate value of parcel 01108107 which includes the Caldwell-Bradford School is \$280,400.
Recommendation for Designation:	Exterior designation of the Caldwell-Bradford School and all the property within Mecklenburg County parcel 01108107.
Name/Address of Current Property Owner:	John Frank Bragg, Jr., and Katharine B. Bragg 1031 S. Caldwell Street Charlotte, NC 28203

*** Despite its mailing address, the Caldwell-Bradford School is located within the sphere of influence and extra-territorial jurisdiction of Huntersville, North Carolina.**

Chain of Title

Grantor	Grantee	Date	Deed Book/Page	Notes
Karen Karaffa Gochnauer, widow	John Frank Bragg, Jr. and wife Katharine B. Bragg	July 10, 2020	34787/866	Parcel #1, 1.68 acres Parcel #2, 36.19 acres
Lillie H. Caldwell	Robert Gochnauer and wife, Karen Gochnauer	May 27, 1977	3948/238	Parcel #1, 1.68 acres Parcel #2, 36.19 acres
Paul R. Ervin	John G. Caldwell and wife, Lillie H. Caldwell	March 17, 1933	837/2	67.33 acres
John G. Caldwell and wife, Lillie H. Caldwell	Paul R. Ervin	March 11, 1933	832/87	67.33 acres
Jno. G. Caldwell and wife, Lillie H. Caldwell	J. R. Beard, trustee Bank of Cornelius	March 1, 1932	816/192	Deed in Trust (mortgage on 67.33 acres for \$700)
S. T. Caldwell and his wife Mary Caldwell	Jno. G. Caldwell	January 26, 1929	817/107	67.33 acres
S. T. Caldwell and his wife, Mary Caldwell	John G. Caldwell	December 26, 1922	605/262	59.75 acres "including about $\frac{3}{4}$ acre School House lot" ¹
M. E. Caldwell	H. J. Washam, J. Y Weddington and M.	April 7, 1884	37/310	0.75 acres

¹ The Caldwell-Bradford School was ordered by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education to be auctioned in March 1927 along with ten other closed schools. However, it appears that ownership of the property reverted to or had been retained by the Caldwell family while the school was still in operation. No deed was found to indicate any transfer of ownership to or from the Mecklenburg County Board of Education. It may be that the building was to be auctioned, or that the Board later found that they did not own the property.

	E. Caldwell (and their successors in office), Public School Committee of District No. 40			
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Abstract

Statement of Significance

The Caldwell-Bradford School is one of the only known surviving one-teacher schoolhouses remaining in Mecklenburg County and is historically relevant as a representation of these institutions that dotted the rural landscape in the early twentieth century. The one-teacher school served students of all ages in the immediate community. As school consolidation intensified in the 1920s, the Caldwell-Bradford School was closed in October 1923 by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education, and students were bused to Caldwell Station School or Huntersville High School, and the structure was converted into its current use as a residence. Lying between two other significant rural local landmarks in north Mecklenburg—the McAuley Road Farmland and the Cashion-Moore Family Cemetery—the schoolhouse completes the historical narrative of the county’s agrarian beginnings. Although student records are unavailable, the women who taught in the school hailed from some of north Mecklenburg’s earliest settlers, families whose surnames are still prominent in the community a century later, including Jetton, Knox, Cashion, Cowell, and Bradford. Despite the changes to the structure after its decommissioning as a school, those changes themselves have acquired historical significance as a century-old example of ingenuity in the adaptive reuse of a former educational resource and are part of north Mecklenburg’s rapidly diminishing inventory of century-old homes.

Integrity Statement

Location - HIGH

The Caldwell-Bradford School is located at its original site of construction.

Design - LOW

The Caldwell-Bradford School has low integrity of design, as it was heavily modified from its original appearance as a schoolhouse into a residence.

Setting - MODERATE

At its time of construction, the Caldwell-Bradford School was in a rural area on a macadam road with little traffic. Today, NC-73 is a heavily trafficked route that is scheduled to be widened, and development in the area has lessened the rural setting. Despite these changes, the rural setting along McAuley Road has been preserved as a gravel road with farms, which raises the integrity of setting to moderate.

Materials - LOW

The Caldwell-Bradford School has vinyl siding over its wood weatherboard siding, asphalt shingle roof where there was likely metal roofing, and vinyl replacement windows in place of the original wood sash.

Workmanship - MODERATE

The Caldwell-Bradford School has moderate integrity of workmanship, as the contrast between the original school portion and the residential addition are clearly visible in the crawlspace.

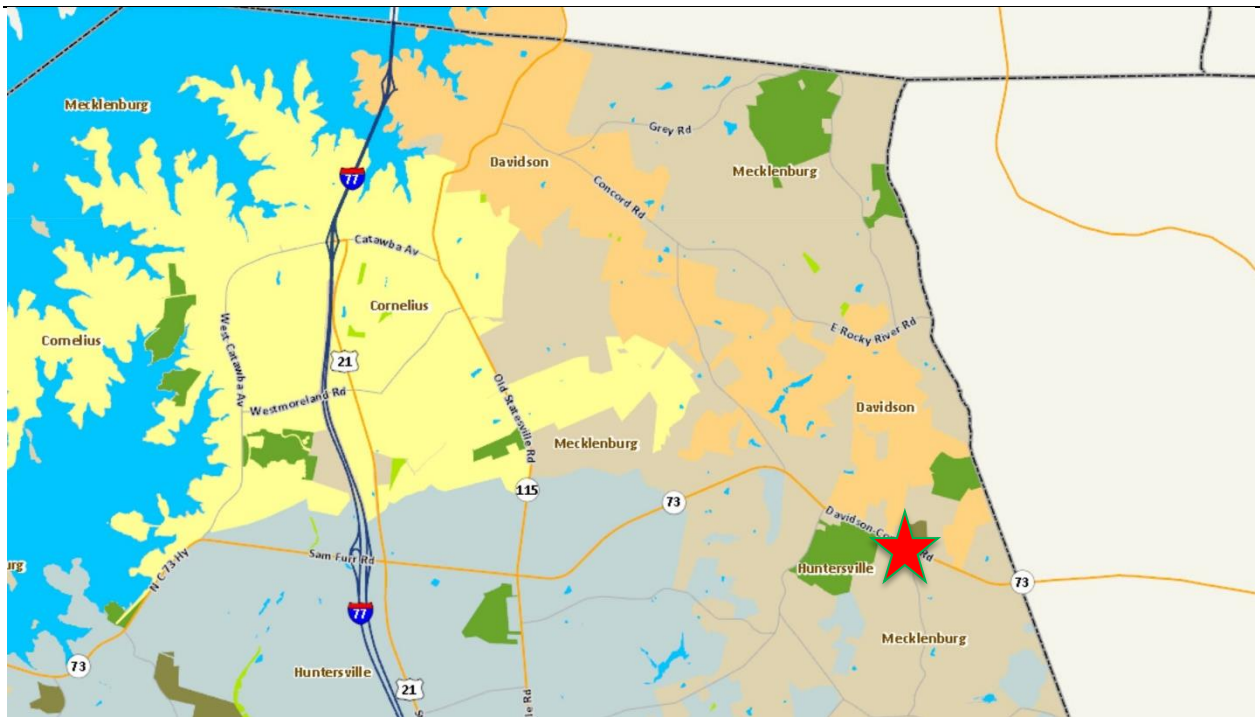
Feeling - LOW

The Caldwell-Bradford School has low integrity of feeling, as the property’s conversion from a school to a residence provides no visible evidence of its original use.

Association - HIGH

The Caldwell-Bradford School is historically significant as a former one-teacher schoolhouse in northern Mecklenburg County. For this reason, its historic association is high.

Maps



Source: POLARIS 3G



Source: POLARIS

Historical Background

One of the only known surviving one-teacher schoolhouses left in Mecklenburg County, the Caldwell-Bradford School is historically relevant as a representation of the small schools that dotted Mecklenburg County in the early twentieth century. The school served students of all ages in the immediate community. As school consolidation intensified in the 1920s, the Caldwell-Bradford School was closed in October 1923 by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education, and students were bused to Caldwell Station School or Huntersville High School, and the structure was converted into its current use as a residence.

Early Mecklenburg County Education

The foundations of the modern graded school system in North Carolina date to the 1839 passage of the Education Act, which established a public school system in the state. The position of state superintendent of common schools, which led the Department of Public Instruction, was created in 1852. The 1868 state constitution included Article IX dedicated to education policy in the state. Taxation was to fund public schools “free of charge to all the children of the State between the ages of six and twenty-one years.”² Counties were to be divided into districts with at least one public school open for a minimum four-month term. However, these grand plans were slow to be instituted, as the General Assembly found it difficult to fund instruction for a population that now included over 100,000 children of formerly enslaved people.

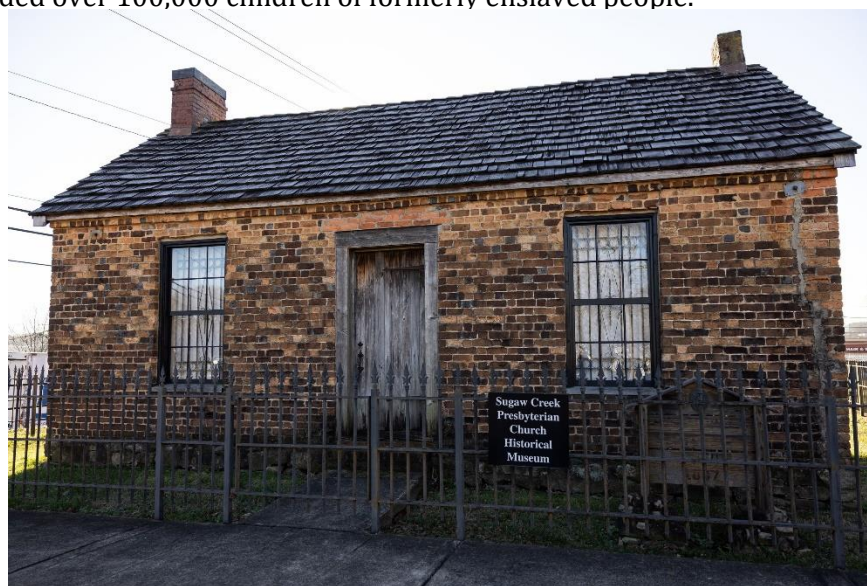


Figure 1 Sugaw Creek School was built in 1837 and still stands in front of Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church in Charlotte. From Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church, <https://www.sugawcreekpc.com/history>.

The history of public education in Mecklenburg County extended back to the colonial period, when Queen’s College was organized in 1771 as the first institution of higher education in North Carolina. In 1778 trustees organized Liberty Hall Academy, the first publicly-funded school in Charlotte, but it

² 1868 North Carolina constitution, Article IX, Section 2.

too was shortlived, closing in September 1780 when Lord Charles Cornwallis occupied the town.³ In the years before the Civil War, the education of Mecklenburg County students was privately funded at academies typically tied to or located near churches. Among these were schools at the Presbyterian churches at Sugaw Creek, Sardis, Hopewell, and Providence.⁴

Although voters in Greensboro approved the creation of a public graded school in 1870, Mecklenburg County was the site of the first public graded school in North Carolina. The Charlotte school was established by Rev. J. B. Boone in October 1873. The new school, which replaced an inadequate one-room structure, was funded by the city, \$600 from the Peabody Fund, and private contributions. Six teachers were employed for the eight-month term, and the average attendance was 175 students. However, the school was short-lived and closed due to lack of funds.⁵ Charlotte voters again approved a public graded school in January 1880, though its opening was delayed by lawsuits for nearly two years.⁶

Education in Deweese Township in northern Mecklenburg County had received public funding since at least 1871. The report of the Public School Fund of Mecklenburg County, which was published annually in newspapers starting in 1872, recorded two teachers, W. S. Black and W. L. Brown, who had been paid for their services in the township. The men were paid \$200 for two four-month terms in 1871, and Brown received an additional \$82.50 in March 1872.⁷ The 1873 report also listed the teachers at Black schools in the township: Sarah J. Johnston was paid \$15.00 in October 1872; Laura Holms was paid \$22.00 in November 1872; and Louisa Miller was paid \$25.00 in November 1872. According to the report, school terms in Mecklenburg County ranged from two to five months. Teachers were paid according to their teacher certificate level and the average attendance number of students.⁸ By 1874 the growth of public education in Mecklenburg County was evident. In Deweese Township six teachers were paid for services at white schools and two teachers at Black schools. For the entire county, 46 public schools served 1,702 white children (with an average attendance 1,122) and 34 public schools served 1,824 Black children (with an average attendance 1,127) during the 1873-1874 school term.⁹

³ D. A. Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte from 1740 to 1903* (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1903), 72-73.

⁴ Dan L. Morrill, Sugaw Creek School House & Associated Properties, survey and research report, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, September 1, 1976, <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Sugaw-Creek-School-House-SR.pdf>, accessed May 17, 2024.

⁵ LeGette Blythe and Charles R. Brockman, *Hornets' Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte: McNally of Charlotte, 1961), 221.

⁶ Stewart Gray, Caldwell Station School, survey and research report, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2009, <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Caldwell-Station-School-SR.pdf>, accessed May 17, 2024.

⁷ "Public Schools in Mecklenburg County," *Charlotte Democrat*, June 18, 1872.

⁸ "Public Schools in Mecklenburg," *Charlotte Democrat*, July 8, 1873.

⁹ "Public Schools in Mecklenburg," *Charlotte Democrat*, July 20, 1874.

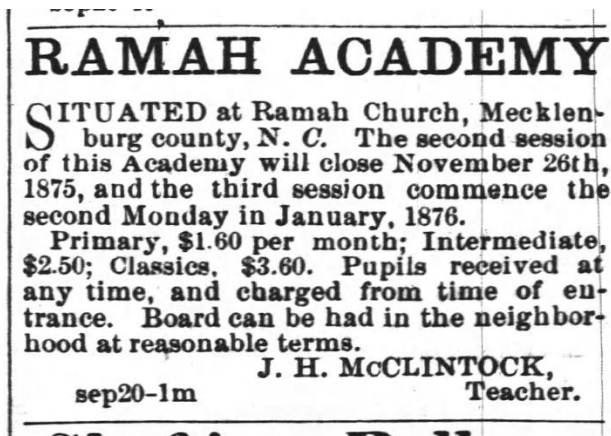


Figure 2 Advertisement for Ramah Academy published in *Southern Home*, September 27, 1875.

While schools likely operated in Deweese Township, there is little record of any outside of Davidson. In 1875 J. H. McClintock opened Ramah Academy at Ramah Presbyterian Church. A graduate of Davidson College, McClintock previously taught at Alexandria. According to a September 1875 advertisement he placed in *Southern Home*, the monthly tuition for the school was \$1.60 for primary grades, \$2.50 for intermediate grades, and \$3.60 for Classics. Non-local students could board with local families. The second session of the school was underway and was scheduled to end on November 26, with the next session beginning in January 1876.¹⁰ Ramah Academy may have been publicly subsidized, as McClintock was paid \$40.00 in August 1876 and \$80.00 in December 1876 from the Public School Fund. It was common for teachers to teach at more than one school in a year, for according to D. A. Tompkins, “many teachers taught two or three schools in one year, as the terms continued only from two to five months.”¹¹ Ramah Academy operated until 1877, when McClintock moved the school to Huntersville. He was elected county superintendent of public instruction in 1882.¹²

A superintendent of education oversaw the public schools in Mecklenburg County. School committees were appointed by the county commission to manage schools in their district; these were largely white male landowners, and they were responsible for the upkeep and staffing of both white and Black schools. In the 1881 school report, District 40 committeemen were Marcus E. Caldwell, J. C. Black, and Henry J. Washam.¹³ This structure was slightly altered in 1885, when the Mecklenburg County Board of Education was established to oversee education for both White and Black schools in the unincorporated areas of the county.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Southern Home*, September 27, 1875.

¹¹ Tompkins, 167.

¹² *Southern Home*, January 15, 1877; “Meeting of the Justices,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 8, 1882.

¹³ “Mecklenburg School Committeemen,” *Charlotte Democrat*, December 9, 1881.

¹⁴ Gray, Caldwell Station.

Caldwell-Bradford School



Figure 3 The Marcus E. Caldwell House still stands on Davidson-Concord Road near the Caldwell-Bradford School. It was built after the original family residence burned in 1877. From Family Search, https://www.familysearch.org/memories/memory/176941606?cid=mem_copy.

The Caldwell-Bradford School gained its name from the two families who patronized the school. Patriarch Marcus Ephraim Caldwell was born in 1824 to James Caldwell (1790-1839) and Araminta Beatty Parks Caldwell (1796-1845). He married Nancy Amanda Sloan (1834-1883) in 1852, and they raised nine children together on their north Mecklenburg County farm: Emma (1853-1855), James S. (1855-1856), Oliver C. (1857), Sylvester Theodore "S. T." (1858-1935), William S. (1860-1913), Harriet Leonora (1862-1930), Lizzie V. (1866-1867), Ferrie A. (1869-1889), Della Mae (1875-1964), and Louise (died 1906). Marcus served in Company K of the 56th North Carolina Regiment during the Civil War and was a ruling elder at Ramah Presbyterian Church. The Caldwell family lived on the Concord Road not far from the Cabarrus County line. S. T. Caldwell and Harriet Caldwell Bradford lived nearby and sent their children to the local schools. S. T. married Alice May Price of Steele Creek Township in 1887. They had six children: James Price (1888-1918), Walter Graham (1890-1953), Louise S. (ca. 1893), John Grier (1894-1971), Theodore Jackson (1896-1973), and Elizabeth C. (1900-1976).¹⁵ Harriet married Charles Wilson Bradford and resided just over the Cabarrus County line with her large family: Cecil DeWitte (1887-1961), Grace (1889-1978), Mary Belle (1890-1985),

¹⁵ "Married," *Charlotte Democrat*, December 23, 1887; "Married," *North Carolina Herald*, December 21, 1887.

Robert Caldwell (1892-1958), and Nora (1893-1967). Charles died in 1894. Eighteen months later their house burned down, and Harriet and the five children moved in with her father.¹⁶

S. T. Caldwell, known by some as Vest, was likely educated at local schools. In July 1878, he attended the second annual session of the Normal School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While no record of his work as a teacher has been found, S. T.'s support for education continued throughout his life. If he did teach, his career may have ended on February 14, 1883, when he lost one of his hands in a cotton gin accident.¹⁷ S. T. and May encouraged their children's education, and many of them attained college degrees. Walter graduated from North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College with a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1914. Theodore studied engineering at N. C. State and the University of North Carolina.¹⁸

¹⁶ Pat Borden, "Mecklenburg Declaration Day: A Special Moment for 2 Sisters," *Charlotte Observer*, May 20, 1976.

¹⁷ "At the Normal School," *Southern Home*, July 12, 1878; Reports of the University Normal School of 1878.15-19; "Spirits Turpentine," *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 18, 1883.

¹⁸ *The North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College Record* 13, No. 4 (March 1915), 192, 200.



Figure 4 This 1888 map of Mecklenburg County included school district boundaries, with the Ramah community and the future Caldwell-Bradford School location in District 34, which included portions of Deweese, Huntersville, and Mallard Creek Townships.

The origins of a school at or near the Caldwell-Bradford School site were likely at the July 13, 1889, meeting of the County Board of Education. The committee of District 34¹⁹ presented a proposition “to purchase a School house site for white race on the lands of M. E. Caldwell, one and a fourth acre,

¹⁹ The official designation of school districts changed over the years as the number of districts increased. There are discrepancies in the names of committeemen listed in school board minutes before and after 1889, which may indicate that the districts had been renumbered.

which the Board after due consideration approved and instructed to Supt. to forward a blank deed.”²⁰ The transaction was made the following week, with Marcus selling to the district committee just over an acre of land “on the great road” for \$37.50.²¹ While no details of construction were recorded in Board of Education minute books or newspapers, it was likely that a new schoolhouse was built on the site. This building may have been the same one which stockholders of Ramah Academy, which included Marcus Caldwell, agreed to donate to the trustees of Ramah Presbyterian Church to be held in trust for use as a session house in 1898.²²

In July 1902, the *News* reported that S. T. Caldwell met in Charlotte with Superintendent Cochran to discuss the special school tax to fund the lengthening of the Caldwell-Bradford School term. As the article noted, “The law says that any school district township or county may levy a special tax provided a majority of the free holders of that township, county or school district, favor such a tax.”²³ This lobbying was a result of the increased attention to streamlining education in North Carolina under the administration of Governor Charles Brantley Aycock. The *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* provides a succinct explanation of Aycock’s motives and initiatives in his term as the state’s Education Governor:

Appalled by the number of children younger than 14 employed in cotton mills, Governor Charles B. Aycock emphasized the importance of education for all North Carolinians in his inaugural address of January 1901 (Aycock’s actual policies reflected his desire for a better-educated white population to keep the Democrats in power). The new governor soon formed the Central Campaign Committee for the Promotion of Public Education, which began operations in 1902 from its headquarters in the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction James Y. Joyner. The committee’s stated purpose was to advance public education through all possible legal means, such as campaigning for local school taxes, consolidation of school districts, better school buildings and equipment, longer school terms, and better-trained and higher-paid teachers.²⁴

The General Assembly amended the Public School Law in 1901 to allow districts to levy taxation to fund a four-month school term. Citizens of Steele Creek School District 2, Erwin School, had been the first in Mecklenburg County to request a special tax district with an election called on July 5, 1901.

²⁰ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Minutes Book 1885-1895, 105, in the Mecklenburg County Board of Education records, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

²¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 66, Page 305.

²² Nell Bradford Jenkins, *They Would Call It Ramah Grove: A History of Ramah Presbyterian Church* (Huntersville, NC: Ramah Presbyterian Church, 1999), 25-26.

²³ “For Longer School Term,” *Charlotte News*, July 17, 1902.

²⁴ Benjamin R. Justesen, Scott Matthews, et. al., “Public Education, Part 4: Expansion, Consolidation, and the School Machinery Act,” in William S. Powell, ed., *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/public-education-part-4-expansion>, accessed May 1, 2024.

While reports are unclear whether the first test of the supplemental funding system succeeded, S. T. was not alone in pursuit of better educational opportunities for his family and community.²⁵

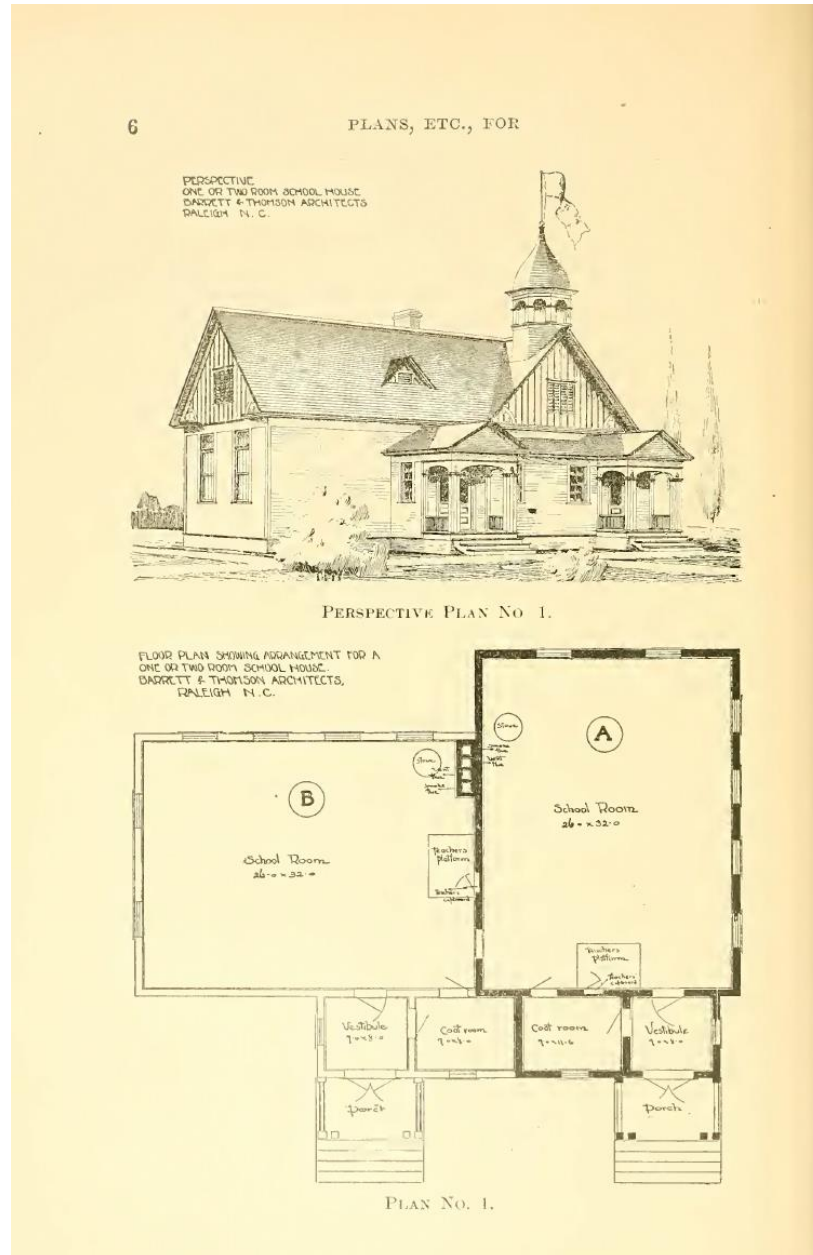


Figure 5 Recommended plan for one-room schoolhouse with optional expansion to two rooms. Barrett & Thompson, Architects, *Plans for Public School Houses* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1903), 6.

In August 1903 the Board of Education approved a petition from landowners in Dewese School District 3, Caldwell-Bradford School, to hold an election for a special school tax. The petition was sent to the county board of commissioners for their consideration along with other petitions. In

²⁵ "School Tax Election," *Charlotte News*, June 8, 1901.

September, Superintendent Cochrane visited the Caldwell-Bradford district and Huntersville Districts 1 and 4, which had also requested a special tax election to fund an eight-month school term. On the day the school terms opened for all Mecklenburg County schools, the special tax election was held for Steele Creek #5 (Shopton School), Deweese #3 (Caldwell-Bradford School), Huntersville #1 (Huntersville School), and Dilworth School.²⁶ The measure seemingly passed, though mention was not made in either Board of Education minutes or newspapers. But by the end of the school term in 1904, Caldwell Bradford School received an additional \$300 in appropriations from the Board of Education. These funds were provided by the Mecklenburg-Henderson Fund, backed by F. C. Abbott and other real estate boosters in Charlotte, specifically to school districts with special school taxes, which indicates that the tax vote was successful.²⁷



Figure 6 The former White Oak School in Barbour County, West Virginia, was built before 1902 and displays a similar appearance to the Caldwell-Bradford School. It has since been demolished. From post by Joyce Fletcher, Dull Men’s Club group, Facebook, April 8, 2024.

The date of construction of the Caldwell-Bradford School is unknown, but it was likely constructed before 1903. That year, as part of the educational reforms championed by Governor Aycock and State

²⁶ “Board to Enforce the School Laws,” *Charlotte News*, August 10, 1903; “Educational Matters,” *Charlotte News*, October 3, 1903; “Educational Matters,” *Charlotte News*, October 31, 1903.

²⁷ “Money for Rural Schools on Hand,” *Charlotte News*, June 29, 1904.

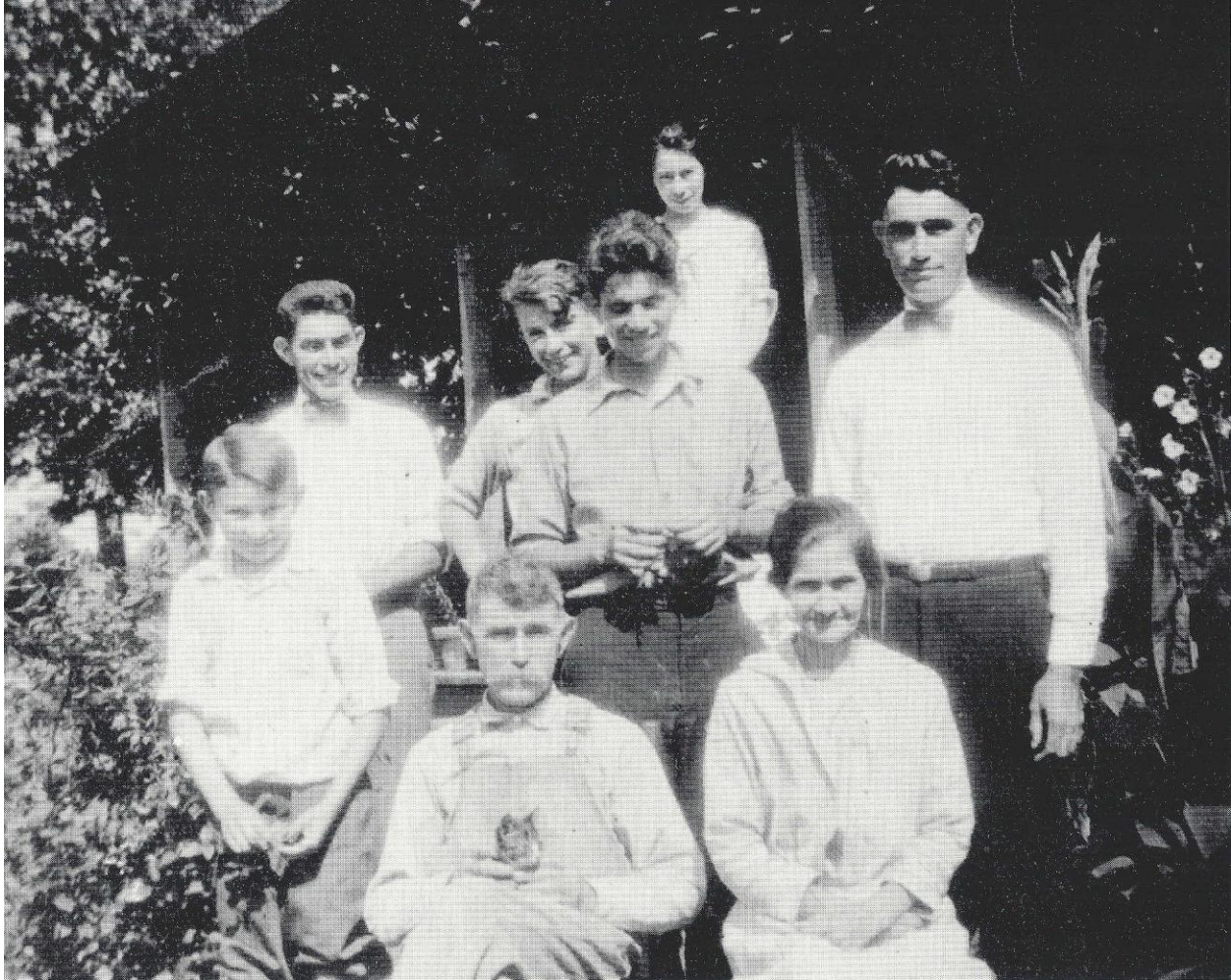


Figure 8 Several children of Jesse Robert and Cora Stenhouse Barnhardt—(left to right in back) Harris Rumple, Edward Stenhouse, James Leonard, John Robert, Kathleen, and William Guy—attended the Caldwell-Bradford School. “Jesse Robert Barnhardt (sic) Family,” posted by rsbarnhardt, Ancestry.com.

While a roster of students who attended the Caldwell-Bradford School is not extant, newspaper reports and local histories provide some names of alumni. Ed Barnhardt was interviewed for a 1989 article, and he remembered that one day at the school “the boys got so excited at a dog and rabbit chase that some of the boys jumped out the window, and school was suspended for a time.”³⁰ He and several of his siblings, including John Robert Barnhardt and Kathleen Barnhardt, attended Caldwell-Bradford School along with children from the Caldwell, Bradford, and White families. John Robert scored fourth highest among county boys on the high-school entrance exam in 1917. Kathleen became a teacher and even taught at Caldwell-Bradford for a short period.³¹ Students recorded as

³⁰ “Ramah’s Rich Heritage,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 24, 1989.

³¹ “Miss Williamson Gets the Honors,” *Charlotte News*, April 15, 1917; Jenkins, 109.

having perfect attendance in December 1913 included Kathleen and John Robert along with Elizabeth Caldwell, Albert Deweese, and White siblings Bertha, Lucile, Harold, and Thomas.³²

Teachers at the Caldwell-Bradford School included:

- Essie Jetton was assigned to the school in 1905-1906. She was a career teacher who later taught for thirty years at Davidson High School.³³
- Mason Lee Cashion, Sr. taught at the school during the 1907-1908 term. He graduated from Erskine College and moved to Texas in 1912, where he was the secretary of the YMCA at Austin College.³⁴
- Mary Loretha Cowell was assigned to the school in September 1911. She later taught at Huntersville High School before entering the social work field.³⁵
- Loma Harris Alexander graduated with an A. B. degree from Presbyterian Female College (today Queens University of Charlotte) in 1909. She married Cecil DeWitte Bradford, a nephew of S. T. Caldwell who she likely met while teaching at Caldwell-Bradford during the 1913-1914 term.³⁶
- Hattie Octavia Knox was listed as the principal teacher at the school in 1915 and 1918. She became a Presbyterian missionary in western North Carolina before joining her sister in Korea.³⁷
- Nora Wilson Bradford, niece of S. T. Caldwell, may have attended Ramah Academy and Caldwell-Bradford School. She studied home economics at Columbia University. Nora was named principal teacher at Caldwell Bradford School starting in September 1920. But her tenure must have ended in 1922, since in June she had taken the position of Moore County Home Demonstration Agent and was living in Carthage. She later worked as a home economist for General Foods, Inc. and for the War Department at the Pentagon in Washington,

³² "Children Not Tardy or Absent during the Year," *Charlotte News*, December 13, 1913.

³³ "Miss Eva Estelle Jetton," *Charlotte Observer*, December 20, 1962.

³⁴ Mason Lee Cashion, Sr., <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/71653146/mason-lee-cashion>.

³⁵ "Many County Schools Open," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, September 19, 1911; "Attendance of Children of the County Schools," *Charlotte News*, March 18, 1913.

³⁶ "Mrs. Bradford," *Charlotte News*, June 30, 1969; "Off to School," *Charlotte News*, September 21, 1904; "Diplomas to Graduates," *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, May 12, 1909.

³⁷ "Full Roster of County Teachers," *Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1915; "Organization to Make Big 'Drive' for War Savings," *Charlotte News*, February 25, 1918; Federation of Christian Missions in Japan, *The Christian Movement in Japan, Korea & Formosa*, Vol. 23 (Tokyo: Japan Times and Mail, 1925), 645-646.

D. C.³⁸ Student Ray Whitley remembered that Nora would bring soup from home on cold days.³⁹

School Consolidation

School consolidation had been a debated issue since the Aycock administration. Officials including State Superintendent Joiner saw the growing population shift across the country from rural to urban areas to be a cause for concern. In his biennial report on the state of education in North Carolina published in 1902, he advocated for increased educational opportunities for the state's farmers:

Eighty-two per cent of the population of North Carolina is rural and agricultural. The great masses of our people, therefore, are dependent upon the rural schools for education. These rural schools, then are the strategic point of the educational system of the State. The very preservation of the rural population depends upon the preservation and the improvement of these schools. The best people of all classes are going to reside where they can get the best educational opportunities for their children. To keep such people on the farms and check the disastrous annual drain upon the best blood of the country by the towns and cities, these rural schools must be made adequate to the educational needs of the people, and equal in merit to the best public schools of the towns and cities, and the character of the instruction given in them must be such as to educate for farm life rather than educate away from farm life. With such schools, the country is the ideal place for the education of man.⁴⁰

The Rural High School Act (1907) authorized the establishment of high schools in rural towns:

With the consent of the State Board of Education, the County Board of Education in any county may, in its discretion, establish and maintain, for a term of not less than five school months in each school year, one or more public high schools for the county at such place or places as shall be most convenient for the pupils entitled to attend and most conducive to the purposes of said school or schools.⁴¹

Within four years there were 200 public rural high schools in North Carolina. These high schools were required to have a minimum of three teachers. One-teacher schools like Caldwell-Bradford School only taught up to grade six, so students could then graduate into a high school by passing an

³⁸ "New Teachers Named," *Charlotte News*, September 7, 1920; "Teachers Being Picked for Year," *Charlotte News*, July 6, 1921; "Miss Bradford Goes to Raleigh," *Moore Community News*, June 1, 1922; *Charlotte Observer*, October 15, 1922; "N. C. Bankers in Annual Convention Discussing the Farmer's Problems," *Charlotte Observer*, May 4, 1923; "A 30-Year Romance Results in Wedding Ceremony Here," *News and Observer*, January 29, 1956; "Frank Parkers to Live Here," *News and Observer*, January 30, 1956; "Mrs. Parker," *Charlotte News*, April 27, 1967.

³⁹ Jenkins, 109.

⁴⁰ J. Y. Joiner, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina for the Scholastic Years 1900-1901 and 1901-1902* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1902), 58.

⁴¹ "Public High School Law," *The Rules and the Law Relating to the Establishment of Public High Schools in North Carolina* (Raleigh: State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1907), 8.

entrance exam. In April 1915, students, John Bradford and Elizabeth Caldwell, received their diplomas from Caldwell School.⁴²

In March 1916, a delegation from Caldwell Station requested the school there be reopened. The school had closed several years before, and students were sent to Huntersville.⁴³ The request was approved and ordered by the Board of Education.⁴⁴ So said the *Daily Observer*,

The Caldwell school was re-established yesterday, this link in the county chain having been discontinued several years ago and its pupils consolidated with the personnel of the Huntersville school. With the growing needs for a school which have appeared since the temporary decrease of the institution, the board unanimously voted for its rehabilitation.⁴⁵

A new building was constructed at Caldwell Station by W. E. Potts. The new school enrolled approximately 50% more students than Caldwell-Bradford School, though the former was in Huntersville Township while the latter fell within Deweese Township. To compare the two schools, in December 1917 Caldwell-Bradford School had an enrollment of 19 students with 78% attendance, and Caldwell Station School had an enrollment of 27 students with 85% attendance. In January 1918, once the harvest season was fully over, Caldwell-Bradford School had an enrollment of 19 students with 67% attendance, while Caldwell Station had an enrollment of 31 students with 70% attendance. At the end of the term in May, the final enrollment at Caldwell-Bradford School was 21 students with an average daily attendance of 14 students, making it one of the smallest schools in the county. Caldwell Station School enrolled 46 students with an average attendance of 21 students.⁴⁶ The decrease in rural students was attributed to the continued rural-to-urban population movement. As noted by county Superintendent J. M. Matthews, "The decrease is taken as incontrovertible evidence of the widely accepted fact that the people of the nation are still leaving the farms to enjoy the greater luxuries and delights of urban life and that, in spite of the back to the farm cry that has been going up for several years the actual trend back to the farm has not begun, so far as this country is concerned at least."⁴⁷

Matthews and other county superintendents fully embraced school consolidation by the end of World War I, and innovations in transportation made the process easier. The General Assembly had initially authorized using buses (or trucks, as they were initially called) to transport students to school in 1911. Pamlico County was the first to purchase a dedicated school bus in 1917. Two years later, the

⁴² "Winners of Entrance Diplomas to High School," *Charlotte News*, April 16, 1915.

⁴³ "County Board of Education Meets—Huntersville Will Vote on \$15,000 Bonds," *Charlotte News*, March 6, 1916.

⁴⁴ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Minutes Book Vol. 4 (1915-1918), 35-37, in the Mecklenburg County Board of Education records, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁴⁵ "Two Bond Elections for Better Schools," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, March 7, 1916.

⁴⁶ "Good Showing Meck Schools," *Charlotte News*, December 17, 1917; "County Schools in January," *Charlotte News*, February 7, 1918; "Attendance in County Schools Shows Decrease," *Charlotte News*, May 29, 1918.

⁴⁷ "Attendance in County Schools Shows Decrease," *Charlotte News*, May 29, 1918.

Board of Education purchased a truck to haul children from Long Creek to the consolidated Paw Creek School, a distance of approximately three miles. A second truck was obtained in October 1919 to bus children from Alexandria and McAuley (which was located near the southern terminus of McAuley Road) schools to Huntersville.⁴⁸ Superintendent J. M. Matthews reported on the status of school busing in the county schools in January 1921:

The experiment of transporting children to school by automobile in the rural districts has proved successful in this county. The total enrollment has not only improved, but the daily attendance has improved also. The four trucks now employed in conveying children from small one-teacher school districts to high schools and Huntersville, Matthews, Newells and Hickory Grove haul about 80 pupils a day. Even on the bad sleety day we had recently there was no falling off in attendance.⁴⁹

Statistics presented by Plummer Stewart, chair of the Board of Education, to the Charlotte Rotary Club in September 1923 showed the accelerated pace of school consolidation in rural Mecklenburg County between 1917 and 1923.⁵⁰

1917	1923
12,600 school age children in the county	12,091 school age children in the county
8,808 enrolled	10,822 enrolled
5,595 average daily attendance	7,792 average daily attendance
108 teachers	197 teachers, most having college degrees
75 school districts	50 school districts
No accredited high schools	6 accredited high schools
28 one-teacher schools	8 one-teacher schools
No school buses	18 school buses transporting 1,200 students
128-day school term	145-day school term
\$50 average salary for teachers	\$99.05 average salary for teachers

⁴⁸ "Truck Will Carry School Children to Their School," *Charlotte Observer*, August 29, 1919; "Huntersville to Get School Truck," *Charlotte News*, October 14, 1919.

⁴⁹ "School Transportation Successful," *Charlotte News*, January 23, 1921.

⁵⁰ "State Superintendent Allen and Chairman Stewart Heard," *Charlotte Observer*, September 12, 1923.

\$3.37 average cost per student

\$2.98 average cost per elementary student,
\$8.27 average cost per high school student

At their October 1, 1923, meeting, the Mecklenburg County Board of Education voted to close the Caldwell-Bradford School. Students would be trucked to Caldwell Station School for primary grades and Huntersville High School for advanced grades.⁵¹ As recorded in the board minutes,

Relative to the routing of the bus in recent consolidation of the upper grades of Caldwell Station and all the grades of Alexandriana, be it ordered that the school bus begin at or in the vicinity of the Douglas place on the first drive and unload at Huntersville and make the second route by Caldwell Station into the Bradford territory, having its terminus near the Bradford store, and returning with children of all grades to the Caldwell Station School, where it will drop all children in and below the fourth grade, and will carry all the children of both schools above the fourth grade, who wish to attend, to Huntersville.⁵²

By the end of the 1923-1924 school term, Mecklenburg County had consolidated 21 white schools, the largest number reported by any county in the state. Eleven of the consolidated schools had more than six teachers. The Board of Education had applied to the state for \$243,000 in funding to complete eight new school building projects including four new schools. The consolidation of schools was a trend ongoing around the state. For the 1924-1925 school year, Mecklenburg County was ranked 50th for its number of one-teacher schools, with fourteen schools remaining in the county.⁵³ By the end of 1925, there were only fourteen one-teacher schools remaining in Mecklenburg County. These schools enrolled a total of 428 students.⁵⁴

⁵¹ "County School Closed by Board of Education," *Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1923.

⁵² Mecklenburg County Board of Education Minutes Book, Vol. 4 (1923-1924), 347, in the Mecklenburg County Board of Education records, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁵³ Edgar T. Thompson, "The County's Schools," in Thompson, ed., *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte* (Charlotte: Queen City Printing Co., 1926), 107, 117.

⁵⁴ "One-Teacher Schools Have Been Reduced by Nearly 75 Per Cent within 25 Years," *Charlotte Observer*, December 20, 1925.

Adaptive Reuse as a Residence



Figure 9 The former Sardis School, built in 1903, in its current use as a residence. April 2019 photograph from Google StreetView.

When schools were closed in Mecklenburg County, the buildings were typically auctioned. In November 1910, the former Ashcraft schoolhouse in Clear Creek District 6 and Beech Grove schoolhouse in Long Creek District 7 were to be auctioned at public sale on November 26. P. C. Harkey purchased the closed Sardis School and two acres of land in Sharon Township in August 1923 for \$890, converting the building into a residence. Caldwell Station School closed in June 1931, and the following year the facility was sold to American Legion Post #86.⁵⁵

The Caldwell-Bradford School was initially used as a community space. In June 1925 the Ladies Aid Society at Ramah Presbyterian Church held an ice cream supper at the former school the evening of Saturday, June 13.⁵⁶ The Caldwell-Bradford School was ordered to be auctioned in March 1927 along with ten other closed schools. However, it appears that ownership of the property reverted to or had been retained by the Caldwell family while the school was still in operation. A deed dated December 26, 1922, conveyed 59.75 acres “including about 3/4 acre School House lot” from S. T. and May

⁵⁵ “Board of Education to Meet Monday,” *Charlotte News*, November 5, 1910; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 509, Page 496; “Ten Abandoned School Houses Go at Auction,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 8, 1927; Gray, Caldwell Station School.

⁵⁶ “Ice Cream Supper,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 10, 1925.

Caldwell to their son John Grier Caldwell.⁵⁷ Two years later, John married Lillie Haltiwanger, a teacher at Huntersville High School.⁵⁸



Figure 10 Aerial view of Caldwell-Bradford School looking southeast, ca. 1982. From Vintage Aerial, <https://www.vintageaerial.com>.

While the date that John and Lillie moved into the former school is unknown, they converted it into a Craftsman-style bungalow with an addition of bedrooms made to the west elevation. As noted by local historian (and cousin to John) Nell Bradford Jenkins, the former Caldwell-Bradford School “still stands at the corner of Concord and McAulay roads and has been a dwelling house for many years.”⁵⁹ John farmed while Lillie taught school until her retirement. John died in 1971, and Lillie lived in the house until moving into Sharon Towers in Charlotte around 1977, when she sold the former school and nearly 38 acres of land to Drs. Robert and Karen Gochnauer.⁶⁰ The veterinarians opened North Mecklenburg Animal Hospital in Cornelius in 1976, and Robert was one of a few specialists in treating large animals and livestock.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 605, Page 262.

⁵⁸ “Many Teachers Chosen for Schools in County,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 27, 1924.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, 26.

⁶⁰ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3948, Page 238.

⁶¹ *Charlotte News*, July 17, 1976; “A Visit with a Country Vet,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 1991.

Architectural Description

The Caldwell-Bradford School is one of the only known extant one-teacher schoolhouses remaining in Mecklenburg County. It was built in the early 1900s to serve the students of the immediate community along Concord Road in southern Deweese Township. After the school was closed in 1923, it was converted into a residence and renovated into a Craftsman bungalow. While its modern appearance does little to communicate its origins as a school, the Caldwell-Bradford School also serves as an example of the adaptive reuse of educational properties into private residences in Mecklenburg County.



Figure 11 Aerial view of the Caldwell-Bradford School looking southeast. Birdseye View, Mecklenburg County POLARIS 3G.

The Caldwell-Bradford School is located in northern Mecklenburg County north of Huntersville and south of Cornelius and Davidson near the Cabarrus County line. It is located on a 1.58-acre parcel at the corner of N. C. Highway 73 (Davidson-Concord Road) and McAuley Road, the last remaining public gravel road in Mecklenburg County and a local landmark. The structure is on the south side of the busy highway, which at the time of this report is two lanes but is planned to be expanded to four lanes. The parcel is largely open with mature shade trees around the structure. Most of the parcel is fenced, creating a yard for the structure, with a gate opening to McAuley Road for a short gravel drive and parking area in front of the former school. The topography of the site gently slopes from north to south.



There are two non-contributing structures on the property—a frame well house east of the Caldwell-Bradford School near the driveway and McAuley Road (left) and a metal storage building south of the structure (right).





The Caldwell-Bradford School is a one-story frame structure with a front-gabled roof and is sheathed with vinyl siding and asphalt architectural shingles. It is built upon a brick pier foundation. Most windows are paired replacement vinyl sash with 4-over-1 interior grid. The front and rear porches have replacement decking, steps, posts, and railing. There are three chimneys—a brick chimney, unknown if dating back to the construction of the school or added when made a residence—rising from the peak of the gabled roof, and two replacement concrete masonry chimney stacks at the west and east elevations.

The appearance of the Caldwell-Bradford School was likely altered when it was converted from a school into a residence in the 1920s or 1930s. At this time, the rooms along the west side of the house may have been added, as the wood structure and subfloor differ between what is likely the original portion of the school in the middle, which has sawn wood timbers with perpendicular wood plank subflooring. In contrast, the west portion has wood joists with diagonally-oriented wood plank subflooring. The roof may have been altered or even replaced at this time, as it features similar wood lumber as the west portion.



Figure 12 Attic



Figure 13 View at the crawlspace looking north toward the brick chimney. The wood plank subfloor at the top of the photo runs perpendicular to the floor beams, identifying this portion of the Caldwell-Bradford School as the original portion.



Figure 14 View at the crawlspace looking northeast. Visible are the original wood timber beams.



Figure 15 Looking up at the wood plank subfloor and wood joists at the west portion of the Caldwell-Bradford School in the crawlspace. This section was likely added later when the former school was converted into a residence.



The façade elevation of the Caldwell-Bradford School faces north and is three bays wide. It has a pair of windows and a replacement Craftsman door under the porch roof along with an enclosed section in the west bay with a horizontal sliding window in its east wall. The hipped porch has a centered gable with vinyl siding, square section wood posts and railing, and brick foundation with wood decking. A vinyl rectangular vent is located in the gable of the primary mass.



The east elevation of the Caldwell-Bradford School is three bays wide. The first bay at the north end of the elevation is gabled with a pair of replacement windows with a small vinyl vent centered in the gable. The middle bay also has a pair of replacement windows. This bay is divided from the rear bay, which has a small replacement window, by the replacement chimney.



The south elevation of the Caldwell-Bradford School features a shed porch which has been enclosed with windows on its south and east elevations. Replacement wood steps, decking, and railing comprises the small porch at the west bay of this elevation. Access to the crawlspace is through a wood door in the brick foundation wall. A shed extension with gable overhang extends from the west side of the elevation.





The west elevation of the Caldwell-Bradford School is three bays wide, each bay with a pair of replacement windows. The north and middle bays are divided by a replacement chimney.

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