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Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

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

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Davidson Elementary School

other names/site number Davidson School

## 2. Location

street & number 500 West Piedmont Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Kings Mountain N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Cleveland code 045 zip code 28086

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** ___ **statewide** _X_ **local**

Kevin Cherry 3/30/2016
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

NC Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper 5-18-2016
Date of Action

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- [ ] Private
- [x] public - Local
- [ ] public - State
- [ ] public - Federal

**Category of Property**
(Check only **one** box.)

- [x] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

**Number of Resources within Property**
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 1 | 1 | **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.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE
OTHER: alumni organization office

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

**Materials**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick
Wood
roof: Asphalt
other: Concrete
Metal

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Setting

Located at 500 West Parker Street, Davidson Elementary School stands in a small multi-block, historically black neighborhood in the northwest quadrant of Kings Mountain. The neighborhood is generally bounded by North Cansler Street, which is two blocks east of the school, by West King Street (Business US 74), which is two blocks south of Davidson Elementary school, and on the west by Davidson Park, which lies along North Sims Street and was developed as a black recreational facility with a swimming pool and athletic fields in 1954-1955. On the north the neighborhood is bounded in part by industrial facilities, north of Mitchell Street, and otherwise merges into mixed-race housing dating largely from the second half of the twentieth century.

The history of this area as a black neighborhood dates to the early-twentieth century, when a small, weatherboarded-frame black graded school was erected on West Ridge Street in the area of today's Cooke Circle, on the west side of North Cansler Street. At about the same time two of Kings Mountain's leading black congregations acquired lots in the same block. In 1903 trustees of the black Baptist church (now Mount Zion) purchased a lot on the north side of West King Street and built a church (at today's #316). In 1906, trustees of Good Hope Presbyterian Church acquired a lot fronting on North Cansler Street and soon built a frame church (at today's #105). In 1925, when a two-acre site was needed for a new black school whose construction would be supported by the Rosenwald Fund, a lot in the southeast corner of North Watterson and West Parker streets was acquired from its white owners, John Oates and Elvira Foust Plonk. Located about one-and-a-half-blocks northwest of the frame graded school, the lot became the site of a "five-teacher type" brick school that about 1934 was named Davidson School in honor of its principal, Rev. Robert James Davidson.

Through time black citizens of Kings Mountain acquired lots in this area, mostly from white landowners who held acreages for investment, and erected houses along its streets. Some of the most prepossessing of those that survive were built on North Cansler and North Watterson streets. On 27 January 1930, Robert B. Byers (1885-1982) acquired an eight-acre tract in the northwest corner of North Watterson and West Parker streets from William Boyce Weir (1848-1934) and his wife. Here he built a frame Craftsman-style house at #303, diagonally northwest of the Rosenwald school, that remains the residence of his granddaughter. In 1953, when acreage was being assembled for the site of this new elementary school, the Kings Mountain School Administrative Unit first purchased two tracts comprising 5.25 acres on the north side of West Parker Street from Mr. and Mrs. Byers. This property, being about one-fourth of the acreage assembled in 1953-1954 for the school, comprised the partially-wooded rear, west portion of the eight-acre tract purchased by Mr. Byers in 1930. It would become the site of Davidson Elementary School.

In the sixty-plus years since the Davidson Elementary School was placed in service, the surrounding neighborhood has remained primarily black and generally residential in character with mostly one-story housing stock, including public housing on the south side of West Parker Street, dating from ca. 1930 through the twentieth century. In the early 1950s, after the Good Hope Presbyterian rebuilt their church at 105 North Cansler Street, the Bynum Chapel A. M. E. Zion congregation erected a new church at 213 North Cansler Street and

moved from South Cherokee Street. The Rosenwald-era Davidson School was demolished in 1967, and the lot was sold in 1968 to the congregation of Mount Zion Baptist Church. Then worshiping in their church in the 300 block of West King Street (at today's #316), the congregation erected an imposing, west-facing brick church on the former school property. A meeting hall for black chapters of the Masonic Lodge and the Order of the Eastern Star stands on Childers Street, one block northeast of the church.

## The School Grounds

The generally-rectangular, five-sided four-acre residual grounds of Davidson Elementary School, mostly comprised of grass-covered lawn and greenswards, are framed by the asphalt-paved path of West Parker Street on the south, native, mostly-deciduous woodlands on the west and north sides in and along which the property lines are not visibly marked, and on the east by a low woven-wire fence, which defines the property line between the school and the Byers residence among others. The fence extends into the woodland in the northeast corner of the property. The school is situated in the front, east center of the lot and stands on a simply graded, elevated level in the otherwise natural topography that slopes gently to the south and west. The school faces south/southeast to West Parker Street (but it will be described herein as facing south). The front lawn is shaded by informally planted willow oak and pecan trees. The pecan trees were probably planted by Mr. Byers between 1930 and 1953 in what was then his back yard. Such plantings were a common practice by homeowners in Kings Mountain from the early-twentieth century through the interwar period. A majestic native white oak, one of the finest specimen trees in Kings Mountain, stands at the woodland edge, northeast of the school.

The willow oaks and the other principal access and landscape enhancements date to ca. 1954. A narrow U-shaped asphalt-paved driveway enters the grounds from West Parker Street, carries north along the east side of the school, continues as an arch around the rear of the building, and carries south to exit onto West Parker Street at a point that complements its pendant entrance. After passing between paired deep-rose colored *Camellia japonicas* off the southeast corner of the school, the asphalt paving expands to cover a generally rectangular parking area on the east side of the school and does likewise on the downgrade west side of the building. A deteriorated metal, mobile unit stands at the east edge of the upper parking area.

On the school's west elevation two poured concrete, partially inset stairways, rising to the east and incorporating flights of steps, landings, and short walkways, provide (the original) principal access to the school's south, front entrance and the sheltered secondary, rear entrance near the north end of the west elevation. They rise from the lower level parking area and driveway. A poured concrete walk, positioned parallel with the elevation and almost immediately beside it, provides access between the stairways. The southernmost stairway rises to a poured concrete terrace that extends to the east along the west half of the building's façade and its front entrance porch. The stairway is flanked by now-overgrown evergreen hedges along its rise. Similar, hedge-like evergreen plantings carry across the south front of the concrete terrace. A length of asphalt paving effectively extends the terrace across the recessed eastern part of the front elevation and continues to join the east driveway. This transition in materials is eased by other, apparently later plantings. An original poured concrete walk, antedating the asphalt terrace extension, carries from the front entrance porch eastward, parallel with the front elevation and in front of original foundation plantings, wraps the southeast corner of the building, and continues along the school's east elevation to the porches that shelter outside access to the east tier of classrooms. Later evergreen foundation plantings appear along the school's east elevation under the windows.

## Exterior

Designed in 1953 by James Lorn Beam Jr. (1918-2010) and constructed in 1953-1954 by Frank Dewey McCall and company, Davidson Elementary School is a small one-story, flat-roof brick masonry building of modest finish that contains six classrooms and related spaces aligned in tiers on the east and west sides of a center, north/south hall. The Modern Movement school enjoys a real presence and character resulting from Mr. Beam's skillful use of banked metal windows in a building defined by balanced symmetry and studied proportions. The school is rectangular in plan, about 66 feet wide and 129 feet deep, except for the offset on the south front elevation, where the center entrance and east tier of rooms is recessed nine feet behind (north of) the south elevation of the west tier of rooms. The red multi-tone brick elevations are laid in a one-to-five bond featuring five courses of stretcher brick between single courses laid in Flemish bond. They rise from grade, with no visible water table, to a flat, shallow two-part, metal-clad wood cornice whose composition and appearance incorporate galvanized metal gutters as design features. These simple cornices are flush against the walls on the south and north elevations. On the long east and west elevations they finish the shallow, projecting eaves that shade the upper panes of the windows. The stucco soffits taper diagonally upward from the wall to the outer edge of the eaves. The gutters are fitted with galvanized metal downspouts. The school has a flat asphalt roof.

The east and west planes of the two-part south, front elevation are blind and linked by a square-in-plan porch that shelters the center entrance. The porch has a poured concrete floor, raised a few inches above the terrace level, a single painted metal pipe support in its southeast corner, and a painted plaster ceiling. Painted double-leaf metal doors with lattice-glass vertical windows are set in a simply-finished metal surround that also enframes the single-pane glass transom. A horizontal metal sign, positioned near the east edge of the elevation and a half course below the wood cornice, has lettering identifying the building as "DAVIDSON SCHOOL."

A balanced symmetry characterizes the school's six-bay east elevation where multi-pane metal windows reflect the alignment of three classrooms in the school's east tier and the blind brick wall of a coal storage room in its northeast corner. The full-width windows of each classroom comprise two banks of horizontally-glazed panes aligned in three vertical tiers of six panes each with a narrow cast concrete upright between the two banks. The windows rest on low brick apron walls. From south to north these banks of classroom windows occupy the first, third, and fourth bays of the elevation with the blind wall of the coal storage-room comprising the sixth, northernmost bay. A small rectangular utility opening, positioned near the top of the blind bay and fitted with a top-hinged metal cover, provides access for unloading coal into the storage room. Shallow porches, sheltering outside entrances to the three classrooms, are symmetrically-positioned in the second and fifth bays. In form and materials they repeat the finish of the south entrance porch and have poured concrete floors that are level with the concrete walk, paired painted round pipe supports, and painted plaster ceilings. Simply-finished metal surrounds like that of the main entrance, hold replacement metal doors with a vertical safety window below single-pane transoms.

A towering square-in-plan chimney stack, positioned slightly east of center, dominates the school's north, rear elevation and serves its furnace and heating system. Laid in the same one-to-five bond as the elevations, it rises against the wall and has a concrete coping. The asymmetrical five-bay elevation has an utilitarian appearance. A rectangular opening, with a concrete sill and containing a metal window with four horizontal panes, and a wide doorway sheltered by a porch are positioned to the east of the chimney stack. Respectively, they illuminate and provide access to the furnace room located west of and beside the corner storage room. The porch, similar in appearance to others on the building, has a raised concrete floor, paired, painted pipe supports and a painted

plaster ceiling. A replacement commercial-grade wood door is fitted in the original metal framing. It opens onto an interior flight of six concrete steps that descend to the poured concrete floor of the rectangular furnace room. The room has painted concrete block and brick walls and a plaster ceiling. A commercial metal door in the room's east wall opens into the coal storage room that has a like finish. Neither room communicates with the interior of the school. Three smaller vertical openings, also fitted with three horizontal tiered panes, are positioned in the elevation to the west of the chimney stack. They illuminate, respectively, east to west, the staff lavatory, the boys' lavatory, and the girls' lavatory in the northwest corner of the interior.

The school's west elevation is dominated by multi-pane fenestration that illuminates and ventilates the three classrooms aligned in the building's west tier of classrooms. It carries without interruption, for about four fifths of its length, from the south edge of the elevation northward to the one-story porch that shelters the building's secondary entrance. The short northernmost part of the elevation, being the west wall of the girls' lavatory, is blind. While the pattern of the fenestration generally repeats that on the school's east elevation, it features three subtle differences. These, in turn, reflect the slightly off-center interior plan in which the long sides of the rectangular classrooms in the west tier are aligned on a north/south axis while the long sides of the classrooms in the east tier have an east/west axis. The brick apron wall below the windows is taller than the wall on the east side, with the result that each vertical tier of horizontal panes comprises five panes instead of the six appearing on the east elevation. Also, the two-part bays per classroom have four tiers of panes on each side of the center, precast concrete upright instead of the three tiers on the east elevation. The porch is elevated a few inches above grade and the connecting concrete walk and walkway and otherwise reflects the form and materials seen on the building's other porches. The wide opening has a simple metal surround holding a double-leaf replacement door with vertical safety windows and single-pane glass transom.

Interior

The interior of Davidson Elementary School, comprising six classrooms and related spaces, a staff room and lavatory, a girls' lavatory, and a boys' lavatory, is arranged on a center-hall plan with tiers of three classrooms aligned on the east and west sides of the hall that carries on a north/south axis. To facilitate the description a copy of the plan of the building is included in this nomination as Exhibit A with classrooms #1 through #3 in the east tier and classrooms #4 through #6 in the west tier. The hall is not positioned in the physical center of the building but off-center, to the west, by about seven feet. At its north end, at a point coterminous with the north wall of classroom #6 the hall continues in a ninety-degree turn to the west and carries to the secondary entrance on the west elevation. The staff room and lavatory and student lavatories are located on the north side of this ell extension. The furnace room and a coal storage room are positioned to the east, in the northeast corner of the building, and have only outside access through a sheltered door on the school's north, rear elevation.

The interior finish, like that of the exterior, reflects the linear, geometric character of the Modern Movement. In 2012, during asbestos abatement the original floor tiles, baseboards, the composition ceilings, some original wood-framed green boards and bulletin boards, and post-construction partitions and other features added during post-1968 usages were removed. As a result, the poured concrete floor is now visible as are the horizontal metal trusses that support the roof and held the ceiling. The original floor plan remains intact as do the painted concrete block walls that form its partitions and enclose classrooms, closets, and lavatories. Nearly all of the original doors remain in place as do the metal surrounds that enframe them. Doors opening from the hall into classrooms have paired, square glazed openings centered in the upper half as do the three doors opening from classrooms #1-#3 into the two vestibules in the east tier. The classroom closet doors in the east tier have inset

metal louvered vents near their bottom edges. Doors opening from the two vestibules into the toilet rooms in the east tier and those opening from the hall into the boys' and girls' lavatories are blind. The window openings retain the original metal windows, flanked by pier-like enframements of unpainted brick, and slate sills that carry above the unpainted brick apron walls. Green boards and bulletin boards remain in place, in whole or in part, in some classrooms, but those in other rooms were taken down, during the asbestos abatement. Ghost marks on classroom walls indicate their original locations and size. The boys' and girls' lavatories, the staff lavatory, and the four small individual toilet rooms in the east tier retain the highest degree of integrity, with the original tilework, fittings, and most of their fixtures installed in 1954.

The plan and arrangement of classrooms differs in the two tiers reflecting the use of the rooms in the east tier for primary-grade instruction and those in the west tier for the older elementary grades. Each of the three east-tier classrooms has a separate closet for children's coats, hats, and other outerwear, and a smaller closet inside each for teacher use. These are fitted with rods for hanging and shelving, most of which survive in place. In plan the closets for classrooms #1 and #2 are aligned between the two classrooms, together with small paired individual toilet rooms for boys and girls, which open from a vestibule at the east end of the alignment. The vestibule has doors opening in its west wall into the toilet rooms, doors in its south and north walls opening into the respective classrooms, and a door in the east wall opening to the outside under a porch. The vestibule has the same materials and finish as the classrooms and a porcelain-on-cast-iron sink mounted on the south wall in its southeast corner. The toilet rooms have brown multi-tone terrazzo tile floors, oatmeal-colored ceramic tile wainscoting with a self cap, original white ceramic toilets with black seats, and chrome fittings. These facilities provided valuable accommodation to the needs and instruction of the school's youngest students.

Classroom #3 was used for an undefined period for serving food that was prepared elsewhere, brought in, and heated when necessary. Ghost marks of service cabinetry, appliances, and counters are visible on the north and west walls. A fully-intact wood-framed combination unit incorporating a wide green chalk board and flanking bulletin boards below a transom-like bulletin board, survives on the south wall. Units like this appeared on one wall or two, with some variation, in each primary classroom. Doors in the north wall open into the closet and the vestibule serving this room alone. A sink is mounted on the south wall in the southeast corner of the vestibule. The toilet rooms retain their original tile floors and wainscoting, as before, however, the toilets have been removed. The south toilet room is now fitted with unpainted shelving: the north toilet room now houses a water heater.

The three classrooms (#4-#6) in the west tier have identical plans with teacher closets in their southeast corner and plumbing for counter-level sinks in the pendant southwest corners. The sinks and counters have all been removed, probably during the asbestos abatement, however the shallow, room-height concrete-block walls that formed their east sides remain in place. With the removal of the ceiling, a painted inscription, "Frank McCall, Kings Mountain, N.C.," is visible on the metal beam above the window in the west wall of classroom #4. All green and bulletin boards in classrooms #4 and #5 have been removed while one framed bulletin board and transom remains in place on the east wall of classroom #6. In the period after the school was used for black education, partition walls were erected on axis with the cast concrete uprights centered between the window banks in classrooms #4 and #6: new doorways were opened in the east walls of these new rooms to provide direct access from the center hall and fitted with hollow-core doors in rudimentary framing.

Near the north end of the center hall, just before the hall continues as an ell to the west, a blind wood door in its original metal surround, opens into a utility room. It has the same finish as the hall and classrooms and an intact plaster ceiling.

Four small rooms of unequal size and varying plan are aligned on the north side of the west, ell extension of the hall. They are, east to west, a staff room with adjoining lavatory, a boys' lavatory, the janitor's room, and a girls' lavatory. The finish of the staff room is like that of the hall and classrooms. The small lavatory, partitioned on its north side, retains its original terrazzo tile floor and oatmeal-colored wainscot but the sink and commode are removed. The window opening is covered with sheet plywood. The finish of the janitor's room repeats that seen earlier and includes its original plaster ceiling. The original porcelain-on-cast-iron utility sink remains in place in an alcove in the east wall. A metal drain is set in the poured concrete floor.

The boys' and girls' lavatories are the most intact, best preserved spaces in Davidson Elementary School and retain their entire finish, fittings, and original fixtures. Both have a patterned, multi-tone brown and ochre ceramic tile floor and a six-foot tall oatmeal-colored square-tile wainscoting with a self base and cap, and painted plaster upper walls and ceilings. In each case the hall doorway opens into a shallow (once tile-floored) vestibule, for privacy, that in turn has a door opening into the lavatory. The doors in these four doorways have been removed except for the one opening from the vestibule into the girls' lavatory. The boys' lavatory has two symmetrically-mounted porcelain-on-cast-iron wall-hung sinks on its east wall and two floor-mounted ceramic urinals and a commode aligned on the west wall. "Royal Sloan USA" appears in the chrome metalwork of the urinals' flush mounts. The commode is similarly labeled "Royal Sloan Valve Co Chicago." The rudimentary wood privacy enclosure for the commode is not original. The girls' lavatory has two symmetrically mounted porcelain-on-cast-iron wall-hung sinks on its west wall and two commodes in rudimentary, early if not original, painted wood enclosures on its east wall. The commodes are labeled "Crown Sloan Valve Co" and "Royal Sloan Valve Co USA."

Mobile Unit
ca. 1990-1994
Noncontributing building

The precise history and use of this rectangular, one-level mobile unit remain to be confirmed, however, it was located here and placed in use during the last years the school building housed the Kings Mountain school district administrative offices. Surviving evidence indicates it housed counseling offices during the period (1995-2009) the 1954 building housed the Parker Street/Davidson Alternative School. The prefabricated building stands on stacks of unmortared concrete blocks at the east edge of the east parking lot. The exterior is clad in vertical metal sheathing and a low metal gable-end roof. A door at the south end of the west side is served by unpainted wood steps that rise to an open stoop. A second door in the north gable end opens onto another unpainted wood stoop and a deteriorated handicap ramp. Three small metal windows are asymmetrically positioned on the east, rear elevation. A heating/air conditioning unit is affixed to the south gable end. The interior is partitioned into three spaces of unequal size, finished with inexpensive, inferior materials, and now used for both storage and the office of the Davidson School Alumni Association.

## 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.)

- [x] 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:

- [ ] 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.
- [x] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Ethnic Heritage/Black

### Period of Significance

1954-1968

### Significant Dates

1954

1968

### Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

African American

### Architect/Builder

Beam, James Lorn Jr., Architect

McCall, Frank Dewey, Builder

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Summary

Davidson Elementary School, a small well-preserved, one-story, six-classroom 1950s-era Modern Movement building on residual grounds of about four acres, occupies a singular place in the history of Kings Mountain. Designed by James Lorn Beam Jr., a Cherryville, North Carolina, architect in 1953, constructed in 1953-1954 by Frank Dewey McCall and company of Drexel, North Carolina, and placed in service on 29 November 1954, the school holds local significance in the areas of education and black ethnic heritage. The period of significance begins in 1954, when the school was completed, and continues to 1968, when the building ceased to be used as a black school and for graded public instruction. This extension of the period of significance beyond the fifty-year rule, for the two year period prior to its closure as a segregated school, is justified by the exceptional significance of the Davidson Elementary School under Criterion Consideration G, which also satisfies National Register Criterion A.

Davidson Elementary School's significance in the areas of education and black ethnic heritage is represented in its history as the last-built of three buildings known to have been constructed in the twentieth century for black public education in Kings Mountain and the only one of the three to survive. Following on the pioneering local efforts of black churches and their ministers to provide rudimentary schooling for black children in the community, a small one-story, weatherboarded frame building was erected as a black public school on West Ridge Street in about 1900-1910. It was replaced in 1925-1926 by a "five-teacher type" school supported by the Rosenwald Fund and erected on a two-acre lot in the southeast corner of North Watterson and West Parker streets. In the late 1940s, that building, named for its long-time principal, the Rev. Robert James Davidson, enlarged by classroom and toilet room additions, and known in its time as Davidson High School, was acknowledged as inadequate. After delays, this building was erected on a nearby site as an auxiliary facility for primary and elementary instruction with the high school grades remaining in the older building. As the processes of consolidation and desegregation advanced in the 1960s, the high school grades were merged in 1961 with those at Compact High School, a rural black school. Black primary and elementary students in Kings Mountain received instruction in this building and the older building from 1961-1962 through the 1966-1967 school year, by freedom of choice beginning with the 1965-1966 school year, and in this building alone for a single final school year, 1967-1968. With the demolition of the Rosenwald-era building in 1967, Davidson Elementary School became the only historically, exclusively black public school in Kings Mountain. Full desegregation came with the opening of the 1969-1970 school year, when all black students in Kings Mountain attended formerly all-white public schools. Davidson Elementary School housed special education classes in 1968-1969, served as administrative offices from 1969 to 1994, and last housed a Cleveland County alternative school.

Historical Background

Educational opportunities for black children of Kings Mountain in the post-Civil War period, like those in other North Carolina towns, came into existence largely through initiatives in the local black community. Later, the cause was supported through white philanthropy, particularly that of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. In Kings Mountain, black students received their first known, organized instruction in about 1888, fourteen years after the

town received its charter in 1874 and a dozen years after Captain William T. R. Bell (1843-1917) began conducting his school for white boarding and day students in a two-story weatherboard frame building in the 100 block of East Ridge Street. According to tradition within the black community, the Rev. A. L. Martin, then pastor of Bynum Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church, initially held classes in a "brush arbor" located behind and east of his congregation's small frame church building on South Cherokee Street. A small, simple frame building is said to have been built later on the church grounds for use as a school. Whether classes were ever held in the first church or the second one, rebuilt in 1899 after a fire, is not known. The term of this school's existence also remains to be confirmed. The congregation acquired property on North Cansler Street in 1947 for a new church, however, it was not until 1954 that the congregation moved into a newly completed church at 213 North Cansler Street, which remains its place of worship to the present. The South Cherokee Street church building and its lot, located in the 400 block of the street, were sold and today, greatly remodeled and enlarged, it houses the congregation of Cherokee Street Baptist Church. The adjoining cemetery on the south side of its former church remains in the ownership of Bynum Chapel Church. Probably containing unmarked graves from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as well as twentieth-century interments with inscribed gravestones, it is the oldest black landmark in the City of Kings Mountain.[1]

The Bynum Chapel Church school was not the first black school in the larger area surrounding Kings Mountain in eastern Cleveland County and western Gaston County, but one of three. Compact School, named for the agreement made by its twelve founders to provide financial and in-kind support for its operation, opened in about 1872 in rural Cleveland County, about three miles south of Kings Mountain. The history of this sizable, enterprising black community, whose leaders came together to organize a school within a few years of emancipation, remains to be fully understood. Compact School gained funding from the Rosenwald Fund in 1924-1925 for a new school building, and was eventually organized as its own school district. In 1961 it and others became a part of the Kings Mountain School Administrative Unit that comprised all public schools in Cleveland County's Number Four Township.

Lincoln Academy, opened in 1888 as a school for black females, was the second of two schools established by Miss Emily C. Prudden (1832-1917) at All Healing Springs, at the foot of Crowder's Mountain in western Gaston County, where she acquired acreage in 1884. Miss Prudden first opened Jones Seminary as a school for white girls: it was later named Linwood College. Lincoln Academy eventually became coeducational and subsequently a part of the Gaston County school system. The extent to which black students in Kings Mountain matriculated at either Compact School or Lincoln Academy remains to be confirmed.[2]

In the early twentieth century, a second black minister, the Rev. George S. Leeper, pastor of Good Hope Presbyterian Church, was associated with the Kings Mountain Colored Graded School, the second known black school in Kings Mountain. A photograph of that one-story weatherboarded frame building located on West Ridge Street in the area of today's Cooke Circle appears in *Tracings: Schools and Schooling, Volume I: Series 1: Black Schools* published in 2009. The extent to which its construction and operation was (likely) funded by the town of Kings Mountain and the local school board is another of the areas of black educational history in the city that awaits its scholar. The minutes of the Kings Mountain School Board for the entire period of its existence through 1925 were destroyed in 1932 in the fire that destroyed the ca. 1910 Central School building. Nevertheless, the long-lost Kings Mountain Colored Graded School on West Ridge Street is acknowledged as the antecedent of the town's Davidson High School, erected in 1925-1926 with support from the Rosenwald Fund, for which this off-site building was constructed in 1953-1954 as an elementary school annex.

The Kings Mountain School Board's decision to seek financial aid from the Rosenwald Fund for a new black school in Kings Mountain was likely influenced by the fund's earlier support for a new building at Compact School. In 1924-1925 the Rosenwald Fund contributed $900 to the construction of a "three-teacher type" one-story frame school building that was erected on a two-acre site at Compact. The total cost of $3,200 included $1,800 from county funds and $500 by "Negroes." A two-acre site was an apparent condition of the grant. Kings Mountain's larger "five-teacher type" brick building was funded with a grant of $1,300 in 1925-1926. Its total cost, including land was $10,500, of which $8,200 was public funding with $500 each from "Negroes" and "Whites."[3] A new site for the school, about one-and-a-half blocks northwest of the existing Kings Mountain Colored Graded School, was selected. On 16 September 1925 the town of Kings Mountain acquired from John Oates and Elvira Foust Plonk a rectangular two-acre lot in the southeast corner of the intersection of North Watterson and West Parker streets in the western part of the city.[4] The lot's frontage was 306 feet on North Watterson Street and 285 feet on West Parker Street.

The new Kings Mountain Colored School was completed and placed in service in about 1926 with Rev. Robert James Davidson, Susie Wilson, and Ina Ellis Brown among its first teachers. It provided instruction for students in grades one through eight. On 19 May 1927, the school board re-elected the three black teachers for the 1927-1928 school year and added Mrs. E. A. Tribble and Geneva Leeper to compete the roster of five teachers. On 11 August 1927, the board discussed the matter of janitorial services at the historically white Central School, replacing the present janitor with "two people, preferably a colored man and his wife." At its next meeting, on 15 September 1927, the board had a different perspective on janitorial services at the newly-completed black school. "It was the Board's opinion that the Principal of the Colored School be instructed to arrange that the cleaning of his school be done by the students."

Whether Robert James Davidson (1889-1982) was the first principal of the Kings Mountain Colored School is unconfirmed but likely. He would serve as principal until 1945, guide the addition of grades nine through eleven/twelve, and oversee a series of additions and improvements to its physical plant. He would also enjoy the distinction of having the colored school named for him by 19 April 1935 when "Davidson High School" appears for the first time in the school board minutes. The addition of the ninth grade is recorded in the school board minutes for 29 September 1932.

> Supt. Grigg reported a crowded condition at the colored school and that the principal, Davidson, was anxious to add the ninth grade. On motion of A. H. Patterson, seconded by L. P. Baker, the board authorized Supt. Grigg with the principal to secure an additional teacher and add the ninth grade, as the State had already allowed funds for the same.
>
> The board agreed to allow $2.00 per week for janitorial services at the colored school.

The school board discussed the first (known) improvements to the colored school plant at its meeting on 13 January 1933.

> Hazel brown [*sic*] and Allen Feaster, colored, presented plans for proposed addition to colored school, which Mr. Mauney, had previously discussed with them.

> These plans provided for four additional rooms, three of which were to be basement rooms. On motion on H. H. Houston, seconded by L. P. Baker, the board voted to begin excavation at colored school with D. C. Mauney in charge.

The board minutes do not record whether the work proceeded at this time or not. The issue of additional classrooms was considered again on 26 July 1934.

> On motion of Mr. P. M. Neisler, Mr. D. L. Stewart having made low bid was awarded contract for completing the two rooms at the colored school. Mr. Stewart's bid being $265.00. The board felt that it might be better to change the number two pine flooring listed in the contract for a good grade of gum flooring. The matter was left to the discretion of the superintendent. If the change was made the cost was not to be more than the difference in material.

The rooms were completed and placed in use. Meanwhile, on 12 July 1933, Superintendent Claude Grigg reported "he had bought ninety desks for the colored school." On 19 April 1935 the Kings Mountain School Board elected principals and teachers for Central, East, West and the high school for white students and those for Davidson High School for the 1935-1936 school year. Mr. Davidson continued as principal with Dwight A. Costner, Ruth Marie Davidson, Mattie Gidney, Eliza T. Tribble, C. E. Fowlkes, Jessie Mae Gidney, Missouri Jackson, and Mattie Belle Ledbetter as his teachers.

The press for additional classrooms for black students continued. The school board minutes for 23 July 1937 record "The plans of Architect C. W. Connelly for two rooms at East School and two rooms at Davidson School were approved; . . ."[5] Whether the rooms were then constructed is unstated. Eight teachers were elected for Davidson High School on 17 May 1939 for the 1939-1940 school. Messrs. Costner and Fowlkes were retained as were Mattie Gidney, Missouri L. Jackson, Mattie Belle Ledbetter, Jessie Gidney Costner, and Mrs. E. A. Tribble. J. W. Lynch was an addition to the faculty. Thereafter and through World War II there is little mention of Davidson School. During this period, the style of identification in the minutes changed from the "Kings Mountain School Board" to the "Kings Mountain Board of Education."

Change came to Davidson High School in 1945. After having served as principal of the school since (at least) 1926, the Rev. Robert James Davidson, effectively resigned in a letter in which he asked not to be considered for the position for the coming year.[6] The letter was read to the school board on 11 June 1945, at which meeting Bahnson Neil Barnes (1903-1996), who had succeeded Mr. Grigg as superintendent of the Kings Mountain schools, "pointed out that Davidson School had been given a very poor sanitary rating because of inadequate toilet facilities, and that there was a great need for improvement in the cafeteria facilities in all the schools." The Central School lunch room recently had received an A rating by the Cleveland County Health Department, those at East and West schools were rated B and C, respectively, while Davidson School received a D rating.

Important developments at Davidson School also figured in the board's next meeting on 19 July 1945. The applications of three men for the principalship were reviewed and a committee comprising Dr. Luther Philip Baker, board chairman, and Superintendent Barnes were empowered to hire one of the three. By the next board meeting John Albert Gibson (1905-1984), a native of Salisbury but then a resident of Taylorsville, Alexander County, North Carolina, was selected, offered the position, and accepted it. The final matter of business at the July meeting concerned facilities at the school.

> Mr. V. W. Breeze, Architect of Shelby, submitted plans for the building of new toilet rooms at Davidson School. Upon motion of B. S. Neill and A. H. Patterson, the plans were approved subject to minor alterations, and Superintendent Barnes authorized to work with Mr. Breeze in the making of these alterations and improvements. The Board requested that the work be rushed as much as possible.

While the new lavatories at Davidson High School answered a critical, immediate need, they were but one part of the larger concerns regarding the quality of black education in Kings Mountain and the inadequate, deteriorating condition of its physical plant built twenty years earlier for a smaller student population.

The construction of Davidson Elementary School in 1953-1954 was the culmination of a series of sustained discussions, decisions, and actions undertaken by the Kings Mountain Board of Education for both its white and black students beginning in 1946. These were launched on 12 July 1946 when the board acknowledged the inadequacy of its buildings "to put into effect the constitutional requirements for the operation of the constitutional six months' school term." It identified the need for a new school building in central Kings Mountain and the necessity of remodeling and enlarging the four existing buildings housing Central School, East and West elementary schools, and the Davidson High School. At the board's invitation, architects Victor W. Breeze and Claude L. Vaughn Jr. of Shelby, were present to discuss the challenges, both fiscal and physical, facing the board. Available funding sources were rightly seen as inadequate for the needs, and the relatively small acreages on which the school buildings were then located allowed for little or no expansion. Time passed and it was not until 20 June 1949 that plans for additions and renovations at West Elementary School were approved, including two new classrooms, a first aid room, a music room, a teachers' room, and office space. The board next discussed "The possibility of consolidating the Davidson High School with the Compact High School" and Superintendent Barnes was requested to arrange a meeting with the Cleveland County Board of Education.

In the event that meeting did not take place until 21 March 1951, and the consolidation of these two black high schools would not occur until 1961. Meanwhile, Mr. Gibson, principal of Davidson, and his roster of teachers in 1949-1950 were re-elected on 15 May 1950 for the 1950-1951 school year. At its meeting on 15 January 1951, the board renewed its discussion of "the Davidson School building program" and requested Mr. Barnes to seek a meeting with the Cleveland County Board of Education and its superintendent on 29 January 1951. It also considered another Davidson High School matter.

> A request was presented from J. A. Gibson, Principal of Davidson High School, for financial help in securing the use of a gymnasium for home basketball games. The request stated that the Cherryville Gymnasium could be rented at $8.00 per night and the Shelby Gymnasium at $12.00 per night. Upon motion of B. S. Neill and A. W. Kincaid, the request was granted and the Superintendent authorized to take care of the expense for either the Shelby or Cherryville gymnasium.

The long-sought meeting with the Cleveland County Board of Education occurred on 21 March 1951 in Kings Mountain.

> Mr. Barnes welcomed the Cleveland County Board and stated the purpose of the meeting. He explained that the Kings Mountain Board was ready to begin alterations and additions to the Davidson Colored School Building but felt that the high school department was so small that an efficient instructional program was difficult. He suggested that since Compact School was also small and near Kings Mountain that a consolidation be seriously considered.
>
> Both Mr. Grigg and Mr. Barnes expressed opinion that the most desirable situation would be to purchase a new site and erect a modern building for all colored children in number 4 township but, due to lack of funds, this solution was impossible. After much discussion Mr. Grigg proposed that it might be possible to consolidate the high school at Compact and send elementary children from Goldmine, Vestibule and other (sic) living in north western number 4 township to the Davidson School.
>
> Upon motion of A. W. Kincaid a decision was made for both boards to think the situation over and meet again on Monday, April 2, at which time the principals of Compact and Davidson Schools and other interested colored people should be invited.

At its next meeting, on 20 April 1951, "The board discussed the reasons for cancelling the scheduled meeting with the Cleveland County Board on April 2. This meeting had been cancelled because of objection to consolidation from patrons of Davidson School." The contracts for Mr. Gibson and the faculty of Davidson, as well as those for the white schools were renewed for 1951-1952.

The situation at Davidson High School began a move to resolution with an on-site visit to the Kings Mountain schools and Compact School on 30 May 1951 by L. A. Enerson and John L. Cameron of the Division of Schoolhouse Planning and Surveys in the State Department of Public Instruction.[7] Their assessment, conveyed by letter and discussed by the board of education on 18 June 1951, was that "Any permanent satisfactory solution to both the white and Negro schools in the southeastern corner of Cleveland County involves both the County unit and the Kings Mountain Unit." To that end they proposed either a merger of the two units or the creation of a single local district comprising "all of the southeastern area of the county." The second stated recommendation was the merger of Davidson and Compact high schools.

> Since the accomplishment of the above would take a considerable time, recommendations for the immediate future are given below:
>
> 1. The total inadequacy of the present buildings at Davidson make it inadvisable to consider major remodeling of these structures, or adding to them. A new unit to include primary classrooms, office, and toilets should be constructed in such a way as to form a nucleus for a future modern plant, entirely replacing the existing structure. Additional acreage should be secured as soon as possible.
>
> 2. Central and East Schools both present crowded conditions. Due to inadequacy of sites, it appears unwise to relieve this congestion by additions to existing plants. A new unit to consist of primary classrooms, office, and lunchroom should be constructed in the northern part of town to take care of parts of the lower grades from both Central and East. As the

> population grows, this school could, in time, be expanded to provide a complete elementary school unit.

The Kings Mountain Board of Education met in special session at Davidson School the following day, 19 June.

> After making an inspection of all facilities at the Davidson School, the board agreed that the recommendations made by Mr. John Cameron and Mr. L. A. Enerson, should be seriously considered. Upon motion of J. R. Davis and P. G. Padgett, the chairman was authorized to appoint a committee to investigate the possibility of securing additional acreage for Davidson School. The chairman appointed Fred W. Plonk, P. G. Padgett and B. N. Barnes to this committee.
>
> Upon motion of J. R. Davis and P. G. Padgett, necessary repairs to the Davidson School were authorized.

After its regular meeting on 16 July 1951, a special meeting of the board of education was held on 19 July at which James Lorn Beam Jr. of Cherryville "was elected architect for the Davidson School Building program." Consideration of a site for the new elementary school and its purchase occupied the board sub-committee for several months with periodic reports at meetings. These delays, in turn, postponed the design of the new school.

Finally, early in 1952 the issue regained momentum with the threat of a loss of accreditation for Davidson High School. Samuel Edward Duncan Jr., identified in the minutes of 18 February 1952 as "State Supervisor of Negro High Schools," had visited the high school on 22 January 1952 and reported inadequacies. A letter from G. H. Ferguson, Director of Negro Education, was read and discussed at a board meeting on 21 April 1952. Mr. Ferguson reiterated the advantages of consolidating the Davidson and Compact high schools and advised that measures be taken immediately to correct deficiencies noted by Mr. Duncan to avoid loss of accreditation with the caveat that equipment and fixtures purchased for use in the present building could be transferred to a new building. He also recommended construction of a new black elementary school.

> I am sure that it would be unwise to spend any more money on the present plant than is absolutely necessary. It would seem wise to take such remaining funds as you may have and start a new elementary plant. Undoubtedly, the limited amount of money will not permit very much construction, but what is done should be modern and of first class type. I certainly hope that within a reasonably short time you may have available funds to build a plant to serve these Negro children such as would meet with your full approval.

The Kings Mountain Board of Education then acted. "Upon motion of J. R. Davis and P. G. Padgett, the board voted unanimously to make necessary repairs to the Davidson School building including installation of new toilet fixtures in place of the old ones and to plan for the erection of a new elementary building." Mr. Gibson and his faculty of seven women teachers were reelected for the 1952-1953 term.

In July or early August 1952, two members of the Kings Mountain Board, Arnold Wesley Kincaid and Fred Wendell Plonk accompanied Superintendent Barnes to Raleigh to meet with an eight-member Survey Panel chaired by John L. Cameron. The panel's report of 6 August 1952, approved by the State Board of Education,

with a specific recommendation for a black elementary school and further study of the white school situation, was read at the board's 18 August 1952 meeting.

1. That the program as presented be approved for Davidson Negro School. This calls for the construction of a six-room elementary building on a new site across the street which runs beside the present Davidson School. The new site should be from 12 to 20 acres, and the building so designed that eventually the entire school can be built on this site.
2. That, due to the multitude of needs for the white schools and the gross inadequacy of funds, action be deferred pending:

   (a) a thorough survey

   (b) a study of available sources of revenue to affect a desirable long-range program.

James Lorn Beam Jr., the architect selected to design Davidson Elementary School, met with the Kings Mountain Board of Education on 15 December 1952 at which Superintendent Barnes "presented a typographical (sic) map of the proposed site and building location for the Davidson School." Encouraged by the discussion, Mr. Beam advanced his work on the school's design. A two-sheet set of plans for the "Proposed Davidson Colored School," dated 6 March 1953, show the elementary school in the location where it was built with proposed locations for additional buildings for the high school, a gymtorium, and a cafeteria.[8] Mr. Beam's floor plan provided two classrooms for primary grades, three for elementary level students, lavatories for male and female students, an office, a first-aid room, and mechanical spaces all arranged along a central corridor carrying north from the south front entrance. A perpendicular hall near the back of the building provided access to a secondary entrance on the west elevation. Two covered exterior entrances on the east elevation served the tier of three classrooms on the east side of the center corridor.

The revised plans, dated 4 April 1953, provided a sixth classroom on the west side of the hall, repositioned the lavatories and teachers' room in the rear northwest corner of the building, with a coal storage room and boiler room, accessible from the exterior only, in the pendant northeast corner. The exterior appearance of the school was enhanced by offsetting the east and west classroom blocks and providing a covered entrance on the south façade.

The grounds of the new school building were assembled through seven separate transactions between 11 April 1953 and 20 May 1954.[9] On 18 March 1953, the board of education authorized the first of these, the purchase of two adjoining lots totaling 5.25 acres on the north side of West Parker Street, from Robert B. Byers (1885-1982) and his wife, Ola Bell Byers (1890-1980). This acreage was immediately west of the Byers' Craftsman-style residence at 303 North Watterson Street. They were prominent members of the black community that developed immediately around Davidson School in the 1920s through the 1940s. During this period the Kings Mountain Board of Education was also overseeing significant additions to both East and West schools designed by Mr. Beam and Victor W. Breeze and Associates, respectively.

A third, six-sheet set of plans, dated 31 July 1953, was the one which was advertised for bids. Seven bids for the general construction were received as of 2:00 p.m. on 25 August 1953, reviewed by Mr. Beam and Superintendent Barnes, and presented to the assembled board at 6:00 p.m. The lowest base bid of $55,000

submitted by Frank Dewey McCall of Drexel, Burke County, North Carolina, was accepted by the board. The low bid of $2,395 for electrical work submitted by the L. A. Hoke Electric Company of Kings Mountain was one of two acceptances awarded to Kings Mountain concerns: the second was given to Ben T. Goforth for his $5,065 base bid for plumbing. Taylor O. Johnson's base bid of $7,787 for heating was also accepted. His business was located in Shelby, the Cleveland County seat. The meeting concluded with the passage of a resolution requesting $70,819.35 from the School Plant Construction, Improvement and Repair Fund of the State of North Carolina. The State Board of Education approved the request on 10 September 1953.

In 1954, as the school building was under construction, the town of Kings Mountain was engaged on a second important project for the benefit of the black citizens that held associations with Davidson Elementary School. On 4 February 1954 the *Kings Mountain Herald* had a front-page article announcing the plan of the city parks and recreation department to create two new, separate recreation centers "adequate for future needs of the city." Jack White, secretary of the commission, identified two possible sites for the white residents, the former city water works property and a twenty-four acre parcel held by Burlington Mills on the west side of Cleveland Avenue, but "He declined to reveal location of the Negro site under consideration . . . .Mr. White also said that the board had discussed building and site layout plans with Charles Graves, Atlanta, Ga., architect. 'We are spending public money and we wanted to get an expert in the field to assist with planning.'"

On 18 March 1954 the *Kings Mountain Herald* printed another front-page article with the heading, "Parks, School Boards Buying Williams Tract."

> Kings Mountain's board of school trustees and parks and recreation commission have entered an agreement to purchase some 16 acres of property from Wray A. Williams at a cost of $12,000.
>
> The property adjoins, on the north, the new Negro elementary school site. The recreation commission will use its portion as the site of the Negro swimming pool approved by the voters last fall.
>
> The school board needed additional property to meet state school board acreage requirements for the new plant, construction of which is well underway. An athletic field will be built on the school's portion of the new property.

The Kings Mountain Board of Education acquired a parcel of unspecified acreage from Wray Alexander Williams (1881-1972) and his wife, Emma Mae Ratterree Williams (1882-1961), adjoining the existing school property on 20 May 1954. By a deed of the same date the Williamses conveyed acreage on the north side of the school property to the City of Kings Mountain for the black park. Apparently questions arose regarding acreage and the boundary between the school and park tracts, and a survey was made in July 1954 by G. Sam Rowe. A second pair of deeds dated 14 February 1955 were executed by the Williamses to the respective entities for tracts comprising 8.1 acres each.[10]

The conveyances made on 20 May 1954 reflected decisions long since made. On 27 May 1954 the *Kings Mountain Herald* carried a front-page article under the heading "Swimming Pools Contracts Are Let." Readers learned that the city had awarded contracts totaling $115,615 to Bennett Construction Company for the two pools. A week later, on 3 June 1954, the newspaper published the "Development Plan of Proposed Community

Center--Davidson School" prepared by The Charles M. Graves Organization, Park and Recreation Engineers. The proposed access road entered the park from the west side of North Watterson Street, north of West Parker Street. A softball field was located on the school property, northeast of the school: a baseball field overlaid by a football field, both sharing one set of bleachers was mostly located on the city park acreage and framed by complementing parking areas. The swimming pool and bathhouse were sited on city park acreage northwest of the school. (The acreage on the west side of the Davidson building apparently remained undeveloped and possibly wooded then, as now.) As newspaper articles and the board of education minutes indicate, the athletic fields were intentionally located for use by both the elementary and high schools and the town's larger black population. The Graves' firm's plan for the whites-only park, Kings Mountain Community Center, had been published by the newspaper on 13 May 1954.

When the 1954-1955 school year began in Kings Mountain on 31 August 1954, the new Davidson Elementary School could not be placed in service. On inspection state officials found the boiler installed by Taylor O. Johnson did not meet the contractual specifications. Black students in grades one through twelve began the year in the old building. John A. Gibson, both principal and a high school teacher, had a staff of seven teachers, with the Misses Mary Lee Pope and Mayola Cameron in the high school, and Miss Mattie Gidney and Mesdames Alva Barnes, Virginia Wiggins, Margaret B. Leach, and Mrs. J.A. Gibson as teachers in grades one through eight. The black enrollment reported in the *Kings Mountain Herald* on 2 September was 170 elementary students and 64 high school students. The white enrollment at Central, East, and West was 1,818 students for a total enrollment of 2,052 students. Davidson Elementary School was placed in service on Monday, 29 November 1954, the same day the four-classroom addition at East School came into use. The Kings Mountain Board of Education met in special session on 7 February 1955, with James Lorn Beam Jr. in attendance, toured both Davidson and East schools after classes were dismissed, and unanimously accepted both buildings. On 17 March 1955 the *Kings Mountain Herald* published a photograph of the new school taken by Hubert Carlisle, a professional photographer, identifying it as the "Davidson Negro Elementary building."

The United States Supreme Court decision in the case of Oliver Brown, et al, v. Board of Education of Topeka, et al, announced on Monday, 17 May 1954, was reported under the caption, "Reaction Quiet on Segregation Rule by Court," on the inside pages of the *Kings Mountain Herald* on 20 May 1954. "While the topic was discussed in almost every home and on the streets, majority of comments indicated a 'wait-and-see' attitude." Superintendent Barnes was reported to have said "city school officials would 'cross the bridge when we come to it.'" The decision declaring segregation and the concept of separate-but-equal unconstitutional did not have an immediate significant impact in Kings Mountain. Davidson Elementary School operated in conjunction with Davidson High School, which remained in the old building, under a single principalship from November 1954 through the 1960-1961 school year. Mr. Gibson resigned in the summer of 1960, as did Mrs. Gibson, to accept the principalship of a school in Rowland, Robeson County, North Carolina. On 8 August 1960 the Kings Mountain Board of Education voted to hire Connie A. Allison (b. 1919), a Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, native then teaching in Yanceyville, Caswell County, North Carolina, to replace Mr. Gibson as principal of the Davidson elementary and high schools. Mr. Allison would oversee both schools through their final years of existence as black educational institutions and later served as principal of both East and North elementary schools. He retired as principal of North Elementary School in 1984, being the only black educator to serve as principal of an integrated, formerly white school in Kings Mountain in the period to 1984.

The matter of consolidating the Kings Mountain School Administrative Unit of the Cleveland County school system, the little used legal term defining the entity comprising the Kings Mountain schools, the principals, faculty, and other staff, its board of education, and Superintendent Barnes, with the smaller adjoining administrative units that operated the Bethware, Grover, Park Grace, Compact and Washington schools, proposed in 1951, advanced through the 1950s. It was put to a public vote on 14 May 1960. The chief advantage was a more effective provision of the best, uniform educational opportunities for all students, black and white. After due advertisement of the boundaries of the proposed district, including all of Number Four Township and a small part of Number Five, publication in the *Kings Mountain Herald*, and discussion throughout the larger community, the language on the ballot was simple. Citizens in the adjoining districts had the choice of voting for or against "the enlargement of the Kings Mountain City Administrative Unit and school tax of the same rate." The consolidation vote passed with 1,120 votes in favor and 874 votes against consolidation.

The manner of effecting the consolidation of the schools within the new administrative unit occupied discussion for the next year. The chief consideration for black parents and students in Kings Mountain was the proposed consolidation of Davidson and Compact high schools. That prospect raised strong feelings in the Davidson community and a group of black citizens met with the Kings Mountain Board of Education on 6 June 1961.

> A committee from the Davidson School met with the board and discussed the problem of consolidating Davidson High School with Compact High School. This committee expressed a desire for Davidson High School to remain at the present location. The board informed the committee that no action had been taken but that it was the board's desire to have the two schools consolidated into one high school and temporarily located at the best place for the high school children next school year. Facts were given showing the advantages of locating at the Compact High School Building since the high school there is larger and the building has more high school facilities.

As in the past, the local board turned to the staff of the Division of School Planning in the State Department of Public Instruction. On 12 June 1961 Superintendent Barnes wrote to the division director, Dr. J. L. Pierce, with a studied series of possible plans to effect the overall consolidation. Three options were submitted for consideration regarding the district's black schools. While stated with equanimity, Plan I involved the least disruption to the total black student body.

> Send Davidson High School's 62 pupils to Compact and approximately 20 high school pupils expected from the Washington School. This will give Compact a high school of 8 teachers. Under this arrangement 85 Washington Elementary pupils will be housed in the Davidson Elementary School, giving Davidson Elementary School 8 grades and 8 teachers.[11]

Dr. Pierce concurred in his reply of 27 June 1961.

> Of the plans being considered for the reorganization of the Davidson and Compact High Schools, it is our opinion that "Plan I" as outlined in your letter of June 12, 1961 is practical and feasible, and educationally desirable. This plan would give the most desirable housing and organization for the children attending the two schools.

> This plan provides for the high school pupils now attending the Davidson School and the high school students living in your district and attending the Washington School in Cleveland County to attend the Compact High School. This organization will give you a high school of eight teachers. Under this plan the elementary children from your district now attending the Washington School would attend the Davidson School.

On 15 August 1961 the Kings Mountain Board of Education adopted a seven-point plan for the "Assignment of Pupils for the Kings Mountain City Administrative School Unit (,) 1961-1962. Points 2. and 4. applied to black students within the board's purview.

> 2. Children in grades 9 through 12 living in the Kings Mountain Administrative Unit who last year attended the Davidson School and the Washington School or have registered to attend the Davidson School, Washington School or the Compact School are assigned to the consolidated High School located at Compact.
>
> 4. Children in grades 1 through 8 in the Kings Mountain City Administrative Unit who attended the Washington School last year or who have registered for the Washington School and the children in these grades living to West and North of the City of Kings Mountain who last year attended Compact School, or have registered to attend the Compact School, are assigned to the Davidson School.

With these assignments Davidson School became strictly an elementary school for black students and it was operated in this capacity through the 1967-1968 school year with Connie A. Allison as principal. Classes were held in both the recently built elementary school and the old high school building. The black elementary school at Compact and the consolidated black Compact High School had Leon L. Adams as their principal. On 21 May 1962 the board elected principals and teachers for the 1962-1963 school year. Davidson Elementary School would have a faculty of ten teachers, Compact Elementary School had thirteen teachers, and Compact High School had six named teachers.

The 1960s were a period of important initiatives effected by the Kings Mountain Board of Education, most notably the construction of a new, large modern high school and related facilities on Phifer Road in suburban southwest Kings Mountain, additions and enhancements to the existing white schools, and sustained efforts to achieve desegregation and full integration following on the passage of Civil Rights Act of 1964. These were completed by the opening of the 1969-1970 school year with pupil orientation day on 22 August 1969. During this period both Davidson and Compact schools, important black educational institutions, ceased to be used for general graded public instruction.

The assignment of additional black elementary students to Davidson School for the 1961-1962 school year, pressed the capacities of the 1954 building and the older high school building. At the school board meeting on 17 September 1962 "A delegation from the Davidson School Parent-Teacher Association requested information concerning the possibility of enlarging the new Davidson Elementary School building to make possible eliminating the use of the old Davidson School building. The Board expressed interest but stated a definite date could not be promised when this could be done." Unsatisfied with the response, William Orr, an important,

recognized spokesman for black educational interests, sought the support of the State Department of Public Instruction early in the winter of 1962-1963 but to little avail. On 22 July 1963 the school board met with "a delegation of Davidson School patrons at the Davidson School."

> After making an inspection tour of both buildings, there was a discussion concerning building plans for the school. Patrons present were anxious to have definite commitments from the Board; however, Board members and Superintendent Barnes explained the difficulty of giving definite building plans at the present time. It was pointed out that the Board would not be in a position to made definite commitments before letting contract for the new Kings Mountain High School building. The delegation was assured that the Board would give careful consideration to the needs of the Davidson School and make definite plans as soon as possible.

On 30 May 1964, the Kings Mountain Board of Education authorized contracts to the low bidders for the new high school designed by Architects Associated (Thomas W. Cothran and Frederick W. Van Wageningen) of Shelby. The general contract for the school building was awarded to R. H. Pinnix, Incorporated, at their base bid of $955,107. Five months later James L. Beam Jr. accepted the board's invitation to a special session conference on 28 September to discuss possible additions to Davidson School. He reviewed with the board the general plan he had prepared in 1953 that provided for additions and the three-sheet set of plans he prepared in September 1958 for a gymtorium and related facilities at Davidson that was never built. Although he expressed interest in the work, the school board deferred any design work until 3 November 1964, when a state school building bond issue would be decided. In the event the discussion came to nothing, largely because the board of education was faced with addressing the complex local issues necessary for compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was designed to integrate the nation's public schools.

The Kings Mountain Board of Education adopted a plan for compliance with the law at its meeting on 21 April 1965 that would implement a freedom of choice operation for the 1965-1966 school year. At that date Kings Mountain had 384 black students in grades one through eight with fourteen black staff in classrooms in both the 1954 building and the older high school. Compact School had a total of 652 black students in grades one through twelve with twenty-five black staff. Black students comprised 1,036 of the system's total student population of 4,591. The decision was reported in the *Kings Mountain Herald* on 22 April 1965 in a front-page article under the full-width headline, "School Body Adopts New Pupil Assignment Plan." Forms to be used to indicate the first and second choices of school assignment were distributed in the schools and available from the schools' and superintendent's offices.

On 20 May 1965 the *Kings Mountain Herald* carried a front-page article on this first exercise of freedom of choice in the city under the heading, "189 Negro Students Prefer Former All-White Schools."

> Members of the board of education examined, without action, requests of 189 Negro pupils of the Kings Mountain school district to attend previously all-white schools in the term starting next September.
>
> Superintendent B. N. Barnes termed in (sic) initial report incomplete, as some principals had not completed their reports by the time the board met Monday, that day having been the final day for legally filing school assignment requests.

> Supt. Barnes said he anticipated the board of education would convene next week to begin work on the chore of assignment of the more than 4000 pupils in the Kings Mountain system. The initial examination of school assignment first choices indicated that 71 colored children wish to attend Kings Mountain high school.
>
> Fifty-one (50 from Davidson, one from Compact) prefer to attend West school, 18 from (sic) from Compact would prefer Grover, ten from Davidson would prefer North, two from Davidson want to go to East, and 37 (24 from Davidson, 13 from Compact) want to attend Central – now envisioned by the board of education as a plant to house only seventh and eighth grades during the coming school year.

The first-choice requests by the parents of fifty Davidson students to attend West Elementary School reflected both their desire for a better education for their children and to have them remain in a neighborhood school. West School was located just two blocks south of the Davidson grounds in the northwest corner of South Watterson and West Mountain streets.

On 18 July 1966, the Kings Mountain Board of Education made a major commitment to desegregation with the adoption of a motion to transfer black high school students in grades nine through twelve at Compact School to Kings Mountain High School for the 1966-1967 school year. Other changes came in 1967 with reduced enrollment at Davidson School and actions taken by the board on 17 July 1967. "The Board discussed the old Davidson building. Upon motion of B. H. Harry, seconded by Mrs. Lena W. McGill, the Board voted to discontinue use of this building by moving the library, office, and one class to the new building where there is sufficient space, and to prepare food at the Kings Mountain High School Cafeteria and transport it to Davidson School."

Later in the meeting the board authorized Superintendent Donald D. Jones, who had succeeded Mr. Barnes on his resignation in 1967, to use his judgment in the matter of "Demolishing old frame building at Compact and old Davidson building." Whether the "old frame building at Compact" was its Rosenwald-funded school building is unconfirmed. Two months later, on 18 September, "Superintendent Jones reported the progress of demolishion of old Davidson and Compact buildings," After advertisement in the *Kings Mountain Herald*, the vacant lot that had been the site of Davidson High School was offered at public auction on 18 May 1968. Agents for Mount Zion Baptist Church submitted the high bid of $8,300, which was accepted. The property was conveyed to John Ross, Sullivan Kibler, and William Morgan, church trustees, on 27 June 1968.[12] The congregation then erected the present brick-veneer church on the two-acre lot.

On 28 February 1968 the Kings Mountain Board of Education adopted a plan for the "Immediate and Long-Range Use of School Facilities" effective with almost complete desegregation on the opening of the 1968-1969 school year. Seven of the ten schools overseen by the board were scheduled for use by students in grades one through six: Bethware, Compact, East, Grover, North, Park Grace, and West schools. All students in grades seven and eight were to attend Central School on East Ridge Street. Students in grades nine through twelve would attend classes at the recently-completed Kings Mountain High School. Davidson Elementary School was the lone, then-operating school destined for a different but important use, vocational rehabilitation.

> Davidson (Immediate and Long-Range – Vocational Rehabilitation)
>
> We are applying for funds under E.S.E.A. Title VI for the establishment of a vocational rehabilitation program for our mentally handicapped students. These facilities would be used to give these students some training that should help them obtain desirable employment, and to make necessary social adjustment. It is our desire to begin this program with the 1968-69 school year.

On 7 March 1968, the *Kings Mountain Herald* published a front-page article on developments concerning area schools under the heading "Davidson Likely Plant For Retarded."

Davidson Elementary School was a casualty of its location for conventional classroom use, situated two blocks north of the larger, better equipped, traditionally white West School. Nevertheless, the parents of sixty-six black students stated their preference for Davidson when exercising freedom of choice for the 1968-1969 year. At its meeting on 15 April 1968 the board of education adopted a motion to the effect that "all requests for school assignment for 1968-69 made within the thirty-day choice period were granted with the exception of those to Davidson School."

By the summer of 1968, grades seven through twelve in the Kings Mountain school system were totally desegregated, and 744 of the system's 933 black students were enrolled in formerly all- white schools. The single remaining obstacle to full desegregation was the continued, dual operation of Park Grace and Compact schools, traditionally white and traditionally black schools, respectively, in southern Kings Mountain. While the classrooms that had historically been used for grades seven through twelve at Compact School were theoretically available for use, the Kings Mountain Board of Education, like many such bodies throughout North Carolina, did not attempt to send any significant number of white students to a formerly black school. Another factor, the social and cultural background of the schools, was operative in this matter as well. Park Grace School, on Parkgrace Road (SR 2298), had been erected to serve the white student population resident in the nearby mill villages of the Neislers' Margrace Mills and the Park textile mill on South Battleground Avenue (NC 216) and white children in the adjoining rural area. Compact School's students were historically rural in background: however, some few of their parents might also have worked as janitors and in other low-level positions at the mills.

The dual nature of the two schools was noted by officials in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, who raised concerns on the point of compliance. Members of the Kings Mountain Board of Education traveled to Charlottesville, Virginia, for a meeting with department officials on 1 August 1968. One possible resolution, to house three grades in each of the two schools, one through three and four through six, respectively, was seen as administratively impossible to effect by the opening of the 1968-1969 school year. The resolution reached at the Charlottesville meeting was stated in a formal letter from Dr. Eloise Severinson, director of Region III Office of Civil Rights dated 7 August 1968, which was entered in the minutes of the 1 August meeting.

> In order for your administrative unit to be in compliance with the Civil Rights Act for the 1968-69 school year, it is necessary that you take the following additional steps to accomplish substantial progress in the elimination of the dual school structure for the 1968-69 school year, and to effect the complete elimination of racially identifiable schools by September 1969:

1. Desegregate the faculties of Compact School and Park Grace School by the assignment of at least three full-time classroom teachers of the opposite race in each school; these teachers may be assigned during the 1968-69 school year or, preferably, at its opening.

2. By December 1, 1968, submit to this office a plan, officially approved by the Board, showing in detail how your administrative unit will completely eliminate all vestiges of the dual school structure, so that there will be no remaining racially identifiable school, by September, 1969.

By letter of 26 November 1968 to Dr. Eloise Severinson, Superintendent Jones outlined his board's plan to effect complete desegregation with the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year. Dr. Severinson accepted the plan and wrote a formal letter of approval on 27 December 1968.

> Your November 26 letter stated that beginning with the 1969-70 school year your administrative unit will be completely desegregated.
>
> We understand that all students in grades 7 and 8 will attend Central School, that all students in grades 9 – 12 will attend the Kings Mountain School, and that all elementary school students (grades 1 – 6) will attend 5 geographically zoned and racially desegregated elementary schools.
>
> It appears that the implementation of this plan will accomplish the purposes of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and allow your administrative unit to maintain its present compliance status.
>
> We commend you and your board for exercising the leadership necessary to expedite the creation of a single nonracial unitary school system.

The "5 geographically zoned and racially desegregated elementary schools" for grades one through six were Bethware, East, Grover, North, and West schools. Park Grace and Compact schools were closed, and the buildings and grounds of both would later be sold and used for non-educational purposes.[13]

Beginning in fall 1968, classes for both mentally and physically handicapped students, including those with Down's syndrome, were held in Davidson Elementary School which was identified as the "Special Education Center." Connie A. Allison served as its principal through its brief operation in this building. In 1969, the former black elementary school was simply adapted and furnished to house administrative offices of the Kings Mountain District Schools. This use continued for twenty-five years. During this period, on 4 January 1973, the larger northwest part of the Davidson Elementary School grounds, comprising a tract of 10.80 acres, was conveyed by the Kings Mountain School Administrative Unit to the City of Kings Mountain.[14] In fall 1994, the district offices were relocated to the Central School building which had been withdrawn from instructional use. On 3 January 1995, the former Davidson Elementary School was placed in service as the Parker Street Alternative School, a special educational facility for students in the Cleveland County school system who exhibited behavioral problems that excepted them from normal classroom instruction. The name was later changed to Davidson Alternative School under which the school operated here until 2009, when it was

relocated. In 2012, Davidson Elementary School was treated for asbestos abatement and the tile flooring, suspended ceilings and other affected parts of the finish were removed, along with some secondary partitions and adaptations made for its later usages.

With the demolition of the original Davidson High School building in 1967, the end of black classroom instruction at Davidson Elementary School in 1968, the end of black instruction at Compact School in 1969, and the full implementation of desegregation in Kings Mountain schools in fall 1969, the long held affection and regard for Davidson School as an important institution in the black community came to fruition with the organization of a Davidson School Reunion held in July 1979. That event, in turn, gave rise to the organization of the Davidson School Alumni Association, an effort spearheaded by Marie Perry Burris (b. 1929), Hazelene Burris Abernathy (b. 1932); and Karlee Jenkins Jr. (1938-2012) who, respectively, graduated from Davidson High School in 1949, 1950, and 1956. On 21 July 1985, the association erected a marker on the Mount Zion Baptist Church grounds commemorating the former site of the Davidson High School.

After its closing as the Davidson Alternative school in 2009, discussion arose in the alumni association and the community about the future of the building. In the winter of 2011, articles of incorporation for the Davidson Alumni Resource Center, Incorporated, were prepared and submitted to the North Carolina Secretary of State. They were approved on 5 April 2011. The center, to be located in the former elementary school, is proposed to house a series of coordinated educational support and job-training programs, recreational, social, and cultural activities, and related initiatives to serve children and youth in the black community. On 24 September 2013, the Davidson Alumni Resource Center, Incorporated, received its Federal tax exemption as a section 501 (c) (3) organization.[15] In 2014 Davidson Elementary School was placed under long-term lease to the Davidson Alumni Resource Center, Incorporated.

Education and Ethnic Heritage/Black Significance

The local significance of the Davidson Elementary School in the areas of education and the ethnic heritage of blacks in Kings Mountain is intertwined in the design, construction and use of the building in the period between 1953 and 1968, and its survival to the present. Erected in 1953-1954, and following the State Board of Education instruction that it "should be modern and of first class type," Davidson Elementary School represents a significant local departure from the heretofore traditional school design, most often with Colonial Revival or classical styling. It stands as the first in a series of school buildings in Kings Mountain, in a modern movement mode, including North Elementary School and Kings Mountain High School, that has since characterized school construction in the city, region, and much of the state. Within Kings Mountain and being a new free-standing building distinct from contemporary additions to existing facilities, the black elementary school also represents the first important step made by the Kings Mountain Board of Education to address the pressing educational needs of the town in the post-World War II period, when response to population increases, obvious need, and inadequate funding was further complicated by the administrative challenges of a small school district grappling to provide state-mandated educational opportunities in a dual, segregated system. As the last built and only surviving black school building in the city of Kings Mountain, the Davidson Elementary School has come also to embody the strong cultural attachments of students and graduates of its older namesake that was pulled down in 1967, as well as those students whose primary and elementary education occurred in its classrooms. It is a landmark in the black community and a focus of increasing regard of the white citizenry of Kings Mountain.

James Lorn Beam Jr. (1918-2010), the designer of Davidson Elementary School, was a member of the regional architectural fraternity that provided designs for school buildings and related facilities in Kings Mountain in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Their number includes George Nicholson Rhodes (1902-1935), a Charlotte architect, who designed the present Central School building in 1932-1933, Charles Wearn Connelly (1905-1967), also Charlotte-based, who designed classroom additions to East Elementary School and Davidson High School in 1937, and Victor W. Breeze (1889-1961) of Shelby who designed "new toilet rooms at Davidson School" in the summer of 1945 and significant additions and improvements to West Elementary School in late 1951. In July 1953, Mr. Breeze was employed to prepare plans for "a cafeteria and modernize the toilet facilities at the West School" and Mr. Beam was engaged "to draw plans for construction of a cafeteria and modernization of toilets and lighting facilities at the East School." In November 1954, the Kings Mountain Board of Education employed Frederick W. Van Wageningen and Thomas W. Cothran to design North Elementary School, the city's third white freestanding elementary school. In fall 1961, the lucrative commission to design a new high school for Kings Mountain was sought by Mr. Beam, Mr. Breeze's firm in Shelby, and other architects in Shelby, Gastonia, Hickory, Asheboro, and Charlotte, however, Messrs. Van Wageningen and Cothran, practicing as Architects Associated, received the design contract.

The place of Davidson Elementary School in James Lorn Beam Jr.'s professional career is yet to be established, however, he specialized in school design, church, and institutional architecture in a career that extended into the 1990s. He was the son of James Lorn Beam (1888-1956) and Ola Carpenter Beam (1895-1976). Mr. Beam Sr. was a contractor who joined with L. S. Costner in the construction in 1933 of Kings Mountain's Central School. A native of Cherryville, Gaston County, North Carolina, Mr. Beam Jr. received a degree in architectural engineering from today's North Carolina State University in 1942, attended classes as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1942-1943, and worked in the Charlotte offices of Charles Wearn Connelly and J. Norman Pease in 1946-1947 before opening his own professional office in Cherryville in 1947. In about 1962, Mr. Beam relocated his professional offices to rooms in the Lawyers Building in Gastonia where he remained until about 1980. Thereafter, and up to his retirement in about 1988, his office was at other addresses in Gastonia. One of his first commissions was for Ebinport Elementary School in York County, South Carolina, of 1948. After designing Davidson Elementary School, he produced plans for numerous schools and school additions in Cherryville, Gaston County, and adjoining counties, including Cherryville Junior High School (1966), Belmont High School (1967), and East Lincoln High School (1968), and buildings at Gaston College. Cherryville, a small town that once enjoyed the prosperity of an important local textile industry and a major Southern motor carrier, Carolina Freight, headed by Charles Grier Beam (1906-1992), boasts the largest number of his known buildings.[16]

The position and significance of Davidson Elementary School in the history of education in the City of Kings Mountain is inextricably linked to its role as one of three documented buildings erected in the twentieth century for the education of black students in the city and as the only one of the three buildings to survive. After the pioneering efforts in black education of the Rev. A. L. Martin, pastor of Bynum Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church, in the late nineteenth century, the cause was taken up by the Rev. George S. Leeper, pastor of Good Hope Presbyterian Church, around the turn of the twentieth century. He is associated with the Kings Mountain Colored Graded School, the first known publically supported black school in the city, however, the nature of that association and his role as a black educator is yet to be fully understood. That ca. turn-of-the-twentieth-century school, a one-story, cross-gable roof weatherboarded frame building erected on West Ridge Street, was typical of small school buildings erected in rural North Carolina in the early-twentieth century. Its plain, simple

appearance was in sharp contrast to Central School, a large, imposing Classical Revival-style brick building with a two-story portico erected ca. 1910 for white students in the 100 block of East Ridge Street. East and West elementary schools were complementing white facilities and sent their students to the high school housed in Central School.

Black students of all grades attended classes in the small frame building for some twenty years, until the completion of the Rosenwald Fund-supported "five-teacher-type" school at the corner of North Watterson and Parker streets in 1925-1926. The circumstances of the loss of the Kings Mountain Colored Graded School are not now known. The new brick school, later named Davidson High School in honor of its long-time principal, Robert James Davidson, was an immediate symbol of pride in the local black community. Then and for some years afterward, the church buildings housing the local black A. M. E. Zion, Baptist, and Presbyterian congregations were modest frame buildings. Davidson High School, in turn, was the lone black school building in use in Kings Mountain for some twenty-eight years, until the occupation of the Davidson Elementary School on 29 November 1954 by black students in the primary and lower elementary grades.

The two black school buildings co-existed in Kings Mountain from 1954 into fall 1967. The consolidation of the high school grades of Davidson and Compact high schools at Compact High School in fall 1961, while ultimately beneficial to black high school students in Kings Mountain, was the initial step in the demise of the city's historic Rosenwald school. Its then inadequate and deteriorating condition probably owed in part to the possible destabilizing effects of excavations to provide basement rooms. For a short period, from fall 1961 through the 1966-1967 school year, students in the primary and elementary grades attended classes in both buildings. At the end of the spring 1967 school term, the older building was effectively abandoned and was pulled down by the end of 1967. For one school year, 1967-1968, Davidson Elementary School was the one--and last--building used exclusively for black education in the city of Kings Mountain. Schools within the city of Kings Mountain and the larger boundary of the school administrative district were fully desegregated with the opening of the 1968-1969 school year.

Endnotes

1. The principal source on the history of education and schools in Kings Mountain is the account appearing in *Tracks Through Time: A History of the City of Kings Mountain, 1874-2005*, pp. 12-22. Its author, Dave Baity (b.1938), a native of Kings Mountain and its Margrace Mill Village, had a long career in journalism, beginning at the *Kings Mountain Herald* and spending the last twenty-nine years at the *Charlotte Observer* before retiring in 2004. His account, like those appearing before his, which he utilized for his 2005 book, is not supported by documentation in the form of either footnotes or endnotes. Accounts of Davidson and Compact schools appears with those of other black Cleveland County schools in *Tracings: Schools and Schooling, Volume I: Series 1: Black Schools* compiled by North Carolina Retired School Personnel of Cleveland County and published in 2009. They have some internal notations including those citing the Kings Mountain Board of Education Minutes. In the research for this nomination this author reviewed the Kings Mountain School Board/Board of Education minutes beginning with the earliest surviving, for a meeting on 7 December 1926, through 19 April 1935, scattered minutes in the years from 1943 through 1945 to confirm published accounts, those from 19 June 1950 through 21 March 1955, and the longer period of 6 July 1959 through 15 December 1969 during which desegregation and integration occurred and black students in Kings Mountain were last

educated in the two historically black schools in the city. The dates of board meetings at which critical decisions were made and the minutes are utilized or quoted in the nomination appear in its text. References to articles published in the *Kings Mountain Herald* appearing in the nomination also incorporate the date of the particular issue in the text. This author also drew on his personal knowledge of Kings Mountain history gained during the preparation of six nominations of historic properties and districts in the city in recent years. He also gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Alex Floyd, genealogy librarian at the Catawba County Public Library.

2. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Emily C. Prudden."
3. Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database.
4. Cleveland County Deeds, NNN/624.
5. Charles Wearn Connelly had earlier designed the municipal building erected at 112 South Piedmont Avenue in Kings Mountain with federal assistance and completed in 1937.
6. Robert James Davidson was born in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, on 10 October 1889. He returned to Charlotte and was living there when he died on 19 February 1982.
7. The identification of staff in the State Department of Public Instruction and their respective positions in this nomination repeats that which appears in the Kings Mountain School Board/Board of Education minutes.
8. These plans and others prepared by Mr. Beam for the school are held in the archives of Cleveland County Schools at the Central School building in Kings Mountain.
9. Cleveland County Deeds, 6T/328, 349, 6U/388, 6Z/8, 19, 28, 234. The conveyances were made to the Kings Mountain School Administrative Unit or a close variation to that term.
10. Cleveland County Deeds, 6Z/234, 610-611.
11. The (former) Compact School is located at 150 Dixon School Road, about three miles southeast of central Kings Mountain. Washington School remains in use as a school at 1907 Stony Point Road, about eight miles northwest of central Kings Mountain and about one-and-a-half miles south of Waco.
12. Cleveland County Deeds, 12M/59-60. The first advertisement of the sale found by this author in his research appeared in the 25 April 1968 edition of the *Kings Mountain Herald.*
13. Compact School and its grounds were sold on 24 April 1984 to Jack and Ruby Barrett and adapted for use as a floor covering concern, Cleveland County Deeds, 18M/377-379. It remains in a related use to the present. Park Grace School was sold on 24 March 1993 to Kelly Bunch and James A. Childers, used for non-educational purposes for periods thereafter, and now stands disused in a neglected and deteriorating condition, Cleveland County Deeds, 1126/1113.
14. Cleveland County Deeds, 16R/181-182, Plat Book 14/56.
15. Photocopies of these documents were provided to the author by Charles Andrew Neisler Jr., an attorney in the firm of Cloninger and Neisler.
16. Biographical documentation on the life and career of Mr. Beam was compiled by this author for this nomination from various sources, including a telephone interview with his son, James Lorn Beam III (b. 1952), in July 2015. After his formal retirement, Mr. Beam had a small office on West Main Street in Cherryville, while he continued to undertake small commissions, and last worked in an *ad hoc* office in his son's residence. Unable to draw after a stroke in about 1997-1998, he ended his work. During this period, his architectural drawings, blueprints, and other records of his near half-century practice were stored at his residence. In 2009 James L. Beam Jr. suffered a severe, debilitating stroke and entered a nursing facility where he died on 24 November 2010. In these last years of his life his wife, Lola Mae Stroup Beam (b. 1922), discarded and otherwise destroyed all of the records of her husband's career that

had survived in his possession except for the blueprints/plans for their house at 408 Farris Drive and their son's residence at 912 Vista Drive, both in Cherryville. After the death of James Lorn Beam Sr. on 23 June 1956, his widow and heirs sold Beam Construction Company to one of the firm's employees, Thomas Brown. The company continues in operation today as Beam Construction Company, headquartered at 601 East Main Street, Cherryville, in Brown family ownership.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Allison, Connie A., telephone interview with author, 13 July 2015.

Baity, Dave. *Tracks Through Time: A History of the City of Kings Mountain, 1874-2005.* Charlotte, NC: Jostens Books, 2005.

Beam, James Lorn, Jr., biographical file compiled and held by this author, Vale, NC.

Beam, James Lorn, Jr., Blueprint plans for Davidson Elementary School, Cleveland Schools Archives, Central School, Kings Mountain, NC.

Byers, Beverly Ann, interviews with author, 11 and 13 July 2015.

Cleveland County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, 311 East Marion Street, Shelby, NC.

*Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. Emily C. Prudden.

Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

*Kings Mountain Herald*, "Parks Board May Purchase BurMil Tract," 4 February 1954,
"Architect Graves To Discuss Pools" and
"School Trustees in Busy Session," 11 March 1954,
"Parks, School Boards Buying Williams Tract," 18 March 1954,
"Engineer's Layout For Proposed Recreation Center," 13 May 1954,
"Reaction Quiet On Segregation Rule By Court," 20 May 1954,
"Swimming Pools Contracts Are Let," 27 May 1954,
"Engineer's Sketch Of Negro Recreation Plant Layout And School Grounds," 3 June 1954;
"City Enrollment Total is 2,052; High School 418," 2 September 1954,
"School Board Meets At Central Monday," 16 December 1954,
"New School Buildings," 17 March 1955,
"School Body Adopts New Pupil Assignment Plan," 22 April 1965,

"189 Negro Students Prefer Former All-White Schools," 20 May 1965,
"Davidson Likely Plant For Retarded," 7 March 1968,
"Legals, Notice of Sale of Real Property," 25 April 1968.

*Tracings: Schools and Schooling, Volume I: Series 1: Black Schools*, compiled by North Carolina Retired School Personnel of Cleveland County. Shelby, NC: Westmoreland Printers Incorporated, 2009.

Kings Mountain School Board/Board of Education Minutes, 1926--19 April 1935, 1943-1945, 1950-1955, 1959-1969, Cleveland County Schools Archives, Central School, Kings Mountain, NC.

Ware, Melvin, telephone interview with author, 13 July 2015.

**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 # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

**Primary location of additional data:**

_x_State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: **Office of Archives & History**
**109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC**

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Approx. four acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

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

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | 3 | | | |
| 2 | | | | 4 | | | |

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 35.244608 Longitude: -81.351979

2. Latitude: Longitude:
3. Latitude: Longitude:
4. Latitude: Longitude:

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The property included in this nomination comprises all that part of parcel #9510, outlined in a bold solid line, lying on the north side of West Parker Street as shown on the enclosed print of a Cleveland County Tax Map. It represents about 3.98 acres of the total property of 4.18 acres and excludes the small tract of the parcel, a wooded area of about 0.20 acre fronting on the street, lying on the southwest side of West Parker Street. The map is at a scale of one inch equals 200 feet.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary, outlined in a bold solid line on the above noted map, is drawn to include the site and setting of Davidson Elementary School and represents the entirety of the residual acreage associated with the school property except a small irregular-shaped tract on the southwest side of West Parker Street, long separated from the principal school grounds.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Davyd Foard Hood
organization
date 22 July 2015
street & number Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road
telephone 704/462-1847
city or town Vale
state NC
zip code 28168
e-mail

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Schedule of Photographs

The following applies to all of the photographs included in this nomination.

The following information applies to all of the photographs included in this nomination.

Name of property: Davidson Elementary School

Location: Kings Mountain, Cleveland County, North Carolina

Name of photographer: Davyd Foard Hood

Date of photographs: 24-25 July 2014

Location of original negatives: Division of Archives and History
109 East Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Photographs

Note: In the narrative description of Davidson Elementary School, for ease of description, the convention of using south, east, north, and west to denote the respective southeast (front), northeast, northwest, and southwest elevations was adopted. For consistency that convention is honored in the following descriptions of photographs #1 through #16. Arrows for the interior views (#8 through #16), appearing on the enclosed floor plan, reflect the actual views.

1. Overall view of Davidson Elementary School, looking northwest.
2. Looking west/northwest onto the south (front) elevation of the school.
3. Detail view showing fenestration, cornice treatment, and porches on the school's east elevation, looking north.
4. Overall view of the school, its north and west elevations, and grounds, looking southeast.
5. Detail view showing fenestration, cornice treatment, and walk on the school's west elevation, looking south.
6. View of the southernmost flight of the paired stairways rising from the lower level parking area, here to the front entrance of the school, looking east.
7. View of the entrance drive leading north from West Parker Street into the school grounds and the mobile unit.
8. View looking south in the school's center hall to the double-leaf front entrance, with the door opening into classroom #1 on the left and doors opening into classroom #4 on right.
9. View in classroom #1 looking west/northwest to partition wall with center hall.
10. View in southernmost vestibule serving classrooms #1 and #2, looking west to doors opening into the girls' and boys' toilet rooms, with door opening into classroom #1 and corner, wall-mounted sink visible on left.

11. View into girls' toilet room in southernmost vestibule, looking west.
12. View looking south/southwest in classroom #2, with door opening into vestibule on on left and door opening into closet on right.
13. View in classroom #2, looking east to full-width fenestration in east elevation.
14. View looking southeast, showing fenestration and materials (concrete block, brick, slate, and glass), and south end of radiator in southeast corner of classroom #1.
15. View looking south/southeast in classroom #6.
16. View looking north into boys' lavatory from doorway opening from ell extension of the hall.

**Property Owner:**

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

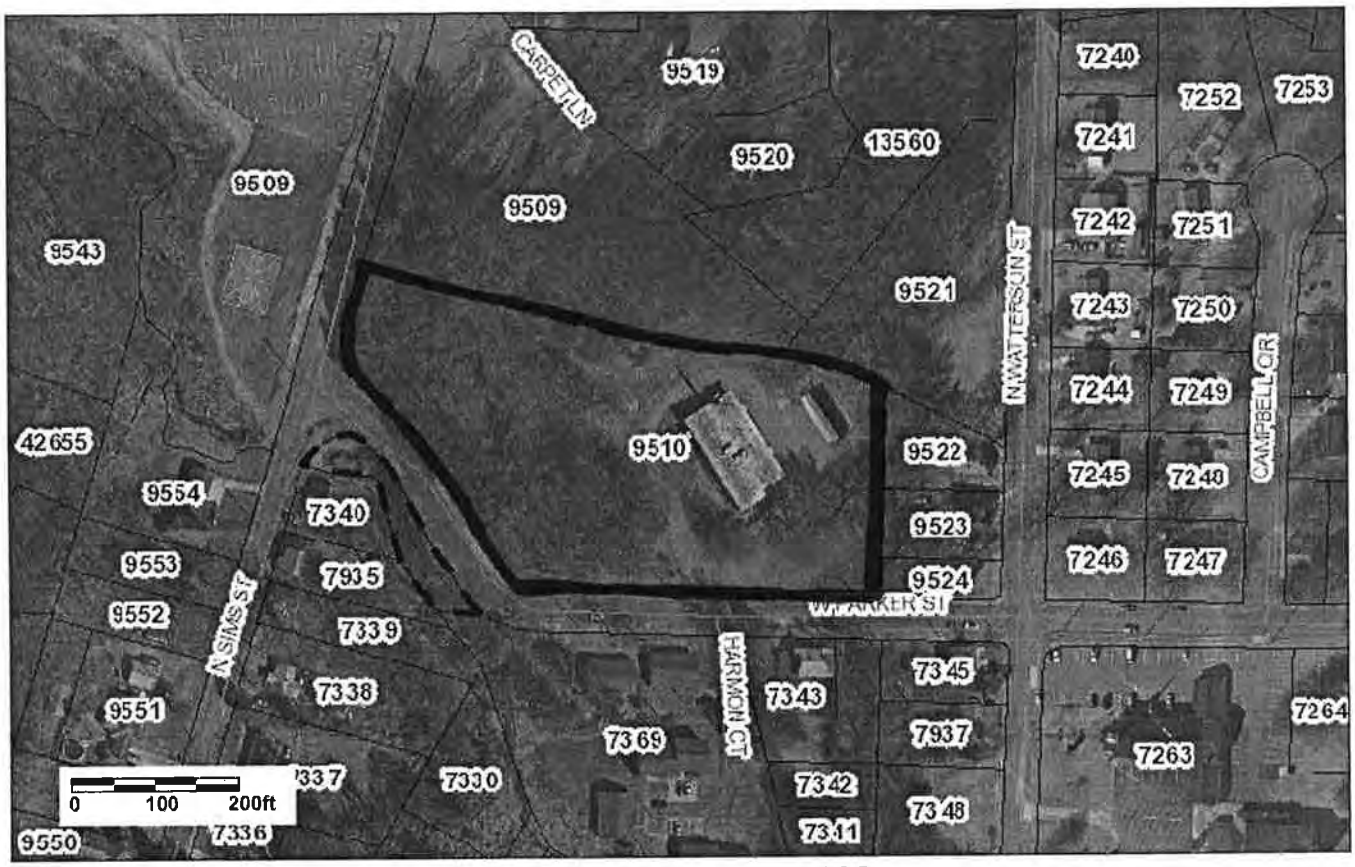
name Cleveland County Schools
Dr. Stephen R. Fisher, Superintendent

street & number 400 West Marion Street telephone 704/476-8055

city or town Shelby state NC zip code 28150

**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.460 et seq.).
**Estimated Burden Statement**: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Davidson Elementary School, 500 West Parker Street, Kings Mountain, North Carolina




## Cleveland County, NC

**Disclaimer:** The information contained on this page is taken from aerial mapping, tax mapping, and public records and is NOT to be construed or used as a survey or 'legal description'. Only a licensed professional land surveyor can legally determine precise locations, elevations, length and direction of a line, and areas.

N

## Parcels

**Parcel Number:** 9510
**GIS Owner:** KINGS MOUNTAIN DISTRICT SCHOOL
**GIS Deed Ref:** 6T 328
**GIS Deeded Acres:** 4.18
**Calculated Acres:** 4.19195561
**Zoning:** R10 Residential
**PIN:** 2595727216
**NeighCode:** 21KM
**Tax_Distri:** 4
**Occ_Code:** 11M
**Use_Code:** F

**Year_Built:** 1950
**Owner:** KINGS MOUNTAIN DISTR
**Owner Address:** 105 E RIDGE ST
**Owner Addr2:** KINGS MOUNTAIN NC 28086-3034
**Parcel Address:** CARPET LN
**Deed Book:** 6T
**Deed Page:** 328
**Map Number:** KM41
**Block:** 1
**Lot:** 2
**Acres:** 4.18

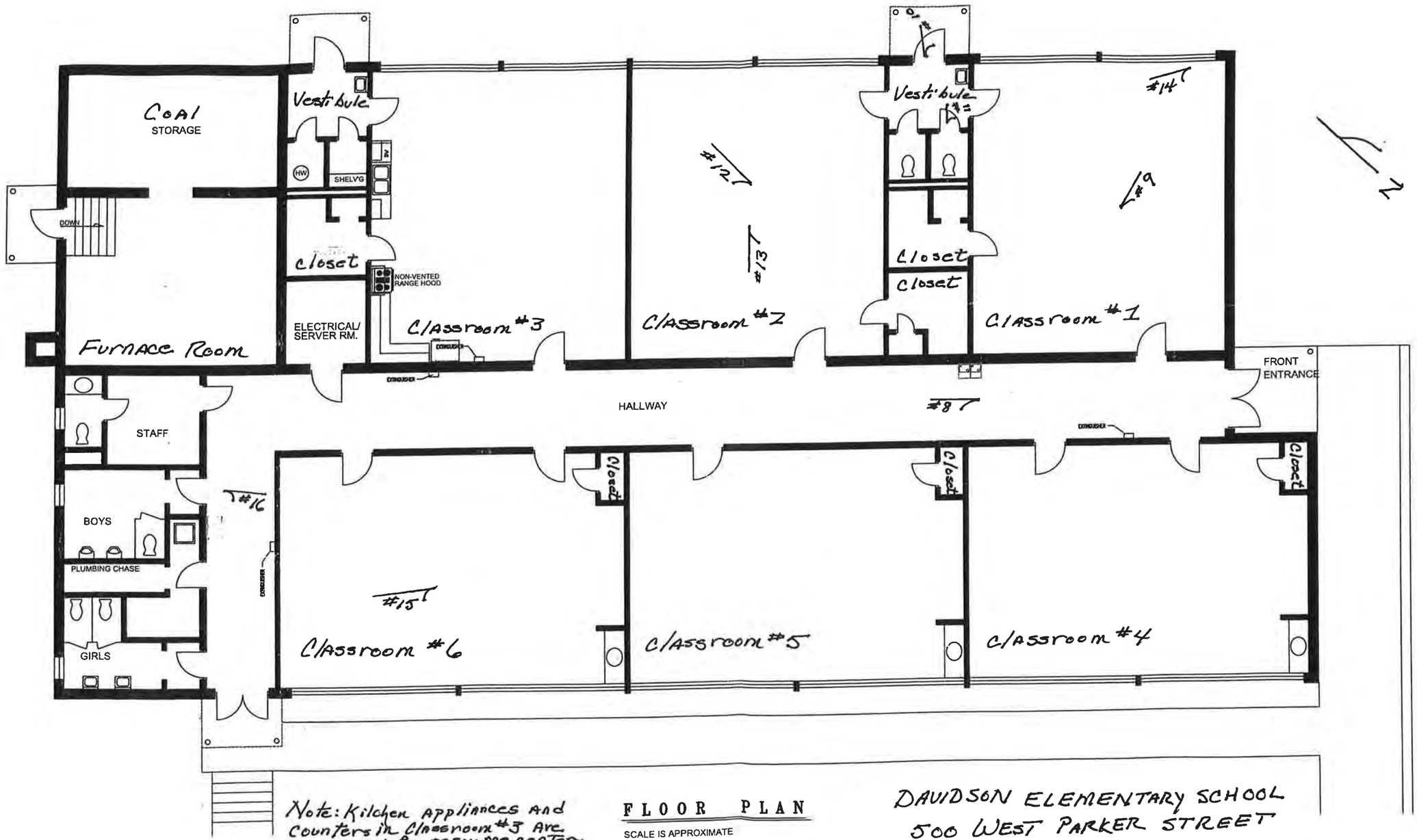
**Land Value:** 60610
**Building Value:** 259253
**Total Value:** 319863
**Tax Year:** 2015
**Street Name:** CARPET
**Type:** LN

Nominated property is outlined in bold.

Latitude: 35.244608 North
Longitude: Negative 81.351979 West

**Attributes at point:** N: 552282, E: 1297674

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Zoning**<br>**Class:** R10 Residential<br>**Municipality:** KINGS MOUNTAIN | **2000 Census Tracts**<br>**Census Tract:** 950400 | **NC House and Senate Districts**<br>**Senate:** 46th Senate<br>**Legist:** 111th House |
| **School Districts**<br>**Elementary:** NORTH ELEMENTARY<br>**Intermediate:** KINGS MTN INTERMEDIATE<br>**Middle:** KINGS MTN MIDDLE SCHOOL<br>**High:** KINGS MTN HIGH SCHOOL | **Flood Zones**<br>**Grid:** 2595<br>**Panel:** 3710259500J | **Voting Precincts**<br>**Precinct:** Kings Mountain North<br>**Voting Site:** Patrick Senior Center |
| **Fire Districts**<br>**District:** Kings Mountain | **Watersheds**<br>**Zone:** NONE | **Jurisdictional Limits**<br>**Name:** KINGS MOUNTAIN |




Note: Kitchen appliances and counters in Classroom #3 are proposed for resource center use; they are not now in place. Sinks in classrooms #4-6 are to be reinstated.

**FLOOR PLAN**

SCALE IS APPROXIMATE

NOTE: SQUARE FOOTAGE IS APPROXIMATELY 8,121

DAVIDSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
500 WEST PARKER STREET
KINGS MOUNTAIN, NC

| REVISION | DESCRIPTION | DATE |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

THIS DRAWING IS TO BE USED FOR CLASSROOM PURPOSES ONLY. THE STUDENT AND/OR INSTRUCTOR ASSUMES ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ITEMS, TECHNIQUES, WORKMANSHIP, CODE REQUIREMENTS, LOCAL OR NATIONAL, AND ALL OTHER ASPECTS OF CONSTRUCTION. THIS DRAWING IS NOT TO BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION.

DESCRIPTION: FLOOR PLAN

PROJECT: DAVIDSON RENOVATION PHASE I

KINGS MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL DRAFTING

DATE: 4/2/2014

SCALE: 3/32"=1'-0"

DRAWN BY: STUDENTS

REVISION:

SHEET # 1 of 2

ONE WAY
NO

DAVIDSON 4-H SCHOOL

DAVIDSON SCHOOL

WOMEN
MEN

MEN