

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 18

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" 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 listed in 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 South Branch Schoolhouse

other names/site number Little Red Schoolhouse

2. Location

street & number South Branch River Road not for publication

city or town Township of Branchburg vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ county Somerset code 035 zip code 08876

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I 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.

[Signature] Date 2/14/05

John S. Watson, Jr., Assistant Commissioner Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO
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 certifying official/Title _____ 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:) _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 3/30/05

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	
1		buildings
2		sites
		structures
		objects
3		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)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/clubhouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Clapboard

t

roof asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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.
[x] 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:

- 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.

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):

- 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 #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
Education

Period of Significance

Circa 1873- circa 1900

Significant Dates

1873

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Primary location of additional data

- [x] State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

SHPO letter of Opinion HPO-D2001-2

10. Geographical DataAcreage of property 3/4 acre**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 525357 4488634
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 Byname/title Dennis Bertland & Janice Armstrongorganization Denis Bertland Associates date April 2003street & number PO Box 24 telephone 908-2130916city or town Bloomsbury state NJ zip code 08804**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 Branchburg Townshipstreet & number 1077 US Highway 202 telephone 908-722-2124city or town Branchburg state NJ zip code 08876-3936**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.

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South Branch Schoolhouse, Somerset County, NJ

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Located on the outskirts of the village for which it is named, South Branch Schoolhouse is a modest, frame, "one-room" school building erected in 1873 and exhibiting simple stylistic embellishment typical of that era. The schoolhouse occupies a rectangular, gently sloping, $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre lot with a set back of about 80 feet from the road. An asphalt-paved driveway running along the south side of the building provides access to a parking lot that fills most of the rear portion of the lot (photo #2). A narrow asphalt sidewalk leads from the driveway to the front door. The rest of the property is planted in lawn with scattered trees and shrubs, including an evergreen tree near the northeast corner of the building, overgrown foundation plantings at its front corners and several large deciduous trees along the south and west sides of the parking lot. One or more privies must have been located in the rear yard, and remnants of the stone and cement foundation of what presumably was a privy survive along the south lot line, as does a capped well. A metal flagpole in the front yard replaces a wooden pole visible in a circa 1897 photograph (figure #2); a lantern-style electric light mounted on a wooden post by the driveway is a recent addition. A mix of residential and agricultural land uses surround the property, a landscape little changed from when the school was built. Several houses of 19th and 20th-century date adjoin it along South Branch Road. Open cropland, separated from the school lot by post-and-wire fencing, stretches to the west and north towards a large 19th-century farmstead (photo #1). Despite a number of alterations, most notable the removal of its original belfry around 1947 and the addition of a small rear appendage in the 1960s, South Branch Schoolhouse retains its essential integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and reflects its 1873 – 1900 period of significance.

The one-story, gable-fronted main block of South Branch Schoolhouse, roughly 28 feet wide and 40 feet deep, is of frame construction above a stone foundation and features a regular fenestration pattern. (photo #s 3 – 7). Much of the clapboard siding evidently is original, attached with machine-cut nails of the type widely used in the middle decades of the 19th century. Wood shingle roofing survives beneath the modern asphalt shingle cladding; it probably dates to the early 20th century and replaces an earlier roof of that material. The small brick chimney stack with simple drip cap centered on the west gable appears to be an early feature. On the 3-bay front elevation, large double-hung 6/6 sash windows, original fabric, flank the central entry, and the 3-bay side elevations feature matching windows, although the lower half of the west end-bay window on the north side was replaced by an "emergency exit" sometime in the early 20th century. A smaller

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smaller 6/6 sash window lights the front gable, the rear gable is blank. The windows and entry have original plain and raked cornices of Gothic Revival derivation. The entry retains a segmental-arched transom, but the door is a modern replacement. The Italianate built-up box cornice at the roof eaves, also original, features scroll brackets and returns and is carried on the raking eaves.

Historic photographs, mostly notably the one dating circa 1897 (figure #2), document other exterior features that have been lost or altered. The school's most prominent and stylish feature was its Italianate belfry centered on the roof ridge just behind the front gable. Capped by a flat or low-pitched, presumably hip, roof with wide bracketed eaves, the belfry had horizontal flush siding and round-arched windows flanked by pilasters at the corners. The circa 1897 photograph indicates that belfry's cornice brackets, three on each side, matched those at the main roof's eaves, and what appears to be cresting can be seen above belfry's roof eaves on the front elevation. The front belfry window was fitted with 6/6 sashes; the north side window appears to have had closed louvered shutters. The building's front, side and gable windows also had louvered shutters, numbers of which are stored in the cellar and attic, some retaining cast-iron butt hinges. Hinge ghosts can be seen on many on the window frames, and a few hinge leaves remain in place. The front entry stoop evidently consisted of a wooden stoop without railings, about the same size as the existing wooden deck. The four-panel front door had round-arched upper panels, instead of the segmental arched panels of the current replacement, and robust moldings articulated the panel edges. The photographs also indicate that the building had a two-tone exterior paint scheme consisting of a light body color and darker trim

The main block's coursed rubble stone foundation, parged with a sand/lime mortar on the exterior, encloses a low, dirt-floored cellar. While traditional mortise and tenon joinery appears to have been used for the major framing members, as evidenced by the connection of the wall posts with the rafter plates visible in the attic, much of the lighter framing is assembled with machine-cut nails. The nailed miter joint connecting the common rafters to a thin ridge board at the roof peak, for example, is a framing detail not usually employed by local builders before the middle of the 19th century. The clapboard-clad perimeter walls, partially visible in the attic, are construction of vertical studs between the posts that divide the longer side walls into three bays. The first floor framing consists of 3 x 7 1/4-inch joists running north/south, 24 inches on center, with intermediate support provided by a large, east/west girder carried by three masonry piers (two brick and one concrete-block replacement). Instead of a perpendicular girder, the attic

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floor framing incorporates three larger joists, running parallel with the others and aligned with the side wall posts. All framing members are saw cut.

While also subject to 20th-century renovations, the interior of the schoolhouse retains much of its original character. The floor plan consists of one large room entered from a vestibule, which served as a cloakroom and included the small office partitioned from its south end in the 20th century. The main room is a high-ceilinged space, about 26-foot square, with three large sash windows on both side walls, two doors to the vestibule on the east wall, and originally a blank west wall (photo #s 8 – 10). In conjunction with the addition of the rear appendage, a door was cut through the south end of the west wall. The two east doors, one of which now leads to office, flank a horizontal band of three 6/6 sash windows (photo #8). Coat racks encircled the vestibule/ cloakroom, and shelves are located on its north wall (photo #s 12 & 15). Benches originally were built in along both side walls of the main schoolroom, as evidenced by the slight cant of the wainscot below the windows and paint ghosts of the removed seats. A one-step-high platform across the west end of the room, documented by patches in the wainscot, also has been removed (photo #11). Blackboards are located between the windows on the side walls, as well as on the windowless rear wall. Iron brackets and a pilaster-like post support the rear-wall chimney, which vents a small cast-iron stove of unknown provenance. The original stove probably was located towards the middle of the room to provide more even heating. The ghosts of what appears to be oil lamp brackets are found on several of the window surrounds, and an oil lamp so mounted, can be seen in a 1924 photograph of the schoolroom (figure #3).

Surviving early interior finishes are quite simple, and exhibit little in the way of decorative embellishment. Characteristic of the region's modest architecture during the middle of the 19th century, original features include, plaster walls above vertical-board wainscot and simply molded woodwork and panel doors, along with tongue and groove floorboards and plaster ceilings, concealed by later finishes. While small quirk-bead moldings provide the vertical boards of the wainscots with their only ornament, a slightly more elaborate molding was employed for the door and window trim, the recessed door panels and the pilaster-like chimney support. Paint analysis has determined that most interior woodwork was originally painted a light yellow orange, "treated with a coat of tinted varnish to simulate wood graining."¹ Hung on cast iron butt hinges, the six-panel vestibule doors originally had mortise locks, none of which have survived. Remnants of hardware of unknown function remain on the windows: small tacks with rosette heads mounted at the upper corners of the lower sashes of both exterior and interior windows.

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South Branch Schoolhouse, Somerset County, NJ

Little is known of any early alterations or repairs made to South Branch Schoolhouse. Documentary and physical evidence does suggest that the side-wall benches were supplanted by individual desks and seats within little more than a decade of building's construction. The 1887 state school report observed that "old style" desks were no longer used in Somerset County schools; by that year all seventy-one county districts had acquired desks of "modern design."² Such "modern" desks and seats with cast-iron supports can be seen in the 1924 photograph of the South Branch schoolroom (figure #3). They must have been installed before 1887, if the state report is correct, probably in conjunction with the removal of the side benches, which paint analysis indicates occurred at an early date.³ It is also possible that the side benches and "modern" desks co-existed for a time.

A number of alterations were made to the building during the 20th century. Physical evidence suggests that the partitioning of the vestibule into two rooms and the installation of bead-board sheathing on its walls and ceiling over the original plaster above the wainscot (along with the application of similar sheathing to the schoolroom ceiling) did not occur before the second quarter of the 20th century. The vestibule wall sheathing is coated with titanium oxide-based paint, a type of paint first patented in the United States in 1916, and not widely used until the 1930s.⁴ The 1924 photograph (figure #3) depicts the north-wall blackboards as mounted above the wainscot like those on the south wall; they must not have been lowered until sometime later. The belfry purportedly was removed in 1947.⁵ However, the original cast-metal bell and frame (inscribed "Troy NY" and "Manreley" or "Henrely," presumably the manufacturer) were preserved and, subsequently donated to the municipality, mounted on a stand placed in the vestibule (photo #14). Other alterations probably made by the mid-20th century include the removal of the platform from the school room and the conversion of the adjacent north window into an emergency exit, as well as the installation of narrow strip flooring over the original flooring and removal of the window shutters. Electrical service also was installed; a photograph probably dating to around that time documents a "goose-neck" light above the front door. The photograph also indicates that the shutters had been removed by then and the building's walls and trim painted the same light color.

Renovations also occurred in the 1960s and later in conjunction with the reuse of the building for school and community purposes, most notably the addition of the rear appendage in the 1960s to provide rest rooms and the installation of modern utilities (photo #s 17 & 18).⁶ A door connecting the rear wing to the schoolroom was installed, along with a new blackboard on the west wall. It is possible that the present flooring was installed around that time, instead of earlier. The existing asphalt shingle roof may be

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twenty or more years old. More recently, the new ceiling lights and fans were installed. In the 1990s, multi-pane wooden storm windows were added to the windows, and the front door and trim reworked in an attempt to recreate the original treatment which had been altered some years earlier. Work also was undertaken to provide barrier free access and ADA compliant restrooms and parking, as well as a security system.

Notes

¹ Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, Appendix B, "Paint Analysis Report for the South Branch Schoolhouse," page 2.

² *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1887*, page 80.

³ Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report Appendix B, Paint Analysis Report for the South Branch Schoolhouse*, page 2.

⁴ Ibid., page 3.

⁵ Wayne Daniels, *South Branch School*, National Register of Historic Places form, 1992, pp. 8-1 to 8-4, as referenced in ^{Dennis} Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, pp. 3-5 & 3-6.

⁶ Ibid.

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South Branch Schoolhouse, Somerset County, NJ

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Set in pastoral surroundings on the edge of South Branch, a largely 19th-century village straddling the river of that name, South Branch Schoolhouse is an important survivor of Branchburg Township's rural heritage, a resource possessing significance under National Register Criterion C in the areas of architecture and education for the period 1873 to 1900. Erected in 1873, it exemplifies rural "one-room" schoolhouses of the post-Civil War era, which incorporated design features advocated by education reformers for several decades previously and whose construction was fostered by state legislation in 1868 and 1871 reforming the local public education system in New Jersey. Despite such alterations as the removal of the belfry and the addition of the rear appendage, South Branch Schoolhouse preserves much of its late 19th-century character, and the property still retains the integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association necessary for inclusion on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

The design of gable-fronted principal facade crowned by a belfry, in combination with a symmetrical rectangular form and regular fenestration pattern, conforms to the plan type used for churches and other public buildings in the region appearing by the late 1700s and remaining popular well into the middle of the 19th century.¹ However, a more direct source for the design of South Branch Schoolhouse can be found among the model school plans included in the 1874 New Jersey state school report. These plans, prepared by architect Albert N. Dobb of Elizabeth, New Jersey, accompanied recommendations for urban and rural school buildings made by Ellis A. Apgar, New Jersey's State Superintendent of Public Instruction. One in particular, design #11, bears a striking resemblance to South Branch Schoolhouse in plan and elevation (figure 1).² A similar plan, if not that one specifically, must have been used by the builders at South Branch.

Several interior design features of South Branch Schoolhouse reveal an awareness of progressive ideas about educational architecture current at the time of its construction. The floor plan of the building incorporating a vestibule and cloakroom, as well as the proportions of the main room and the arrangement of its doors and windows (high ceilings, large side-wall windows with weighted movable sashes, blank rear wall), conforms to recommendations for school buildings in country districts made by State School Superintendent Apgar in his 1873 and 1874 reports, treatises expressive of ideas about school architecture then circulating in progressive educational circles. Among other aspects of

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design and construction, Superintendent Apgar was concerned with the provision of adequate space, light, heat, and ventilation in schoolhouses. He advised, for example, that classrooms generally should have ceilings 12 to 14 feet high and average about 24 by 25 feet in width and length, the room size he considered adequate to accommodate fifty pupils, the maximum class size which he thought one teacher could reasonably be expected to manage, and specifications met at South Branch. Seating students to face a windowless wall, he maintained, precluded direct sunlight from injuring their eyes. The best source of light was from the side. The provision of at least four large windows in each classroom not only supplied adequate natural light but also, if fitted with easily raised and lowered sashes, ensured sufficient ventilation during good weather. Apgar recommended a platform at the front of the schoolroom only if it was to be used for assemblies or lecture; physical evidence indicates that South Branch Schoolhouse had such an arrangement. Apgar maintained that all schools should have a bell, and a cast-metal bell hung in the South Branch belfry.³

In his report Superintendent Apgar also addressed how schools should be finished on the interior and furnished:

A teacher cannot be expected to do good work without the proper tools. The desks furnished the students should be of the most approved style; they should have folding seats, so as to allow of freedom of motion in marching, calisthenics, and general exercises. Settees placed in front of the teacher's desk are convenient for recitation purposes. The teacher's desk should be neat and substantial, having at least six drawers in it. There should be three or four chairs, a thermometer, an eight day clock, a small globe, a call bell, and other conveniences for teaching. Every school room should have a plentiful supply blackboards.⁴

South Branch Schoolhouse had such modern student desks at an early date, if not originally, and several blackboards. While the desks, depicted in a 1924 photograph (figure 3), have been removed, blackboards survive on three walls of the main room. Architectural specifications for model schoolhouses accompanying the superintendent's report called for the lower portion of interior walls to be wainscoted, and the upper portions and ceilings to be plastered. The superintendent recommended cloakroom walls to be wainscoted to a height of six feet and the rooms amply supplied with iron coat hooks, as well as shelves for "dinner baskets and overshoes." Coat racks encircled the South Branch vestibule/cloakroom, and shelves are located on its north wall. As regards painting, Apgar called for interior woodwork "to have three thin coats of paint, grained in imitation of light oak, and varnished."⁵ Interior walls at South Branch are wainscoted and plastered, although the vestibule/cloakroom wainscoting is not six feet high, and paint analysis has

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determined that most interior woodwork was originally painted a light yellow orange, "treated with a coat of tinted varnish to simulate wood graining."⁶

In several respects, the original design of South Branch Schoolhouse did not comply with the recommendations of the state superintendent of schools. As documented by paint ghosts, the schoolhouse originally had built-in benches along the side walls of the classroom, the slightly canted wainscots forming continuous backs for the bench seats (any evidence of associated desks being hidden by the modern flooring). Blackboards are located between the windows on the side walls, as well as on the windowless rear wall. In the superintendent's opinion, shared benches were less conducive to good discipline than individual desks and seats. Perhaps in recognition of this problem, the side-wall benches at South Branch evidently were replaced with individual desks and seats within little more than a decade of the building's construction.⁷ While light would have come over the backs of the seated students, as the superintendent recommended, students using the side wall blackboards would have had direct light in their faces, which he claimed was injurious to their eyesight. Superintendent Apgar maintained that schoolhouses ideally should have separate cloakrooms for boys and girls; at South Branch there is only one. To facilitate supervision of students, the superintendent also advised that cloakrooms only communicate with classrooms; at South Branch, a band of windows allowed the teacher a partial view of the cloakroom. Apgar favored interior window blinds over exterior shutters, citing ease of use and less costly maintenance as supporting reasons.⁸ The windows at South Branch featured exterior shutters with moveable louvers; a more common treatment the during the Victorian era.

Like design #11 in the 1874 school report, the design of South Branch Schoolhouse incorporates decorative motifs derived from the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles fashionable in mid 19th-century America. Italianate cupolas and belfries similar to the one which originally graced South Branch Schoolhouse distinguish a number of the schools, dwellings, churches, and commercial blocks erected in villages and towns around the region during the third quarter of the 19th century, and local factories of the period produced ornamental millwork like that used on South Branch Schoolhouse for the bracketed cornices, raked window hoods and other moldings.⁹

Construction of a new schoolhouse at South Branch evidently occurred in the spring and summer of 1873. The trustees of the South Branch school district (district #22) purchased the lot on which it stands from Joseph and Tiney Reed on March 11th of that year for the substantial sum of \$1,000. The annual state school report, dated August 31, 1873, recorded that the South Branch "school property" was worth \$3,000 and the

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condition of its "school building" was "v. g." or very good. Since the state report for 1872 gave the value of the South Branch "school property" as \$200 and described its physical condition as "poor," one can reasonably conclude that the new school was erected between March and August of 1873. Furthermore, the state reports record that the South Branch district raised \$1,500 for "building, purchasing, hiring, repairing, etc" through "local district tax" in 1873 and \$2,210 in the following year. This money presumably funded construction of the schoolhouse.¹⁰

While Branchburg Township's seven schoolhouses were reportedly "all new and in good order" in 1851, by the late 1860s the condition of the school building at South Branch had deteriorated markedly.¹¹ In 1868, of the five township school districts for which the state school report provides information about the physical condition, South Branch was one of two whose condition was described as "bad." A lack of money undoubtedly was the primary reason for the situation. Local schools at that time received minimal financial support from local tax revenues and had to rely on tuition to pay teacher salaries and other expenses. In 1868, the South Branch district reported a \$22.80 state appropriation, \$161.21 township funds received, and \$146 "tuition fees collected." With the teacher's salary costing \$500 and no "district tax assessed" as of August 31st of that year, it is not surprising that no money was reported as used for repairs. The South Branch school was kept open twelve months that year with an enrollment of thirty-nine and average attendance of thirty-six. Like nearly all other Somerset County schools, it was not free; students paid tuition to attend.¹²

Two state legislative acts led to the reform of the local public education system, encouraging the construction of new schoolhouses like the one at South Branch. The Public Instruction Act of 1867 established county-wide school superintendents and enabled the creation of local districts on the basis of regional population distribution without the constraints of municipal boundary. Secondly, the 1871 Free School Act freed all public schools from reliance on tuition by providing state funds distributed on the basis of population.¹³ In Branchburg Township, the number of districts decreased from nine in 1870 to five in 1871 of which the South Branch District, #22, was one.¹⁴ The school-aged population of the district in that year was ninety-six children between the ages of five and eighteen, of whom seventy-six were enrolled. The average attendance was thirty-two for the eleven-month school year; that the schoolhouse could only "seat comfortably" fifty pupils may have discouraged a larger attendance. While the school-aged population of the district grew to one hundred and eight in the following year, enrollment increased only to eighty and attendance declined to twenty-eight. During the nine-month 1872 school year, twenty-four pupils attended four to eight months and fifty-six attended

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less than four months.¹⁵ In 1874, the first full school year after the construction of the new schoolhouse (which seated eighty comfortably), enrollment increased to eighty-eight of the total school aged population of one hundred and fourteen children, and average attendance climbed markedly to forty-seven. The school was open 11.25 months in 1874; thirty-two students attended more than eight months, eighteen from four to eight months, and thirty-eight less than four months.¹⁶

Enrollment at the South Branch School peaked at ninety-five in 1875. It ranged from seventy-six to ninety students during the next five years, and varied from fifty-nine to seventy-five over the course of the next decade. Average attendance also declined over the period, but never went below thirty. Between 1890 and 1894, enrollment declined from fifty-nine in 1890 to fifty in 1894, while attendance averaged twenty-seven or twenty-eight, except for a spike of thirty-four in 1893. In all but four years between 1873 and 1894, the district employed one male teacher with a monthly salary mostly in the \$40 to \$50 range. Female teachers were employed only in 1882, 1883, 1892 and 1893; their monthly salaries averaged about \$42. While the condition of the schoolhouse continued to be described as very good between 1873 and 1889, the value of the district school property declined from \$3,000 in 1873 to \$2,000 in 1889.¹⁷

Little else is known about the school during the period. The 1885 state school report noted that South Branch was one of three districts in Somerset County whose Arbor Day observances were "quite elaborate and well conceived." The 1887 report observed that South Branch was one of five schools that had added to its library and that its library contained 122 books.¹⁸

South Branch Schoolhouse continued to be used as a public school until the middle of the 20th century, when upon the construction of a consolidated township school it was abandoned for educational purposes in 1950. The Branchburg Board of Education sold the property to Branchburg Township in 1963, but two years later a classroom shortage led to its reuse for one year as a sixth-grade classroom. Extensive repairs were made at this time, and a small appendage added on the rear to accommodate rest rooms and other modern utilities. In recent decades, the building has served as a community center, used by more than two dozen groups and organizations ranging from a girl scouts troop to a senior citizen club.¹⁹

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Notes

¹ Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, page 3-2; Dennis Bertland Associates, *The Brick Academy Historic Structures Report*, 1995, page 1; William A., Susan J. Winter, and Robert Bouwman, *Images of America Branchburg and the River Towns of Burnt Mills, North Branch, North Branch Depot, South Branch and Neshanic Station*, pp.121-124; "Oldwick Historic District," National Register of Historic Places nomination form, 1983, site #79; James P. Snell (ed.), *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey*, page 667.

² *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, page 35.

³ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1873*, pp. 21-25; *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, pp. 26-29.

⁴ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, page 29.

⁵ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, pp. 26 & 85.

⁶ Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, Appendix B, "Paint Analysis Report for the South Branch Schoolhouse," page 2.

⁷ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1887*, page 80; Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, page 3-5.

⁸ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, pp. 26 & 85.

⁹ Dennis Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, page 3-2.

¹⁰ Somerset County Deeds, Book P-4, page 589; *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1873*, pp.150-151; *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, page 110.

¹¹ *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Schools of the State of New Jersey for the Year 1851*, page 116.

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¹² *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education With the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1868*, pp.104-105.

¹³ Roscoe West, *Elementary Education in New Jersey: a History*, pp. 36-41.

¹⁴ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1871*, pp. 120-121.

¹⁵ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education with the Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1872*, page 152-153.

¹⁶ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1874*, pp.146-147.

¹⁷ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1875*, pp.150-151; *Report ... 1876*, pp. 156-157; *Report ... 1877*, pp.168-169; *Report ... 1878*, pp.160-161; *Report... 1879*, pp. 182-183; ; *Report... 1880*, pp. 178-179; *Report... 1881*, pp. 182-183; *Report... 1882*, pp. 152-153; *Report... 1883*, pp. 182-183; ; *Report... 1884*, pp. 176-177; *Report... 1885*, pp. 186-187; *Report... 1886*, pp. 192-193; *Report... 1887*, pp. 172-173; *Report... 1888*, pp. 1212-213; *Report... 1889*, pp. 246-247; *Report... 1890*, pp. 182-183; *Report... 1891*, pp. 204-205; *Report... 1892*, pp. 208-209; *Report... 1893*, pp. 121-122; *Report... 1894*, pp. 302-303.

¹⁸ *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1885*, page 52; *Report of the New Jersey State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the School Year Ending August 31, 1887*, pp. 71 and 106.

¹⁹ Somerset County Deeds, Book 1005, page 109; Wayne Daniels, *South Branch School*, National Register of Historic Places form, 1992, pp. 8-1 to 8-4, as referenced in ^{Dennis} Bertland Associates, *South Branch Schoolhouse Historic Structures Report*, pp. 2-3 & 2-4.

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Correspondence:

Letter from Fred Sisser, III, to Dennis Bertland, September 16, 2004.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The legal description of metes and bounds for Block 68, Lot 57, the lot occupied by the South Branch School, as given in the original deed of purchase:

Beginning at the stone in the public road leading from Ne-shanic Station to Old York Road said stone being a corner of lands belonging to the heirs at law of Lawrence V. Stud-diford: thence running (1) by their line North 61 degrees 30' West 4 chains and 84 links to a stone in their line; (2) by lands of said Reed South 28 degrees 30' West one chain and 55 links to a stone; (3) South 61 degrees 30' East 4 chains and 84 links to a stone in the first mentioned public road; (4) in said road by lands of said Reed North 28 degrees East 1 chain and 55 links to the place of begin-ning... Containing three-quarters of an acre of land. [Som-erset County Deeds, Book P-4, page 589]

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the entire municipal tax parcel, Block 68, Lot 57, which consti-tutes the original $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre property purchased for the construction of the schoolhouse in 1873.

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South Branch Schoolhouse, Somerset County, NJ

PHOTOGRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION:

The following information is the same for all of the photographs submitted:

Name: South Branch Schoolhouse
Location: South Branch River Road
Branchburg Township, Somerset Co., NJ 08876
Photographer: Janice Armstrong
Date of photographs: February 2003
Negative repository: Dennis Bertland Associates
PO Box 24
Bloomsbury, NJ 08804

Photograph direction of view:

- #1 Overall, northwest view.
- #2 Overall, southwest view.
- #3 East and south facades, northwest view.
- #4 West & south facades, northeast view.
- #5 West facade, east view.
- #6 North & west façades, southeast view.
- #7 East facade detail, northwest view.
- #8 Room 102, east view.
- #9 Room 102, northwest view.
- #10 Room 102, south view.
- #11 Room 102, southwest view.
- #12 Room 101, southeast view.
- #13 Room 101, northeast view.
- #14 Room 101, historic bell detail, southwest view.
- #15 Room 101, detail, northeast view.
- #16 Room 101, detail, southeast view.
- #17 Room 105, west view.
- #18 Room 107, north view.

5.05
75.87 AC

68

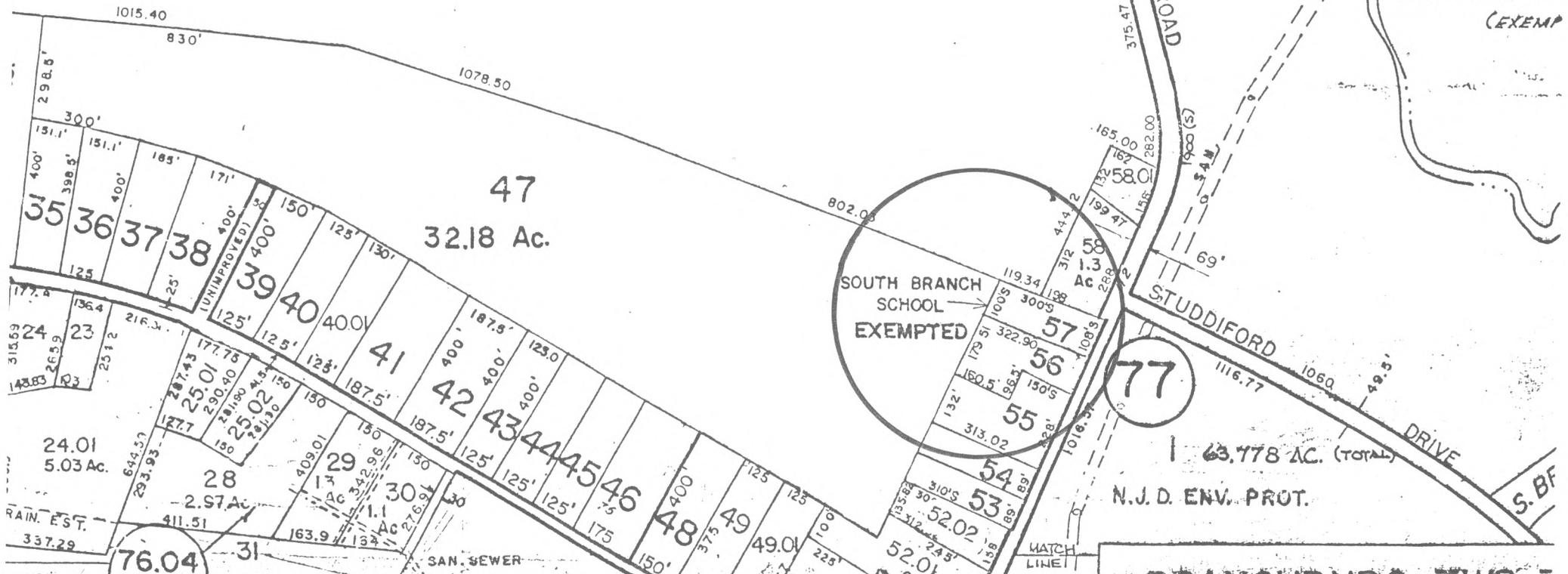
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20.62 AC

5.03
1.33 AC

67

2.03
81.09 AC

N. J. DEPT. OF
EXEMPT



REVISED TO DEC 1 1965	TECTONIC ASSOC.
REVISED TO DEC. 1 1964	TECTONIC ASSOC.
REVISED TO DEC. 1 1963	TECTONIC ASSOC.
REVISED TO DEC. 31, 1962	TECTONIC ASSOC.
REVISED TO OCT. 1, 1960	TECTONIC ASSOC.
REVISED TO OCT. 1, 1959	TECTONIC ASSOC.

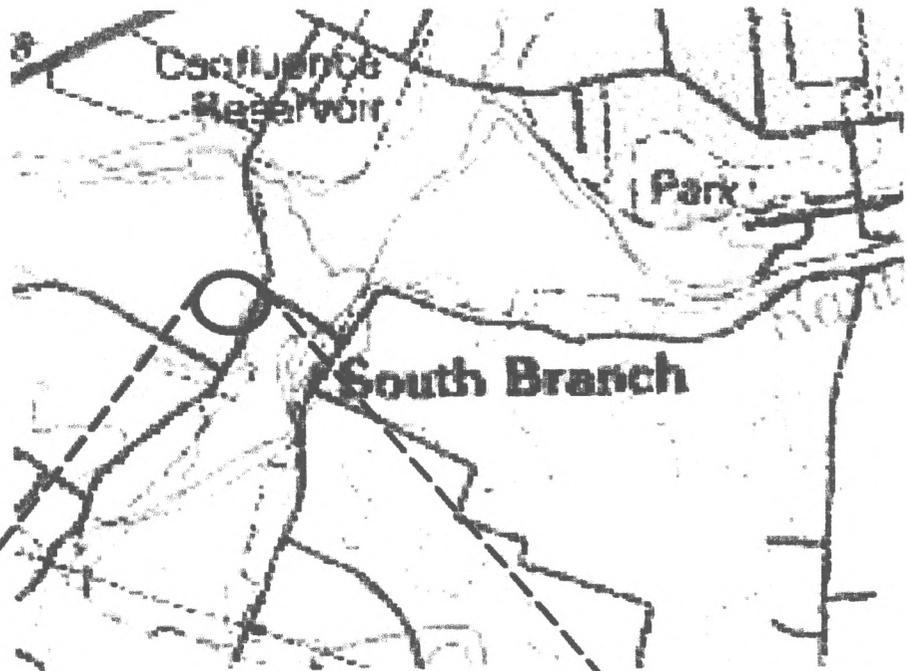
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N. J. D. ENV. PROT.

BRANCHBURG TWP. T
SOMERSET COUNTY NJ
SCALE 1" = 400' FEBRUARY 1965
AERO SERVICE CORPORATION
210 E. COURTLAND STREET PHILADELPHIA PA

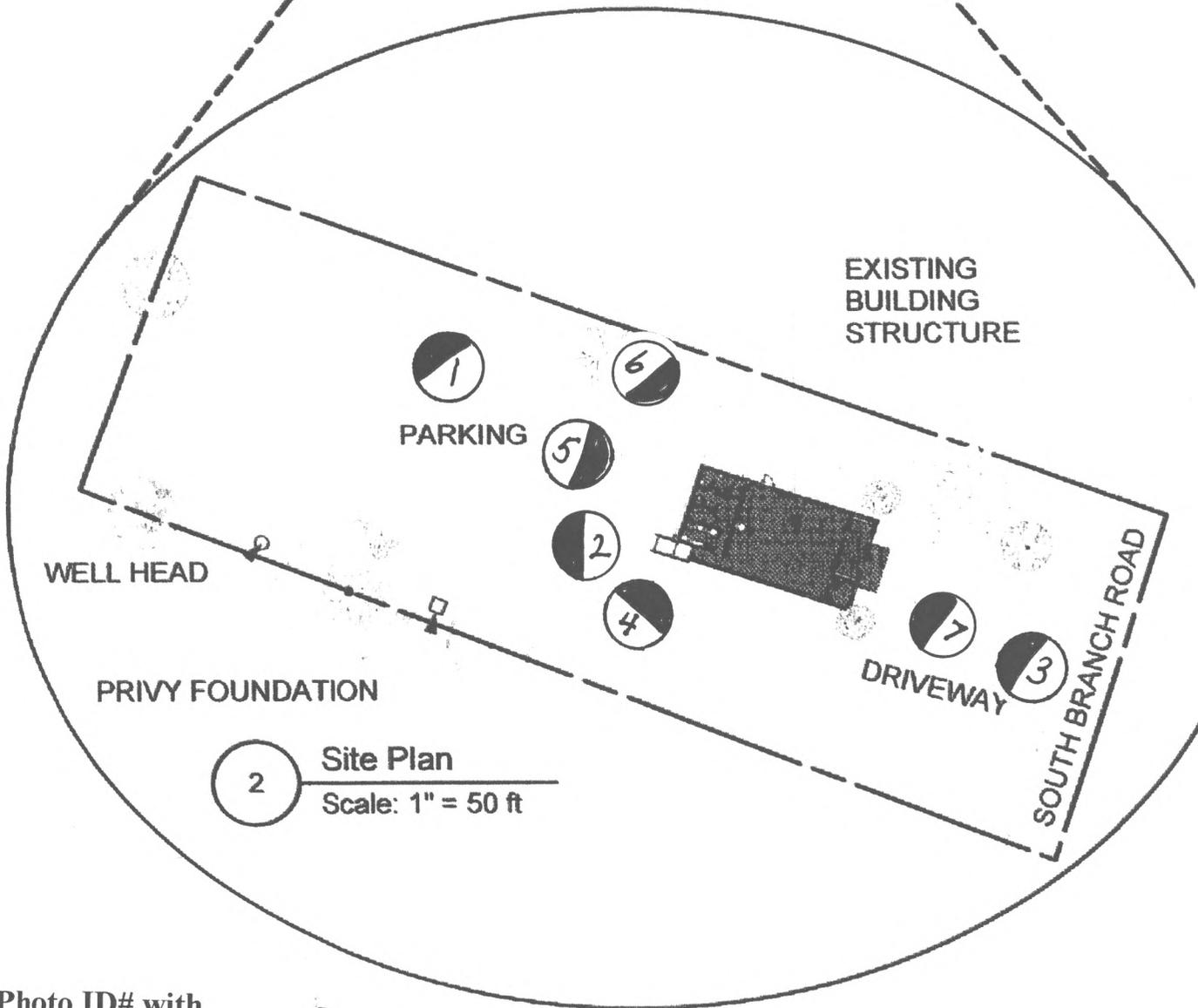
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SOUTH BRANCH SCHOOL
Branchburg Township,
Somerset Co., New Jersey

Historic Preservation
Commission
Branchburg Township
1077 U.S. Route 202
Somerville, N.J. 08876



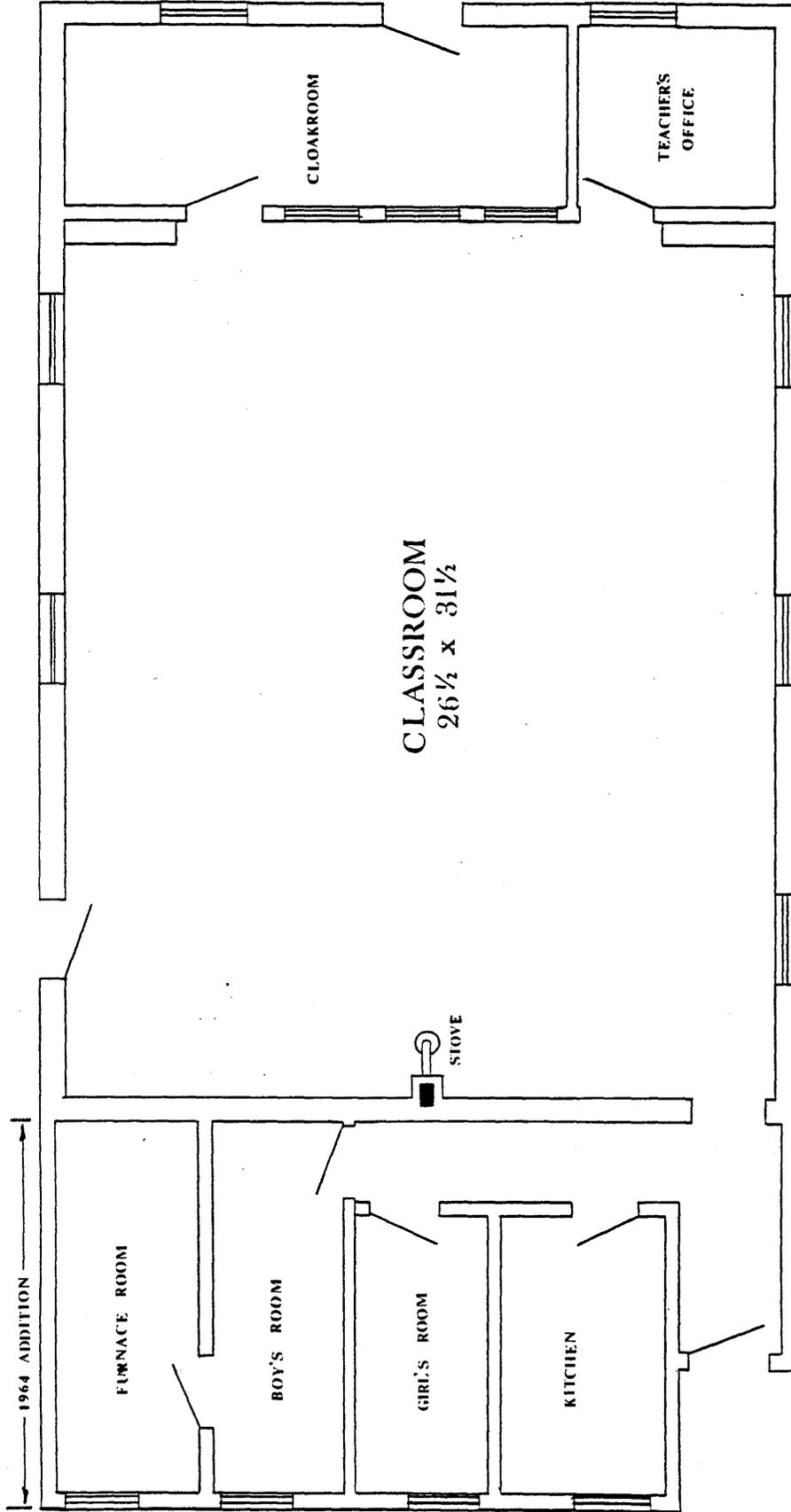
1 Location Plan
NOT TO SCALE



2 Site Plan
Scale: 1" = 50 ft

Photo ID# with
direction of view





LANCHBURG TOWNSHIP HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

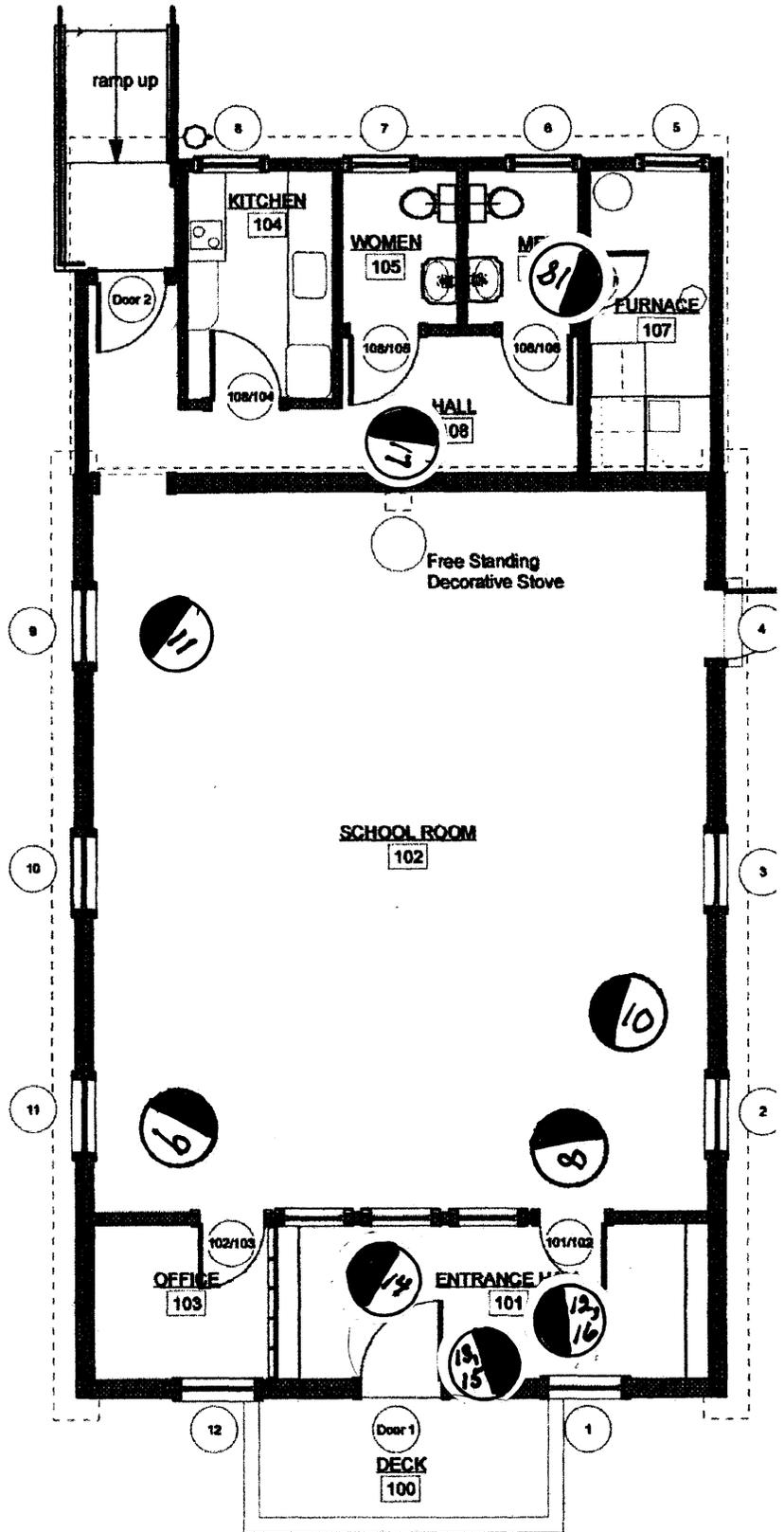
SOUTH BRANCH SCHOOL HOUSE
 SOUTH BRANCH ROAD, BRANCHBURG, - NEW JERSEY 08876

DRAWN BY

WILLIAM A. SCHLEICHER IV
 65 HASLAN SCHOOL ROAD
 SOMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY 08876

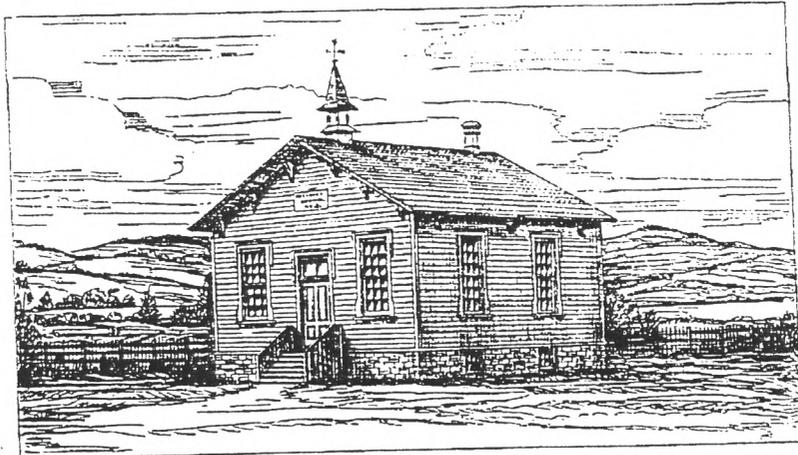
**South Branch Schoolhouse
Somerset County, NJ**

**Photo ID# with
direction of view**



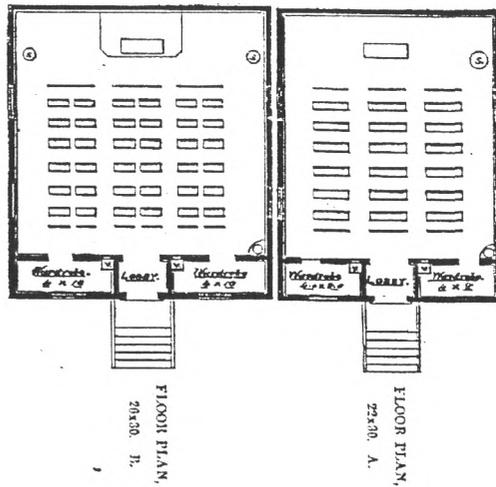
2 FIRST FLOOR PLAN
A-101 scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

B 1874



DESIGN II.

Albert N. Dobb, Architect.



DESCRIPTION OF DESIGN II.

The exterior of this building is inexpensive, plain, and unpretentious; the interior is similar to No. 1, excepting the room is larger, and no provision is made for a teacher's closet. Two floor plans are given to show two methods of seating. Floor plan A is twenty-two feet wide, packed with double desks. Floor plan B is twenty-six feet wide, and is packed with single desks, each pupil having a separate desk and seat; this is a very desirable method, as the scholars are thereby kept separate, but is of course more expensive, as it requires a wider room, and single desks cost nearly as much as double ones. The ventilating arrangements, and the interior fitting up are the same as in No. 1.

The cost of the building, without furniture, will be between \$900 and \$1000.

Figure 1. Model for a small rural school, 1874. Exterior detailing bears a striking resemblance to the South Branch Schoolhouse, as does plan with entry vestibule and platform in the front of the classroom. [Annual Report of the Superintendent of New Jersey Public Schools for the Year 1874, pages 34 and 35.]



Figure 2. South Branch Schoolhouse, southwest view, circa 1897, collection of Fred Sisser III. Note the building's Italianate belfry, louvered shutters and two-toned paint scheme, as well as the flagpole, carved spar-like from a log.



Figure 3. "Little Red Schoolhouse 1924". Room 102, classroom, northeast view. The blackboards on the north wall were lowered sometime after this picture was taken,