

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mount Vernon School

other names/site number Chatham Red Brick Schoolhouse

2. Location

street & number 24 Southern Boulevard ☐ not for publication

city or town Chatham Township ☐ vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ county Morris code 027 zip code 07928

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

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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

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

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

GOVERNMENT: town hall

SOCIAL: meeting hall, clubhouse, civic

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: vernacular classical revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls BRICK

WOOD: shingle

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

METAL: aluminum

STONE: limestone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria considerations

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

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Politics/Government

Social History

Period of Significance

1860 - 1970

Significant Dates

1860, 1900, 1902, 1929, 1959

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 0.36

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum is other than WGS84: _____
(Enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 40.721976 Longitude: -74.403383

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Margaret M. Hickey, AIA and Beth A. Bjorklund, Historic Preservation Specialists
organization Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects, LLC date 28 February 2020
street & number P.O. Box 1726 telephone 973-746-4911
city or town Cranford state NJ zip code 07016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Chatham Township
street & number 58 Meyersville Road telephone 973-635-4600
city or town Chatham Township state NJ zip code 07928

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Direct questions regarding the proper completion of this form or questions about related matters to the Registration Section, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Mail code 501-04B, PO Box 420, Trenton, NJ 08625-0420.

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Summary Paragraph

The Mount Vernon School is a two-story, three-bay-wide-by-seven-bay-deep brick masonry two-room school building. Constructed in 1860, the vernacular school building utilizes characteristics of the Classical Revival style. The front elevation faces west/southwest toward Southern Boulevard; for descriptive purposes, the front will be referred to as west. (Photograph 0001). The building has three distinct sections with the original main section, a front vestibule, and a rear addition. Each section has a front-gable roof clad with twenty-first-century asphalt shingles. The windows are typically twentieth-century six-over-six hung wood sashes, with the exception of those at the rear addition. The building is constructed of red brick laid in an English bond pattern.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Mount Vernon School is set on at 0.36-acre lot at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Fairmont Avenue in a residential neighborhood (Photograph 0002). The land slopes up from both streets. There is a narrow lawn with mature trees along Fairmont Avenue. There is an entry drive at the east end of the building and an exit drive at the west end, with the area immediately south of the building paved and laid out with parking (Photograph 0003). The lot continues south of the parking area where it is wooded.

Exterior

General

The Mount Vernon School is composed of three sections: a one-and-one-half-story entry vestibule at the west end (c.1900), a two-story main section at the middle (original 1860), and a one-story rear addition at the east end (c.1959), all of which are the same width.

Roof and Roof Drainage

All three sections of the building have front-gable roofs clad with asphalt shingles. The roof drainage consists of hung aluminum gutters with corrugated aluminum leaders, most of which connect to an underground drainage system. A small square bell cupola with louvered side and a pyramidal roof (replaced circa 1959) is centered at the ridge towards the west end, and an interior brick chimney pierces the ridge at the east end (Photograph 0004).

Elevations

The entry vestibule contains the front entrance at its west elevation (Photograph 0005). Brick steps with bluestone treads and metal railings lead up to the centered entrance, which is a three-panel wood door with a narrow center panel. Six-over-six hung wood windows set in narrow flat-stock trim flank the door. The window and door openings have limestone lintels and sills. The windows are early-to-mid-twentieth-century replacements and are typical throughout unless otherwise noted (Photograph 0006). The front-gable roof has a full pediment return with molded raking cornice, shallow eave, and a wide frieze board. The pediment is finished with wood shingles and there is a four-lite round window at the center. The side elevations of the vestibule lack fenestration.

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The west (front-facing) elevation of the main two-story section is largely obscured by the entry vestibule. Visible at the attic level is a round wood window with louvers. The north and south side elevations have four evenly-spaced bays with a typical window in each bay at both floor levels with one exception: the second-floor eastern-most bay at the south elevation contains a nine-lite over one-panel wood door (Photographs 0007 and 0008). A simple, late-twentieth-century, straight-run, open wood staircase rises east-to-west- up to this entrance. The lower portion of the east (rear) elevation is obscured by the rear addition; visible at the second-floor level are two three-over-three hung wood windows with typical trim, sills, and lintels. The front-gable roof of the main section has wide overhanging eaves, a simple raking cornice, and a wide frieze board (Photograph 0009).

The rear addition contains an entrance at its south elevation. Centered on the elevation, the door matches that at the entry vestibule (Photograph 0010). West of the door is a six-lite wood awning window. The window has narrow flat-stock wood trim and a brick sill, which are typical for the rear addition. The north elevation has two irregularly-spaced bays, each containing a pair of four-lite wood casement windows. The east elevation has two four-lite wood casement windows set off-center towards the south, and centered in the gable end is a six-lite wood awning window. Set above the awning window is a small louvered opening. The end-gable roof lacks an overhang and is detailed with a simple raking cornice.

Interior

General

The interior finishes generally date to the mid-twentieth-century when the building was renovated for use as Chatham Township's municipal offices. Earlier ceiling finishes remain intact but are obscured by later finishes. There is baseboard heating throughout.

First Floor

The front (west) entrance leads into the vestibule (Room 101) (Photograph 0011). The floor is carpeted with mid-twentieth-century vinyl tile underneath. The walls are finished with gypsum board above a mid-twentieth-century wood paneled wainscot with molded top rail set higher than a chair rail. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove wood molding at the perimeter. A dog-leg stair occupies the south end of the space and features wood treads and risers; a simple, square wood balustrade with narrow top rail and square newel with molded top; and a wood stringer with molded upper edge (Photograph 0012). A pair of louvered doors set off-center at the east wall leads into the main first-floor space.

The main first floor room (Room 102) occupies the footprint of the main section (Photograph 0013). The flooring is late-twentieth-century 12x12 vinyl tile, which is typical throughout. The walls are finished with gypsum board above a mid-twentieth-century wood paneled wainscot with molded chair rail. There is no base, and the baseboard heat is faux-grained to blend with the wainscot. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove molding at the perimeter. A boxed beam extends east-west at the center of the ceiling and rests on two steel columns. There are three rows of fluorescent light fixtures at the ceiling. Centered at the east wall is a chimney. There are two doors at the east wall that access the rear addition: the northern door accesses the kitchen/break room and the southern door

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accesses the hall.

A Kitchen/Office (Room 103) occupies the north half of the rear addition (Photograph 0014). The flooring is typical vinyl tile. The walls are finished with gypsum board above a mid-twentieth-century wood paneled wainscot with molded chair rail. There is no base, and the baseboard heat is faux-grained to blend with wainscot. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove molding at the perimeter. The east wall features modern base and wall cabinets with Formica countertop and a four-inch backsplash lip, a stainless steel sink, stove with a hood, and refrigerator. There is an electrical closet at the west end of the south wall that houses the meter.

The L-shaped Hall (Room 104) at the south portion of the rear addition provides access from the main section to the exterior entrance at the south end and men's and women's restrooms along the east wall (Photograph 0015). The flooring is typical vinyl tile. The walls are gypsum board with a vinyl base where there is no baseboard heat. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove molding at the perimeter. There is a pull-down attic stair at the north end of the ceiling. There is a vault at the west wall that has a concrete slab floor, CMU block walls, and cast-in-place concrete ceiling.

The Women's Room (Room 105) is located east off the Hall adjacent to the Kitchen/Office. The flooring is typical vinyl tile. The walls are finished with a wainscot of 4x4 ceramic tiles with bullnose top and rough-finished gypsum board above. There is a sanitary cove base that is flush with the wall. The ceiling has the same rough-finished gypsum board. There is a toilet and a sink at the south wall.

The Men's Room (Room 106) is located east off the Hall adjacent to the Women's Room and occupies the southeast corner of the rear addition. The flooring is typical vinyl tile. The walls are finished with a wainscot of 4x4 ceramic tiles with bullnose top and rough-finished gypsum board above. There is a sanitary cove base that is flush with the wall. The ceiling has the same rough-finished gypsum board. There is a toilet and a sink at the north wall.

The Mechanical Room (Room 107) is located at the west end of the Hall at the north wall. The floor is concrete. The west wall is brick and the north and east walls are unfinished CMUs. The ceiling appears to be fire-rated gypsum board. The entire space is occupied with mechanical equipment.

Second Floor

The stair at the entry vestibule leads up to a small landing/anteroom (Room 201) (Photograph 0016). The finishes are generally the same as at the first floor of the vestibule. The floor is carpeted with mid-twentieth-century vinyl tile underneath. The walls are finished with gypsum board. There is a narrow wood base with molded top edge and shoe molding. There is baseboard heat at the west wall, which sits below duct work. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove molding at the perimeter. A door at the north wall leads into the main second-floor space. There is a closet at the east end of the north wall.

The Exhibit Space (Room 202) occupies the footprint of the main section and is filled with museum displays (Photograph 0017). The floor is carpeted with typical vinyl tile underneath. The walls are

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finished with gypsum board. There is a narrow wood base with molded top edge and shoe molding at the east wall only. There is baseboard heat at the north and south walls. There is a furred acoustical tile ceiling with a narrow cove molding at the perimeter. A section of removed finishes reveal the original beaded board ceiling is intact above (Photograph 0018). A ceiling hatch with grate provides access up to the bell cupola. There is an exterior door at the east end of the south wall.

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Statement of Significance

The Mount Vernon School is a two-story, two-room schoolhouse constructed in 1860 to educate the children of the Long Hill section of Chatham Township, Morris County, New Jersey, and it is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Education, Social History, and Politics/Government for its key roles in the history of Chatham Township as schoolhouse, community space, and municipal offices. Its period of significance is 1860, the year it was constructed, to 1970 (the fifty-year cutoff), a time period inclusive of its use as a schoolhouse, community center, and township municipal offices.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Historical Overview of Chatham Township

Chatham Township was originally home to the Minsi of the Lenni-Lenape, whose migratory Minisink trail from the Delaware River to Shrewsbury Inlet passed through Chatham at a crossing of the Passaic River.¹ The land including the present Chatham Township was first settled in the seventeenth century as part of the greater exploration and settlement of the state of New Jersey. The area including what is now Chatham belonged to East Jersey before 1688, but became part of West Jersey due to boundary line changes later that same year.² By the early-eighteenth century, the Chatham area was an unnamed section of a larger settlement called Whippany, which was renamed Hanover Township in 1720. Whippany and the surrounding area was part of Burlington County until Hunterdon County was created in 1714, and then part of Hunterdon County until 1739, at which time Morris County was incorporated.³

Settlers arrived in Chatham during the 1720s, and the area (today Chatham Borough) became known as John Day's Bridge or Day's Bridge, named for the small village that developed around the property of John Day and the bridge he constructed at the Passaic River.⁴ When Morris County separated from Hunterdon County, the Minisink Trail (today Main Street) at Day's Bridge became the dividing line between the newly established Hanover and Morris Townships.⁵ Other early settlers included Samuel Carter, John Budd, Nathaniel Bonnell, William Broadwell, Samuel Lum, and Ichabod Genung, Peter Raymond, Israel Ward, and Moses Carter.⁶ Many of the early settlers established farms around the Great Swamp, which is the remnant bottom of the prehistoric glacial Lake Passaic, which once covered a large portion of northern New Jersey. Early settlers also built mills along the Passaic River, which required damming the river and constructing millraces, as there were no waterfalls or rapids.⁷

Chatham's location approximately midway between the markets of Newark and Elizabeth and the iron mines of western Morris County spurred development in the village. The village became a popular

¹ Charles A. Philhower, *Brief History of Chatham, Morris County, New Jersey* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1914), 2.

² John T. Cunningham, *Chatham: A Crossing of the Fishawack* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham Historical Society, 1967), 7.

³ Leonardo A. Fariello, "A Place Called Whippany: Its history and contemporary times," The Whippanong Library <http://www.whippanong.org/hanover.html> (Accessed January 2020).

⁴ Cunningham, 8.

⁵ Cunningham, 10.

⁶ Cunningham, 8-9.

⁷ Cunningham, 83.

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stopover point, and the first inn or tavern was built around 1755, with a second one a few years later.⁸ The name was changed to Chatham circa 1773 in honor of William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham who was a British supporter of the colonial cause.⁹ Other settlements in what would become Chatham Township were Bottle Hill (present-day Madison); Columbia, also called Afton (present-day Florham Park); Green Village; and Long Hill.

Chatham Township was established in 1806 from portions of Morris and Hanover Townships and its development was focused around the aforementioned villages. Five years earlier in 1801, the Morris Turnpike, the state's first chartered turnpike, was approved by the Legislature to extend from Elizabeth to the upper Delaware River Valley, including passage through the villages of Madison and Chatham.¹⁰ The turnpike was completed in 1804 and resulted in some growth in the villages, including a post office in Chatham in 1808.¹¹

Like the turnpike, the Morris and Essex Railroad was constructed through the villages of Madison and Chatham in 1837 on its way between Newark and Morristown. This resulted in marked population growth in the villages but little growth in the more rural parts of the Township. The disparity in growth between the Township and the villages including disagreements over taxes led to the separation of the Boroughs of Madison in 1889, Chatham in 1892, and Florham Park in 1899, with Chatham Township reaching its existing boundaries at that time. The more isolated Chatham Township remained sparsely developed through the nineteenth century. The population decreased from 4,681 in 1890 to just 620 in 1900 following the separation of the Boroughs.¹² A thriving rose and greenhouse industry developed in a section of the Township that became known as Floral Hill during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century¹³ and continued into the twentieth century.

Suburban development began in the Township following World War II, as the many farms and nurseries were sold off, and even greater residential development occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Chatham Township today features suburban development, dominated by subdivisions dating from the second half of the twentieth century. Green Village remains as an unincorporated community within both Chatham Township and neighboring Harding Township, with its own fire department, post office, church, and a few businesses. A fair amount of open space remains, with approximately one-third of the Township being marshland, which is largely made up of a portion of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

⁸ Cunningham, 11.

⁹ Chatham Township, "History of Chatham Township," <https://www.chathamtownshipnj.gov/government/history> (accessed December 2019).

¹⁰ Cunningham, 55.

¹¹ Cunningham, 59.

¹² Federal Census data.

¹³ "History of Chatham Township."

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New Jersey Public Schools Through the Nineteenth Century

When discussing the history and development of a public school, it is best to have a general understanding of the history and development of the public school system in New Jersey. The earliest settlers each brought their own traditions in education, which were often tied to their families and their church. Even though education during the colonial period helped to shape the public education system in New Jersey, the act of educating children outside of the home varied widely from community to community. For instance, in Bergen County the Dutch Reformed Church was the primary progenitor of education to its children, where in towns controlled primarily by Puritan or Congregationalists faith, education was seen as a civic responsibility and public school boards and funding was provided through levies. Quaker communities also established schools using revenues from properties they sold or rented to support operational expenses and would often charge tuition. The school buildings themselves were typically simple one-room buildings that reflected simple homes. Despite the presence of school buildings and educational funding, education was not a high priority for most, attendance tended to be sporadic, and the focus was on basic reading skills. Despite the presence of public schools, church-run schools were the most common type, but the religious denominations were also the ones that campaigned for public schools as a given rather than the exception after the American Revolution.¹⁴

Presbyterianism, the fastest growing denomination in New Jersey in the late-eighteenth century, established many schools, often called academies, grammar schools, or classical schools, in what would have been considered the urban centers of Newark, Elizabeth, and Trenton as well as other towns, prior to the American Revolution that were then reinvigorated after the war. School growth was stimulated in part by both local community action and by legislative action in 1799; the “Act to Incorporate Societies for the Promotion of Learning” was passed to permit the creation of public schools. Despite an increase in the number of schools, the quality of the education, the availability of suitable teachers, and sufficient school buildings were lacking particularly in the more remote locales of the state. The majority of schools continued to be mostly unavailable to poor and black children, except in rare instances.¹⁵

A solid foundation for public schooling was slow to develop in New Jersey compared with other states in the Early National Period because the majority of New Jersey residents lived and worked on farms and their livelihoods revolved primarily around agricultural pursuits and less around educational needs beyond religious literacy and simple arithmetic. Education remained primarily in the private sector and on a voluntary basis until the early 1800s; however, a movement, albeit a slow one, grew for publicly-funded schools in order to prepare the country’s next generation for citizenship and to be able to participate in an emerging industrial economy. In 1816, the New Jersey legislature established its first school fund and, slowly, local municipalities began to fund public schools primarily to reach the poor. This was the first step in establishing a state-wide public school system by the mid-nineteenth century. Initial educational goals were to promote “civic virtue” focusing on citizenship, thrift, industry and

¹⁴ Howard Green, “Classrooms Struggle: A History of School Construction in New Jersey: Chapter 1 – Colonial and Early National Background c. 1665 – c. 1815”. (Trenton: Preservation New Jersey, 2011) [This is a draft report without page numbers. Use in the development of this National Register Nomination was to help provide context and establish the broad patterns of education and school construction in New Jersey in the context of the Mount Vernon School. Where needed, other resources were referred to confirm statements or firm up dates provided in this report.).

¹⁵ Howard Green, “Chapter 1 – Colonial and Early National Background c.1665-1815.”

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developing skills so that there was a broader participation in democratic institutions and the ability to participate in an economy that was changing from one of agriculture to one of industry. The disparity in the quality of education persisted through much of the nineteenth century so that middle-class families often sent their children to private academies while the poor were relegated to often under-funded public schools. As the public school system was established and grew, the one- and two-room schoolhouse became the predominant building type, employing simple vernacular forms and detailing. Despite their presence, they were often derided as being inadequate due to the lack of proper funding.¹⁶

As the quality (and even quantity) of public schools lagged behind neighboring states, New Jersey slowly improved through acts of the legislature and efforts by local municipalities, religious groups, and private individuals. Key improvements included: the construction of better school buildings particularly in urban centers that had more resources and used local taxes or tuition fees as part of their funding mechanism; the establishment of a post-primary school to educate future teachers in 1855; a State Board of Education established in 1866 that had the power to regulate aspects of public education; and the abolishment of tuition fees in 1871 that made schools free of charge for all children ages 5 to 18 and affixed a school tax to all taxable property in the state. Howard Green notes in his draft report, "Classrooms Struggle: A History of School Construction in New Jersey", which focuses on the development of New Jersey's public school system, that many historians believe the 1871 legislation led to a building boom in 1871 and 1872; however, he suggests that more likely, an increase in school construction by the mid-1870s was a reflection of a rising popular support for public education. One could argue the legislature responded to the needs of the communities based on the rising public support for a state-wide public education system.

The building boom continued the construction of one- and two-room schoolhouses in the smaller towns and rural communities, while the larger urban areas with greater populations broke out of this mold to erect two-story buildings of greater consequence in construction and capacity that employed the popular architectural styles of the period.¹⁷ Again, aligning with the broad patterns of public education in New Jersey, from the onset of public school education, each neighborhood had its own schoolhouse; so by the 1890s, some Townships had multiple and often under-funded schools without an established curriculum and a varied level of competence in education fundamentals. As such, in 1894, the state legislature amended the law for each municipality to establish a single, central school district; this resulted in the number of school districts in the state going from 1408 to just fewer than 400.¹⁸

Mount Vernon School

The first known school in Chatham was likely built during the late-eighteenth century as reference was made to it in 1805 as "the school house" and "the old school."¹⁹ Little is known of this particular school, but looking at the broader history of education in New Jersey, the school would have been started and funded by the local citizens. This early school was replaced by the Chatham Academy, which was

¹⁶ Howard Green, "Chapter 2 – The Common School Campaign 1816-1876."

¹⁷ Howard Green, "Chapter 2."

¹⁸ Howard Green, "Chapter 3 – The School System Emerges 1880 – 1945."

¹⁹ Dorothy-Edna Stuart, "The History of Education in Chatham from the end of the eighteenth century to July 1904," The Fishawack Papers, 1963, pages 3-4. The Fishawack Papers, Chapter 5.

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established by group of Proprietors in 1805; construction appears to have started the following year but took several years to finish. A board of Trustees ran the Academy and charged tuition, but it seems to have had financial difficulties from early on. In 1829, the Chatham Township School Committee was appointed and the Township voted to raise a school tax.²⁰ With the 1838 Act establishing Common Schools by Districts,²¹ the Chatham Township school districts were formed. Ten Chatham Township school districts are identified on the 1868 Beers Atlas of Morris County, although the number of districts and their naming changed at different points. In 1894, as a result of the state legislation call for a single, central school district, a consolidated Chatham Township Board of Education was formed.

The Mount Vernon School was constructed in 1860 for the Long Hill section of Chatham Township. It served the Mount Vernon Washington School District No. 7, which was later called Mount Vernon District No. 78.²² An earlier school, constructed circa 1825, existed in Long Hill and appears to have been located across the street from the later Mount Vernon School.²³

In 1860, land was purchased from Jonathan C. Bonnell and bricks purchased from nearby Lum's brickyard to construct the new school in Long Hill. The 1860 Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Schools of New Jersey stated, "The people of district No. 7 have lately completed a very substantial building of brick, an ornament to their place, and to every passer by pleasing and attractive,"²⁴ which appears to refer to the Mount Vernon School.

Initially, only the first floor of the Mount Vernon School was used for a public school, and the second floor was used for Sunday school and church services by the non-denominational Mt. Vernon Sunday School. At that time, two main doors (one for girls and one for boys) at the front elevation both accessed the first floor classroom, and it appears the second floor was only accessible via an exterior staircase at the east elevation. The school was enlarged in 1900 and 1902, likely with the addition of the front vestibule²⁵ followed by the addition of a rear shed to contain the furnace and hot water heater. The following year the building was painted at the exterior and interior.²⁶ In 1904, both floor levels became public school classrooms for the first time, with kindergarten through fourth grade taught downstairs and fifth through eighth grade taught upstairs; this was the first school year where two teachers were employed.²⁷ In addition to the school still being used for religious education on Sundays, the building was also used for plays, festivals, and other community events. From its initial construction, the building was more than a school and played various important roles in the community.

²⁰ Stuart, 38.

²¹ Stuart, 7.

²² Stuart, 48.

²³ Stuart, 47.

²⁴ New Jersey Department of Education, Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Schools of New Jersey, for the Year 1860, page 177.

²⁵ "Chatham Schools Open Sept. 4," The Madison Eagle, August 24, 1900. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

²⁶ Stuart, 48.

²⁷ Unknown article, 1973.

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The Mount Vernon School functioned in this manner until it closed in 1929, when the Southern Boulevard School was constructed to better house the growing population of Chatham²⁸ and provide more modern facilities. From its construction through 1929, "...the Red Brick School House, located on Southern boulevard at Fairmount avenue in Chatham Township, held a very important place in the life of the Long Hill community... Education, both secular and religious, was fostered, and it was here that the entire social life of the community centered."²⁹

Despite its closure in 1929, the Mount Vernon School continued to serve an important role in the Chatham Township community. In 1930, Elliott and Martha Averett of neighboring Dixiedale Farm purchased the former school in order to ensure its preservation, recognizing its important role in Chatham Township's history. In the following decades, the Averetts provided the building free of charge for use by various community organizations including the Chatham Art club, the Red Cross, the Woman's Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Girls Scouts, and the Long Hill Chapel; the building was also used as a polling station and for some public meetings. The Mount Vernon School essentially served as a community center for nearly three decades.

The community center movement began in the early-twentieth century as an outgrowth of social welfare programs. In 1918, Mary Parker Follett, a prominent social worker, management consultant and philosopher, wrote:

The training for the new democracy must be from the cradle – through nursery, school and play, and on and on through every activity of our life. Citizenship is not to be learned in good government classes or current events courses or lessons in civics. It is to be acquired only through those modes of living and acting which shall teach us how to grow the social consciousness. This should be the object of all day school education, of all night school education, of all our supervised recreation, of all our family life, of our club life, of our civic life.³⁰

The community center, as a built form, was popular in the early-twentieth century, and community centers often first started as after-school programs in neighborhood schools to host various community activities, such as adult education classes and recreational activities. In rural areas in particular, where people had fewer options for social gatherings, the schoolhouse functioned as the heart of the community, providing opportunities for community meetings, fairs, lectures, and various other social and educational events.³¹ The federal Bureau of Education became involved with the movement and encouraged the use of schoolhouses as community centers. As Commissioner P. P. Claxton stated:

²⁸ "Township Buys New School Site," The Chatham Press, September 3, 1927, page 5. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

²⁹ "Red Brick School Was Scene of Fairs, Service 50 Yrs.," Chatham Courier, May 22, 1946.

³⁰ Infed, "Mary Parker Follett: community, creative experience and education," Infed, <http://infed.org/mobi/mary-parker-follett-community-creative-experience-and-education/> (accessed December 2019).

³¹ L. J. Hanifan, "The Rural School Community Center," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 67, New Possibilities in Education (Sep., 1916), 132-136. (Available from JSTOR)

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For this purpose the schoolhouse is specially fitted; it is non-sectarian and non-partisan; the property of no individual, group or clique, but the common property of all; the one place in every community in which all have equal rights and all are equally at home. . . . Here all members of the community may appropriately send themselves to school to each other and learn from each other the things pertaining to the life of the local community, the state, the nation, and the world.³²

As there became an increase in the need for community spaces not restricted by the timing of school programs, community centers became self-contained buildings creating a framework for local organizations to engage in a communal setting. The ideal for community centers was for engagement in civic programming and to promote democratic ideals pursuing educational, welfare and social activities. Often, however, the reality was community centers increasingly served as the place for clubs, youth groups, and lodges to meet. The proponents for community centers held one ideal where the reality on the ground was similar to that of the Mount Vernon School after purchase by the Averett family, as a place for clubs, youth groups and civic groups, such as the Red Cross, to meet. Having provided a space for various community events since its construction, the school's new role as unofficial community center was a natural progression and expansion of how the building had long been used in response to the community's needs.

The Mount Vernon School was home for nearly a decade to the Chatham Art Club, which was founded in 1932 by members of the Art Department of the Chatham's Woman's Club. The members presented exhibits at the schoolhouse and participated in exhibits at other locations, including such places as the Hahne & Co in Newark and the Summit Loft. The club offered art classes for their members and students³³ as well as talks open to the public, parties, and other social events. Over six hundred people attended the Club's first art exhibit,³⁴ and their annual spring and fall exhibitions drew attendees from all over New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.³⁵ In 1937, the Club undertook a renovation of the former schoolhouse including painting, installation of a new lighting system, and construction of a new gallery space at the second floor.³⁶ The Chatham Art Club continued to use the school as their clubhouse until around 1942.

Various other community uses during the 1940s included the headquarters for the Republican Party in 1940; the headquarters of the Chatham Red Cross for certain meetings and fundraising events; and use by the Chatham PTA, which was started at the Schoolhouse.³⁷ From 1946 to 1951, the Long Hill Gospel Fellowship used the Schoolhouse for church services, Sunday school, and bible classes until their own

³² C. J. Bushnell, "The Community Center Movement as a Moral Force," *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 30, No 3 (April 1920), 333. (Available from JSTOR)

³³ Untitled, The Chatham Press, February 4, 1933, page 3. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

³⁴ Untitled, The Chatham Press, January 7, 1933, page 3. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

³⁵ Untitled, The Chatham Press, December 7, 1934. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

³⁶ "Art Club Exhibition Attracts Large Crowds," The Chatham Press, November 12, 1937. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

³⁷ "Chatham Township P.T.A. News," The Chatham Press, April 4, 1944, page 4. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

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church building was constructed (across the street from the Schoolhouse);³⁸ they occasionally used the schoolhouse for meetings as late as 1957.³⁹ From 1947 to at least 1957, the Fairmount Woman's Club used the Schoolhouse for different events and meetings; starting in 1952, it served as their clubhouse.⁴⁰ Chatham Township Girl Scouts also met at the Schoolhouse from 1947 until at least 1953, with it serving as their headquarters beginning in 1952.⁴¹ The various community organizations that called the schoolhouse home respected its important role in the community. As a member of the Woman's Club stated in 1954, "This old school house is an historical shrine in the Township, and it is a privilege granted the Club by Mrs. Elliot Averett, to use for Department meetings."⁴²

The Averett family deeded the property back to the Township in 1956, "...for use as a meeting place to supplement the Township Hall and for meetings of the various organizations of the Township residents – to serve, in other words, as a sort of community center."⁴³ This coincided with the Township's 150th anniversary celebration. The deed stated the property must be, "for municipal or public purposes forever, such as municipal administration building, recreation or park purposes or the like and should the grantee fail to use the property in such manner, or fail to faithfully keep, perform and observe each and every the conditions hereinafter set forth, then in any of said events the title to the above described property shall immediately pass to and vest in the Morris County Historical Society, in fee simple absolute."⁴⁴ It also included that the schoolhouse must be preserved and maintained in good condition and that additional buildings could not be constructed on the property or any additions could not be added to the schoolhouse.

In 1958, the Township committee decided to renovate the Schoolhouse for use as Township Hall rather than construct a new, larger building. The Township had discussed the need for larger municipal space and the idea of moving into the Schoolhouse as early as 1939.⁴⁵ As part of the renovation, a twenty-foot addition was constructed at the rear of the building in place of the earlier rear shed to provide additional space, restrooms, and a fireproof vault. At the interior, the finishes were upgraded and the floors were reinforced in order to hold the weight of voting machines. The renovations met the approval of Martha Averett, and her son, Sam Averett, was appointed to the advisory committee to plan the project. The Mount Vernon School served as Chatham Township Hall until 1988 when municipal offices were moved to another former school building. In 1991, the Chatham Township Historical Society opened the building as a local history museum. Today, the building retains a high degree of architectural integrity to its time as Township Hall in the mid-twentieth century.

³⁸ "Ground Broken for New Chapel Last Sunday," The Chatham Press, June 29, 1951, page 1. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

³⁹ "Long Hill Chapel," The Chatham Press, February 1, 1957, page 3. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

⁴⁰ "Fairmount Woman's Club Election of Officers," The Chatham Press, April 11, 1952, page 5. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

⁴¹ "Fairmount Woman's Club Election of Officers."

⁴² "Township Topics," The Chatham Press, March 26, 1954, page 3. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

⁴³ Letter from Samuel Averett to Abe Bahooshian, March 27, 1954. Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

⁴⁴ Deed between Martha Snead Averett (widow) and the Township of Chatham; dated May 29, 1956.

⁴⁵ "Township Seeks to Acquire Brick School for Meet'gs," The Chatham Press, December 29, 1939, page 1. (Available from Newspapers.com.)

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Significance Under Criterion A

The Mount Vernon School is significant under Criterion A for its role in the education, social and civic development of Chatham from 1860, the estimated date of construction, to 1970 (the fifty-year cutoff), a time period inclusive of its use as a schoolhouse, community center, and municipal offices. Not the first or only school building in Chatham, it was recognized by its position in the landscape and its original use as a schoolhouse as a local landmark by 1929 when a local family purchased it as an ideal location to play host to community organizations from until 1958 when the building was converted for use as the municipal building. The image of the Mount Vernon School in the eyes of the local community is as a landmark for its long history serving many needs of the community.

The Mount Vernon School served the children of the Long Hill section of Chatham Township for 69 years. Built as a two-room schoolhouse, only the first floor was initially used as a classroom while the second floor was used for Sunday school and various community uses including plays, festivals, and other events. The second floor was not used as a classroom until 1904, at which time the grades were divided with kindergarten through fourth at the first floor and fifth through eighth grades at the second floor. From its initial construction, the building played a vital role in the community beyond educational purposes.

Upon its closure as a school in 1929, the neighboring Averett family purchased the building because they recognized its important role as a landmark in the community. They provided the building for use by the Chatham Art Club and many other local organizations, and this was a natural transition into a community center of sorts, a role the building had always essentially played. Groups that used the building included the Girls Scouts, the Fairmount Woman's Club, the Red Cross, the Republican Party, the Long Hill Gospel Fellowship, the Chatham PTA, and the Daughters of the American Revolution; the building was also used as a polling station and for some public meetings. This came at a time in the early-to-mid-twentieth century when advocates of community centers stressed their importance for providing social and educational activities in the pursuit of democratic ideals and civic engagement.

After thirty years as a de facto community center, the Mount Vernon School filled its next role in the Chatham community as that of the Township municipal building. As part of the Township's 150th anniversary celebration, the Averett family deeded the property back to the Township in 1956, specifying its use for municipal or public purposes and that it must be preserved. Following a renovation, which included a small addition, the building served as Chatham Township Hall from 1959 to 1988 at which time the Township offices were relocated to a larger building. Since 1991, the Chatham Township Historical Society has operated the former schoolhouse as a local history museum. Whether as a school, community center, or municipal building, the Mount Vernon School has played a key role in the Chatham Township community since its construction and continues to be valued today as an important local landmark.

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Primary Sources

Deed between Martha Snead Averett (widow) and the Township of Chatham; dated May 29, 1956.
Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

Letter from Samuel Averett to Abe Bahooshian, March 27, 1954. Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Newspaper Articles

“Art Club Exhibition Attracts Large Crowds.” *The Chatham Press*, November 12, 1937. Available from Newspapers.com.

“Chatham Schools Open Sept. 4.” *The Madison Eagle*, August 24, 1900. Available from Newspapers.com.

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Untitled. *The Chatham Press*, February 4, 1933. Available from Newspapers.com.

Untitled. *The Chatham Press*, December 7, 1934. Available from Newspapers.com.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries include those of Lot 1 of Block 67 on sheet 52 of the Chatham Township tax maps.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries align with those of the property deeded to the Township by Martha Snead Averett in 1956.

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Section number Photo Log Page 1**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Mount Vernon School

City or Vicinity: Chatham Township

County: Morris State: New Jersey

Photographer: Margaret M. Hickey (0002, 0003, 0004, 0005, 0006, 0007, 0008, 0010, 0013) and Beth A. Bjorklund (0001, 0009, 0011, 0012, 0014, 0015, 0016, 0017, 0018)

Date Photographed: October 25, 2019 (0002, 0003, 0004, 0005, 0006, 0007, 0008, 0010, and 0013) and December 6, 2019 (0001, 0009, 0011, 0012, 0014, 0015, 0016, 0017, and 0018)

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

Photo 0001: View of the front (west) elevation of the Mount Vernon School; camera facing north.**Photo 0002:** Overall view of the site at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Fairmount Avenue; camera facing northeast.**Photo 0003:** View showing the parking area south of the building; camera facing east.**Photo 0004:** View of the main roof showing the cupola and chimney; camera facing north.**Photo 0005:** View of the entry vestibule; camera facing southeast.**Photo 0006:** View showing typical windows at the main section of the building; camera facing south.**Photo 0007:** Overall view of the north elevation showing the three sections of the building; camera facing south.**Photo 0008:** View of the south elevation of the original section of the building; camera facing north.**Photo 0009:** View showing the detailing of the roof edge at the original section of the building; camera facing east.

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Photo 0010: Overall view of the rear addition; camera facing north.

Photo 0011: Overall view of the Vestibule; camera facing north.

Photo 0012: View of the stairs from the Vestibule; camera facing south.

Photo 0013: Overall view of the main first floor room, one of the two original classrooms; camera facing east.

Photo 0014: Overall view of the Kitchen/Office; camera facing east.

Photo 0015: Overall view of the Hall; camera facing east.

Photo 0016: Overall view of the Stair Landing; camera facing north.

Photo 0017: Overall view of the second-floor Exhibit Room; camera facing east.

Photo 0018: View showing early beaded board ceiling intact above mid-twentieth-century finishes at the second floor; camera facing up.



Mount Vernon School

New Jersey and National Registers Nomination
24 Southern Boulevard, Chatham Township,
Morris County,
New Jersey

Boundary and tax map

0 10 20 40 60 Feet

Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane New Jersey

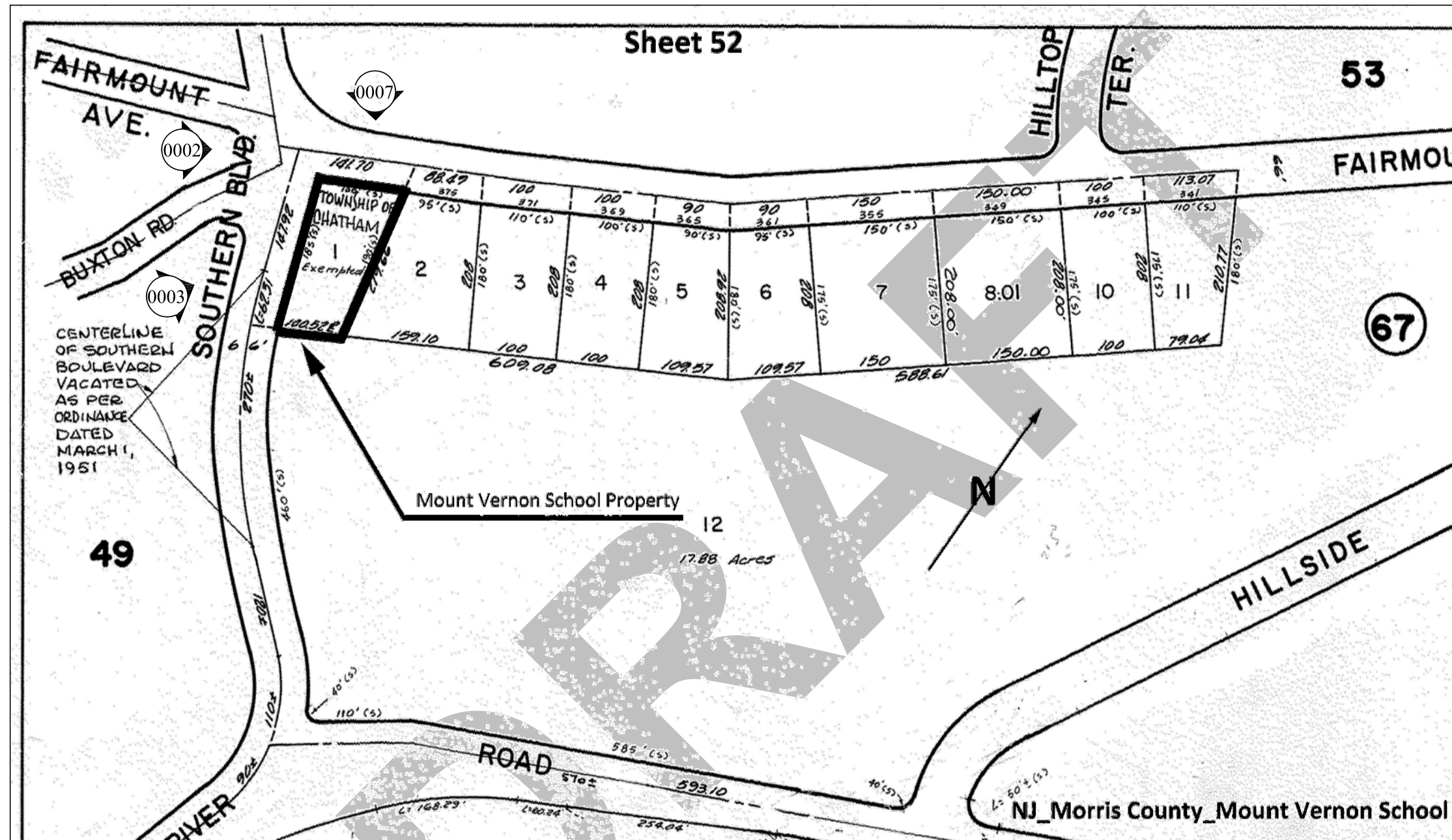
Legend

- NJ & NR boundary
- Coordinates
- Tax Parcels

0.37 Acres



NJDEP,
Historic Preservation Office
April 2021



SITE MAP - PHOTO KEY

3/16" = 1' - 0"

CONNOLLY & HICKEY
HISTORICAL
ARCHITECTS, LLC
P.O. Box 1726
Cranford, N.J. 07016
973 746-4911

THOMAS B. CONNOLLY, AIA
NJ 21A101699200
PA RA403776

MARGARET M. HICKEY, AIA
NJ 21A1018244500

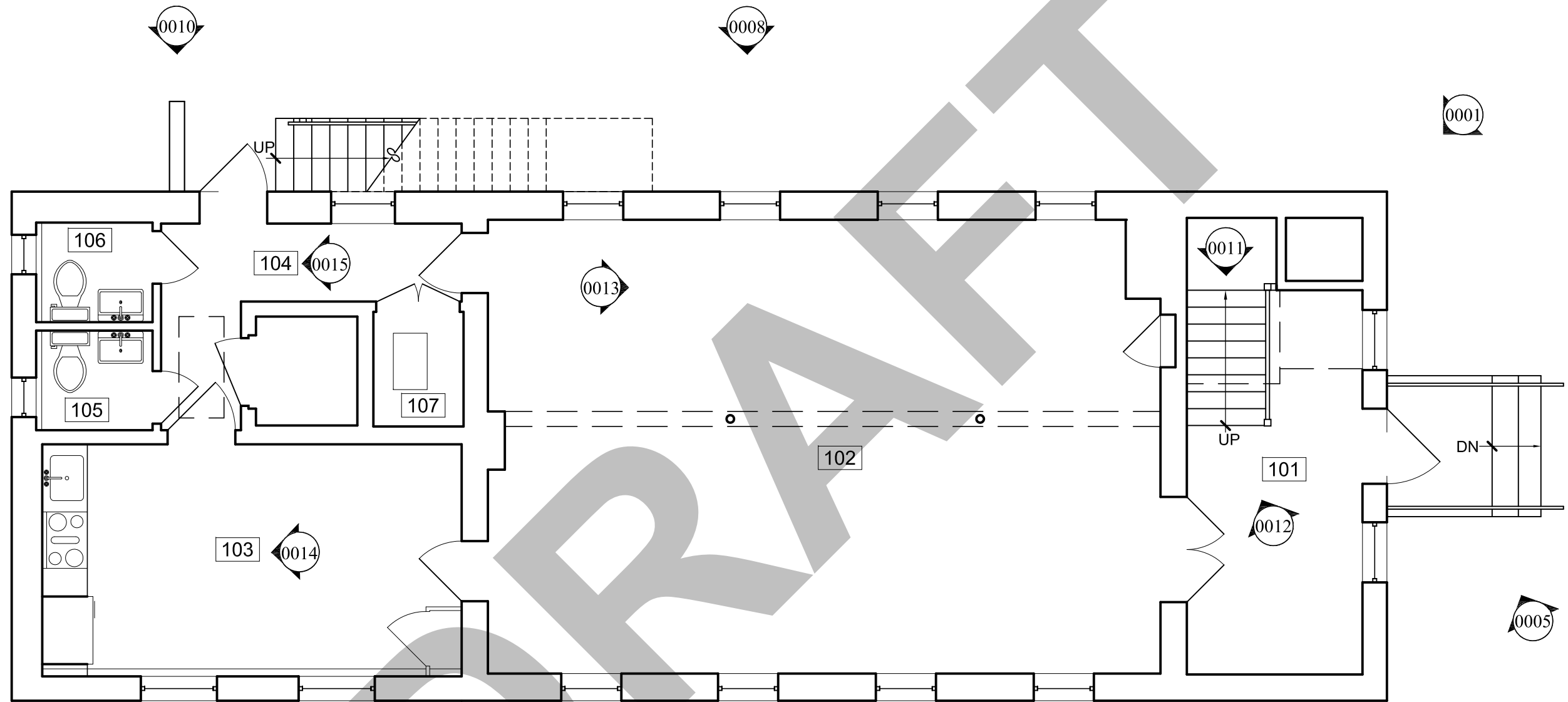
PROJECT No. 1921C

DATE: 30 JANUARY 2020

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

MOUNT VERNON SCHOOL
CHATHAM TOWNSHIP, MORRIS COUNTY, NJ

1



FIRST FLOOR PLAN - PHOTO KEY

3/16" = 1' - 0"

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973 746-4911

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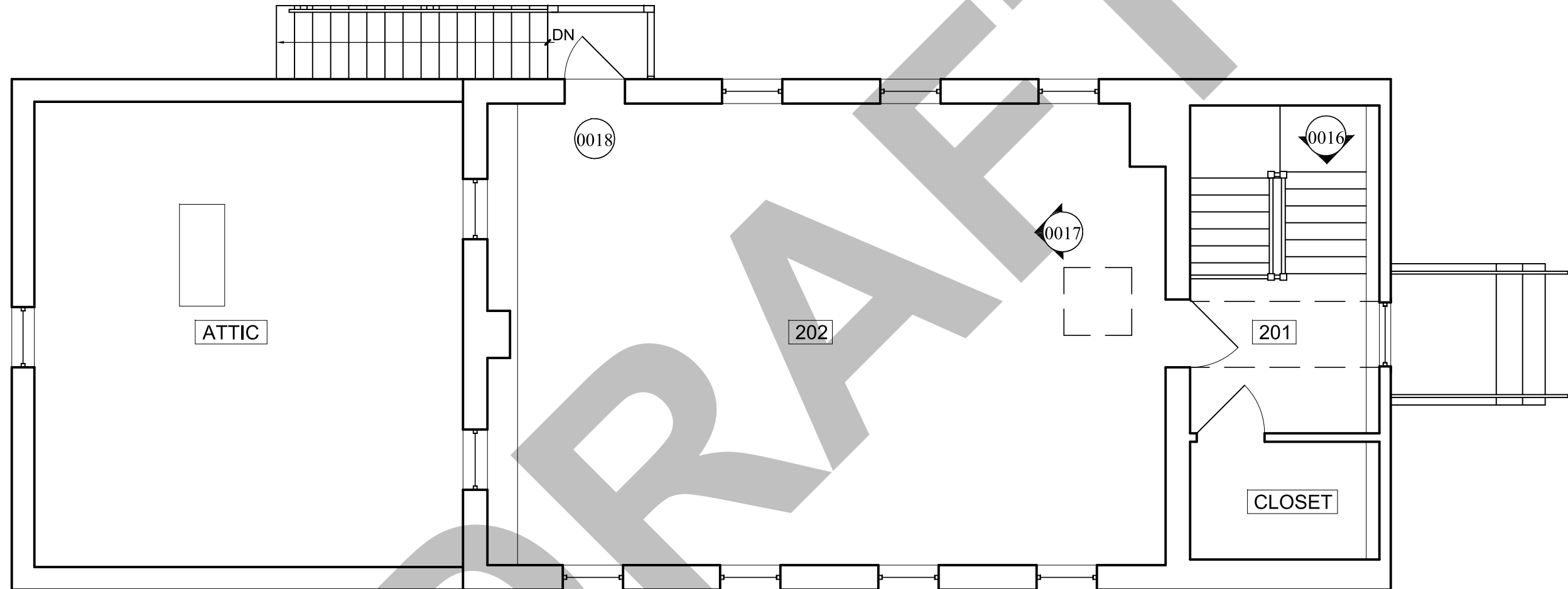
PROJECT No. 1921C

DATE: 30 JANUARY 2020

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

MOUNT VERNON SCHOOL
CHATHAM TOWNSHIP, MORRIS COUNTY, NJ

2



SECOND FLOOR PLAN - PHOTO KEY

3/16" = 1' - 0"

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NJ 21A1018244500

PROJECT No. 1921C

DATE: 30 JANUARY 2020

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

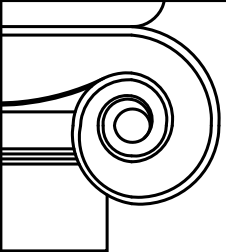
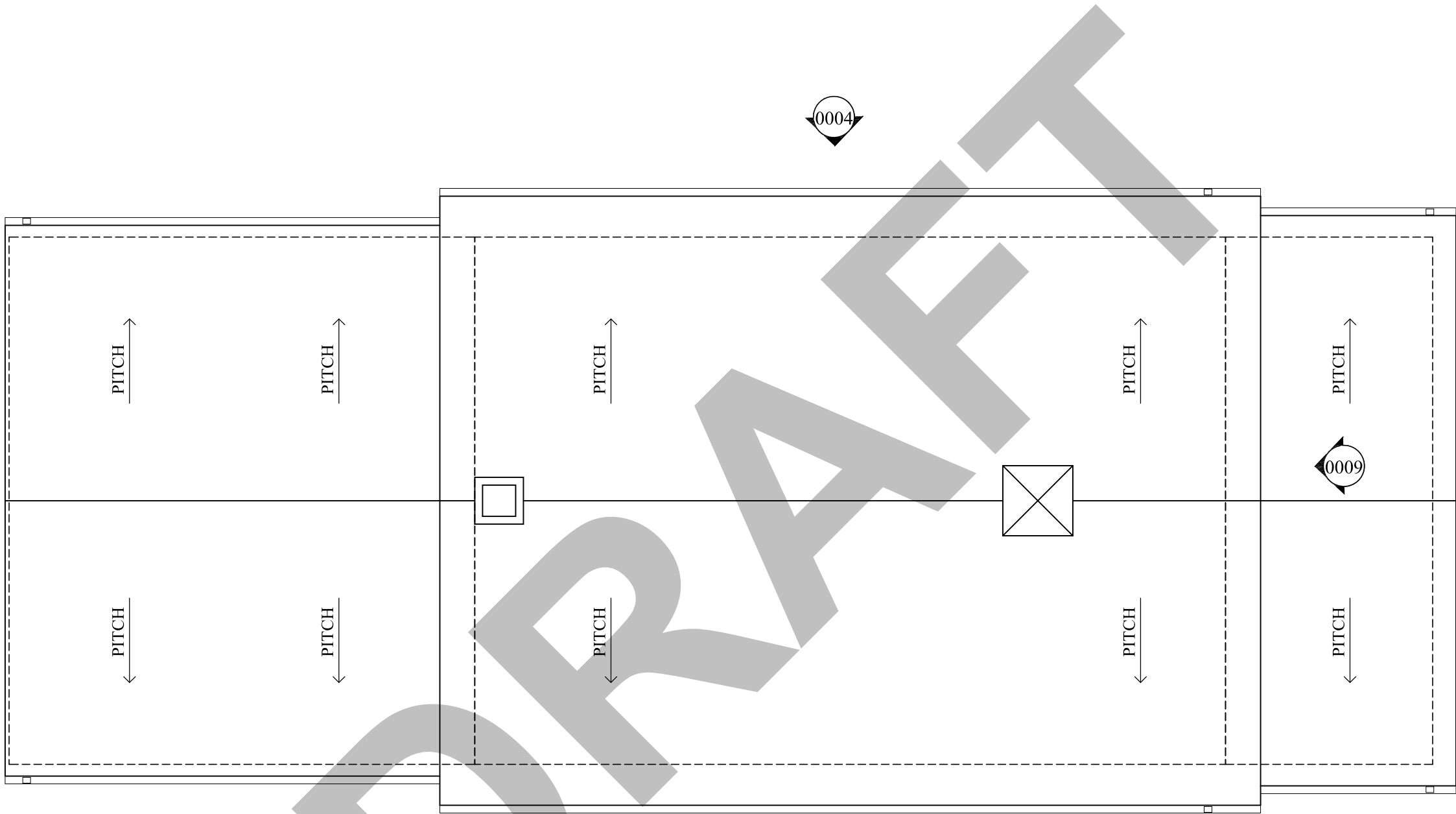
MOUNT VERNON SCHOOL
CHATHAM TOWNSHIP, MORRIS COUNTY, NJ

3



ROOF PLAN - PHOTO KEY

3/16" = 1' - 0"



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Figure 1. Circa 1900 image showing the Mount Vernon School before the vestibule was added and there were two entrances.¹

¹ "50 Years Ago at the Red Brick School House," *The Chatham Courier* (June 1, 1950).

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Figure 2. 1918 view of the Mount Vernon School. Note the vestibule has been added and a small covered entry is located at the front door.²

² Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 3. Mid-1920s view of the school showing the rear shed, which housed the furnace and hot-water heater.³

³ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 4. 1936 Sketch of the Mount Vernon School.⁴

⁴ "Sketches of New York's Suburbs—No. 371," *The New York Sun* (August 7, 1936).

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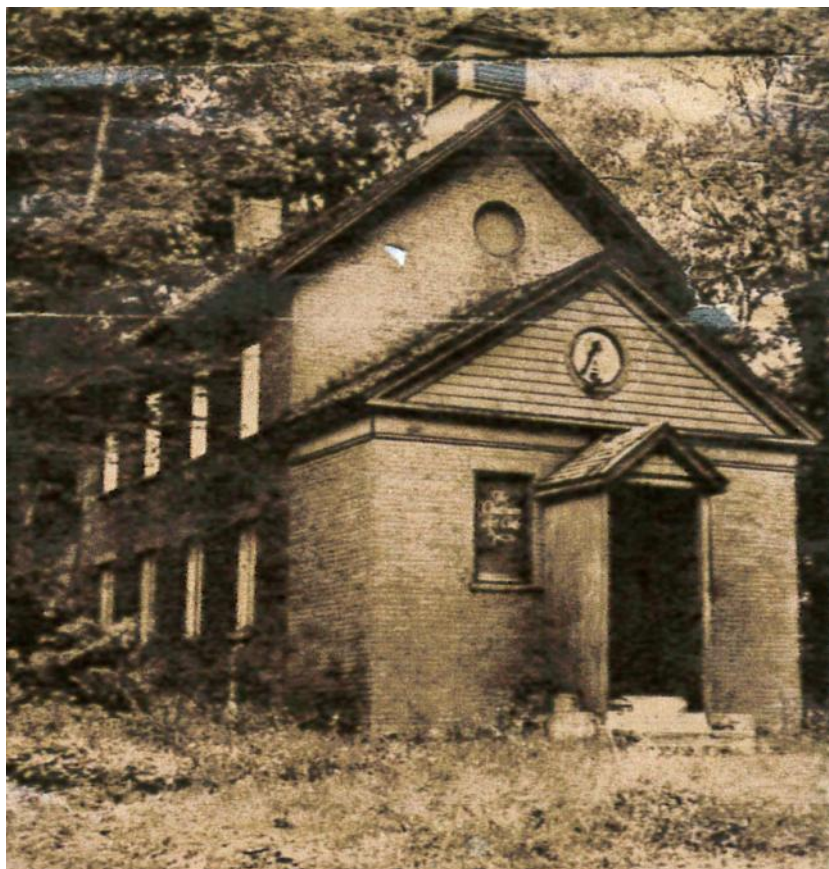


Figure 5. 1938 view of the Mount Vernon School. Note the Chatham Art Club sign in the window.⁵

⁵ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 6. Late-1930s view of the Mount Vernon School.⁶

⁶ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 7. Circa 1941 interior view of the Mount Vernon School when it was used by the Chatham Art Club.⁷

⁷ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 8. c.1945 view of a Red Cross meeting in the Mount Vernon School.⁸

⁸ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 9. 1954 image of members of the Fairmount Woman's Club in front of the Mount Vernon School.⁹

⁹ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 10. 1959 image of the Mount Vernon School being renovated for use as Township Hall. The front steps have been installed although the railing has not yet been installed, the rear addition has been added, and the site has been prepped for paving.¹⁰

¹⁰ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Figure 11. 1968 image of the Mount Vernon School when it functioned as Township Hall.¹¹

¹¹ Image Courtesy of the Chatham Township Historical Society.

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Photo 0001: View of the front (west) elevation of the Mount Vernon School; camera facing north.



Photo 0002: Overall view of the site at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Fairmount Avenue; camera facing northeast.

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Photo 0003: View showing the parking area south of the building; camera facing east.



Photo 0004: View of the main roof showing the cupola and chimney; camera facing north.

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Photo 0005: View of the entry vestibule; camera facing southeast.



Photo 0006: View showing typical windows at the main section of the building; camera facing south.

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Photo 0007: Overall view of the north elevation showing the three sections of the building; camera facing south.



Photo 0008: View of the south elevation of the original section of the building; camera facing north.

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Photo 0009: View showing the detailing of the roof edge at the original section of the building; camera facing east.



Photo 0010: Overall view of the rear addition; camera facing north.

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Photo 0011: Overall view of the Vestibule; camera facing north.



Photo 0012: View of the stairs from the Vestibule; camera facing south.

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Photo 0013: Overall view of the main first floor room, one of the two original classrooms; camera facing east.



Photo 0014: Overall view of the Kitchen/Office; camera facing east.

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Photo 0015: Overall view of the Hall; camera facing east.



Photo 0016: Overall view of the Stair Landing; camera facing north.

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Photo 0017: Overall view of the second-floor Exhibit Room; camera facing east.



Photo 0018: View showing early beaded board ceiling intact above mid-twentieth-century finishes at the second floor; camera facing up.