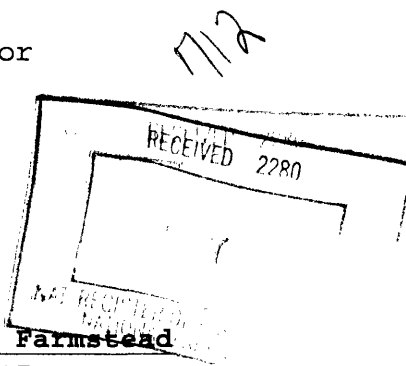


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead

other names/site number AL-#286, AL-#287

2. Location

street & number 3293 & 3109 Big Springs Road not for publication N/A
city or town Settle vicinity X state Kentucky code KY county
Allen code 003 zip code 42164

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

Signature of certifying official David L. Morgan, SHPO

6-13-03

Date

Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

for Signature of Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Ownership of Property | Category of Property |
| <u>X</u> private | ___ building(s) |
| ___ public-local | <u>X</u> district |
| ___ public-State | ___ site |
| ___ public-Federal | ___ structure |
| | ___ object |

Number of Resources within Property

| | | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
| <u> 9 </u> | <u> 2 </u> | buildings |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | sites |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 1 </u> | structures |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | objects |
| <u> 10 </u> | <u> 3 </u> | Total |

Number of resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Cat: <u> EDUCATION </u> | Sub: <u> school </u> |
| <u> DOMESTIC </u> | <u> single dwelling </u> |
| <u> AGRICULTURE </u> | <u> processing </u> |
| <u> AGRICULTURE </u> | <u> animal facility </u> |
| <u> AGRICULTURE </u> | <u> agricultural outbuilding </u> |

Current Functions

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cat: <u> SOCIAL </u> | Sub: <u> clubhouse </u> |
| <u> DOMESTIC </u> | <u> single dwelling </u> |
| <u> WORK IN PROGRESS </u> | <u> </u> |

7. Description

Architectural Classification Other: no style, I-house form

Materials

| | |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| Foundation | <u> STONE </u> |
| roof | <u> METAL </u> |
| walls | <u> WOOD: Weatherboard </u> |
| other | <u> BRICK </u> |

Narrative Description (See continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- A owned by a religious institution, used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance EDUCATION

Period of Significance 1900-1956

Significant Dates CA. 1900, CONSTRUCTION OF BIG SPRING SCHOOLHOUSE

Significant Person N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (See continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References (See continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determinat. of individual listing has been requested.
- 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

Name of repository: Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 12 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
|---|------|---------|----------|-------------|
| 1 | 16 | 568 250 | 4081 650 | Meador Quad |
| 2 | 16 | 568 190 | 4081 520 | |
| 3 | 16 | 567 650 | 4081 585 | |
| 4 | 16 | 567 660 | 4081 660 | |

Verbal Boundary Description (See continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (See continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rachel Baum

organization Programs in Folk Studies, Western Kentucky University date April 1, 2003

street & number 643 Bramblebush Dr. telephone 270-842-3025

city or town Bowling Green state KY zip code 42103

Property Owner

name Wilmer Dean Oliver

street & number 3213 N. East Ave.

city or town Panama City

telephone 850-769-7776

state FL zip code 32405

name Oretha Connor

street & number 1216 King Arthur Rd.

city or town Chattanooga

telephone 423-893-0775

state TN zip code 37421

name Dal Clark

street & number 1005 Claypool-Alvaton Rd. telephone 270-793-0615

city or town Bowling Green state KY zip code 42103

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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Materials, continued:

Other CONCRETE
Other METAL: Steel

Narrative Description:

The Big Spring School and Oliver farmstead are located on Big Springs Road in a rural neighborhood in Allen County, Kentucky. This country road winds its way among gently rolling hills, passing farmhouses, small fields, pastures, and patches of woods. The proposed historic district, comprised of the school property (AL 287) and the adjacent Oliver farmstead (AL 286), is an integral part of this rural landscape. Its primary buildings -- the schoolhouse and the Oliver farmhouse -- date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Typical of the architecture of this region and period, these buildings are of frame construction covered with clapboard. Typical vertical-plank outbuildings, dating from the early to mid-twentieth century, are found on both properties as well. The district includes the approximately 1 acre of land traditionally belonging to the schoolhouse and 161 acres of the Oliver farm's original 200 acres of fields, pasture, and woodlands. The district is in very good condition and retains a high level of integrity.

A) The Big Spring school property includes the following features:

- three contributing buildings -- a schoolhouse (sketch map letter A), cistern shed (SML B2), and privy (SML D).
- one contributing structure -- a cistern/pump (SML B1).
- two non-contributing buildings -- a mobile home (SML E) and a storage shed (SML C).

Dating to about 1900, the Big Spring schoolhouse is a small, plain, one-room, one-story rectangular balloon-frame building covered in white clapboard. It is surrounded by Big Springs Road to the south, woods to the west and north, and a

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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neighboring farmstead to the east. Facing south, the schoolhouse perches on a grassy knoll. It lies at the end of a gravel driveway that leads straight from the road and ends about fifteen feet from the building. Originally, Big Spring Road ran right in front of the school's front door, but the road was rerouted in the 1930s, giving the school children enough room to fit a small softball field in between the school and the road.

The schoolhouse sits on a fieldstone pier foundation. About 20% of the fieldstone piers have crumbled and have been replaced with concrete blocks. The schoolhouse has two doors topped by glass transoms, one door on each gable end. A sign reading "Big Spring School" hangs above the transom of the front door. Three concrete steps lead up to the front door, with similar steps in back. Four long double-hung four-pane windows are located on the eastern and western elevations. The standing-seam metal, gable roof is pierced in the center by a small brick chimney. The interior of the schoolhouse consists of one room. Its floor and walls are wooden, and the original painted wooden blackboard remains to the west of the back door.

A galvanized steel cistern pump, dating from at least the 1930s, sits over a cistern on a concrete pad directly behind the schoolhouse. It is housed in a vertical-plank shed, which dates to the same time period. The shed's door, which is elevated and reached by a concrete step, is located on its western side. Its angled shed roof is made of metal.

A vertical-plank privy, oriented to the south, is located on the edge of the woodland to the rear and the west of the schoolhouse. This privy was historically used by the girls and dates to the late 1920s or early 1930s. Its angled shed roof is made of metal. A boys' privy (SML F), historically located to the west of the schoolhouse, has been demolished.

A non-contributing prefabricated white metal shed is located behind the schoolhouse. A non-contributing white mobile home, with small porch additions on its northern and southern sides, is located to the west and the rear of the schoolhouse.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

B) The Oliver farmstead includes the following features:

- six contributing buildings -- a farmhouse (SML G), barn (SML M), henhouse (SML L), privy (SML K), smokehouse (SML J), and shed (SML I).
- one non-contributing structure -- a cistern/pump (SML H).

The Oliver farmhouse, which dates to 1892, is a two-story, five-bay, central-passage I-house with a rear ell. It is balloon-framed and covered with clapboard. The house faces south onto Big Springs Road and sits about fifty yards back from it. A semi-circular dirt driveway bisects the grassy front yard. Tall hardwood trees surround the house on three sides, and several saplings have been planted to replace trees that used to grow in the front yard. The farm is no longer actively farmed, so the character of the surrounding landscape has changed somewhat. Crops no longer grow in the fields. The site of the orchard and garden, once located to the east of the house, is now simply an open meadow.

The house sits on a fieldstone pier foundation. Two concrete steps lead up to a low porch which extends across the middle portion of the front (southern) elevation. The porch's six support posts are topped with triangular pieces of Victorian-style decorative millwork. The southern elevation is five-bay, with five double-hung windows on the upper story and four on the lower story. On the western elevation, a door, currently without steps, opens into the rear ell. Two double-hung windows, one for each story, are vertically aligned with one another to the left of the door. On the opposite, eastern side of the ell, another door opens out from the hallway that used to be the back porch. On the northern elevation, the only windows are on the back side of the eastern half of the main part of the house. Here, two windows are stacked vertically, roughly in the center of the wall, one for the upper story and one for the lower story. The gable roof is made of standing-seam metal. Interior end chimneys made of brick are located at all three gable ends.

The house originally had a central passageway and six rooms. The ell, built at the same time as the main portion of the house, contains the kitchen. A bathroom, hallway and storage

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

room were added when the back porch was enclosed in 1987. The house has two staircases to the upper floor, one in the central passage and one that leads directly from the lower room to the upper room on the western side of the house. The interior is characterized by poplar paneling, most of which is unpainted, and chestnut and poplar floorboards.

Several vertical-plank outbuildings, dating from the early to mid-twentieth century, sit behind the house. A henhouse, privy, and smokehouse, all oriented to the south, create a semicircle behind the main house. A shed, oriented to the west, sits alone to the rear and east of the farmhouse. The henhouse, smokehouse, and shed have gable roofs made of metal. The privy has an angled shed roof made of metal. A large grassy area lies behind these outbuildings and then a wooded area slopes steeply downwards.

A transverse crib barn, with a shed addition on the south side, stands in the middle of a field about seventy-five yards to the west of the house. The barn was built around 1930. It is oriented to the west and east. It is constructed of vertical planks, and its gable roof is made of metal. A small pond (SML O) is situated between the south side of the barn and Big Spring Road. A vertical-plank, gable-roofed crib (SML N) historically stood near the barn's eastern side, but fell into disrepair and was demolished in the 1980s.

A non-contributing cistern pump, which dates to 1956, is located on a concrete pad over a cistern close to the house, inside the northeast corner formed by the ell.

Integrity Evaluation

The Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead district is eligible for listing on the National Register because it meets Criterion A and is significant within the historic context "Rural Education in Allen County, Kentucky, 1900-1953." While the district maintains all seven factors of integrity, its integrity of location, setting, and association are especially important to conveying its historic significance. In addition to the setting, the factors of design and materials combine to relate integrity of feeling.

The district maintains its integrity of location because it

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 5 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

is located in its original location and none of its component buildings or structures have been moved.

The district's setting is fundamental to understanding its significance within the context of rural education. Fortunately, the district's surroundings are rural, and three of the four properties to the west, south, and east of the district are farmsteads with buildings constructed during the period of significance. The setting within the district is largely intact. While the fields are no longer cultivated, the overall impression of fields and forest surrounding the buildings is still evident. The school property's integrity of setting is somewhat affected by the presence of the non-contributing mobile home and shed, but this is offset by the otherwise unchanged setting of grassy yard in front and woods behind the schoolhouse. The girls' privy and the cistern with its pump and shed also contribute to the integrity of setting. The farmstead's integrity of setting is maintained by the presence of almost all of its original buildings. Only a crib, formerly situated between the farmhouse and the barn and grown too dilapidated for repair, was torn down in the 1980s. The only non-contributing feature, the cistern, does not substantially detract from the setting.

The district's integrity of association is intact. Schoolchildren, including those from the Oliver farm and the surrounding neighborhood, attended the Big Spring School for over fifty years, and many of them still gather at the school for a yearly reunion. The parents of Sarah Tom Oliver provided the land and timber for both the school and the farmhouse, and Oliver men worked for the school district as enumerators. Together, the district's physical features reflect the events that took place in its history. Examining these events creates a picture of the history of rural education in Allen County in the early to mid-twentieth century.

The district's integrity of feeling is strong due to the integrity of setting combined with the retention of original design and materials found in its component buildings and structures. Taken together, these factors express the historic sense of the early to mid-twentieth century in rural Allen County, Kentucky. They show a preference for the use of local materials, which parallels the local support and control of

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

education. The design of the schoolhouse, both interior and exterior, has not been altered at all, allowing the simple, common, and functional design of the building to remain clear. The Oliver farmhouse has seen some changes to its design. The house's former back porch, which was historically located in the northeast corner formed by the ell, was enclosed in 1987 to provide space for a bathroom, hallway, and storage room. While the owner nailed aluminum flashing around the foundation of the house last fall to protect it from the weather, he intends to remove it and put in a dry-stone foundation. The original windows have been recently covered with storm windows. None of the district's outbuildings have had their design altered since the period of significance.

All of the district's features retain the majority of their original materials. According to oral tradition¹, the schoolhouse and farmhouse were constructed with timber from the farmstead, so the retention of their original wooden materials helps to tell the story of the two properties' historical association. A few of the fieldstone piers of the schoolhouse and farmhouse foundations have crumbled and have been replaced with concrete blocks. Due to deterioration, approximately 40% of the farmhouse's clapboards have recently been replaced, and the floor of the front porch was replaced in the 1990s for the same reason. The materials of the outbuildings remain entirely original. Currently, the farmhouse and schoolhouse are in excellent condition, and the outbuildings are in fair to good condition.

¹ Dal Clark, interview by author, 8 September 2002, vicinity of Settle, Kentucky, notes in author's possession.

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Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

Section number 8 Page 1

Statement of Significance:

The Big Spring School (AL-287) and the Oliver Farmstead (AL-286) meet National Register Criterion A and are significant within the historic context "Rural Education in Allen County, Kentucky, 1900 – 1953." Taken together, the Big Spring School and the Oliver Farmstead illustrate the patterns and trends in rural education in Allen County from a time of local control and rapid growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a time of school reform and consolidation in the mid-twentieth century. The Big Spring School typifies patterns of new school construction in the early part of this period and the dominance of the one-room school in Allen County until the mid-twentieth century. The Big Spring School is best understood in conjunction with the Oliver Farmstead. The farmstead illustrates how local landowners supported rural education by donating land for new schoolhouses, reflects the enduring Oliver family association with the school, and places the school in its economic context by illustrating the subsistence-agriculture-based economy that made the continuance of the rural one-room school a necessity far into the twentieth century. Together, the two properties contribute to a better understanding of Allen County's rural common schools.

Historic Context: "Rural Education in Allen County, Kentucky, 1900 – 1953."

The history of the Big Spring School embodies the history of Allen County rural schools. Originally a log building, the first Big Spring schoolhouse was constructed on Boucher family land sometime before 1847 and was undoubtedly a privately run school, at least initially.¹ At this point in time, Kentucky provided no free public schools to its children, and control of the educational system rested strictly in the hands of small local districts. Most schoolhouses of this era were constructed of log and, according to some critics, did not provide an ideal learning environment. Writing in 1874, Governor Preston Leslie described these log schoolhouses in highly derogatory terms:

A little square, squatty, unhewed log building . . . is the fit representative of the district schoolhouses of the commonwealth . . . The benches — slabs with legs in them so long as to lift the little fellows' feet from the floor, without support for the back. The desks- slabs at angles, cut, hacked, scratched, blotted. . . Full of foul air and feculent odors. These are the places in which a cruel parsimony condemns childhood to pass its bright young days.²

Around 1900, a new, one-room frame schoolhouse replaced the old log Big Spring School. This new building, the current Big Spring School, was part of a flurry of school construction in Allen County and Kentucky in general. Across the commonwealth, school

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Continuation Sheet

Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

Section number 8 Page 2

districts replaced log schoolhouses with new, frame buildings: "In the time period between 1881-1901, the number of frame one-room schools [in Kentucky] grew from 2,138 to 6,752, while log schoolhouses declined from 3,360 to 1,238."³

Not only did Allen County communities replace their log schoolhouses, they also organized completely new schools. The number of Allen County schools grew from 28 in 1855 to 64 in 1891. At least 35 rural public schools, known as "common schools," were organized and recorded through county deeds in the years between 1865 and 1902.⁴ Some of this may have been in response to the Kentucky Common School Law of 1884, which sought to introduce more standardization to the school system and which also set forth the process for the condemnation and erection of school buildings.⁵ By 1915, Allen County's transition from log schoolhouses to "modern" frame houses was complete, and the Allen County Homecoming Centennial Organization was able to boast that "there is not a log or box-plank school house in the county today."⁶

Allen County's 64 schools for white children placed it above the 1891 median average for number of white schools per county in the Pennyriple region of Kentucky. Considering that Allen County fell in the bottom 25% of counties for land values and taxes paid in Kentucky's 37-county Pennyriple region, this was a considerable achievement. With property taxes paying their school teachers' salaries, Allen County should be expected to have fewer, rather than more schools relative to the other counties in the Pennyriple.⁷

At the turn of the twentieth century, the control of Kentucky schools still remained firmly in local hands, as did the responsibility for funding the construction of new schools. Once again, the Big Spring School represents this larger situation. As Allen County deeds reflect, many individual landowners in this period deeded over their land to county school districts in order to provide for new schools. The Big Spring School was no exception; in 1889, E.C. and Elizabeth Motley deeded over a one-acre plot of their land, near the original Big Spring School, as the site for a new schoolhouse. The deed stipulated that the land would return to the family if the school district moved the school from the property.⁸ As mentioned above, a new frame building, the present Big Spring schoolhouse, was built on this land. The exact date of construction is unknown, but oral tradition places it at or near 1900.⁹ At this time in Kentucky, schools were either built with volunteer labor or were financed through local taxation.¹⁰ It is not known which method was used for the Big Spring School, but oral tradition holds that the Motleys donated poplar timber from their land for the construction of the school.¹¹

The Motley family connection with Big Spring School continued through four generations of their descendants. At about the same time that they provided the land for the new Big Spring schoolhouse, the Motleys deeded 200 acres of adjacent farmland over to their oldest daughter, Sarah Tom, and her husband, Willie Gray Oliver. Sarah Tom and Willie Gray established their farm, and in 1892 they built a farmhouse on the land. They raised five children in this home.

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Continuation Sheet

Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

Section number 8 Page 3

At least one, and probably three, of Willie Gray and Sarah Tom Oliver's children attended the new Big Spring School. The 1900 United States census shows that Isa, Ana, and Malon Oliver, the three youngest children, attended school that year.¹² Without a definite construction date for the new Big Spring schoolhouse, it is not clear whether the children were attending the old or the new schoolhouse at that time. A program for the December 6, 1902 closing exercises of the "Big Springs Academy" lists Ana and M. Oliver as performers, and a handwritten note includes their sister Isa as well.¹³ Assuming that the new schoolhouse was built by then, this program indicates that all three children were students there. By the 1910 census, only the youngest child, Malon, was still young enough to be listed as attending school,¹⁴ but by that time the new school house definitely had been built.

The Oliver children achieved a higher educational level compared to other rural Allen County children. Their home's proximity to the school was likely an important factor in providing this educational advantage. The 1900 United States census shows that three out of five of the Oliver children had each attended five months of school in the past year.¹⁵ While the census data for 1900 has not been analyzed in this way, statistical analysis has shown that in 1920 only 19.5% of Allen County's children between the ages of 7 and 20 attended school.¹⁶ The Oliver's 60% attendance rate was significantly higher. Furthermore, at 18 and 20, it is not surprising that the two older Oliver children no longer attended school, especially since Cecil, the oldest, was married. The census shows that by 1910 all five of the Oliver children had learned to read and write.¹⁷ The children's 0% illiteracy rate compares favorably with the 22% illiteracy rate among Allen County's native white population in that year.¹⁸

The Oliver family's association with Big Spring School continued into the third and fourth generations. When Willie Gray Oliver died in 1925, the youngest son Malon brought his family to live at the farmhouse, joining his widowed mother Sarah Tom Oliver. Malon's daughters Stella and Zola attended the Big Spring School in the 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁹ Malon's family remained in the farmhouse until Sarah Tom's death in 1938. When Sarah Tom Oliver died in 1938, her oldest son Cecil inherited the farmhouse. He moved in along with two of his grown children, who had previously attended Big Spring School. County school censuses reflect that both Cecil and Malon served as enumerators for the Big Spring School census in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰

When the Big Spring School finally closed its doors in 1956, the land reverted to Walter Conner and his wife Lula, a granddaughter of the original Olivers and a former Big Spring School student. Although the Conners regained title to the school's land, they had to purchase the schoolhouse from the county in 1958.²¹ The current owners of the schoolhouse, great-grandchildren of the original Olivers, attended Big Spring School in the 1930s and '40s.

In addition to illustrating the donation of private land to school districts, the Oliver farmstead also tells the story of the relationship between Allen County's economics and its rural educational system. Allen County was a predominately rural county, with 81.5% of its homes located on farms in 1910.²² Likewise, the majority of Allen County schools were located in the

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

Section number 8 Page 4

countryside and were surrounded by farms. According to *The Pennyryle Cultural Landscape*, Allen County falls into a sub-region characterized by soils with medium to low fertility, with mostly small subsistence farms, and devoted more to livestock than to the cultivation of tobacco.²³ While wealthier regions of Kentucky began modernizing and consolidating their rural schools in the 1920s and '30s, Allen County was not able to afford to consolidate and modernize the majority of its schools that early. While small improvements were made, the one-room rural school continued to dominate the county's educational system until the 1940s and '50s. Other subsistence farming areas of Kentucky followed the same pattern. In the early 1950s, Kentucky still retained 3,000 of the 5,000 one-teacher schools found in the commonwealth in 1936.²⁴

The Oliver farmstead represents a fairly typical Allen County farm. At 200 acres, the Oliver farm was twice the size of the 1890 county average of 95 acres, but only half of the land was suitable for farming. The Olivers used roughly 20% of their land for fields, 30% for pasture, and left the remaining 100 acres wooded.²⁵ Allen County does not retain tax assessments from this historical period, so comparisons with other farms based on this evidence are not possible. According to oral tradition, however, the Olivers appear to have been average members of their neighborhood. Like his neighbors, Willie Gray Oliver engaged in mixed-use, subsistence farming, growing corn, oats, wheat, hay, an orchard, and garden vegetables, and keeping a mule, one or two milk cows, and hogs.²⁶

Further evidence indicates that the Motleys and Olivers should not be considered wealthy among Allen County's population. Wealthier Kentuckians tended to send their children to private academies, tended not to support taxes for public education, and would not have been likely to donate land for a public school.²⁷ Furthermore, Mrs. Mildred Corder, a neighbor who grew up with the Oliver grandchildren in the 1920s and '30s, indicated that the Olivers were not considered rich by their neighbors at that time.²⁸

Between the 1920s and '40s, the neighborhood began to see some small-scale commercial farming. In these years, limited production of tobacco began, and farmers started to sell small quantities of milk to milk companies. Oral tradition indicates that the current barn on the Oliver farm was built around 1920 and served partly to air-cure tobacco and partly to shelter the family's cows. Wilmer Dean Oliver, the great-grandson of Willie Gray Oliver, remembers that the Pet Milk Company used to show free movies at the Big Spring schoolhouse in the evenings, in the hopes of convincing local farmers to sell their milk. Wilmer Dean saw his first movie in this way, and he and his brother Carleen went on to own a milk truck and route from 1949-1950.²⁹ These additions to the local agricultural economy may have helped fund the modernization and consolidation of Allen County's schools in the 1940s and '50s.

Taken together, the Oliver farmstead and the Big Spring School tell the story of the transitions taking place in rural education in Allen County in the first half of the twentieth century. The Big Spring School was built at a time of growth and expansion in Allen County's rural education system. This growth was largely made possible through the generosity of local families, such as the Motleys, who donated land and timber for the construction of new schools.

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Continuation Sheet

Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

Section number 8 Page 5

The Motley family remained connected to the Big Spring School through their descendants, the Olivers. The Oliver farmstead provides important context for the Big Spring School by representing this local, private support and by illustrating the subsistence agriculture economy that prevented Allen County's rural schools from modernizing and consolidating until the mid-twentieth century. Big Spring School followed that pattern, not closing its doors until 1956.

¹ Retired Teachers of Allen County, *School Days of Allen County, Kentucky: From Ciphering and Reciting to the Age of Technology*. (Allen County, Kentucky: privately printed, 1992), 17.

² Quoted in Edwina Ann Doyle, Ruby Layson, and Anne Armstrong, eds, *From the Fort to the Future: Educating the Children of Kentucky*. (Kentucky Images: Lexington, Kentucky, 1987), 108.

³ Rachel Kennedy and Cynthia Johnson, *Kentucky Historic Schools Survey: An Examination of the History and Condition of Kentucky's Older School Buildings*. (Frankfort, Kentucky: Kentucky Education, Arts, and Humanities Cabinet, 2002), 34-35.

⁴ Retired Teachers, *School Days of Allen County*, viii.

⁵ Doyle, Layson, and Armstrong, *From the Fort*, 112.

⁶ Quoted in Retired Teachers, *School Days of Allen County*, viii.

⁷ Charles E. Martin, *The Pennyryle Cultural Landscape*. (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Kentucky Heritage Council, 1988), 468.

⁸ Allen County, Kentucky, Deed book 4, p.6; Retired Teachers, *School Days of Allen County, Kentucky*, 17.

⁹ Wilmer Dean Oliver, telephone interview by author, 18 November, 2002, notes in author's possession.

¹⁰ C.W. Hackensmith, "Out of Time and Tide: the Evolution of Education in Kentucky," *Bulletin of the Bureau of School Service* XLIII, no. 2 (Dec 1970): 89.

¹¹ Dal Clark, interview by author, 8 September, 2002, vicinity of Settle, Kentucky, notes in author's possession.

¹² U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900*, Population Schedule, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Allen County, Supervisor's District 3, Enumeration District 5, Sheet 3.

¹³ Printed in Retired Teachers, *School Days of Allen County*, 179.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*, Population Schedule, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Allen County, Supervisor's District 3, Enumeration District 6, Sheet 10A.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900*.

¹⁶ Martin, *The Pennyryle Cultural Landscape*, 520.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*.

¹⁸ Martin, *The Pennyryle Cultural Landscape*, 495-496.

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Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Allen County, KY

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¹⁹ Wilmer Dean Oliver, electronic mail messages to author, 31 May and 2 June, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Allen County, Supervisor's District 11, Enumeration District 2-7, Sheet 4A.*

²⁰ Allen County, Kentucky, County School Census, Subdistrict 12, 1924; Allen County, Kentucky, Enumerating Sheet for Recording School Census Data, Subdistrict 12, 1934.

²¹ Noble Allen, Superintendent of Allen County Schools, open letter, 13 September, 1958.

²² Martin, *The Pennyrite Cultural Landscape*, 492.

²³ Martin, *The Pennyrite Cultural Landscape*, 4, 6.

²⁴ Kennedy and Johnson, *Kentucky Historic Schools Survey*, 28.

²⁵ Wilmer Dean Oliver, electronic mail message to author, 27 March, 2003.

²⁶ Lewis and Stella Conner, interview by author, November 14, 2002, vicinity of Settle, Kentucky, notes in author's possession; Mildred Corder, interview by author, 23 November 2002, vicinity of Settle, Kentucky, notes in author's possession; Wilmer Dean Oliver, interview.

²⁷ Doyle, Layson, and Armstrong, *From the Fort*, 107.

²⁸ Mildred Corder, interview.

²⁹ Wilmer Dean Oliver, electronic mail message to author, 22 November, 2002.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 9 Page 1 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 2 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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Enumeration District 5, Sheet 3.

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Section 10 Page 1 Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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Verbal boundary description:

See the attached map that delineates the area proposed for listing. It is a portion of map 33 from the Allen County, Kentucky, Property Valuation Assessor office. The area proposed for listing consists of parcels 33-19-1, 33-42-A, and a portion of parcel 33-19 as shown on the map.

Boundary justification:

The boundary includes the schoolhouse and grounds that historically made up the Big Spring School; the farmhouse, outbuildings, and barn historically associated with the Oliver farmstead; and the land linking the two properties. Parcels 33-19 and the upper portion of 33-19-1 were historically owned by the Motley/Oliver family. The parcel labeled 33-42-A, a triangular piece of land measuring approximately 0.3 acres, became a de facto addition to the Big Spring schoolyard in the early 1930s when Big Springs Road was rerouted. All of this land retains its historic integrity and conveys the district's historic setting.

0 scale 660



33-19

17

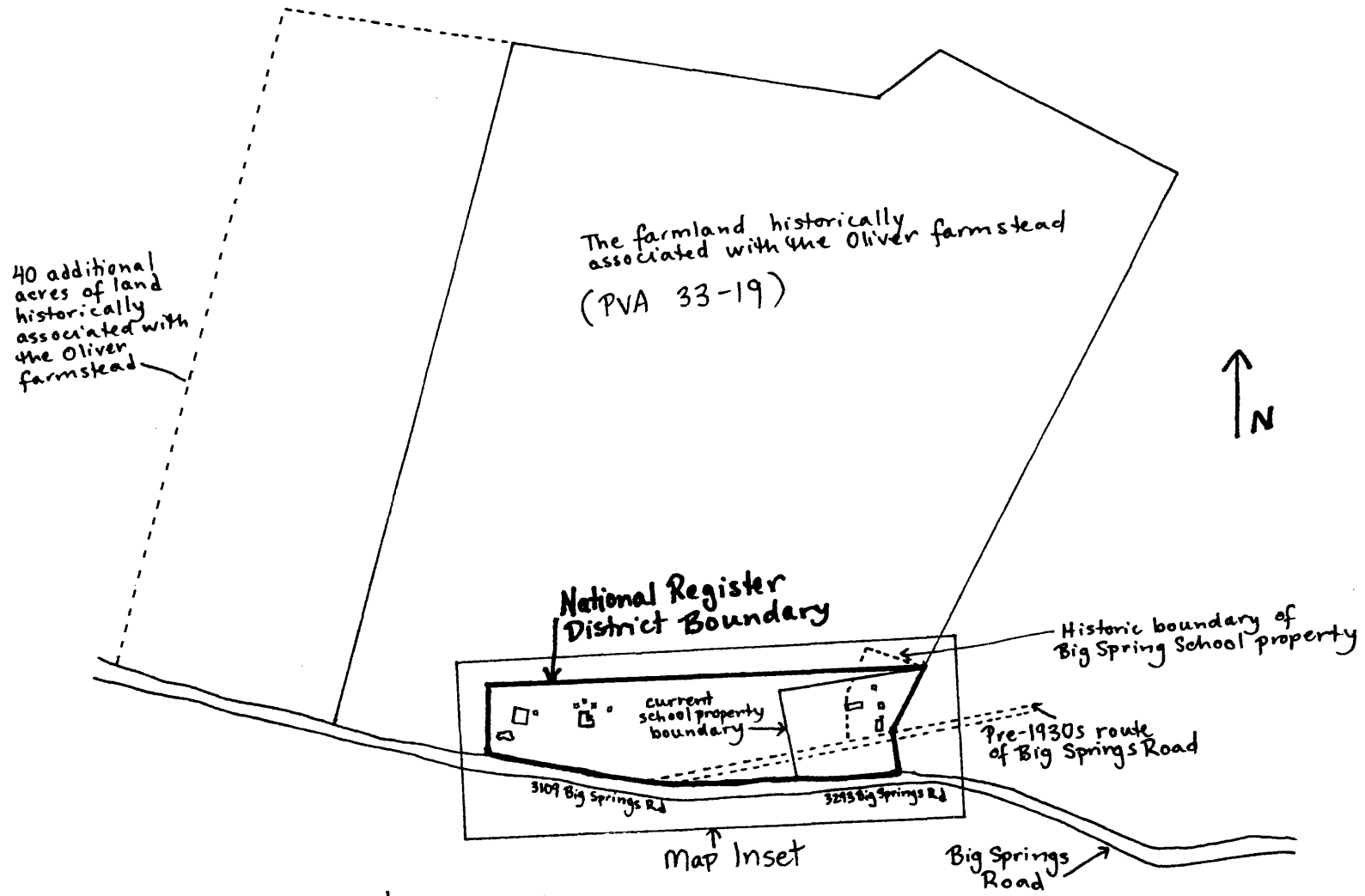
National Register
District

33-19-1

33-42-A



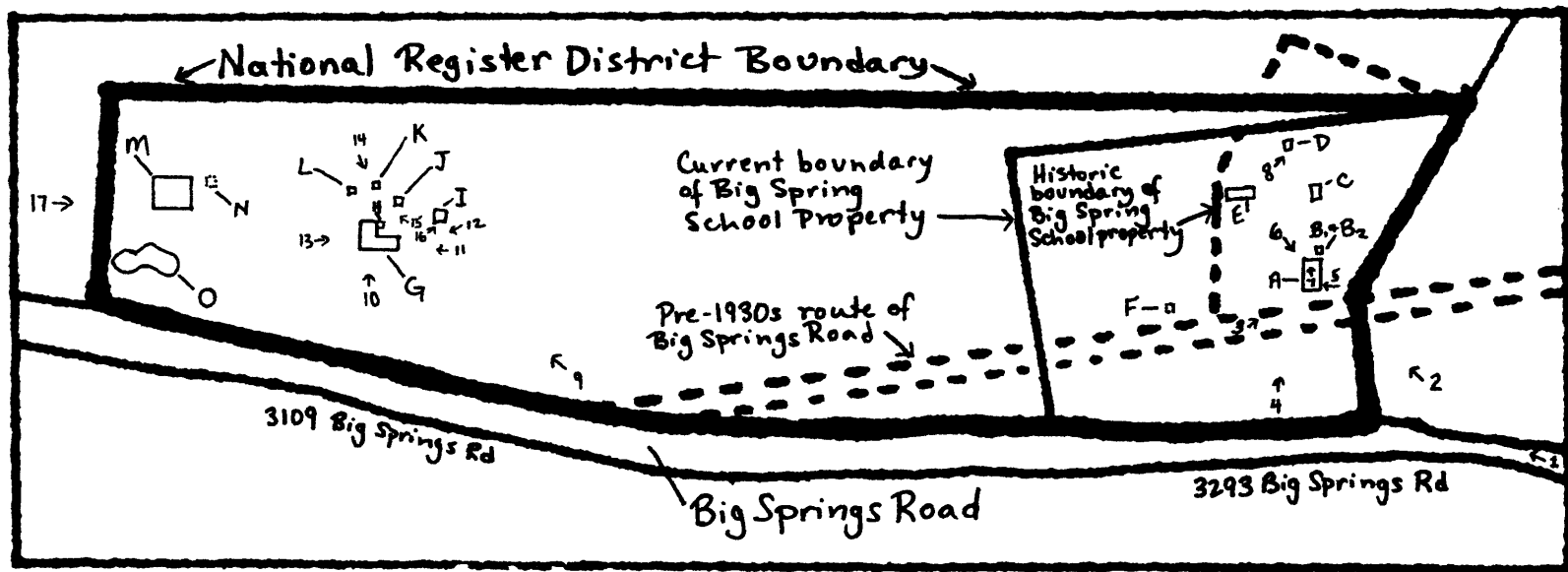
Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
district sketch map
Allen County, Kentucky



0 200 yds
approximate scale

Relative size and position of resources is an approximation

Inset of Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
 district sketch map
 Allen County, Kentucky



approximate scale 200yds

Relative size and position of resources
 is an approximation



Key to Features

Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead district sketch map
Allen County, Kentucky

- A Big Spring School. Contributing.
- B1 Cistern/pump. Contributing.
- B2 Cistern shed. Contributing.
- C Shed. Non-contributing.
- D Girls' privy. Contributing.
- E Mobile home. Non-contributing.
- F Site of former boys' privy, no longer standing.
- G Oliver farmhouse. Contributing.
- H Cistern/pump. Non-contributing.
- I Shed. Contributing.
- J Smokehouse. Contributing.
- K Privy. Contributing.
- L Henhouse. Contributing.
- M Barn. Contributing.
- N Site of former crib, no longer standing.
- O Small pond.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

Name of Property: Big Spring
School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky

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Same information for all photos:

Name: Big Spring School/Oliver Farmstead
Location: Allen County, Kentucky
Name of photographer: Rachel Baum
Date: November 2002
Location of Negatives: In photographer's possession. 643
Bramblebush Dr, Bowling Green, KY 42103

Photo-specific information:

1. To west. Big Spring School, taken from Big Spring Road, east of the property.
2. To west, Big Spring School. Note cistern shed and non-contributing shed behind the schoolhouse.
3. To northeast. Front (southern) and western sides of Big Spring schoolhouse.
4. To north. Front (southern) sides of Big Spring schoolhouse and non-contributing mobile home.
5. To west. Eastern side of Big Spring schoolhouse.
6. To southeast. Back (northern) and western sides of Big Spring schoolhouse and cistern shed.
7. To north. Big Spring schoolhouse interior.
8. To northeast. Western and southern sides of schoolhouse privy.
9. To northwest. Oliver farmhouse and outbuildings, seen across eastern field, taken from Big Springs Road.
10. To north. Front (southern) side of Oliver farmhouse.
11. To west. Eastern side of Oliver farmhouse.
12. To southwest. Northeastern corner of Oliver farmhouse, showing non-contributing cistern and enclosed porch.
13. To east. Western side of Oliver farmhouse.
14. To south. Back (northern) side of Oliver farmhouse and (from left to right) smokehouse, privy, and henhouse.
15. To northwest. Southern and eastern sides of (left to right) Oliver henhouse and smokehouse.
16. To northeast. Western and southern sides of Oliver shed.
17. To northeast. Southern and western sides of Oliver barn, with Oliver farmhouse in the background.