

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECEIVED 410

1372

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

OCT 18 1995

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name DEKALB COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 103 Fairground Road N/A not for publication

city or town Alexandria N/A vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county DeKalb code 041 zip code 37012

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays 10/19/95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State of 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau.

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 A. Beall 11/29/95
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Entered in the
National Register

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	7	buildings
1		sites
1		structures
		objects
4	7	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 National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: fair

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: fair

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Wood/Limestone

walls Wood

roof Tin

other Concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

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.)

Property is: N/A

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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)

Agriculture

Entertainment/ Recreation

Architecture

Period of Significance

1920-1945

Significant Dates

1920

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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:

Private: Ria Baker, Alexandria, TN

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7 acres

Alexandria 318 SE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 6	5 8 7 1 7 0	3 9 9 2 8 5 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
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 Carroll Van West

organization MTSU Center for Historic Preservation date May 25, 1995

street & number PO Box 80, MTSU telephone 615-898-2947

city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37130

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Alexandria (Ria Baker, contact person)

street & number City Hall telephone 615-529-2171

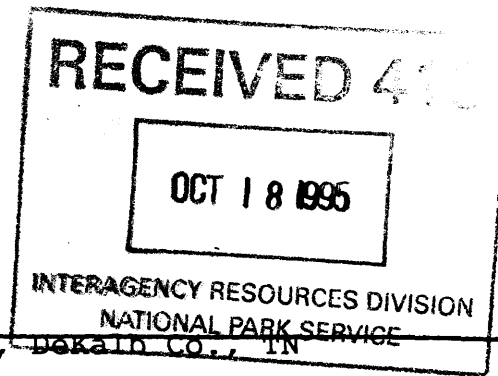
city or town Alexandria state TN zip code 37012

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1



~~DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN~~

VII. Description

The DeKalb County Fairgrounds were established on approximately seven acres along Hickman Creek in Alexandria, Tennessee, on April 15, 1856. The acreage of the fairgrounds has remained the same throughout the years, although the individual grandstands and supporting buildings have changed at different times, sometimes in responses to fires and floods, other times in response to changing trends in agriculture and outdoor recreation and entertainment. The buildings on the fairgrounds today all date to the twentieth century; the fairgrounds itself is considered a contributing site (C) in this nomination.

Located in the center of the fairgrounds is a large V-shaped grandstand (C), which dates to 1920. It is the oldest surviving county fair grandstand yet identified in Tennessee and has received a state highway historical marker from the Tennessee Historical Commission in 1989. Covered by an original hip tin-covered roof, the frame-constructed grandstand has nine rows of benches for seating. Unadorned square poles support the overhanging roof and two metal rain gutters have been placed on each side of the grandstand to facilitate drainage from the roof. At the point of the V, at the front of the grandstand, is a small stage, with wooden foundation of 2 x 4s, with a fiberboard flooring. The stage was constructed at the point of the V in circa 1975.

The rear of the grandstand originally was used to house animals and other agricultural exhibits. The open spaces underneath the grandstands were enclosed with a combination of wire and mesh fences, along with access gates, so small animals, especially poultry and rabbits, could be exhibited. At the rear point of the V, a small office was enclosed, with a modern paneled wooden door, in circa 1980.

Along Hickman Creek, to the immediate west of the fairgrounds, is a small one-story frame building, with tin-covered gable roof, built in circa 1920, that is used for storage (C). The other historic structure within the fairgrounds is the foot bridge over Hickman Creek that allowed town residents in Alexandria to directly enter the fairgrounds. This bridge dates to 1920, but its supports were strengthened and some floor boards replaced in 1994, to meet current safety standards (C).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

The other buildings on the fairgrounds date from about 1985 to 1994, as the Alexandria Lions Club and the city of Alexandria made efforts to modernize visitor facilities at the fair, without compromising the historical integrity of the fairgrounds. On the west side at the foot bridge is a small concrete ticket booth, with a asphalt shingle covered gable roof, which was built in 1994 (NC, due to date). North of the ticket booth, adjacent to the frame historic storage building, is a modern concrete block storage building, with a metal security door on the north gable end and a tin-covered gable roof, that was built circa 1985 (NC, due to date).

Abutting the east end of the grandstand is a circa 1985 two-story modern building, which houses restrooms in the concrete block first floor, with two modern metal doors on the east side. On the second floor is a reviewing area, where announcers and judges work during the fair. This floor is comprised of aluminum walls, with three single pane windows providing views of the fairgrounds and grandstand (NC, due to date).

To the east of the grandstand are the remaining modern support buildings. An aluminum covered frame building, with tin-covered gable roof, houses the electrical equipment. The frame building dates to 1924, but the aluminum was added in circa 1990 (NC, due to alterations).

Directly to the east of this building is a small frame fairgrounds office, built circa 1990. This rectangular building, with asphalt shingle-covered gable roof, has a concrete foundation. At its south gable end is a modern metal security door and a six-over-six double-hung window, with metal shutters (NC, due to date)

To the south of the fairgrounds office is a large refreshment stand, built circa 1985. This rectangular building is of concrete, with a large overhanging gable roof, covered with asphalt shingles (NC, due to date).

To the southeast of the refreshment stand is a second ticket booth, built circa 1990 (NC, due to date). This concrete block building has an asphalt shingle-covered gable roof.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

VIII. Significance Statement

The DeKalb County Fairgrounds in Alexandria, Tennessee, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance to the promotion and development of agriculture in DeKalb County and for its significance as place of recreation and entertainment in this rural Tennessee county. It is also eligible under Criterion C as a rare, extant example of the vernacular craftsmanship skills and architecture of a county fairgrounds grandstand.

To answer critics of antebellum agricultural practices in Tennessee, and to stimulate greater market production among Tennessee farmers, the General Assembly created the State Agricultural Bureau in 1854. "Farmers throughout Tennessee enthusiastically supported the new state agency. Farmers and community leaders quickly organized the state division fairs and thousands attended these gatherings where they learned about new crops, new breeds of livestock and new farming techniques." (1) The fairs, according to historian Donald L. Winters, "also offered entertainment and occasion to socialize with people from other farm households." (2) By 1859, 40 county agricultural societies had been established across Tennessee. Most depended on state financial support for establishing their fairs and for providing bounties, or prize money, for winning entries.

In 1856, DeKalb County created one of the first agricultural fairgrounds in a rural Middle Tennessee county. Middle Tennessee fairs had been previously held in Davidson and Sumner Counties and in 1855-56, Davidson County (Nashville) had become the location of a State Agricultural Fair. The DeKalb County Fairgrounds was chartered by a special act of the state legislature on April 15, 1856. The fair and fairgrounds were a private corporation, headed by Otho Sizemore, president and J.P. Doss, Secretary. The fairgrounds would remain in private hands until transferred to the City of Alexandria in 1994. This private ownership and administration made the fair unique, compared to other rural counties. In the late twentieth century, it was the only such private fairgrounds and fair in Tennessee, and one of only two in the United States.

The first fair was scheduled for October 5-7, 1856, but an extremely early snow storm caused its postponement until the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

following week. The first fair grandstand had no roof and mere rail pens served as animal stables.

Even this rudimentary step forward suffered during the American Civil War when Federal troops burned the fairgrounds in 1863. Not until well into the Reconstruction period, in 1872, had the county's agricultural economy recovered enough to support a county agricultural fair. In that year, the grandstand and other buildings were rebuilt and the fair had a successful October showing.

In 1903, a flood along Hickman Creek destroyed most of the fairgrounds' buildings from the nineteenth century. In 1908, the DeKalb County Fair became the first in Tennessee to hold a night-time session. Electric lights were installed, with electricity provided by a tractor-powered generator. Six years later, however, disaster struck as a fire claimed the grandstand and other fair buildings. From 1914 to 1919, the DeKalb County Fair continued to be held in every August, but the events were housed in tents erected on the fairgrounds.

During these same years, 1914 to 1919, agricultural reformers were once again altering agricultural practices and rural life throughout Tennessee. To county extension agents in particular, the county fair became a vehicle through which new ideas about crops, soil conservation, fertilizer, and other elements of "progressive" agriculture, could be demonstrated to farm families. As Charles A. Keffer, Director of the Agricultural Extension Service of the University of Tennessee, noted in 1924: "the highest educational value of these exhibits is the opportunity the fair affords for creating and establishing, in the minds of the visitor, standards of excellence by which the farmer may judge the output of his own farm." (3)

In 1920, a new grandstand and foot bridge over Hickman Creek were constructed; they remain in place today. Rob Roy was the owner of the fairgrounds and secretary of the fair. He strongly believed in the agenda of agricultural reform then reshaping the Tennessee countryside and cooperated with the agricultural extension service. Three years later, a separate Woman's Building (no longer extant) was constructed. The DeKalb County Fair became one of the most "progressive" of the rural county fairs in Tennessee and was known as the "Grandpa Fair of the

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

the South." (4)

The fair program for 1929 documents how the concerns of progressive agricultural reformers shaped the events of the annual county fair. The fair proudly listed itself as a member of the "National Association of County, District and Independent Fairs; the Association of Tennessee Fairs; and a Life Member of American Poultry Association." (5) It administered a separate Woman's Department, Poultry Department, and Agricultural Department, effectively separating the domestic sphere of women and their poultry production from the more traditional agricultural production areas of males. The fair announced that it had received \$940 from the State Department of Agriculture for use as premiums "for agricultural products, live stock, club work, poultry, and woman's work." (6) Improving live stock and introducing specially bred stock; home demonstration clubs; poultry production; and farm women programs were all important projects of the Tennessee Extension Service throughout the 1920s. Like much of the progressive activism of the 1920s, however, the fair offered little to African-American farm families. At the 1929 Woman's Department competition, for example, black women were only eligible for a premium (\$1 at that) under the category of "best laundry work on shirt by colored woman." (7) In 1930, the last major construction project of the progressive era at the fair took place when an extant retaining wall of rock and dirt, 450 feet in length, for containing Hickman Creek was constructed.

Like other county fairs in Tennessee, the DeKalb County Fair began to move away from earlier concerns about promoting progressive agriculture by the World War II years. It then became more of a yearly recreational and entertainment event that farm families eagerly looked forward to, as a way to have a break from the hard work of the hot summer months. In 1947, the American Legion Post 122, DeKalb County, established an annual walking horse show held in May at the DeKalb County Fairgrounds. The horse show remains a popular event today. The 1951 program of the August county fair documents how horse shows and other livestock-focused events had replaced the earlier focus on mixed, progressive agriculture. The cover proclaimed that the fair featured "beef cattle shows, jersey cattle shows, horse shows, [and] exhibits of all kinds." (8) That year's fair also featured Governor Gordon Browning singing "Tennessee Waltz;" prospective visitors were encouraged to "COME EARLY TO AVOID THE BIG CROWDS."

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

(9) Also performing that year was the Carter Family and Chet Adkins. "What does DeKalb County Fair Mean to DeKalb County and its Communities," asked a full-page announcement in the booklet. It listed three benefits: 1) "Thousands of dollars worth of livestock have changed hands in our livestock yards" 2) "In the past two years the secretary of this Fair, has been to various schools in DeKalb County, auctioned pie and box suppers. A total of twenty-one-hundred dollars, of which was free gratis to the good schools of our county" and 3) "Approximately \$1200 in premiums goes to DeKalb County." The ad pleaded: "DeKalb County Fair wants to grow stronger and be the leading Fair---`BOOST US'--- for it is you that makes DeKalb County Fair." (10)

In 1974, disaster again struck the fairgrounds as a tornado damaged several buildings. Five years later, another wind storm inflicted further damage at the fairgrounds. By the mid-1980s, only three historic buildings from the 1920s still stood on the fairgrounds. Most importantly, however, the 1920 grandstand remained as the focal point of the fairgrounds. The grandstand had evolved into a historical landmark carefully and proudly nurtured by a new generation of fair secretaries and local residents. The grandstand is a locally recognized link between the present and the agricultural activism and grandeur that once made the DeKalb County Fair one of the best known, attended, and regarded rural county fairs in Tennessee. The grandstand is of architectural interest as a rare extant example of the vernacular craftsmanship involved in, and associated with, the construction of fairgrounds in the early twentieth century. Its hipped roof, square support columns, and plain plank rows of benches are basically unchanged from the 1920s as the enclosed historic photograph of the fairgrounds, taken in circa 1930. with the original belonging to Ria Baker of Alexandria, indicates.

In 1968, Wendell R. Owen, Tommy Harrell, and Grandpa Jones, the Grand Ole Opry star, purchased the DeKalb County Fairgrounds. Owen and his son Mike Owen were the last long-term private operators of the fairgrounds. In May 1993, Wendell R. Owen sold the fairgrounds to Louis G. Simpson, who then conveyed the property to the city of Alexandria for \$87,500 in January 1994. All of the property of the fairgrounds now belongs to the City and its officials plan to continue to preserve the grandstand and to keep this rare and valuable building as the centerpiece of the annual DeKalb County Fair.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

Endnotes:

1. Carroll Van West, Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1986), 83.
2. Donald L. Winters, Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 175.
3. C.A.K. [Charles A. Keffer], "Lessons of the Fairs," Tennessee Extension Review, 8(September 1924): 2.
4. Quote is from front cover, 63rd Annual DeKalb County Fair [program] (Alexandria, TN: Times Print, 1929).
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Ibid., 14.
7. Ibid., 93.
8. 96th Annual DeKalb County Fair and Homecoming (Alexandria, TN: publisher unknown, 1951), front cover.
9. Ibid., n.p.
10. Ibid., n.p.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 8

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

IX. Bibliography

Baker, Ria. Interview with Dr. Carroll Van West. Alexandria, TN, March 22, 1995.

Deeds, DeKalb County Fairgrounds, DeKalb County Courthouse, Smithville, TN.

C.A.K. [Keffer, Charles A.] "Lessons of the Fairs." Tennessee Extension Review 8(September 1924): 2.

96th Annual DeKalb County Fair and Homecoming. Alexandria, TN: publisher unknown, 1951.

63rd Annual DeKalb County Fair. Alexandria, TN: Times Print, 1929.

West, Carroll Van. Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective. Nashville: Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1986.

Winters, Donald L. Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 9

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

X. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The DeKalb County Fairgrounds comprises seven acres in Alexandria, Tennessee, as indicated as Parcel 1, Map 22-8, DeKalb County Tax Maps.

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundaries contain all of the historic property associated with the DeKalb County Fairgrounds.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number PHOTOS Page 10

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

PHOTOGRAPHS

DeKalb County Fairgrounds
Alexandria, TN

Photos by: Dr. Carroll Van West
MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
2941 Lebanon Road
Nashville, TN 37243

Date: March 22, 1995

Historic photograph of grandstand, c. 1930, owned by Ria Baker
1 of 16

Fairgrounds/ parade grounds, facing southwest
2 of 16

Grandstand, facing northeast
3 of 16

Grandstand, facing east
4 of 16

Grandstand, detail, facing northeast
5 of 16

Grandstand, rear, facing south
6 of 16

Grandstand, rear, facing southeast
7 of 16

Poultry exhibit space, rear grandstand, facing south
Photo by Ria Baker
8 of 16

Grandstand, rear, facing northwest
9 of 16

Ticket booth, foot bridge, facing west
10 of 16

Concrete storage building and frame storage building, facing west
11 of 16

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number PHOTOS Page 11

DeKalb County Fairgrounds, Alexandria, DeKalb Co., TN

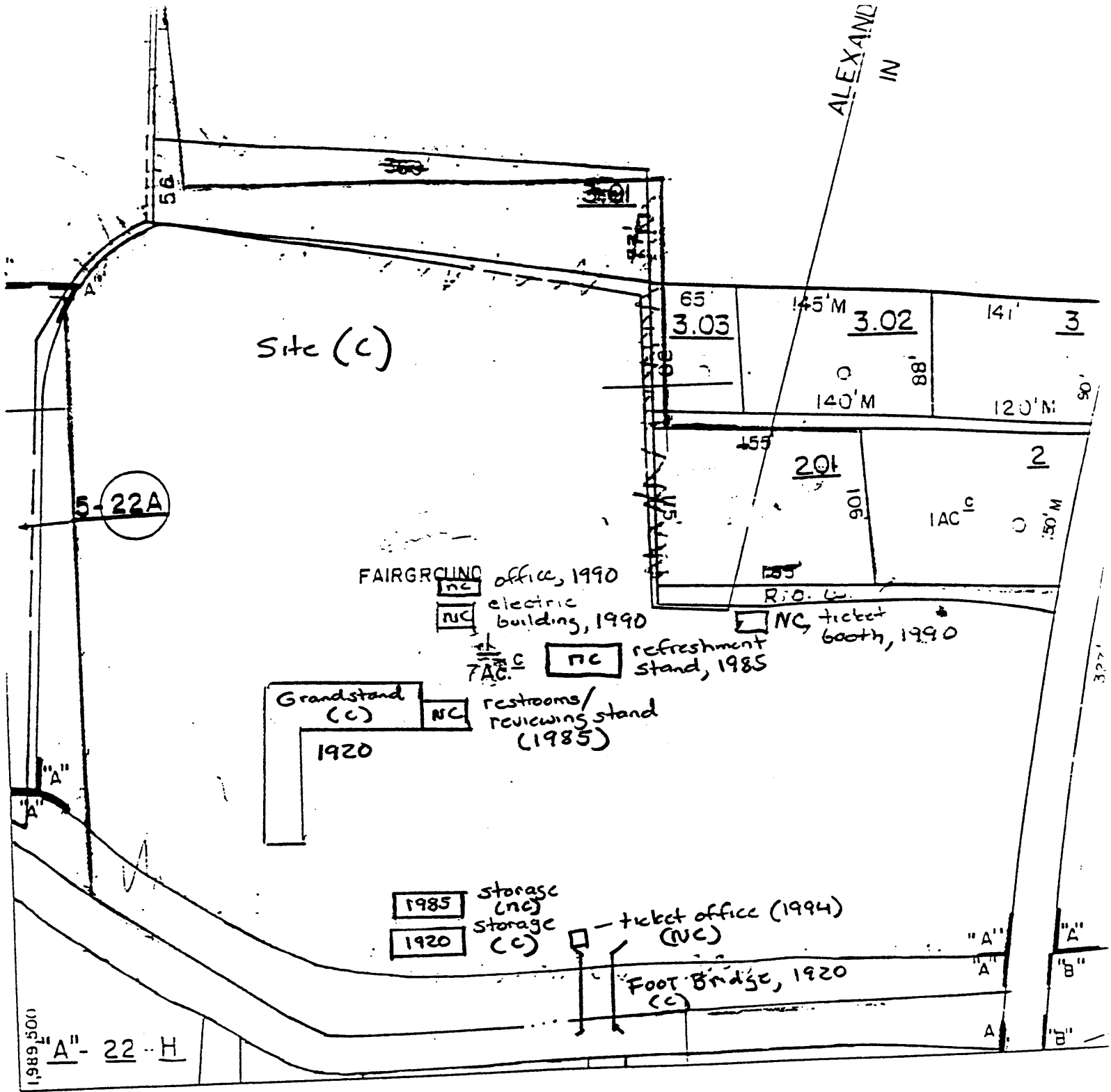
Bathrooms and announcer's stand, facing west
12 of 16

Refreshment stand, facing south
13 of 16

Electrical building, facing southeast
14 of 16

Office building, facing northwest
15 of 16

East parking lot ticket booth, facing southeast
16 of 16



PREPARED FOR
 TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION

Scale - 1" = 100'

District - 1
 Map # 22-B
 Group A
 Parcel 1

Jack Estes
 Assessor of Property
 DeKalb County