

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>South Carolina</b>
COUNTY: <b>Beaufort</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Penn Center Historic District**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Penn School**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**one mile south of Fragmore on S.C. Highway #37**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Fragmore**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE: **South Carolina** CODE: **45** COUNTY: **Beaufort** CODE: **013**

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Community Services</u>
ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC: Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No			

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Penn Community Services, Inc.**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**P.O. Box 126**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Fragmore**

STATE:  
**South Carolina**

CODE:  
**045**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
**Beaufort County Court House**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Bay Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Beaufort**

STATE:  
**South Carolina**

CODE:  
**45**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Inventory of Historic Places in South Carolina**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1973**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**South Carolina Department of Archives and History**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1430 Senate Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Columbia**

STATE:  
**South Carolina**

CODE:  
**45**

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Penn Center Community Services, as the historic Penn Center is now called, is located about one mile south of Fragmore on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. The center occupies approximately 47 acres and is divided by Land's End Road. The road is lined with Spanish-moss covered oaks. Structures on the campus span a period of over one hundred years, from an ante-bellum church to a retreat house constructed in 1968.

Brick Church, a rectangular two story brick structure, is the oldest building still standing. Built in 1855 by Baptist planters of St. Helena, it was used by blacks and northern abolitionists during reconstruction as a school, church, and meeting hall. Unaltered, the church is in present day use. The other 17 structures on the campus were built during this century and span the center's history. They consist of residences, dormitories, administrative buildings, workshops, a dining hall, and a health clinic. The exact construction dates of most of these structures is not part of the published record. They are of no architectural significance.

The integrity of the Penn School is not derived from a single structure, but rather from the campus as a whole. All the structures are a part of a 112 year history that has witnessed development from a rural school to a contemporary black community center.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |   | _____  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

When in 1861 Union forces captured St. Helena Island, South Carolina, the plantation owners fled to the mainland leaving behind their slaves. These sea island slaves were members of a group called Gullahs, a name derived from an African tribe called the Gulas or Goras. Brought to this country from Angola, they were sold to sea island plantation owners between Georgetown, South Carolina, and Georgia. Together they constituted an unusual folk group in the general Afro-American population. Unlike most other slave groups, the Gullahs retained their own language and many of their customs. With the plantation owners gone, the United States Army divided up the former plantations and distributed the land among the Gullahs. Released from bondage they faced the economic and social problems of adjusting to freedom.

In 1862, long before the end of the Civil War, northern missionaries arrived on St. Helena Island to assist the black population. Among these missionaries were a black woman from Philadelphia named Laura M. Towne and her Canadian friend Ellen Murray. The ladies were sponsored by the Freedmen's Association of Philadelphia. Their first act was to establish a school. First located in a room of the Oaks Plantation House, the school soon moved to the Brick Baptist Church in order to accommodate an influx of pupils who desired to learn quickly what to them had always been a privilege and mark of distinction of white folks. They wanted to learn to read and write. In 1864 one Hasting Gantt, a black who owned land across from the church, donated a tract as a site for a school. With the property in hand Miss Towne turned to the Freedmen's Association of Philadelphia for help in securing a building. In 1864 the first real school was built. It had been sent in pre-fabricated panels from Philadelphia. In appreciation the community named the school Penn School after the State of Pennsylvania.

Between 1862 and her death in 1901 Laura Towne dedicated herself to improving the welfare of the sea island Gullahs. Time and again she traveled north to secure financial support and she conducted a wide correspondence on the school's behalf. In addition to the school Miss Towne also established a health center and a center for assisting the community in such matters as farming and marketing. The basic philosophy of education and self help which guides the center to this day was born during Laura Towne's almost 30 year devotion to the blacks of St. Helena Island and the surrounding community.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Dabbs, E.M., "Walking Tall, A Brief Sketch of Penn School" (Fragmore, 1964).  
 Dabney, Charles, Universal Education in the South (Chapel Hill, 1936).  
 Holland, Rupert S., Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884 (New York, 1912).  
 Johnson, Guion, A Social History of the Sea Islands With Special Reference to St. Helena Island, South Carolina (Chapel Hill, 1930).  
 Jones, Thomas J., Negro Education (Washington, 1917)

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	32° 23' 23"	80° 34' 58"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	32° 23' 23"	80° 34' 29"				
SE	32° 23' 10"	80° 34' 29"				
SW	32° 23' 10"	80° 34' 58"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 47

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 James Sheire, Historian

ORGANIZATION Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation,  
 National Park Service

DATE  
 August 1974

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN:  
 Washington

STATE  
 D.C.

CODE  
 11

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Penn School

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance

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Before Miss Towne died in 1901, she took steps to secure her school's future. She convinced Dr. Hollis Frissell of Hampton to take over sponsorship of the school. Dr. Frissell arranged for two Hampton instructors, Rosse B. Cooley and Grace House, to move to South Carolina to carry on Miss Towne's work. In the tradition of Miss Towne these two women dedicated the remainder of their lives to the school and community center. According to Charles B. Dabney in his history of "Universal Education in the South," Rosse Cooley and Grace House made Penn School a "splendid illustration" of the Hampton - Tuskegee vocational approach to black education. Educators from throughout the South visited Penn School to study their methods.

In 1948, when the State of South Carolina assumed responsibility for public education on St. Helena Island, the Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School's functions as a private normal and vocational school came to an end. Penn School became a community center incorporated in 1951 as Penn Community Services. Since 1951 Penn Community Services has developed a program centered on five functions: black land services, business development, preschool child development, a black cultural program oriented on the Gullah past, and a conference center for groups interested in black social, economic, and political concerns (Martin Luther King held a planning session at the center in preparation for his famous 1964 march on Washington). Today, as in the days before the end of the Civil War, Penn is dedicated to promoting the interests of blacks through self help and education.

The significance of the Penn School in its relation to the history of black education is threefold. First, the Penn School can lay claim to being the first school established in the South as a result of the Civil War for the formal education of Negroes. Schools for blacks existed in the pre-Civil War South. However, they were often carried on surreptitiously with the tolerance of local authorities or they were centered on the benevolence of the "big house" and were informal in nature. Formal education in the sense of a school system for educating free or slave did not exist. Penn School was, if not the first, then surely among the first legitimate formal schools for blacks in the South.

Second, the Penn School is a model of a type of elementary-secondary school established by northern religious and philanthropic organizations for educating the freedmen. The example of northern teachers going South and establishing private schools supported by religious groups and the Freedmen's Bureau was followed throughout the South. Penn is one of the very few

Third, the Penn School was an excellent example of the influence of the Hampton-Tuskegee approach to black education. Under Laura Towne's leadership, Penn School developed a vocational program, but the school also stressed the traditional, "literary" curriculum. When Penn School came under the directorship of two Hampton teachers, the curriculum stressed instruction

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8. Significance

Continued

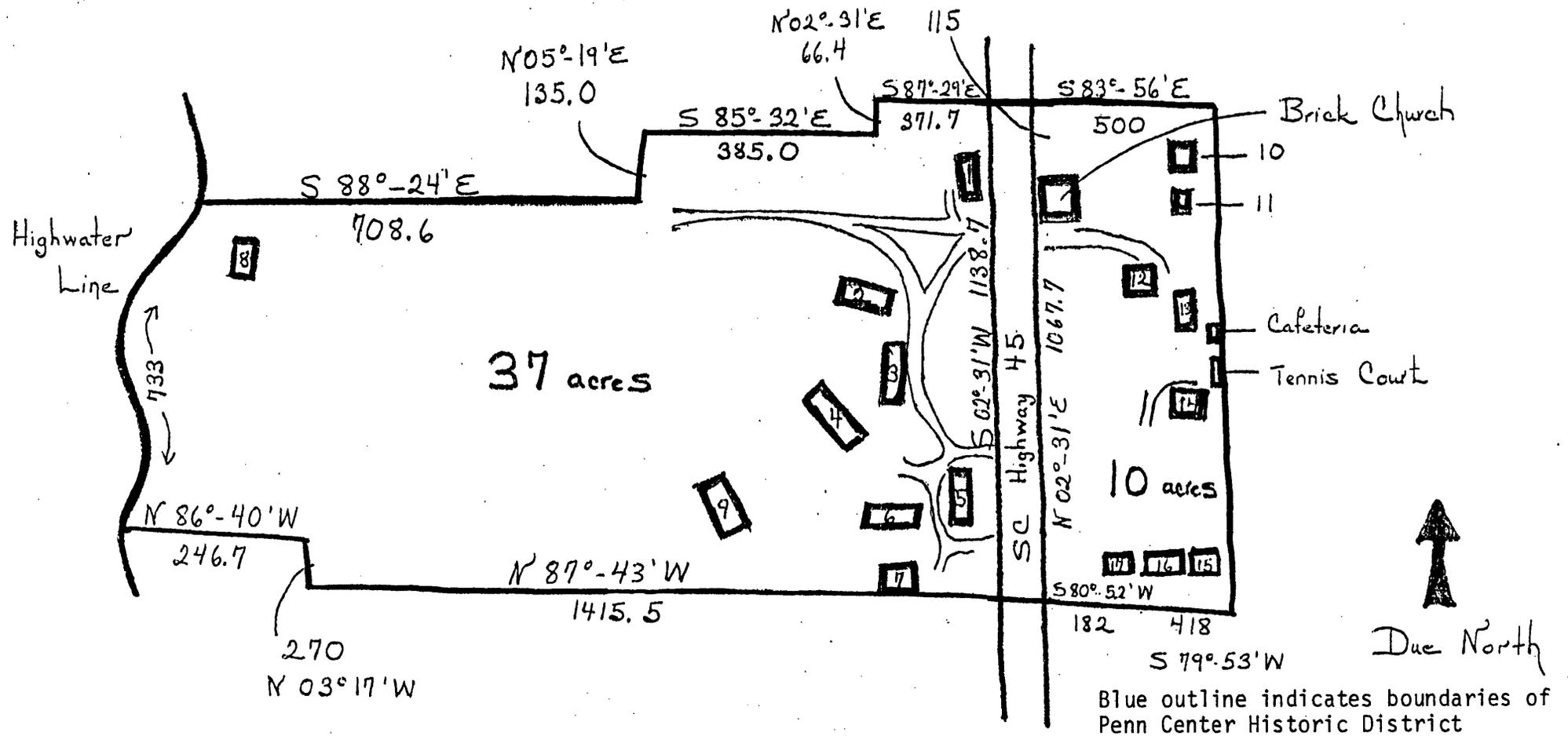
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in practical, vocational skills especially useful in a rural, sea island setting. Girls were offered two courses, sewing or cooking and housekeeping. The boys were taught basketery, blacksmithing, carpentry, rudimentary agriculture, and elementary mechanics. All these subjects were the traditional subject matter of a "special education" designed especially for black students. Penn School was a very good illustration of how the influence of Hampton vocationalism spread to elementary and secondary schools in the South.

In addition to its association with the history of black education, the Penn Center is also significant in black history because of the center's other functions. Penn pioneered in the area rural health services, agricultural extension services, and in its programs of business and real estate training. Penn Center was a model and precursor of many of the forms of contemporary black self help programs.

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# Penn Center Historic District



- |                                      |                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Frissell Hall                     | 10. Orchard Cottage   |
| 2. Butler Building                   | 11. Water Tank        |
| 3. Lathers Hall                      | 12. Hampton House     |
| 4. Former Dining Hall<br>(abandoned) | 13. Benzette House    |
| 5. Cope Building                     | 14. Arnett House      |
| 6. Hose House                        | 15. Gantt Cottage     |
| 7. Pine Cottage                      | 16. Jessemine Cottage |
| 8. Retreat House                     | 17. Cedar Cottage     |
| 9. Darrah Hall (abandoned)           |                       |

