

ROCKY BOTTOM 4-H CAMP, DINING HALL
Intersection of Routes 178 and 199
Pickens Vicinity
Pickens County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-666-A

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROCKY BOTTOM 4-H CAMP, DINING HALL

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- Location: On Route 199, .4 miles northeast of the intersection of Routes 178 and 199 and approximately 16 miles northeast of the town of Pickens, Pickens Vicinity, Pickens County, South Carolina.
- U.S.G.S. Eastatoc Gap, South Carolina-North Carolina, 7.5' Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 82 degrees 47'53" and 35 degrees 2'43"
- Present Owner and Present Occupant: Rocky Bottom Camp of the Blind, Incorporated, a subsidiary of the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina.
- 119 South Kilbourne Road, Columbia, South Carolina 29205
- Present Use: The former dining hall of the Rocky Bottom 4-H Camp is now used as a storage facility by the current owners of the camp, the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina. The building will be demolished in the spring of 1990 because of its unsafe and dilapidated condition, and a 9,000 square foot building will be constructed on the site, which will house dining facilities, classrooms, and other administrative facilities.
- Significance: The dining hall of the Rocky Bottom 4-H Camp is significant because it is the only original structure left of the first permanent county 4-H Camp built in South Carolina and in the nation, and is part of the oldest existing camp of its kind in the country.
- Bernard Baruch, noted American financier, contributed twenty percent of the funds needed to construct the original camp in 1925. As part of the camp complex, the dining hall is a visual reminder of important events and trends in the history of Pickens county. These include the role of the 4-H club and political gatherings in this rural, agricultural, upcountry county during the early twentieth century.

The 4-H movement was thus viewed as very important to Pickens county during this period, and was also extremely popular. County residents showed their support for and interest in farm boys' and girls' clubs by managing to raise enough money to construct the first 4-H camp in the country; by getting the support of major political figures in the area; by covering every detail of the fundraising and building efforts in the local newspaper; and most important, by enrolling great numbers of boys and girls in the county farm clubs. Pickens county had the largest enrollment in its clubs of any county in the U.S. in 1923 and 1924. Club membership was 1,041 in 1924, and in 1925 the county membership exceeded 1,400 (The Pickens Sentinel, March 19, 1924, and August 6, 1925).

Although the Rocky Bottom Camp was built in 1925, the encampment held that year was not the first for the boys and girls of Pickens county; three other encampments had been held in previous years in other locations. Mr. T. A. Bowen, Pickens county farm agent, and Miss Elva Stewart, county home agent, and their assistants led the drive for the construction of a permanent camp. Their intent was to build a camp that could be used by all of the farm boys' and girls' clubs in South Carolina, although at first it would only be available to clubs in Pickens County (The Pickens Sentinel, July 2, 1925). Land was donated to the Pickens County Farm Boys' and Girls' Clubs in 1924 for this purpose by Wade Chastain, a prominent local farmer; he also donated a cottage that was already on the camp site. The donated acreage is variously described as 23 acres (The Pickens Sentinel, December 4, 1924) or 30 acres (The Pickens Sentinel, October 16, 1924).

A great many Pickens county residents were involved in the funding, construction and management of the camp. The Pickens County Board of Education, the Pickens county legislative delegation, the state Department of Education, and the people of Pickens county each gave \$1,000 toward initial construction costs (The Pickens Sentinel, July 2, 1925).

Prominent Pickens county residents served on the Board of Trustees. The first camp trustees were: Senator John E. Craig of Easley; George E. Hendricks, a farmer and businessman of Easley Township; Wade H. Chastain, who donated the land for the camp; T. R. O'Dell, a farmer and businessman from Liberty; C. L. Cureton, Mayor of Pickens; and T. A. Bowen, the Pickens county farm agent (The Pickens Sentinel, October 16, 1924, December 4, 1924, and July 2, 1925).

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Volunteers from Pickens county cleared the camp site and constructed the buildings. As many as 35 men worked at one time, and materials were given or sold at cost by the businessmen of Pickens (The Pickens Sentinel, August 20, 1925; McFall, p. 165). The Pickens Sentinel, on June 25, 1925 called for more volunteers to complete the camp:

"...and we are asking everybody to come, bring the lady folks and also bring dinner (and) any one or all of the following tools: Maddocks [sic], axes and hoes. If you are a good carpenter bring your saw, square and hammer."
(The Pickens Sentinel, June 25, 1925).

The natural resources of the area were used in construction, rock being used for pillars and black locust trees for sills and sleepers for buildings. A contemporary description of the camp describes it as:

"...23 acres of land--at first all rocks as far as the naked eye could see, but these were gathered up and many of them used in the construction of the buildings--donated, with a cottage, by Wade Chastain to the club boys and girls of Pickens county..."
(The Pickens Sentinel, August 20, 1925).

The camp was under construction in July, 1925 when funds were exhausted, and an urgent appeal was made by B. O. Williams, state boys club agent, to Bernard M. Baruch, noted financier and South Carolina native. Volunteers had completed the girls' dormitory and the kitchen complex, had the boys' dormitory under construction and the foundation of the dining hall laid when funds were depleted. Mr. Baruch donated \$1,000, which allowed the camp to be completed. The Pickens Sentinel of July 2, 1925 commented that:

"...Mr. Baruch's substantial contribution has put new life into the club work here and filled those connected with the work with a stronger determination to carry out the plans of making the camp at Rocky Bottom a place from which good

influence will go out not only in Pickens county and South Carolina but throughout the United States." (The Pickens Sentinel, July 2, 1925)

The visitors to the first encampment at Rocky Bottom must have beheld a scene much like what H. R. E. Hampton described in 1925 in the Columbia State: "Tucked in a little valley in the Blue Ridge of Pickens County, amid a series of tinkling streams, with a background of a near precipitous mountain that lifts its shaggy head far into the blue, stands the first completed permanent camp for farm boys and girls in the United States." (The Columbia State, August, 1925).

The completed camp consisted of:

"the cottage given by Mr. Chastain, another cottage for the instructors, the boys' dormitory, the girls' dormitory and the dining room and kitchen in one building...The dining room will seat 400 at a single sitting, and meals are served in rotation or on the installment plan. The kitchen is equipped with two large army ranges and running hot and cold water brought from the stream above by Newton's law of gravitation. The kitchen this year was in the charge of B. B. LaBoon of Pickens. The electricity for the building was furnished at this camp by a generator run by a tractor, but the plans are to have a water wheel in one of the creeks do this work next year."

A manmade lake was also dug at the camp (The Pickens Sentinel, August 20, 1925).

The fourth encampment in Pickens county and the first at the Rocky Bottom camp was held from Tuesday, August 11 to Friday, August 14, 1925. Over 600 boys and girls attended the event, making it the largest camp of its kind in the country. This number was actually less than in previous years because admission standards had been made more stringent. The children enjoyed various recreational events, and also were addressed by local doctors on health and sanitation subjects. The Pickens County Medical Society held a meeting at the camp on Thursday, August 13, which also allowed them to give lectures to club members (The Pickens Sentinel, August 6, 1925).

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Various 4-H and community leaders assisted in teaching and supervising the campers. They were: B. O. Williams, state boys club leader; I. D. Lewis, assistant club leader; A. A. McKeown, district agent; T. A. Bowen, Pickens county farm agent; W. R. Gray, Greenville county agent; S. M. Byars, Anderson county agent; Dexter Jones, an Easley resident who assisted in the recreation program; Miss Harriet B. Layton, assistant state agent, Winthrop College; Miss Minnie Floyd, food and nutrition specialist; Miss Blanche Tarrant, district agent; Miss Jane Ketchen, marketing specialist; Miss Julia Stebbins, Greenville county home demonstration agent; Miss B. Holden, Lexington county agent; Miss Elva Stewart, Pickens county agent; and Miss Edna Hunt, an Easley resident who assisted in recreation work (The Pickens Sentinel, August 6, 1925).

A Pickens county picnic was held during the encampment on Wednesday, August 12, a day long affair to which everyone in the county was invited. Over 2,000 persons attended, looked over the new facilities, and heard speeches by U.S. Senator Cole L. Blease and Dr. W. W. Long, head of farm extension in South Carolina. This was the only day the public was invited to the camp that year, and was also parents' day for the campers (The Pickens Sentinel, August 6, 1925, and August 20, 1925).

Rocky Bottom operated as a 4-H camp for over 40 years, from 1925 to 1966. Hundreds of 4-H club members from Pickens county attended the camp in those years and received educational and recreational opportunities that were unavailable elsewhere (The Pickens Sentinel, August 20, 1925). The camp clearly had a lasting effect on many of the campers, as a number of them later became county extension agents, and three became state 4-H directors at Clemson University: Leon Clayton, B. O. Williams, and J. B. Williams (interview, Mr. Jesse Wood, October 31, 1989).

Rocky Bottom was also an important local meeting place. County picnics, church socials, civic and professional club conventions, family reunions, the Goodwill club and political meetings were all held at the camp over the years. One of the more illustrious meetings held at the camp occurred in 1964, when President Lyndon Baines Johnson addressed a political gathering there as part of his campaign for the Presidency (The Pickens Sentinel, June 25, 1925, July 23, 1925, August 20, 1925; interview, J. R. Wood, October 31, 1989 and November 1, 1989; McFall, pp. 166-167; and interview, Robert Spaulding, November 1, 1989).

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After the 4-H clubs stopped using Rocky Bottom for summer encampments, the camp stood empty for 13 years, and the buildings deteriorated greatly during that period of time. Many of the original buildings were in an advanced state of dilapidation due to neglect and vandalism when the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina obtained rights to the camp in 1979. The National Federation of the Blind now uses the Camp to provide recreational and educational services for the blind. The Federation made many changes in the camp's facilities, and are continuing to make improvements; planned for completion in 1990 is a 9,000 square foot building, which will be used for administrative, dining, recreational and rehabilitative activities. The camp currently consists of an approximately 30-acre site with two creeks; the camp pond, which was dug in 1925; a swimming pool, which was constructed in 1983; the 1925 Dining Hall, which is now in dilapidated condition and is used as a storage building; Osterneck cottage, built in 1980, which sleeps 36 and has dining facilities for 60; the Robert Lee Oglesby cottage, built in 1984, which houses up to 10 persons and also has its own kitchen facilities; and the Doctor Samuel M. Lawton Memorial Hall, an assembly hall that can seat 50-60 in a banquet setting, which was renovated in 1982 (fundraising literature, National Federation of the Blind of S.C., 1989).

The camp is open year round to all blind persons in South Carolina, free of charge, and is also available when not in use by the blind to other groups and individuals at a nominal charge. The camp was used by 1,419 persons in 1988. The largest event held at the camp annually is the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina's Fun Day weekend; 541 persons attended Fun Day at the camp during Labor Day weekend in 1988. The Federation also sponsors annually two week-long children's camps for blind children and their parents (Community Development Block Grant application, Pickens County, 1989).

Rocky Bottom Camp of the Blind is governed by a seven member board of directors, all of whom are blind. The board receives input from an advisory board composed of prominent citizens of South Carolina (Community Development Block Grant application, Pickens County, 1989).

Of the original camp buildings constructed in 1925, only the Dining Hall remains. Mr. J. R. Wood, former Pickens county extension agent and camp director, called the Dining Hall the most significant building at the camp because "it was the main gathering place, the place where people met and food was served..." (interview, J. R. Wood, November 1, 1989). The

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South Carolina Department of Archives and History also consider the assembly hall, camp pond, open space area, creek, remnants of the original water system, the kiln and amphitheatre as "contributing properties to the historic complex." (letter, Department of History and Archives, November 1, 1989, to the Appalachian Council of Governments).

Rocky Bottom 4-H Camp has played an important role in Pickens county for 65 years, in many different ways. It has played an important role in the economy and prosperity of the county by training young men and women to be successful, contributing members of the agricultural economy of the area; it has played an important role in the community by providing a meeting place for social groups, families, community groups and political parties; and it has played an important role socially by introducing generations of campers to the beauties of the mountains of upstate South Carolina. Although the camp is no longer a 4-H facility, it is still playing a vital role in Pickens county and in the state of South Carolina, by providing blind citizens of the state with the only exposure they may have to a truly natural world. Rocky Bottom will thus continue to be significant, not only to past generations, but to future generations as well.

PART II: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Rocky Bottom 4-H Camp is located high in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, on the border between North and South Carolina. Sassafras Mountain, the highest mountain peak in South Carolina, is nearby. The Blue Ridge Mountains are part of the Appalachian Mountain system, which runs roughly parallel to the eastern coast of the United States from Maine to Georgia, in a northeast to southwest direction.

The Camp is situated between two streams on steep, rugged, and rocky terrain. The rushing noise of these two creeks as they flow over rocks and stones and make their way down the mountain slope, and the pools and small waterfalls they form, are some of the most distinctive features of Rocky Bottom. The Camp is reached by a rustic bridge over one of the creeks. The stream that forms the border of the camp farthest from the entrance is Rocky Bottom creek. Several cottages and year-round homes are located on the opposite bank of Rocky Bottom Creek, but the land around the Camp is otherwise undeveloped.

The Camp buildings are for the most part set in a large, open, level area, surrounded by pine and deciduous trees. The heavily wooded mountain slope rises steeply up from and down from the level site of the Camp. Roundtop Mountain, a high tree-covered mountain ridge, frames the horizon to the southeast, and Chimneytop Mountain is directly north of the camp, but is not visible from the site except as a steep, wooded slope.

The Camp originally consisted of a boy's dormitory, a girl's dormitory, a cottage that was already on the site, a cottage for the instructors, and a dining hall with a connected stone kitchen. Judging from the dining hall, the only original building that is still standing, the buildings were of simple board-and-batten construction, stained brown, and set on piers made of local stone. They were scattered around the level area of the Camp, on either side of a rough dirt road. The source of water for the kitchen, through gravitational feed pipes, was Rocky Bottom creek, and electricity came from a generator hooked to a tractor. The original Camp also had a manmade pond located to the northeast of the dining hall; the pond is still there, but silt and debris have filled it in and made it somewhat smaller and shallower.

Over the years, other features were added to the Camp. A small stone amphitheater was built into the side of the hill; a stone kiln was constructed between the dining hall and Rocky Bottom creek; an assembly hall, complete with a small

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stage, was added; a small wooden spring house was built over Rocky Bottom creek; and a pool was dug, and filled with water piped in from the creek.

When the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina purchased the Camp in 1979, most of the buildings were in a state of serious disrepair. The Federation replaced most of the older structures with more modern buildings, but left the assembly hall and dining hall intact. The assembly hall was winterized and renovated in 1982.

The original dining hall, built in 1925, is located at the end of the access road that bisects the level area of the Camp. It is situated directly on Rocky Bottom Creek, less than twenty feet from its bank; the long side of the building, the south side, runs parallel to the creek bank. The building is a large simple rectangle, about seventy feet long by thirty feet wide. Almost all of the original features of the building are intact except for an attached stone kitchen that has fallen down. The kitchen was adjacent to the east side of the dining hall, the short end farthest from the road. Most of the kitchen ruins have been removed, leaving only a stone chimney, now freestanding, and part of the foundation.

The dining hall is constructed of board-and-batten siding, stained brown. A steeply pitched tin roof, painted brown, overhangs the sides of the building slightly, and a large rectangular wrap around window forms a band around the middle of the exterior walls of the building. The window is covered with metal screening.

The original stone staircase, located on the west side of the building, the narrow end of the building nearest the road, is still intact but is no longer in use. It is fashioned out of stone blocks, is extremely narrow, and has no handrail. The stairs end at a small stone landing in front of a small door.

Two new doorways have been added to the building, both on the north side. One doorway is at the corner of the building closest to the original stairway, and does not appear to be in use. The other door is located in the middle of the wall and is reached by a long ramp. Both doorways have cutaway corners.

The dining hall rests on its original stone piers, which are painted white. A small area underneath the structure and to the south of the original staircase has been enclosed in stone to form a small cellar.

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The interior of the dining hall is entirely open and forms a very large space in the shape of a rectangle. The roof supports, beams and joists are exposed, as is the underside of the peaked roof; the effect is of a complex and lofty upper space. The floor is wooden. A portion of the southwest corner of the building has been made into a rudimentary modern kitchen, with appliances, counters, and cabinets.

The dining hall feels as if it is a part of the natural world of Rocky Bottom because its thin walls, its lack of weatherization or insulation, the openness of its interior space, and its large continuous window open the interior to the outdoors. These features give the building the appearance of a freestanding porch instead of a more permanent structure. This is appropriate, as the dining hall was meant to be used by campers who were at Rocky Bottom to enjoy the mountains, the clean air, the forest, and the swiftly flowing streams of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

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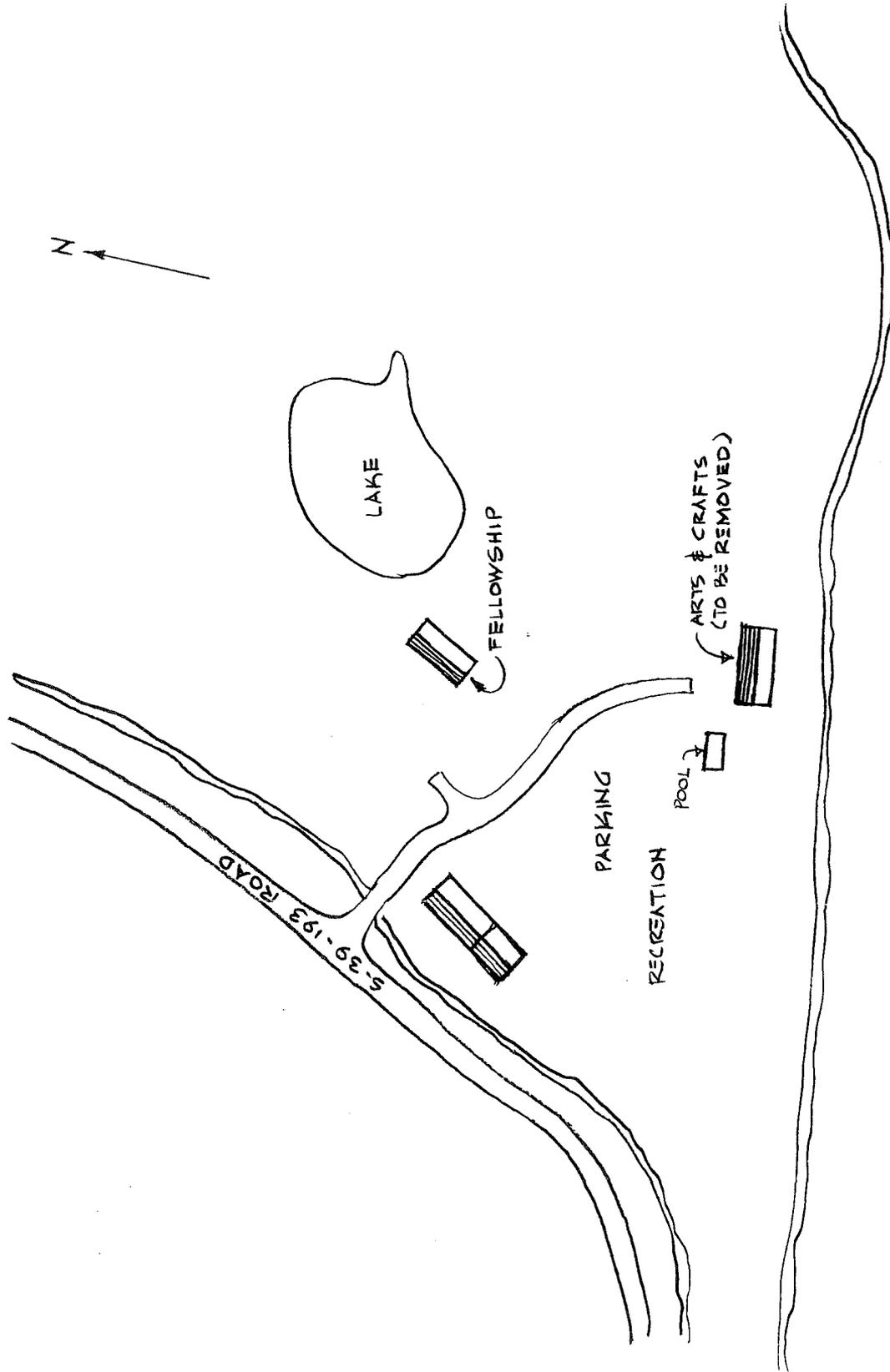
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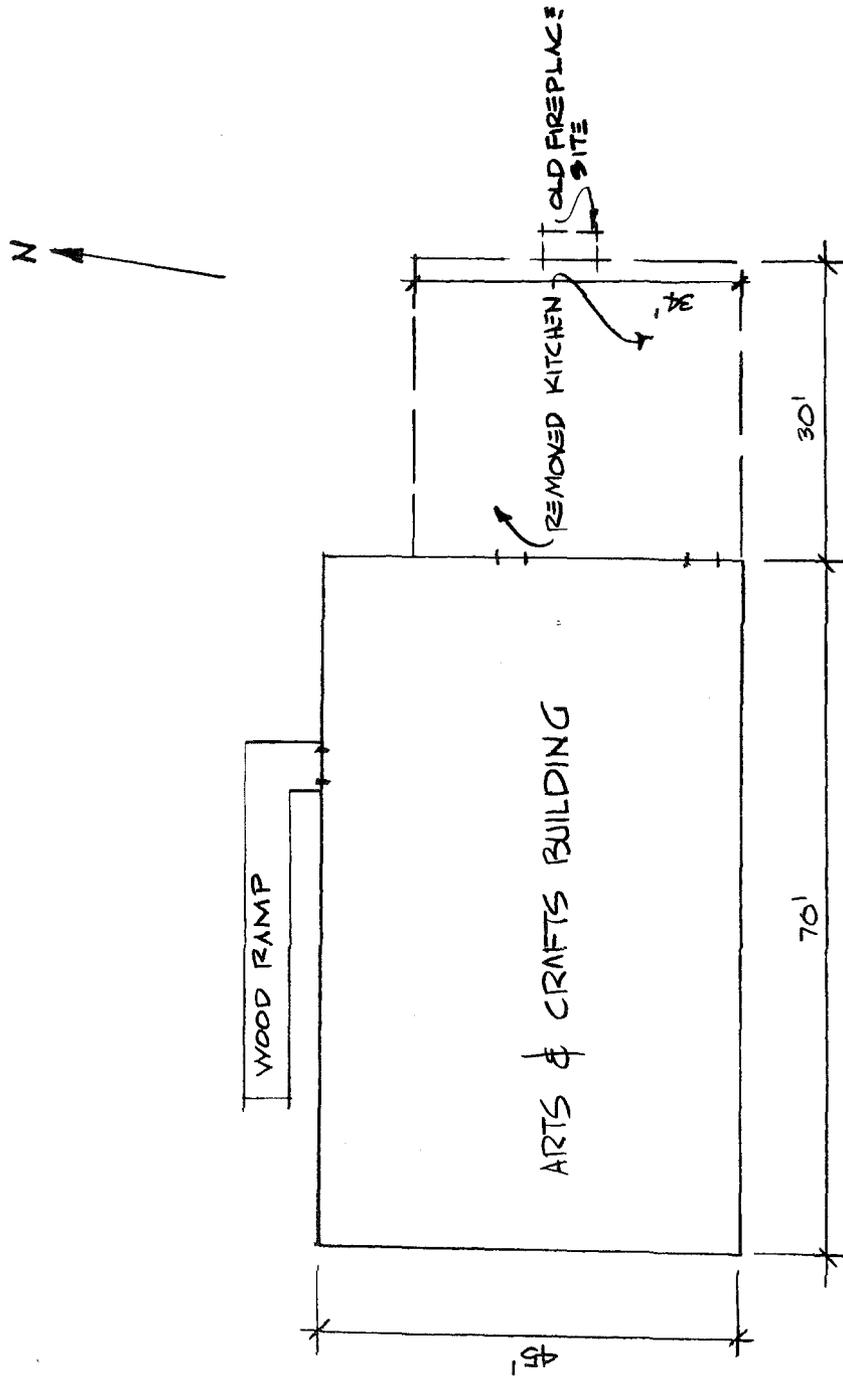
Spaulding, Robert: Clemson University, Clemson, South
Carolina.

Wood, Jesse R.: Pickens County, South Carolina.



**ROCKY BOTTOM CAMP OF THE BLIND,
PICKENS COUNTY, S.C.**

FEB, 26, 1990



ROCKY BOTTOM CAMP OF THE BLIND,
PICKENS COUNTY, S.C.

FEB. 26, 1990