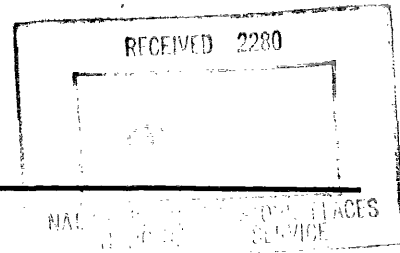


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name Thomaston Colored Institute
other names/site number Thomaston Academy

2. Location

street & number 1120 Seventh Ave. not for publication N/A
city or town Thomaston vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Marengo code 91 zip code 36783

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 locally statewide
X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

July 28, 2000
Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

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):

Edson H. Beall

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

8/31/00
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check only one box.)	Category of Property (Check as many boxes as apply.)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources.)	
		Contributing	Non-contributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	—	— sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	—	— structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	—	— objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the NR
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Education</u>	Sub: <u>school</u>
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Vacant</u>	Sub: <u>—</u>
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

No Style
—
—

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>concrete</u>
roof	<u>metal</u>
walls	<u>brick</u>
other	<u>wood</u>

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- 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 (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or 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 (Enter categories from instructions)

- Education _____
- Ethnic Heritage:Black _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance 1910-1950 _____

Significant Dates 1910 _____

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A _____

Architect/Builder Unknown _____

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS) N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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
Alabama Historical Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>440630</u>	<u>3570650</u>	3	-	-
2				4	-	-

 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joan Embree

organization Preservation Consultant

date April 25, 2000

street & number 1364 Lake Valley Road

telephone (601) 324-0410

city or town Starkville

state MS zip code 39759

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association, care of Mr. Willie Pond

street & number P.O. Box 321 telephone (332) 627-3666

city or town Thomaston

state AL

zip code 36783

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Name of property Thomaston Colored Institute

County and state Marengo, Alabama

SECTION 7: NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Thomaston Colored Institute/Thomaston Academy at 1120 Seventh Avenue in Thomaston, Marengo County, Alabama, is a rare survivor: an early school building purposely built for African-Americans. The substantial building was constructed on the north side of the Linden-to-Cahaba Road within 10 years of the establishment of the "modern" town of Thomaston by its founder, Dr. C.B. Thomas. The building is set back from the road in a two-acre plot with cleared parking areas, a few old trees, and a concrete-block building added in the mid-20th century for Association conferences.

The main building is rectangularly-massed. It is two stories tall, built of brick laid in common bond on a poured concrete continuous foundation. A low-pitched, hipped, v-seal metal roof covers the main part of the building; a front-gabled roof covers the entry. The southern elevation is the building facade. (See photo #1.) The facade is symmetrical, five-bay on both first and second stories. Upper story bays are all 9/9 double-hung windows. The central, front-gabled section encloses the centered, recessed entry flanked by 9/9 double-hung windows and one 9/9 double-hung window at each side of the main facade. The walls of the recessed entry are covered with beadboard. Entry doors are six-panel, double-leafed, wood, in a surround with a transom now filled in with wood. (See photo #2.) Secondary doors in the entry recess are five-panel, single-leaf, wood, in surrounds with two-light transoms. All openings have segmental brickwork hoods. Most of the windows on the facade and all other elevations are broken out. Some are covered with wood.

The eastern elevation of the building is 7-bay, with 9/9 double-hung windows grouped in threes at the south and north ends. On the first floor, a single-leafed wooden door is centered between the two sets of triplicate windows. Stairs lead directly to the ground. The metal-clad roof, concrete foundation, and window and door details are the only stylistic elements visible. (See photo #3.) The rear, northern elevation of the building is 9-bay, with tripled 9/9 and 4/4 double-hung windows matching those on the other elevations. (See photo #4.) Foundation, fenestration, and roof details are the same as those on other elevations. The western elevation is 7-bay, repeating the fenestration pattern on the east elevation. (See photo #5.) Roof, fenestration, and foundation details are the same as other elevations.

The interior of the building is divided into five classrooms on the first level (See plan.) and into two small classrooms and an auditorium space on the second. Interior walls are plastered. (See photo 9.) Some have been covered with inexpensive wooden paneling. Woodwork is milled and standard early 20th century designs. Original woodwork, including beadboard walls, bevelled chair rails, and deep, molded baseboards, survive in the "T" halls on the first floor and in the classrooms. Floors are tongue-and-groove pine. Two narrow staircases give access from the first to the second floor. These staircases are wooden, with turned spindles and heavy, turned newel posts. Classrooms on the upper floor are odd-shaped, tucked between the angled walls of the auditorium and stage areas and the exterior. The upper floor of the two-story gabled entry serves as a hall or pass-through behind the stage area. The upper windows light this space. Most of the upper floor is devoted to a large auditorium, well-lit by the second floor windows. (See photos 6,7,8.) Some attempts at renovation have been made, including the application of sheetrock on some ceilings and in downstairs classrooms.

The second, non-contributing, building on the property is a one-story, concrete-block, side-gabled, "conference hall" to the east. This structure, on a concrete slab foundation, was constructed in the mid-20th century to serve as a meeting hall for the West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association. The roof is covered with composition shingles. The facade is 4-bay, with double-leafed doors located between 2/2 aluminum and glass windows, one to the left of the entry, two to the right. Windows and doors on other elevations match those on facade. A third building associated with the Institute/Academy in the early-to-mid 20th century was a two-story wooden dormitory for boarding students. It was located to the north of the school complex, but is no longer extant. No photos survive of this building.

Archeological Component: Although no formal archeological survey has been made of the Thomaston Colored Institute, the potential for subsurface remains may be good. Buried portions may contain significant information useful in interpreting the entire property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 2

Name of property Thomaston Colored Institute

County and state Marengo, Alabama

SECTION 8: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage: Black/Education

The Thomaston Colored Institute/Thomaston Academy at 1120 Seventh Avenue in Thomaston, Marengo County, Alabama, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its place in the education of local African-Americans. The school was opened in 1910, two years after Thomaston had successfully campaigned for and built the segregated Marengo County High School closer to downtown. Although the Institute was, and remains, privately owned by the West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association, its establishment and its unusually substantial building appear to have been accomplished by a combination of early 20th-century phenomena: the involvement of African-American churches in a post-Reconstruction effort to assure education for their children; the socially responsible "New South" philosophy of Thomaston's founder; and the statewide effort to improve educational opportunities for Alabama's rural school-aged children. The building's common bond brick construction was widely used by Tuskegee-trained architects/students. The Institute may have been designed by someone with Tuskegee training.

Although no records have been found that indicate the Primitive Baptist Association's involvement with a school prior to the Institute, church-based schools were among the most common forms of education for blacks until a segregated public education system was established. Mt. Hebron Primitive Baptist Church, organized in the late 19th century on Seventh Avenue and surviving there today in a 1925 brick church, is a likely source for a church school operation that was transformed into the Thomaston Colored Institute. The Thomaston Institute struggled for private funding and suffered from inadequate materials and a lack of qualified African-American teachers, but survived until 1951, when it ceased operating as a private school and was leased by the county for use as a public school. Its public school service continued until 1981, when the present Amelia Love Johnson High School was opened in the northern part of town. Thomaston Colored Institute/Academy survives as the physical proof of the efforts of Thomaston's African-American community to see its children educated.

Criterion Consideration A: The Institute meets this criterion exception, despite being owned by a religious organization, as the building derives its primary significance from its African American educational history rather than its religious associations.

HISTORIC SUMMARY

The only remaining building of the Thomaston Colored Institute/Academy is an unusually substantial reminder of the first serious, statewide, post-Reconstruction effort to make education accessible to rural school-age Alabamians. There is circumstantial evidence that the two-story brick building was aided or encouraged by Dr. C.B. Thomas, founder of the town as part of his program to create a modern, quality town. The setting for the building remains similar to when it was founded. The western portion of Seventh Avenue passes through an African-American residential area just to the south of the school property. When Thomaston was founded and during its early years, this was part of the Linden-to-Cahaba Road, the main link between the county seat at Linden, to the west, and the early state capital of Cahaba. A well-built, imposing brick building for African-American students, located on a main road into Thomaston and on to other sections of the county, would have added to Thomaston's early 20th century claim to be a model for city design and operation.

The school was built in 1910, after a committee of elders of the West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association bought the two acres of land in an established African-American neighborhood. The land was signed over to the Trustees of the Thomaston Colored Institute in 1902 by Dr. Thomas, the agent representing the Marengo Improvement Company. (Thomaston Town Hall documents: copy of county deed record.) A Board of Trustees was appointed representing a coalition of African-American church groups when Incorporation papers were filed in late August, 1909. The papers, copies of which are held with the historical documents at Thomaston Town Hall, also set out the powers and purposes of the organization. Ten men are registered as incorporators and six of those named as Trustees: C.H. Davis, Robert Fritts, and Preston Jones of Thomaston; C.C. Kennedy and J.E. Eldridge of Prentice, AL; and K.W. Walker of McKinley. Other incorporators were S.S. Franklin of Golson, AL; C.C. Addisder (sic) of Corley's, AL; E.B. Robinson of Eleanor, AL; and C.J. Webster of Yellow Bluff, AL. (Corporation Records, Vol. I., Marengo County Probate Records)

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3

Name of property Thomaston Colored Institute

County and state Marengo, Alabama

A check of state and local archives finds that there are no known historic photographs of the school. Written records about its establishment and operation are also lacking. The West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association has few related documents.

Several factors undoubtedly contributed to the development of this private school in this out-of-the-way place in Marengo County. Beginning in 1881, Booker T. Washington worked through his newly-established Tuskegee Institute to recruit financial aid and moral support for the development of community schools for African-American students. Washington's model for his schools came from his association with Hampton Institute in Virginia and the philosophy of its superintendent, Gen. Samuel Chapman Armstrong. This industrial/agricultural philosophy called for African-Americans to better themselves by learning farming, domestic, and industrial skills which would both improve their characters and their economic options. (Rosenwald Schools Nomination, pgs. E10-12) By the first years of the 20th century, Washington had successfully convinced a growing number of northern philanthropists to commit large sums of money to aid in the expansion of the training-schools system. (Ibid.) Among the scant printed references to the school found is one citing "a denominational institution which participates as a beneficiary in the Jaynes (sic) Endowment Fund." ("Marengo's Modern City," Demopolis Times, 1910.) The philanthropical funds Dr. Washington solicited from Philadelphia Quaker Anna T. Jeanes helped establish many rural schools for African-Americans, but no record was found of such a donation for the Thomaston Colored Institute.

The philosophy of educational improvement for all rural students also became a fundamental part of the "New South" philosophy that key Southerners adopted to promote the South's recovery from the devastation caused by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Alabama's Governor from 1907-11 was Braxton Bragg Comer, a "New South" advocate who made significant progress in improving educational opportunities for all Alabama school-aged children. (Alabama, History..., p. 363) Gov. Comer oversaw the 1907 passage of legislation that provided for state funds to establish a consolidated, 16th-section-funded school in each of Alabama's counties. (Ref.) He visited Thomaston during the time that Dr. Thomas and other town leaders were successfully campaigning to bring the (white) Marengo County High School to town. (Pearson, "History..." pg. 4.) (Also, see history of Thomaston Central District)

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Dr. Thomas also had a hand in the development of the Institute. Though he did not donate land for the school, as he had for the Marengo County High School, and though no records exist that show him establishing any sort of school for African-American children, the concept of the Institute and its physical presence seem to indicate his involvement. An unpublished history of the school says it was built from the same locally-made (Thomaston Brick Works) brick as the Marengo County High School. (Early Settlers and Settlement of Thomaston," p.4.) In materials and style, it was certainly above the average rural school building of the early 20th century. The previously mentioned Demopolis Times special edition in 1910 comments:

The latter (the Institute) has a fine brick building and reports an attendance of 150 pupils...If schools and school buildings find priority in enumeration of Thomaston's assets, it is because they so rank in her civic and industrial code and nothing can be said in higher praise of the town's municipay (sic) company; but save only in object this prize item is discounted in the magnitude of Thomaston's commercial and industrial claims...

This quote and Dr. Thomas's early Thomaston Post promotional articles most likely articulate his support of the New South principles and his belief that Thomaston's development follows the socially-uplifting precepts of the code. In comparison to other early 20th century schools – even the consolidated county schools – the building for the Colored Institute is above average. The Tuskegee plans for rural schools advocated one- or two-room, frame structures that could be simply built and would be economical enough for parents of the intended students to be able to raise a significant amount of the cost. (Ref.) The newly-built consolidated schools in many counties, such as Marengo and Wilcox tended to be multi-roomed, one-story frame structures. Therefore, it can be considered unusual that a private school, apparently financed by collections and family donations, chose to construct a state-of-the-art, two-story, multi-roomed school with an auditorium rather than a simpler, more modest building.

United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

Name of property Thomaston Colored Institute

County and state Marengo, Alabama

The Thomaston Colored Institute is perhaps a grand expression of Dr. Thomas's promotional efforts. As "agent" (and leader, and financier) of the Marengo Improvement Company, Thomas made the effort to organize the campaign for a school for African Americans and saw to it that the building, located on a main artery through Thomaston, brought notice to the town's "advanced thinking" about the importance of education for all of its school-age children. As founder of the Thomaston Brick Works, he may have made the bricks available, though there are no records to document this. The Institute's substantial presence is perhaps indicative of Dr. Thomas's civic intentions but personal limitations. Once the school was established, it was apparently ignored. Outside the gridded street plan of the incorporated town, it was also outside consideration about the actual effectiveness of the education program for African-American students.

A reference in a Bureau of Education, U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin on "Negro Education" published in 1917 notes the state of affairs at the school a few years after it opened. In this "Study of the Private and Higher Schools for the Colored People in the United States," the Thomaston Colored Institute is noted as a private school with two black teachers and a principal, but few books or other resources. The school was surveyed in 1914, according to the entry, and was listed as "an elementary day school with a seven months term." The report rates the teaching as "poor," and recommends that the West Alabama Primitive Baptist Association try to get the county to take it over and combine it with the nearby county school. According to the entry, the total annual income of the school in 1914 was \$475.00, a sum provided by the Baptist Association and by tuition. The value of the building was estimated at \$5,000.00, including its two-acre lot and its "meager equipment." (Bulletin #39, 1916)

The only written documentation provided by the Baptist Association is a brief description of the school and a listing of its benefactors and officials by the current caretaker of the building, Mr. Willie Pond, of Thomaston. Mr. Pond lists the principals as : Professors Brewer, Germany, Kennedy, and Pennington. Teachers listed are: Ms. Kennedy, Knox, Marshall, C. Patten, N. Potter, and Pennington. No information is accessible on the rates for school terms or boarding, the complete names of students and teachers, or the actual classes offered. Mr. Pond's notes do say that the Institute served "all surrounding counties and communities." A large number of "Founding Ministers, Matrons, and Trustees" provides evidence of the cooperative community effort in founding and running the school. No former students from the years before 1942 have been located to provide personal information.

Recollections of local people who attended the school after it was taken over by the County in 1951 are helpful. Oral history gathered from Mrs. Julia Nathan Saunders and Mr. George Shields, former Academy students, indicates that students took reading, writing, and arithmetic classes with added emphasis on modern agricultural and domestic practices. (Saunders and Shields interviews) Mrs. Saunders's earliest recollections of the African-American community on the northwest corner of Thomaston are of her grandparents' large home and garden south of the school and of "The Academy," still the pride of the neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Thomaston Colored Institute/Academy is significant for its substantial physical presence, for its survival, and for the role it played in the lives of several generations of local and regional African-American students. It's presence on a main road through the interior of Marengo County in the early 20th century was apparently meant to be a signal of the progressive nature of the new community. The Institute/Academy continued to serve as a school from its establishment into the 1970s. It is particularly significant to Thomaston's complete history because, of the very few African-American enterprises that were operated in Thomaston, it is the lone substantial and intact survivor.

The nomination for the Thomaston Colored Institute is one of three individual nominations prepared to accompany the nomination for the Thomaston Central Historic District. All three individual nominations lie outside the original city limits of the town of Thomaston. Thomaston was the early 20th-century creation of Dr. Charles B. Thomas, a native of nearby Rembert Hills who joined with other development advocates in promoting the "New South" effort to help the South recover from Civil War and Reconstruction. Details of Dr. Thomas's city development plans and of Thomaston's history and growth are presented in the National Register nomination for the Thomaston Central Historic District.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9, 10 Page 5

Name of property Thomaston Colored Institute

County and state Marengo, Alabama

SECTION 9: MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Pond, Willie. Letter containing information on "Thomaston Colored Institute," now Thomaston Academy. Unpublished material written in November, 1996. Copy at Thomaston Town Hall in "Thomaston Institute" file.

Bureau of Education, U.S. Department of the Interior. "Negro Education, A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States." Bulletin, 1916, No. 39, Vol 11, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917. (Citation found at Samford University Library, Special Collections, Birmingham, AL.)

_____. "Early Settlers and Settlement in Thomaston." Undated, unpublished, unsigned term paper. Copy available at Thomaston Town Hall.

_____. "Marengo's Modern City, The Story of Thomaston's Wonderful and Magic Growth." Centennial Edition, The Demopolis Times, pp. 11-14, 1910. (No date.) Partial copy held in historical files at Thomaston Town Hall.

Saunders, Julia Nathan. Interviewed by Joan Embree, architectural historian, November, 1994 and October, 1996, at her home on West Seventh Street in Thomaston, AL.

Shields, George. Interviewed by Joan Embree, architectural historian, in October, 1996, at his home on Taylor Road in Thomaston, AL.

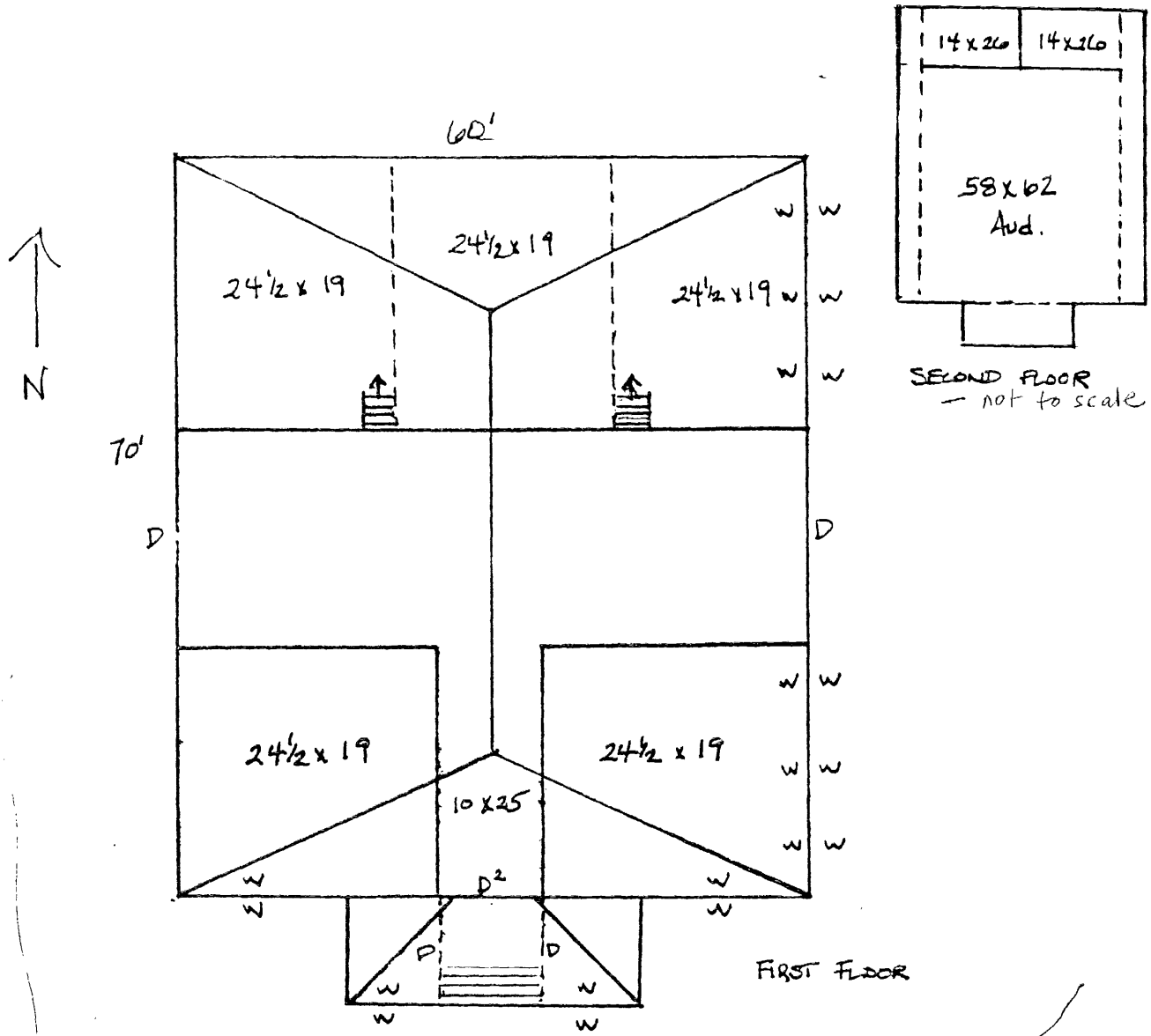
SECTION 10: GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

All of parcel #27 in Block #5 of Marengo County Tax Assessor's Map 19-06-13-1, in Section 13, Township 15N, Range 4 East.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the school and the surviving acreage that has been associated with it since its establishment.



THOMASTON COLORED INSTITUTE

Marango Co., AL

SCALE ¼" = 4'