

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received NOV 7 1984  
date entered 3/1/85

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic BOOT HILL FARM  
and/or common John Jacob Niles House

2. Location

street & number Athens-Boonesboro Pike, Route #7 not for publication  
city, town near Athens  vicinity of congressional district  
state Kentucky code 021 county Clark code

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. John Jacob Niles  
street & number Athens-Boonesboro Pike, Route #7  
city, town Lexington vicinity of state Kentucky

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Clark County Courthouse  
street & number  
city, town Winchester state Kentucky

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(Supplement)  
title Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date 1974  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records Kentucky Heritage Council  
city, town Frankfort state Kentucky

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The **John Jacob Niles House** is located in a rural area about twelve miles southeast of Lexington, on a narrow, shaded stretch of the Athens-Boonesboro Pike above the bank of Boone Creek which runs through the rear of the property. The rambling stone and frame house is partially hidden by a small grove of trees and is given privacy by a stone wall enclosing the house and studio.

The house consists of several wings built in succeeding years around a large courtyard. The oldest wing, now used as bedrooms, was originally a Gunnison prefabricated unit constructed in 1939. The exterior of the house, with the exception of the stone living room wing, is of brick. The main entrance is on the north side of the residence away from the road. Entry is to the receiving room with doors leading to the office and living room, constructed in 1940, and dining wing. The walls and floor in the reception room and office are of stone with doors made, hand-carved and inscribed by Mr. Niles. The north wall of the living room is brick laid in Flemish bond with a stone fireplace. The south wall has oak paneling surrounding a stained glass window obtained from an unidentified Lexington saloon. The floor is two-leveled. The upper level, approximately one-third of the floor area where the piano is placed, is of oak, creating the effect of a stage. The lower floor is of stone, laid by Mr. Niles.

To the upper right of the living wing is the two-level dining wing and hall completed in 1948. On the south side of the wing along the hall wall are three extremely large windows which, together with the eight smaller windows on the north and west of the dining room side, fill the entry wing with light. The railing along the stairs leading up to the dining room is of river oak. A tapestry, hand-loomed in Russia at the turn of the 20th century dominates the south hall wall.

The remaining wings are bedrooms constructed in 1945 at a right angle to the dining room, and which culminate in the original prefab. and a large screened-in porch. Both the bedroom wing and the 1948 kitchen and dining room were designed by Ernst Johnson, architect of the University of Kentucky Coliseum and the Fine Arts Building, to reflect Niles' taste. From the porch one can view the hand-carved garage door. The completed house, product of the owners own craftsmanship, is a unique and picturesque expression of his taste and interests.

To the east of the house is a converted "pony barn," a rammed-earth structure built during World War II when building material was not available. Mr. Niles renovated it in 1972 for use as his writing studio. The exterior is of brick, stone, and stucco construction. The studio, approximately 30' by 21', varies in ceiling height slanting upward toward the north end of the studio. There is a low entranceway on the far south side of the studio. The one front studio window contains woodsills, of wood oak obtained from nearby Morton Mill. The walls are pise-de-terre. The floor, two-leveled, is of stone. On the west wall is a brick fireplace surrounded by stone, slanting to the contour of the ground.

The other section of the barn is used for wood storage. The over-all effect is of one of warmth, of rustic charm; the diverse elements of the architecture unified by the strong stamp of the personality of the owner-builder.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates**      **1939–1945**      **Builder/Architect**      **John Jacob Niles**

### Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The **John Jacob Niles House**, while having been constructed within the last fifty years, is a property of exceptional significance because it was the home of America's foremost folk balladier and composer, as well as having been personally and artistically built by him. Niles (1892–1980), a noted writer, collector, and arranger of early Anglo-American ballads, was most famous for "Go Way From My Window," "The Rovin' Gambler," "I Wonder as I Wander," and "Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair." His compositions and arrangements of the folk songs of Appalachia are known and performed all over the world. His collection of American folk music, begun before World War I is the largest private collection in the U.S.; much of it has been published by G. Schirmer, Inc. He completed his last major works, the Niles-Merton Song Cycles in 1972. Niles was a prolific author, editor, scholar, story teller, poet, artist, inventor, craftsman, and performer. He collected, expanded, arranged, published, performed and recorded more than 1,000 folk songs and ballads. He was awarded five honorary doctoral degrees. The University of Kentucky dedicated a library collection to him. His leadership in the field of American folk music is of exceptional significance in the history of American musicology; he is considered the most important figure in the renaissance of American folk music. In the words of Time Magazine, Niles was "the dean of American balladeers."

A native of Louisville, Niles was born into a musical family. His great-grandfather was a composer, organist, and cello manufacturer, and Niles learned to play the piano from his mother and began singing publicly by the time he was seven. When ten, he was recording musical compositions and dialect speech.

In his late teens, he worked as a surveyor in eastern Kentucky and began keeping a notebook of the songs and tales he heard across Appalachia. He studied music at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and the University de Lyon and the Scola Cantorum in Paris. In the early 20s he teamed up with contralto Marion Kerby and toured the U.S. and Europe, returning to Appalachia to record folk music and lore. During the 20s and 30s he became widely known as a concert artist; the height of his prominence was the late 40s and 50s when his music became popular. With the rediscovery of folk music as part of pop culture in the 1960s, such performers as Joan Baez, Judy Collins and the Kingston Trio sang Niles' compositions as modern folk classics. He continued as a performing artist until 1978.

The people of whom Niles has such an abiding interest and whose heritage in song he sought to preserve are mountain people, poor people generally, those living in a frugal manner, people of "the soil." His love of Americana, of the unpretentious, is reflected in his house in which he lived since its construction in 1939. As with his music, he has used his home as a means of self-expression. The heavily-carved doors, the stone fireplaces and floors are products of his own hand. It is a unique house constructed by a unique man—a man to whom the entire nation is indebted. He has given Americans what he has always believed should be their birthright—"the right to be benefitted, inspired, comforted, and assured by contact with the legend, the poetry, the prose writing, and the folk music arising from the language they speak or the race to which they belong."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From Niles, quoting Cecil B. Sharp, in The Ballad of John Jacob Niles (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p.xvi.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Courier-Journal (Louisville). May 19, 1974, p.D.1.  
 Lawless, Ray M., Folksingers & Folksongs in America. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, p.175-178.  
 Niles, John Jacob. Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961, p.xvi.  
 National Geographic, May 1974, p.647.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property ca.5  
 Quadrangle name Ford

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

**UMT References**

A 

1	6	7	3	3	8	4	0	4	2	0	1	3	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

The site is included within the boundary marked A.B.C. on the attached sketch map.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn M. Wooley and Gloria Mills, Historians  
 organization Kentucky Heritage Council date February, 1984  
 street & number 12th Floor, Capital Plaza Tower telephone 502/564-7005  
 city or town Frankfort state Kentucky 40601

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national     state     local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature David L. Morgan  
 title Director, Kentucky Heritage Council and State Historic Preservation Officer date October 23, 1984

For NPS use only  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.  
 Keeper of the National Register [Signature] date 3/1/85  
 Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

KENTUCKY HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY SUPPLEMENT  
BOUNDARY AND LOCATION INFORMATION

Historic Property Name John Jacob Niles House Site # CK-61

Multiple Resource/Thematic Nomination Title \_\_\_\_\_

U.T.M. Coordinates - List multiple UTMs if property is ten or more acres.

A. 16 733830 4201540 D. \_\_\_\_\_

B. 16 733780 4201380 E. \_\_\_\_\_

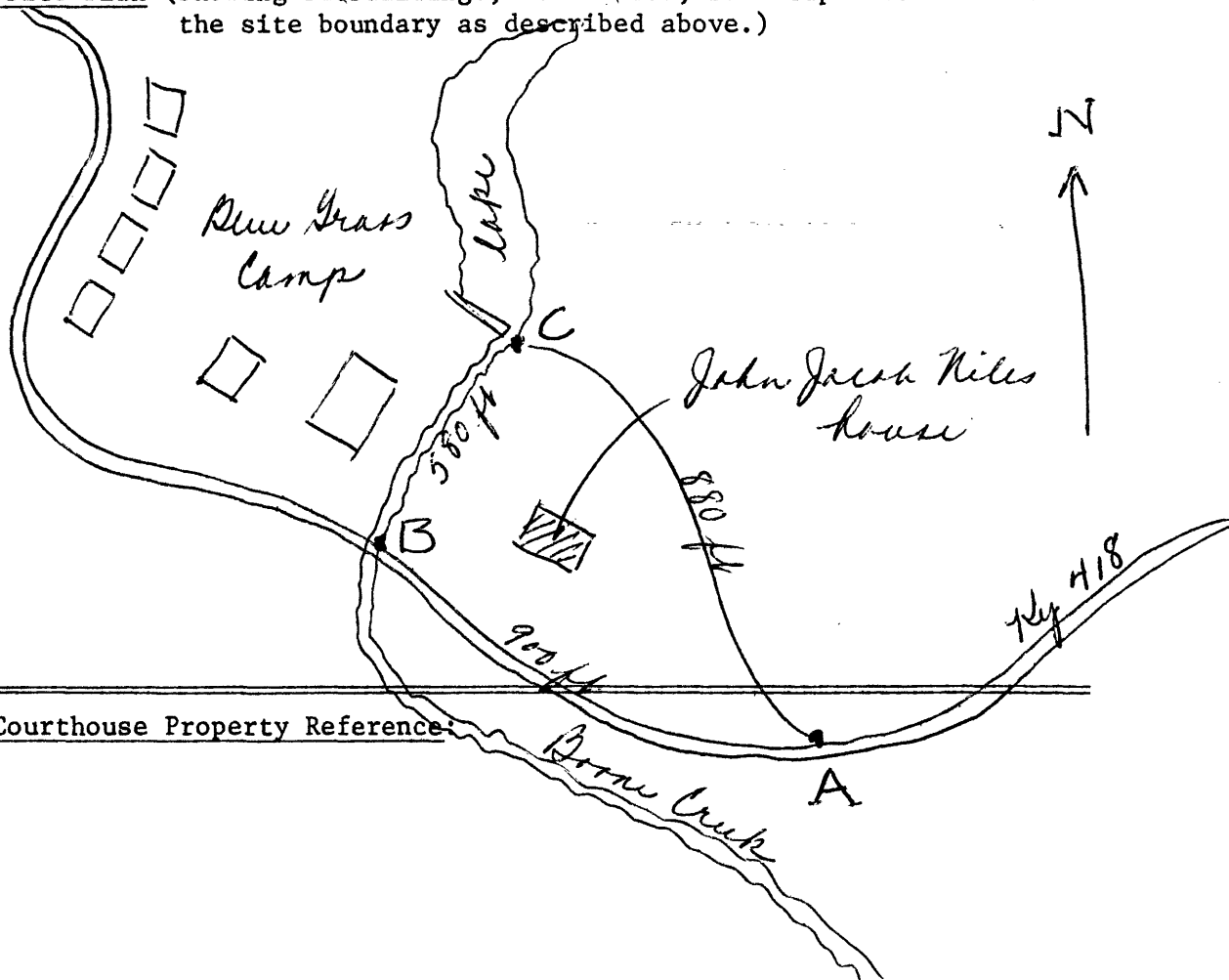
C. 16 733830 4201540 F. \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal Boundary Description

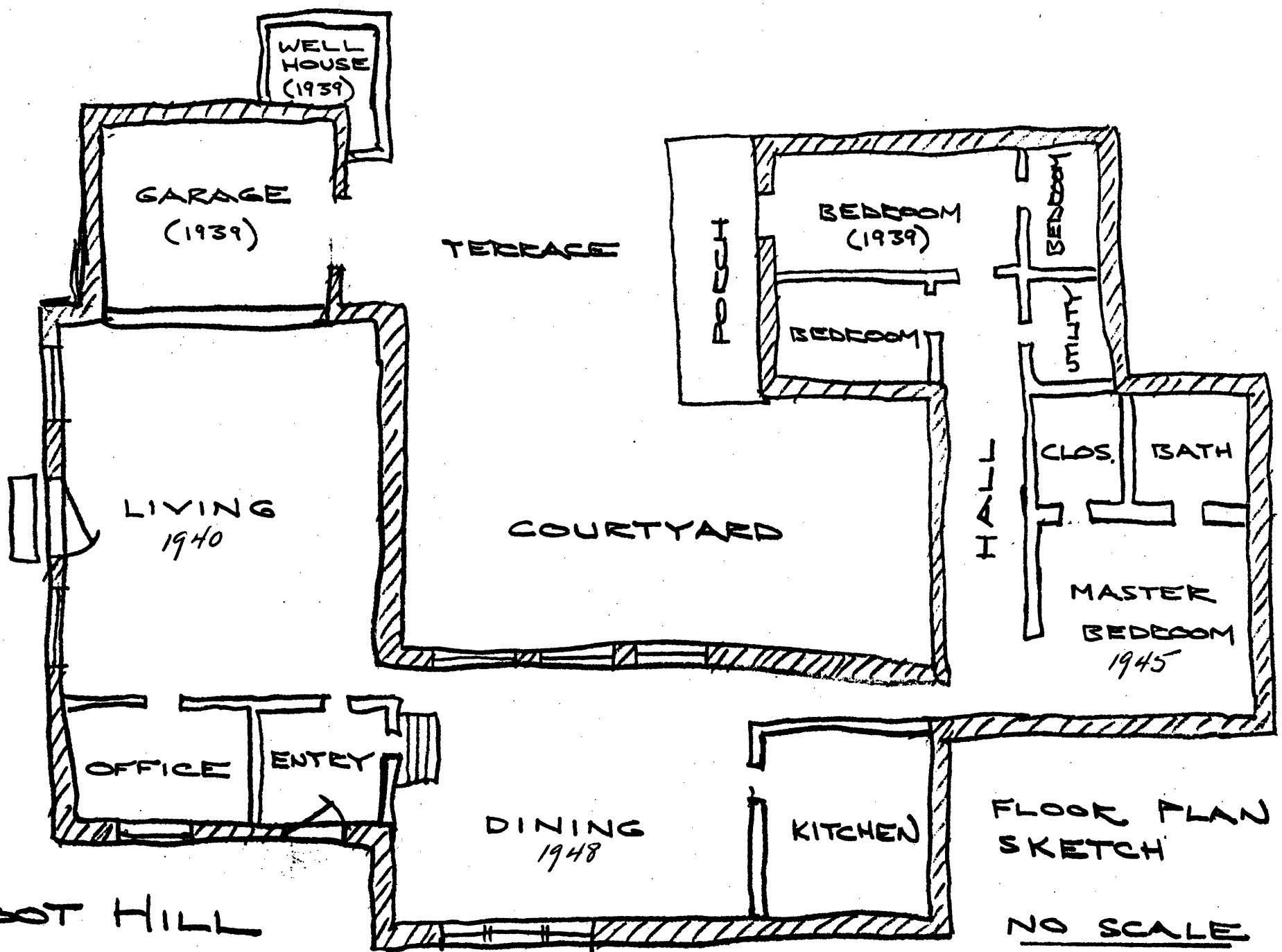
Acreage About Five Acres

Beginning at A, 600 feet east of the south corner of the house and at the road, thence with road 900 feet northwest to B at the creek, thence with creek 580 feet northeast to C, thence south-east partially along 800 feet elevation line 880 feet to the beginning.

Sketch of Site Plan (Showing outbuildings, structures, landscape features and the site boundary as described above.)



Official Courthouse Property Reference: \_\_\_\_\_



BOOT HILL  
FARM

CLARK COUNTY, KENTUCKY

BOOT HILL FARM (John Jacob Niles)  
Athens-Boonesboro Pike, Clark Co.  
Floor Plan Sketch  
F. T. Wilson - October, 1974  
No Scale

FTW

5/2/74