

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Martin Elementary School
other names/site number Walter Martin Elementary School

2. Location

street & number 608 Church Street
city, town Bronwood () **vicinity of**
county Terrell **code** GA 273
state Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 31726

() not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| buildings | 1 | 0 |
| sites | 0 | 0 |
| structures | 0 | 0 |
| objects | 0 | 0 |
| total | 1 | 0 |

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Richard Coates
Signature of certifying official

3-25-08
Date

W. Ray Luce
Historic Preservation Division Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

() entered in the National Register

Edson H. Beall 5-12-08

() determined eligible for the National Register

() determined not eligible for the National Register

() removed from the National Register

() other, explain:

() see continuation sheet

[Signature]

Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions:

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

MODERN MOVEMENT: International Style

Materials:

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| foundation | Brick |
| walls | Brick |
| roof | N/A |
| other | N/A |

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:

Martin Elementary School, named in honor of local African-American educator Walter Martin, is a L-shaped, one-story, 13-room schoolhouse, with International-style elements, located in the town of Bronwood (Terrell County) in southwest Georgia. The school has retained its essential form and floor plan since the S. J. Curry Company of Albany completed its construction in 1956. Architect Edward Vason Jones of Albany, Georgia, designed the school that opened in 1956 and closed in 1970. The historic school is the only building on the four-acre property. The property is located in the small town of Bronwood—which is in a predominately rural part of the state. The extant building is vacant.

DESCRIPTION:

Martin Elementary School was built in 1956 as a segregated public school for African-American children in the town of Bronwood and its surrounding area. The school is a L-shaped, one-story building with International-style elements. The rectilinear building is clad in red brick and has a flat roof. The building's façade contains an elongated wall of glass (daylight) windows. Typical among International-style buildings, the school has minimal ornamentation and was built using industrially produced materials (Photographs 1, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24).

Martin Elementary School's historic floor plan remains intact. The main portion of the school has a 173-foot central hallway that connects seven classrooms, two restrooms, a library, a principal's office, and three storage rooms to the cafeteria/auditorium. Each classroom and the library are 32 x 24

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

feet. All of the interior doors have an overhead transom light that opens into the interior of each room allowing for additional air circulation (Photograph 2). The classrooms and library have two interior windows that allow light and air to pass from the central hallway into the room (Photographs 1, 5). The exterior walls in the classrooms, offices, and library have an elongated wall of daylight windows that provide each space with natural lighting and a constant supply of fresh air (Photographs 1, 3, 6, 8, 9). The library has a doorway that leads to a small room that was once used as the school librarian's office (Photograph 8). This office space is the only room in the main portion of the building without direct access to the central hallway. The remaining rooms along the central hallway were used as office space for the principal and his/her staff, storage closets, and restrooms (Photographs 10, 22).

The western end of the central hallway has a rectangular-shaped room that once served as the school's cafeteria and auditorium. This multi-purpose room has a stage. Unlike most of the other rooms in the school, this room does not have an elongated bay of daylight windows. Instead, this room has six nine-over-nine windows. The historic overhead lighting fixtures can be seen in this room (Photographs 12, 13, 20, 21, 24).

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Education
Ethnic Heritage—Black
Social History

Period of Significance:

1956

Significant Dates:

1956—Martin Elementary School's date of construction.

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Jones, Edward Vason (architect)
Curry, S.J., Company (builders)

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Statement of significance (areas of significance)

National Register Criteria

Martin Elementary School is an excellent intact example of a mid-20th century segregated school building located in the small town of Bronwood, Georgia (Terrell County)—which is in a predominately rural part of the state. This International-style architect designed school building operated from 1956 until 1970 when Terrell County integrated its public school system.

Martin Elementary School meets National Register Criterion “C” at the local level of significance in the area of architecture because it is an excellent example of International-style architecture in Georgia. International-style architecture was developed in the 1920s and 1930s by European architects who wanted to break with historical precedent and take advantage of modern building materials and technology. The result was a structural skeleton covered with a thin exterior skin of material. Design was stripped to its basics; the efficient functioning of a building without decorative ornamentation became the guiding principle. In Georgia, the International Style was essentially a post-World War II phenomenon. After the war, throughout the state, communities increasingly adopted International-style architecture when constructing community landmark buildings such as post offices, schools, libraries, courthouses, and city halls. A significant number of International-style commercial buildings can also be found throughout the state. During the 1950s, the state’s county school boards adopted the International Style as the dominant architecture style to be used in the construction of new, state-of-the-art, school buildings. Martin Elementary School, therefore, is an excellent local example of a statewide occurrence. The school is an excellent example of International-style architecture in Georgia because of its shape, mass, form, materials, and ornamentation. Edward Vason Jones—a native of Albany, Georgia—designed the school. Jones was a leading figure in the renowned School of Georgia Classicism and designed only a handful of International-style buildings during his career. The Albany (Ga.) City Hall and Municipal Court, for example, is one extant case in point of his International-style design work.

Martin Elementary School meets National Register Criterion “A” at the local level of significance in the area of education, ethnic heritage-black, and social history because it is an excellent intact example of a mid-20th-century, segregated, elementary school building in Georgia. The school operated from 1956 until 1970 when the Terrell County Board of Education integrated the local school system. During Reconstruction, the state of Georgia created its first statewide public school system. From the start, the state’s public schools were segregated by race. Racial segregation remained the status quo in the state until the late-1960s when many individual counties integrated. Following the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, most local school boards throughout the state of Georgia—and American South—developed strategies to resist impending federally mandated integration ordinances. In Terrell County, as in numerous other Georgia counties, the local school board initially considered plans to close their public schools rather than submit to racial integration. Such plans attracted little support for working and middle class white families whose only source of education for their children were the local publicly funded comprehensive schools. Equipped with new sources of

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

revenue following the state's school building initiative launched by populist governor Herman Talmadge, local school boards saw the construction of new state-of-the-art school buildings for African-American schoolchildren as a possible way to circumvent impending federal mandates. The most modern school buildings of the period were those designed in the International Style. Such designs included large-scale buildings capable of holding large class sizes in comfort while optimizing common elements such as massive walls of elongated daylight windows that provided students with fresh air and proper lighting. The all-white Terrell County school board believed that if they built new school buildings for African-American students then perhaps the local African-American community as well as national Civil Rights advocates might view this as a progressive step forward that might convince both parties to forestall integration into the unforeseeable future. When Terrell County integrated its school system in 1970, it was one of the last remaining racially segregated school systems in the state. While racially segregated schools represent the state of Georgia's past racist public policies, African-American schools developed into major community centers within most black communities. In the town of Bronwood, Martin Elementary School is one of the few remaining remnants of a mid-20th century African-American community that since the school's closing in 1970 has lost much of its social and cultural cohesiveness.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

N/A

Period of significance (justification)

Martin Elementary School's period of significance is 1956. The school was constructed in 1956.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

Contributing—School building (1956)

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

Martin Elementary School was built in 1956 as part of the Terrell County Board of Education's school building program and as a defiant effort to resist impending federal mandates requiring the integration of the state of Georgia's public learning institutions. Since the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling in 1896, the state of Georgia maintained a segregated public school system based upon the constitutional principles outlined in that historic decision. Prior to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the state never operated integrated public schools, but instead established black-only and white-only schools in most counties (some counties lacked black schools prior to *Plessy v. Ferguson*). The *Plessy* decision transformed the state's existing *de facto* segregation policies into *de jure* laws that were constitutionally upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. In many areas of the state, African-American leaders saw the creation of racially integrated schools as a significant—though limited—step toward achieving greater access to education. African-American schools suffered from inadequate funding throughout their entire existence (1865-1970). Local

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

school boards allocated funds on an unequal basis often illegally skirting the *Plessy v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” mandate. Despite fiscal concerns, black schools emerged as important symbols within the state’s African-American community.

Following World War II, African-American soldiers returning from Europe and the Pacific began demanding equal civil rights as defined by the constitution and restricted by court decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The integration of public schools was one of the first goals of civil rights advocates in the state of Georgia and throughout the nation. Influenced heavily by the teachings of earlier leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, mid-20th-century civil rights advocates saw equal access to education as a critical step toward obtaining additional civil liberties. In Georgia, state and local officials—as well as national representatives—lobbied to maintain the status quo and saw integration as a direct challenge to their perceived “states rights.”

During the immediate post-World War II period, civil rights proponents developed a legal strategy that if successful would overturn existing segregation laws in many parts of the country. Their initial plan revolved around building a case that African Americans were equal taxpayers and therefore deserved to have equal access to the services funded in part by their taxable income and spending. Future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, who served as lead counsel during the groundbreaking *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) case, understood that southern states in particular and the nation in general were unresponsive to pleas based upon assumed notions of social justice and racial equality. Rather than build a philosophical argument, Marshall and others formed cases based upon the shared notion that taxpayers deserved equal service regardless of their race, gender, or creed. During the early 1950s several state level cases challenging segregated schools climbed the judicial ladder toward the highest court in the land. In Georgia, white leaders grew increasingly concerned that the Supreme Court—led by Chief Justice Earl Warren and Associate Justice Hugo Black—would soon overturn the existing segregation codes based upon the facts presented to the court that the state’s black schools were unequal in terms of funding and facilities in comparison to their white counterparts. One strategy adopted by numerous county school systems was to resist integration by allocating unprecedented sums of money for the construction of new modern-designed school buildings for African Americans. White leaders hoped that the Supreme Court and the region’s African-American population would see such an action as being in step with the existing *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling. If counties provided equal schools then perhaps the Supreme Court and federal government would allow segregated schooling to continue into the unforeseeable future. Their strategy coincided well with Georgia governor Herman E. Talmadge’s statewide school building program that provided counties with additional funding to pay for new construction costs.

Like most white Georgians in 1954, the white residents of Terrell County were willing to resort to extreme measures to resist racial integration. One year after the *Brown v. Board* decision ruled racially segregated public services and accommodations as unconstitutional, the *Dawson News*—a newspaper published in Terrell County—reported that local whites were prepared to shut down the entire school system rather than submit to integration and that the local school board had moved forward with its plans to build several new schools for African-American students. The newspaper printed a statement released by Robert Pinkston—county school superintendent—that declared if the local schools were integrated that the county would respond by refusing to collect any further tax

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

revenues. If implemented such an action would have effectively shut down the county's entire public school system (Attachment Two). The Georgia General Assembly considered a similar proposal. Fortunately, only two of its members—one of whom was future governor Zell Miller—supported the plan, thereby sparing the state's school system from closure.

Prior to the *Brown v. Board* decision, few African-American schools in the state that were built using public funds were architect designed. The vast majority of the post-*Brown* schools in the state built for African Americans were architect designed. This change reflects the efforts of white leaders to resist federal mandates. They hoped that by providing African-American schoolchildren with state-of-the-art designed school buildings they might be able to prevent or at least delay desegregation. Terrell County adopted a similar tactic. In 1954, they hired architect Edward Vason Jones (a native of neighboring Albany, Georgia) to design several modern school buildings. Jones completed the job during a period when many white architects in the state refused to work on projects to be used or funded by African Americans. Early in his career, Jones developed numerous professional relationships with African-American carpenters and craftsmen whose woodworking skills complemented his classical-style renovation projects. Designing the Martin Elementary School was a unique opportunity for Jones. Most of his architectural work had been in the Neo-Classical Style. Terrell County wanted a modern building. Jones, nonetheless, accepted the commission and designed the extant International-style school building. The county hired the S. J. Curry Company of Albany to construct the building. The S. J. Curry Company built more than one dozen schools in south Georgia during the 1950s and 1960s.

After experiencing several problems related to funding and construction delays, the Martin Elementary School opened in September of 1956. For the next 14 years, the school served as the major educational institution for African-American schoolchildren in the town of Bronwood as well as a central location for community gatherings. The school held classes for kindergarten through the eighth grade. The school also had the town of Bronwood's sole library. During its period of operation over 1,000 black schoolchildren matriculated at the school (Attachment One). While African Americans in Bronwood welcomed the new school, they continued to protest the existence of racially segregated schools. Finally, in 1970, the Terrell County Board of Education integrated its local school district. The county reluctantly chose to do so rather than lose its annual allotment of federal education funds. Terrell County was one of the last counties in the state to desegregate their public schools.

The integration of the Terrell County public school system was a major victory for local African Americans, but the monumental change spelled the end for Martin Elementary School. When most counties integrated their school system they chose to close existing black schools and relocate its students to extant white schools. In Bronwood, Martin Elementary School closed in 1970 as its students were bused to a former all-white elementary school located in the county seat of Dawson. As was the case in thousands of African-American communities scattered throughout the deteriorating Jim Crow South, the town of Bronwood suffered from the closure of its black school. The school had been more than an educational resource. The school was a focal point of local community activities as well as a source of employment.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Since its closure, the school building was temporarily used as a nightclub during the late-1980s, but has been otherwise vacant since 1970. Today, the current property owners, Herbert L. and Dorothy Tomlin, hope to restore the school building so that it can be used as a community center.

9. Major Bibliographic References

O'Neil, Steve. "Martin Elementary School: Historic Property Information Form," 2007. On file Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia.

"Preserving Georgia's Historic Schools," Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2003. On file Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia.

Ray & Associates, "Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868-1971: Multiple Property Documentation Form," 2004. On file Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested**
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued**
date issued:
- previously listed in the National Register**
- previously determined eligible by the National Register**
- designated a National Historic Landmark**
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #**
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #**

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office**
- Other State Agency**
- Federal agency**
- Local government**
- University**
- Other, Specify Repository:**

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Four acres

UTM References

A) Zone 16 Easting 749968E Northing 3524327N

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary includes a four-acre parcel historically associated with the school. The school is bounded to the west by Church Street.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes a four-acre parcel historically associated with the school.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Keith S. Hébert
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
mailing address 34 Peachtree St., N.W. Suite 1600
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 651-5568 **date** 2-6-2008
e-mail keith.hebert@dnr.state.ga.us

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title Steve O'Neil
organization Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center
mailing address PO Box 346
city or town Camilla **state** GA **zip code** 31730
telephone 229-522-3552
e-mail soneil@swgrdc.org

- () **property owner**
() **consultant**
(X) **regional development center preservation planner**
() **other:**

Property Owner or Contact Information

name (property owner or contact person) Herbert L. and Dorothy Tomlin
organization (if applicable) N/A
mailing address 104 University Ave.
city or town Albany **state** GA **zip code** 31707
e-mail (optional) N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

Name of Property: Martin Elementary School
City or Vicinity: Bronwood
County: Terrell
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: 11-2007

Description of Photograph(s):

Number of photographs: 24

1. School, exterior, façade; photographer facing north.
2. School, interior, central hallway; photographer facing west.
3. School, interior, classroom; photographer facing west.
4. School, interior, classroom; photographer facing west.
5. School, interior, classroom; photographer facing south.
6. School, interior, classroom; photographer facing southwest.
7. School, interior, classroom; photographer facing west.
8. School, interior, library; photographer facing west.
9. School, interior, window; photographer facing east.
10. School, interior, bathroom; photographer facing north.
11. School, exterior, entryway and portico; photographer facing south.
12. School, exterior, entryway; photographer facing northeast.
13. School, exterior, window; photographer facing east.
14. School, exterior, school building; photographer facing northeast.
15. School, exterior, façade; photographer facing west.
16. School, exterior, school building; photographer facing west.
17. School, exterior, school building; photographer facing southwest.
18. School, exterior, façade; photographer facing southwest.
19. School, exterior, entryway; photographer facing east.
20. School, interior, cafeteria and stage; photographer facing north.
21. School, interior, cafeteria and stage; photographer facing north.
22. School, interior, office; photographer facing east.
23. School, exterior, school building; photographer facing northwest.
24. School, exterior, entryway; photographer facing east.

(HPD WORD form version 11-03-01)

MARTIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TERRELL COUNTY, GEORGIA
ATTACHMENT ONE: Martin Elementary School Students, c. 1960.



DAWSON NEWS

CIRCULATED IN
THE HEART OF THE
PEANUT BELT

DAWSON, GEORGIA, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1955

PRICE 10c

County Moves To Preserve Segregated Public Schools

The Terrell County Board of Commissioners has moved to insure the maintenance of segregated public schools in the county.

In a statement of policy adopted September 6, the board declared:

1. That it will not levy any school tax for the support of public schools which are integrated.
2. That it has authorized and directed the sheriff of Terrell County to employ and deputize sufficient persons as his deputies for the purpose of maintaining and keeping separate public schools for the white and colored races in the event such is necessary.

Chairman James Greene said the resolution was passed unanimously by the board at a called meeting. Other members are A. D. (Gillie) Henry and L. D. Hiller.

Officials of the County Board of Education said they had no comment to make on the resolution.

Following is its text:
"Whereas, the Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues of Terrell County, Georgia, deem it necessary to declare its position upon the question of segregation of the races in the public schools in Terrell County.

"Now therefore, be it resolved by the Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues of

TERRELL HI GREEN WAVE TO MEET HAWKINSVILLE HERE FRIDAY NITE

Terrell High's 1955 edition of the Green Wave looked encouraging in a lot of ways in its debut against Colquitt here last Friday night but the 40 to 7 score which the visitors ran up against them indicates the superiority they held.

That was the opinion of Coach Kelley Mote who said that Colquitt was simply too strong for his charges who showed their inexperience and made too many mistakes.

The Green Wave this week prepared to receive Hawkinsville on its home grounds Friday night with kick-off time at 8 o'clock.

Hawkinsville, like Colquitt, has an exceptionally strong team but Perry beat them last Friday night and Coach Mote holds that the Wave can do likewise.

"All our boys need is confidence," Coach Mote said, "and a victory over Hawkinsville.

Construction Bids On Terrell School Bldgs To Be Opened Tuesday

Construction bids on Terrell County's million dollar school building program will be opened by the State School

Building Authority at its offices in Atlanta next Tuesday afternoon.

School Superintendent Robert Pinkston, Chairman Albert Radford and Member Roy Pinkston will represent the County Board of Education at the meeting at which the contract may be awarded.

Mr. Pinkston said he understood that at least six contractors have applied for plans and specifications which are available only from the architect.

Six new school buildings—five of them for negroes—and remodeling of four exist-



Uniform at left, heralds the opening of another. The News caught them in this photo at Main and

Gas System Completion

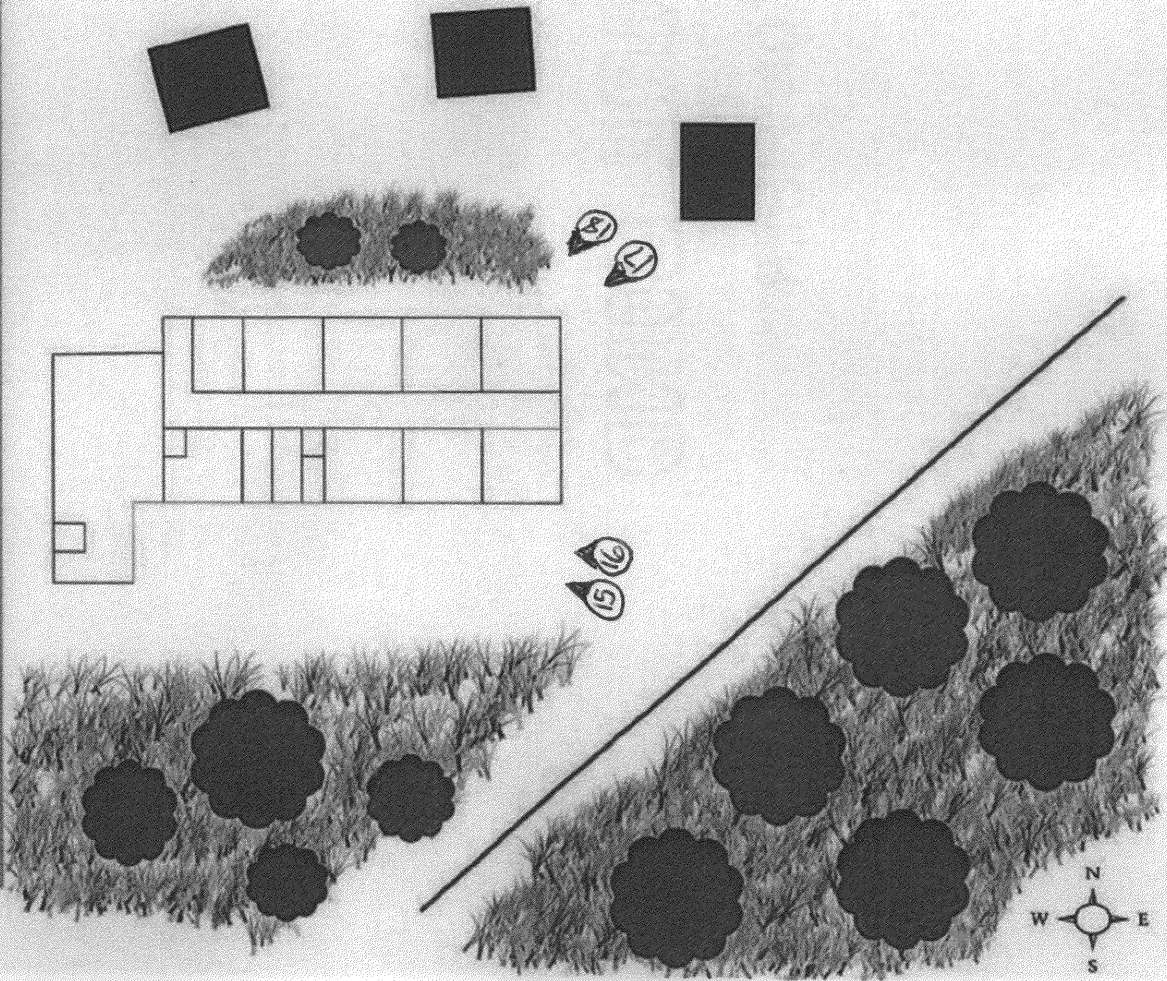
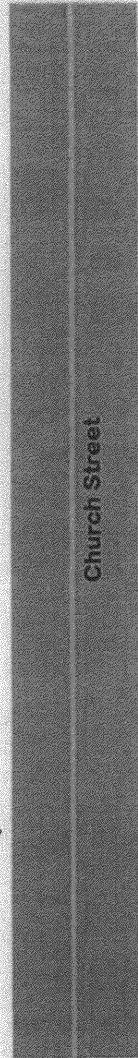
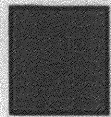
MARTIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TERRELL COUNTY, GEORGIA
SITE PLAN
NORTH: ↑
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE
SOURCE: DRAWN BY STEVE O'NEIL, 2007

Martin Elementary

Exterior

LEGEND

- House
- Tree
- Utility Line



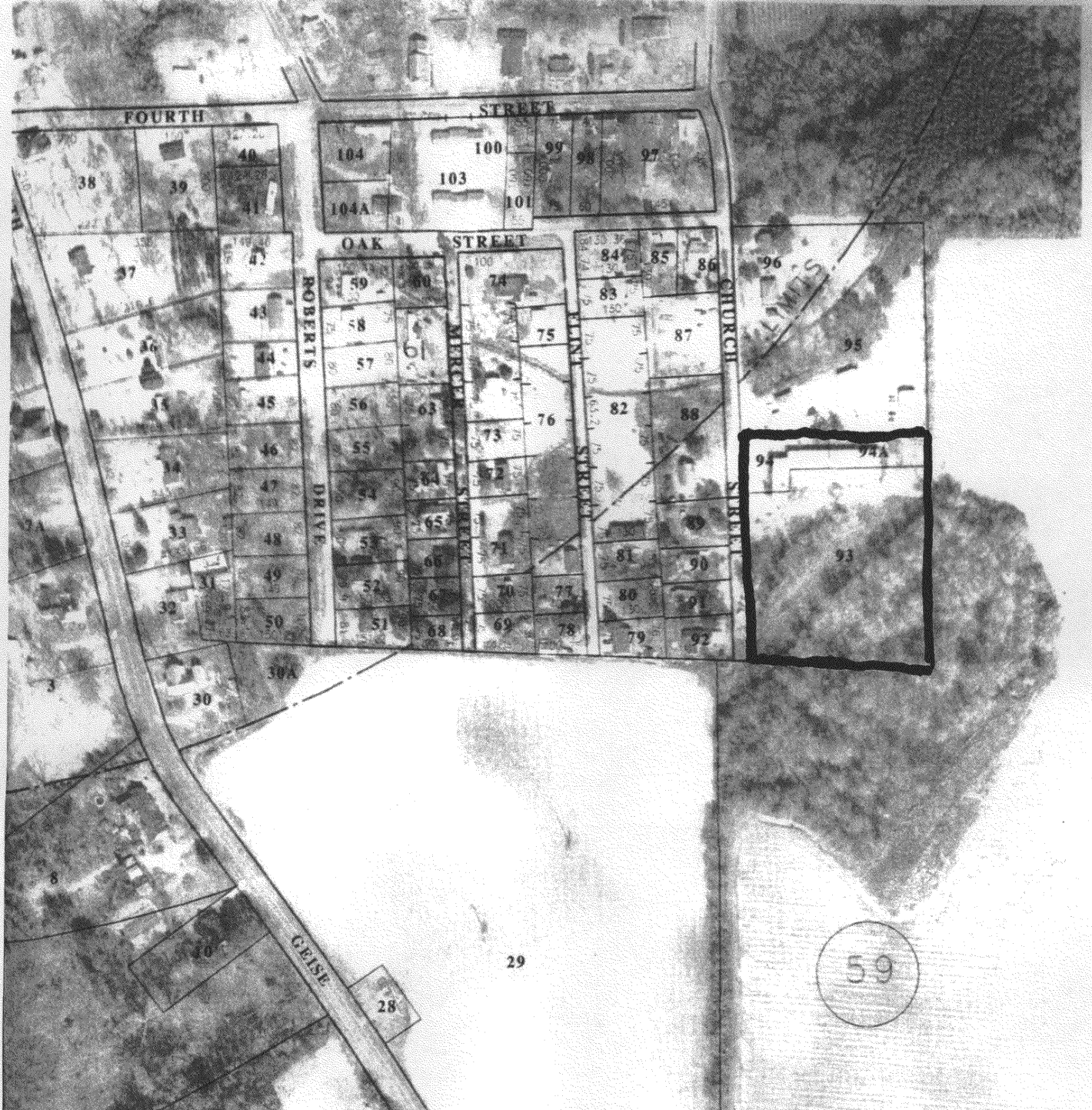
**MARTIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TERRELL COUNTY, GEORGIA
TAX MAP**

NORTH: ↑

SCALE: 1" : 200'

PROPERTY BOUNDARY: 

SOURCE: TERRELL COUNTY TAX ASSESSOR. 2000



**MARTIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TERRELL COUNTY, GEORGIA
FLOOR PLAN
NORTH: ↑
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE
SOURCE: STEVE O'NEIL, 2007**

