



U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Wythe County Poorhouse Farm  
Wythe County, Virginia

**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>14</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>14</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.)

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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

Cat: <u>Domestic</u>	Sub: <u>Institutional housing</u>
<u>Agriculture/Subsistence</u>	<u>Storage, agricultural field, animal facility</u>
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Single dwelling</u>
	<u>Secondary structure</u>

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

Cat: <u>Domestic</u>	Sub: <u>Single dwelling</u>
<u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>Museum</u>

**7. Description**

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

Late Victorian Queen Anne

**Materials (Enter categories from instructions)**

foundation Limestone and Brick  
 roof Tin  
 walls Weatherboard  
 other Brick

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

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**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.

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**Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)**

Social History  
Health/Medicine  
Architecture

**Period of Significance** 1858 - 1949

**Significant Dates** 1858  
ca. 1890

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Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder None known

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

See attachments

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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.)

See attachments

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: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond Virginia

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### 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property 9.09 Acres

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

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 17 497480 4092640    2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_    4 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

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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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kalli Lucas

Organization: University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Anthropology Dept.) date September 21, 1999

street & number: 250 South Stadium Hall telephone (423) 974-4408

city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37996-0720

**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 Sarah and Abner Graham

street & number Rural Route 2, Box 357 telephone (540) 228-5136

city or town Wytheville state VA zip code 24382

**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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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT

### Summary

The Wythe County Poorhouse Farm lies off of Peppers Ferry Road four miles northeast of the town of Wytheville. Wythe County established the Poorhouse Farm in 1858 as the second such home for the impoverished people of the county. The first poor farm served the county from 1825 until 1858, when it passed into private ownership. The current nominated property, which was sold by the county in 1957, consisted of 340 acres and included an overseer's house, tenant farmer's dwellings, pauper homes, and outbuildings such as barns, sheds, animal pens, and a springhouse, smokehouse, corncrib, wash house, chicken house, and granary. Abner and Sarah Graham own the nine-acre nominated parcel that contains the overseer's house, the formal yard with the wash house, smokehouse, chicken coop, shed, springhouse, and eight pauper houses. The Wythe County Pauper's Field borders the nominated property. The overall condition of the existing property is good, with many of the nineteenth-century buildings remaining intact. This is the only surviving poorhouse farm in Wythe County, and perhaps the best surviving one in southwest Virginia. Most of the other poor farms and poorhouses were abandoned and the inmates, as they were referred to in the census records, were consolidated into "District Homes" in the early twentieth century, thus suggesting that the Wythe County Poorhouse Farm may be a rare survivor.<sup>1</sup> The complex still stands today and is open to the public for visitation and historical interpretation. The nominated property provides a unique opportunity to study public provisions for care of the poor.

## INVENTORY

1. Overseer's house (ca. 1890). Contributing building.
- 2-9. Eight pauper houses (ca. 1858). Contributing building.
10. Wash house (ca. 1858). Contributing building.
11. Smokehouse (ca. 1858). Contributing building.
12. Chicken coop (ca. 1900). Contributing building.
13. Shed (ca. 1920). Contributing building.
14. Springhouse (ca. 1858). Contributing building.

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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT (continued)

### *Main House Description*

The main house, or overseer's house, is a two-story, three-bay, one-pile-deep, ca. 1890 frame I-house with a rear one-story ell. Although the Poorhouse Farm was established in 1858, it is not known what preceded the surviving overseer's house. However, the 1860 census indicates that the overseer, James B. Hurt, his family of six, and 29 paupers were residing at the property.<sup>2</sup> The house and ell rests on a rough-cut, regular-coursed, limestone foundation, and the rear portion of the ell lies on a brick foundation with 6/1 common bond. This rear section served as a root cellar and pantry. The original weatherboard covers the house, and modern asphalt shingles cover the side gable roof with pediments. The roof has a slight eave overhang with a wide fascia board below. Two-over-two wood sash windows, flanked by wood shutters, light the house. A one-story, three-bay, shed-roofed porch covers the front central entrance and is supported by turned wooden posts in the Queen Anne/Folk Victorian tradition. Two interior brick chimneys provide a fireplace for every room in the main section. The ell has two interior brick chimneys that provided a heat and cooking source through the use of a fireplace in the formal dining room and stoves in the kitchen and large public dining area. The entire building appears to have been built at the same time and shows no signs of major alterations.

The ell porch was originally built as an open structure with a pantry; wheat and flour were stored above the root cellar. The porch was later enclosed to create a sun porch and two bathrooms. One of these, from the ca. 1940s, can only be reached from the original doorway in the central hallway. The Grahams converted the pantry/storage room into a bathroom after they acquired the property in the 1990s. Mrs. Graham stated that this was the largest alteration that was made to the building during their ownership.<sup>3</sup> The Grahams have restored the entire house and have it decorated with historical or reproduction furniture and artifacts.

The interior of the main house has a single-pile, central passage plan. The house is entered through the central front door, which is wood paneled with its upper portion glazed and surrounded by stained glass. The central passage contains a dogleg staircase with parlors on either side. The staircase is dark wood with detailed geometric hand-carved designs on the banister and rails. To the east of the central hall is the parlor, which includes a simple wooden mantle and fireplace surround decorated with fluted columns. The floor is original tongue-and-groove board. The west parlor is

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**NARRATIVE STATEMENT (continued)**

reached behind the staircase and is now used as the master bedroom. This room is the mirror image of the east parlor, with two windows, tongue-and-groove wooden floors, and a wooden mantle and fireplace surround. The ca. 1940s bathroom is located at the end of the hall. The door to the bathroom once led to the ell porch, which was enclosed to create this room, which is now finished in pink and blue tile and has a replaced parquet floor. From the west parlor, one enters the ell and the formal dining room, which is a relatively large room with east- and west-facing windows. The window on the east wall faces the porch. The dining room has hardwood tongue-and-groove floors and a fireplace with a flat, turned spindle surround. Both this room and the east parlor have a closet next to the fireplace. From the dining room, the kitchen is entered through one of three doorways. The kitchen is a large room that has an east and west window and large built-in cupboards on the north and south walls. The original hardwood floors were replaced with parquet flooring.

The very large public dining room is reached from the kitchen's northern doorway. This room was used historically as the dining area not only for the paupers but also for the Wythe County Board of Supervisors during their monthly meetings.<sup>4</sup> This large room appears to have been heated with a stove and has three window openings, two to the west and one to the north. It has vertical wainscoting and a chair rail. The original hardwood floors were replaced with parquet flooring. Upon leaving the dining room through an eastern doorway, one enters the enclosed porch. The porch is a long narrow room that spans the length of the kitchen and part of both dining rooms. The southern end of the porch was enclosed to create the 1940s/1950s bathroom. The *Grahams* converted the northern end of the porch, which originally served as the flour and grain storage or pantry area, into a bathroom.

The second floor contains two bedrooms that lie to the east and west of the landing and that mirror the rooms directly below. Both bedrooms have two windows, tongue-and-groove floorboards, fireplaces, and closets. The fireplace mantle and surrounds match the more simplistic one in the formal dining room and are not as ornate as those in the master bedroom and parlor. The original hardwood floors are throughout the house except in the kitchen, large dining room, and the added baths. The entire house contains matching fluted pilaster window and door surrounds, topped with a crosshatched block, and wide baseboards.

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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT (continued)

### Secondary Resources and Landscape Features

The nine-acre nominated parcel includes the overseer's house, the formal yard with the wash house, smokehouse, chicken coop, and shed, and the springhouse and eight pauper houses. The overseer's house, smokehouse, wash house, shed, and chicken house appear to have been sited within a fenced, formal yard. Two rows of four small pauper houses were aligned adjacent to the formal yard. The corncrib, granary, and one barn were built west of the formal yard, and the tenant dwellings that housed the full-time farm employees and their families were constructed to the north and west of the formal complex.

Behind the main house lie the eight brick pauper houses, four in two rows, just outside of the formal yard and facing south toward the rear of the ell of the main house. Seven of the original buildings still stand; the eighth has partially collapsed. Looking north at the front of the one-story pauper houses, each rectangular building contains two separate, 16' x 16' single rooms that were each heated by a central chimney and lighted by two windows. The dwellings have a single front entrance protected by a small, shed-roofed porch, and have gable roofs. The buildings are all constructed of 6/1 common bond and are almost identical, except that the first row of houses rests on rough-cut, regular-coursed limestone foundations with pressed tin metal roofs, and the back row rests on brick foundations with corrugated metal roofs. Additionally, the first row has interior flue openings whereas the rear row has fireplaces. The rooms are well lighted with north- and east/west-facing, six-over-six windows capped with a segmental arch. Most of the buildings still retain the original hardwood floors and have simple 2" x 4" window and door surrounds. The seven standing pauper houses have been restored by the Grahams, who have the rooms filled with antiques and collectibles from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and encourage visitation at no charge.

The ca. 1858 log smokehouse is a one-room building with a high-pitched, front gable roof covered in corrugated tin. The round logs are V-notched and are broken only by the front entrance and a small side window. The ca. 1858 wash house sits north of the main house and is divided into two rooms, the wash room and a wood shed. The frame structure is clad in vertical plank siding and has a standing seam gable roof and a shed-roof addition. An oversized rock and mortar chimney on the southern end of the building provided heat for a large iron washing pot or basin.

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### NARRATIVE STATEMENT (continued)

A ca. 1900 shed-roof, seven-bay, board-and-batten-covered chicken house appears to have been used for horses and was later converted to a chicken house. A vertical plank-covered, ca. 1920 frame shed constructed of wormy chestnut has corrugated tin covering its shed roof. The last building within the nominated parcel is the original springhouse, which was reduced to ruins by a recent ice storm.

The Poorhouse Farm lies at the end of a dirt access road off of Route 610, Peppers Ferry Road. The site is a secluded area surrounded by pasture and farmland. A high mountain range rises up to the north, and a gently rising pasture/field rises in a southerly direction toward Peppers Ferry Road. Some modern housing is visible to the south and east, but at a distance. Surrounding the tract is pristine farmland that has stood undeveloped over the years. Little modern expansion has encroached upon the original 340 acres, and Mrs. Graham's father has owned 140 acres surrounding the central complex since the county sold the property in 1957. He later bought the central portion and more acreage, using the entire complex for farming and storage. Overall the entire setting is undisturbed by modern encroachment, and photos of the time show that it appears largely as it did in the late 1800s.

### INTEGRITY STATEMENT

Overall, the property retains its historic integrity and is presented in nearly original condition because of the restoration and rehabilitation efforts of the Grahams. The main house is in excellent condition and has been only slightly altered with the additions of bathrooms. The pauper houses had been used for storage and livestock for several years and had to be thoroughly cleaned and restored. The Grahams have retained most of the original materials and historic feeling for each building, and have tried to replace as many items in kind as they could, including windows, doors, and bricks and other building materials, particularly within the pauper houses. Although the buildings were neglected for many years, they maintain their structural integrity and overall integrity of design, material, and workmanship. Concrete floors were laid in a couple of the buildings because of the deteriorated state of the wood floors. The remaining dwellings stand as they were and have not been altered, and the property maintains its overall integrity of location, feeling, and setting.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

The Wythe County Poorhouse Farm is the only surviving facility of its type in Wythe County. The 9.09-acre nominated complex contains the heart of Wythe County's second poor farm, which operated from 1858 to 1957. Included in the nomination are the overseer's house, eight pauper dwellings, and five contributing outbuildings. In accord with Virginia law, Wythe County in 1825 established its first poorhouse farm "and work house for receipt of poor of the county and for reforming vagrants."<sup>5</sup> After abandoning its first poorhouse farm, Wythe County established the second poorhouse farm on 340 acres just east of Wytheville. The county officials provided food, shelter, and medical care for the poor, the infirm, and the homeless. In an undisturbed setting with its core buildings intact, the Wythe County Poorhouse Farm continues to tell the important story of a century of Wythe County's care for her most unfortunate citizens.

### Justification of Criteria

The Wythe County Poorhouse Farm is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with social history because the county attempted to provide shelter for the welfare of her homeless and disabled citizens. The Poorhouse is also eligible under Criterion A for its association with the practice of health and medicine because the county provided care for the illnesses of her most destitute citizens. The Poorhouse is also eligible under Criterion C for architecture for its design of the pauper houses. Its period of significance is from 1858 to 1949, and it is eligible at the local level of significance.

### Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Ms. Rachel Katsil of the Virginia Department of Transportation for her research and nomination preparation assistance. The author would also like to thank Ms. Anne Beckett and Dr. John R. Kern of the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office for their editing assistance. Lastly, the author would like to thank Mrs. Sarah Graham for the inspiration and endless information concerning the Wythe County Poorhouse Farm.

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)**

**Historical Background**

Prior to the nominated parcel, the Wythe County Court established the first poorhouse in Wythe County on June 14, 1825. The county selected a group of Wythe County citizens to find an appropriate site for the poorhouse, which was to contain approximately 150 acres, 40 of which should be cleared and suitable for the buildings. On January 12, 1829, the poorhouse tract was selected and approved by the county.<sup>6</sup> The commissioners purchased a 195-acre tract from John M. Crockett just east of the town of Wytheville for \$2,000.<sup>7</sup> In February of that year, a contract for the buildings was commissioned and construction began. On August 10, 1829, Molly Saul, a "poor infirm woman," became the first resident of the Wythe County Poorhouse. Henry Umberger appears to have been the first elected overseer of the poor.<sup>8</sup>

By 1840, the overseers of the poor were ordered to sell the stock, grain, and farm utensils on hand and rent out the farm. It appears that the overseer and farm workers were using the farm profits for themselves. Henry Umberger was relieved of his position as overseer of the poor. The county then mandated that the poorhouse and related farm were to be rented out for contract for a period of three years. The overseer would be chosen according to bid. In 1849, the Wythe County justices were called to discuss the selling of the poor farm because of complaints from citizens and misappropriation of funds, but the poor farm remained open. In 1857, the citizens went before the legislature in an attempt to close the poorhouse, arguing that they were not able to afford the mandatory tithes that maintained the institution. Once again, the citizens' pleas were ignored, and in 1857 the court appointed a committee to acquire a new site for the Wythe County Poorhouse.<sup>9</sup>

In 1858, a larger tract of land was purchased for the development of a new poor farm. This tract of land consisted of 340 acres located approximately two miles northeast of the town of Wytheville, near the community of Stringtown. This is the present location of the historic complex, which is located on 9.09 acres of the original 340 acres. The land was purchased from the estate of Judge Joe Brown for \$7,000.<sup>10</sup> The county officers that enforced the legal and moral responsibilities of the selected overseer drew up a new contract.<sup>11</sup>

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)**

From examining the census records, county board meeting minutes, and interviews with previous tenants, a picture of poor farm life can be developed. From the time that the current poor farm was established in 1858 there was a steady population living in the one-room pauper houses. The 1860 census lists the overseer of the poor as James B. Hurt. Twenty-nine paupers lived on the farm, ranging in age from a four-month-old, unnamed infant to an 83-year-old woman named Susan Haden. Most of the 29 paupers are listed as "unable to maintain" himself or herself. Two inmates are listed as being blind, including 50-year-old George McGonigal and 38-year-old Abram Johnston.<sup>12</sup> Johnston's wife Mary, age 30, and five of their children under the age of 11 are also listed. It is speculated that Mr. Johnston lost his eyesight from disease or an accident and that what was a functional family ended up in the poorhouse.

George McGonigal was also listed in the 1850 census as living at the poor farm, thus having lived at the facility for at least 10 years.<sup>13</sup> A Burgess family also lived at the farm; the family consisted of a 72-year-old man named John, a 40-year-old woman named Malinda, and two teenage children. Perhaps Malinda's husband was no longer the caregiver and she, her father-in-law, and her two children had to rely on the county. The census also lists orphaned children, such as the four Simms children: two children that were three years of age and one eight and one nine years of age. One four-year-old African-American child is listed, as well as several more orphaned children under the age of 10. One of these children, Peter Scott, and 25-year-old Malinda Hoover are listed as idiotic.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Social Statistics for 1860, a total of 51 paupers had lived at the Poorhouse, and 35 people were assisted that lived outside of the facility. A total of \$2,623.00 had been spent in upkeep of the poor, which would equal approximately \$51.43 spent per inmate at the poor farm. When compared to neighboring counties, Wythe County spent more on its poor than Washington, Tazewell, Smyth, Grayson, Pulaski, Craig, and Giles counties. Only adjacent Carroll County spent more, with \$64.47 per inmate. The average cost of the nine counties was \$42.20 (Wythe surpassed this by nearly ten dollars), an increase from \$32.82 in 1850.<sup>15</sup>

The Poor Farm raised a broad range of agricultural goods that benefited the paupers, overseers, and tenant farmers. The excess would be sold to put money back into the system, which was supported by community taxes. The existing outbuildings such as the springhouse and smokehouse were used for these endeavors. In 1860, the farm was valued at \$7,000, with the machinery valued at \$30,

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)**

livestock at \$500, and the value of slaughtered animals at \$250. The farm livestock consisted of four horses, seven milk cows, 10 cattle, and 49 hogs.<sup>16</sup> The farm had recorded raising sheep in 1850, but apparently had abandoned that practice by 1860.<sup>17</sup> Crops raised in 1860 included 60 bushels of wheat, 600 bushels of corn, 600 bushels of oats, 300 bushels of potatoes, and 25 bushels of buckwheat. The farm also produced 500 pounds of butter.<sup>18</sup>

Typically the population of the Poor Farm was between 20 and 30 inmates. The 1870 census, however, reported a marked increase from the 1850s through the early 1900s. That year a total of 56 paupers, plus the overseer Wiley Spence and his five family members, were residing at the facility. Of the 56 inmates, 52 were women and children. This could be attributed to the recent end of the Civil War and the deaths of male providers. Thirty-one-year-old Sopha Creger was probably one of these war widows. She and her four children, all under the age of 13, were living at the Poorhouse Farm in 1870. Out of the 52 women and children, 20 were African-Americans. There were no African-American men in the facility. This too may be attributed to repercussions of the Civil War. These women and children were probably freed slaves that after the war were left to care for themselves and were unable to do so in the post-bellum South. The African-Americans in the census are grouped together, suggesting that they were housed together. Of interest was Polley Wright, a 65-year-old white woman, who was grouped with a 34-year-old Frances Wright and three small children who were all recorded as being black. It is possible that this European-American lost her home because of the war and was left with no way to care for herself or Frances who perhaps had been her slave.<sup>19</sup>

The paupers recorded for the 1870 census year ranged in age from one to 88 years old; four were blind, and two were listed as idiots. \$6,000 had been spent that year on pauper upkeep, which would be about \$107 per pauper, an exceptionally high amount. On average the surrounding counties were spending approximately \$53 per pauper.<sup>20</sup>

In 1871, the Wythe County Courts developed a contract that provided medical care for the paupers at the facility. A county-appointed doctor remained on staff for the duration of the institution's existence.<sup>21</sup> The number of doctors caring for the inmates increased in times of greater need, such as during an outbreak of smallpox in the winter and spring of 1917. Up to seven different doctors cared for the sick during this time of disease.<sup>22</sup>

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)**

By the 1880 census the population of the Poorhouse Farm was down to 16 inmates; Joseph Shafer was the overseer of the facility. The ages of the paupers ranged from two-year-old Bell Neece to 82-year-old Nathan Nelson and Barney Devil. Three of the paupers were listed as idiotic, one was insane, and three were classified as crippled, maimed, or bedridden.<sup>23</sup> There were two African-American men listed at the facility, one of who suffered from rheumatism; the other had lost a leg.<sup>24</sup> Jane Wampler was listed as an epileptic and had been in the Poorhouse Farm since the 1870 census.<sup>25</sup> Only five of the 16 paupers were listed as able-bodied. A total of \$1,600 had been spent during the 1880 year for the paupers, and a total of 35 paupers had been cared for during that year.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1800s William Allen Crenshaw was hired as the Poorhouse Farm overseer. He and his wife Bessie served in this job until after 1930. During Crenshaw's time as overseer the population of paupers went from 20 in 1900, to 19 in 1910, to 15 in 1920. The Crigger and Canoy families are recorded during the early 1900s as working as the tenant farmers for the facility.<sup>27</sup> William Crigger, whose father had been a tenant farmer for the facility and became the overseer in the 1930s, told the Grahams many stories of the Poorhouse Farm based on memories from his childhood. He said he remembered the paupers being mostly old, sick, and disabled. There were few young people or children that were physically able to work. Mr. Crigger did remember one man, Bob Soyers, who was unable to walk but grew strawberries and made baskets to sell.<sup>28</sup> This story was verified by the 1910 census, which lists Bob Soyers and his wife Nancy, who were both 37 years old, living there.<sup>29</sup> The 1920 census again lists Bob Soyers, marital status single, as a basket maker.<sup>30</sup> It appears that by the 1900s the Poorhouse Farm had become a precursor to a nursing home facility.

On March 15, 1908, the General Assembly created the Virginia Board of Charities and Corrections. It was the responsibility of this board to determine the conditions of the poor facilities and to ensure the proper care of the poor. The secretary elect was Reverend Doctor Joseph Thomas Mastin, who served from 1908 to 1922. Within his first year as secretary he visited 96 county almshouses and 12 city almshouses. Dr. Mastin found a few adequate and well-managed facilities, but overall the conditions he reported were deplorable. The facilities were often crowded, with several individuals sleeping in the same bed. "Improper" segregation of the sexes, races, and age groups appalled Mastin. The general population of the almshouses included the old and helpless, the physically and mentally challenged, the sick, the blind, and the illegitimate.

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)**

Tuberculosis went untreated and venereal disease was rampant. Many of the facilities were without water other than from a spring or well. Few had modern toilet facilities; the rooms were filthy and the buildings in dilapidated condition. Maintenance of the farms went undone, and care of the patients was left up to the inmates themselves.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Mastin determined that, overall, the state was spending excessive amounts of money on facilities that housed only a few individuals and that were maintained quite poorly. He suggested that a district home should be developed that would house inmates from a group of counties, thus reducing the cost from uncultivated lands, overpaid superintendents, and high upkeep. Four district homes were constructed in Virginia, with locations in Waynesboro, Dublin, Chatham, and Manassas.<sup>32</sup>

Wythe County, however, never joined the district home. The Wythe County Poorhouse Farm continued to operate until 1957. The county continued to employ tenant farmers to tend the crops and animals at the Poor Farm and in 1947 allotted \$8,333.33 to each inmate for upkeep, which was second only to Highland County's rate of \$10,000.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that, because of the high amount of money being put into the Wythe County Poor Farm, the facility was able to operate longer and more humanely than most in the state.

In 1957, Wythe County decided to close the Poor Farm, at which time it was divided into seven tracts and ordered to be sold by the board of supervisors. The proceeds from the sale went to the construction of the Mountain Empire Airport in Wythe County.<sup>34</sup> The Wythe County Poorhouse Farm has been rehabilitated and restored by the current property owners to reflect its period of importance from 1858 to 1957. Because of its overall undisturbed setting and the nature in which it has survived, the property still reflects its original use as the county poor facility and thus represents an important chapter of Wythe County history.

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Wythe County Poorhouse Farm (98-30)  
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ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kirkwood, Fit Surroundings, District Homes Replace County Almshouses in Virginia.
- <sup>2</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1850.
- <sup>3</sup> Graham personal communication.
- <sup>4</sup> Graham personal communication.
- <sup>5</sup> Kegley, Early Adventures on the Western Waters, Vol. III.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Wythe County Deed Book 11, page 137.
- <sup>8</sup> Kegley, Early Adventures on the Western Waters, Vol. III.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Wythe County Deed Book 21, page 144.
- <sup>11</sup> Kegley, Early Adventures on the Western Waters, Vol. III.
- <sup>12</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1860.
- <sup>13</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1850.
- <sup>14</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1860.
- <sup>15</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1860, non-population statistics.
- <sup>16</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1860, agriculture.
- <sup>17</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1850, agriculture.
- <sup>18</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1860, agriculture.
- <sup>19</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1870.
- <sup>20</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia 1870, non-population statistics.
- <sup>21</sup> Kegley, Early Adventures on the Western Waters, Vol. III.
- <sup>22</sup> Southwest Virginia Enterprise, Wytheville, Virginia, 1917.
- <sup>23</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1880.
- <sup>24</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1880, Defective Populations.
- <sup>25</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1870.
- <sup>26</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1880, Defective Populations.
- <sup>27</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1900, 1910, 1920.
- <sup>28</sup> Graham Personal Communication, 1998 & 1999.
- <sup>29</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1910.
- <sup>30</sup> United States Census, Wythe County, Virginia, 1920.
- <sup>31</sup> Kirkwood, Fit Surroundings District Homes Replace County Almshouses in Virginia.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Kegley, Early Adventures in the Western Waters, Vol. III.

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Wythe County, Virginia

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Non-population Statistics, Wythe County, Virginia.
- 1860 General Population, Wythe County, Virginia.  
Agricultural Census, Wythe County, Virginia.  
Non-population Statistics, Wythe County, Virginia.
- 1870 General Population, Wythe County, Virginia.  
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- 1880 General Population, Wythe County, Virginia.  
Agricultural Census, Wythe County, Virginia.  
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- 1900 General Population, Wythe County, Virginia.
- 1910 General Population, Wythe County, Virginia.
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- 1829 Book 11, page 137. Original poor farm property purchased.  
1858 Book 21, page 144. Second poor farm tract purchased.

Other sources of information include:

1917 Southwest Virginia Enterprise, Wytheville, Virginia. Semi-annual report of the Board of Supervisors, Wytheville, Virginia.  
Newspaper articles, county records, oral histories, original farm items, and photographs maintained by Sarah Graham at the Poor Farm.

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Wythe County, Virginia**

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries for the Wythe County Poorhouse Farm nominated parcel correlate to the present boundaries of the Wythe County tax map 14.2 (1) & 6 parcel 30 which the house and associated resources occupy. The boundaries are depicted on the accompanying tax map (Exhibit A).

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries for the Wythe County Poorhouse Farm nominated parcel encompass the main house, the pauper houses, and the wash house, smokehouse, springhouse, chicken house, and shed. The 9.09-acre parcel contains the core of the original 340-acre Poorhouse Farm tract that was closed by Wythe County in 1957 and is currently the only parcel to be considered for nomination.

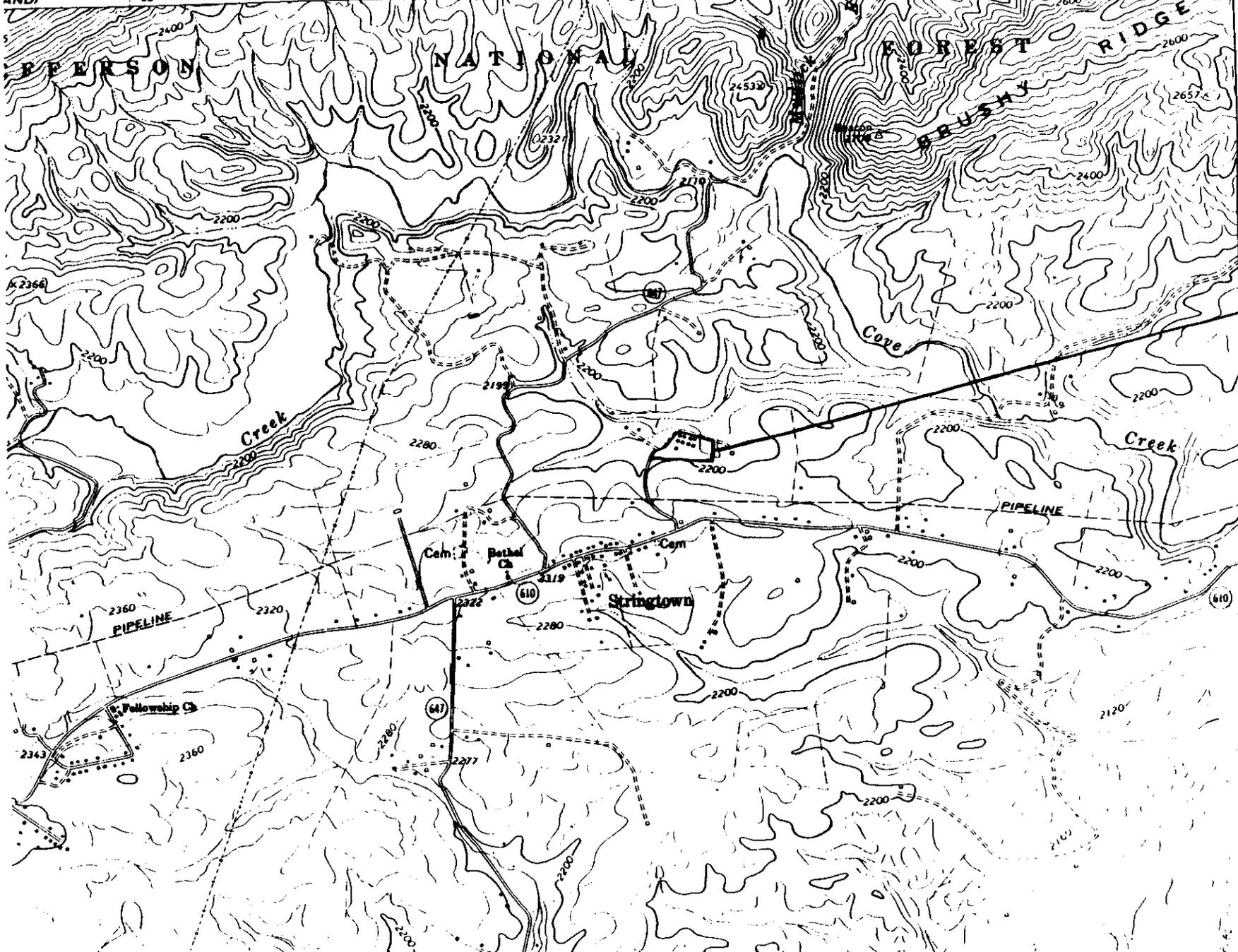


TH OF VIRGINIA  
ERAL RESOURCES

WYTHEVILLE QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA - WYTHE CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

4858 III SW  
(LONG SPUR)

11 SE ANDI 495 496 2'30" 1 260 000 FEET 497 498 499 81°00' 37°00'



250 000  
FEET

WYTHE COUNTY  
POOKHOUSE FARM

493 WYTHE CO, VA  
(98-35)

17/497480/  
4092640

WYTHEVILLE  
USGS.  
QUADRANGLE

492

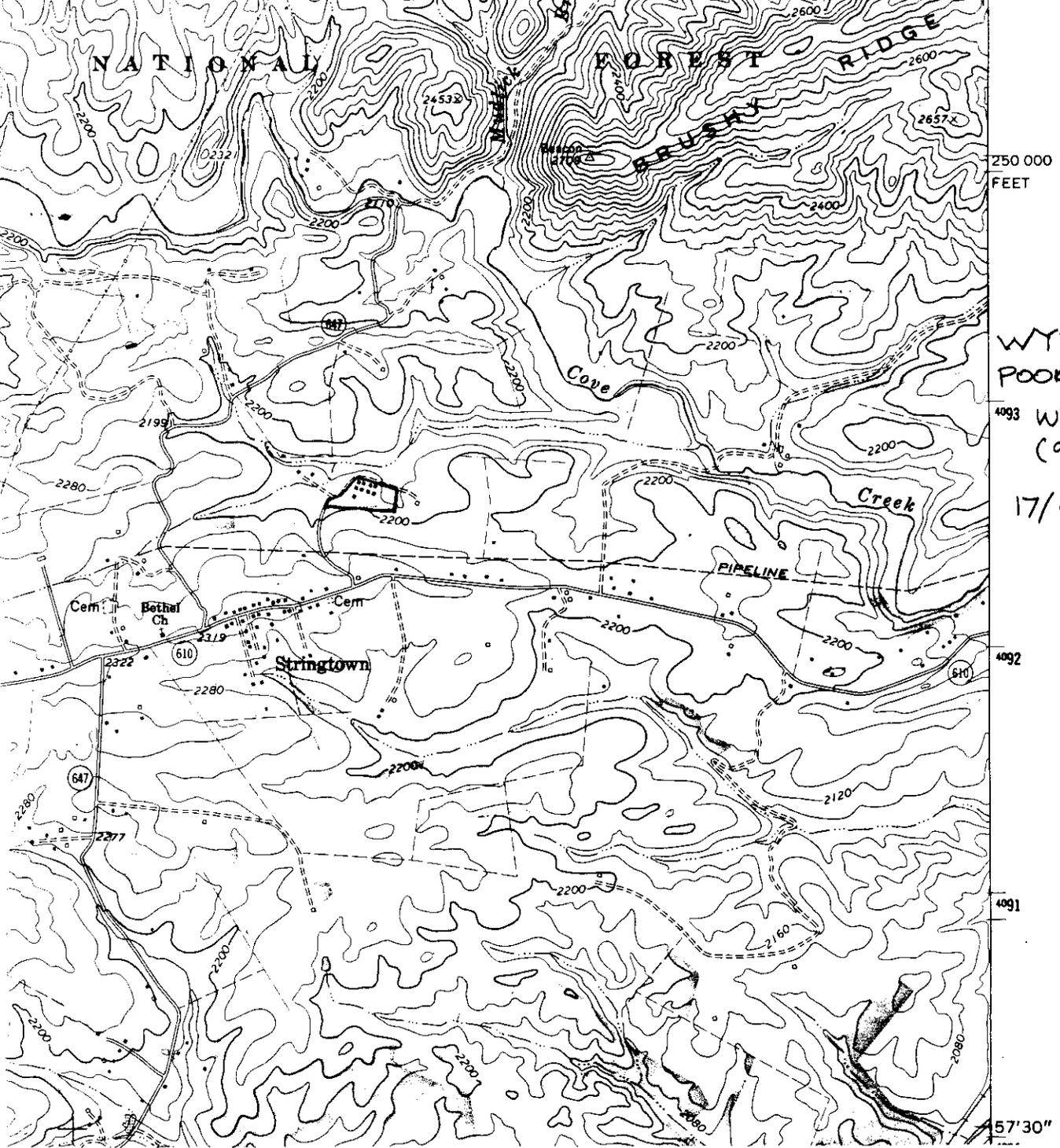
491

INTERCHANGE 8

WYTHEVILLE QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA-WYTHE CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

4858 III SW  
(LONG SPUR)

496 2'30" 1 260 000 FEET 497 498 499 81°00' 37°00'



WYTHE COUNTY  
POOKHOUSE FARM  
4093 WYTHE CO, VA  
(98-30)  
17/497480/  
4092640

57'30"