

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**The Meadows (Boundary Decrease)**

Fletcher, Henderson County, HN1981, Listed 01/10/2019

Nomination by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc.

Photographs by Heather Fearnbach, March 2018



Commercial park east of reduced boundary, looking south



Looking west on lot south of reduced boundary

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Henderson County, NC

## 1. Name of Property

historic name The Meadows (Boundary Decrease)

other names/site number The Blake House

## 2. Location

street & number 31 Meadows Blake House Lane

**N/A** not for publication

city or town Fletcher

**N/A** vicinity

state North Carolina

code NC

county Henderson

code 089

zip code 28732

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination  
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for 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

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

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 the property is:

☐ 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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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## Section 7. Narrative Description

The Meadows was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 under Criterion A, ostensibly for entertainment/recreation, and Criterion C for architecture and landscape architecture with a nineteenth-century period of significance and a ten-acre boundary. The nomination is very brief, as was typical for those written during that time. The residual 2.02-acre tract associated with the Italianate dwelling erected between 1868 and 1871 encompasses two noncontributing resources added since 1980: a storage shed moved to the property in the late twentieth century and a playhouse constructed in 2008 by the current owners, Michael and Judy McKnight.<sup>1</sup> The following narrative describes those buildings as well as setting changes in order to justify the boundary decrease, which does not affect the contributing resource count. The house remains the only contributing building. The excluded areas are visually and physically distinct from the nominated tract. The North Carolina Department of Transportation initiated and subsidized the boundary decrease as mitigation for Old Airport Road's widening. The areas within the boundary decrease contained ruins of a house and ice house that were mentioned, but not called out as contributing or noncontributing resources in the original nomination (see 1980 National Register boundary map).

### Setting

The Meadows stands on a slight rise in the southwest quadrant of Old Airport Road and Fletcher Commercial Drive's junction. Old Airport Road, the east-west thoroughfare north of the house, was called Dixie Highway in the early twentieth century. The alignment was the same at the time of National Register designation, but the road has been widened and improved and is now an extensively developed commercial corridor.<sup>2</sup> The ten-acre 1980 National Register tract was gradually subdivided following designation. Fletcher Commercial Drive, a short access road, was laid out east of the house and the flanking parcels sold in the early twenty-first century.

The 950-acre tract that South Carolina rice planter Daniel Blake purchased in 1827 had been reduced to approximately 127 acres by 1927, when his son Robert B. Blake sold the residual property. Subsequent land sales further winnowed the parcel's size. The house was occupied by a series of owners until its July 1979 acquisition by apparel manufacturer Kellwood Corporation to serve as an office. In addition to the ten acres surrounding The Meadows, the concern had purchased the contiguous 10.16 acres to the west, upon which it erected an expansive industrial building in 1979.<sup>3</sup> The north-south property line between the parcels served as The Meadows' west 1980 National Register boundary. The Meadows' tract extended east to the railroad right-of-way, north to Old Airport Road, and south to a wooded parcel.

<sup>1</sup> Burke County Deed Book 753, p. 250; Michael and Judy McKnight, conversation with Heather Fearnbach, March 8, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> "The Famous Robert Blake Estate," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 7, 1926, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Buncombe County Deed Book 15, p. 8; Henderson County Deed Book 139, p. 6; Deed Book 151, p. 162; Deed Book 172, p. 89; Deed Book 175, p. 338; Deed Book 195, p. 59; Deed Book 202, p. 224; Deed Book 235, p. 107; Deed Book 501, p. 59.

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Michael and Judy McKnight bought The Meadows and just over two acres in 2004.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 4.5 acres east of the house have been split into nineteen parcels that contain a carwash erected in 2003 and a commercial park with eight buildings constructed between 2004 and 2015. In the portion of the National Register tract's north section fronting Old Airport Road, Turner Development LLC erected twelve self-storage-unit buildings in 2014 on two parcels totaling 3.57 acres. Commercial development continued through the early-twenty-first century on the parcel west of The Meadows that includes Kellwood Corporation's 1979 industrial building at its southeast corner. A tall chain-link fence separates the paved parking area east of the industrial building from a half-acre lot south of The Meadows tract.

At the time of the 1980 nomination, there were several resources south of the house within the boundary. No above-ground components of these resources are extant. When comparing the 1980 National Register boundary map with current aerial views, it appears that the area directly south of the house, within the new National Register boundary, encompassed a portion of the circular drive that once led to the house, a brick chimney that was the sole surviving element of a nineteenth-century detached kitchen, and a rectangular, weatherboarded, three-bay, twentieth-century equipment shed southwest of the chimney. That area now only contains the 2008 playhouse at the shed's approximate former location.

Two approximately half-acre parcels are directly south of the new boundary at a lower elevation than the house. The western lot, a 0.49-acre tract, comprises an asphalt-paved north section and an overgrown south section. The gambrel-roofed frame storage shed at the paved area's southeast corner was moved to the site in the late twentieth century. In 1980, the ruins of a two-story, weatherboarded, heavy-timber-frame, nineteenth-century servants' dwelling with brick end chimneys stood in the overgrown area. Remnants of a stone ice house were in the woods southeast of the servants' quarters. The ice house site is on the eastern 0.47-acre tract, now occupied by a 2007 commercial building that faces Fletcher Commercial Drive's south end. Fletcher Commercial Drive's east-west leg separates the two half-acre parcels from Veritas Christian Academy's 6.22 and 4.09-acre wooded tracts to the south and west. That acreage abuts the east edge of its Fletcher campus and the south edge of the former Kellwood Corporation industrial tract.

The Meadows faces east toward the commercial park, but the new construction's visual impact is mitigated by the house site's higher elevation and the wooded buffer along the east lot line. Deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs and planting beds surround the house and punctuate the lawn. Much of the lot's perimeter vegetation is volunteer growth, but nineteenth-century plant material includes English boxwoods and hemlock, magnolia, Norway spruce, and white pine trees. The McKnights removed the English boxwoods that were south and east of the house. However, a boxwood cluster remains along the west lot line.

The only access to The Meadows in 1979 was via the entrance drive that extended from Old Airport Road west of the house through Kellwood Corporation's industrial tract to the dwelling's south side. The

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<sup>4</sup> Henderson County Deed Book 1189, p. 365; Deed Book 1326, p. 648.

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driveway wound through the rear yard and turned south, encircling the kitchen chimney and equipment shed. The chain-link fence now prohibits egress from the west.

The existing curving gravel driveway provides access from the northeast, gradually rising in elevation as it extends west from Fletcher Commercial Drive and wraps around the dwelling's west elevation to a parking area south of what is now the primary entrance. North of the house, a low, dry-laid stone, twentieth-century retaining wall ameliorates the change in grade. The 2008 playhouse is south of the parking area. A late-twentieth-century frame storage shed stands on the driveway's west side at the lot's wooded west edge. North of the house and driveway, a creek winds through the wooded ravine adjacent to the north property line.

The tract's reduction in size and setting changes necessitate this boundary decrease. The following two noncontributing buildings are within the 2.02-acre boundary.

## Storage Shed, Late Twentieth Century, Noncontributing Building

A previous owner moved thirteen gambrel-roofed storage sheds with board-and-batten siding from Dreamland Flea Market on Tunnel Road in Asheville to The Meadows during the late twentieth century. Michael and Judy McKnight have disposed of all but two of them since 2007.<sup>5</sup> The shed on the 2.02-acre tract stands west of the house and driveway in a cluster of towering English boxwoods. Three wood steps with an open wood railing provide access to the double-leaf door at the east elevation's center.

## Playhouse, 2008, Noncontributing Building

Michael and Judy McKnight erected this small, square, hip-roofed playhouse south of the driveway. Local stone sheathes the façade (north elevation). The single-leaf wood door at the façade's center has a two-panel base and two vertical panes in its upper section. Sawnwork brackets ornament the north eave. A small square window pierces each of the other three particle-board-clad walls. A pyramidal skylight tops the roof. Plain wood fascia cap the rafter ends.

## Integrity Statement

The Meadows possesses integrity of location, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship. The house remains on its original site. Although commercial and industrial development has transformed the once-rural surroundings, the property's 2.02-acre tax parcel provides an appropriate setting.<sup>6</sup> The visual impact of the commercial park to the east is mitigated by the house site's higher elevation and the wooded buffer along the east lot line. Dense perimeter vegetation also screens the house. The nineteenth-century

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<sup>5</sup> Michael and Judy McKnight, conversation with Heather Fearnbach, March 8, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> The North Carolina Department of Transportation subsidized the boundary decrease as mitigation for the widening of Old Airport Road.



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English boxwood cluster along the west lot line is particularly significant as the boxwoods south and east of the house have been removed.

The two-story granite house erected between 1868 and 1871 is imbued with Italianate characteristics including a low hip roof with deep bracketed eaves, slightly projecting cut-granite window sills and lintels, chamfered porch posts, paneled doors, and double-hung two-over-two wood sash. Four tall four-over-four sash on the north elevation's first story function as entrances to the north porch. The original hip-roofed cupola was replaced with a steel-frame tempered-glass skylight following Edwin Tracy Edgerton's 1941 acquisition of the property.<sup>7</sup>

After Kellwood Corporation conveyed the house and twenty-four acres to the Henderson County Community Foundation in 1990, the town of Fletcher leased the property and engaged Hendersonville architect William O'Cain to assess its potential to serve as a town hall and recreation center. The municipality expended approximately \$126,000 on repairs and maintenance prior to the town council's November 1994 decision to terminate the lease.<sup>8</sup>

Michael and Judy McKnight purchased the house in 2004. Following a windstorm that year, they replaced the soldered-metal-panel roof with a standing-seam metal roof that is barely visible due to its low pitch. The couple undertook much of the subsequent rehabilitation work themselves, repairing and painting plaster walls and ceilings, refinishing floors, and conserving black walnut, cherry, mahogany, oak and maple door and window surrounds, baseboards, mantels, and doors. Michael McKnight reinstalled an original window on the northeast parlor's north elevation that a previous owner had replaced with a door. The sash had been stored in a shed. They also found the original tall, paneled, double-leaf door that the Kellwood Corporation removed from the east (front) entrance, but have not rehung it. A single-leaf glass door, sidelights, and transom remain in that opening, recessed behind the double-leaf wood-frame screen door.<sup>9</sup>

The Kellwood Corporation also removed the open-stringer staircase from the center hall and enclosed the mezzanine opening with gypsum board. The opening, which is beneath the skylight, was designed to serve as a light well for the first floor's center hall. Michael McKnight demolished the infill and repaired the skylight. The original north mezzanine railing section was intact. He installed simple east and west railings that complement the original railing. The couple updated two bathrooms that a previous owner had created in what was initially the northwest bedroom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Frances Benjamin Johnston, photographer. "Robert Blake House, Fletcher, Buncombe County, North Carolina," 1938, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/csas200802243/> (accessed March 2018); Michael and Judy McKnight, conversation with Heather Fearnbach, March 8, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Tula Andonaras, "Architect to breathe life into historic house," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 3, 1991, pp. 1, 5; Tula Andonaras, "Fletcher Town Council says 'No' to Meadows property," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 23, 1994, p. 8S.

<sup>9</sup> Michael and Judy McKnight, conversation with Heather Fearnbach, March 8, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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### **Statement of Archaeological Potential**

The Meadows is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash middens, remains of planting beds, the kitchen ruins, and other structural remains and which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the house and gardens. Information concerning social standing and mobility, as well as structural details and landscape use, can be obtained from the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the property. At this time no investigation has been done to document these remains, but it is likely that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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## Section 8. Significance

The Meadows was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 for its local importance under Criterion A, ostensibly for entertainment/recreation, and Criterion C for architecture and landscape architecture with a nineteenth-century period of significance. The nomination is very brief, as was typical for those written during that time. Although “entertainment/recreation” is not specifically delineated as an area of significance, it is alluded to in the “Criteria Assessment” portion of section 8 and the nomination provides context for the dwelling as a representative example of the seasonal retreats that proliferated in the North Carolina mountains during the nineteenth century. Elite low-country residents seeking to escape heat and disease transformed rural communities through the introduction of sophisticated buildings, culture, and landscapes. The Meadows epitomizes this trend. The period of significance encompasses original owner Daniel Blake’s introduction of landscape features including a formal garden with English boxwoods in conjunction with his circa 1829 dwelling as well as the circa 1868-1871 construction of the Italianate residence that his son Robert B. Blake erected after a November 10, 1867 fire destroyed the 1829 house.<sup>11</sup> The 950-acre tract that Daniel purchased in 1827 had been reduced to approximately 127 acres by 1927, when Robert sold the residual property. Subsequent land sales followed, but the house remained a residence until July 1979, when apparel manufacturer Kellwood Corporation acquired it and ten acres to serve as an office. Old Airport Road was to the north and Kellwood Corporation’s industrial plant was being built to the west at the time of National Register designation. The wooded areas north and east of the house remained undeveloped until the early twenty-first century, when Fletcher Commercial Drive and the flanking commercial building were constructed. The purpose of this boundary decrease is to reflect the reduction in tax parcel size and setting changes that have occurred since 1980.

## Section 9. Bibliography

*Asheville Citizen-Times*.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds. Deed Books.

Henderson County Register of Deeds. Deed and Plat Books.

Johnston, Frances Benjamin photographer. “Robert Blake House, Fletcher, Buncombe County, North Carolina,” 1938, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/csas200802243/> (accessed March 2018).

McKnight, Michael and Judy. Conversation with Heather Fearnbach, March 8, 2018, and email correspondence.

“The Meadows.” Survey file, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

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<sup>11</sup> Fire date provided in April 28, 1978 letter from Byron L. Edwards to Brent Glass. “The Meadows,” survey file, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.



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## Section 10. Geographical Data

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

1. Latitude: 35.436279
2. Longitude: -82.495030

## Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property consists of Henderson County tax parcel PIN 9653921075 (2.02 acres), as indicated by the heavy solid line on the enclosed map. Scale: one inch equals approximately 200 feet.

## Boundary Justification

The Meadows' 1980 National Register boundary encompassed the ten-acre tract upon which it then stood. The parcel's reduction in size and setting changes necessitate this boundary decrease. The nominated tract encompasses the residual 2.02 acres historically associated with The Meadows. Adjacent lots subdivided from the 1980 National Register boundary contain incompatible late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century industrial and commercial buildings.

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Photos Henderson County, NC

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Heather Fearnbach  
organization Fearnbach History Services, Inc. date 3/8/2018  
street & number 3334 Nottingham Road telephone 336-765-2661  
city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27104

## Additional Documentation

### Current Photographs

All photographs by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc., 3334 Nottingham Road, Winston-Salem, NC, on March 2, 2018. Digital images located at the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



1. Commercial park east of reduced boundary, looking south

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2. Front lawn, looking east toward commercial park



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3. Looking east on lot south of reduced boundary

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4. Looking west on lot south of reduced boundary



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**5. Looking northeast from front lawn toward self-storage-unit complex  
and Fletcher Commercial Drive**



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6. Self-storage-unit complex north of boundary decrease, looking west

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**Property Owner**

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

name Michael and Judy McKnight  
street & number 31 Meadows Blake House Lane telephone 828-691-5711  
city or town Fletcher state NC zip code 28732

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