



U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Bluemont Presbyterian Church and Cemetery  
Patrick County, Virginia

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### 5. Classification

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**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>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
Reverend Robert Childress Presbyterian Rock Churches, MPD

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### 6. Function or Use

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**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   Religion   Sub:   religious facility    
  funerary     cemetery  

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   Religion   Sub:   religious facility    
  funerary     cemetery  

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### 7. Description

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**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

  Gothic Revival  

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   concrete    
roof   asphalt    
walls   stone    
other   wood  

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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### 8. Statement of Significance

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**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.

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**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions) Religion, Social History, Architecture

**Period of Significance** 1919-1956

**Significant Dates** 1919; 1946

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** N/A

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

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### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**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**

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Bluemont Presbyterian Church and Cemetery  
Patrick County, Virginia

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 2 acres

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

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing				
1.	17	538086	4056857	2.	17	538150	4056849	3.	17	538132	4056714	4.	17	538058	4056742

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: Randle Brim, John Kern, and Michael Pulice  
 Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources date December, 2005  
 street & number: 1030 Penmar Ave SE telephone 540-857-7586  
 city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24013

**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 Rev. Stuart Lee Childress (contact)  
 street & number 30 Lynn Drive telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
 city or town Ararat state VA zip code 24053

**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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**7. Summary and Site**

Bluemont Church and cemetery occupy 2.0 acres on the south side of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is a unit of the National Park Service, and just to the east Willis Gap. The land surrounding the church and cemetery is owned by the Park Service. The church is in northern Patrick County, within a few hundred feet of the Carroll County line, which follows the parkway through the immediate vicinity of the church. Between the church and the parkway is a split-rail fence. The cemetery begins immediately southwest of the church.

**Description**

Bluemont Church is a small edifice sited on the south side of the Blue Ridge Parkway, with its rear elevation facing toward the parkway. Besides its natural quartz and quartzite stone facing, the main character element of the church is the Gothic styled bell tower on its north (rear) elevation. The tower is semi-hexagonal, with three sides facing outward and a back side, and has triangular-headed louvered openings on the three outward sides. It has no other openings. The church is entered from the south elevation, through a shallow, gable-roof entrance portico, and a vestibule appendage that is neither as tall or as wide as the sanctuary. The portico, vestibule and sanctuary all have front-gable roofs covered with new, brown-colored asphalt shingles. The church has a total of six windows—three tall, triangular-headed, stained-glass windows on each long side of the sanctuary. Between the windows and at both ends of the long elevations are shallow stone buttresses that tapered inward toward the top, terminating near the top of the walls. The interior of the church has a nave plan with pews facing the rear of the church, is plainly decorated, and has sheetrock walls and ceiling, painted white. A white marble cornerstone reads, “Bluemont Presbyterian Church, 1919.”

Situated to the southwest of the church is the church cemetery of perhaps one hundred graves with mostly modern, granite markers. Bluemont Cemetery is perhaps the most impressive of the Rock Churches, with a large number of closely-spaced, robust, ashlar masonry pillars and heavy, painted steel chains between them. The cemetery is nearly as old as the church and thus is considered a contributing site for the purposes of this nomination.

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## **8. Statement of Significance**

### **Summary and Justification**

Bluemont Presbyterian Church is one of the six Childress rock-faced churches located in the Virginia counties of Floyd, Carroll, and Patrick, built between 1919 and the early 1950s by Presbyterian minister Robert W. Childress. The six churches are significant in their embodiment of Appalachian patterns of Presbyterian religious worship and Presbyterian social activism in western Virginia. The churches also tell the story of the remarkable ministry of Robert W. Childress, who brought spiritual faith and social awakening to the people of the central portion of the Blue Ridge Province in Virginia. As such, Bluemont Church is significant under Criterion A in the areas of Religion and Social History, and under Criterion C for its unique architecture. The period of significance is from 1919, the year of its construction, to 1956, the year of Robert Childress's death.

### **Historical Background**

Bluemont Presbyterian, on the border between Patrick and Carroll Counties, was built in 1919 eight miles southwest of Buffalo Mountain and rock-faced in 1946 shortly after Bob Childress assumed the pastorate there at the close of World War II. Rev. Roy Smith, Childress's mentor by 1919, preached the first Presbyterian sermons near Bluemont at Pilot View and Rome School houses beginning in 1915. In 1918 the Abingdon Presbytery promised \$500 for a church building, provided that worshipers would raise an equal amount. The wood-frame Bluemont Presbyterian Church was ready for use in the spring of 1920, and the church was organized in September 1920 with G. E. Willis as elder and James A. Vass as deacon. Granville "Ernest" Willis owned the first automobile in the region and traveled to Presbytery sessions in southwest Virginia and to Richmond to represent Bluemont. Ernest Willis's daughter Polly Willis, later Polly Willis Cock, and Vida Bowman taught Sunday school at Bluemont when Bob Childress became pastor in 1945.

Polly Willis Cock remembers when Bob Childress approached her father, Elder Ernest Willis, about rock-facing Bluemont. Childress asked the Sunday school teachers Polly Willis and Vida Bowman to write letters to church members to solicit funds for the project. In September 1945 Childress wrote Polly Willis and Vida Bowman that he was beginning to receive pledges. The

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next month Childress thanked both women for their funding efforts to rock-face Bluemont, pledged \$100 of his own to each of their subscription lists, and closed with the following:

Please make it plain to those approached, that we expect to finish regardless of what they give but that you want them to have a part in it for their own sakes as well as for the cause. Let them also know that those who desire to work can work out their pledges and we expect to begin hauling stones within a few days, weeks at most. We will need a lot of helpers for that.

Vida Bowman remembers that when her husband came home from World War II in December 1945, he began helping haul fieldstones to Bluemont. He collected field rock from Ed Gardner's place. Cecil Cock, who married Polly Willis two years later, brought one of his favorite quartz rocks and still remembers its placement in the Bluemont stone facing.

Bluemont Church received a scenic easement with the Blue Ridge Parkway in October 1937, which stipulated that church buildings could not be erected or altered without Park Services consent and approval. Polly Willis Cock remembers that several times a Park ranger would ask Childress to stop the alterations at Bluemont. Childress would tell the workers to stop, but then would have them resume as soon as the ranger left. Polly remembers Childress saying, "I don't care what they say, we will finish rocking this church even if we have to work on it at midnight." In disregard of the Park Service scenic easement, Bluemont Church was rock-faced in 1946 under the supervision of Sam Branscome, who had learned rock laying in Tennessee.

During the ten years of his pastorate at Bluemont, Bob Childress installed a Delco Battery System that provided electric lights and public address system with outside speakers that broadcast music and church services for several miles. He also employed perhaps the first use of church busses in the area to transport children to Sunday school and vacation Bible school.<sup>1</sup>

**Endnote**

1. This information on the Childress pastorate at Bluemont is drawn from Randle Brim, *Simple Pleasures*, July 2004. Brim has made excellent use of primary source interviews he conducted with Polly Willis Cock and Vida Bowman. The two women have retained personal letters from Rev. Childress and are grateful that he encouraged their leadership in the church. Brim also reported that Childress invited the choir from Clark's Creek Primitive Baptist Church, a black congregation, to sing at Bluemont and another of the Childress churches. Brim, *Simple Pleasures*, February 2005.

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## 9. Bibliographical References

Abingdon Presbytery, Wytheville, Virginia. Published minutes, 1916-1944.

Brim, Randle. *Simple Pleasures*. Monthly publication of *Mount Airy News*, North Carolina.  
July 2004                      Bluemont Presbyterian Church, 2-6.

Brim, Randle.

April 2005, personal communication, Stuart, Virginia.

September 2005, personal communication.

September 2005, digital annotation of articles in *Simple Pleasures*, July-December 2004.

September 2005, digital images of session minutes for Bluemont, Slate Mountain,  
Dinwiddie, Buffalo Mountain, and Willis Churches.

Davids, Richard C. *The Man Who Moved a Mountain*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.  
Paperback edition, 1972.

Slate, Richard, elder of Dinwiddie Presbyterian Church since 1947. Personal communication,  
September 2005.

## 10 . Geographical Data

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated parcel includes only the church and cemetery and the immediate grounds around them, as shown on the accompanying GIS-produced aerial image. The following UTM points designate the boundary polygon as it is being nominated: 1. 17 538086 4056857  
2. 17 538150 4056849            3. 17 538132 4056714            4. 17 538058 4056742

### Boundary Justification

The nominated boundary corresponds exactly to that of the original church and cemetery parcel.

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**Photographs**

Bluemont Presbyterian Church (DHR #070-5044)  
Patrick County, Virginia  
Date: December 2005  
Photographer: Michael J. Pulice  
Negative No. 22020

1. Church, principal (south) facade.
2. Church, facing southeast.
3. Church and cemetery, facing southwest.
4. Church and split-rail fence, as seen from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
5. Church and cemetery, facing northeast.
6. Cemetery, facing southeast.
7. Church interior, facing rear of sanctuary.
8. Church interior, view of windows and pews.
9. Church interior, detail view of window.
10. Church cornerstone.
11. Church, facing west.

BLUEMONT  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
PATRICK COUNTY  
UTM ZONE 17

1. 538086 E  
4056857 N
2. 538150 E  
4056849 N
3. 538132 E  
4056714 N
4. 538058 E  
4056742 N

120 000  
FEET

