

VER 9/8/4
NRHP - on hold

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 Hamner House
other names/site number Jay Hamner House, Copps House DHR # 062-0282

2. Location

street & number 128 Treetop Loop not for publication
city or town Schuyler vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Nelson code 125 Zip 22969

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 10/19/04
Signature of certifying official Date
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 Signature of Keeper _____
 See continuation sheet. Date of Action _____
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

 LATE VICTORIAN: Victorian: Folk

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Soapstone

roof METAL: Tin

walls METAL: Aluminum

other Porch: WOOD

 Windows: WOOD

 Chimney: CONCRETE

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.
- x B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- x 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.
- x G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

LITERATURE

PERFORMING ARTS

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1915-1974

Significant Dates: 1915, 1929-1940, 1974

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Earl Hamner, Jr.

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder N/A

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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.

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1/3 acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	702340	4185030	2			
3				4			

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: Beth Scripps, Research Historian

Organization: Frazier Associates date 06/17/04

street & number: 213 N. Augusta Street telephone 540-886-6230

city or town: Staunton state VA zip code 24401

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 The Original Waltons' Home LLC (Pam Rutherford, Manager)

street & number P.O. Box 822 telephone 540.337/2111

city or town Stuarts Draft state VA zip code 24477

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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Hamner House
Nelson County, Virginia

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Summary Description:

The Hamner House, a two-story, three-bay, frame dwelling, is located at 128 Treetop Loop and is one of three vernacular frame dwellings dating from the early-twentieth century along a common access road near the intersection of Routes 617 and 800 in the village of Schuyler in Nelson County, Virginia. It is one of several surviving company houses associated with the local soapstone industry that operated here in the early 1900s. Located on the west side of Route 617, the south (front) elevation of the Hamner House faces the common access road parallel to Route 800. Large oak trees shade the front of this one-third acre lot that gently slopes south towards Route 800. Accented with rhododendron and azalea, a poured concrete walkway bisects the front lawn and connects the driveway to the front porch steps. From 1929 until 1940, the house was the boyhood home of Earl Hamner, Jr., novelist and scriptwriter and creator of the well-known television series, *The Waltons*.

Detailed Description

The original house is a two-over-two, three-bay, single-pile frame dwelling with a small one-story frame ell to the north that housed the kitchen. This ell was enlarged after 1936 during the Hamner's ownership. A porch to the east of the kitchen was enclosed to provide space for an indoor bathroom and later the kitchen was extended approximately ten feet to the north. The addition was squared by adding an enclosed washroom in the northeast corner of the newly extended ell.

The balloon-framed main portion of the house rests on a dry-stacked soapstone foundation. On the west side of the foundation a small repair has been made using concrete block. The original weatherboard siding remains but has been covered with aluminum siding. The gabled roof over the two-story portion of the dwelling is clad in standing-seam metal. The ell also has a standing-seam metal gable roof, most likely an extension of the framing for the original ell roof. A shed roof covers the additional washroom and bathroom area.

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The one-story south (front) porch is three bays wide, spanning the front elevation of the dwelling. It is accessed from the concrete sidewalk by poured concrete steps and is built on a dry-stacked soapstone foundation. The porch floor appears to have been replaced in the late-twentieth-century and is constructed of butted board decking. The original beaded-board ceiling remains. Square posts spanned by horizontal boards and capped by a plain rail support the galvanized tin shed roof. Additionally, there is a poured concrete patio to the rear on the west elevation.

All windows are six-over-six, wood, double-hung sash. On the first level of the south elevation there are two windows, one on either side of the centrally placed front door; and three additional equally-spaced windows on the second level. On the east elevation there are two windows centrally located beneath the gable end, one on each level. There are no windows on the east elevation of the ell. To the rear (north) elevation there is one window on the second level located in the center bay. The west elevation of the two-story portion of the house mirrors the east elevation. The fifteen-light front door is located in the central bay of the south elevation and is a modern replacement. On the north elevation, at the end of the kitchen ell there is a pair of fifteen-light sliding doors with applied muntins.

The only visible exterior chimney is a cinderblock flue for the furnace located to the north of the windows on the west elevation. From the basement, remnants of a dry-stacked soapstone interior chimney, placed equidistant from the front and rear of the dwelling and on the interior wall of the east room, are visible. The chimney is also visible from the east bedroom on the second level. The soapstone portion of the chimney terminates prior to the roofline and the chimney continues in brick to the ridge. This chimney is no longer visible from the exterior. A third chimney was noted in the closet wall between the kitchen and west room on the first level and may have originally vented the cookstove. It is constructed of dry-stacked soapstone and measures approximately forty-two inches from the ground before it terminates. A modern galvanized tin flue has been placed next to what remains of this chimney.

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The house remains in its original two-over-two configuration with rooms retaining their original functions. The east room on the first floor was the master bedroom during the Hamner ownership with the room across the hall functioning as the living room. A door on the north wall of this west room provides access to the enlarged kitchen where the family ate their meals. The door to the washroom is located in the northeastern corner of the kitchen. At the north end of the center hall a door leads into the house's only bathroom. A door under the stairs provides access to the unfinished basement.

In the central hall there is an open stringer stair on the east wall. The original newel post is square, with chamfered corners to a horizontal molding detail, above which the post is not chamfered and is capped with a large ball. This newel repeats at the top of the stair. Stair treads are pine and the balustrade is composed of painted, simple, turned balusters capped by an oviolate rail. The balustrade on the second floor is composed of square, painted wood balusters with the same rail as below.

Floors throughout the two-story portion of the house are tongue-and-groove pine with the exception of the hall and west (living) room on the first level. In these two rooms oak, tongue-and-groove boards have been laid over the original pine flooring. The bathroom and kitchen have modern vinyl flooring and the washroom is floored in plywood. The plain board window trim and sills throughout the house appear to be original as does the trim surrounding the original five-panel door openings. This painted trim appears to have been shellacked originally.

Earl Hamner, Sr. made a number of improvements to the house after purchasing it in 1936. Original beaded-board walls, evident in the kitchen closet, basement stairwell, and other wall openings, were covered in plasterboard; closets were framed out; simple, beaded-edge baseboard trim was installed; and the basement was excavated to allow for the installation of central heat. The only significant alterations to the interior since that time is the opening of the east bedroom ceiling to the rafters by Jay Hamner in the late-twentieth-century.

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Statement of Significance

SUMMARY

The Hamner House was built in the early-twentieth century in the small company town of Schuyler, Nelson County, Virginia. It is a simple, frame, folk Victorian, working-class family dwelling and was most likely built by the manager of the local soapstone quarry, M. J. Copps after his purchase of the land on which it sits in 1915. This dwelling is culturally significant as the boyhood home of Earl Hamner, Jr., distinguished author and creator of *The Waltons*, a long-running television program. His childhood experiences in and around this house and small town formed the basis for a number of his books, movies and the popular television series. It has also brought the small town of Schuyler national recognition as a tourist attraction. The dwelling is also architecturally significant in its unique use of stacked soapstone as a foundation material and as an early example of company housing in Schuyler.

CRITERIA STATEMENT

The Hamner House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria B and C. It is the property in Virginia most closely associated with the author Earl Hamner, Jr., and directly influenced his work. The house is also architecturally significant as a company house built by the local soapstone company using soapstone in the construction of its foundation.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Virginia Soapstone Company opened a quarry and mill operation in Schuyler, a small village approximately four miles northeast of Rockfish Depot in the mid-1880s. By the turn of the 20th century the company had constructed two hydroelectric dams on the Rockfish River and an electric railroad following the river from the soapstone mill to the Rockfish Depot. Virginia Soapstone and Albemarle Soapstone Corporation, operating at Alberene, in nearby Albemarle County ran joint operations from 1904 until 1916. Capitalizing on the experience of M.J. Copps, who ran the operation at Schuyler and had been trained in the marble quarries of Vermont, “the company developed tools and machinery capable of cutting and removing the quarry stone and fabricating finished products in the mill.”¹ The Schuyler operation became part of the Virginia Alberene Company in 1916. By 1925, Schuyler was Nelson County’s largest community, with about twenty-five hundred residents of which approximately half worked for the quarry. Schuyler’s company-built amenities included dozens of single-family and duplex residences built on loop roads adjacent to the quarries, a hospital built of soapstone blocks, a company store, post office, and movie theater. Virginia Alberene went into receivership during the Depression and a new company, the Alberene Stone Corporation of Virginia, acquired its assets.

The three-bay, single-pile, folk Victorian house located at 128 Treetop Loop in Schuyler is architecturally significant for its association with soapstone operations in Schuyler in the first quarter of the twentieth century. M.J. Copps who came to Schuyler from the marble quarries of Vermont to run the soapstone operations built this frame dwelling around 1915. The Copps House, into which the Hamner family moved in 1929, was modern by Schuyler standards and was one of only two houses in Schuyler with a telephone. Many of Schuyler’s other residents who worked for the soapstone company lived nearby in company houses constructed on loop roads adjacent to the quarries. A single feature shared by both the company houses and the house at 128 Treetop Loop is that they are all built on soapstone foundations. After purchasing the property in 1936, Earl Sr. dug out the basement, added to the bathroom, made a washroom and extended the kitchen² to make room for the his growing family to take meals at a long wooden table in the kitchen³ as portrayed in the television series.

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According to Earl Hamner, Jr.'s recollection, "when the [Alberene Stone] company closed it offered its company-owned houses for sale. My father bought ours for five hundred dollars."⁴ According to Nelson County records, Earl Hamner, Sr. and his wife Doris bought the house at 128 Treetop Loop in June of 1936. Deed Book 63, page 404 records the transaction and describes "a certain house and lot situated in Nelson Co., Virginia on the Rockfish Road near Schuyler, Virginia known as the Copps house and lot.

Doris Giannini married Earl Henry Hamner, Sr. in 1921.⁵ Their first child, Earl Hamner, Jr. was born on July 10, 1923.⁶ Six years later, as he approached school age, his parents moved into the Copps House to be close to the Schuyler School. The house at 128 Treetop Loop, now known as the Hamner House was the childhood home of Earl Hamner, Jr. The noted author lived in this modest five-room house with his parents and siblings from 1929, when Earl Jr.'s first literary work, a poem about puppies and a red wagon, was published in The Richmond [VA] Times-Dispatch until 1940. After his 1940 graduation from the Schuyler High School, directly across Route 617, Earl Hamner, Jr. attended the University of Richmond on scholarship but was drafted before completing his degree. After active duty in the Army, he returned to his studies while working in broadcasting in Chicago and Cincinnati.

After graduating from the University of Cincinnati, Hamner moved to New York City to work for NBC, where he wrote for both radio and television. By 1960, the television industry was increasingly centered on the west coast and Earl Hamner moved to Los Angeles to continue his career writing for television and film. In his distinguished career he has received the TV-Radio Writers Award (1967), the George Foster Peabody Award for Distinguished Journalism (1972) for *The Waltons*, an Emmy for *The Waltons* in 1974, and Man of the Year Awards from the Broadcast Industry and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Hamner also holds honorary doctorates from a number of colleges and universities across the country.

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CRITERIA B: PERSON / EXCEPTION G

The Hamner House is exceptionally important as the physical location of Earl Hamner, Jr.'s life experiences during his formative childhood years from 1929 to 1940. These experiences provided the basis for his future literary works including *Spencer's Mountain* (1963), its prequel *The Homecoming* (1971), movies based on these novels, and the television series *The Waltons* (1972-1981). In *Goodnight John-Boy*, Earl Hamner writes of his childhood in Schuyler: "this is the family I recreated in my books and on television, my brothers and sisters, my mother and father, my grandparents as we were during the depression years of the '30s."⁷ There is no other house with which Earl Hamner can make this association.

The Waltons series was based on Hamner's novel *Spencer's Mountain*, which had been made into a feature film of the same name and subsequently adapted as a CBS-TV holiday special, *The Homecoming*, in 1971.⁸ Working with executives at Lorimar, Hamner, the co-executive producer and story editor, strived to craft story lines that accurately portrayed the Depression-era as he experienced it in Schuyler, Virginia, a small town nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Care was taken by the production team to "emphasize[d] the respect to be afforded the family and its culture."⁹ Although *Father Knows Best* and *I Remember Mama* had established a precedent for wholesome family television series in the 1950s, producers did not want *The Waltons* to be a transplanted version of these earlier shows. Instead they sought to portray "the continuing story of a seventeen-year old boy who wants to be a writer, growing up during the Depression in a large and loving family"¹⁰ based on the early life of its creator, Earl Hamner, Jr.

The Waltons premiered in September 1972 competing in a time slot against the number-one-rated show in the country at that time, NBC's *The Flip Wilson Show*. By December, *The Waltons* was leading the Neilson ratings.¹¹ Unlike competing programs such as *All in the Family*, *Maude* or *Sanford and Son* which portrayed urban families and socially relevant topics, *The Waltons* chose to deliver to television audiences "what a lot of people have been asking for in television for a long, long time – a simple, human drama about a family of real people who care a great deal about each other and aren't ashamed to show it."¹² The production team was lauded for the creation of a series that "conveyed a vivid authenticity of both historical time and cultural place,"¹³ which was made possible only through the childhood experiences of Earl Hamner at the house at 128 Treetop Loop in Schuyler, Virginia.

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The Waltons model which featured “continuing story of domestic unity and redemption”¹⁴ provided the basis for the creation of NBC’s *Little House on the Prairie* (1974), a family drama in the image of *The Waltons* but borrowing the set and star of their earlier successful *Bonanza* series. *The Waltons* has also been credited with providing the basis for *Family* (1976) but departing from the two earlier series in its contemporary setting and lack of intact family unit. These three programs, *The Waltons*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *Family* were the only three dramatic series set in the home to achieve ratings success in the 1970s.¹⁵

Thirty-two years after it first aired, *The Waltons* airs daily in syndication. The series continues to endure in “America’s mythic imagination as well as in ratings popularity.”¹⁶ It is considered to be the “epitome of television’s capacity for romantic, effective and moving storytelling in its evocation of childhood and its ability to tap into a deep desire for a mythicized community and family intimacy.”¹⁷

The Hamner House remained in the Hamner family until its sale at auction in December 2003.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Pollard, Oliver A., Jr. Under the Blue Ledge: Nelson County, Virginia. Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1997. p. 115

² Wyerman, Scott "A Visit with the 'Real' Mrs. Walton" Vacation and Leisure Summer 1980

³ Hamner, Earl and Giffin, Ralph. Goodnight John-Boy. Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, Inc. 2002, p. 3

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ www.the-waltons.com/doris.html

⁶ Hamner, Earl and Giffin, Ralph. Goodnight John-Boy. Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, Inc. 2002, p. 3

⁷ Ibid., p. 9

⁸ <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/waltonsthe/waltonsthe.htm>

⁹ <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/waltonsthe/waltonsthe.htm>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1581822987/qid=1087502836/sr=1-2/ref=sr_1_2/104-0590743--5931119?v=glance&s=books#product-details

¹² Houston Chronicle, *TV Scene*, Section 3, p. 21 September 15, 1972.

¹³ <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/waltonsthe/waltonsthe.htm>

¹⁴ Taylor, Ella. Prime-time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 104

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 101

¹⁶ <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/waltonsthe/waltonsthe.htm>

¹⁷ Ibid.

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———. Houston Chronicle "TV Scene" *Section 3 p. 21*. September 15, 1972.

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Ziegler, Robert E. "Memory-spaces: Themes of the House and the Mountain in The Waltons" *Journal of Popular Culture* (1981) 15:3-104-111

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/waltonsthe/waltonsthe.htm>

www.the-waltons.com

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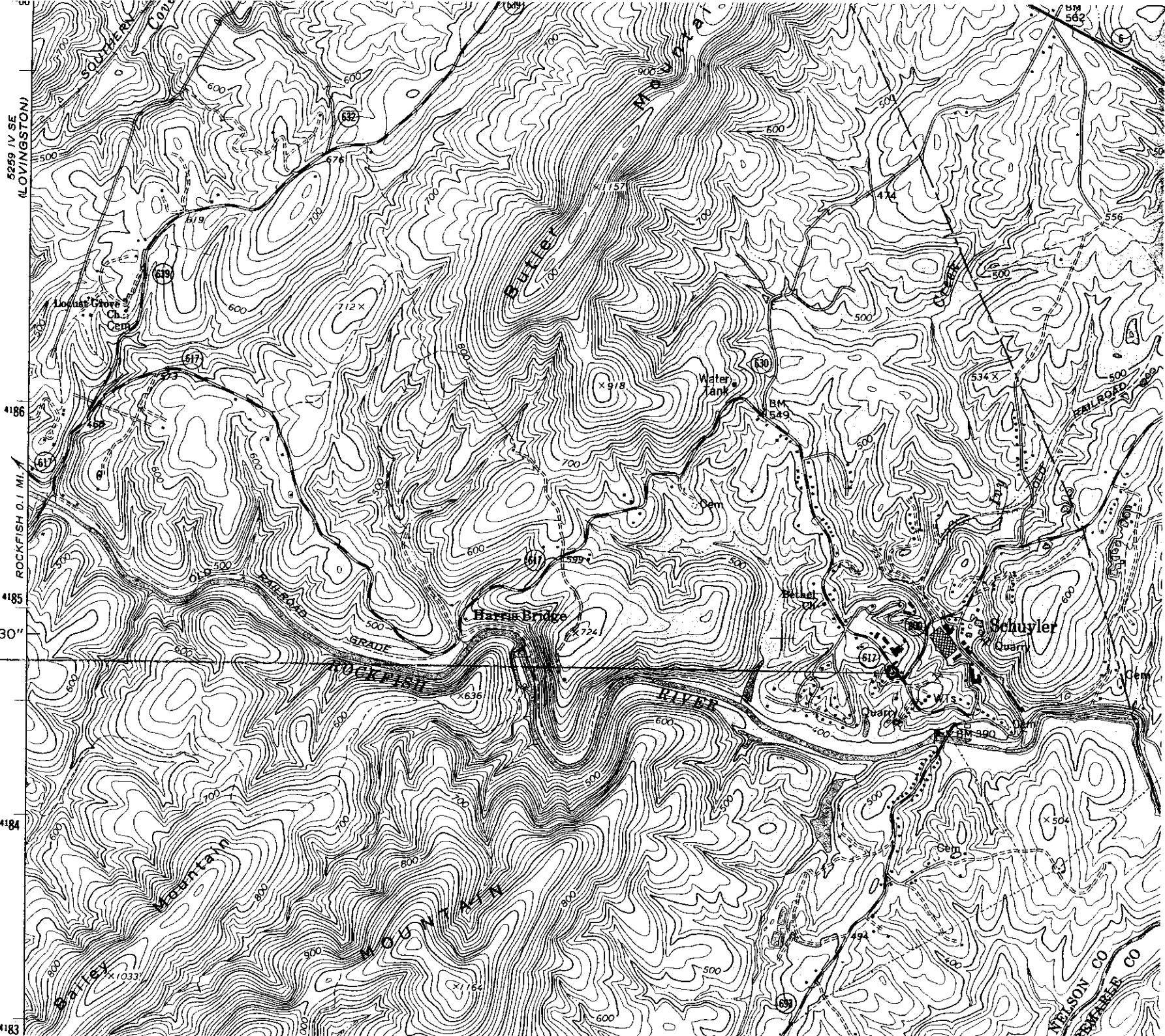
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Hamner house is identified as parcel # 62-A-9 on the tax parcel maps for Nelson County, Virginia.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the entire 1/3-acre parcel historically associated with the Hamner House.



HAMNER HOUSE 47°30"
SCHUYLER,
NELSON COUNTY, VA
UTM REFERENCE:
17T02340/4185030
SCHUYLER QUAD