

10-20-93
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NRHP

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and 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 any 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 from 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 The Ferry Farm

other names/site number The River House (preferred), DHR 21-64

2. Location

street & number U.S.Rt. 17/50, 2.5mi. east of Millwood not for publication
city or town Millwood vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Clarke code 43 zip code 22620

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 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.)

W. L. C. Miller Signature of certifying official Date 11/5/93

Director, Virginia Department of Historic 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 commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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 Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | buildings |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | sites |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | structures |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | objects |
| <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 3

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: **DOMESTIC** Sub: **single dwelling**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: **DOMESTIC** Sub: **single dwelling**

hotel

secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal _____
Vernacular _____

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE _____
roof METAL _____
walls STONE _____

other _____

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Period of Significance 1820-1865 _____

Significant Dates ca. 1820 _____

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation N/A _____

Architect/Builder unknown _____

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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.
X 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

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other
Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 17 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Table with 4 columns: Zone, Easting, Northing. Data rows: 1 17 759640 4325450, 2 17 759420 4325200, 3 17 759300 4325310, 4 17 759420 4325430

X 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 Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian
organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date 17 August 1993
street & number 221 Governor St. telephone 804-786-3143
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

=====
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_Cornelia and Donald Niemann
street & number_River House, Rt.2 Box 135 telephone_703-837-1476
city or town_Boyce state_VA zip code_22620

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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Located on the west bank of the scenic Shenandoah River, The River House is a massive stone dwelling exhibiting the influence of the formal Georgian style on the vernacular architecture of the lower Shenandoah Valley. The house has a single-pile plan with nearly identical five-bay land and river fronts. Its walls are of irregular coursed limestone rubble. The interior retains most of its original, relatively plain Federal woodwork. On the property is a rare three-part slave or servants' house and an early smokehouse. Although situated immediately adjacent to the busy U.S. Route 17/50, the property has the ambience of a secluded rural setting. The house has undergone few significant alterations and preserves a high degree of architectural integrity. The property was recently listed as a contributing resource within the Greenway Historic District.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The River House is located less than one hundred yards south of U.S. Route 17/50, on the west bank of the Shenandoah River.¹ The roadway, formerly the Ashby's Gap Turnpike, originally was closer to the house but the alignment was moved to its present location farther north when the modern highway was constructed. The old roadway presently forms part of the driveway to the house. Although close to the highway, a thick screen of trees prevents the house from being seen by passing motorists. As late as the late 1960s a clear view from the house to the river existed. The view is now obscured by a lush growth of trees and underbrush. To the west of the house is a broad sloping lawn traversed by the driveway. A three-part servants' house stands on the western edge of the property, approximately a hundred yards from the main house.

The River House or the main house is a massive five-bay stone structure covered by a gable roof with wide interior-end chimneys. The roof is currently sheathed in standing-seam sheet metal but likely originally had wooden shingles. At the eaves is a very simple molded cornice. The walls are laid in irregularly coursed limestone rubble, an indigenous material probably quarried on nearby. The principal openings are topped by flat arches with heavy stone voussoirs. The stonework is in good condition and preserves most of its early lime mortar joints. Because the house is situated on a slope, the basement on the north end is fully above grade. There is an exterior entrance to the north basement room (originally the kitchen) on the east side.

The weightiness of the walls is emphasized by the relative small size of the window openings. Both the river front and the land front are similarly treated, with evenly spaced bays and a central entrance. Adding to the formality of the elevations is the diminution of the second-floor fenestration and the use of a wider window in the center bay of the second floor on both sides. All of the window openings preserve original, though simple, architrave frames and what appears to be original sash. The first-floor windows have nine-over-nine sashes while the second-

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**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

floor windows (except for those in the center bays) have six-over six sashes. A ca. 1925 photograph shows the windows hung with louvered blinds.

Both main entrances were formerly sheltered by gabled porches which probably dated from the mid-nineteenth century. These had fallen into deteriorated condition and were removed by the present owners following their purchase of the property in 1973. Both principal entrances are now approached by modern concrete steps and stone platforms with concrete decks. The land front door frame is a later alteration. The river front door frame--a simple architrave with transom, appears to be original.

On the south end of the house is a one-and-a-half-story frame wing built in 1949 to replace an earlier two-story frame wing that burned in that year. The earlier wing, shown in a ca. 1925, may have dated from the nineteenth century, although the house probably did not have a wing originally. The present owners enclosed a screened porch on the east side of the wing.

The first-floor plan of River House is a standard I-house plan with center passage and a single large room on either side. The original woodwork is mostly intact and is relatively plain. In the passage is a single-run, closed-string stair with square balusters, square newel, and simple molded handrail. Paralleling the stringer is a bold, two-plane architrave. The passage also preserves a chair rail, baseboard, and simple door frames. The woodwork has been stripped of paint, revealing boldly grained heart pine. Both entrances have original six-paneled doors with early box locks. The doors are set in paneled jambs. The interior doors throughout the house are largely original.

The parlor or north room has an original Federal mantel featuring plain end columns supporting an entablature with narrow architrave, wide frieze, and boldly molded cornice shelf. The room also preserves its original window frames. The crown molding is modern; none of the rooms originally had crown molding or cornices. The bookshelves on either side of the mantel and on the south wall were added by the present owners.

The dining room opposite also preserves its original Federal mantel. This mantel is fancily decorated with reeded pilasters, reeded bed moldings, and a pair of reeded panels in the center of the frieze. It also has carved pateras at the ends of the frieze and a wavy incised band below the frieze. On the west side of the mantel is an original, built-in cupboard with flat paneled doors. A similar cupboard may have existed on the east side but the space currently has a doorway leading into the south wing. A short cupboard above the doorway may be the remnant of the original cupboard. The room also preserves its chair railing, window frames, door frame (into the passage), and plain baseboard. The crown molding is modern. Original pine floors survive in this room as they do throughout the house.

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**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

The second-floor passage has been altered to accommodate a modern linen closet and two modern bathrooms at the west end of the space. Presumably the west end of the passage was originally open with the stair railing extending around the end of the stairwell.

On the north end of the house is a large master bedroom. Its fireplace has a very plain but probably original wooden mantel. The closets on either side of the mantel appear to be early but not necessarily original. The room also has plain chair railing and plain baseboards. The large closet on the south wall was added by the present owners.

The space on the south side of the passage is divided into two narrow bedrooms. Both rooms have plain wooden mantels and other trim matching that in the master bedroom. There is no attic stair; the attic was inaccessible for examination.

The basement is reached by an interior stair below the main stair. The large room on the north end was originally the kitchen and preserves an impressive fireplace originally used for open-hearth cooking. The opening had been sealed up and was reopened by the current owners, exposing the stone chimney breast and the wide segmental arch. The south basement room was is currently arranged as a bar, installed when the house was used as a restaurant. It has a small fireplace and exposed ceiling joists, most of which appear to be boxed in with later material. A boxed steel girder supports the dining room floor. Log joists survive beneath the basement flooring.

Although the modern alterations and additions on the interior are readily apparent, they do not distract from the general historic flavor of the house. The house is maintained in excellent condition and has a pleasant ambience, being used currently as a bed and breakfast inn.

The property preserves two original outbuildings: a servants' house and a smokehouse. Both are contributing structures. The interesting three-part servants' house or slave house is located less than a hundred yards to the west of the main house. It is not known if this building was meant merely for housing or if its spaces were used for other domestic functions such as laundry or weaving. The long, one-story building is built of rubble limestone and is covered by a three-sectioned gable roof with standing-seam sheet metal. A shed-roof porch shelters part of the east front. Each unit has its own entrance. An original, horizontally narrow opening is on the south end. The building is currently used for storage and is in fair condition. Little interior trim appears to survive on the interior although it probably had little trim to begin with. The current owner stated that the property was used as a beer joint earlier in the century.

Immediately to the south of the house is the original smokehouse, also a contributing structure. Its walls are limestone rubble and it is covered by a gable roof with standing-seam sheet metal and a box cornice.

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**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

Less than fifty feet to the west of the smokehouse is a small wooden playhouse in deteriorated condition. This is a twentieth-century structure and is a non-contributing resource.

Although no archaeological survey has been conducted on the property, it likely contains sites of significance, including sites of vanished outbuildings and farm buildings, and sites related to the ferry crossing.

ENDNOTES

1. Because the house is diagonally orientated on the compass, it is sometimes stated that the house faces north/south rather than east/west. However, since the river side of the house is built to face the river, and the Shenandoah River is normally considered to flow north, this description will refer to the land front as the west front and the river front as the east front.

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**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built overlooking Berry's Ferry, a historic crossing of the Shenandoah River, The River House is a noteworthy example of the stone domestic architecture for which the lower Shenandoah Valley is celebrated. Unlike such prominent dwellings as Carter Hall or Annefield, River House is not a high-style structure, but rather reflects a blending of vernacular traditions with academic forms. The I-house plan, rugged stone construction, and simplicity of ornamentation are its vernacular characteristics. The symmetrical five-bay facades and Georgian proportions show the influence of more sophisticated design. The house was probably built around 1820 for William Nelson Burwell, son of Nathaniel Burwell of Carter Hall. Although it has passed through many owners the house has suffered few major alterations and preserves much early fabric. An important feature of the property is a rare, three-part slave house or servants' house. The property was recently listed as a contributing resource within the Greenway Historic District.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Known originally as the Ferry Farm or the Ferry Tract, The River House has long dominated this historic crossing of the Shenandoah River. The construction of the house is uncertain although it is generally believed that it was built around 1820. The county tax records for that year mention buildings there worth \$1,350, although 1820 is the first year buildings began to be noted in the tax records.¹ Dating stone houses on the basis of construction styles is difficult since stonework varies little throughout the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. However, the Federal woodwork in The River House house is consistent with the type of woodwork frequently found in Virginia houses erected in the 1820s.

The present owner related her understanding that the basement of the house dates from the eighteenth century and was built to house laborers or slaves assisting with ferry traffic.² An examination of the house by the author, however, revealed no evidence that the stone portion of the house was built other than all at once, as one structure.³

Despite the uncertainty of the construction date, the property has been part of the holding of the Burwell family, of nearby Carter Hall, since the late eighteenth century. It may be that the house was erected for William Nelson Burwell, son of Col. Nathaniel Burwell for whom Carter Hall was built. William Nelson Burwell died in 1822, before his late father's estate had been settled, therefore he did not have clear ownership of The River House property at the time of his death. In any case, it would seem reasonable that the adult heir of a prominent family would have such a commodious though not ostentatious house on a family estate even though he was not officially the master of the property.

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The River House
Clarke County, Virginia

The house was strategically located overlooking Berry's Ferry, one of the main ferry crossings of the Shenandoah River. The site marked the eastern terminus of the Winchester and Berry's Ferry Turnpike. At the crossing the turnpike joined the Ashby's Gap Turnpike which extended to Aldie where it joined the Little River and Alexandria Turnpike. The trace is still a major thoroughfare, being today the four-lane U.S. Route 17/50.

Nathaniel Burwell's estate was not settled until 1828, at which time the Ferry Farm tract passed to a granddaughter, Susan Grymes Randolph, who soon let the property go in a property swap to her brother, Dr. Philip Grymes Randolph.⁴ In 1833, Dr. Randolph sold Ferry Farm to Nathaniel Burwell of Saratoga.

During the Civil War, Berry's Ferry was frequently crossed by both Southern and Northern troops. Stonewall Jackson and his men crossed here on July 18, 1861, on their way to First Manassas. There is no documentation to suggest that the house itself was occupied by troops of either side although local tradition has it that the house was used for a time as a field hospital. The tradition did not specify which side used it.

The property continued to pass through the ownership of members of the Clarke County gentry into the present century. In the late 1940s the house was owned by the Gilpin family who renamed it The River House and used the house as a restaurant and retreat. In the 1950s the house served as a residence for Mr. and Mrs. M. Tyson Gilpin. In 1973, the house and seventeen acres was purchased by its present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Donald E. W. Niemann. Mr. Niemann is the former headmaster of Powhatan School, a private school in Clarke County. The house is now used as a bed and breakfast inn as well as the Niemann residence.

ENDNOTES

1. Clarke County tax records, 1820.
2. Interview by Calder Loth with Cornelia Niemann, June 16, 1993.
3. It may be that the slave house on the property is earlier than the main house and that this is the basis of the belief that a slave house existed on the property before the main house was erected.
4. Stuart E. Brown, Jr. Annals of Clarke County (Berryville, 1983) vol.1, p. 44.

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**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

Major Bibliographical References

Brown, Stuart E., Jr. *Annals of Clarke County*. Berryville, 1983, Vol. 1, p.44.

Clarke County Land Tax Books 1820-1855

Wayland, John W. *Stonewall Jackson's Way*. Verona, VA. 1940, pp. 30-32.

UTM REFERENCES

E 17 759340 4325560
F 17 759420 4325440
G 17 759400 4325620
H 17 759470 4325640

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the southeastern corner of the intersection of U.S. Route 17 and the Shenandoah River, proceed southwest along the norther bank of the Shenandoah River approximately 1200' to a point delineated by UTM reference B 17/759420/4325200, then proceed northwesterly approximately 500' to a point delineated by UTM reference C 17/759300/4325310, then proceed northeast approximately 500' to a point delineated by UTM reference D 17/759420/4325430, then proceed north approximately 500' to a point delineated by UTM reference E 17/759340/4325560, then proceed east approximately 200' to a point delineated by UTM reference F 17/759420/4325440, then proceed north approximately 100' to a point delineated by UTM reference G 17/759400/4325620, then proceed east approximately 150' to a point on the western right-of-way of U.S. Route 17 delineated by UTM reference H 17/759470/4325640, then south along the said right-of-way to point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The seventeen acres of The River House nomination include the main dwelling, the historic outbuildings, and the dwelling's immediate landscape setting, including the land leading down to the Shenandoah River and the river's historic crossing. It also includes a portion of the historic trace of the Ashby's Gap Turnpike, now paralleled by U.S. Route 17/50. The boundaries of the seventeen-acre tract also are consistent with the property boundaries of the current owners of The River House.

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Section Photographs Page 3

**The River House
Clarke County, Virginia**

PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs are of:

**THE RIVER HOUSE, CLARKE COUNTY, VA.
DHR FILE NUMBER: 21-64**

All photographs were taken by Calder Loth on June 16, 1993. Negatives are on file with the VDHR Collection at the Virginia State Library and Archives.

VIEW OF: west elevation, main house; view looking east
NEG. NO.: 13096
PHOTO 1 OF 6

VIEW OF: east elevation, main house; view looking west
NEG. NO.: 13096
PHOTO 2 OF 6

VIEW OF: stair, center passage, main house; view looking west
NEG. NO.: 13097
PHOTO 3 OF 6

VIEW OF: dining room, main house; view looking south
NEG. NO.: 13097
PHOTO 4 OF 6

VIEW OF: basement kitchen fireplace, main house; view looking north
NEG. NO.: 13097
PHOTO 5 OF 6

VIEW OF: east front, servants' house; view looking northwest
NEG. NO.: 13097
PHOTO 6 OF 6

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Section Site Plan Page 9

The River House
Clarke County, Virginia



