

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Ben and Barbara Graves House**

Mount Airy, Surry County, SR0669, Listed 12/19/2019

Nomination by J. Daniel Pezzoni, Landmark Preservation Associates

Photographs by J. Daniel Pezzoni, May, June, and July 2018



West elevation, view facing east



Living room

**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: Graves, Ben and Barbara, House

Other names/site number: SR0669

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: 309 Fairview Avenue

City or town: Mount Airy State: North Carolina County: Surry

Not For Publication: N/A

Vicinity: N/A

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

    national     statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

   A    B XC    D

**Signature of certifying official/Title:**

**Date**

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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

**Signature of commenting official:**

**Date**

**Title :**

**State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government**

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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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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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 ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐



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

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD; CONCRETE; GLASS; ASPHALT

### 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 1953-54 Ben and Barbara Graves House is located at 309 Fairview Avenue in Mount Airy, Surry County, North Carolina. The one-story International Style frame house has a built-up asphalt flat roof with a monitor, vertical wood siding, a poured concrete and cinder block foundation, and a carport connected to the house by a hyphen. The interior, which centers on a kitchen/family room space with clerestory windows, features wood and plaster-finish walls and ceilings; cork, vinyl, and carpeted floors; and simple trim and doors. Minor alterations to the house were made in the 1960s. The 2.269-acre lot lies at an elevation of just under 1,100 feet above sea level and occupies the edge of a bluff overlooking the bottomland along Lovills Creek, a tributary of the Ararat and Yadkin rivers. Fairview Avenue, which adjoins the lot at the northeast corner, is lined with Ranches and other mid-twentieth-century houses. With minor later modifications, the house retains its overall historic exterior and interior character.

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### Narrative Description

#### *Inventory*

1. Ben and Barbara Graves House. 1953-54; 1960s. Contributing Building.
2. Shed. Ca. 2000. Noncontributing Building.

#### *Exterior and Grounds*

The Graves House was conceived by its architect, Cecil D. Elliott, as a T-shaped arrangement of flat-roofed rectangular elements. The northward-pointing stem of the T is formed by a carport wing that links to a circular drive and the street. The house proper has an east-west oriented main level which is elevated at its east end on a cinder block basement level. The roof is flush with the walls on the north and south sides and cantilevers at the east and west ends. On the west or living room end a wall of windows and sliding glass doors opens onto a patio. Originally the sliding doors opened onto lawn, as shown in 1955 photos, but the original owners put in a patio in the

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late 1950s or 1960s and the current pavement is “zbrick” pavers on a concrete pad. The flagstone steps which serve the doors appear to be original (similar steps are shown in the 1955 photos). On the east or bedroom end is a bank of fixed and casement windows above paneled aprons. Over the bedroom windows, and also over the doors and windows on the west end, are fixed and operable transom windows between the tapering beams that support the cantilevers. The various windows and exterior doors are modern replacements in keeping with the form and appearance of the originals.

The carport has open ends and solid side walls. Its west end is extended by a porch with slender wood posts. The porch continues as a hyphen connection to the main house, the hyphen part open on its west side and screened by a louvered partition on its east side. The hyphen floor is paved with light blue-gray flagstones in an irregular pattern. A walkway with similar paving extends from the hyphen around a louvered screen at the northwest corner of the house. Adjacent to the flagstones are two areas of white pebble gravel. The house’s entry has a plain door with a modern storm door, a single sidelight with weave-pattern textured glass, and a clear glass transom.

The south side of the house has a recessed center porch—described as a dining terrace in the 1956 article—which in the 1960s was reduced in width by infill at its east end. The south elevation was originally symmetrical, with window elements consisting of four sections—fixed and casement panes, a glass transom, and a solid apron—flanking the porch, but the 1960s infill visually shifted the east window element to the right. The 1960s alteration included the extension of the porch roof, which was formerly recessed, out to the foundation line. The porch has a brick-bordered flagstone floor and is reached by a set of steps without risers. The current steps are modeled on the original ones at the location, with angled supports under the treads that create a cantilevered effect. The sloping site creates a full-height basement story at the east end, with two-pane slider windows and an entry. The basement entry and the window next to it occupy a recess that originally contained double-leaf vertical-board doors with a transom.

The north elevation has a four-part window element identical to the ones on the south elevation, and positioned symmetrically opposite the right-hand south-elevation window element (the main entry occupies the position where the second window element would have been). The middle section of the north elevation is recessed, mirroring the south-elevation porch recess, though not reduced in width and depth. The recess features a kitchen entry with a Dutch door, a clear glass transom, a weave-texture sidelight, and a flagstone walkway which connects to the front entry walkway through a door in the louvered screen.

Above the roof projects the monitor and a chimney. The monitor has a broad, low, rectangular form with a slightly overhanging flat roof and multiple square and rectangular windows that light a variety of spaces on the interior. The chimney, which rises a few feet above the monitor, is faced with irregular ashlar granite blocks and has a screened top. The area around the house is mostly lawn with scattered trees and landscape beds. Shade trees include a trio of larches off the southwest corner and a birch and hemlock beside the driveway. A path of granite footstones leads from the driveway to the basement-level concrete patio at the east end of the house. The lot’s periphery is wooded. Hardwoods like beeches and tulip poplars predominate but there are

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also hemlocks, a white pine, and magnolias (the latter planted). At a low part of the lot is a former tennis court now grown up with trees. The yard area at the foot of the south-elevation steps was described as a children's play area in the 1956 article and a slide appears at the edge of the woods in a 1955 photograph. In the northwest corner of the lot is a modern frame shed with vertical wood siding, double-leaf front doors, a cinder block and poured concrete foundation, and a shed roof. The shed was designed to harmonize with the house.

### *Interior*

At the center of the plan is a high-ceilinged space illuminated by the clerestory windows of the monitor, which also supply natural light to a pantry and three bathrooms off the center space. The space contains a family room and galley kitchen divided by a freestanding cabinet island. The cabinets have upper and lower sections separated by an open passthrough, with the upper cabinets standing on slender iron legs at each end. The upper cabinets, which are narrower than the lower cabinets, open only to the kitchen, whereas the lower cabinets are back-to-back, with doors opening to the kitchen and the family room. The door fronts and back of the upper cabinets and the lower cabinet door fronts opening to the family room are birch plywood, originally with a light finish and now with a rich honey-colored finish. The hinges and door pulls appear to be original. The lower cabinet door fronts opening to the kitchen are the same wood and finish but are modern replacements of original enameled metal door fronts. The island's original sink and two dishwashers have been replaced by a modern sink and single dishwasher. A low partition formerly extended from the south end of the island but has been removed. The metal door fronts of the base and wall cabinets on the other side of the kitchen have also been replaced with wood and the appliances on that side have been modernized.

On the east wall of the family room, opposite the cabinet island, is a fireplace with a shelf-less rectangular granite surround and a raised granite hearth. The granite is quarryfaced and laid in courses of irregular width. The wall into which the fireplace is set is sheathed with vertical boards, a material used throughout the center space. On the north and south sides of the space are circulation paths defined by wood-cased posts. Arranged along the north circulation path are (from left to right) the kitchen entry, a laundry and storage closet, and a sewing alcove. The laundry closet is still used as such and retains its original doors and ring pulls, although the doors have a brown finish that is darker than the original. The wall-mounted metal light in the sewing alcove appears to be original, as does the square light recessed into the ceiling of the north circulation path (similar light fixtures survive throughout the house). Further to the left along the north circulation path is the main entry foyer, which has sliding closet doors with the same brown finish as the laundry closet doors.

Arranged along the south circulation path are (from left to right) the 1960s basement stairs and the windows and door opening to the south porch. The stairwell has carpeted steps and vertical board sheathing (painted gray) above a wood-paneled wainscot (natural finish). The glass partition between the stairwell and the circulation path, which preserves the basic character of the originally exterior window wall at this location, retains an original aluminum-framed hopper transom window. Further to the right along the south circulation path is a small office.

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The living room at the west end of the house is characterized by plaster-finish walls, the windows and doors that face onto the patio, and a beamed ceiling. A freestanding storage unit originally divided the dining area at the south end of the space from the living room at the north end. (The unit has been moved to the basement and is described below.) The three bedrooms at the east end of the house have plaster-finish walls and ceilings and dressing alcoves with natural-finish wood walls and sliding closet doors. Natural-finish wood is also used as an apron under the east-facing bedroom windows. The bathrooms preserve some original finishes and fixtures such as a white porcelain sink set into a green formica counter with metal trim.

The basement under the east end of the house (the rest of the space under the house is crawlspace) was originally unfinished and was used for boat and general storage. In the late twentieth century the basement was partially finished as a recreation room with wood-paneled walls and a tile floor. A bathroom was also created. The unfinished part of the basement, which is used as a workshop, has exposed cinder block walls, exposed ceiling joists, and a concrete floor. Stored in the workshop is the storage unit that originally stood in the living room. It is three-tiered, with side-hinged cabinet doors at the bottom, drop-down doors in the middle, and fixed panels above. The doors and panels have the original black painted finish which contrasts with the natural wood finish ends of the unit and the narrow divisions between the doors and panels (the natural finish may be the same finish that other woodwork in the house once had). The upper left panel has a circular opening for a phonograph speaker. The upper right panel has a smaller circular opening for a clock (the clock is stored in the space behind the panel). The left middle cabinet has the original pale yellow painted finish inside.

### *Integrity Statement*

The Ben and Barbara Graves House possesses a high degree of architectural/historical integrity which is more than sufficient to convey the property's significance. The house stands at its original location. With the exception of the partially infilled back porch, which was altered in keeping with the spirit of the original design, the house possesses integrity of design. (The 1960s porch infill dates to the historic period although it post-dates the 1953-54 period of significance.) The current setting, a combination of natural surroundings and historic-period suburban development, is very similar in character to the historic setting, and the one post-historic non-contributing resource added to the property—a shed—is small in size and was designed to harmonize with the house. The house also possesses high integrity of materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



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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

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1953-54

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1953

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Elliott, Cecil Dean (architect)

Johnson, Marvin R. A. (associate architect)

Brown, T. C. (mechanical engineer)

Nichols and Snyder (contractors)

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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 1953-54 Ben and Barbara Graves House is an important example of early modernist domestic architecture in Mount Airy, North Carolina. The one-story International Style house was designed by NCSU School of Design professor Cecil D. Elliott and reflects the influence of pioneering modernist architect Mies van der Rohe on North Carolina architecture during the period. The Graves House is composed of a rectangular core with alternating expanses of windows and solid wall and a hyphen connection to a front carport. Clerestory windows illuminate the simply-finished interior. The Graves House is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the architecture area of significance as a sophisticated work of modernist domestic architecture in Mount Airy and the most distinctive example of the NCSU School of Design brand of modernism in the community. The period of significance corresponds to the design and construction of the house in 1953 and 1954. The Graves House is eligible at the local level of significance.

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

### *Historic Background*

Benjamin Kelly Graves (d. 1997) was the son of George O. Graves, the founder and president of the Mount Airy Mantel and Table Company, one of several industries for the manufacture of furniture and architectural components that operated in Mount Airy during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ben attended Princeton University, where he graduated in 1945. Prior to graduation he served as a technical sergeant with the Army Engineers and saw combat in the Pacific. After graduation he returned to Mount Airy where in 1949 he was the secretary and sales manager of his father's factory.<sup>1</sup> Barbara Wrenn Graves (1926-2014) was the daughter of Lucien Patterson Wrenn, who operated Granite Mercantile in Mount Airy, and his wife, Beatrice Pelley Wrenn. Barbara attended Mary Baldwin College, where she was student body president, and after graduating moved to New York City "for the experience," according to her daughter, Meg Graves. Barbara worked at a New York City-area airport before returning to Mount Airy and marrying Ben in 1949.<sup>2</sup>

In 1949 Barbara's father developed a small subdivision at the west end of Fairview Avenue known as the Pine Crest Development.<sup>3</sup> In October 1950, for the stated sum of \$10, Lucien and

<sup>1</sup> Meg Graves, personal communication with the author, May 2018; *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Benjamin Kelly Graves '45 Memorial online, accessed July 28, 2018; *Miller's Mount Airy, N.C., City Directory, 1949-1950* (Asheville, N.C.: Charles W. Miller, 1949), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Meg Graves; *Mount Airy News*, March 31, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Surry County Plat Cabinet A Glide 98. The subdivision's name is also spelled Pinecrest in the records.

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Beatrice Wrenn sold lots one and two in the development to Ben and Barbara Graves.<sup>4</sup> In subsequent years Ben and Barbara acquired adjacent lots and the vacated south end of Laurel Street (which intersects Fairview in front of the house), thus assembling the two-acre-plus parcel on which they built their house.<sup>5</sup>

Ben Graves took a course in architecture while at Princeton, and his daughter remembers him as “a little bit of a rebel,” factors that led him toward modernism for the design of his house.<sup>6</sup> According to research by former owner Rebecca Holder, Ben and Barbara were impressed by the modernist Fred and Edna Garvey House in Winston-Salem, which they learned about in an article in the *Winston-Salem Journal*.<sup>7</sup> The 1952 Garvey House was designed by James W. Fitzgibbon, associate architect for campus planning at North Carolina State University (NC State) in Raleigh and assistant professor of architecture at the school.<sup>8</sup> According to Holder, “The Graves visited the Garvey home and fell in love with the design. The Graves contacted the chair of the School of Design [Fitzgibbon] and requested that he design a home for them. The chair’s schedule could not accommodate a commission and he referred the Graves to ‘one of his leading professors,’ Cecil D. Elliott. Mr. Elliott and the Graves met and proved a perfect match for each other.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding the initial meeting, Cecil Elliott later wrote, “The Graves contacted James Fitzgibbon, a colleague at NC State who had done houses of note. Fitz could not take on the project and referred them to me, which would provide a beginning in my own practice.”<sup>10</sup>

Construction commenced in 1953 and continued into 1954, supervised in its later stages by Raleigh architect Marvin R. A. Johnson. The Graveses “were so happy with the house,” recalls Meg Graves.<sup>11</sup> “The open plan is very good for casual, contemporary living,” Ben and Barbara are quoted in a period article on the house. “The family room is our favorite. And the house lends itself well to entertaining, whether small, informal get-togethers or special-event dinner parties with all the stops open.”<sup>12</sup> Meg Graves notes that the design of the kitchen cabinet divider, with the open passthrough area between the upper and lower banks of cabinets, allowed her mother to be part of activities in the adjacent family room area even when she was working in the kitchen. The basement was originally unfinished, but Ben Graves eventually put a pool table in the space, then a ping pong table, and finally a large television set, pull-out sofa, and bathroom. Meg Graves believes the basement finish work was done in the 1960s in conjunction with the creation of the patio outside the basement door and the construction of the interior stairs. Meg Graves recalls the house was painted gray with “vivid orange” panels under the windows that were later

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<sup>4</sup> Surry County Deed Book 175, p. 375. Nominal purchase prices do not always reflect actual amounts, but in this case the amount agrees with the recollection of Meg Graves, who recalls that her parents were essentially given the property by the Wrenns.

<sup>5</sup> Surry County Deed Book 186, p. 462.

<sup>6</sup> Meg Graves; Mark Spencer, personal communication with the author, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca S. Holder, “The Graves House” (N.C. State Historic Preservation Office Study List Application, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> David R. Black, “Fitzgibbon, James W.,” article (2011) online at the North Carolina Architects & Builders website, accessed July 28, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Holder, “Graves House.”

<sup>10</sup> Cecil D. Elliott, letter to Rebecca S. Holder, ca. 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Meg Graves. Graves recalls that the family moved in in 1954.

<sup>12</sup> *Architectural Record*, mid-May 1956.

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painted "soft yellow" (the panels are currently the same gray color as the rest of the siding).<sup>13</sup>

The color scheme is also described in a 1956 article in *Architectural Record*: "The structure is of wood frame, with grey-stained cypress siding, white trim, orange or brown cement asbestos panels."<sup>14</sup>

The Graves House received national attention. Cecil Elliott later recalled:

At that time it was an unwritten rule at NCState that advancement in the School of Design required publication of architectural work in one of the major architectural periodicals. I had paid no great attention to that, but during the summer of 1955, while I was in St. Louis working with HOK (now the world's largest firm) George Matsumoto, close friend and colleague at NCState, mentioned the matter to an architectural photographer, who wrote me in St. Louis suggesting that he shoot the project the following fall.

The photographer was Joe Molitor, who was a regular with the major magazines of the time (*Forum*, *Record*, *PA*). About twice a year Molitor made trips south along the coast from Ossining, NY, shooting work assigned to him by editors and other projects he had picked up from his professional contacts. Joe used a large camera that took 8x10 plates. A "dusk" view of the Graves living room was accomplished by his small Asian assistant lying behind furniture to trigger an assortment of flash bulbs.

The photos were placed in 1956 with *Architectural Record* for the first of their annual *Record Houses* . . . Molitor also placed shots in articles: "Family Rooms," *House & Home*, Feb 1957; "Kitchens," *Record*, Dec 1956; "Bathrooms," *Record*, Dec 1956.<sup>15</sup>

The 1955 photographs document the use of the house and yard during the early years. Furnishings included a mix of traditional and contemporary pieces. The living room featured a Japanese screen and a zebra-striped armchair and the adjacent dining area had curtains with a bold abstracted pattern of mushrooms. The alcove on the north side of the family room was set up for sewing. The master bath was carpeted and had towels monogrammed with the letter G. The kitchen door on the north side and the basement door on the east end opened to lawn or landscaped areas that were later converted to concrete patios.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the major shortcoming of the design, from the standpoint of the owners/users of the house, was the lack of inside access to the basement. This was remedied in the 1960s by the enclosure of a portion of the south porch recess to create a basement stairwell. The design of the addition matched the original style and materials of the house.

During their years at 309 Fairview, Ben and Barbara Graves maintained an active involvement in the affairs of their community. Ben, who operated a real estate firm in addition to running the Mount Airy Mantel and Table Company, chaired the Mount Airy Board of Education and spearheaded the local United Fund. He was also a director of the Frist National Bank of Mount

<sup>13</sup> Meg Graves. Graves is certain the interior stairs were in existence by the mid-1970s and believes they were also in existence in the 1960s, possibly as early as ca. 1960-62.

<sup>14</sup> *Architectural Record*, mid-May 1956.

<sup>15</sup> Elliott to Holder letter.

<sup>16</sup> Graves House photo album, photos by Joseph W. Molitor, 1955.

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Airy and in the 1960s, as a member of Mount Airy's Central United Methodist Church, he chaired the building committee that oversaw the construction of the congregation's current church complex on North Main Street.<sup>17</sup> Barbara devoted herself to healthcare and social causes. She was a member of the Surry County Mental Health Authority Advisory Board in 1971 and worked with the Northern Hospital volunteers. She was also active with the Mount Airy Woman's Club and Salvation Army and served as the first woman on the Central United Methodist Church board of trustees.<sup>18</sup>

The Graves House belonged to John M. and Rebecca S. Holder in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first. It was acquired by the present owners, Mark and Sheila M. Spencer, in 2017.<sup>19</sup>

### *Architectural Context*

Architectural modernism has many contributing strands in North Carolina. In domestic architecture, the Craftsman style of the 1910s and 1920s and its representative form the bungalow generally eschewed historicism and explored novel forms, details, and plan arrangements that may be considered proto-modernist. The French-inspired ornamental Art Deco style and its relative, the streamlined Moderne style, were introduced for a range of North Carolina building types in the 1930s. A more distilled and cerebral form of modernism developed in Europe in the 1920s and was popularized in America by a 1932 exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The new style, dubbed the International Style by the exhibit's curators, was employed for a handful of North Carolina buildings during the 1930s and early 1940s, notably the 1931 Weyman Memorial Library in Highlands, designed by German émigré architect Oskar Stonorov, and the 1940-41 Weizenblatt House in Asheville, designed by another German émigré, Marcel Breuer.<sup>20</sup>

A watershed event in the popularization of the International Style in North Carolina was the opening of the NCSU School of Design in 1948. Headed by Henry Leveke Kamphoefner, a strong proponent of architectural modernism, the School of Design trained a generation of the state's architects in the precepts of modern design, and its professors influenced architectural developments through their teaching and, for those who were practicing architects, through construction.<sup>21</sup> Architectural historian David Black, in a study of early modernist architecture in Raleigh, notes: "So important was the School of Design under Kamphoefner to the introduction and proselytizing of modern architecture in North Carolina that the period during which the

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<sup>17</sup> *Princeton Alumni Weekly*; *Mullin-Kille Mount Airy . . . City Directory, Master Edition, 1971-72* (Chillicothe, Oh.: Mullin-Kille, 1972), 486.

<sup>18</sup> *Mullin-Kille Mount Airy . . . City Directory, Master Edition, 1971-72*, 486; *Mount Airy News*, March 31, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Spencer.

<sup>20</sup> David R. Black, "Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh Associated with the Faculty of the North Carolina State University School of Design, Raleigh, North Carolina" (National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1994), E.1-E.3; Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 451-453.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest H. Wood III, "The Opportunities Are Unlimited: Architects and Builders since 1945," in Catherine W. Bishir et al., *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 359.

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Modern Movement flourished in the state corresponds very closely with Kamphoefner's tenure at the school, from 1948 to 1972."<sup>22</sup>

Kamphoefner came to NCSU from the University of Oklahoma, accompanied by another proponent of modernism, professor and practicing architect George Matsumoto. In a 1948 letter Kamphoefner suggested his move to North Carolina was a group decision made by him and "my colleagues" at the University of Oklahoma.<sup>23</sup> Cecil Dean Elliott (1923-2003) was likely a member of this group, although his path to North Carolina was less direct. An Oklahoma native, Elliott received bachelor degrees in architecture and architectural engineering from the University of Oklahoma in 1944, served in the US Naval Reserve in 1944-46, and enrolled in the Harvard University Graduate School of Design from which he graduated in 1948. His teaching career began in 1944 at the University of Oklahoma and led to assistant professorships at the University of Minnesota (1948-49) and North Carolina State University beginning in 1950. During his twelve years in North Carolina—he left to teach at Auburn University in 1962—Elliott immersed himself in the life of his university, community, and profession. He served on a long-range planning committee for NCSU; joined the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and served on its education, publications, and historic preservation committees; produced programs on architectural topics for WUNC-TV; and served as secretary (1957) and vice-president (1958) for the Raleigh Council of Architects. He wrote numerous publications during his long career in education and the architectural profession, including an article as part of a series on the influence of Walter Gropius in the United States, published in the May 1950 issue of the French journal *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*; a textbook, *Technics and Architecture* (1992); and a history of the architectural profession, *The American Architect from the Colonial Era to the Present* (2003). In 1952 Elliott was licensed to practice architecture in North Carolina.<sup>24</sup>

In a ca. 2000 letter to former owner Rebecca Holder, Elliott recalled the circumstances of the design of the Graves House:

At that time the international star in architecture was Mies van der Rohe, and many of us attempted to follow his lead. This was difficult on small residential projects for which wood construction was appropriate. Mies's work was principally in metal, and that material does not have the limitations that are characteristic of wood. Mies's work also often involved symmetrical planning . . . Maintaining the symmetry—which can sometimes become rather foolish—was made easier by the fact that in college (at Princeton?) Ben Graves had taken an elective course in the history of architecture, classical period. This meant that there was an understanding that if a window were added at one corner it might entail adding windows at three other corners. (I've already said "foolish.")<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Black, "Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh," E.2.

<sup>23</sup> Wood, "The Opportunities Are Unlimited," 359.

<sup>24</sup> Cecil D. Elliott resume.

<sup>25</sup> Elliott to Holder letter.

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Though Elliott took a wry view of symmetry in his letter, the house's symmetry was regarded as one of its main virtues at the time. The 1956 *Architectural Record* article on the house, titled "Revival of Symmetry in North Carolina," claimed: "As in other parts of the country, many architects in the South are reconsidering the stand against absolute symmetry in design. The new approach, sometimes called another *neo-classical* revival, tends to create a certain repose and formality, and to purposefully set the house apart as an entity, rather than blend it with the countryside. The results, however, are thoroughly contemporary."<sup>26</sup> As Elliott noted, symmetry was common in Rohe's work, and it was also used by Elliott's colleague George Matsumoto in the design for his own residence in Raleigh, built in 1952-54 and featured on the cover of the *Architectural Record* publication *Record Houses of 1957*.<sup>27</sup>

The 1956 *Architectural Record* article revealed other aspects of the design. "From a concept of separate wings for bedrooms and living quarters, the plan was finally developed into three zones. One block is for sleeping, one for guests and entertainment. These are separated by a central zone for family-living with utilities arranged around the periphery. With the formal arrangement, each block has its own 'garden front.'" Elliott is quoted as stating: "The fundamental decisions of orientation and lot-use permitted a building form based on symmetry about two axes. While this decision might have been influenced by my own study of Greek Revival architecture in this area, the only common feature that can be sensibly claimed is the use of symmetry to develop a static unity." Elliott produced other designs before and after the Graves House. He worked as a designer or consultant for architects John Erwin Ramsay in Salisbury and William Moore Weber in Raleigh beginning in 1951 and in 1953 provided interior design for the Student Union Building at NCSU in association with George Matsumoto. Other work included the A. J. Borg House (Raleigh, 1955-56), the Sanford High School Auditorium (1956-57), the T. Franklin Williams House (Chapel Hill, 1958), and a fellowship hall and manse for the Community Church of Chapel Hill (1957, 1960).<sup>28</sup>

The Graves House also exists within the context of the development of architectural modernism in Mount Airy. Modernism got its start locally with the construction of prominent Art Deco or Art Deco-influenced buildings in the downtown, notably the 1931 Masonic Temple, the 1932-33 Mount Airy Post Office, and the 1938 Earle Theatre. These were followed by the first known Moderne building in the community, the 1939 W. Guy Bondurant House.<sup>29</sup> In the late 1940s, resident architect Dwight Kenneth Cooke Sr. produced Moderne designs such as the 1947 Derby Restaurant and probably the ca. 1946 remodeling of the 1939 Hutchens Laundry and Cleaners building. The earliest International Style-influenced building in the community may be the 1942 Hale and Nina Yokley House at 224 Howard Street in the Taylor Park development, located near the Graves House. In 1965 the Yokley House was remodeled and its apparent original International Style character intensified according to a design by the New York firm of architect

<sup>26</sup> *Architectural Record*, mid-May 1956.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 131-132.

<sup>28</sup> Cecil D. Elliott resume.

<sup>29</sup> Laura A. W. Phillips, *Simple Treasures: The Architectural Legacy of Surry County* (Mount Airy, N.C.: Surry County Historical Society, 1987), 152.



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William Pahlmann.<sup>30</sup> The 1951-52 International Style Reeves Community Center, designed by Shelby architect Fred Simmons, heralded a period of more sophisticated design with greater formal and spatial complexity, of which the Graves House was a part. Modernism was standard for much commercial and institutional architecture in the community through the early 1980s and remains an important idiom.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. Daniel Pezzoni, "Taylor Park Historic District" (National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> J. Daniel Pezzoni, "Mount Airy Architectural Survey Update Final Report" (2018).

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Surry County, N.C.  
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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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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:**

  X   State Historic Preservation Office

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- ☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** SR0669

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 2.269 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: 36.518197 | Longitude: -80.609925 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- |          |          |           |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
|----------|----------|-----------|

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

The nominated area corresponds to the modern tax parcel (PIN 502119616388) on which the Graves House stands.

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

The nominated area corresponds to the historic and modern parcel on which the Graves House stands.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni  
organization: Landmark Preservation Associates  
street & number: 6 Houston St.  
city or town: Lexington state: Virginia zip code: 24450  
e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net  
telephone: (540) 464-5315  
date: July 27, 2019

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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,

Graves, Ben and Barbara, House

Surry County, N.C.

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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: Ben and Barbara Graves House

City or Vicinity: Mount Airy

County: Surry State: North Carolina

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Date Photographed: May 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: North elevation, view facing southeast. Photo 1 of 9.

May 2018

West elevation, view facing east. Photo 2 of 9.

July 2018

South and east elevations, view facing northwest. Photo 3 of 9.

July 2018

East and north elevations, view facing southwest. Photo 4 of 9.

July 2018

Living room. Photo 5 of 9.

May 2018

Cabinet divider between kitchen and family room. Photo 6 of 9.

July 2018

Family room clerestory and construction detail. Photo 7 of 9.

July 2018

Closet area in south bedroom. Photo 8 of 9.

July 2018

Shed, view facing northwest. Photo 9 of 9.

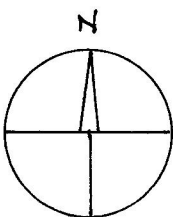
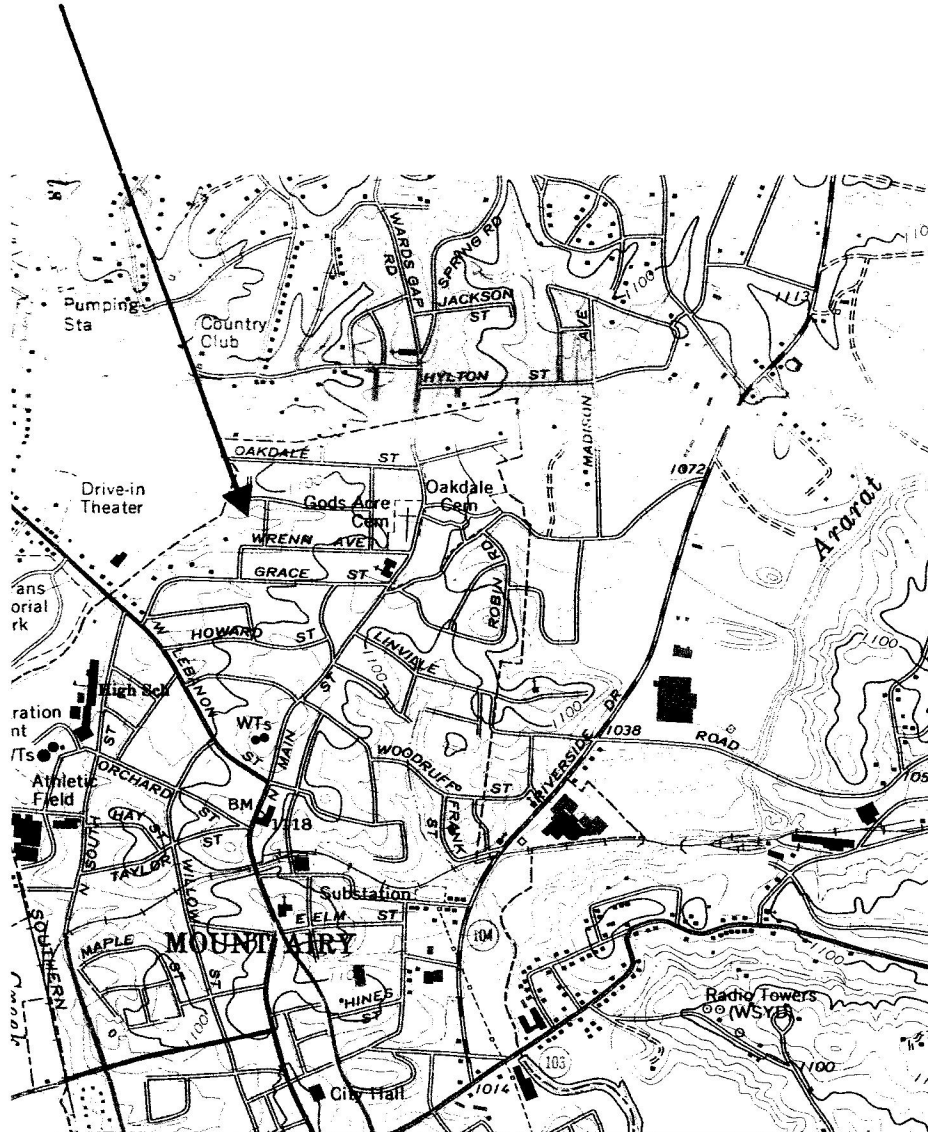
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**Ben and Barbara Graves House**  
309 Fairview Ave., Mount Airy, Surry County, N.C.

National Register of Historic Places Location Map  
Latitude: 36.518197, Longitude: -80.609925

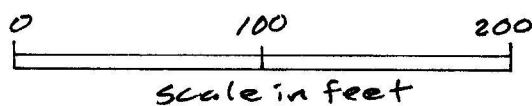
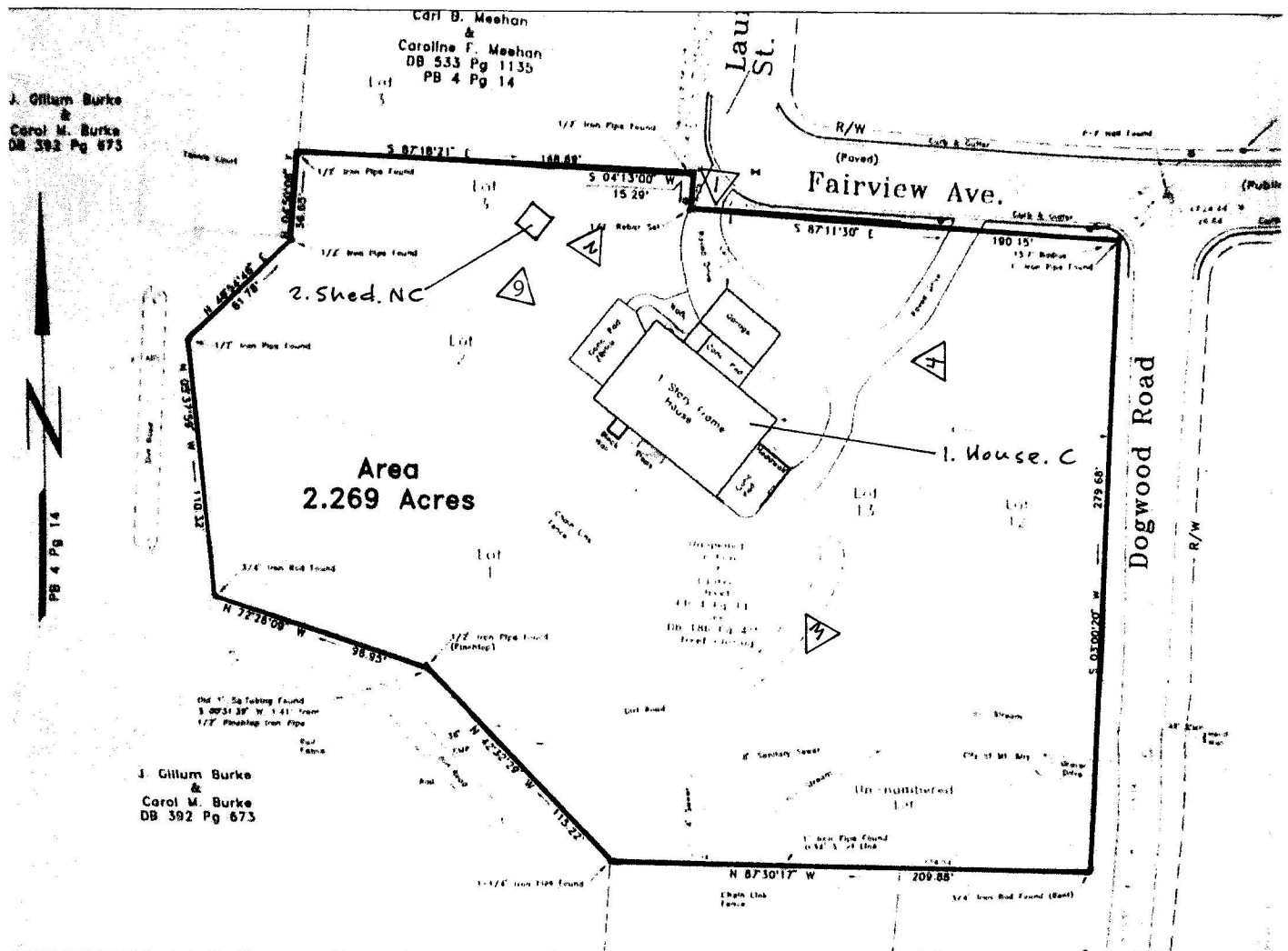
location of NR property



0 2000 4000  
scale in feet

309 Fairview Ave., Mount Airy, Surry County, N.C.

Nominated area, north arrow, and map scale indicated. Triangular markers indicate number and direction of view of nomination photos and are keyed to the photo log in the nomination. The nominated area corresponds to modern tax parcel PIN 502119616388. Lat/long coordinates are latitude 36.518197 and longitude -80.609925. The house is labeled C for contributing and the shed is labeled NC for non-contributing.





# Ben and Barbara Graves House

309 Fairview Ave., Mount Airy, Surry County, N.C.

## National Register of Historic Places Floor Plan and Photo Key

Drawing not to scale. Triangular markers indicate number and direction of view of nomination photos and are keyed to photo log in the nomination.

