

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 PropertyHistoric name: F. D. Wharton HouseOther names/site number: Annie H. and F. D. Wharton HouseName of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

2. LocationStreet & number: 521 East Saint James StreetCity or town: Tarboro State: North Carolina County: EdgecombeNot 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 ___ 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 ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A X B ___ C ___ D

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

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

F. D. Wharton House
Name of Property

Edgecombe Co., NC
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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

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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐☐

F. D. Wharton House
Name of Property
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Structure

☐

Object

☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

0

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

0

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Minimal Traditional

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: brick, frame, asphalt /composition shingle

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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.)

Summary Paragraph

The F. D. Wharton House is a one and a half story, side-gabled, Minimal Traditional dwelling located at 521 East Saint James Street in Tarboro, North Carolina. Constructed in 1954, the brick structure features modest Tudor Revival elements in its front-facing gable, facade chimney, recessed front entrance, and casement windows. The house is eligible for the National Register under Criterion B at the local level of significance for its association with Edgecombe County's dedicated African American Agricultural Extension Agent Fletcher Decatur (F. D.) Wharton. Described as one of East Tarboro's most intact mid-twentieth century houses in the Tarboro Architectural Survey Update, it maintains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.¹

Narrative Description: See continuation sheets

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

¹Martin, Jennifer and Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, Tarboro Architectural Survey Update. October 2022, p.18.

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(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.)

Agriculture
Government
Social History

Period of Significance

1954-1975

Significant Dates

1935-1975

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

F. D. (Fletcher Decatur) Wharton

Cultural Affiliation

Black History

Architect/Builder

Manning Construction Company of Williamston, North Carolina
George Harrison and George Harrison, Jr. – father and son brick masons

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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 F. D. Wharton House is nominated to the National Register under Criterion B at the local level of significance in the areas of Agriculture, Government, and Social History for its association with Fletcher Decatur (F. D.) Wharton (1889-1977), who built a wide-ranging career as an African American Agricultural Extension Agent in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, from 1935 to 1951. Wharton worked diligently to improve conditions for Black sharecroppers and tenants at a time when they supplied much of the farm labor in Edgecombe County and their opportunities were limited by prejudice and Jim Crow laws. Independent of his work for the Extension Service, Wharton co-founded the Tarboro Civic Forum in ca.1942 to address problems affecting the town's Black residents. At a time when State and local regulations essentially prohibited Blacks from voting and they had no representation in local government, the forum provided an organized voice to address the infrastructure repairs and facilities badly needed in Black neighborhoods. After retirement, Wharton volunteered his services to the community in many capacities until he and his wife moved to Penick Village in Southern Pines, North Carolina, in 1975. Although Wharton's professional accomplishments were completed before the house was constructed in 1954, it is the only remaining building associated with his cumulative contributions. Other dwellings that he and his family previously occupied and the building where his office was located, have been demolished.²

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

² Martin and Miranda, Study List Presentation, p.3.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

BOOKS:

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Credle, Ellis, (1935) *Across the Cotton Patch*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York.

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ARTICLES:

Bishop, RoAnn, (2010 Fall), Agriculture in North Carolina during the Great Depression, *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/agriculture>.

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Daly, Jack et al, World Food Policy, (2023) *Duke Sanford World Food Policy Center*, <https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu>.

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Tucker, Harry Z., (1943 November Vol II, Nos. 26, 27) Braswell Plantation, *Our State Magazine*, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/collections/our-state-magazine>.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES:

F. D. Wharton House

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1912, May 31, The Closing of A. and M., Helpful Address Made by Dr. Hendrick C. Babcock Yesterday, *Greensboro Daily News (News and Record)*, p. 10,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1935 September, *Extension Farm News Vol. 20 No. 12*, Special Collections Research Center, N.C. State University Libraries, p.2, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

1943, December 6, Jeter, F. H., Farm News and Notes, *Charlotte Observer*, p.13,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

2018, October 1, Douglass, Laura, At Penick, New Building Marks a Broken Barrier, *The Pilot*, p. 1-5, <https://www.thepilot.com/news/at-penick-new>.

The News and Observer:

1935, September 9, Employ Number Negro Agents in Farm Work, Extension Service of State College Reports 27 Negro Agents Employed, *The News and Observer*, p.3,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1936, March 16, Negro Farmers' Work Improves, Annual Report of State Agent Shows Great Improvement in Economic Status, *The News and Observer*, p.9,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1937, September 20, p.12, Braswell Farm Tenants Enjoy Family Picnic, *The News and Observer*, p.12, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1938, August 8, Negro Tenant Farmers Taught to Aid Selves, *The News and Observer*, p.5,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1939, November 6, Negroes Employ Cooperative Idea, Halifax and Edgecombe County Cooperatives Offer Good Examples of Work, *The News and Observer*, p.12,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1944, September 19, Little Acreage Produces Profit, *The News and Observer*, p.8,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1947, January 27, Edgecombe Program Cuts Tenant Moving, *The News and Observer*, p.9,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

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<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1955, April 23, Parrish Leaders in Drive Named, *The News and Observer*, p. 18,
<https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

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Rocky Mount Telegram:

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1954, June 12, Officials to Visit Negro Curb Markets, *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.10, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1970, April 13, Edgecombe Credit Union Plans to Revitalize Program in 70s, *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.8, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1977, May 1, Edgecombe Credit Union Marks 32nd Year, *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.48, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1982, February 7, Liquidation Sale, Edgecombe Credit Union, All Furnishings, Fixtures, and Office Equipment Will Be Sold to The Highest Bidder, *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.26, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

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1938, June 27, Gardens to Meet Home Needs Urged, Agent Reports Tenants Who Grow Their Own Food Don't Mind Allotments, *Herald Sun Newspapers*, p.9, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1948, October 25, Junior Dairy Cattle Show Big Improvement, *Herald Sun Newspapers*, p.8, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

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1952, July 24, Own Credit Unions Give NC Negroes Financial Freedom, *Herald Sun Newspapers*, p.6, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

Nashville Graphic:

1948, September 16, Negroes in Edgecombe Improve Farms, Homes, *Nashville Graphic*, p.4, <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

1953, January 29, Schools Planned Next Week for Negro Farmers and Homemakers, *Nashville Graphic*, p. 6., <https://go.newspapers.com/online/archive>.

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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AGENCY REPORTS:

Wharton, F. D., Annual Narrative Reports of Agricultural Extension Work, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, Cooperative Extension Service (1936 p. 9, 12, 3), (1938), (1939, p.5 & 31), (1940, p.7, 44, 54), (1941, p.2, 58, 59-60), (1942-43, p.33,54), (1944, p.30, 46, 51-53), (1946, p.16, 51, 66-67, 72), (1947, p.57), (1949, p.1,10, 13, 16, 18), (1950, p.5-7, 33, 86, 97,103,104), Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

Wharton F. D., Hazel Parker et al, Combined Annual Report of Edgecombe County Extension Workers, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, Cooperative Extension Service, (1935, p.4), (1951, p.1, 3), Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

Hudson, Cassius R., Annual Narrative Report, African American County Agent Work, (1937, p 1-2,11), (1938, p.6-7), library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

PUBLIC RECORDS:

Land Records, Edgecombe County Register of Deeds Office, Tarboro, NC, Deed Book 461, p.99, Deed Book 799, p.174, <https://www.edgecombecountync.gov/departments>.

Martin, Jennifer and Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, (2022 October 13), *NRAC Study List Presentation for the Annie H. and F. D. Wharton House*, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/historic-preservation>.

MdM Historical Consultants, (2022 October), *Tarboro Architectural Survey Final Update*, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/tarboro-historical-and-architectural-context/open>.

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS:

Baten, Betsy, (2023 January), (2023 July), (2023 August), (2023 September), Telephone interviews with Juanita Wharton Taylor, daughter of F. D. and Annie Harris Wharton.

Baten, Betsy, (August 2023) Telephone Interview with Annita M. Bridges, JD, and Sheila Bridges-Bond, PhD, granddaughters of F. D. and Annie Harris Wharton.

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 # _____

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____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # ____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # ____

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ED 1677 ED0017

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.4027

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

**Or
UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):



NAD 1927

or



NAD 1983

Zone: 18S

Easting: 271730.32

Northing: 3975778.40

1. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

F. D. Wharton House

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2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

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

The National Register Boundary encompasses the entire .4027-acre parcel associated with the F. D. Wharton House. The property is located at 521 East St. James Street in Tarboro, North Carolina, and is described in Edgecombe County Deed Book 799 on page 174. The deed record is to be found in the Edgecombe County Register of Deeds office in Tarboro, North Carolina.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of the property at 521 East St. James Street are sufficient to convey the historic context of the F. D. Wharton House and to protect its mid-twentieth century urban character.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Betsy Baten
Organization: N/A
Street & Number: 3508 Wedgewood Court
City or Town: Keswick State: VA Zip Code: 22947
E-mail betsygbaten@earthlink.net
Telephone : (434) 293-5552
Date : 3/24/24

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.)

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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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: F.D. Wharton House

City or Vicinity: Tarboro

County: Edgecombe

State: North Carolina

Photographer: All photographs were taken by Lauren Poole.

Date Photographed: February 7, 2025.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: **See continuation sheet**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Numbers below correspond to numbered locations on the floor plan sketches.

1. Date: February 7, 2025, Northwest or Front Elevation
2. Date: February 7, 2025, Northwest or Front Elevation
3. Date: February 7, 2025, Front Elevation Chimney and Entrance Detail
4. Date: February 7, 2025, West Corner Elevation
5. Date: February 7, 2025, Southwest Elevation
6. Date: February 7, 2025, Southeast Elevation
7. Date: February 7, 2025, Southeast Elevation, Detail of Back Porch
8. Date: February 7, 2025, Northeast Elevation and Detail of Porch
9. Date: February 7, 2025, Interior Hall and Stairs facing southeast

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10. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southeast, view from Living Room into Dining Room
11. Date: February 7, 2025, facing northwest, Fireplace Mantel in Livingroom
12. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southwest, Detail of Kitchen cabinets
13. Date: February 7, 2025, facing northwest, Stove in Kitchen
14. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southwest in Upstairs Hall
15. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southeast from Living Room through arch to Dining Room
16. Date: February 7, 2025, facing northwest from Dining Room to Living Room
17. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southwest into upstairs Bedroom
18. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southwest, green tile in downstairs Bathroom
19. Date: February 7, 2025, facing northeast, sink and toilet in Downstairs Bathroom
20. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southwest, yellow tile in Upstairs Bathroom
21. Date: February 7, 2025, facing southeast, replaced sink and toilet in Upstairs Bathroom

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

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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.

DRAFT

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 7 Page 1**Section 7: Narrative Description:**

During the early 19th century, the area now known as East Tarboro was comprised of two large plantations bordering the Tar River east of the town. The 908-acre Panola Plantation and the adjoining 1,200-acre Oakland Plantation, also known as the Lloyd Farm, each had several owners before being sold to developers.¹ As grids of streets were laid out to divide the former plantations, lots were priced to sell to Black families and White investors. Over time, East Tarboro became a thriving Black community. By the early 1910s, the area boasted neat rows of single and double shotgun houses, side-gabled dwellings, duplexes, and wing-and-gable houses. I-houses and larger houses with Queen Anne massing appeared by the early 1920s. These, in turn, were followed by Minimal Traditional houses and Ranch houses in the middle years of the twentieth century.²

In 1934, the National Housing Act and the simultaneous creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) led to the popularity of the Minimal Traditional style. The FHA, formed to insure home mortgages, aggressively promoted these compact and affordable houses through standardized plans presented in publications like *Principles of Planning Small Houses*, first released in 1936. More designs for the simplified dwellings with subdued expressions of earlier traditional architectural styles soon appeared in government publications, newspapers, magazines, and in catalogs of retailers offering prefabricated homes. Minimal Traditional houses were fashionable among home builders and buyers in Tarboro.³

Black Families wishing to build homes in East Tarboro could find plans for Minimal Traditional styles in the

Rocky Mount Telegram. The regional daily newspaper featured designs from prominent architects like George F.

Hackney of Durham, North Carolina. Blueprints were also available in booklets such as *Carolina*

¹ Martin, Jennifer and Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, (2022 October 13), *NRAC Study List Presentation for the Annie H. and F. D. Wharton House*, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/historic-preservation.p.14-15>.

² MdM Historical Consultants, (2022 October), *Tarboro Architectural Survey Final Update*, p. 17-18, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/tarboro-historical-and-architectural-context/open>.

³ MdM Consultants, *Tarboro Architectural Survey Update*, p.23.

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Homes, published by Brick and Tile Service, Inc., of Statesville, North Carolina.⁴

In 1948, F. D. Wharton and his wife, Annie Harris Wharton, purchased two adjoining lots on East Saint James Street.⁵ The lots originally contained four small houses that were removed by 1954 when the Whartons engaged the Manning Contracting Company of Williamston, North Carolina, to construct their house. As Wharton was losing his eyesight to advancing Glaucoma, he and his wife chose an attractive Minimal Traditional design and worked with the builder to adapt a pre-existing plan for their needs. George Harrison and his son, George Jr., a father and son masonry team considered to be the best in the area, did the precise brick work on the dwelling's exterior.⁶ On completion, the Wharton House featured modest Tudor Revival elements in its front-facing gable, facade chimney, recessed front entrance, and casement windows. Over the ensuing years, the house has been well cared for and most original features remain.

Approached from the street by a concrete walkway and a cement slab and dirt drive, the Wharton House faces northwest near the front of an expansive grass-covered lot that is edged by mature pines and deciduous trees. At present, a portion of the front yard is bare, and decorative shrubbery is planted intermittently around the house. The house is a one and a half story, side-gable dwelling set on a brick foundation and capped by an asphalt-shingle roof. A shallow cross gable featuring a center chimney intersects the primary roof on the front elevation. Shed porches are attached on the northeast (side) and southeast (rear) elevations and roof dormers project on the front and rear elevations. The dwelling is of masonry construction faced with brick laid in a running bond pattern.

Roof dormers are frame and sheathed in weatherboard siding. Windows are metal casements, most with regular divisions of four, eight, nine, or twelve lights. Fenestration on the front-facing cross gable is symmetrical and single windows under the gable peaks are centered, but elsewhere window and door placements are irregular. Bricks along the corners, edges, and steps around the house were painted white

⁴ MdM Consultants, Tarboro Architectural Survey Update, p.23.

⁵ Land Records, Edgecombe County Register of Deeds Office, Tarboro, NC, Deed Book 461, p.99, <https://www.edgecombecountync.gov/departments>.

⁶ Baten, Betsy, (2023 August 13), Telephone interview with Juanita Wharton Taylor, daughter of F. D. and Annie Harris Wharton .

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to help Wharton find his way as his vision declined.

The main elevation features a wide, straight-line chimney that extends from the front-facing cross gable. A large decorative "W" displayed on the chimney near the gable peak identifies the house as belonging to the Whartons. Molded rake boards behind the chimney define the gable roofline. At the first-floor level, twelve-light casements flank the chimney and wrap the corners extending onto the southwest gable end elevation and into a narrow, recessed entry porch. Approached by a low brick step, the porch serves the main entrance where a metal and glass storm door protects a single-leaf entry door with small, rectangular windows set in a descending diagonal pattern. Left of the entry porch, a long bank of four eight-light casements extends across the front elevation and wraps onto the northeast side of the house. A prominent fascia board surmounts the casement bank and a pair of front-gabled dormers, each with an eight-light casement, rest on the roof slope above.

Adjacent to the driveway, the northeast gable end elevation features an attached, metal-roofed shed porch right of center. Accessed from the southeast by brick steps, the porch has wrought iron supports and railings. A storm door and a plain, single-leaf entry door open from the porch into the den/family room and were most often used by Wharton family members to enter the house. Right of the porch, two eight-light casements continue the bank of windows from the main elevation, and to the left of the porch, a single twelve-light casement illuminates the master bedroom. A twelve-light casement is centered in the gable peak and surmounted by a triangular ventilator. Molded rake boards accentuate the eaves.

The southeast or rear elevation has irregular divisions. A twelve-light casement inset from the right corner abuts a one-story shed-roofed furnace/laundry room that extends a short distance from the main block. A paneled door on the southwest side opens into the room and a narrow brick chimney topped by a corbelled crown rises from the roof to vent the furnace. Left of the furnace room and approached by brick steps, an elongated shed porch has a metal roof with a scalloped overhang and wrought iron supports. The porch shelters a small three light casement that serves the bathroom and to its left, a

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tripartite dining room window consisting of a pair of single light casements flanked on either side by four-light casements. A storm door on the far left shelters an entry door with six paired lights over a single panel that provides access to the kitchen. A fascia board at the roofline surmounts the windows and doors and passes beneath the porch roof to span the entire first floor elevation. Above it, a large, extensive shed dormer extends from the roof and houses rooms on the second floor. Fenestration there is divided into three irregular bays with twelve-light casements serving bedrooms off-set to the right and left of a small three-light casement in the bathroom.

Sun exposure is most intense on the southwest gable end elevation where casements are shielded by segmented canopy awnings with scalloped edges. On the first floor, window placement is irregular. An eight-light casement on the northwest corner continues fenestration from the front-facing gable. An eight-light casement is offset from the center of the elevation and an eight-light casement at the far right is set horizontally above HVAC equipment. As on the northeast elevation, a twelve-light casement in the gable peak is surmounted by a triangular ventilator and molded rake boards accentuate the eaves.

On the interior, a double pile floor plan on the first floor is organized around an entry foyer joining a long center hall that extends to the back of the house and from which a staircase rises to serve bedrooms on the second floor. On the southwest, the foyer opens directly into a large living room that was designed to hold community meetings and family gatherings. A broad arched opening joins the living room to the dining room making additional space for entertaining. A separate entrance to the dining room opens off the hall toward the back of the house and a sunny, south-facing kitchen is accessed from the dining room. On the northeast, doors from the hall open into the den/family room and master bedroom and on the southeast provide entrance to a bathroom at the back of the house. A combination furnace and laundry room cannot be accessed on the interior and is entered through a door on the back porch. A staircase rising from the hall on the first floor leads to a narrow passage on the second floor serving two bedrooms and a bathroom, all of which are contained within the large, shed dormer extending from the roof on the rear elevation.

Notable interior features include the large Federal Revival mantel in the living room ornamented with

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applied sunbursts and the shelves in the den that once contained F. D. Wharton's extensive collection of classic literature. Kitchen cabinets and most bathroom fixtures are original, walls and ceilings are plastered, and floors are hardwood except in the entry foyer and the bathrooms where they are tiled. Hardwood is exposed on floors in the upstairs hall and in the kitchen, but elsewhere the floors have been carpeted. Tile is also found on tub-shower surrounds in the bathrooms and on the hearth and under mantel in the living room.⁷

Since 1954, very few changes have been made. Shingles on the roof have been replaced, interior walls have been repainted, hardwood floors have been installed in the kitchen, tub-shower surrounds in both bathrooms have been re-tiled, a modern basin was installed in the upstairs bathroom, and a repair was made to a wall in the furnace and laundry room following water leakage. The house is otherwise very much as it was when F. D. and Annie Harris Wharton built and occupied it.⁸

⁷ Taylor, Interview, 11 September 2023.

⁸ Taylor, Interview, 11 September 2023.

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Section number 8 Page 1**8. Narrative Statement of Significance**

Fletcher Decatur Wharton was born on April 23, 1889, in Benaja (near Reidsville), North Carolina.¹ He was oldest of three boys born to Mary Lee Wharton (1862-1945) and a father who is reported to have died when he was a child.² One boy died before 1900 when United States Census records show Fletcher I.(sic) and one brother, James E. (1897-1958), living with their grandmother Easter Wharton (abt.1845-?) in Oak Ridge, North Carolina. The census listed Easter Wharton, age 57, employed as a laundress, and Wharton, age 11, employed as a farm laborer. Family sources, however, relate that Wharton was sickly as a boy and physically unable to do farm work.³ Even so, he was familiar with the hard labor, malnutrition, and daily struggles experienced by Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers that informed his later commitment to improve their circumstances.⁴

Mary Lee Wharton established a household in Oak Ridge between 1900 and 1910.⁵ She was initially employed as a farm laborer but was soon offered a job at the Oak Ridge Institute (now the Oak Ridge Military Academy) a preparatory school then exclusively for White boys. She declined at first since no one was available to care for her sons but she accepted the position when Wharton was given an opportunity to attend classes at the school and arrangements were made for her younger boy.⁶

Wharton soon showed himself to be an exceptionally gifted student and on finishing his course of study, is reported to have told Thomas E. Whitaker, who would become president of the Oak Ridge Institute in 1914, that he intended to find work to help support his mother and brother.⁷ Whitaker insisted that Wharton continue his education instead. He arranged that the young man should attend Agricultural and

¹Wharton, Fletcher Decatur, (1918), US World War I Draft Registration Card, retrieved from Ancestry.com database.

² Baten, Betsy, (2023, January 17 and August 5), Personal interviews with Juanita Wharton Taylor, F. D. Wharton's daughter, Wharton's father is listed in several vital records as Moses Wharton, but US Census records identify Moses Wharton as his grandfather. Another man by the same name and having a strong physical resemblance to F.D. Wharton was born and raised near Winston Salem, NC, but was living in Pennsylvania in 1889. No record could be found connecting him to Mary Lee Wharton. The 1890 US Census Records for North Carolina did not survive a fire in 1921 at the U.S. Department of Commerce building in Washington, D.C. These records, had they been available, might have provided information about F. D. Wharton's father.

³ Taylor interview 2023, January 17) and US Census Bureau, (1900), 12th Census of the United States, 1900 population schedule for Oak Ridge, Guilford County, NC, retrieved from Ancestry.com database.

⁴ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17).

⁵ Taylor, Interview (2023, January 17) and US Census Bureau, (1910), 13th Census of the United States, 1910 population schedule for Oak Ridge, Guilford County, NC., retrieved from Ancestry.com database.

⁶ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17), also US Census record for Guilford County, NC (1910).

⁷ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17).

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Mechanical College (now Agricultural and Technical University) in Greensboro, North Carolina, and found employment that allowed him to finance his studies by working at night to service home furnaces.⁸ Wharton excelled in the Agriculture Department and received his degree at commencement exercises on May 30, 1912. He was awarded a portion of the prestigious Kimel prize money for having the best academic record in his class.⁹

After graduation, Wharton taught briefly at A&M College.¹⁰ In 1915, he married Annie Melissa Harris (1885-1981) who had transferred from Barber-Scotia College to complete her studies at A&M College. Wharton's career took the couple to Winston Salem, North Carolina, where he taught at the Slater Industrial and Normal School (now Winston Salem State University) and then to Henderson, North Carolina, where he was employed as the Regional Negro Agricultural Extension Agent for Vance, Warren, and Granville Counties.¹¹ Subsequently he held a variety of teaching and agriculture-related positions in West Virginia, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma.¹² The Whartons became proud parents as three children, Annie Mae (1917-2022), Ferdinand Decatur (1919-2001), and Juanita Novella (1924-), joined the family.¹³

At the onset of the Great Depression in 1930, the Wharton family returned to North Carolina to care for Wharton's mother, Mary Lee, then 60 years old and living in Henderson.¹⁴ Wharton taught at Brick Junior College, an agricultural, industrial, and normal school for Blacks in northern Edgecombe County, until financial difficulties and decreasing enrollment closed the school in 1933.¹⁵

The Great Depression devastated the local farming economy. By 1931, market prices for North

⁸ Douglass, Laura, (2018, October 1), At Penick, New Building Marks a Broken Barrier, *The Pilot*, p. 1-5, <https://www.thepilot.com/news/at-Penick-new>.

⁹ The Closing of A. and M., Helpful Address Made by Dr. Hendrick C. Babcock Yesterday, (1912, May 31) *Greensboro Daily News (News and Record)*, p.10, retrieved from Newspapers.com database. The Kimel prize was created by Horace M. "Jim" Kimel a prominent figure in the Greensboro, North Carolina Community. The prize in 1912 was \$25 of which Wharton received \$15. Today's cash equivalent is \$486.40.

¹⁰ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17), and Douglas, Laura, in *The Pilot*.

¹¹ Seventh Annual Report of the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service of the State College and State Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture (1921, June 30), P 6. Wharton was the Regional Agricultural Extension Agent for Vance, Warren, and Granville Counties concurrently. He filed reports as the regional agent with the NC State Agricultural Extension Services in 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921.

¹² Taylor interview, (2023, January 17), Douglas, Laura, in *The Pilot*.

¹³ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17), Douglas, Laura, in *The Pilot*.

¹⁴ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17).

¹⁵ Taylor interview, (2023, January 17), see also Cross, Jerry, (1979), Joseph Keasbey Brick Agricultural, Industrial, and Normal School (Brick School):1895-1933, Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History, <https://www.ncpedia.org.joseph-keasbey>.

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Carolina's primary cash crops had plummeted as tobacco fell from eighty-six cents to nine cents per pound and cotton from thirty cents to less than six cents per pound.¹⁶ President Franklin Roosevelt, elected to office in 1932, promised direct government action to solve the farm crisis, and in May of 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Act was enacted. The legislation was designed to bolster farm prices by reducing the supply of commodity crops. Subsidy payments were given to landowning farmers in return for crop reductions and letting land lie fallow. There were legal obligations to compensate sharecroppers and tenant farmers for loss of income, but enforcement was lax or nonexistent.¹⁷

The United States Supreme Court declared the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional in 1936, but amendments were made to satisfy the Court's objections and the revised act became law in 1938. The act now provided that landowning farmers could receive subsidies for taking land out of use and parity payments to reimburse any difference between the cost of production and the market value of a particular crop. Subsidies and parity payments provided dependable income that enabled landowning farmers to purchase tractors and harvesters. Mechanization reduced the need for farm workers and industrialization began to attract them to wage-paying jobs in northern cities. As before, laws requiring landlords to compensate sharecroppers and tenants for crop reductions were ignored, and those who remained on the farms eked out meager livelihoods.¹⁸

New Deal funding enabled the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service to employ seven Black agents in 1935, and F. D. Wharton became Edgecombe County's Negro Agricultural Agent on the first of September that year.¹⁹ As Wharton began his work, there were 2,282 farms in Edgecombe County.²⁰ Almost 80 percent of the County's farmers were tenants or sharecroppers, and the majority were

¹⁶ Bishop, RoAnn, (2010 Fall), Agriculture in North Carolina during the Great Depression, *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/agriculture>.

¹⁷ Metych, Michele, (2023) Agricultural Adjustment Act, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Agricultural-Adjustment-Act>.

¹⁸ Metych, Michele, Agricultural Adjustment Act, see also Dodson, Howard, and Sylviane Diouf, *In Motion, The African American Migration Experience*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, (2004), p. 136-138.

¹⁹ *Extension Farm News Vol. 20 No. 12*, (1935, September), Special Collections Research Center, N.C. State University Libraries, p.2, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

Employ Number Negro Agents in Farm Work, Extension Service of State College Reports 27 Negro Agents Employed, (1935, September 9), *The News And Observer*, P.3, See also *Carolina Times*, Wharton Obituary, 23 April 1977, p.6, retrieved from Newspapers.com database. In 1919, Henry G. Forney submitted an annual report as the Negro Agricultural Agent in Edgecombe County. Wharton would appear to be the second man employed in that capacity.

²⁰ Wharton, F. D., Hazel Parker et al, Combined Annual Report of County Extension Workers, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, Cooperative Extension Service (1935, p.4-6), Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

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Black.²¹ Most of them plowed behind a mule and harvested crops by hand. White landlords and merchants were the only sources of capital, and Black farmers paid exorbitant interest rates to buy household goods and the fertilizer, tools, animals, and other items necessary for farming. Trying to get ahead, they planted commodity crops year after year that depleted nutrients from the soil. They often moved from farm to farm in search of better conditions that were elusive as White landlords structured business arrangements to benefit themselves.²² In 1935, 43.2 percent of Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers in Edgecombe County had moved after one year or less and only 27.5 percent had remained on the same farm for five years or longer.²³

Cassius R. Hudson, Supervisor of Negro Agricultural Extension Services at the North Carolina Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Agency best described the conditions among the State's Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers in newspaper articles and reports he filed with the Agency in the 1930s.²⁴ Hudson's reports detailed their low standard of living exacerbated by inadequate unsanitary housing, malnutrition, and disease.²⁵ Pellagra in particular was prevalent among Black tenant farm families as White landlords often forbade them to raise vegetables.²⁶ Consequently their families consumed what Hudson called a "Three-M" diet of meat, meal (ground corn), and molasses.²⁷ Hudson felt that lifestyle improvements could be achieved if Black farmers were taught better health habits and farming practices through Extension Services programs and could buy farm commodities for cash or at low rates of interest. However, Hudson cautioned, "The attitude of county officials and people in general is not very cordial. Many good citizens are prejudiced against helping Negroes in any way whatsoever especially where finances are involved." He found such attitudes often made work difficult

²¹ Wharton, F. D., Annual Narrative Report of Agricultural Extension Work, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, Cooperative Extension Service, (1946, p.51) Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu.

²² Johnson, K. Todd, (2006) Crop Lien System, *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/crop-lien-system>.

²³ Wharton, F. D., Annual Narrative Report of Agricultural Extension Work, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, Cooperative Extension Service., (1946), p.51, also Edgecombe Program Cuts Tenant Moving, (1947, January 27), *The News and Observer*, p.9, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

²⁴ Hudson, Cassius R., Annual Narrative Reports, African American County Agent Work, (1937), p 1-2,11, (1938), p.6-7, Special Collections Research Center at NC State University Libraries, library_specialcollections@ncsu.edu, Hudson filed descriptive reports about the conditions among North Carolina's Black farm families in 1937 and 1938. He was employed by the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Agency in Raleigh as the State Supervisor in charge of Negro work for the Extension Service for 18 years. A battleship was named in his honor because of the seminal work he did for Black farmers and his role in founding 4-H clubs in North Carolina. The SS Cassius Hudson was sunk by mines off the coast of Africa during WWII. Hudson received written threats from the KKK that were among letters found in his records after his death in 1940.

²⁵ Hudson, Reports, African American County Agent Work (1937), p 5-6, (1938), p. 4.

²⁶ Hudson, Report, African American County Agent Work (1938), p 7.

²⁷ Negro Farmers' Work Improves, Annual Report of State Agent Shows Great Improvement in Economic Status, (1936, March 16), *The News and Observer*, p.9, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

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for Negro agricultural agents but he hoped the prejudice would gradually pass away and be replaced by a more favorable sentiment.²⁸

The North Carolina Extension Services Agency's calendar year began on December first and ended on the following November 30. The agency required that Wharton and other agents in the State submit annual narrative reports "that can be verified by records on file in County offices. Agents were instructed to "summarize, and interpret under appropriate subtitles, the outstanding results accomplished, and the methods used for each project," and to use "a descriptive style of writing."²⁹ Agricultural agents and home demonstration agents were also required to submit a combined statistical report of work done during a given year. Statistical reports were standardized typescript lists of services offered by the agency followed by blanks for recording the numbers of services performed and the numbers of beneficiaries receiving them.³⁰

F.D. Wharton had been the Negro Agricultural Extension Agent in Edgecombe County for only three months by November 30, 1935, but he filled the year's statistical report with impressive data given his short tenure. He spent 60 days in the field during which he made 174 farm visits, he wrote 251 letters in 19 office days, he organized six community meetings attended by 872 persons, and he held three 4-H Club meetings attended by 75 youths. His initial farm visits and community meetings addressed the malnutrition and poor health he found prevalent among the County's Black farm families and he stressed the benefits of raising fruit and vegetables for home consumption. In bold handwriting at the bottom of page four of the statistical report he wrote "work just beginning."³¹

In 1936, Wharton described the accomplishments of his first full year on the job in a 34-page narrative report filed with the State Extension Office in Raleigh. His report began by thanking the Edgecombe County Commissioners for their "liberal appropriations" to his work.³² He hoped he could show his

²⁸ Hudson, Reports, African American Edgecombe County Agent Work, (1937), p 5-6, (1938), p. 6.

²⁹ Hudson, 1938 Annual Narrative Report, p 6.

³⁰ Annual Statistics Report, of County Extension Workers, Edgecombe County, 1935, p. 2

³¹ Wharton, Parker et al, Combined Annual Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1935), p. 4.

³² Historical State Timelines, NC Cooperative Extension, Agricultural extension agents are employed jointly by the State Extension Office in Raleigh and by the County where they are assigned to work. <https://historicalstate.lib.ncsu.edu/timelines/cooperative-extension-service>.

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“appreciation for the excellent cooperation by a well-planned, efficiently-executed program of improvement for Negro farmers.”³³ He set out ten goals that prioritized improving self-sufficiency for Black farmers through raising vegetables, fruit, livestock, and poultry. He also emphasized restoring fertility of depleted soils, making home improvements for better health and sanitation, and setting aside time for entertainment and recreation. He intended to publicize extension services programs, activities, and achievements in newspapers and on the radio.³⁴

To accomplish his goals during 1936, Wharton traveled 11,961 miles around Edgecombe County to make 699 farm visits. He hosted 450 office calls, held 90 4-H Club meetings, gave numerous leadership training sessions, and organized celebrations for special achievements. He conducted demonstrations to present advances in home gardening methods, orchard cultivation, livestock care, and pest control techniques that at times were spontaneous in reaction to a pressing need.³⁵ During the summer and fall, he carried a dust gun and a spray pump in his car so that he could show the immediate benefits of insecticides. He reported that many Black farmers purchased their own equipment after seeing the results.³⁶

Thomas J. Pearsall, who had recently assumed management of the M. C. Braswell Farms, a 22,000-acre complex that incorporated parts of Edgecombe, Nash, Halifax, and Martin Counties, came to Wharton in 1936 for advice about how to better the living conditions for his 150 tenant families.³⁷ Wharton shared his ten goals for improvements with Pearsall and proposed a picnic celebration for Braswell’s tenants following harvests in the fall.³⁸ Pearsall approved, and in September that year, Wharton organized the program for, and was master of ceremonies at, a Field Day gala attended by 900 persons. The festivities included exhibits, seminars, demonstrations, a barbeque picnic, and contests and games with prizes for the winners. Field Days at Braswell Farms became annual events that were featured in “news articles

³³ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1936), p. 9.

³⁴ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1936), p. 9.

³⁵ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1936), p.34.

³⁶ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1936), p.20-21.

³⁷ Tucker, Harry Z., (1943 November Vol II, Nos. 26, 27) Braswell Plantation, *Our State Magazine*, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/collections/our-state-magazine>, also Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1944), p.30.

³⁸ Taylor Interview, (2023, June 12).

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appearing in leading papers and magazines from Florida to New York.”³⁹ For many years Wharton continued to organize and preside at Braswell’s Field Days that were attended by large crowds of sharecroppers and tenants and by State, civic, legislative, and agricultural dignitaries.⁴⁰

Wharton’s efforts to encourage proper nutrition and self sufficiency for Black farmers had begun to yield positive results by June of 1938 when the *Durham Morning Herald* quoted him as saying, “It’s almost impossible for small farmers to feed and clothe a family by raising a few acres of cotton and tobacco and it’s even harder for a tenant who must share part of his crop with a landlord.” But, as Wharton told the reporter, “Farmers growing their own vegetables and raising poultry and livestock are usually well fed, and can reserve their cash income for things that can’t be grown on the farm or made at home.”⁴¹ The *Raleigh News and Observer* had predicted that Wharton’s help in seeing that many Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers in Edgecombe County “got busy and planted food crops,” would enable them “to get through the winter without having to call their local relief headquarters.”⁴²

The year 1939 was a very busy one for Wharton. His annual narrative report included copies of newspaper articles that described his extension services activities. Notably, he had organized the Kingsboro-Providence Bull Association, a group of Black farmers who pooled their resources to purchase half interest in a registered Guernsey Bull. The animal’s owner donated its remaining value to the group and expressed his pleasure with “the real service that is being rendered by the County agent work of the extension service.”⁴³ In subsequent years, Wharton arranged for several rail carloads of Jersey heifers to be brought to the area and sold to Black farm families at affordable prices.⁴⁴ He encouraged 4-H club members to care for the heifers, and organized Junior Dairy Cattle Shows at which the animals could be exhibited for judging and awards.⁴⁵

³⁹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1944), p. 30.

⁴⁰ Braswell Farm Tenants Enjoy Family Picnic, *The News and Observer*, (1937, September 20) p.12, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁴¹ Gardens to Meet Home Needs Urged, Agent Reports Tenants Who Grow Their Own Food Don’t Mind Allotments, *Herald Sun Newspapers*, (1938, June 27), p.9, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁴² Negro Tenant Farmers Taught to Aid Selves, *The News and Observer*, (1938, August 8), p.5, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁴³ Negroes Employ Cooperative Idea, Halifax and Edgecombe County Cooperatives Offer Good Examples of Work, *The News and Observer*, (1939, November 6), p.12, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁴⁴ Heifers to City, Edgecombe Negro Agents in Charge, *Rocky Mount Telegram*, (1944, September 29), p.10, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁴⁵ Junior Dairy Cattle Show Big Improvement, *Herald Sun Newspapers*, (1948, October 25) p.8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

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In the course of his work, Wharton found many of Edgecombe County's Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers living in ramshackled log cabins and delapidated frame houses covered in worn weatherboard siding. Newspapers or cardboard tacked onto logs or interior studs sometimes provided insulation. Windows, if present, were fitted with broken glass, scraps of cloth, or crude board and batten shutters. Roofs were covered in tar paper or made from hand-riven wood shingles or rusted metal. Few had proper outhouse facilities.⁴⁶

Wharton's 1939 narrative report described the consequences of these living conditions. He had observed "very little home pride and no community pride" and "practically no knowledge of correct health habits and sanitation" among Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Without telephones or other means of contact, he often made several farm visits before finding anyone at home or discovering that a particular family had moved. In hopes for a better quality of life with more stability for Black farm families, he promoted home improvements and sanitation initiatives. He stressed to White landlords that "better housed and fed tenants" would be "healthier, more satisfied, and happier," and that they, in turn, would benefit from reduced tenancy turnover and increased productivity. He persuaded Black tenants and sharecroppers to clean their yards "of accumulated trash and rubbish" and to plant "grass, flowers, and shrubbery as the conditions of the family will permit."⁴⁷ Wharton noted that most landlords initially "felt it would be a waste of money to try to keep tenant houses repaired" but when they observed the occupants improving their surroundings, they were "favorably impressed."⁴⁸ He stated that many landlords responded by repairing, repainting, remodeling, screening, or electrifying their tenant housing and by providing new outhouses. A few tenant houses were supplied with running water and sewer connections.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Campbell, T.M. *The Movable School Goes to the Negro Farmer*, (1936). Tuskegee Institute Press, Tuskegee, Alabama. Campbell (1883-1956) was the first Black Agricultural Extension Agent in the South. He visited Edgecombe County during an early twentieth-century tour of North Carolina. He described "squalid, ramshackled cabins tenanted by forlorn, emaciated, poverty-stricken Negroes who year after year struggled in cotton fields and disease-laden swamps, trying to eke out a miserable existence." Also Credle, Ellis, *Across the Cotton Patch*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935, illustrations p.2, 16, 33, and photographs found in Wharton's Annual Reports

⁴⁷ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1939), p.5.

⁴⁸ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1939), p.31.

⁴⁹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1939), p.9.

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The following year, Wharton's report expressed determination to overcome the widespread discouragement he had observed among Black sharecroppers and tenant families by "creating in them a desire for those things that are within their reach" and helping them "see the beauty and cheerfulness in nice home surroundings." He believed "self-respect, self-reliance, and home and community pride were Americanisms that every Black farm family should have."⁵⁰ He reported good progress that year. Black farm families were gradually "becoming healthier, happier, wearing better clothes, eating better food, and looking better." More White landlords continued to improve tenant housing by adding rooms, remodeling, painting, screening, and installing electric lights, water pumps and outhouses. "All landlords," he stated, "are encouraging more and better gardens,"⁵¹ He found the improvements to be "notable changes around the County" in comparison to the conditions of "a few years ago."⁵²

Recognizing that problems also existed for Black residents in town, Wharton was instrumental in organizing the Tarboro Civic Forum to give Black townspeople a voice in local government affairs at a time when literacy tests and poll taxes made it almost impossible for them to vote, and local laws essentially excluded them from holding elected office.⁵³ Wharton and other Forum members met with public officials, church leaders, and other concerned citizens to address such issues as the establishment of a municipal cemetery for Black citizens, and better sanitation services, streetlights, police protection, and flood preparation and relief in Black neighborhoods. The Forum proved to be successful in helping to develop better relationships among Tarboro's Black and White residents and addressing the needs of the Black community that had long been overlooked.⁵⁴

The United States officially entered World War II on December 11, 1941, and in 1942, Wharton's narrative report related "considerable time spent on various war efforts" in addition to his extension services work. As one of two African Americans in Edgecombe County appointed to chair civil defense-

⁵⁰ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1940), p.54.

⁵¹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1940), p.7.

⁵² Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1940), p.44.

⁵³ Evans, Farrell, (2021, May 13) How Jim Crow-Era Laws Suppressed the African American Vote for Generations, accessed at History <https://black-vote.org>. In 1898 The North Carolina Constitutional Convention imposed literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses, effectively disenfranchising African American voters and solidifying White supremacy in the State. While they can no longer be enforced, many of these discriminatory laws are still on the books in North Carolina today.

⁵⁴ Taylor and Bridges-Bond, Sheila, interviews, (2023, August 31, September 6.) Also *The Carolina Times* April 23, 1977, Obituary for Fletcher Decatur Wharton. The obituary mentions that Wharton along with others founded the Tarboro Civic Forum.

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related committees he had presided at or attended 45 meetings. He had helped to set up collection stations for “thousands of pounds” of salvage materials and assisted in starting a Red Cross nursing course for rural people.⁵⁵ He met with farmers and other County residents to encourage purchases of war bonds and stamps, noting that many “Negro farmers, school children, and 4-H Club members have bought far beyond what might be expected of people with so limited means.”⁵⁶

When able-bodied men enlisted or were drafted into military service, it was obvious that there would be a significant labor shortage at harvest time. Working through the Tarboro Civic Forum in 1942, Wharton arranged meetings “of Negro citizens” in town to inform them of the pending farm labor problem and to ask for their help. The response was overwhelming. Many schoolboys volunteered to help with the harvests, and the wives of professional men and other “women who had never worked in the fields” also offered assistance. A two-day harvest holiday was held in October during which some schools were closed, Tarboro town employees were given paid time off, and large corps of Black and White workers brought in the crops. Wharton praised everyone’s excellent cooperation.⁵⁷

Twelve days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U. S. Secretary of Agriculture co-hosted a conference to “formulate a national campaign to encourage home and community gardens to improve health through better food habits.”⁵⁸ Wharton endorsed what became the Victory Gardens program, and by 1943, a number of Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers were producing surplus fruit and vegetables in sufficient quantities that Wharton proposed establishing a special curb market in Tarboro. It was to be organized by and run by Black farm families.⁵⁹

Knowing that such a venture had been controversial and unsuccessful in Wilson, North Carolina, Wharton solicited the cooperation of Tarboro civic authorities before proceeding, and two adjoining town lots containing a dilapidated building were made available for the curb market. Twelve men

⁵⁵ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1942 -1943), p.58.

⁵⁶ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1942-1943), p.60.

⁵⁷ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1943) p. 59-60.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, (1941, December 19-20). *National Defense Gardening Conference*: Washington, D.C., p. 2., also, Hayden-Smith, Rose (2014), *Sowing the Seeds of Victory*, McFarland & Company Inc.: Jefferson, NC, p197, <https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/ipd/small/exhibits/show/victory-gardens>.

⁵⁹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1943), p. 39-41

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dismantled the structure and used salvageable material to construct market sheds. Surplus components were sold and the money used to purchase nails, windows, roofing, and lumber to complete the job. The market opened on July 8, 1943, to a large crowd of Black and White buyers. Tarboro officials were on hand to offer congratulations, and area merchants donated paint to cover the new sheds. During its first six months of operation, 14 sellers earned a combined total of \$2,533.67.⁶⁰

A Rocky Mount official attending the Tarboro market's opening festivities asked Wharton to set up a similar curb market in his town. Putting aside his involvement in numerous war-related activities, Wharton "dropped everything else," to find a site, see that a suitable building was constructed, and ensure that any financial shortfalls were covered.⁶¹ The Rocky Mount curb market opened on September 18, 1943, as municipal officials gave celebratory speeches.⁶² Three and a half months of sales netted 17 farmers a total of \$969.64.⁶³

The Black curb markets' successes garnered statewide and national attention in agricultural circles. In 1945, H.W. Hockbaum and John W. Mitchell of the U.S. Department of Agriculture visited the markets and Wharton was invited to speak at State organizations and conferences.⁶⁴ From the opening of the markets in 1943 through November 1950, 103 sellers at the markets netted a total of \$72,607.61.⁶⁵ Wharton reported that the money enabled them to pay doctor's bills, to repair automobiles and farm machinery, and to purchase livestock, poultry, gasoline, farm equipment, clothing, food not grown on their farms, and various household articles.⁶⁶

The *Charlotte Observer's* farm page editor, F. H. Jeter, devoted a lengthy column exclusively to Wharton, praising him for his "fine work" in establishing the curb markets. Jeter described Wharton as

⁶⁰ Negro Curb Market Issues Report, 17 Farmers Earn \$969 in 3 Months, (1944, January 7), *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.7-8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁶¹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1944), p.52.

⁶² Little Acreage Produces Profit, (1944, September 19), *The News and Observer*, p.8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁶³ Negro Curb Market Issues Report, 17 Farmers Earn \$969 in 3 Months, (1944, January 7) *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.7-8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁶⁴ Officials to Visit Negro Curb Markets, (1954, June 12), *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.10, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁶⁵ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p.86.

⁶⁶ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1949), p.16.

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“an untiring Negro farm agent and hustling fellow when it comes to working for the improvement of his people in the rural districts.” Jeter reported that Wharton “encouraged gardens; he has seen to it that fruit trees have been planted and that they were sprayed and pruned; he has encouraged the production of hogs for a home pork supply,” and “lately has helped his people to buy heifer calves.” Jeter pointed out that through Wharton’s “incessant prodding,” many brooder houses were built, good brooders were bought, and laying houses and old farm outhouses were remodeled to be used for poultry keeping. Wharton’s hard work, said Jeter, was not unnoticed, “The (Edgecombe) County Commissioners and officials at State College in Raleigh gave Wharton an assistant.” He was “the first Negro agent in the State to have this kind of help.” Subsequently several Black agents joining the Agricultural Extension Services in eastern North Carolina trained in Edgecombe County under Wharton’s direction.⁶⁷

Wharton had long been aware that one of the greatest impediments facing Black farmers was the inability to obtain financing at affordable interest rates if at all. In 1944, he organized and co-founded the Edgecombe Farmer’s Cooperative Credit Union to provide lower cost loans financed through member savings accounts.⁶⁸ As one of the original thirteen members of the credit union, he served for many years as its secretary-treasurer.⁶⁹ Membership increased after World War II ended in 1945 and the credit union soon offered loans at four and six percent interest “instead of the usual ten percent” charged to Blacks. Wharton’s 1946 narrative report highlighted Ed Williams’ and his wife’s move “from a sharecropper home” into “a nicely and attractively built home of their own” financed by the Edgecombe Farmer’s Cooperative Credit Union.⁷⁰ In 1947, Wharton noted that with “big countries no longer shooting at each other,” returning Black veterans needed financing to resume farming operations, purchase land and farm equipment, make home repairs, and send their children to college.⁷¹ Loans were required for many purposes in addition to farming, and the name of the credit union was shortened to reflect a more expansive mission.⁷² It became the Edgecombe Credit Union and retained a largely Black

⁶⁷ Jeter, F. H., Carolina Farm News and Notes, (1943, December 6) *Charlotte Observer*, p.13, retrieved from Newspapers.com database, also, Martin and Miranda, Study List Presentation, p.3.

⁶⁸ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1944), p.54, also Credit Union Plans to Revitalize Program in 70s, (1970, April 13) *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database

⁶⁹ *Rocky Mount Telegram*, Rocky Mount, NC, 1 May 1977, p.48, retrieved from newspapers.com.

⁷⁰ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1946), p.16.

⁷¹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1947), p.57.

⁷² Edgecombe Credit Union Plans to Revitalize Program in 70s, (1970, April 13), *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.8, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

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membership until it closed in 1982.⁷³

In 1946 Wharton reported "the citizens of the County look to the county agent not only for advice on farming and rural living, but they flock to my office for advice on numerous matters not directly related to agriculture but to human welfare in general."⁷⁴ That year, he not only drafted a detailed plan "to improve social, economic, and physical conditions" for Black farm families but also offered suggestions about appropriate manners and dress to sellers at the curb markets and demonstrated the use of telephones to Black families installing these amenities for the first time.⁷⁵ The *Nashville Graphic*, quoting Wharton in 1948, stated that he would continue his efforts to have "telephones placed in as many homes as possible."⁷⁶

Wharton had been plagued by failing eyesight for several years before being referred to Johns Hopkins Medical Center for evaluation in 1949. He missed two months of work at the beginning of the year as a series of tests were performed at the Maryland institution.⁷⁷ It was determined that he suffered from Glaucoma that had progressed too far to save his sight. He had already experienced considerable vision loss and the doctors concluded that he would gradually become blind.⁷⁸ Such terrible news was a shock, and it took time to accept. Nevertheless, Wharton returned to work and carried on with an energetic year since he was aware that his time to be effective would be limited. His annual report for that year listed 1,328 farm and home visits, 1,327 office calls, 1,231 telephone conferences, and 23 meetings with local leaders. He wrote 28 news articles, appeared on three radio shows, distributed 2,404 extension-related bulletins, and gave 55 method demonstrations for 914 attendees, and 45 results demonstrations for 809 attendees.⁷⁹ In addition to his work, there were other important considerations. In 1948, he had purchased two adjoining lots in East Tarboro on St. James Street, and he began to think about a suitable house for his and his family's future needs.⁸⁰

⁷³ Liquidation Sale, Edgecombe Credit Union, All Furnishings, Fixtures, and Office Equipment Will Be Sold to The Highest Bidder, (1982, February 7), *Rocky Mount Telegram*, p.26, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁷⁴ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1946), p. 72.

⁷⁵ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p.33.

⁷⁶ Negroes in Edgecombe Improve Farms, Homes, (1948, September 16), *Nashville Graphic*, p.4, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁷⁷ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1949), p. 10, and Taylor Interview, (2023 July 1).

⁷⁸ Taylor Interview, (2023, July 1).

⁷⁹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1949), p.13.

⁸⁰ Land Records, Edgecombe County Register of Deeds Office, Tarboro, NC, Deed Book 461, p.99, <https://www.edgecombecountync.gov/departments>.

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Wharton's final narrative report, filed in 1950, contained 104 pages. It began on a somber note. Acreage restrictions and market quotas had been placed on cotton and peanuts making farming outlook at the beginning of the year "not very bright." Since 1946-47, tobacco production had been controlled by acreage allotments, and with limitations on the County's two additional major cash crops, landowners had to consider how to "meet operating expenses and pay their taxes." For sharecroppers and tenants, the outlook was darker. There seemed to be little chance of their being allotted enough cash crops to make ends meet.⁸¹

Large numbers of Black sharecroppers and tenants came to Wharton for guidance. He proposed a plan whereby they should pay for their own seed and supplies to grow food crops and raise hogs while staying on the land rent free. Wages as day laborers could be earned when farm help was needed. The plan did not prove practicable. Black sharecroppers and tenants had few resources with which to buy seed and supplies. Landlords had increasingly mechanized and could not offer much wage-paying work. Many Black sharecroppers and tenants now had no alternative but to move in search of non-farm employment.⁸²

Wharton finished his report in a more positive tone. The year had begun with "dark clouds in the sky," but it had been "one of the best all-round farm years" for extension work.⁸³ Regardless of what had been accomplished, Wharton felt that still "more and better could be done."⁸⁴ Extension workers, he stated, "can never sit down and feel that anything has been so well done that it will never need improving." He ended his report with the 4-H Club motto. With a willingness to work, he concluded, we can "make the best better."⁸⁵ At the annual conference of the North Carolina Negro Extension Agents Association held just before Christmas in Raleigh, Wharton received a Distinguished Service Award. He had worked diligently for the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Agency for 20 years.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p.5 and p. 97.

⁸² Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p. 5-7.

⁸³ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p. 103.

⁸⁴ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p. 104.

⁸⁵ Wharton, Annual Narrative Report, African American, Edgecombe County, NC, (1950), p. 104.

⁸⁶ J. C. Hubbard Gets Award at Gathering in Raleigh, (1950, December 26), *Herald Sun Newspapers*, p. 16. Wharton served as a Regional Extension agent

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F. D. Wharton retired on June 30, 1951.⁸⁷ Over the course of his 16-year career in Edgecombe County, he traveled thousands of miles to present the latest farming techniques to hundreds of Black farmers and their families. He motivated them to raise fruit and vegetables for their health and wellbeing. He helped them acquire livestock and poultry. He established curbside markets to provide income from sales of their surplus farm produce. He worked with White landlords to improve their housing, sanitation, and general living conditions. He co-founded a credit union to provide financing for their needs at affordable interest rates. He set up agricultural organizations and 4-H Clubs and encouraged their participation in community activities. He arranged harvest festivals, livestock shows, and prize days to reward their efforts. In addition, he trained several Black agents new to the Agricultural Extension Services and organized a civic forum to bring attention to the needs and concerns of Black citizens living in Tarboro. He had always been available when anyone, Black or White, needed advice and assistance.

In retirement, Wharton continued his work with the Tarboro Civic Forum and volunteered for other community projects as his eyesight permitted. In 1951 and 1952, he organized thrift clubs in Black schools throughout the County to teach children the value of saving money at credit unions as an important way to achieve financial independence for African Americans.⁸⁸ In 1953, he became a notary public, and joined banking officials in a panel discussion about the importance of Farm Credit at a Farmers and Homemakers conference in Nash County.⁸⁹ In 1954, he devoted much time to planning and supervising the construction of his new home at 521 East St. James Street. Wharton and his wife were active members of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Tarboro where in 1955, he represented the parish as the Advance Gifts Chairman for the Capital Improvement Fund Campaign.⁹⁰ In 1955 they were especially pleased to welcome both their daughters and a granddaughter to their newly completed home. Annie Mae Wharton Bridges and Juanita Wharton Taylor came to live with their parents as their husband's careers were transitioning. While in Tarboro, Annie Mae presented them with a second granddaughter and Juanita presented them with a

for four years and as Edgecombe County's Extension Agent for 16 years.

⁸⁷ Statistical Annual Report for Edgecombe County, 1951, p.1 (Title page).

⁸⁸ Own Credit Unions Give NC Negroes Financial Freedom, (1952, July 24), *Herald Sun Newspapers*, p.6, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁸⁹ Business Notes, Notaries, (1953, July 7), *The News and Observer*, p.20, also, Schools Planned Next Week for Negro Farmers and Homemakers, (1953, January 29) *Nashville Graphic*, p. 6., retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

⁹⁰ Parrish Leaders in Drive Named, (1955, April 23) *The News and Observer*, p. 18, retrieved from Newspapers.com database.

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grandson.⁹¹

By the early 1960's, Wharton could no longer see to read, and he walked in familiar places with a cane, counting the number of steps he knew would take him to his destinations and back. His increasingly failing eyesight further limited his activities, but he spoke at community gatherings on a variety of subjects when he was invited to do so, and he continued to advise about management of the Edgecombe Credit Union.⁹² In November 1971, as the Whartons advanced in age and their health declined, they made generous gifts to their children and conveyed their home to their daughter, Juanita, and her husband, Thomas Taylor, Jr.⁹³ Several years later, the Reverend Mayo Little of the Calvary Episcopal Church in Tarboro suggested that they move to Penick Village, an Episcopal retirement community in Southern Pines, North Carolina. When Little advised that they would be the first Black residents, Annie Harris Wharton replied, "as long as the people are nice and the care is good, I don't care what color they are!" In 1975, the Whartons were welcomed to Penick Village where they remained until F. D. Wharton passed away on April 21, 1977, and Annie Harris Wharton followed him on December 22, 1981.⁹⁴ Fletcher Decatur Wharton and Annie Harris Wharton are interred side by side in Beechwood Cemetery in Durham, North Carolina, near the home of their daughter, Juanita Wharton Taylor.⁹⁵

In 2018, Penick Village paid homage to F. D. and Annie Harris Wharton by erecting and naming a new residence building in their honor. On September 28, a consecration and groundbreaking ceremony was held at Penick Village for the Wharton Building. Over 100 persons attending the festivities included the Right Reverend Anne Hodges-Copple, North Carolina State Senator Michael Woodard, Southern Pines city leaders, members of St. Titus Episcopal Church of Durham, North Carolina, Penick Village board members and residents, newspaper and television reporters, friends, and family members.⁹⁶ Three generations of the Wharton family, including five-year-old Alexandra G. Taylor, the Whartons' great-granddaughter, participated in the ceremony. A letter from the Right Reverend Michael Curry, Presiding

⁹¹ Taylor, interview, (2023, July 27).

⁹² Taylor, interview, (2023, July 17).

⁹³ Land Records, Edgecombe County Register of Deeds Office, Tarboro, NC, Deed Book 799, p.174, <https://www.edgecombecountync.gov/departments>.

⁹⁴ Douglass, Laura, (2018, October 1), At Penick, New Building Marks a Broken Barrier, *The Pilot*, p.1-5, accessed online at www.thepilot.com, also Taylor, interview, (2023, August 8).

⁹⁵ Taylor, interview, (2023, July 27).

⁹⁶ Taylor and Bridges-Bond, interviews, (2023, August 31 and September 6).

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Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, was read by the Whartons' granddaughter, Annita M. Bridges, JD. Michael Penick, grandson of Bishop Edwin A. Penick, concluded the ceremony with the presentation of a Penick Village plaque to the Wharton family. The three-story, twenty-unit Wharton Building was completed and opened for occupancy in 2019.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Douglass, *The Pilot*, and Taylor, interview, (2023, August 8).