

VLR-4/18/89 NRHP-11/14/89

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See Instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Miles B. Carpenter House
other names/site number Miles B. Carpenter Museum (DIR-91-73) 323-0003

2. Location

street & number VA State Route 460 N/A not for publication
city, town Waverly N/A vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Suss code 183 zip code 23890

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public ownership and building/site/structure/object categories. Resource counts: Contributing (9+1+3+0=13), Noncontributing (1+0+0+1=2).

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: VA Department of Historic Resources
Signature at commenting or other official:
State or Federal agency and bureau:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[ ] entered in the National Register.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Museum

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late Nineteenth Century

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Aluminum Siding

roof Metal

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Miles B. Carpenter House is a two-story frame dwelling built in 1890 in Waverly (Sussex County). It and an associated collection of nine outbuildings, eight of which are contributing, are located on a six-acre lot at the intersection of Hunter Street and Virginia State Highway 460. This modest house is typical of the late nineteenth century and is simply detailed. Remaining on the site is the covered work area adjacent to the house where Carpenter carved the wood sculptures that earned him a reputation as one of America's foremost folk artists.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Carpenter House is a two-story, gable-roofed, frame structure with a one-story rear addition. The house has a T plan with a front cross gable typical of this form; this cross gable projects slightly and is flanked to the left by a smaller cross-gabled entrance. The house rests on brick piers with vented brick infill.

Originally clad with wood weatherboards, the house was covered with aluminum siding after 1945 by Miles Carpenter. The roofs are covered with standing seam metal. An interior brick chimney is centered in the front cross-gabled section and an exterior end chimney is located at the northwest end wall of the perpendicular wing. The majority of windows are six-over-six double-hung sash within slightly pedimented frames.

The front elevation, which faces the highway, has a full one-story front porch that was added about 1930. The balustraded hipped roof is supported by battered wood columns resting on brick piers, between which is a wood railing. The northwest end of the porch has been enclosed with siding and six-over-one windows, with four windows across the front and three on the side. A four-paned diamond-shaped attic window is positioned in the largest gable end. The entrance consists of a 1930s wood and glass door with a three-light transom. A pair of two windows, with a single slightly larger centered second floor window above, is located to the right of the entrance. There is also a second floor window centered above the entrance and another above the enclosed porch.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Art

Period of Significance  
1940-1985

Significant Dates

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
Miles B. Carpenter

Architect/Builder  
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Miles Carpenter House, in Waverly (Sussex County), was constructed about 1890. In 1912 it was purchased by Miles B. Carpenter, the owner of a local sawmill, planing mill, and ice delivery business. His familiarity with wood, together with his artist's eye for the figures suggested by the shapes of branches and stumps, led Carpenter to begin the carving of folk sculpture as his lumber business declined during World War II. Although he largely abandoned his art during the decade following the end of the war, he resumed it after his retirement from the lumber business and even more intensively after the death of his wife in 1906. Using his back yard and the kitchen of his house as his studio, Carpenter fashioned figures that ranged from the whimsical to the frightful. His carved and painted watermelons, monkeys, monsters, and humans attracted the attention and earned him the respect of collectors, artists, museums, and the general public that passed through Waverly. By the 1970s Carpenter had acquired a national reputation as a folk artist. Since his death in 1985, Carpenter's house has been preserved not only as a museum in which are displayed his tools and carvings, but as a gallery to encourage and exhibit the work of young artists in the region.

**JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA**

The Miles Carpenter House is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B and Criterion Consideration (Exception) G because of its association with the life and work (ca. 1940-1985) of Miles B. Carpenter, an American folk artist of national importance. Although the period of significance for Carpenter's association with the house falls within the last fifty years, his reputation as a folk artist has been so clearly established that it justifies an exception to the usual criteria for registration. There are several reasons to allow the exception. First, the house best represents the artistic career of Miles B. Carpenter because it was where he did his active work as a folk artist. Second, the house retains its integrity

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bishop, Robert. American Folk Sculpture. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1974.  
Brewster, Todd. "Fanciful Art of Plain Folk." Life, June 1980, 112-122.  
Carpenter, Miles B. Cutting the Mustard. Tappahannock, Va.: American Folk Art Co., 1982.  
DHL Survey File 91-73.  
Johnson, Jay, and William C. Ketchum, Jr. American Folk Art of the Twentieth Century. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1983.  
Sussex County. Deed Books 8 and 22. Courthouse, Sussex, Va.

See continuation sheet

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 Miles Carpenter Museum, Waverly, VA

Specify repository:  
VA Division of Historic Landmarks  
221 Governor St. Richmond, VA 23219

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property six acres

UTM References

A 

1	8	3	1	2	7	2	0	4	1	0	0	9	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Beginning at the southeast corner of the intersection of Hunter Street and the old Southern Railway Co. Right-of-way, proceed northeast 383 feet along the Southern Railway right-of-way. Then proceed south 600 feet along the rear property line. Then proceed 160 feet southwest to a point on US Hwy. 460 100 feet southeast of the intersection of Hwy. 460 and Hunter Street. Then proceed 100 feet northwest along the property line along Hwy. 460. The proceed 200 feet northnorthwest along the property line along Hunter St. to the beginning.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the house and outbuildings that have historically been part of the Miles Carpenter property and maintain historic integrity.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title John S. Salmon and Julie L. Vosmik  
organization VA Division of Historic Landmarks date March 1989  
street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3143  
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

---

The southeast elevation is completely symmetrical with four windows at each level. The fenestration of the northwest end elevation of the principal structure is limited to two small first-floor windows flanking the chimney. Extending from the northeast corner is a one-story gabled kitchen wing with an interior brick chimney and a small hipped-roof projection at the junction of the main structure and the rear addition. The fenestration of the rear elevation is very similar to the front, with the exception of a pair of six-light casement windows that light the second floor bathroom. The area between the original rear wing at the left and the addition to the right contains an enclosed porch. The ends of the addition and the porch each have an entrance covered by a bracket-supported wood canopy.

Resembling the exterior, the interior of the Carpenter House is simply detailed and reveals minor alterations dating from about 1930. The floors throughout the house are wood, the walls are plaster, and the woodwork is simple. The majority of the doors on the first floor are 1930s multipaned glass doors, while those on the second floor are wood with four raised panels. The first floor consists of a central stair hall flanked by the principal rooms: one large room to the left and two rooms to the right. The straight-run stair has a turned newel and balusters. A rear entrance door also dating from the 1930s accesses the rear porch.

Double multipaned glass doors lead to the largest room, off of which is located the enclosed porch. This room was probably two rooms before the remodeling that occurred about 1930.. A door in the rear wall leads to the rear addition, which contains a breakfast room, kitchen, pantry, and bath. The brick fireplace mantel in this room dates from the 1930s. A door at the foot of the stairs leads from the hall to the right front parlor. A simple wooden mantel adorns the fireplace, to the right of which is a door leading to the dining room. A closet is located to the right of the mantel in both rooms.

The upstairs has two bedrooms with wooden mantels on the southeast side, matching in size and location the parlor and dining room below. A bath, small room, and front bedroom are located on the other side of the hall.

Of nine outbuildings, eight are counted as contributing. There is also a small goldfish pond, a pergola, and a covered work area, each of which are considered contributing structures. The sole noncontributing building is the icehouse near the highway. This resource is less than fifty years old. The covered work area is adjacent to the rear kitchen wing and consists of a metal roof supported by wood posts. To the rear of the house are a garage, two storage buildings, a truck shed, a playhouse, and a privy. To the northeast is the lumber building, a

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   2  

---

privy, and the site of the lumber mill. The latter consists of brick rubble and pieces of machinery and is considered a contributing site.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

---

for the period of significance--the artist himself made the extant alterations to the structure, such as the addition of aluminum siding, to reduce maintenance expenses or for other personal reasons. Third, the home and workplace of Miles B. Carpenter retains the integrity of association and feeling that evolved during the seventy years of his ownership. The Miles Carpenter House therefore meets the standards of the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B and Criterion Consideration (Exception) G for exceptional significance.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Miles Burkholder Carpenter was born on 12 May 1889 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In 1901 his father purchased a farm near Waverly, in Sussex County, Virginia; the Carpenter family moved there in the spring of 1902. Because the farm lacked some of the buildings necessary to house the large family and its livestock, Carpenter's father constructed a sawmill to provide the needed lumber.

Carpenter worked on the family farm until 1912, when he went into the lumber business for himself. He purchased an abandoned canning factory, turned it into a planing mill, and bought a sawmill two years later. In Sussex County at this time, as in much of the South, lumbering was a major industry. Despite occasional fires that destroyed his operations, Carpenter always rebuilt and remained in the lumber business until 1957. He also bought an ice plant and a movie theater, but his primary source of income (as well as his primary interest) remained the lumber business.

During his childhood and young adulthood Carpenter sometimes indulged his creative instincts and made objects of wood. As he later recalled,

When I was working for my father, I made a violin.  
. . . It burned up in my mill fire. . . Also, I was  
interested in pyrography [burning process for making  
incisions in wood]. I would make different trinket  
boxes. . . . Anytime I saw something strange or  
something I liked to have, I made it myself.<sup>1</sup>

Carpenter's ability to work with his hands was typical of American folk artists. For an exhibit of nineteenth-century folk sculptors held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932, Holger Cahill wrote: "Many of these people had little training, but all of them knew how to coordinate the activity

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

---

of the hand and the eye, and had the art of making things with their hands."<sup>2</sup>

In 1912 Carpenter purchased the house that would be his home for the rest of his life--a two-story, wood-frame, Victorian vernacular dwelling that had been constructed about 1890.<sup>3</sup> He added a sun room to the front of the house in the late 1920s or early 1930s.

After the United States entered World War II in December 1941 Carpenter's lumber business, which had prospered despite the Depression, became sluggish. As Carpenter later wrote,

That's when I started whittling and carving things. I could'nt sit still and do nothing. out came my pocket knife cutting and whittling at a piece of pine bark or a piece of wood and there was always pieces of wood lying around the mill. I sat on a log waiting for customers to come and buy lumber or bring a wagon load of lumber to have planed into flooring or finishing material, and behold I looked at what I whittled it looked kinda like a bear. I put my wits together with expert cutting and shaping a piece of sandpaper and before I realized I had a real good looking bear. next day with some white paint I had a polar bear. my wife said "why that is real good go make other animals when the mill is idle" I did - in several weeks I made a dog, sheep, deer, rooster, horse and more different things.<sup>4</sup>

That Carpenter initially viewed his art as merely a way to fill the empty hours was typical of his nineteenth-century artistic forebears as well. Mary Black, formerly of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, wrote that

the genesis, rise, and disappearance of folk art is closely connected with the events of the nineteenth century when the dissolution of the old ways left rural folk everywhere with an unused surplus of time and energy. People were free to invent and make simple things for their own pleasure in each household and in each village. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Soon Carpenter's customers were placing orders for his carvings as well

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

---

as his lumber. When the demand for housing and lumber increased after the end of the war, however, he found himself too busy at the mill to carve. In 1957, after he was nearly blinded in an accident at the sawmill, Carpenter closed down his lumber business and concentrated on selling ice and garden produce. In 1960 he carved and painted a wooden watermelon to attract attention to his produce stand and soon was busy carving again.

During the next several years Carpenter developed his artist's eye to the extent that he was able to "see" monkeys and other figures in twisted pieces of wood before he carved them. Besides animals and vegetables, he carved life-sized human figures as well. After the death of his wife in 1966 Carpenter devoted himself to his carving and began to acquire a national reputation as a folk artist. His work has been exhibited in museums around the world. In the United States his carvings are in the collections of the Corcoran Gallery, the Brooklyn Museum, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, and the Museum of International Folk Art. "In 1981, he became the second folk artist ever invited to the White House, preceded only by Grandma Moses."<sup>6</sup>

Instead of using a studio, Carpenter roughed out his sculptures in the yard and finished them in his house. Just before he died he described his method of work to an interviewer. He used a cardboard pattern to trace an outline of the figure on a piece of wood and then sawed it out with a coping saw. To shape the figure he used rasps of varying coarseness and finished it with sandpaper:

After I was finished with the outside work like cutting it our and other rough work, I would sit in my chair in the kitchen and sand before I went to bed. I would sit here an hour, especially in the winter time.

As Carpenter's sculptures were discovered and admired by an increasing number of collectors, artists, and museums, as well as by the general public that passed through Waverly, he began to acquire a national reputation as a folk artist. Two critics offered the following assessment of his work in 1983:

Miles Carpenter is one of this century's most important carvers in the folk idiom. For over forty years, his powerful and symbolic representations of humans, animals, and biblical characters have been

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

---

dominating the galleries and museums in which they are shown. . . . Carpenter's work often has an apocalyptic quality. . . . The impending doom and terror create a tension uncharacteristic of most folk art that is immediately appealing to the sophisticated viewer.

After a few months of illness, Miles Carpenter died on 7 May 1985. He left behind several unfinished sculptures as well as a national reputation as an important folk artist.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 6

---

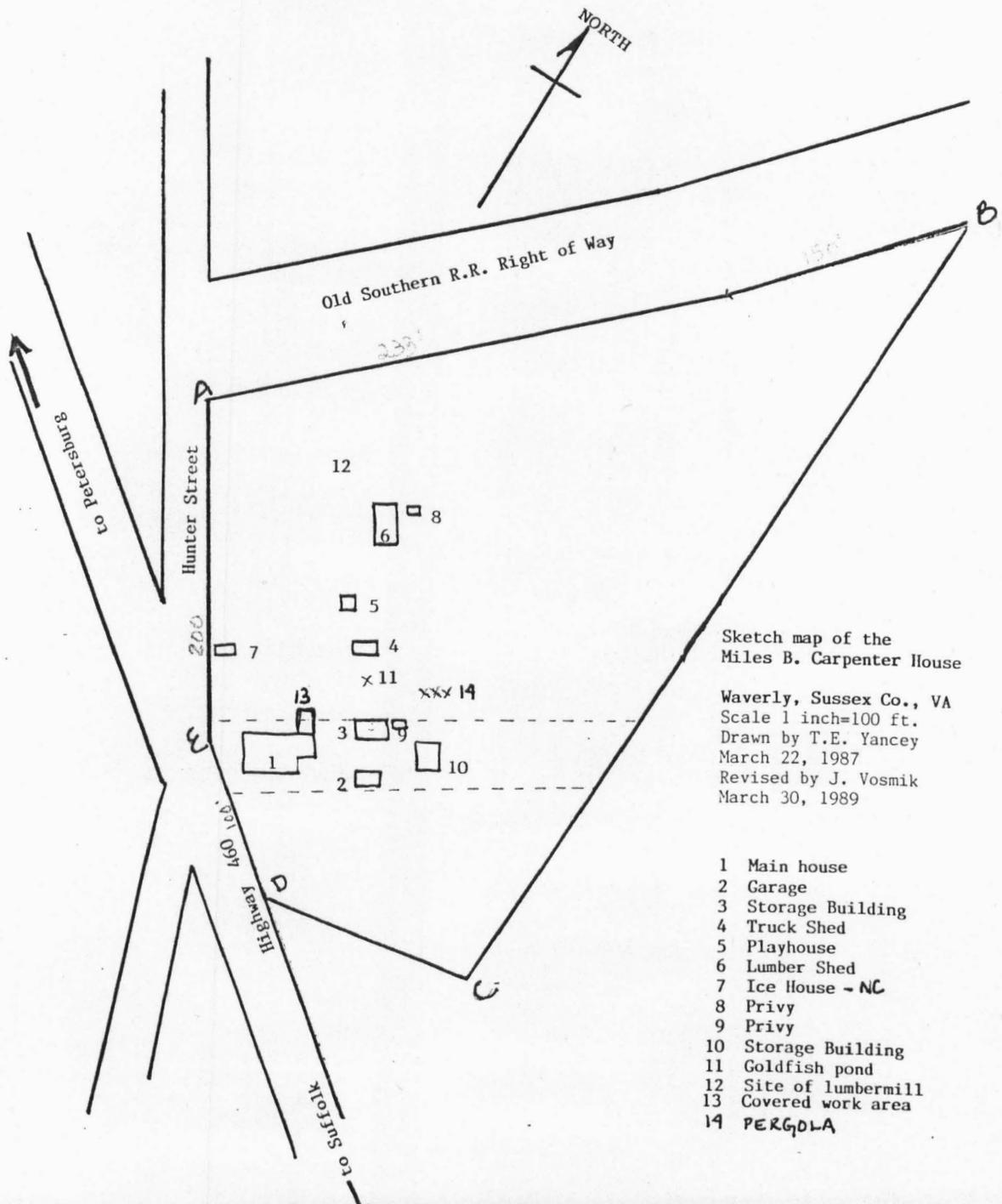
ENDNOTES

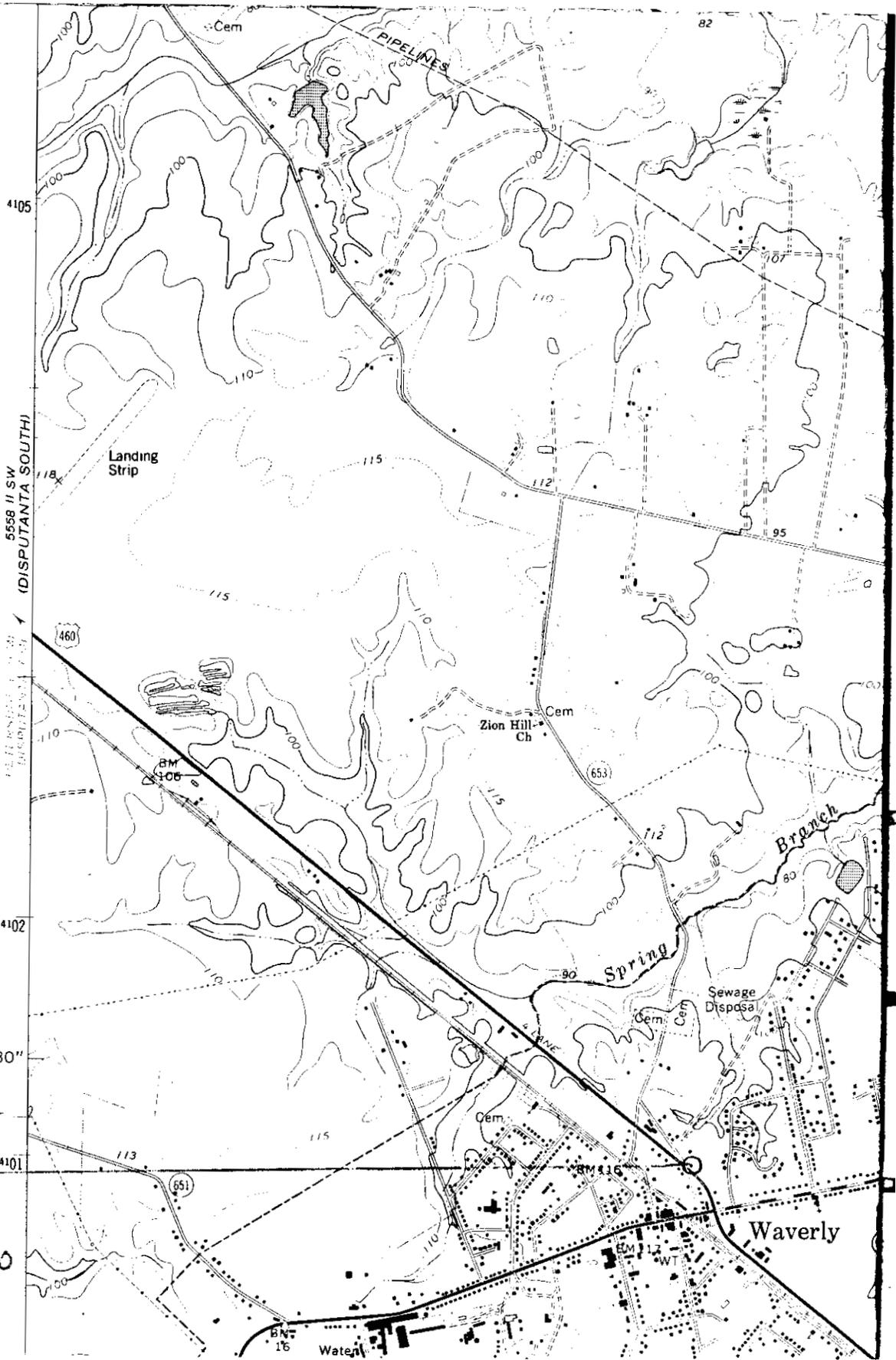
1. Chris Gregson, "Conversation with the Artist," n.p., 27 March [1985?], in DHL Survey File 91-73.
2. Robert Bishop, American Folk Sculpture (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1974), 12.
3. Sussex County, Deed Book 22, p. 165, Katherine Burt to Miles B. Carpenter, 12 October 1912, recorded 4 October 1913, courthouse, Sussex, Va. According to an earlier deed (Deed Book 8, p. 196, George E. Burt to Robert W. Chappell, January 1891) George Burt "has just erected a dwelling"--meaning before January 1891.
4. Miles B. Carpenter, Cutting the Mustard (Tappahannock, Va.: American Folk Art Co., 1982), 35, 39.
5. Bishop, American Folk Sculpture, 12.
6. Newspaper article by Diane Tennant, n.p., [1986?], in DHL Survey File 91-73.
7. Gregson, "Conversation."
8. Jay Johnson and William C. Ketchum, Jr., American Folk Art of the Twentieth Century (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1983), 38-39.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_





USGS 7.5' QUAD  
1:24000

THE CAMPBELL  
HOUSE  
WAVERLY  
SUSSEX CO., VA.

UTM  
18/312720/4100920