

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
**Office of Archives and History**  
**Department of Natural and Cultural Resources**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Mendenhall, Abigail, Ann, and Elihu, House**

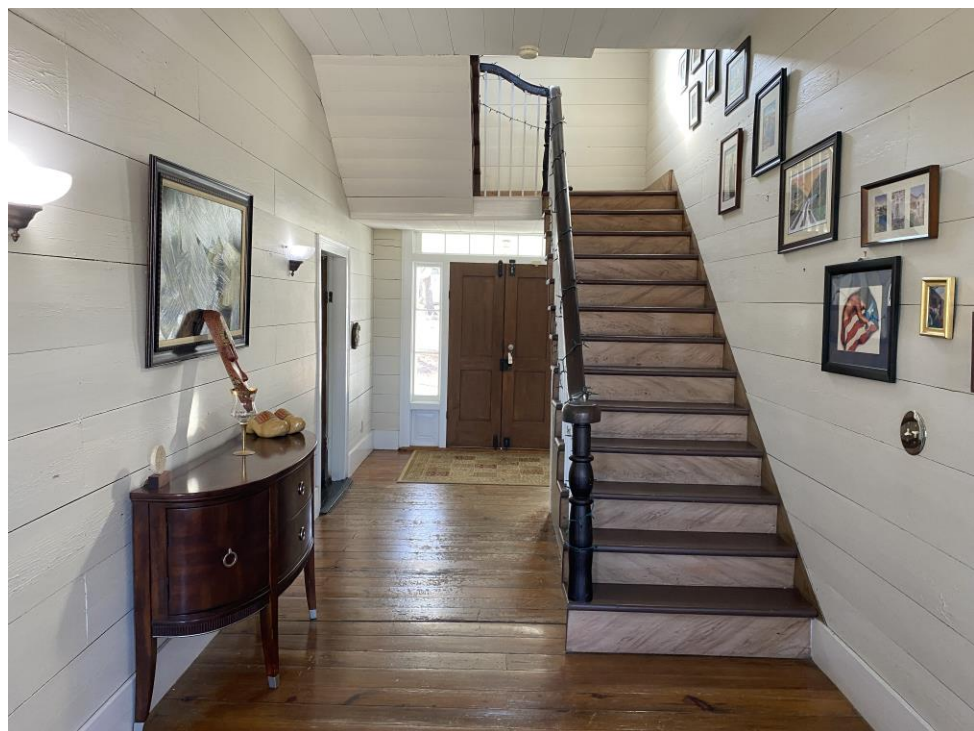
High Point, Forsyth County, GF1544, Listed 11/14/2025

Nomination by Samantha Stewart and Benjamin Briggs, Gate City Preservation L.L.C.

Photographs by Samantha Stewart, February 2022



Front (north) elevation of the Mendenhall House.



Main foyer facing south of the Mendenhall House.

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.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Mendenhall, Abigail, Ann, and Elihu, HouseOther names/site number: Mendenhall-Blair House (GF1544)

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

**2. Location**Street & number: 1106 Skeet Club RoadCity or town: High Point State: North Carolina County: Guilford CountyNot For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

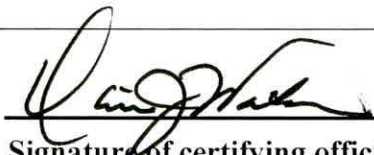
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

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      meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national     X     statewide     X     local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

     A     X     B     X     C      D

Signature of certifying official/Title: State Historic Preservation Officer Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

9/23/20

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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**

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#### 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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

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### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

3

buildings

0

0

sites

0

1

structures

0

0

objects

1

4

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 6. Function or Use

#### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/ SUBSISTENCE

#### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Greek Revival

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD/weatherboard, STUCCO, BRICK, FIBERGLASS

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House, hereinafter called the Mendenhall House, is located on a 6.43-acre residual tract of an earlier, substantial farm established in the late eighteenth century. The property is located in western Guilford County within the historically rural community of Deep River, North Carolina, and maintains a setting representative of the once agrarian district. The primary structure consists of a c. 1850, two-story Greek Revival house with some Romantic Period embellishments and a rear ell dating from the 1810s. Located four miles north of downtown High Point, the house is oriented to the north and fronts Skeet Club Road across its broad, sloping lawn. A gravel drive presently rises across the lawn from the road, passing between the outbuildings and the house before encircling the house and intersecting with itself on the front lawn. Other resources on the property include the foundation of an early spring house, located northwest of the main house, and clustered to the east of the house, a 1952 grain silo, a c. 1920 processing house, and a c. 2000 stable. Although located in a rapidly suburbanizing area of High Point, the farm still retains such rural characteristics as fields, hedges, and groves of sugar maple, locust, and walnut trees. Some specimens of pecan and red maple are quite old and venerable. The front of the house looks north across Skeet Club Road to property that has been divided into six-acre tracts and is protected from further development by strict covenants.

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## Narrative Description

### A. The Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House c. 1850 Contributing Building

#### Exterior

The Mendenhall House is a high-sited and imposing two-story, double-pile house arranged on a center hall plan. Originally a two-room hall-parlor house owned by Elihu's parents James and Miriam Mendenhall, Elihu and his first wife Ann substantially expanded the home sometime between 1848, when the family moved back to Deep River, and 1856, the year Ann died. The c. 1850 date is further substantiated by the Greek Revival with Romantic Period embellishments architectural style of this main block, the presence of circular saw marks as opposed to the pitsaw marks of the earlier rear ell, and the needs of the Mendenhall's growing family at this time.

Influenced by Neoclassical precedents, the symmetrical five-bay house is topped by a tall, side-gabled roof pierced by two slender interior chimney stacks. To the rear of the house is a one-story ell composed of two rooms. One of the rooms dates to the original hall-and-parlor house, as evidenced by wooden sheathing on the walls and ceilings, pitsaw marks, and cut nails that date to this earlier period. The other room in this ell is a 1993 reconstruction of the c. 1810 parlor. The style of the house combines elements of simple Greek Revival design with modest Romantic Period embellishment. The structure of the house incorporates post and beam construction with platform framing techniques used for floor systems. King posts, a rare feature in the North Carolina Piedmont, support the high gable roof. The foundation of the main house is comprised of locally produced brick laid in a running bond. The exterior is weatherboarded and features wide, eleven-inch baseboards, six-inch-wide corner posts, and raking eaves of revealed rafter and purlin ends.

Centered in the middle of the symmetrical front (north) facade is a one-story pedimented porch roof, supported in each corner by double posts, linked by diagonally placed lattice. These paired columns have solid sculpted brackets placed at their ceiling junction. The porch pediment and the sheathing around the front door are of flush horizontal sheathing. The porch floor is wood and the railings between the columns are composed of simple wooden pickets and rails. The decorative elements on the house resemble similar details shown in drawings designed by architect Alexander Jackson Davis for proposed improvements in 1844-1846 to Blandwood, the Greensboro home of Governor John Motley Morehead and his family, and the Jesse Lindsay House, also located in Greensboro, in 1853.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, Mills, "Plan and Exterior Elevation for Additions to Jesse Lindsay House, Greensboro, by A. J. Davis, 1853," *Architecture of the Old South: North Carolina*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1985, p. 250.

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The centrally placed, oak-grained, double-leaf front door is surrounded by sidelights and a transom. The back door of the main body is also a double leaf, oak-grained, and surrounded by scaled-down versions of the front sidelights and transom. Double-hung six-over-six-sash windows appear to have been shuttered with louvered shades and are trimmed with wide boards that are mitered at the upper corners.<sup>2</sup> Originally shingled with oak, the roof is now covered with fiberglass shingles. The two interior chimneys are parged with stucco.

The two-bay side elevations of the main house (east and west) were virtually identical when constructed. During the early twentieth century, the west facade was altered to accommodate a modified bay window on the first floor adjacent to the rear ell.<sup>3</sup>

The rear (south) elevation is three bays wide and is dominated by the roof of the one-story rear porch that extends the length of the house, from the rear ell eastward to the end of the structure. East (right) of the double-leaf rear door, a room was added in the 1920s within the porch to the east of the door to accommodate a bathroom. That room was deconstructed in 1993 and replaced with a similar infill for use as a bathroom.

Extending to the south of the main block is a one-and-a-half story ell with vernacular details that dates to the c. 1810 hall-and-parlor home owned by Elihu's parents James and Miriam. Architectural evidence for this earlier construction date is found in the boxed eaves with simple moldings that are only present in this portion of the house, along with butt-jointed window surrounds, pitsaw marks, and cut nails that date to this earlier period. Though six-over-six windows and weatherboard siding unify the main block and the ell, oral tradition and construction details confirm the earlier construction date for this wing.<sup>4</sup> The foundation is of dry-laid fieldstone of various sizes. The two wings join each other to form an ell that continues the porch along its eastern elevation.

This rear porch exhibits paired lattice columns, similar to the front porch, that are embellished with pierced brackets. Its facade has no skirtboard and corner boards are thinner. The dimensions of the windows are also much smaller. Double vertical panel oak-grained doors are used at the exits. The interior chimney is stucco-covered.

In the 1920s, the southern room of this ell, historically the c. 1810 parlor, was demolished. In 1993, the owner reconstructed this room, using the vocabulary of the remaining earlier room: weatherboard siding, boxed eaves, and cornerboards. Little documentation was found for the fenestration of the wing, but the new six-over-six windows approximate dimensions and

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<sup>2</sup> A photograph from the early twentieth century shows what appears to be louvered shutters. Four sets of old louvered shutters were found in the attic, allegedly removed by the Blairs in the 1920s.

<sup>3</sup> At a site visit recorded by Jack H. Campbell, Jr., November 1994., Beulah Venable Ballance, daughter of Floyd and Edna Venable, stated that this bay window did exist when she lived in the house in the 1920s, however, Garland Blair, Jr. claims that his mother had the bay added so that she could better view the front yard. The beadboard sheathing on the interior of the bay suggests a late nineteenth to early twentieth-century construction date.

<sup>4</sup> In a phone interview between Benjamin Briggs and Garland Blair, Jr. in July of 1993, Blair remembered his family tradition which held that the home was constructed around 1790.

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elevation of earlier windows. A French door, located on the back porch to access kitchen space, is the only deviation from the earlier architectural vocabulary.

The back porch repeats the Picturesque treatment of the portico as it follows the rear elevation of the main block and then turns to run along the ell's east elevation. Along the east elevation of the 1993 room, the porch is a reconstruction, and at the east end of the porch along the main block, the porch is enclosed for use as a bathroom.

## **Interior**

The interior of the two-story c. 1850 main block of the house features a center hall, double-pile plan, with fireplaces located centrally between the front and rear rooms. Details of the first and second-floor hallways feature flush sheathing on the walls and ceilings. The nine-inch baseboards were originally marbled, and some decorative painting remains intact. The central hall stairway has a turned newel post that exhibits a series of convex and concave forms topped by a simple handrail which is carefully formed to follow the rise of the steps. The individual balusters are simple and rectangular in section. Both the handrail and balusters were grained to resemble mahogany while the risers were marbled. An interesting feature of the stair is the manner in which the landing between the second and third floors bisects a rear, second-floor window, so that light from outside is shown both above and below the divider. This distinctive feature was shared with the 1875 Deep River Friends Meeting House, where the second-floor gallery bisected the front windows of that building in a similar fashion.<sup>5</sup> The gallery level of the meeting house has since been destroyed, but ghost marks remain to document its position.

To the east of the front entry is the formal parlor which contains lath and plaster walls and the only originally plastered ceiling in the house. This ceiling also features a simple medallion of four concentric rings of raised plaster. The structure of the ceiling was temporarily revealed in 1994 for restoration work and is constructed of twin systems of floor joists, one supporting the ceiling below and one supporting the floorboards above. The mantle in this room is the largest in this period of the house and is of simple post and lintel Greek Revival design with a scalloped mantle shelf. It was originally marbled, as were the baseboards. The firebox and hearth are constructed of soapstone. The floors are composed of six-inch-wide pine boards. The pine door into the room is of vertical double panels and is grained to resemble oak, matching other doors which open onto the first-floor hallway.

The other rooms are less formal than the parlor. The first-floor southeast corner room, the first-floor northwest corner room, and all four second-level rooms contain wooden ceilings with plastered walls. The first-floor southwest corner room has a wooden ceiling as well as wood sheathed walls. Originally, all eight of the house's wooden post-and-lintel mantles and baseboards were painted to resemble marble or granite using different colors in each room. The double vertical panel doors were painted to resemble wood; oak on the first floor, mahogany

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<sup>5</sup> Florence White Allen (lifelong member of Deep River Friends Meeting and local historian) in discussion with Benjamin Briggs, August 1994.

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with crotch maple panels on the second. Thought to date from the c. 1850 period of construction, the composition and technique of the faux finish closely resembles finishes found at Blandwood, an 1844-1846 house designed by architect A. J. Davis in nearby Greensboro. Surrounds with "cove and bead" molded back bands, picture rails, and ceilings were painted a color to complement the mantles. Six-inch wide pine flooring is used throughout.

Form and construction techniques affirm the oral tradition claims that the rear ell dates from the early nineteenth century or earlier.<sup>6</sup> The ell was a hall and parlor plan, designed and built with one centralized chimney. An enclosed stair was located in the southwestern corner of the "hall" which led to the second-floor loft space.<sup>7</sup> The hall was destroyed in 1926 but the firebox and chimney were retained and faced the open yard.<sup>8</sup> Significant features of the parlor of this early section include two double paneled doors, one board and batten door, flush horizontal sheathing on the walls and ceiling, six-inch-wide pine floorboards, simple butt jointed window and door surrounds, and a post and lintel style mantle covering a soapstone fireplace. To the right of the fireplace is a two-level storage cabinet, consisting of four double panel doors.<sup>9</sup> Circular saw marks and decorative details indicate that this room was heavily remodeled at the time the main block of the house was built, and it is likely that the mantel and two-paneled doors date from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Elements of the c. 1810 hall, demolished in 1926, remain. The fireplace remains and is a good example of a cooking fireplace as it still contains its original crane. A peculiar pit is located in the bottom of the firebox. Speculation that the pit was used for smoking meat for barbeque has not been validated, since no precedent can be found in the Deep River community. Another feature of the demolished room is the four-door cabinet located to the left of the fireplace. The cabinet was removed when the room was demolished, but the doors were preserved in the attic, and have since been restored to their original location.<sup>10</sup>

### **Additional Resources on the Property**

#### **B. Spring House Foundation**

**Early 19<sup>th</sup> century**

**Not Classified**

Near the northwestern property line is the site of the spring house, which was likely constructed in the early nineteenth century as a resource for chilling perishable food. The site was important to the function of the property as a domestic site. Documented by NCDOT archaeologists Brian Patrick Overton and M. O'Connell in May of 2002, the spring house foundation measures approximately 14' by 24' and is constructed of brick and stone with concrete blocks. A brick-lined depression measuring roughly 4' by 4' was filled with water. Walls are partially intact and best preserved on the southwestern portion. Originally, a one-story gabled wooden structure

<sup>6</sup> Beulah Venable Ballance (daughter of Floyd and Edna Venable), recorded site visit with Jack H. Campbell, Jr., November 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Garland Blair (son of Garland and Gladys Edmonds Blair), interview with Benjamin Briggs, July 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Garland Blair, interview with Benjamin Briggs, July 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Beulah Venable Ballance, recorded site visit with Jack H. Campbell, Jr., November 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Garland Blair, interview with Benjamin Briggs, July 1993.

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stood over the masonry foundation. Though the upper portion of the building has collapsed, the foundation and spring remain to document the location, size, and feeling of this component of the farm. The resource, however, lacks the integrity to convey its historic use or association, it is not visually intrusive, and Criterion D is not being claimed. Therefore, the spring house foundation is described but not designated as contributing or noncontributing.

### **C. Grain Silo**

**ca. 1952 Noncontributing Structure**

This metal silo was constructed on the site of a wooden silo dating from 1920 that was destroyed in a windstorm. Approximately thirty feet high, the galvanized structure dominates the eastern farmscape of the property. Reportedly, the storage capsule is excavated as deeply as it is high. The silo is capped with an octagonally formed gambrel roof, fashioned of galvanized metal.

### **D. Stable**

**ca. 2000**

**Noncontributing Building**

The stable was constructed c. 2000, perhaps with some salvaged materials. Although aspects of the building seem historic, property owners over the long history of the Mendenhall House have no recollection of a stable on the property as late as 1996.

### **E. Processing House**

**ca. 1920**

**Noncontributing Building**

The pasteurizing house, constructed c. 1920, was an important building utilized during the property's history as a dairy farm. In an interview, Sonny Blair recalled this building's use as a processing house for milk. The structure has a high level of integrity, and has retained its original paneled doors, metal casement windows, and metal roof. It is located to the east of the property near the grain silo.

### **F. General Store Site**

**ca. 1845-1927**

**Not Classified**

Little is known about the Mendenhall general store that is thought to have been active between 1845 and 1927. An image of the main house taken around the turn of the century shows the store as an approximately fifteen feet wide unpainted weatherboarded structure with boxed eaves and a forward-facing gable, located ten feet east of the main house. Ledgers found in the attic of the main house record the purchases of sugar, fabric, etc. by local residents. The ledgers are dated from around 1845 and are thought to be from the store and indicate that Elihu Mendenhall had some involvement in its operation. These ledgers have been donated to the Friends Collection archived at Guilford College. The building survived until the 1920s when it was destroyed along with the hall of the earlier house.<sup>11</sup> No above-ground evidence remains of the store. The general store site is not visually intrusive, and Criterion D is not being claimed. Therefore, the store site is described but not designated as contributing or noncontributing.

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<sup>11</sup> Garland Blair, interview with Benjamin Briggs, July 1993.

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**G. Roadbed**

**1800s**

**Not Classified**

A farm-roadbed from the nineteenth century is clearly visible beginning to the immediate west of the stable and continues southward to ford a small stream near the southeastern corner of the property. Portions of the roadbed are overgrown, and the southernmost portion has been used as a debris pit. The road was used to access the main pastures southeast of the farm which were developed into the Windsor subdivision. The roadbed is not visually intrusive, and Criterion D is not being claimed. Therefore, the roadbed is described but not designated as contributing or noncontributing.

**H. Garage**

**c. 2020**

**Noncontributing Building**

The garage located southwest of the main house was constructed by the current owners in c. 2020.

**Integrity**

The Mendenhall House retains integrity of location because it has not been moved. It also retains integrity of feeling and association as a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century home for a merchant, small-scale farmer, and Quaker advocate. Setting and feeling have been negatively affected by the loss of surrounding farmland, but the parcel on which the Mendenhall House stands is over six-acres, which provides enough setting to convey some sense of feeling and setting. The house itself has retained its sense of feeling and character.

Elihu's granddaughter by his first marriage, Margaret Davis Winslow, described the house as she remembered it as a child. She recalled, "The two-story house painted white was a good example of Southern Colonial architecture...with a small front portico, a wide central hall with two rooms on each side...The dining room, kitchen and back porch formed a long ell at the rear."<sup>12</sup> All of these character defining features remain today.

Integrity of materials, design, and workmanship have experienced some losses over time, but those losses are minimal. Changes have included the addition of two bathrooms and a modern kitchen. One bathroom replaced an early twentieth-century bathroom in a traditional porch enclosure and an upstairs bathroom was created with minimal loss of original materials. Missing porch posts and the southernmost room of the ell were reconstructed based on physical evidence and historic photographs. Some historic faux finishes have been painted over. None of these changes detract from the resource's overall integrity of materials, design, and workmanship.

The Mendenhall House's secondary resources, including the silo and the dairy processing house, retain good integrity, however these buildings are not a fully intact assemblage of the original outbuildings or historic landscape and are located outside of the 1880 period of significance; therefore, they are not contributing.

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Davis Winslow, *A Gift from Grandmother*, privately printed, December 1958, p. 53.

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## **Threats**

The most imminent threat to the Mendenhall House is commercial redevelopment, as plans emerged in the summer of 2021 for the construction of a grocery store and shopping center on the site. If rezoning is denied for the grocery store and shopping center, additional threats could include high-density housing or subdivision of the property.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

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**Period of Significance**  
1850-1880

**Significant Dates**  
1850

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
Abigail Mendenhall  
Elihu Mendenhall

**Cultural Affiliation**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Unknown

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The c. 1850 Mendenhall House is significant at the statewide level under Criterion B for its association with Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall and at the local level under Criterion C for its Greek Revival architecture with Romantic Period, Picturesque embellishments. The property is eligible at the statewide level under Criterion B because of its association with significant persons, Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall. Because the sites of Abigail and Elihu's Meeting for Sufferings and freedmen's education work are no longer extant, their family home is the best remaining place associated with them as significant persons. The Mendenhalls were active participants in three statewide movements: 1) the manumission and migration of over 1,000 freedmen by the Meeting for Sufferings of the North Carolina Society of Quakers; 2) the transportation of self-emancipated Black freedom-seekers through the Underground Railroad; and 3) the education of Black students by southern Quakers before and after Emancipation. Along with its statewide significance under Criterion B, the main house is eligible locally under Criterion C as an outstanding example of Greek Revival architecture in Guilford County. The period of significance ranges during the active period of Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall's anti-slavery and freedmen's education work, 1850-1880.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**CRITERION B: Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall**

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Elihu Embree Mendenhall (1817-1906) was born May 4, 1817, likely in the c. 1810 portion of the house which now makes up the rear ell. Although his middle name sometimes appears as “Emery,” it is recorded that his parents, James W. Mendenhall and Miriam Hoggatt Mendenhall, named Elihu after the abolitionist publisher of the *Manumission Intelligencier*, Elihu Embree (November 11, 1782 – December 4, 1820).<sup>13</sup> Elihu Mendenhall was the twelfth of fourteen children in a family that held openly abolitionist views, uncommon in a Southern slave state where abolitionist views could lead to ostracization, threats, and physical harm. Elihu’s first wife was Ann “Annie” Hill (1819-1856) of Back Creek Meeting in Randolph County, North Carolina. After her death in 1856, Elihu married Ann’s cousin, educator Abigail “Abby” Hill (1834-1913). The Hill family, like the Mendenhalls, also held openly abolitionist views.<sup>14</sup>

In the antebellum period, North Carolina was home to several Quaker meetings throughout the state. The most influential in central North Carolina was New Garden Meeting, as it was “from New Garden as a center most of the meetings in this section of the State take their rise...New Garden Monthly meeting also established a preparative meeting at Deep River, in Guilford County, in 1758. This was made a monthly meeting in 1778 and a quarterly meeting in 1818.”<sup>15</sup> Ann and Elihu Mendenhall moved back and forth from different meeting houses in Randolph and Guilford counties until they found their permanent home back at the Deep River Meeting in 1848. Although most North Carolina Quakers held anti-slavery views, the Quakers in Guilford and Randolph counties were “notable for anti-slavery spirit” amongst other North Carolina Quakers.<sup>16</sup> The Quakers of Guilford, Randolph, and adjoining counties “were as ardent in the cause of abolition here, in the face of slaveholders, as their brethren had been in Pennsylvania...They accustomed the people around them to the ideas of anti-slavery, and that was a great advance for that day.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Impacts of Quaker Manumission, Abolition, and Freedmen’s Education in North Carolina**

After the demolition of the Nereus Mendenhall House (1830) in 2017, the Mendenhall House became the only surviving property representative of the decades of anti-slavery work undertaken by the Quakers at Deep River Meetinghouse and the Meeting for Sufferings in Guilford County during the antebellum period, most notably the manumission and migration of over 1,000 freedmen, the association with self-emancipated Black freedom-seekers through the Underground Railroad, and the education of Black freedmen after Emancipation. From 1820-1865, the Meeting for Sufferings of the North Carolina Society of Friends, of which Elihu Mendenhall was an active member, facilitated the manumission and migration of over 1,000 free Black families from North Carolina to the northern and northwestern states like Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, Haiti, and Liberia, Africa.<sup>18</sup> This anti-slavery work was accomplished through

<sup>13</sup> Kirkman, Roger N., *Break Every Yoke: The North Carolina Manumission Society, 1816-1834*, p. 510.

<sup>14</sup> Haworth, Cecil E., *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, Greensboro: North Carolina Yearly Meeting, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Weeks, Stephen, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1896, p.109.

<sup>16</sup> Bassett, John Spencer, *Anti-Slavery Leaders in North Carolina*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, June 1898, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Bassett, John Spencer, *Anti-Slavery Leaders in North Carolina*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Dissertation, 1968, 220.

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monetary support and collaboration between the North Carolina meeting houses in Guilford County, Concord, and Wilmington as well as meetings in the northern states and even London, England. As one of the influential Meeting Houses among the North Carolina Society of Friends, the Quakers of New Garden and Deep River in Guilford County were largely responsible for a massive shift in thought among white North Carolinians about the institution of slavery and the possibilities of Black colonization of Haiti and Liberia in the 1820s.<sup>19</sup> Along with the manumission of enslaved people under their care, these Quakers, publicly led by abolitionist Levi Coffin, were also connected to the Underground Railroad in North Carolina, assisting the transportation of self-emancipated Black freedom-seekers from out of the south into the northern states until the practice was further criminalized and evidence of their involvement disappears.<sup>20</sup> After Emancipation in 1865, the Deep River Quakers turned their attention to the education, enfranchisement, and general welfare of Black freedmen in the state.<sup>21</sup>

Southern Quaker's anti-slavery beliefs and practices were the main differentiator between them and other religious bodies in the state.<sup>22</sup> North Carolina Quakers, specifically central North Carolina Quakers, differentiated themselves further through their ardent anti-slavery work, "first with the colonization movement, and from that...into the more comprehensive program of abolition."<sup>23</sup> The actions of Quakers from other southern states in the matter of slavery differed significantly. Virginia Quakers, for example, "were far more temperate" as "they condemned both the colonization and abolition movements."<sup>24</sup> The 1898 publication, *Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina* describes the anti-slavery work of Guilford and Randolph County Quakers,

"By the time the colonies were committed to the cause of independence the Friends [of central North Carolina] were committed to the cause of abolition. In the face of harsh laws which made emancipation very difficult, they worked on, liberating their own slaves, and sometimes buying slaves of other people that they might liberate them. Those that they could induce to go they sent to the free States; those that would not go they transferred to the Society and held them in only nominal bondage. Thus by the middle of the century they had worked slavery out of their connection. They ever remained a nucleus for anti-slavery sentiment. They joined with their non-Quaker neighbors in the support of a Manumission Society."<sup>25</sup>

Between 1816 and 1835, a number of manumission societies sprung up in central North Carolina, due in large part to the strong Quaker presence there. "These societies were most numerous and aggressive in Guilford County. Quakers did not claim control over these

<sup>19</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 220.

<sup>20</sup> Richmond, Ben, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin: The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Hinshaw, Mary Edith and Seth B., *Quaker Women of Carolina*, North Carolina: United Society of Friends Women, 1994, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Weeks, Stephen, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, p. viii.

<sup>23</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

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organizations, nor were they conducted as Quaker bodies, but Quaker influence was paramount in their development and growth.”<sup>26</sup> Four branches, all in or near Guilford County, Centre, Caraway, Deep River, and New Garden, were represented at the first meeting in July of 1816. Meetings for the society were held in the meeting houses of Centre and Deep River, alternately, in April and October.<sup>27</sup> By 1817, there was a split between members who were slaveholders seeking conscripted colonization of Black freedmen, and Quakers (and those who were philosophically aligned with them), who sought the freedom of agency for all Black people, enslaved or free, to make their own decisions. Levi Coffin explains in his *Reminiscences*,

“Many of us were opposed to making colonization a condition of freedom, believing it to be an odious plan for expatriation concocted by slave holders, to open a drain by which they might get rid of free negroes, and thus remain in more secure possession of their slave property. They considered free negroes a dangerous element among slaves. We had no objection to free negroes going to Africa of their own will, but to compel them to go as a condition of freedom was a movement to which we were conscientiously opposed and against which we strongly contented...We felt that the slave power had got the ascendancy in our Society, and that we could no longer work in it. The convention broke up in confusion and our New Garden branch withdrew to itself, no longer cooperating with the others. Our little anti-slavery band, composed mostly of Friends, continued to meet at New Garden until the majority of the members emigrated to the west, preferring to live in a free state.”<sup>28</sup>

By 1827, this newly formed Manumission Society, led by Levi Coffin and based in Guilford County, was comprised of over forty branches accounting for around 1,000 members from across the state. After Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831, the changing tide of race-based fear and the subsequent passing of repressive laws in North Carolina contributed to a mass emigration of North Carolina Friends, including the Coffins, to the free states of the north and northwest. As a result, the society “drifted until it ceased to have an organization save as part of the Underground Railroad,” which had been organized by Vestal Coffin “near the present Guilford College in 1819...Addison Coffin, his son, entered its service as a conductor in early youth.”<sup>29</sup> Levi Coffin migrated to Indiana where his substantial work with freedom seekers in Indiana and Ohio earned him the title “President of the Underground Railroad.”<sup>30</sup> It was at this point that the Meeting for Suffering took up much of the anti-slavery advocacy work in North Carolina.

### **The Meeting for Sufferings’ Impact on the State of North Carolina (1820-1860)**

#### *Involvements in Free Black Colonization of Haiti and Africa in the 1820s*

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> Richmond, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin: The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 242.

<sup>30</sup> Richmond, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin: The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, 1991.

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Because the Deep River Meetinghouse was rebuilt in 1873 (NR 1995) and there are no other known residences of Meeting for Sufferings members that possess a period of significance during the Meeting's active period (1820-1880s), the Mendenhall House is the best extant building to represent the anti-slavery movement of the Deep River Quakers in North Carolina.<sup>31</sup> Elihu was a member of the Meeting for Sufferings as late as 1860 and his father, James, may have also been a member.<sup>32</sup> From the 1820s, members of the Meeting for Sufferings dedicated themselves to the emancipation of Black people enslaved in the South. In the 1820s and 1830s, members of the meeting provided financial, legal, and strategic support to emancipate and ferry freedmen to the northern states, Haiti, and Liberia, Africa. The impact of the Meeting for Sufferings on the state of North Carolina was significant. Guilford County Quaker Jeremiah Hubbard expressed his hope in 1826 that the Society of Friends' colonization and manumission efforts would "doubtless have a very striking influence on the community at large and assist in paving the way for the mitigation or removal of one of the greatest evils that ever affected the human race."<sup>33</sup>

This sentiment proved true as Stephen Grellet, a Northern Friend, traveled through Guilford County, he remarked at "the changed atmosphere for now 'slaveholders could bear to be reasoned with on the great evils of slavery.'"<sup>34</sup> Due in large part to the outreach of Guilford County Quakers in the 1820s, 75% of North Carolinians were receptive to the idea of colonization while only 5% were "bitterly opposed to any form of emancipation."<sup>35</sup> It was during this decade, where there was an air of receptiveness to colonization among non-Quaker North Carolinians that the Quakers emancipated and helped transport 652 people to freedom in the northern states, Haiti, or Liberia, Africa.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Continuing Anti-Slavery Work throughout the 1830s*

In 1829, the editor of the *Greensborough Patriot*, William Swaim, reported that "the people are turning their attention more and more to the all important subject of slavery."<sup>37</sup> Swaim, an abolitionist, worked closely with Guilford County Quakers and promoted his abolitionist beliefs in the local paper, of which the general population of the county was receptive. However, outside forces from other parts of the state began to threaten Swaim and his Quaker compatriots, calling his publications seditious and libelous. Due in large part to widespread fears after Nat Turner's Rebellion in August of 1831, the 1830s was a period of intense opposition and antagonism to advocates of emancipation. North Carolina legislators retaliated by passing laws which made it much more difficult and costly to manumit enslaved people in the state, made it illegal to help a

<sup>31</sup> Oppermann, Langdon, "Deep River Friends Meeting House and Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, National Park Service, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> His name is listed under the "Member" list in 1860 and he is frequently mentioned by name.

<sup>33</sup> "Jeremiah Hubbard to the North Carolina Quarterly Meetings," *Record of Correspondence 1826*, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 230

<sup>35</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 105-106.

<sup>36</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 108.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

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self-emancipated person, and prohibited educating enslaved people, as “the teaching of slaves to read or write has a tendency to excite dissatisfaction in their minds and to produce insurrection and rebellion to the manifest injury of the citizens of the state.”<sup>38</sup> Violators of these laws faced penalties based on their race and status. Those who were caught teaching an enslaved person to read or right faced “a penalty varying from \$100-200 [for a white person]...twenty to thirty-nine lashes for a free negro, and thirty-nine lashes for a slave.”<sup>39</sup> Fines up to \$1,000 were charged for white people assisting a self-emancipated person to freedom.

The Meeting for Sufferings, though discouraged by these repressive laws and costly fines, persevered in their work to emancipate and manumit the hundreds of enslaved people in their midst, though their work drastically slowed. It was during this time that many Quakers fled north for fear of violence in reaction to their abolitionist beliefs. In 1830 alone, 300 families migrated from Guilford County to the North. Meanwhile, the families that stayed, including Elihu’s parents James and Miriam, continued to fight against the institution of slavery, “The meeting for Sufferings produced a memorial and petition to the General Assembly of N. C. on the subject of the oppressive laws of this state prohibiting the literary instruction of slaves.”<sup>40</sup> The petition was denied and there is a noticeable absence of meeting minutes indicating that the Quakers continued their education efforts for Black students until the close of the Civil War.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1830s, the attitudes of most Black freedmen living with the Quakers at Deep River were drastically changing regarding colonization. The majority resisted migration efforts and refused to leave the country, either due to the dangers of the migration, inter-marriages with manumitted women and free Black men who could not leave due to incurred debts, inter-marriages between manumitted men and women who were still in bondage, or familial connections between manumitted people and others who were owned by nearby enslavers.<sup>42</sup> Simultaneously, as anti-Black sentiment grew even stronger in the northern states, northern Quakers “would not willfully receive them,” many of them citing anti-Black sentiment in their region. The Meeting for Sufferings advocated hard, made arrangements, and raised funds from other meetings, including the meeting in London, England to facilitate the migration of their remaining manumitted individuals. Elihu’s older brother, Nathan Mendenhall, also a member of the Meeting for Sufferings, reported to the Friends in New England that the “Meeting for Sufferings had removed 842 of their slaves at a total cost of \$17,493.38. He hoped that the remaining 21 would settle in the Northwest as soon as possible.”

*Continuing Anti-Slavery Work in the Antebellum Period, 1840-1860*

By the 1840s-1860s, the Meeting for Sufferings had done everything in its power to manumit all enslaved people owned by the Society of Friends in North Carolina. By 1842, Quakers comprised around 1% of the total white population of North Carolina and had successfully

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, p. 231-232.

<sup>40</sup> Klain, Zora, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, Philadelphia: Westbrook Publishing Company, 1925, p. 316.

<sup>41</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 316.

<sup>42</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, p. 231-232.

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liberated one thousand enslaved people. However, the number of enslaved people continued to exponentially grow in the state and by the late antebellum period, over 245,000 enslaved Black people in North Carolina remained in bondage.<sup>43</sup> From 1840-1860, the Meeting for Suffering focused on assisting Friends with the manumission of enslaved people who were inherited by or otherwise lawfully given to Quakers for purposes of their emancipation. They also worked diligently to prevent free Black North Carolinians from unlawfully being resold into slavery. By the eve of the Civil War, "Quakers in the slave state of North Carolina realized the inexpediency and futility of continually protesting against the evils of an institution over which they had no control."<sup>44</sup> As a result, they focused their efforts on where they could make the most impact, by publicizing their anti-slavery position and continuing to manumit and legally and financially assist freedmen "at a great expense and hardship."<sup>45</sup>

### *Meeting for Suffering's Involvement in the Civil War*

A publication from the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, held at Deep River on July 18, 1868, is an invaluable primary source recording the experiences of North Carolina Quakers during wartime. The document begins with the purpose for the publication, "The position of Friends in this State was a peculiar one. Utterly opposed not only to war itself, but, as was well known, to the system of slavery, which was the leading object of the contest... We think it right to refer more minutely to our position respecting Slavery:--a position reached by patient and continuous effort about one hundred and fifty years after the origin of our Religious Society."<sup>46</sup> The Quakers at Deep River, of which the Mendenhall Family were active members, suffered greatly during the war. They "refused to participate in the rebellion and, as a result, suffered persecution at the hands of Confederates. Meanwhile, their pacifism provided no protection from the physical and economic devastation of war."<sup>47</sup> Accounts of torture, wrongful death, and further cruelty to North Carolina Quakers who refused to fight are recorded in detail in the publication.<sup>48</sup>

After the passage of a Conscription Act by the Confederate Congress in 1862, every southern man between the ages of 18 and 35 was required to join the Confederate Army. In response, the Friends petitioned both the State Assembly and the Confederate Congress for an exemption based on their pacifist beliefs. As a result, the first Act of Exemption was passed, which did release them from military duty but required a sizeable payment of \$100 each. The fines grew after a similar bill passed in Richmond and required a payment of \$500 each.<sup>49</sup> The fines were

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<sup>43</sup> Jones, Rufus, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, London: MacMillan and Co., 1921, p. 434.

<sup>44</sup> Bland, Linda Adams, *Guilford County Quakers and Slavery in North Carolina*, 163-164.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Bellows, John, "Friends in North Carolina During the American War, 1861-1865," *The American Narrative*, Gloucester: 1894, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Butchart, Ronald E., *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom 1861-1876*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010, p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> "Friends in North Carolina During the American War, 1861-1865," pages 8-14.

<sup>49</sup> Bellows, John, "Friends in North Carolina During the American War, 1861-1865," *The American Narrative*, Gloucester: 1894, p. 1.

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exorbitant and some Quakers refused to pay them based on their principles, “We have had the subject [of the Exemption taxes] under serious consideration, and while, in accordance with the advice issued by our last Yearly Meeting, ‘we do pay all taxes imposed on us as citizens and property holders, in common with other citizens...we cannot conscientiously pay the specified tax, it being imposed upon us on account of our principles, being the price exacted of us for religious liberty.’”<sup>50</sup> Fines continued to grow over the course of the war as an effort to fundraise for the failing Confederate Army. A note found in the attic of the Mendenhall House described this fundraising effort, forcing Quakers to pay for a war they did not support or believe in: “I shall attend at Mendenhall's Tan Yard on Saturday, the 12th day of Nov. next to take the 5 per cent Confederate tax list of those who have not given their lists. Those failing to attend will be returned as defaulters. Oct. 29th, 1864 W. F. Bowman, Agt.”<sup>51</sup> The southern insurrection weighed heavily on Quakers in North Carolina,

“We were still loyal at heart to the Government of the United States, and though submitting passively to a temporary usurpation, this was little merit in a community that called for the utmost zeal in the new cause. We testified against slavery, and in the fresh effort to establish it more firmly this was no small offence. Above all, we could not fight, and with the spirit of war so rampant in our midst, that the preaching of the Gospel of Peace gave way in almost every place of worship to a call to arms, the hatred and malice thus aroused fell with much violence upon us.”<sup>52</sup>

By the end of the Civil War as Sherman marched south, “the Friends living in the counties of Alamance, Chatham, Randolph and Guilford, corresponding nearly with the limits of four Quarterly Meetings—Western New Garden, Deep River and Southern, and comprising by far the largest portion of those in the State, were placed in most imminent peril.”<sup>53</sup> The army of General Johnston was near Greensboro and General Sherman’s army was moving from Goldsboro to Raleigh when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. The publication reports, “The army of Sherman seemed prepared for the most utter devastation. Between the two opposing forces, and indeed partially surrounded by them, lay our peaceful homes, with an apparently almost certain destruction hanging over them.”<sup>54</sup> The Quaker communities were spared as the last of the Confederate armies surrendered without bloodshed “in our very midst” to Governor Morehead at Blandwood Mansion in Greensboro.<sup>55</sup>

## **Mendenhall Involvements in Anti-Slavery Work**

### *Elihu Mendenhall’s Involvement in the Meeting for Sufferings*

<sup>50</sup> Bellows, *The American Narrative*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Bellows, *The American Narrative*, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Bellows, *The American Narrative*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Bellows, *The American Narrative*, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

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The impact of the Guilford County Quakers' manumission, abolitionism, and dedication to Black education had a profound impact on the state of North Carolina. At least by 1860, but likely earlier, Elihu Mendenhall was a member of the Meeting for Sufferings and participated in this work to financially and legally assist enslaved and emancipated Black people.<sup>56</sup> While residing in the Mendenhall House, Elihu Mendenhall only missed one Meeting for Sufferings between 1860 and 1870.<sup>57</sup> His documented participation and leadership in the Meeting for Sufferings includes support of helping enslaved people to freedom through legal, financial, and transportation assistance; writing a letter to insurrection leader, Alexander Jackson Davis, opposing Quaker involvement in the Confederacy; and publishing a Memorial explaining the Quaker refusal to swear an contrived oath of loyalty to the Union and President Andrew Johnson due to their continued, steadfast commitment to the United States government and their anti-slavery work before and during the insurrection.<sup>58</sup>

### *Mendenhall Family Involvement in the Underground Railroad*

As more research is conducted into the Underground Railroad, it is becoming increasingly evident that most self-emancipated people found their way to freedom without the assistance of whites or free Blacks, however, there were some freedom seekers who did enlist the assistance of their neighbors to escape the horrors of slavery, and many of them were Quakers.<sup>59</sup> After the Coffins left Guilford County for Indiana in the late 1830s, there is a lack of documented leadership in Underground Railroad work in Guilford County, likely do to the increasingly repressive legislation passed by the General Assembly to discourage anti-slavery work. Despite this lack of documentation, oral tradition indicates that the Mendenhall House was a stop on the Underground Railroad, which is plausible based on documented evidence of the Mendenhall's abolitionist views. Though neither Abigail nor Elihu are referenced by name in any documented pre-war activity related to the Underground Railroad, which is likely due to the clandestine nature of the work, it has been passed down through oral tradition that they were participants. Well into the twenty-first century, Blair family members continued a narrative that enslaved people were harbored inside the Mendenhall home as a component of the Underground Railroad. These narratives have been passed down through the family and seemingly date to reports made in the 1920s. Some members of the family reference a small room in the oldest portion of the house, which is still extant, as evidence of this chapter in history. Regardless of the use of the small room, family reports of the Mendenhall's participation in the Abolitionist Movement are confident and included many family members.<sup>60</sup> In a private correspondence from 1868, referenced in *Schooling the Freed People* (2010), Alfred H. Jones writes, "She [Elihu's cousin,

<sup>56</sup> *Meeting for Suffering, 1860-1881*, Minutes from the Meetings, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives.

<sup>57</sup> *Meeting for Suffering, 1860-1881*, Minutes from the Meetings, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives.

<sup>58</sup> *Meeting for Suffering, 1860-1881*, Minutes from the Meetings, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Lasley, Rebecca Graham, "Anti-Slavery Movement in North Carolina," Tar Heel Junior Historian Association and the North Carolina Museum of History, Revised by NC Government & Heritage Library, May 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Garland Blair, interview with Benjamin Briggs, March 1996. Bill Blair (cousin to Garland Blair), interview with Benjamin Briggs, August 2021.

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Judith] and her family [the Mendenhalls] have been for years the friends of the colored people running much risk both before and since the war on their account.”<sup>61</sup>

This evidence, though circumstantial, makes it plausible that Abigail and Elihu were supporters and potential participants in the Underground Railroad, even after strict laws prohibiting this work were passed in North Carolina. The Hill family, of which both Ann and Abigail were members, were associated with a history of manumitting enslaved workers and providing education for Black people in their Randolph County community of Uwharrie, located around the Back Creek Meetinghouse, the only meeting with a Black member.<sup>62</sup> Overall, there is a lack of substantive documentation for North Carolina Quakers’ and other abolitionists’ participation in the Underground Railroad after 1830. Francis Charles Anscombe stated “during all these years there does not appear in the yearly meeting minutes any direct reference to the Underground Railroad. A perusal of Levi Coffin’s *Reminiscences* gives the impression that the undertakings were purposefully secret, and probably the suppression of information was deliberate.”<sup>63</sup>

Elihu’s obituary alludes to his abolitionist beliefs, well-known Union principles, and the secretive “alms” he provided to those in need,

“He was a birthright member of the Society of Friends and was convinced in early life of their doctrines in regard to temperance, simplicity, slavery, and war. His conviction enabled him to advise wisely many young men who came to him in perplexity during the years preceding the Civil War (1861-65) and also while the war was in progress. Those were days that tried men’s souls. His well known Union principles made him suspected by many of his neighbors who favored secession and slavery. More than once he was warned that he would be hanged on a certain day, but the hangmen never came for that purpose and were glad to take shelter under his protecting care in time of trouble. The poor and the afflicted were never turned empty from his door but his alms were so quietly done that his left hand knew not what his right hand did.”<sup>64</sup>

Abigail Mendenhall was remembered in a similar light, “She loved people more than things and was interested in all that pertained to them. Sorrow, suffering and want found warm sympathy in her and she gave herself with her alms.”<sup>65</sup> The financial and educational support of freedmen after emancipation by the Deep River Friends under the leadership of the Mendenhalls strengthens the evidence of their involvement in the Underground Railroad. Both Abigail and Elihu likely made quiet and undocumented contributions to the abolitionist movement to minimize threats and violence. The family’s covert participation with the Underground Railroad

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<sup>61</sup> Butchart, Ronald E., *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom 1861-1876*, p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Gwen Gosney Erickson (Quaker Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at Guilford College) in discussion with author, November 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Anscombe, Francis Charles, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina*, Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1959, p. 166-167.

<sup>64</sup> “In Memory of Elihu E. Mendenhall,” FC Memorials- M, August 29, 1906.

<sup>65</sup> “Memorial to Abigail Mendenhall,” Obituary, May 15, 1913.

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further connects them to the state-wide anti-slavery and Black enfranchisement movement of the Quakers in North Carolina from 1820-1880.

*The Mendenhall Family During Reconstruction: Advocating for Freedmen*

After Emancipation, freedmen established the community of Hill Town near Deep River, with their own school that continued to flourish during the Reconstruction Era.<sup>66</sup> Elihu is mentioned after the Emancipation Proclamation, in July 1866 in the minutes of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting, as a member of a new committee to investigate “the condition of the Freedmen in our midst.”<sup>67</sup> The purpose of the committee was to “help the Freedmen to employment and education, and in general labor for the good of these people, and report to next Yearly Meeting.”<sup>68</sup> Working alongside Elihu and sharing his abolitionist beliefs, Abigail Mendenhall taught Black students despite the risk of fines and censure. It is well documented that Abigail Mendenhall taught freedmen in the yard of the Mendenhall property for several years directly after the Civil War.<sup>69</sup> Her educational work is a significant example of an association with freedmen’s education throughout the state of North Carolina.

Quakers were the only white southern denomination to support African American education in the south. Although Quaker women constituted less than two percent of North Carolina’s church membership, they made up more than one-fifth of all the state’s white teachers in Black schools between 1865 and 1876.<sup>70</sup> In Abigail’s obituary, it is recorded, “For several winters after the close of the Civil War she taught the Freedmen in a house in her own yard. Not a few have testified in later years to her practical and forceful instruction both in text-books and right living.”<sup>71</sup> Her decision to educate her Black neighbors is notable as it came at a great threat to her family’s welfare and lends credence to potential earlier abolitionist and antislavery actions in a time where there is limited documentation.<sup>72</sup>

The education of youth was a key initiative of the Quakers in North Carolina and at Deep River specifically, “From an examination of the minutes of the Deep River Monthly Meeting from the beginning of the nineteenth century, we note that the members of this Monthly Meeting dealt seriously with the advice handed down by the superior meetings, especially in reference to the tuition and Education of the Youth under Friends’ care both white and black.”<sup>73</sup> Elihu

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<sup>66</sup> Williams, Margo Lee, *From Hill Town to Strieby: Education and the American Missionary Association in the Uwharrie “Back Country” of Randolph County, North Carolina*, Crofton, Kentucky: Backintyme Publishing, 2016, <https://margoleewilliamsbooks.com>. Accessed on January 7, 2022.

<sup>67</sup> “Minutes of North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, held at New Garden on Second-Day, the Fifth of Eleventh Month, 1866,” Greensboro, NC. A. W. Ingold, Printer, Greensboro Patriot Office, 1866.

<sup>68</sup> “Minutes of North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, held at New Garden on Second-Day, the Fifth of Eleventh Month, 1866,” Greensboro, NC. A. W. Ingold, Printer, Greensboro Patriot Office, 1866.

<sup>69</sup> “Memorial to Abigail Mendenhall,” FC Memorials- M, May 15, 1913.

<sup>70</sup> Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom 1861-1876*, p. 64.

<sup>71</sup> “Memorial to Abigail Mendenhall,” FC Memorials- M, May 15, 1913.

<sup>72</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 101.

<sup>73</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 201.

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Mendenhall is mentioned frequently throughout the minutes of the Deep River Monthly Meeting as a key figure in establishing four schools at Deep River, which were open to not only Quaker children but any children in their community.<sup>74</sup> The Deep River Quakers partnered with the Baltimore Association in Maryland, a group organized by white Baltimore leaders “with funds raised from Quakers, New England abolitionists, European donors, Black business leaders, and Black churches” to support the education of freedmen after the Civil War.<sup>75</sup> Together, the Quakers at Deep River and the Baltimore Association started and maintained schools for freedmen immediately after Emancipation. “Immediately after the Civil War activities are detected within the minutes of meetings pointing to a co-operation with the Baltimore Association in establishing schools: ‘This meeting appoints Daniel Barker, Jonathan Harris, Aaron Elliot, Elihu E. Mendenhall, and David Wheeler to confer and act in conjunction with the superintendent of the Baltimore school association in regard to establishing a Monthly Meeting School in the vicinity of this monthly meeting.’”<sup>76</sup> When visiting Deep River in 1866, representative of the Baltimore Association, John Scott, recorded in his diary, “Visited the Freedmans School, there were 106 present...there are five Teachers conducting the School which is under the Superintendence of Thomas Connard a Member of Phila. Yearly Meeting.”<sup>77</sup> By the end of 1866, the Baltimore Association reported that “Friends in North Carolina have charge of or assist in teaching twenty First day schools for colored persons with 1,165 pupils enrolled. This does not include schools under the care of the Freedmen’s Association.”<sup>78</sup>

Due to their openly abolitionist beliefs, the Mendenhalls were targeted by white supremacists.<sup>79</sup> An 1878 article in the *Greensboro North State*, a progressive-leaning local paper, reports on a death threat issued by white supremacists to Elihu Mendenhall. The article, entitled “County Campaign Catechism” opines on the activities of members of the Democratic Party including political appointments and racial discrimination. In relation to a democrat named Cyrus Wheeler, the question-and-answer format of the article asks,

“What was his conduct towards Elihu Mendenhall?  
*He was the leader of a party who had planned to hang Mr. Mendenhall.*  
What prevented him from carrying his plan into execution?  
*Mr. Mendenhall was warned by a friend and left.*  
What was his [Cyrus Wheeler’s] opinion about colored people?  
*He said that any white man who would receive a vote from a ‘n\*\*\*\*\*,’ was beneath the notice of a dog.”*<sup>80</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 201.

<sup>75</sup> Green, Hilary and Keith S. Hébert, “Historic Resource Study of African American Schools in the South, 1865-1900,” National Park Service: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2022, p. 250.

<sup>76</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 204.

<sup>77</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 317.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> “County Campaign Catechism,” *Greensboro North State*, July 25, 1878, Newspapers.com. Accessed January 7, 2022.

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### *Conclusion*

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu's dedication and documented participation in antislavery work and the freedmen's education movement in the state of North Carolina contributes to the statewide significance of the Mendenhall House under Criterion B because of the Mendenhalls' anti-slavery work conducted with the Meeting for Sufferings and their participation in the movement of southern Quaker men and women to educate freedmen after Emancipation.

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## **History of the Mendenhall Family**

### *Mendenhall Settlement through 1817*

The Mendenhall family arrived in Chester County, Pennsylvania, along with William Penn, from the village of Mildenhall, England to secure land and enjoy religious freedom. A continuing pursuit of affordable land brought James Mendenhall, Elihu Mendenhall's great-grandfather, to North Carolina. Upon arriving in present-day Guilford County, James established a homestead along the banks of the Deep River near Jamestown, a settlement named in his honor. James' son, Elijah, established a home farther upstream at what was referred to as "Deep River."<sup>81</sup> To date, a deed recording Elijah's initial possession of land in Deep River has not been located, but during the August 1802 term of Guilford County Court, the court divided Elijah's land among his heirs. Those heirs included three sons: James (Elihu's father), Daniel, and Isaah. James received a 142-acre tract of land, and upon his death in 1861, he left this land to his son, Elihu.<sup>82</sup>

### *Ann Hill and Elihu Mendenhall, Involvements through 1856*

After attending New Garden Boarding School (later Guilford College) during its second year of enrollment in 1838, Elihu Mendenhall married Ann (Annie) Hill (1819-1856), of Back Creek Meeting in Randolph County, North Carolina in 1841.<sup>83</sup> Upon marriage, Ann and Elihu moved to Randolph County for seven years before returning to Deep River to care for Elihu's widowed father. The minutes of Deep River Monthly Meeting from February 18, 1848 verify that Elihu asked for a transfer of membership for himself, Ann, and their sons Samuel and James from Back Creek Meeting to Deep River Meeting. The family eventually grew to include four children, Samuel Hill, born at Deep River on March 18, 1842; James Nathan, born in Randolph County on October 2, 1844; Mary Eliza, born on March 17, 1850 in Guilford County, and William Allen, born on July 20, 1854 in Guilford County.<sup>84</sup> This family history further substantiates a construction date of c. 1850 for the front, two-story portion of the house.

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<sup>81</sup> Hobbs, Mary Mendenhall, "A Tribute to E. E. Mendenhall," *The Guilford Collegian*, October 1906.

<sup>82</sup> Guilford County Deed Book 7, Pages 502-503.

<sup>83</sup> "In Memory of Elihu E. Mendenhall," FC Memorials- M, August 29, 1906.

<sup>84</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 96-97, and Hinshaw, William Wade, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, 1936, 26.

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Like many families in the North Carolina Piedmont before the Civil War, the Mendenhalls farmed for their own sustenance, worked at trades, and operated a variety of businesses. One of the many activities on the farm at this time was centered on the general store, formerly located ten feet east of the house. Ledgers and receipts found in the attic of the house show that there was trading between the Mendenhalls' general store and Charleston, South Carolina. Receipts from M.T. Mendenhall (brother of Elihu) of Charleston indicate the arrival at the railroad depository of barrels of sugar, vinegar, and coil rope, perhaps for shipment to Deep River. A "book ledger" of Elihu's records the sale of bacon, flour, coffee, boots, cork, molasses, oats, shirting, mules, and salt in May of 1854 to residents of the area.<sup>85</sup>

An industrial enterprise of the family was known as Mendenhall's Tanyard, located in a low area 800 feet northwest of the house (outside the nomination boundary), and dated at least to the lifetime of Elihu's father, James. The 1850 Products of Industry Schedule of the 1850 United States Census listed Elihu Mendenhall as one of three tanners in the Southern Division of Guilford County. The enterprise was valued at \$2,800 of capital investment, and processing 15,000 pounds of hides valued at \$1,700. The horse-powered facility employed three men who specialized in upper and sole leather.<sup>86</sup> By 1860 the capital value of the business had risen to \$3,000, with 2,000 hides valued at \$4,000.<sup>87</sup> The tanyard was re-established in 1890 by Elihu's son, Samuel, who continued the family tradition.<sup>88</sup> E. L. Briggs Sr. remembered getting shoes at Mendenhall's Tanyard in the 1890s before school started each fall.<sup>89</sup>

Ann and Elihu Mendenhall were highly involved in activities at Deep River Monthly Meeting, the Meeting for Sufferings, Deep River Quarterly Meeting, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting. In 1856, Elihu was appointed an elder and soon after helped to estimate Deep River Monthly Meeting's first annual budget. Ann served as a representative to Deep River Quarterly Meeting in 1848 and later served on a joint committee of women and men to "labour as truth may direct for the removal of the many deficiencies that exist among us" within the church. Tragically, Ann died of an illness on December 23rd, 1856.<sup>90</sup> Their youngest son, William Allen lived for only three more years.<sup>91</sup>

### *Abigail Hill and Elihu Mendenhall, Involvements through 1861*

After Ann's death, Elihu joined the Board of Trustees of the Florence Female Academy, a private school organized by Friends and located in the village of Florence four miles east of the

<sup>85</sup> These documents are currently in the possession of Benjamin Briggs.

<sup>86</sup> Census Year: 1850; Census Place: Northern Division, Guilford, North Carolina; Archive Collection Number: M1805; Roll: 6; Page: 366; Line: 1; Schedule Type: Manufacturing.

<sup>87</sup> Census Year: 1860; Census Place: South Division, Guilford, North Carolina; Archive Collection Number: M1805; Roll: 2; Page: 1; Line: 1; Schedule Type: Manufacturing.

<sup>88</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 97.

<sup>89</sup> E. L. Briggs, Jr. (son of E. L. Briggs, Sr), discussion with Benjamin Briggs, August 1991.

<sup>90</sup> "U.S, UK and Ireland, Quaker Published Memorials, 1818-1919" Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/34430:2581>.

<sup>91</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 97-98.

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Mendenhall home. It was there that Elihu met Abigail Hill (1834-1913), who would become his second wife.<sup>92</sup> Abigail was the daughter of abolitionist Aaron Orlando Hill, Sr. of Back Creek Meeting in Randolph County and a cousin of Ann Hill Mendenhall, Elihu's first wife.<sup>93</sup> Upon reaching school age, Abigail attended one year at New Garden Boarding School before returning to Randolph County to teach.<sup>94</sup> As a teacher, she earned enough money to finance a year at Westtown School outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she attended on a teaching scholarship.<sup>95</sup>

Upon returning to North Carolina in 1857, Abigail was employed as Principal Teacher of the Girls School in Florence, North Carolina.<sup>96</sup> The school was a family affair for both Abigail and Elihu, and it was here that the two met. Abigail's sisters Penelope Gardner and Margaret Davis jointly headed the institution from 1850-1865.<sup>97</sup> Penelope's husband William Gardner was considered "Proprietor" and Margaret and her husband, Winslow Davis, directed the boarding department. Elihu's cousins were also involved. As early as 1859, sister and brother Judith and Nereus Mendenhall took charge of the school, renaming it Gardner School.<sup>98</sup> Another relation to Elihu, Dr. Mary Mendenhall Hobbs, was a pupil, and George C. Mendenhall taught at the school as its first instructor with the help of one or two assistants.<sup>99</sup> Forty-seven women were attending the school in 1860, some from as far away as South Carolina and Virginia. Their ages ranged from 13 to 20, with one woman aged 22.

Abigail left her position at the school after she married Elihu on May 12, 1859, and the couple had two children. Jehu lived only one day in June 1861. Elihu Clarkson Mendenhall was born in September 1863.<sup>100</sup> Two years after their marriage, Elihu's father James Mendenhall died in 1861. In his will, James officially willed to Elihu "...my home tract of land on the waters of Deep River...", the tract that included the Mendenhall House, which Ann and Elihu had already added on to and established as their family home ten years prior.<sup>101</sup>

Abigail served fellow Quakers in the capacity of Clerk of North Carolina Yearly Meeting for many years and was also a member of the permanent board. Similarly, she served as Clerk of North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Women Friends for many years. Abigail continued her interests in education by serving on an Advisory Board for New Garden Boarding School and Guilford College. These activities do not include her numerous involvements in assisting local

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<sup>92</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 97.

<sup>94</sup> Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> "Memorial to Abigail Mendenhall," Obituary, May 15, 1913, and Westtown School Alumni Records. [www.westtown.edu/about/history/archives/research](http://www.westtown.edu/about/history/archives/research).

<sup>96</sup> Anscombe, Francis Charles, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina*, p. 98.

<sup>97</sup> Anscombe, Francis Charles, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina*, p. 123.

<sup>98</sup> Browning, Mary, *Bending the Twigs in Jamestown: A History of Education in Jamestown, North Carolina 1755-1945*. Privately Published by the Historic Jamestown Society, 2004, p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> Klain, *Quaker Contributions to Education in North Carolina*, p. 292-293.

<sup>100</sup> "Back Creek Monthly Meeting, Women's Meeting Minutes, Randolph County, North Carolina." North Carolina Friends Historical Society, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives.

<sup>101</sup> "Estate of James Mendenhall," Guilford County Wills, May Term, 1861, Number 79.

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needs, such as visitations and counseling.<sup>102</sup> Her active community involvement well-illustrates the belief among the Religious Society of Friends of “the essential equality of women,” especially in the realm of education and spirituality.

*Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall, Involvements from 1870 to 1913*

Abigail and Elihu Mendenhall were well regarded in Deep River for their hospitality. Arthur E. Ledbetter recalled the Mendenhalls in the 1870s: “‘Uncle’ Elihu’s and ‘Aunt’ Abbie’s cup of happiness overflowed with its fulness” as they threw their home open to community social gatherings and overnight guests. He adds that their “Spacious barns and stables were in constant readiness for horses and vehicles of visitors; their guest chambers were furnished for solid comfort; the dining room table groaned beneath the weight of good things” he provides insights into the life of the farm in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>103</sup> Abigail and Elihu were central figures in the Guilford County antebellum and postbellum Quaker community of Deep River.

Elihu Mendenhall is remembered as an enterprising businessman, well-respected among Quakers statewide for his work with the North Carolina Yearly Meeting.<sup>104</sup> Because of their central location, the Quakers of Deep River in Guilford County were often the host of the statewide Yearly Meeting.<sup>105</sup> Their leadership was a large part of why Guilford College was established nearby, North Carolina’s only four-year college established by Quakers and a prominent Quaker educational institution in the American South. Mendenhall was one of the most respected and longest-serving chairs of the Board of Trustees of Guilford College, guiding the college through a transition period as the school overcame difficulties following the Civil War, and encouraging the school to redefine itself to face opportunities of the future and become the internationally recognized institution it is today.<sup>106</sup>

Elihu was appointed to the New Garden Boarding School Committee by the Yearly Meeting and in 1873 was appointed to the School’s Board of Trustees.<sup>107</sup> He was elected Chairman of the Board in 1875, a position he remained in for twenty-seven years. During his chairmanship, the school grew from being New Garden Boarding School with an enrollment of fifty-eight with poor financial footing to Guilford College, a school of nearly 200 students and an endowment of \$175,000 (NR 1990). His memorial printed in the *Guilford Collegian* in 1907 remembers Elihu’s dedication when some were ready to close the school: “We can keep the school going and we must do it,” he said.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Memorial to Abigail Mendenhall” and “In Memory of Elihu E. Mendenhall.”

<sup>103</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p.130.

<sup>104</sup> Oppermann, Langdon, “Deep River Friends Meeting House and Cemetery,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, National Park Service, 1995.

<sup>105</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. vii.

<sup>106</sup> Edmisten, Linda, “Guilford College,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, National Park Service, 1990.

<sup>107</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 102-104.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103. and *North Carolina Yearly Meeting Book of Memorials*, p. 54.

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Elihu's dedication during his chairmanship on the Board was remembered in remarks from his obituary, "when the day appointed for the meeting came, and often with it a storm, in reply to the question 'Can the Trustees get here today?' 'Elihu Mendenhall will.' and soon his familiar horse and buggy would drive into the yard. Neither heat nor cold, stormy weather nor beautiful days for farming prevented his presence."<sup>109</sup> Likewise, he only missed one Meeting for Sufferings between 1860 and 1870 and it was an excused absence.<sup>110</sup>

Along with his leadership with Guilford College, one of Elihu's most lasting contributions to the Deep River community is his involvement with the construction of the new meeting house. Elihu was appointed chairman of a committee directed to construct a new meeting house for Deep River Friends Meeting in 1873 (NR 1995).<sup>111</sup> The committee oversaw the preparation of building material, taking nearly two years to gather the necessary materials. Construction took place from 1874-1875 with the first service held in the new building on the first Sunday of November 1875.<sup>112</sup> Mendenhall may have been involved with the design of the new meeting house since both buildings originally shared an unusual feature of windows bisected by internal structures; in the case of the Meeting House, a gallery, in the case of his own home, a stair landing.

Elihu died in August 1906 after a long period of declining health. An advertisement was placed in the *High Point Enterprise* to announce an auction sale of "the personal property of the late Elihu E. Mendenhall" held on Wednesday, December 12, 1906. The auction consisted of "farming implements, horses, wagons, cows, and hogs, farm products, wheat, corn, oats, and hay, threshing and mowing machine, reaper, 2 horse power. Household and kitchen furniture. Terms of sale cash."<sup>113</sup>

Abigail remained in the home until her death in May of 1913. After her death, her son Elihu Clarkson (Clark) Mendenhall sold the farm to Floyd and Edna Venable on December 17, 1919.<sup>114</sup>

### **Life After the Mendenhalls: The Venable and Blair Twentieth Century Dairy Enterprises**

After Abigail Mendenhall's death in May 1913, her son Elihu Clarkson (Clark) Mendenhall sold the farm to Floyd and Edna Venable.<sup>115</sup> The Venables moved into the house Christmas Day 1919 by way of a train of covered wagons.<sup>116</sup> The family of five sons and one daughter came from Stokes County, where a living had been made raising tobacco. Floyd Venable, the head of the

<sup>109</sup> "In Memory of Elihu E. Mendenhall," FC Memorials- M, August 29, 1906.

<sup>110</sup> *Meeting for Suffering*, 1860-1881, Minutes from the Meetings, Greensboro: Guilford College Quaker Archives.

<sup>111</sup> Haworth, *A Valiant People: Deep River Friends*, p. 99-100.

<sup>112</sup> Oppermann, Langdon, "Deep River Friends Meeting House and Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, National Park Service, 1995.

<sup>113</sup> *High Point Enterprise*, December 12, 1906.

<sup>114</sup> Guilford County Deed Book 335, Page 123.

<sup>115</sup> Guilford County Deed Book 335, Page 123.

<sup>116</sup> Beulah Venable Ballance, interview in November 1994.

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family, decided to refocus his career upon realizing that dairying would be profitable. Purchasing the property, he converted the old Mendenhall homeplace into Northview Farm, a state-of-the-art dairy operation producing milk and cream for several customers in High Point, including the Sheraton Hotel.<sup>117</sup> Beulah Venable Ballance, daughter of Floyd and Edna Venable, remembered the family farm as being an average size, but modern for the time. Property improvements made by the Venable family to the 202 ½-acre farm in the 1920s included construction of a milking barn, processing house (still extant), granary, and grain silo, later destroyed by a windstorm.

In 1920, Guilford County farms ranged in size from 25 to 200 acres in size, averaging 100 acres.<sup>118</sup> Considerable dairying was carried on in the vicinity of High Point and Greensboro in 1920.<sup>119</sup> Though many dairies supplied a creamery and pasteurizing station in Greensboro, or ice cream factories in High Point and Greensboro, Northview Farm took its position supplying products directly to the consumer. A processing house housed machinery to separate the milk from the cream, and the product was stored in a large refrigeration unit on the back porch until the morning or evening delivery.<sup>120</sup>

Northview farm was relatively short-lived, however. As the five Venable sons all married or moved away, they took with them much-needed assistance in day-to-day operations of the dairy. In consideration of his increasing age and loss of help, Floyd Venable auctioned off Northview Farm in 1927 and moved to Greensboro, where he became a home builder. A large advertisement in the local paper announced the May 31st auction and described the property to potential buyers. "This beautiful property," the ad states "offers an excellent opportunity to the man a modern, first-class dairy farm, and to the investor a great opportunity to make a sound and conservative investment that is sure to enhance in value. 200 acres in high state of cultivation. Many improvements. New, modern dairy barn with 40 stanchions, feed and lounging barn for 50 cows. 100-ton silo, milk house, outbuildings, 2 tenant houses, good ten room house."<sup>121</sup>

John B. Blair purchased the farm from the Venables in May of 1927.<sup>122</sup> Blair was an established dairyman in High Point, with a successful farm named Cloverhill located on the edge of the growing city. In buying Northview Farm, Blair intended to move the Cloverhill dairy operations to the new site and sell off his original farm for development. He renamed his new acquisition Cloverhill Farm and relocated his large family of eight sons to the new site to manage it.<sup>123</sup> Though the main base of operations was on an adjacent farm, the large Mendenhall House was well suited for boarding family members. Many members of the Blair family resided at the house for varying lengths of time throughout the 1930s and part of the 1940s until Garland A. Blair and

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<sup>117</sup> The Venable's building campaign of new dairy related improvements testifies to the high goals and ambitions the family had for the operation.

<sup>118</sup> Turney, R. C. and S. O. Perkins, W. A. Davis, W. D. Lee, *Soil Survey of Guilford County, North Carolina*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923, p. 175.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p. 173.

<sup>120</sup> Beulah Venable Ballance, interview in April 1997.

<sup>121</sup> *High Point Enterprise*, May 29, 1927.

<sup>122</sup> Guilford County Deed Book 566, Page 517.

<sup>123</sup> Garland Blair, interview in March 1996.

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his wife Gladys Edmonds purchased the farm from the family operation in 1945. Garland and Gladys had "sold out" of Cloverhill Farms several years prior to their purchase of the Mendenhall House and had established their own operations in 1938 named Blairwood Dairy located several miles south. In 1945, the operations for Blairwood Dairy were moved to the Mendenhall House property, a new pasteurizing house was constructed, and other improvements were made.<sup>124</sup>

Blairwood Dairy was one of three dairies in High Point that catered to the needs of individual homeowners. Though Lindale Dairy and Cloverbrand Dairy were larger enterprises, Blairwood provided more specialized services and a higher grade of whole milk than its competitors. Many of their customers were from prominent families in High Point, who had been served by the elder Blair through Cloverhill. Cloverhill, by this time, sold primarily to Guilford Dairy, a large processing house in Greensboro. Garland Blair's declining health led to the sale of Blairwood Dairy's accounts to Coble Dairy in 1955, and the property reverted to small-scale agricultural use by the Blair family. The Blair family-maintained ownership of the property after Garland Blair's death, and his wife Gladys remained in the Mendenhall House until 1990. During the 1970s and 1980s, Gladys Blair sold portions of the farm to individuals who have since constructed single-family homes on the tracts.<sup>125</sup>

The six-acre remnant of the original Mendenhall property was sold to Jack H. Campbell in 1993 and was designated a Guilford County Historic Landmark in September of 1993. A meticulous restoration campaign followed and was completed in 1996.

### **CRITERION C: Greek Revival Architecture in Guilford County**

The Mendenhall House meets Criterion C as one of Guilford County's most significant mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival-style houses. A review of buildings in Guilford County reveals the house to be on the cusp of the transition of building technology as well as design; from traditional practices that had been in use in the area since settlement in the 1740s to new methods of construction brought during the period of rapid change after the completion of the Fayetteville and Western Plank Road (1853) and the North Carolina Railroad (1855) to the county.<sup>126</sup> The Mendenhall House marks its forward-thinking builder's welcome of improved access to ideas and technology to the area. With this new exchange came new concepts of architecture. National building styles made their way into rural Guilford County timidly, as the backcountry of North Carolina was notoriously conservative. The Mendenhall House is one of the county's finest examples of Greek Revival architecture and illustrates the adaptation of the Romantic Period's European and Classical Revival styles brought into the area and introduced to the local building tradition by A. J. Davis through his work at Blandwood in Greensboro in the 1840s. The design of the house, utilizing national building styles, is a testament to the progressive nature of its

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Bishir, Catherine, *North Carolina Architecture*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.p. 268.

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forward-thinking owner.<sup>127</sup> As a benchmark to the development of Guilford County into a cultural, educational, and economic center of the state, the Mendenhall House today symbolizes the faith and practice of its past owners.

Despite its unusual size for a nineteenth century home in Guilford County, the house is austere and conservative in detail.<sup>128</sup> Rather than employing an impressive, imposing porch, which is often utilized in Greek Revival residences, the Mendenhalls opted for a very modest portico to their large house with delicate detailing. This is perhaps due to the egalitarian and welcoming Quaker nature of the Mendenhalls who sought a separation from the Olde South plantation homes owned by nearby enslavers. It may well be that the Mendenhalls built their large house, comparable in size to plantation houses found in some slave-economy counties, to demonstrate that one did not need to exploit the labor of enslaved people to be successful.

### Architectural Context

Throughout the state of North Carolina, particularly in the agrarian plantation areas of the state, builders blended Picturesque ornamentation with standard house forms.<sup>129</sup> The Mendenhall House survives as one of the few examples of the Greek Revival style with Picturesque elements in Guilford County. Some of the best contextual comparisons are now gone, including the Nereus Mendenhall House (c. 1850), the home of Elihu's cousin, and the Isaac Thacker House (GF2076). Though the Mendenhall House is among the largest antebellum houses in the county, its design ranks among the most austere. Some Greek Revival counterparts include the Jesse Benbow II House (GF0166), The Shubal House (GF0025), and the Sanders-Blaylock House (GF0374); however, these houses are purely Greek Revival and differ from the Mendenhall House in their lack of Picturesque ornamentation.

The minimal, reserved Romantic detailing of the Mendenhall House illustrates the entry of Victorian era designs into rural, Quaker Guilford County. A few Romantic counterparts remain in the county, including the Gothic Revival William Fields House (GF0174), the Italianate Blandwood Mansion (1844 additions) in Greensboro (NHL 1988) and the Gothic-styled Shubal Coffin House II (c. 1855) in Jamestown (NR District 1969). Although they share Romantic expression, the Mendenhall House differs greatly from these examples because of its Greek Revival aspects.

The Mendenhall House offers a unique snapshot of the years around the arrival of the products of the industrial revolution to the upper Piedmont. The year 1853 marked the completion of the Great Fayetteville and Western Plank Road to Salem, North Carolina, which improved the

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<sup>127</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 269.

<sup>128</sup> The Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House is an unusually large scale for all of Guilford County during this time period. There are very few nineteenth century double-pile, two-story, center hall houses in the county, and the scale of this house is large compared to Alexander Strong Martin House (1835) in Summerfield, the Bumpass-Troy House (1847) of Greensboro, Model Farm (1867) in High Point, and the Jesse Benbow House (1858) in Oak Ridge, with a notable exception being Blandwood Mansion after the 1844 Alexander Jackson Davis Italianate expansion.

<sup>129</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 307.

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economic outlook of the region and allowed for construction of larger, finer dwellings.<sup>130</sup> The plank road was constructed through the area with the use of portable circular saws. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the lumber in the Mendenhall House exhibits circular saw marks as they were taking advantage of this new and efficient technology. This new technology had not been perfected yet as lumber and floorboard widths vary as much as one-half inch.

The plank road also opened the area to trade with more populated and industrialized areas. Many items in the Mendenhall House appear to be machine-made or pre-manufactured; for example, nails from the c. 1850 section are machine-cut and headed. Poorly fitted mantles indicate their construction in a location offsite. During the 1994-1996 rework of the front door, when the transoms and sidelights were removed for restoration, mortise and tenon peg corners were revealed, suggesting that they were modular units of a standardized in size, like a window sash, and inserted into place rather than built-in on site.

The design of the house, its materials, and its technology are indicative of a renaissance “age of improvement” in the Carolina Piedmont, made more accessible by the Plank Road and the North Carolina Railroad.<sup>131</sup> High Point historian Colonel W. A. Blair recalled, “the influence of the road upon the manners and customs of the people was striking and interesting. They were able to send produce, their dried fruit, beeswax and other commodities to the markets and people began to put on airs, dress better, move their pig pens back of their houses, fix up their homes, yards and garden, grease their boots and harness, curry their horses and quit using the old accustomed designation ‘meat sop’ and called it ‘gravy!’”<sup>132</sup>

With new access and communication to other areas of the country came new construction techniques. Although the frame of the Mendenhall House is hewn timber, platform framing was supplemented for floor and ceiling construction and walls were constructed using evenly spaced studs. Hand split lath was attached using machine-made nails. A unique double joist floor system was used to alleviate doubts about the ability of the parlor's plaster ceiling to withstand stress cracks. Air space of approximately one inch was maintained between the bottom of the 2" x 7" ceiling joist and the plaster and lath.

The Mendenhall House is the product of a time of change in Guilford County. Like a snapshot, it records a brief moment in time through its physical record. Its architecture records the influence of national trends and its progressiveness stands in testimony of its original owners. With the local neighborhood growing at a rapid pace, the Mendenhall House needs to be recognized for its significant role in North Carolina history, so that this historic place may remain a landmark within its changing landscape.

### *Statement of Archaeological Potential*

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<sup>130</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 297.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Briggs, Benjamin, “Quaker Home Documents Progressive Chapter of History,” Preservation Greensboro Blog, October 21, 2013. <https://preservationgreensboro.org/quaker-home-documents-progressive-chapter-of-history>.

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The North Carolina Historic Preservation Office requested a statement of potential archaeological significance from the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology. Pursuant to that request, Assistant State Archaeologist and Site Registrar, Rosemarie Blewitt, provided the following statement:

The Mendenhall House is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological deposits and remnant landscape features such as planting beds, filled-in privies and wells, trash middens, and structural remains which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the property. Information regarding the no-longer extant general store and the old wooden grain silo may be available through archaeological excavation. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the property. These potential remains should be considered in any future development of the property.

Furthermore, the archaeological remains of the spring house (archaeological site number 31GF436) have been recorded on the property. NC Department of Transportation archaeologists identified the foundation of the spring house during a 2002 survey. The spring house foundation should be considered in any future development of the property.

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**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:**

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- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** GF1544

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 6.43 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.036941 Longitude: -80.017372

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

AD 1927

or

☐

NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

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

The property to be nominated is all of the lot described by Guilford County Tax Map #: 18-401, Block #: 001, Parcel #: 05, Deed Book #: 4093, Pages 15, 16. The nominated area is outlined on the attached map titled "National Register Boundary Map".

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated boundary is drawn to include the Mendenhall House and historically related outbuildings and sites on the residual 6.43-acre parcel, which provides an appropriate historic

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House  
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setting for the nominated resources. The boundary includes the main house, outbuildings, fields and hedgerows that have historically been components of the Mendenhall House and that maintain historic integrity.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Samantha Stewart, Benjamin Briggs  
organization: Gate City Preservation L.L.C.  
street & number: 211 Tate Street  
city or town: Greensboro state: NC zip code: 27403  
e-mail: samantha@gatecitypreservation.com  
telephone: (919) 389-0564  
date: November 16, 2023

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House  
Name of Property

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### Photo Log

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Front (north) elevation of the Mendenhall House.

1 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Side (west) elevation of the Mendenhall House.

2 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House  
Name of Property

Guilford, North Carolina  
County and State

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Rear (south) elevation of the Mendenhall House.

3 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Side (east) elevation of the Mendenhall House.

4 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Main foyer facing south of the Mendenhall House.

5 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House  
Name of Property

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Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Downstairs bedroom facing southeast.

6 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Kitchen cooking hearth facing north.

7 of 10.

---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Stairs with divided window facing south.

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---

Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House  
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County and State

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: Upstairs hall facing south.

9 of 10.

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Name of Property: Abigail, Ann, and Elihu Mendenhall House

City or Vicinity: High Point

County: Guilford County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Samantha Smith

Date Photographed: February 11, 2022

Description of Photograph: View of grain silo and pasteurizing house, facing west.

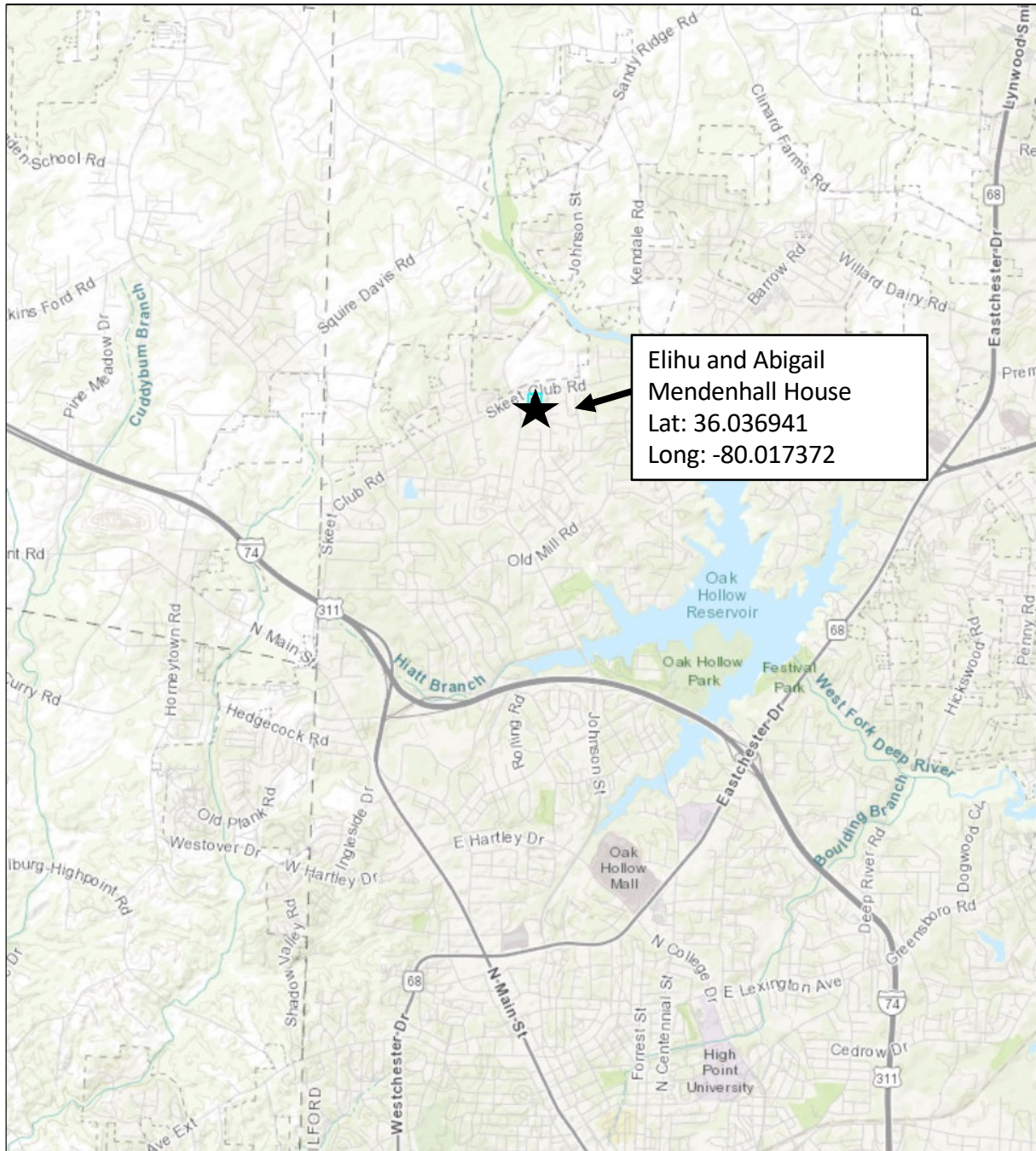
10 of 10.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

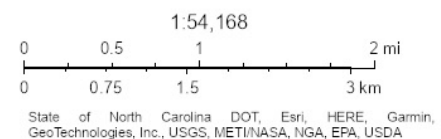
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

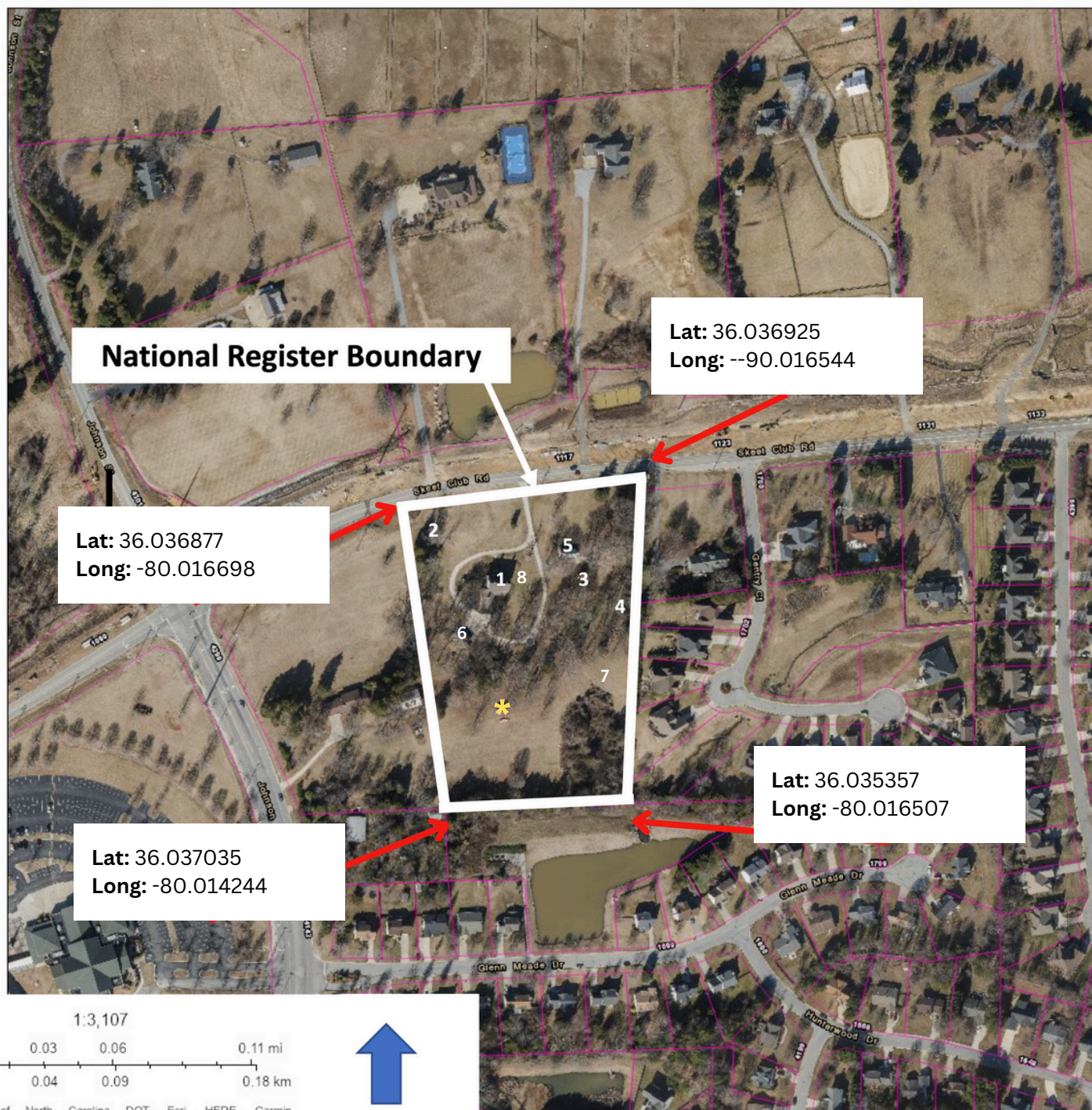
The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



**Elihu and Abigail Mendenhall House**  
 1106 Skeet Club Road  
 High Point, Guilford County  
 North Carolina  
**National Register Location Map**



Source: NC HPO, HPOWEB  
 Created by Samantha Smith 08-23-2022



**Elihu and Abigail Mendenhall House**  
1106 Skeet Club Road  
High Point, Guilford County  
North Carolina  
**National Register Boundary Map**

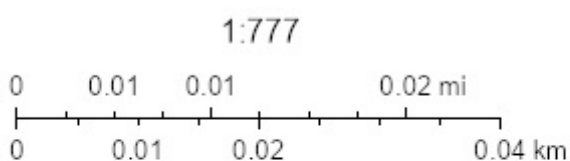
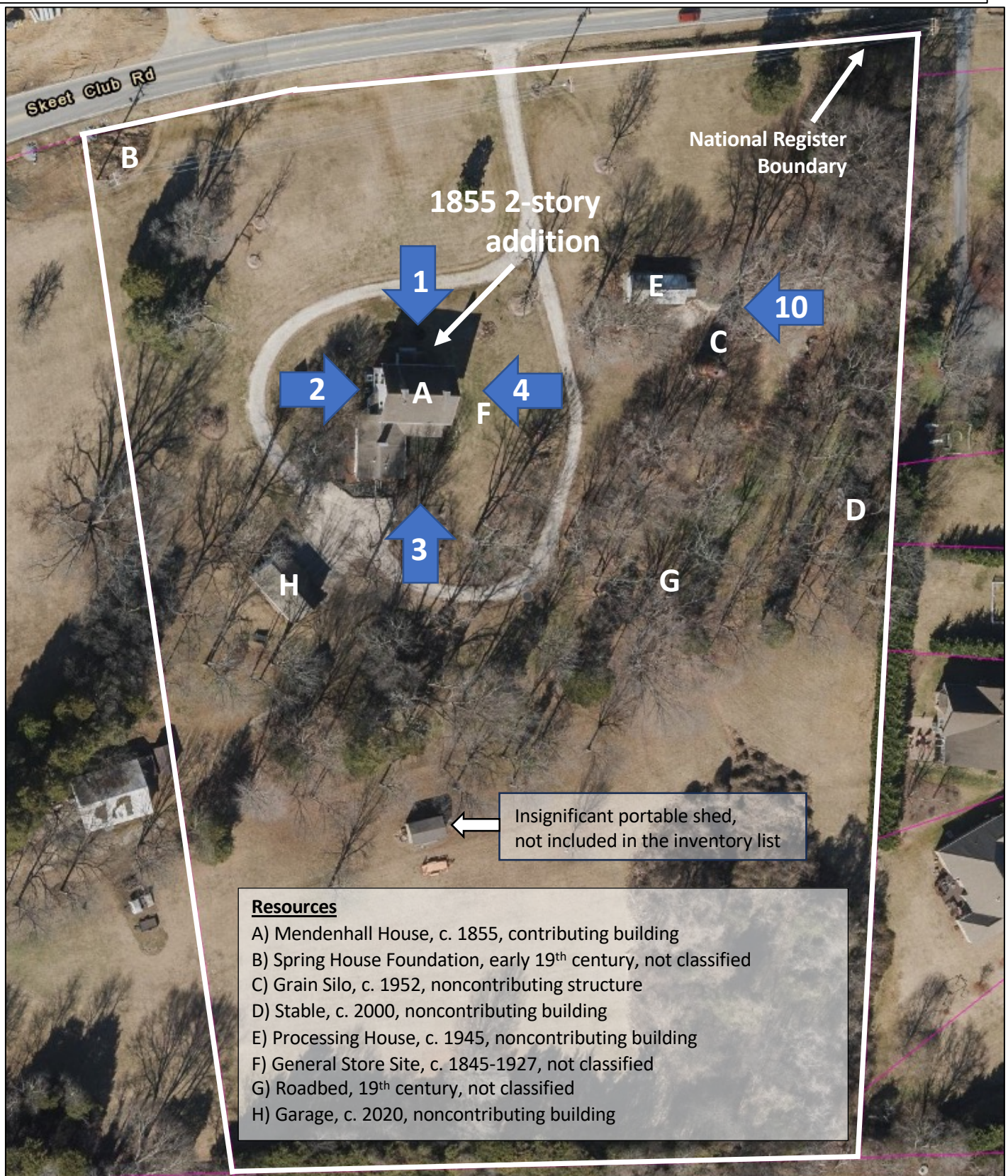
**Boundary encompasses tax parcel number 53000000370000 indicated by the thick white line.**

#### Resources

1. Elihu and Abigail Mendenhall House, c. 1855, contributing building
2. Spring House Foundation, early 19th century, not classified
3. Grain Silo, c. 1952, noncontributing building
4. Stable, c. 2000 noncontributing building
5. Processing House, c. 1920, noncontributing building
6. Garage, c. 2020, noncontributing building
7. Roadbed, 19th century, not classified
8. General Store Site, c. 1845-1927, not classified

\* Insignificant portable shed, not included in the inventory list

**ABIGAIL, ANN, AND ELIHU MENDENHALL HOUSE | 1106 Skeet Club Rd  
High Point, Guilford County, North Carolina 27265**



**Photographic Key**



**Parcel Boundaries**



**ABIGAIL, ANN, AND ELIHU MENDENHALL HOUSE** | 1106 Skeet Club Rd  
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**Photographic Key**

