

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Williamson Field House

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 1703 West 3rd Ave

☐ not for publication

city or town Williamson

☐ vicinity

state West Virginia

code

WV

county

Mingo

code

059

zip code

25661

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

West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office

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

Williamson Field House
Name of Property

Mingo County, WV
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		1
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		1
			structures
			objects
		1	2
			Total
Name of related multiple property listing		Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register	
n/a		0	

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions	Current Functions
RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility	RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility
RECREATION AND CULTURE/ auditorium	RECREATION AND CULTURE/ auditorium

7. Description

Architectural Classification	Materials
MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne	foundation CONCRETE
	walls CONCRETE
	BRICK
	roof SYNTHETIC: polyurethane
	other WOOD

Narrative Description
See Continuation Sheets

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

- ☒ **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

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B.** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **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

See Continuation sheets

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

local

Areas of Significance

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

c. 1951-1961

Significant Dates

c.1951; 1960

Significant Person

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Stettler, Lewis E., architect

C.H. Jimison & Sons, Inc; contractor

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography****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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Williamson Field House
Name of Property

Mingo , WV
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre Williamson Quad

UTM References

1	<u>17</u> Zone	<u>386006</u> Easting	<u>4170685</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See Continuation Sheets

Boundary Justification

See Continuation Sheets

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bethany Canfield

organization WVSHPO date 9/1/2011

street & number 1900 Kanawha Blvd E telephone 304-558-0240

city or town Charleston state WV zip code 25305

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.
- CD with electronic images if digital photographs.

Floorplans for individual listings

Additional items

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

Property Owner

name City of Williamson, Mayor Darrin McCormick

street & number (P.O. Box 1517) 107 E 4th Ave telephone 304-235-1510

city or town Williamson state WV zip code 25661

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 listing. 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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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LOCATION and SETTING

Williamson, the county seat of Mingo County, rests along the Tug River and is nestled on the state line between West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. The area is known as the "Heart of the Billion-Dollar Coal Field." Williamson is located along US Route 119 approximately 100 miles west of Bluefield, 80 miles south of Huntington, 85 miles from Charleston, and 30 Miles from Pikeville, Kentucky. The area of the Field House is in west Williamson and the closest section to the Kentucky state line along the Tug River. The Norfolk and Western Railroad (now Norfolk and Southern Railway) has a terminal in Williamson and the tracks run perpendicular to the Field House. The railroad is an integral part of the coal industry, transportation, and the development of Williamson.

The Williamson Field House is adjacent to and part of the Williamson Memorial Park, which includes one multipurpose field and one little league ball field. The little league field is on a separate parcel and not part of this nomination. The other field and the grandstand associated with it are noncontributing resources. There is a chain-link fence around the park fields, which ends on the northeast corner of the Field House. The grandstand for the larger field runs along the north side of the Field House.

The building is oriented east to west and painted red, white, and blue. The front (east) elevation faces 3rd Avenue in Williamson with the sides facing Brother Reid Avenue and the ball park. The rear of the building faces the Tug River and the modern floodwall (c.1992).

DESCRIPTIONS

1. Field House

c.1951

1 contributing building

Exterior

The Williamson Field House, constructed c.1951, is a large, two-story, modern-style rectangular building with diagonal corners. It is constructed out of concrete blocks and bricks and measures approximately 165'x 201'. The only decorative elements are on the front elevation above and between the entrances. The roof is flat over the main elevation and then forms a low dome which runs the length of the roof. The corners of the roof are hipped to meet the dome.

The main elevation (facing 3rd Avenue) encompasses the entranceways and ticket and concession windows. A small hipped roof overhang protects the entrances and wraps around the front cornered entrance. A two-story brick wing extends from the center of the main elevation. It has brick quoins and a modern shed roof (See Photo No.1). This wing has decorative glass-block windows on each side. A wood covering with a centered sculpted medallion separates the windows on the first and second story. In between the windows, a large concrete section is inscribed, "Dedicated to the Youth of Williamson West Virginia 1950" (See Photo No. 3 & 4). At the top of the area are small wooden decorations.

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The main elevation and angled corner feature three horizontal bands of concrete block that project slightly from the building; the top band being just below the cornice. Between the bands are painted wooden stars and stripes (See Photo No.2). The angled corner includes a glass block window on the second story and a metal casement window above. Brick pilasters extend from ground to the roof between the six small metal casement windows on each side of the building.

A 1960s flat-roof addition extends from the rear of the building with flat roof and stepped parapet. This addition has a modern metal overhead cargo door for ease in unloading and loading trucks. A small gravel and dirt employee parking lot is situated in the small area between Brother Reid Avenue, the field house, and the flood wall (See Photo No. 5). The rear door has a small shed roof overhang.

The roof is a semi-circle dome in the center and hipped on the corners, painted white to match the horizontal strip and the detailing around the building. In 2000, the shingles were replaced and a two layer synthetic polyurethane coating sealed the roof from water and the elements. The original roof was asphalt shingles nailed to gypsum rock board. There are two small fixed vent windows on the northern side, facing the ball park (See Photo No. 6).

Interior

There are two sets of metal and glass entrance doors on the southeast corner. The hard wood basketball court, measuring 84'x 112', dominates the entire center of the building. The remaining floor space is poured concrete. The area around the court is two stories high. On the first floor, wooden theater-style seats, taken from the Williamson High School theater in 1984, are on a raised platform on the east end against the wooden court floor (See Photo No. 7). Metal decorative flowers and lines adorn the ends of the seat rows (See Photo No.8). These replaced the original seats, which were destroyed by a flood in 1977. Former activities manager, James Wolford recalled that the original wooden seats were built into the floor and walls.¹

Offices and restrooms are on the east end of the building. On the west wall, portable metal bleachers allow for visiting teams to sit, adding 1,000 seats. During boxing matches or other smaller stage events, folding chairs are placed around the stage, these chairs allow for a potential seating of 6,000 people. The concession area is behind the bleachers. Also, on the west wall dressing rooms, comprise the 1960 addition. The south wall does not have any seating but holds two rooms; one is for organizations, such as boy or girl scouts, evident by the wolf emblem on the floor. The other room is used for janitorial storage. These rooms are accessible via the hallway but not the basketball court. At the corners of the building are concrete steps to access the second floor.

¹ Telephone Interview with James Wolford, August 2011.

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The second floor balcony is arranged in ten sections of concrete steps with wooden planks and steel supports. There are 275 seats in each section totaling 2,700. They comprise the majority of the seats in the Field House. Concrete steps are situated in the corners and in the center of each section, above the basketball hoops and the building's corners, allowing access first story access (See Photo No 8 & 9). On the east wall above the bleachers are the words "WOLF PACK COUNTRY" painted in black. Wooden advertisement billboards hang on the second level balcony and display sponsors and best wishes to the athletes. A modern, large, four-sided digital scoreboard hangs from the ceiling (installed c.1998) however the original 1951 system is still used. The ceiling is a tile drop ceiling, to make a flat surface for the scoreboard and also assist in heating and sound quality of the building. This alternation occurred in c. 1981, filling in the semi-circular dome above the playing area.

2. Jim VanZant Field

c.1939

1 non-contributing structure

Jim VanZant Field, a multi-purpose football/baseball field, is part of the larger Lefty Hamilton Ball Park within Williamson Memorial Park. This park also includes a smaller field known as Brother Reid Little League Field located on a separate parcel. The VanZant Field is a grassy field with small sand-covered areas for the pitcher and home base. The field is surrounded by several tall lamp posts. A goal post is situated at either end of the field and a score board is located at the east end of the field. In 1950, the original sand lot ball field was filled in, and a new ball field was constructed twenty feet to the north. Various floods have required the field to be reconstructed, including a new drainage system for left field in the 1970s. This field is a non-contributing site due to various alterations.

3. Grandstand

1950

1 non-contributing structure

The grandstand includes an L-shaped shed-roof awning, supported by rounded metal poles, covering most of the metal bleacher seating. In 1950, C.H. Jimison & Sons reconstructed the grandstand (the original was constructed in 1939). A flood in 1977 destroyed a small section of the 1950s bleachers and modern fiberglass bleachers on steel supports were installed. A shed-roof, frame press box with T-111 siding is situated over a section of the bleachers and is accessed by a set of wooden steps. Due to the various changes to the grandstand, it is considered noncontributing.

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STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE

The Williamson Field House is eligible for listing in the National Register under *Criterion A: Entertainment/ Recreation* as a locally significant facility reflecting the area's post-war history. Since constructed in 1951, southern West Virginians have used this facility for various community as well as sporting events. The period of significance begins in 1951, the finished construction date of the field house, and ends in 1961, corresponding to the 50 year cut off and representing the continued significance as a recreation and entertainment venue in the community and county.

General Williamson History

Williamson was part of once-larger Logan County until January 1895 when the state legislature created Mingo County and named Williamson as the county seat.² Mingo County is named for Chief Logan's Indian tribe, the earliest known settlers of the area.³ Even prior to the creation of Mingo County, coal and timber industry drove the growth in population and infrastructure. The Williamson Coal Field, one of the richest coal fields, spans most of the southwestern counties, including Mingo, Wayne, and McDowell, and is located along the Tug River and the state line.⁴ Mingo County thrived on their coal industry and still does today. In 1892 the Norfolk and Western Railroad built a large rail yard in Williamson and initiated the town as the center of the coal field. The nickname "Heart of the Billion-Dollar Coal Field" is derived from the fact that over one billion dollars in coal has passed through Williamson on the railroad since 1892.

After the establishment of the Norfolk and Western Railroad terminal in Williamson, the coal industry boomed, with the greatest period of production occurring 1914 to 1930. The coal industry is still a predominant employer, today. Mechanization of mines allowed for a safer workplace, however it also caused loss of jobs for many workers. In 1950, the railroad traffic was mostly for coal shipments, due to the affordable personal automobile. Also in 1950, a national coal strike caused a shortage of steel, which affected the Field House's construction.

Due to its close proximity to the Tug Fork River, Williamson is prone to devastating floods. Two of the most notable and destructive events occurred in 1977 and 1984. These two floods caused several changes to the town and in particular the Williamson Field House. The Army Corps of Engineers constructed a massive concrete flood wall, in the early 1990s, around the Field House, Memorial Park, and other areas in West Williamson to help with future disasters.⁵

² Williamson Chamber of Commerce. "Williamson West Virginia: Heart of the Billion-Dollar Coal Field" 2010 reprint, 5.

³ Mingo County History, <http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/wv/Mingo/minghistory.html>.

⁴ Coalcampusa.com, "Williamson Field" <http://www.coalcampusa.com/sowv/williamson/williamson.html>.

⁵ Williamson Heritage Book 1996, 38.

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History of the Field House

In 1946, the City of Williamson purchased the five-acre property where the field house is situated from a local baker for \$11,500. The park was to be a World War II veteran's memorial in the form of a recreational center, to serve Williamson City and Mingo County citizens.⁶

In 1950, Mayor Joe P. Hatfield and city council members helped plan the details of the facility, including the original idea for a removable wooden sectional floor for basketball, which could be stored under the stands. However, this concept was abandoned due to cost. Mayor Hatfield, as well as the committee, established that the building would be cinder block and painted white or gray and would consist of two floors.⁷ Hoping for construction to start in early spring, they awarded the contract for the concrete foundation work on January 3, 1950 to a local general construction firm, C.H. Jimison & Sons, Inc.⁸

Huntington architect, Lewis Stettler, designed the memorial field house and described it to the local news at the time as an "unusual fieldhouse."⁹ Stettler studied architecture at the Chicago Art Institute, where he concentrated on the modern style and form. He designed numerous schools and specialized in sports arenas in West Virginia.¹⁰ Another work of his, which is contemporary to the Williamson Field House, is the Huntington Veterans Memorial Field House.¹¹

Construction bids were received in February 1950. In order to award the contracts, the city of Williamson had to raise the money. The city raised \$300,000 in revenue bonds to be paid from tax yields. The project would not cost the city taxpayers any more money.¹² It was estimated that the new field house would cost approximately sixty dollars per guest, with 5,000 seats.¹³

On February 25, 1950 the construction and detail contracts were awarded to C.H. Jimison & Sons, Inc. for general construction; Huntington Heating & Supply Company for design and installation of a heating and cooling system; Rosenblat and Kirstein, Inc. for the electrical work; and Whitehurst and Company for the plumbing.¹⁴ The original opening date was set for fall of the same year; however, the coal strike created a

⁶ Williamson Daily News, March 9, 1946, p.1.

⁷ Williamson Daily News, January 6, 1950, p. 1.

⁸ Williamson Daily News, January 3, 1950, p.1.

⁹ Williamson Daily News, January 23, 1950, p. 1. No other remarks were recorded in the newspaper and it is not clear why Stettler referred to the building as "unusual."

¹⁰ *The Huntington Advertiser*, May 5, 1956, p.5. "Obituary for Lewis E. Stettler"

¹¹ The Huntington Veterans Memorial Field House is scheduled for demolition in 2012.

¹² Williamson Daily News, February 14, 1950, p.1. "Revenue Bonds To be Sought For Fieldhouse"

¹³ Williamson Daily News, March 9, 1950, p.7.

¹⁴ Williamson Daily News, February 25, 1950, p. 1.

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steel shortage. Construction on the field house was halted from February to mid-August 1950. Though the building was not complete until 1951, the dedication plaque installed on the front side of the building was inscribed with "1950." The first event held in the newly finished facility was a rival high school basketball game between Williamson and Wayne High Schools, held on December 15, 1951. A news article in the Williamson Daily News stated that a formal gala for the opening would be held after the New Year. However, it is unclear if such an event ever occurred.¹⁵

Over the years the venue hosted various events including local high school basketball games, the Harlem Globetrotters show, and various concerts. During the period of significance local dances, state basketball, wrestling, boxing tournaments, circuses, car shows, and celebrity athletes drew an average of 1,500 spectators to the field house.¹⁶ It was also used as FEMA emergency distribution center in 1953. Additionally National Guard units used the Field House any time Williamson was declared in a state of emergency. In one year, on average, 30,000 spectators attend events at the Williamson Field House.¹⁷ Williamson prides itself on the fact that the Field House is one of the largest in the area. The closest in size and location is the Huntington Veterans Memorial Field House, which is currently facing potential demolition (as of 2011).

Southern West Virginian communities rely on local events and activities to bring new people to the area. The Williamson Field House is large enough venue to hold a sizeable crowd and allow for outside spectators. Drawing large crowds, the Field House can host popular or famous celebrities or events such as the Harlem Globetrotters who performed there in 1951. The Williamson Field House can hold as many as 6,000 (5,000 seats with an extra 1,000 on portable metal bleachers) people at the same time. In 1960 the boosters club raised money to build shower and dressing rooms onto the west end of the field house, increasing the space originally provided for the amenities. Most of the original boosters are deceased by their influence is evident in the dressing rooms and concession areas.

Demonstrating the Field House's continual significance, local events such as car shows, community celebrations, and entertainment shows still perform. The most notable visit, within the last year, was Oprah Winfrey's return to Williamson. She re-interviewed family members of a memorable and controversial show in the 1980s. In addition, the annual "Rough and Rowdy" boxing tournament is conducted in the Field House and this event draws spectators and competitors from across the state and nearby states.

Many field houses listed in the National Register in other states were built during the New Deal programs. This is not the case with the Williamson landmark; instead, the building was constructed in the post-war era. It provided Williamson youth a safe place to exercise and socialize.

¹⁵ Williamson Daily News, December 6, 1951, p 1.

¹⁶ Correspondence with Peirce Whitt, August 2011.

¹⁷ Oral Interview with Peirce Whitt, et al. October 2010.

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Integrity

Devastating floods in 1977 and 1984 destroyed the court floors, wood seats, and some wood bleachers. However, sympathetic and similar replacements were installed. In 1986, the original 275 wooden theater-style seats were replaced with 115 actual theater seats from the nearby Williamson High School Theater. When the flood waters reached the second row of bleachers on the second story, similar wood planks replaced the original 1959, sodden timbers. No seating was lost with the replacements. Also, all doors were replaced in the early 1980s for improved security. In 1981, the dome ceiling was lowered with a tiled drop ceiling to enhance the sound quality and improve the efficiency of the heating system. On the exterior, the original asphalt shingles were replaced with a rubberized plastic, polyurethane coating and a small shed roof was added to the flat-roof wing off the main elevation.¹⁸

The above-mentioned alterations to the Williamson Field House do not affect its ability to convey significance under Criterion A as an important part of Williamson and Mingo County's history. The alterations did not affect the overall massing, form, or design of Stettler's original design. The building continues to be used for sporting events, concerts, and other local functions.

Summary

Serving not only the city of Williamson, but also the entire region of southern West Virginia, the Williamson Field House was an integral and significant part of the community upon completion in 1951 and continues to be so today. It is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A: Recreation and Entertainment for the significant role it plays in the history of the Mingo County area.

¹⁸ Correspondence with Peirce Whitt, August 2011.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The National Register boundary for the Williamson Field House includes the entire current parcel listed as Parcel 2 of Map 10 in the Williamson District.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The National Register boundary for the Williamson Field House includes the entire parcel historically associated with the resource during its period of significance.

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Photographer: Bethany Canfield
Date: October 12, 2010
Williamson Field House
Mingo County, West Virginia

Photo 1 of 9: Exterior of the Field House, facing northwest.

Photo 2 of 9 Southeast (Front) corner showing the entry way and window details.

Photo 3 of 8: Front brick section, showing art deco wooden decorations and the multi-pane windows, facing North.

Photo 4 of 9: Dedication Plaque on the eastern side of the Field House, facing west.

Photo 5 of 9: Rear of the Field House, showing the 1960 addition and loading door, facing northwest.

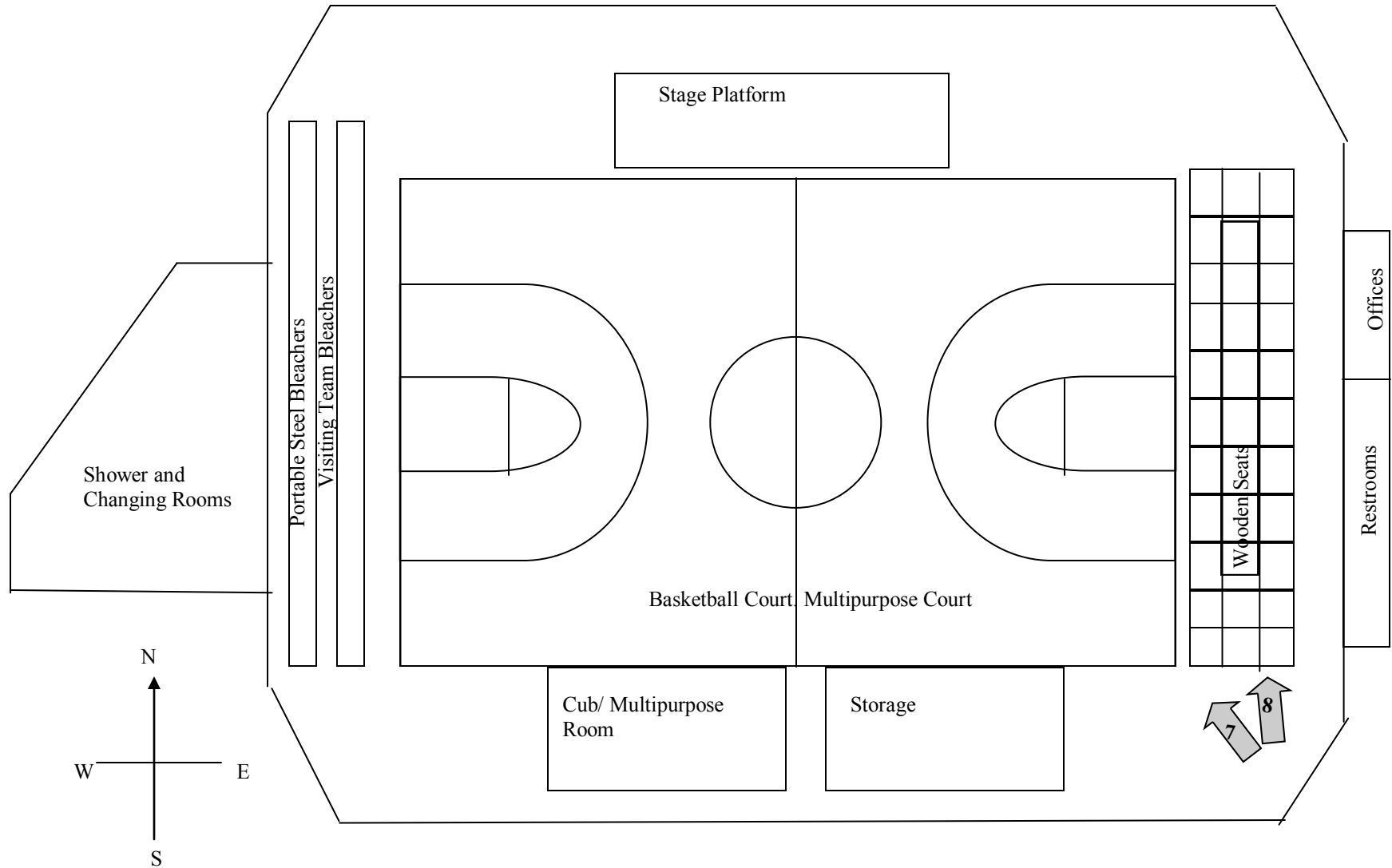
Photo 6 of 9: Ball Field and the rear of the Field House, facing southwest.

Photo 7 of 9: Interior of Field House, facing west, shows the original wooden seats, portable stage, and the second story balcony.

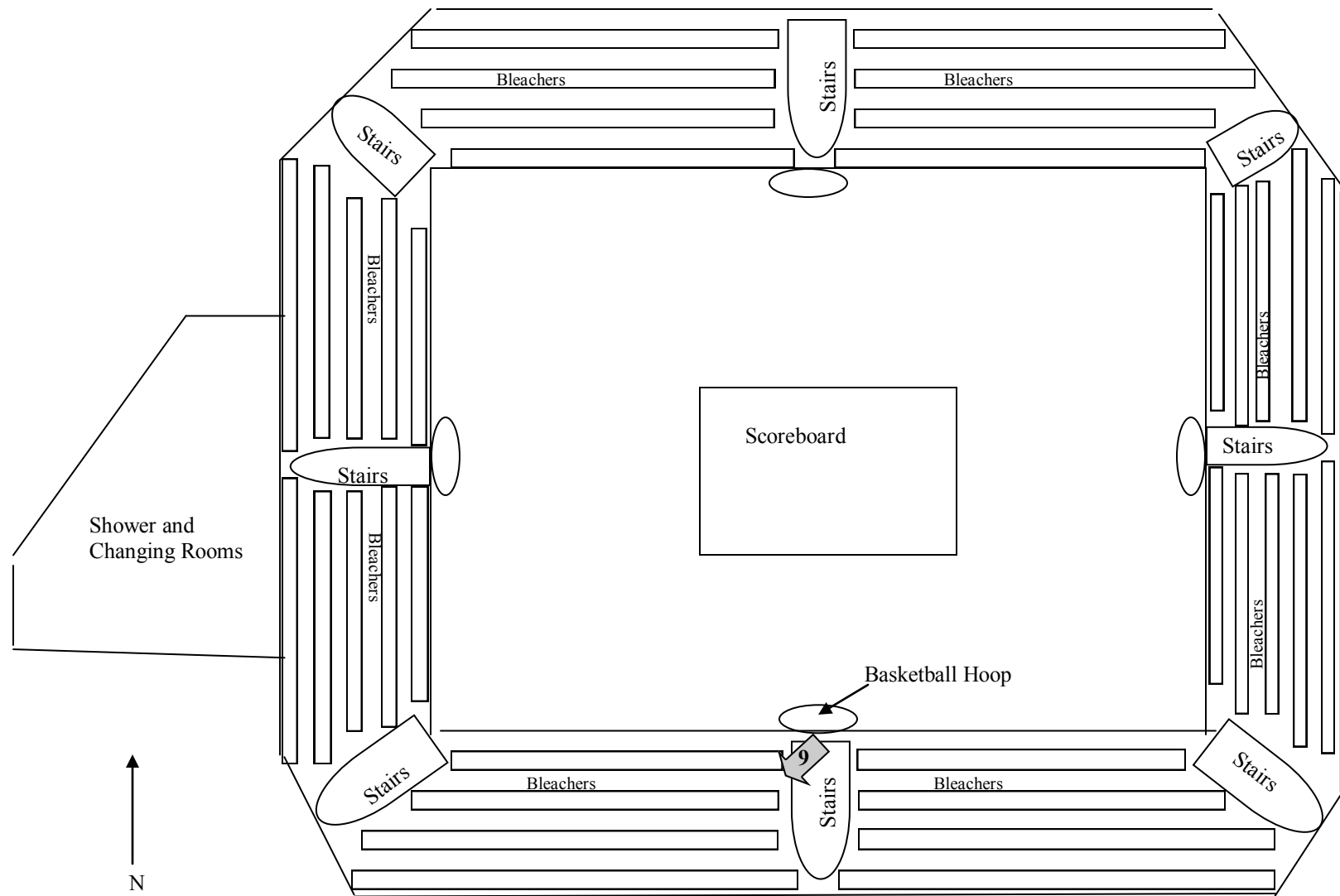
Photo 8 of 9: Second floor wood bleachers on concrete steps, facing west.

Photo 9 of 9: Close-up of the original wooden seats, facing east.

Williamson Field House
Interior Floor Plan—1st Floor (not to scale) and photo view
Mingo County, West Virginia



Williamson Field House Interior Floor Plan—2nd Floor (not to scale) with photo view
Mingo County, West Virginia





Williamson Fieldhouse

National Register Nomination Map

Mingo County, WV

UTM 17: 386006 E 4170685 N

Map printed 2/10/2012

68 0 68 136 Meters



1:10169



Williamson Field House and Ball Park

Mingo County

West Virginia

Exterior Photos (not to scale)

----- chain-link fence

———— NR boundary

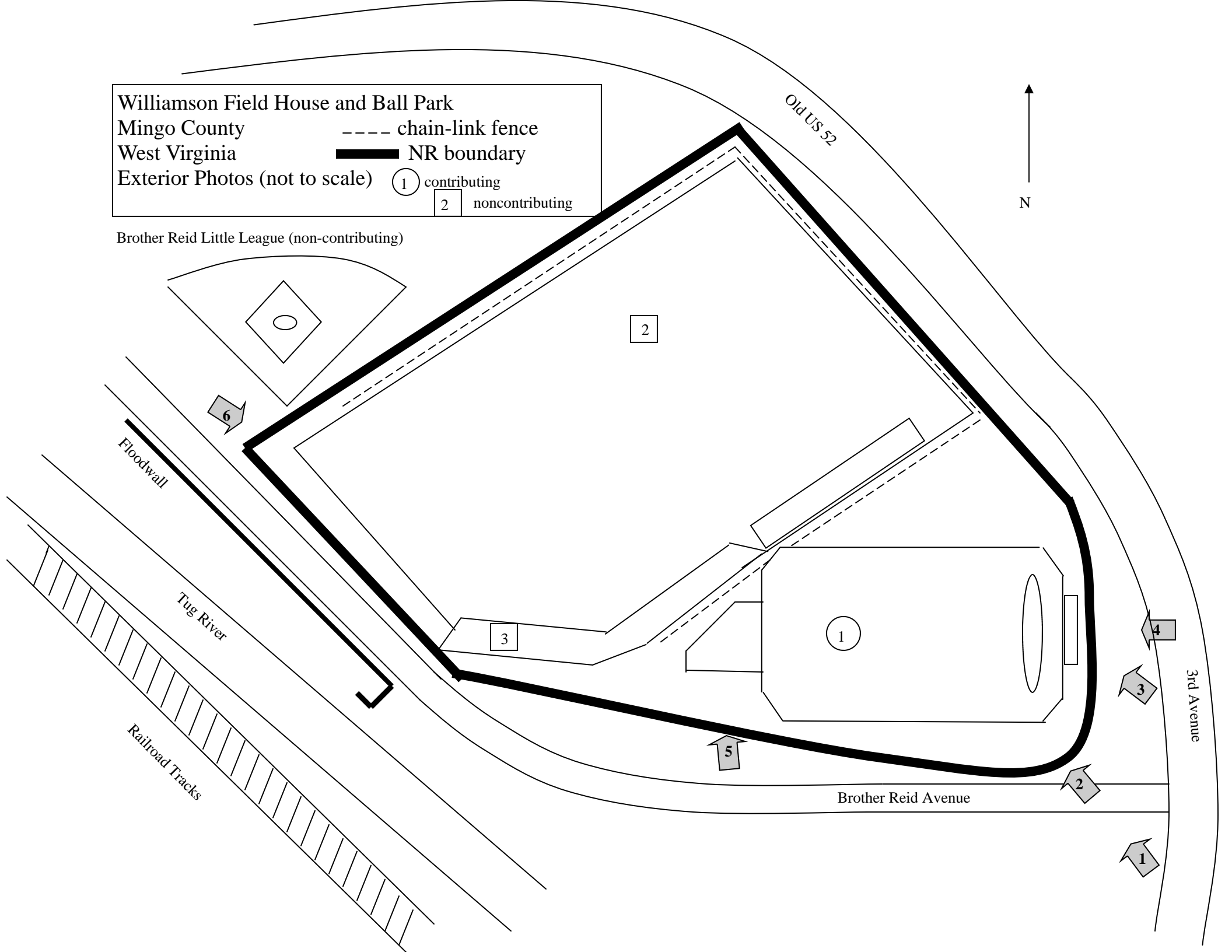
1

contributing

2

noncontributing

Brother Reid Little League (non-contributing)







WILLIAMSON PARK

108

DEDICATED TO
THE YOUTH OF
WILLIAMSON
WEST VIRGINIA
1950

SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DEDICATED TO
THE YOUTH OF
WILLIAMSON
WEST VIRGINIA
1950











MINUTES
SECONDS
PERIOD
HOME VISITOR