

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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VLR 09/17/2009
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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 Foster Falls Historic District
other names/site number Foster's Falls, Foster Falls, VDHR ID 098-5141

2. Location

street & number New River Trail State Park, 176 Orphanage Drive not for publication n/a
city or town Max Meadows vicinity x
state Virginia county Wythe code 197 zip code 24360

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

M. Catherine Sussner September 23, 2009
Signature of certifying official Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s), district, site, structure, object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, 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: Commerce, Industry, Transportation, Agriculture, Government; Sub: Hotel, General Store, Iron Furnace, Gristmill/sawmill, Rail-related, wagon road, barn, corncrib, granary, Post office

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

- Cat: Recreation, Vacant; Sub: Park facility, not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

- Late Victorian, No style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation limestone, roof metal, asphalt, walls brick, wood, other wood

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)

- X 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.
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.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

- Commerce, Industry, Transportation
Social History, Architecture
Engineering

Period of Significance 1881-1962

Significant Dates 1881, 1887, 1888, 1919, 1938, 1939, 1962

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) n/a

Cultural Affiliation n/a

Architect/Builder Graham and Robinson

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
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

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 16.5 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 <u>512736 4082001</u>	2 17 <u>512951 4081835</u>	3 17 <u>512928 4081760</u>	4 17 <u>512595 4081771</u>

 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 Michael J. Pulice, architectural historian
 organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date May 2009
 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 Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
 street & number 203 Governor Street telephone 804-786-1712
 city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219-2094

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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**Foster Falls Historic District
Wythe County, Virginia**

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7. Description

Summary

The Foster Falls Historic District is a 16-acre area encompassing much of the commercial and industrial area of Foster Falls, a village that originated in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a farming community but grew exponentially with the nearby discovery of iron ore and the subsequent construction of an iron furnace in 1881. The site was located on the New River, and after circa 1886, it became a stop on the Cripple Creek Extension (later called the North Carolina Branch) of the Norfolk and Western Railway (N&W). During the early 20th century, the bustling community included some 300 hundred residents and at least 100 houses, including a row of 27 company houses, though not a single company house remains today. Extant resources within the district include the iron furnace stack—a pyramidal structure built of blocks of stone; the rail bed and frame railroad passenger station, built c.1887; and the imposing Foster Falls Hotel, a late-Victorian style brick edifice that stands vacant on the hill overlooking the railroad, furnace and New River. The hotel property, which includes two brick dependencies associated with an orphanage that occupied the hotel building beginning in 1938, now serves as the headquarters of the New River Trail State Park. Also within the district are a general store building, a combination gristmill/sawmill, and several frame utilitarian structures dating to the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, all of which are well preserved. The district is today entirely within the confines of New River Trail State Park, which is accessible by road, river, or the New River Trail—the N&W rail bed converted for hiking and biking, following the scenic New River for 39 of its 57 miles between the historic Virginia towns of Pulaski and Galax.

Setting

The village was located on fertile floodplains and river terraces of the New River, next to Foster's Falls, a series of ledges about 1.25 miles down river from Jackson's Ferry, established by the mid-18th century. Foster Falls lies at an elevation of 1,960 feet above sea level. The New River is one of the world's oldest rivers and among a handful of rivers flowing northerly. It begins in North Carolina and terminates at its junction with the Kanawha River in West Virginia. Foster Falls is a short distance north of midway on the New River Trail, the recreational *rails to trails* path crossing though the mid-section of the district. The trail meanders through Grayson, Carroll, Wythe and Pulaski counties of southwestern Virginia. Along the trail to the north and south of the district are two railroad tunnels: 135 feet and 193 feet long; three major bridges at Hiwasee - 951 feet, Ivanhoe - 670 feet, and Fries Junction - 1,089 feet; nearly 30 smaller bridges and trestles, and the shot tower at Jackson's Ferry, constructed of stone in 1807 for the purposes of manufacturing lead ammunition. It was designated as the Shot Tower State Historical Park in 1968 and has since been incorporated within New River Trail State Park.

Detailed Description

Former Hotel Building

The two-story brick building has an uneven U-shape, with parallel front and back wings connected by a perpendicular section. The principal façade including the porch is approximately eighty-eight feet in length, and faces south-southwest toward the park entrance road, Orphanage Drive. The full-length porch wraps around to the west side, continuing back to the rear wing, which extends westerly at the northwest corner of the building and has a windowed

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polygonal bay on the west elevation. The west elevation is a secondary façade, overlooking the railroad station, much of the village of Foster Falls and the river and falls below.

The hotel building originally looked quite different than it does today, due largely to loss of the original two-story wrap-around porch seen in old photos. The building also went through a series of changes and small brick additions when it ceased to be used as a hotel in 1919 and became an industrial school and later an orphanage. A fire burned the roof off of the building and otherwise severely damaged it in 1940, but the building was rehabilitated and used subsequently. Throughout the building originally were large, two-over-two double-hung window sash. The eaves had decorative brackets at about 2-foot intervals. The rear elevation of the rear wing had six window apertures across the 1st and 2nd floors, the northernmost was in-filled with brick when the building was a children's home. A one-story, shed-roofed "lean-to" addition was built onto the east elevation of the rear wing, and a one-story hip-roofed addition was affixed to the rear of the building in 1938. Both appendages were constructed of frame with machine-made brick veneers. The original back door, with lighted transom, had a gable-roof over it at one time, the ghost of which appears in a circa 1941 photo. A brick walkway connected the rear door of the back wing with the boys' cottage behind the former hotel building.

Currently the hotel building appears as a two-story brick structure with a shallow-pitch, hipped, standing-seam metal roof and a concrete-decked, one-story, partial wrap-around porch. The wooden porch posts are bracketed, chamfered and incised with two annular grooves near the bottom. Tucked within the wooden brackets are quatrefoil cut-outs within circles. The posts appear to be mostly original, but pre-fire photographs reveal changes in the number and placement. The porch has an unappealing concrete block apron that replaced the original after the fire of 1940.

The front (south) wing of the building exhibits a coursed, rough-cut limestone foundation and walls of hand-made brick laid up in six-course common bond. All of the windows and doors have been boarded up for at least a decade. The shed additions to the side and rear are poorly constructed of low-quality brick and are unsightly, at best. Moreover, they degrade the historic character of the old hotel by disturbing the original massing of the building.

The interior had 14 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, a reception room, large parlor and dining room, an office, kitchen, pantry, and storage room.¹ The first floor has 14-foot tall ceilings. The interior has essentially been gutted— almost nothing decorative, such as woodwork, survives from the hotel period.

Children's Home Dependencies

The children's home dormitory for boys, constructed c.1938, is located about 100 feet directly behind (north) of the hotel's rear wing. The early section of the dwelling is a brick-veneered, 1.5-story gable-ell plan. A later two-story brick section was added to the west end in the mid-20th century. The original (east) part of the dwelling is constructed of crude, early mass-produced brick. It has a 1.5-story front section facing east, and a 1-story rear ell. To the west end of the rear ell was added a 2-story section with veneer of later, more sophisticated brick. Its addition gave the building a U-shape, and re-oriented the building to facing south. The center area between the wings was in-filled with a one-story, metal-roofed porch. The windows are one-over-one sash. The building is currently used by the state park for storage.

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Located 90 feet off the northeast corner of the hotel building and 70 feet southeast of the boys' cottage, the former wash house/dwelling is a two-over-two-room, brick-veneered building, constructed c.1938. The second floor was probably a dwelling for a cook, laundress, or custodian. The building faces west and has a side-gable roof. The windows are one-over-one sash. It has a later, one-room concrete block addition on its north end. The building currently houses the New River Trail State Park offices.

Foster Falls Railroad Depot

The one-story, frame, gable-roofed N&W Railway depot is located about 230 feet south of the furnace and 200 feet west of the hotel. The building is 70 feet long and has board-and-batten siding, a box bay on one side, six-over-six sash windows, and freight doors. The decorative trusses on the gable ends survive. The Foster Falls depot serves as a visitors' center at the headquarters of the New River Trail State Park. The loading docks have been rebuilt and now include a handicap access ramp. Like the identical Allisonia Station up the rail line to the north, the Foster Falls depot maintains a high degree of architectural integrity. Both depots follow typical southern station design with "separate but equal" waiting rooms, agent-operator's office, and freight holding area together under one roof.

Foster Falls Furnace

The remains of the furnace consist mostly of the massive stone furnace stack, pyramidal in dimensions, topped with a round brick section that is 6-7 feet tall. Part of the furnace race, through which water ran to the furnaces bellows, survives, along with the concrete platform a few feet north of the furnace structure, on which the bellows stood. The furnace was sited on the east floodplain of the New River, 535 feet from the river bank. The embankment behind the furnace is at least 20 feet high. With iron ore, charcoal fuel, and limestone flux stored at a staging area on the embankment, this plan eased the process of loading the ore, fuel and flux into the top of the furnace.

Foster Falls General Store

This one-story, timber frame structure is clad with vertical board-and-batten and has an aging V-crimp sheet metal-covered front gable roof with a cantilevered overhand in front sheltering the principal entry. The plan of the building is an elongated rectangle, 65 feet in length. The front doors—a normal door for persons and a large freight door are fashioned of lumber arranged in a diagonal pattern. The store has a continuous, coursed limestone foundation under the front part of the building, but the rear 3/5 of the building is supported by stone piers. It has experienced flooding, which may explain this anomaly. It is boarded up for the time being, but is in overall good condition. An ice house sat 75 ft. northwest of the general store- towards the river. The site is clearly discernable and the foundation visible, but the building has long been gone. It was a small building, perhaps 10 or 12 feet square.

Gristmill/Sawmill

This elongated rectangular building is similar to the general store in dimensions, construction methods and materials. It is located 275 feet west of the furnace and only 200 feet from the river's edge. Built of un-coursed stone rubble, the remnants of the mill race are best seen behind the general store, where the race remains fairly well intact. The diminutive shingle shed, in which shingles were made, sits on the north side of the northwest corner of the mill, no more than two feet away. Millstones and milling equipment, as well as radial sawing equipment, is still found within the building.

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Other Non-domestic Utilitarian Buildings and Structures

Located 50 feet east of the hotel's front wing, a tall, two-story board-and-batten building is said to have been used as a dry goods storage facility, its footprint measuring 18' 5" square. It has a front-gable roof and a fieldstone foundation. Another alleged use of this building was an ice house. Running along in front of the hotel are the remains of a previously documented wagon road, leading to the industrial complex and the river.

A good-sized corncrib by any measure, the sturdy frame building located just southwest of the furnace has a front gable roof, and is partially clad with weatherboards, board-and-batten, and with slats having equal-sized spaces between each slat to allow for good ventilation. It is a very traditional design similar to many others surviving in the region, though most others are no longer in use and endangered by neglect. This example, however, is maintained in very good condition. A much smaller corncrib, measuring about 6 feet by 12 feet, stands just east of the larger corncrib. A windstorm in early 2008 knocked the building off of its fieldstone foundation, yet it remains otherwise intact and in good condition. Its walls are horizontal slats with open spaces between for ventilation, affixed to 2-inch upright framing members. It has a front gable roof with wide eaves.

Perhaps the most interesting traditional building in the district is the half-dovetail-notched log granary. The T-shaped building consists of a two-story front section and a one-story ell, both with simple gable roofs clad with V-crimp metal. A neatly constructed and unusually well-preserved log farm structure, it is the only surviving log building of the many that once stood in the vicinity of Foster Falls.

The large, two-story frame horse barn, in the southwest corner of the district, was substantially refurbished in the 1990s. It received new exterior cladding and a new roof was constructed, but the building retains a large part of its historic fabric. The lower level has a small office and horse stalls, and the upper level is an open hay loft.

Non-Contributing Resources

Sited next to the log granary, a one-story frame building was totally reconstructed in the 1990s on the site of the old woodshop, and closely approximates the former building in scale, dimensions, orientation and materials.

Another shop building was constructed in the 1990s on the site of an older pole shed that was used for servicing dinky rail cars and other equipment. The new shop building approximates the orientation and similar dimensions of the earlier pole shed, but it consists of all new construction materials. The vertical board-and-batten cladding, stained dark brown, simulates a common historic form of sheathing at Foster Falls and in the region in the late 1800s. It has a sheet metal gable roof and a very small ell extending north off of the northwest corner.

Tucked between the furnace and the mill, a small, modern amphitheater is subdued in design in order to be un-intrusive, but also was placed in a good location for park rangers to interpret the surroundings to visitors. It has a covered stage structure and uncovered rows of benches arranged in semi-circular fashion on a concrete floor, seating about 50 people.

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Inventory of Resources

	Resource Name	Construction Date	C/NC Status	DHR ID	Other DHR ID
1	Foster Falls Hotel	1887-1888	Contributing Building	098-5141-0001	098-5103
2	Park Office	c.1938	Contributing Building	098-5141-0002	
3	Boy's Cottage	c.1938	Contributing Building	098-5141-0003	
4	Dry Goods Storage	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0004	
5	Foster Falls Wagon Road	Mid-19 th C.;	Contributing Structure	098-5141-0005	44WY0252
6	N&W Railway Station	c.1887	Contributing Building	098-5141-0006	
7	N&W N.C. Branch rail bed	1886-1887	Contributing Site	098-5141-0007	077-5068
8	Foster Falls Iron Furnace	1881	Contributing Structure	098-5141-0008	44WY0029
9	Foster Falls General Store	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0009	
10	Ice house site	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Site	098-5141-0010	
11	Gristmill/Sawmill	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0011	
12	Shingle shed	Late 19 th /early 20 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0012	
13	Mill race	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Structure	098-5141-0013	44MY0082
14	Large corncrib	Late 19 th /early 20 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0014	
15	Small corncrib	Late 19 th /early 20 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0015	
16	Granary	Late 19 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0016	
17	Horse Barn	Early 20 th C.	Contributing Building	098-5141-0017	
18	Woodworking shop	Late 20 th C.	Non-contributing Building	098-5141-0018	
19	Repair shop	Late 20 th C.	Non-contributing Building	098-5141-0019	
20	Amphitheater	Late 20 th C.	Non-contributing Structure	098-5141-0019	

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8. Statement of Significance

Summary

The village of Foster Falls—originally *Foster's Falls*—named for an early settler and farmer at the location, was a product of the iron industry that flourished in the New River Valley of southwestern Virginia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The iron furnace at Foster Falls was constructed in 1881 by the Foster Falls Mining and Manufacturing Company and enlarged and improved in 1906. At its peak, the furnace employed up to 80 men and could produce up 3000 tons of pig iron annually, shipped by rail to distant manufacturing centers such as Baltimore, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. Iron-ore was brought in from several nearby mines. The New River provided the necessary water power, and the Cripple Creek Branch of the Norfolk and Western Railway, begun in 1882, was a stone's throw away from the furnace, providing easy means of distribution. A railroad passenger/freight station was built in close proximity to the furnace about 1887, leading other businesses to locate there. By 1895, Foster Falls had a population of 296, an elegant Victorian-style hotel, a post office, a gristmill and sawmill, a general store, a distillery, and about 100 houses. The Foster Falls Hotel, erected by the Foster Falls Mining and Manufacturing Company, prospered for 25 years, serving as the social center of the community. The furnace ceased operations in 1914, however, and in 1919 ownership of the hotel was transferred to the Abingdon Presbytery to house an industrial school for young women. In 1938, the school became a co-ed orphanage called the Abingdon Presbyterian Children's Home. The old hotel/school building was fitted with small, one-story appendages, and two separate brick dependencies were built, one of which would be the dormitory for boys. By 1962 the buildings had fallen into disrepair, and the children's home was moved to a new complex in Wytheville.

Applicable Criteria

The Foster Falls Historic District is eligible under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Industry, Transportation, and Social History. The Foster Falls Hotel and the General Store are the most significant commercial resources to have existed in Foster Falls, and today are the lone survivors of the commercial history of the tiny, defunct, industrial village in rural Appalachia. The hotel and store provided lodging, prepared meals, a post office and mercantile for the once-bustling community, as well as a number of jobs. The iron furnace and mill were equally important to the industrial history of the community. Both resources still stand and continue to represent and help interpret that history.

The district is also eligible under the theme of Transportation by virtue of the North Carolina Branch of the N&W Railway, which has been determined individually eligible, crossing through it; and the Foster Falls passenger/freight depot stands as a contributing resource within the district. The Foster Falls Hotel and the General Store served the community in many ways, often as a gathering place at the center of the community, and therefore contributed a great deal to the social history as well as the commercial history of the village. Moreover, the former hotel, having served from 1919 to 1962 as an industrial school for homeless young women and later as an orphanage operated by the charitable ministry of the Abingdon Presbytery, is an important part of the social history of Wythe County and the New River Valley of Southwest Virginia.

The district is also eligible under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering. Significantly, the iron furnace possesses a design and composition more distinctive of iron ore processing facilities of the mid-19th century, reflecting few of the numerous advances made during the last 15-20 years of the century, such as coke-fueled, "hot

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blast” technology. The Foster Falls Furnace was the last of the cold-blast, charcoal-fueled furnaces to operate in the region. Because the furnace remains are well preserved, they inform our understanding of the design of a 19th-century iron manufacturing complex, and help broaden our understanding of the development of the iron industry and the evolution of iron technology during the industrialization of America. Both the furnace complex and the nearby gristmill/sawmill demonstrate specialized engineering technology that is representative of the period in which they were constructed.

The district’s period of significance began in 1881 with the construction of the Foster Falls Iron Furnace and ended in 1962 with the closing of the Presbyterian Children’s Home. The industrial enterprise of mining (performed just outside of the district) and iron production required many supporting structures, only a few of which have survived at Foster Falls. Those that still exist offer a compelling glimpse of the iron industry still in its infancy, as well as construction practices of the period, now long obsolete.

Integrity Statement

The village of Foster Falls experienced sudden decline related to three key events, causing resources to be abandoned at once rather than being modified and adapted for continued use over time, which would likely have impacted their integrity to a much greater degree. The first event was circa 1914 when the furnace shut down; followed by the closing of the iron ore mines early in the Great Depression; and finally, the relocation of the Presbyterian Children’s Home to Wytheville in 1962. Since then, little change has taken place within the district, other than some gradual, inevitable deterioration, and the New River Trail State Park’s adaptive use of the Railway Station, horse barn, and little 1938 outbuilding in which their offices are located. The contributing resources throughout the district all remain easily recognizable as historic features with specialized functions, with antique character and charm well preserved.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to the following individuals who assisted with finding research materials for this document: Cathy Reynolds at the Kegley Library in Wytheville, Barbara Umberger and Ann Laing of the Wythe County Historical Society, Frances Emerson at the Wytheville Museums. Mark Hufeisen and Patrick McFall of New River Trail State Park provided additional information and access to the resources. Support during the process and/or careful review of this document was provided by: Quatro Hubbard, Marc Wagner, Kelly Spradley-Kurowski, and John Kern of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and Theresa Layman of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Historical Background

Wythe County was formed from Montgomery County in 1790, some 45 years after first being settled by German and Anglo immigrants. While farming the fertile valleys has historically been the primary occupation of its inhabitants, the mining of lead in Wythe County began near the New River in present-day Austinville around 1761. So productive were these lead mines, they became the primary source of lead for the Continental forces and militias during the Revolutionary War.

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Iron operations began in Southwest Virginia around 1779. Wythe County had Speedwell Furnace and Poplar Camp Furnace by circa 1790, Raven Cliff Furnace on Cripple Creek and Cedar Run Furnace in 1810, Little Wythe Furnace in 1818, Barren Springs Furnace in 1853, Gray Eagle Furnace in 1863, and the Radford Iron Company in 1867.² A map of “Iron Furnaces in Virginia Before 1865” shows thirteen furnaces in Wythe County, all but two of which were located along the New River, attesting to the richness of natural resources needed for iron production in the New River Valley. Not only was iron ore, or hematite, in ready supply, but there was an endless amount of limestone for making lime – a necessary ingredient for the “cold blast” furnaces, and vast forests provided the necessary massive amounts of wood. In 1878, Wythe County Chancery Court records noted that it took five hundred cords of wood to produce fourteen thousand bushels of charcoal, the fuel used by most furnaces at the time.³ Also locally available was durable quarry stone for the construction of furnaces, and the New River, one of Virginia’s largest, provided more than a sufficient amount of water, though it was hardly navigable due to its shallow depths and bedrock substrate. Waterpower was needed to operate furnace bellows and sawmills.⁴

The transportation of goods relied on wagons, but despite of the difficulty in transit through the mountainous terrain, the natural resources in Southwest Virginia attracted the attention of industrialists and mining prospered, even without nearby canals, and well in advance of the railroads. Beginning about 1840, lead and pig iron were shipped from Wythe County by wagon to Lynchburg and floated to Richmond’s Tredegar Iron Works.⁵

The Civil War had a devastating impact on the iron industry in Wythe County and across the state, but it began to recover after 1875. Investors from the north financed rebuilding and/or enlarging the old furnaces, and new ones were constructed with greater production capacities. Foster Falls Furnace, established in 1881 by the Foster Falls Mining and Manufacturing Company, was one of five new furnaces constructed in the county during the 1880s.⁶ It was located at one of the New River’s most scenic locations— on the east bank, across from dramatic rock cliffs. Nearby was Jackson’s Ferry crossing, around which a small farming community had grown on the fertile floodplains and river terraces. Foster “falls” are a series of one-to-three-foot ledges extending across the entire width of the river, making navigation all the more difficult. Railroad plans were nearing completion, however, and surely the precise corridor had already been laid out as far as Foster Falls when the furnace was constructed, because the tracks could not have safely come any closer to the furnace.

In 1882 work began on the Cripple Creek Extension of the Norfolk and Western (N&W) Railway. The extension ran a distance of forty-seven miles from Martin’s Tank, which would be renamed Pulaski, through Foster Falls, to towns of Speedwell and Austinville in Wythe County. Though work was halted during the Economic Panic of 1884, the rail finally reached Ivanhoe in 1887. The New River Plateau Railway Company, incorporated in 1888, planned to continue south from Ivanhoe to the North Carolina border. The following year, however, the New River Plateau Railway merged with the N&W, and the extension became the North Carolina Branch of the Cripple Creek Extension. After reaching Galax in 1904, the 57 mile-leg beginning at Pulaski became known simply as the North Carolina Branch of the Norfolk and Western Railway.⁷

In 1880, Wythe County’s population totaled 14,314, including 2,850 black residents. Three thousand individuals lived in Wytheville, the county seat. The Norfolk and Western Railroad extended through the middle of the county from northwest to southeast, furnishing excellent transportation facilities.⁸

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In 1887, McCreath and D'Invilliers reported the iron furnace at Foster Falls was at the time called "Pierce Furnace." The name Pierce ascribed to the Foster Falls furnace appears to have been erroneous, though a David Pierce (1756-1833) was an early furnace owner/operator and major entrepreneur in the area.⁹ The furnace stack then measured 36 feet by 10 feet. The agent for the furnace was John W. Robinson of nearby Grahams Forge, Virginia. Robinson was also the agent for Foster's Falls Iron Company, listed under the heading "Miners and Shippers of Iron Ore."¹⁰ At this time, most of the iron from area furnaces was shipped by rail to Pittsburgh, where it was used to make wheels for steam engines and rail cars.¹¹

In 1890, the American Iron and Steel Institute listed "Fosters Falls" Furnace under the heading "Virginia Charcoal Blast Furnaces." The entry follows: "Fosters Falls Mining and Manufacturing Company, Fosters Falls, Wythe County. Furnace on the Cripple Creek branch of the N&W RW. One stack, 35 x 8, built in 1881; open top; cold blast; water-power; ore, local hematite; product, car-wheel pig iron; annual capacity, 2,500 tons. Brand "Foster's Falls." M.B. Tate, president; J.W. Robinson, secretary and Treasurer; J.A. Dyer, manager. Sales agents, R.C. Hoffman and Co., Baltimore."¹²

Evidently the furnace thrived long enough for the community to grow quickly after the rail stop was established, for in 1887, Foster Falls Mining & Manufacturing hired the local firm of Graham and Robinson to construct a hotel, to be completed the following year. The earth was excavated and the bricks molded on the site. The bricks are said to have been fired in what became the cellar of the hotel.¹³

On July 13, 1888, *The Wytheville Dispatch* reported, "Several of the young people of town went down to Foster Falls yesterday to attend a large ball given there last night. The occasion was the opening of a new hotel." The spacious and elegant Victorian hotel, built of costly brick, surely opened with considerable fanfare. In addition to out-of-town guests, it accommodated boarders working for Foster Falls Mining & Manufacturing. It included a restaurant, commissary and post office. A Mrs. Phelps may have been the first manager of the business. Less than a year after the grand opening, however, the *Dispatch* reported, "Mrs. Eugene Phelps who has carried on the hotel at [Foster Falls] with so much success, leaves for Barren Springs this week. Mrs. Hall of Hillsville succeeds her."¹⁴

Chantaigne's Virginia Gazetteer and Business Directory of 1888-89 listed, within the fledgling community of Foster Falls, Post Officer, James A. Dyer; General Merchants: Foster Falls Mining Co. and Hemetite Iron Co., and George T. Mills; Hotels: Lewis, William; Iron Founders and Machinists: M. & M Co. (1 of 3 in the county); Mines – Iron: M. & M. Co., Hemetite Iron Co., and A. M. Oglesby (3 of 6 in the county); Physician A. G. Crockett; Principal Farmers: Wm. H. Carter, J. J. Baker, A. M. Oglesby, Robt. Jackson, Thomas M. Jackson, J. P. M. Sanders, L. D. Sanders, Wm. J. Roper. Although listed for other communities, no sawmills or corn or flour mills are listed for Foster Falls, perhaps because they were for company use and did not sell to the open public. The existing flour and corn mill/sawmill was probably standing by around that time. Before then, if no permanent mills existed, a portable steam-powered sawmill would have been in use. No schools are listed, but if it was not already standing, a one or two-room frame schoolhouse, known to have existed, would soon follow.¹⁵

In 1895, Foster's Falls had a population of 296.¹⁶ There were about one-hundred houses, including 27 company-built

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row houses, all of which are gone now.¹⁷ There was a boarding house, a company store, blacksmith shop and a machine shop, and even a distillery. A narrow-gauge “dinky” railroad ran from the mines to the furnace and across the river on a trestle. The trestle and a nearby settler’s cabin were washed away by a great flood in 1916.¹⁸

Famous industrialist and railroad magnate George L. Carter (1857-1936), from nearby Hillsville, started his Carter Iron, Coal and Coke Company in 1897 after working for the lead mine in Austinville. Carter, along with Ben Dulaney and John Colwell, then organized the Virginia Iron Coal and Coke Company (VICC) in 1899. His company took ownership of several iron furnaces and related resources in Pulaski and Wythe counties, including Pulaski’s Dora Furnace, and the charcoal furnaces at Reed Island and Foster Falls. In a deed recorded June 27th, 1899 at the Wytheville Courthouse, Foster Falls Mining & Manufacturing transferred 2200 acres and all of the existing structures to VICC.¹⁹ The company now owned and continued to operate the Foster Falls Mine, Furnace and Hotel. Mr. Carter was the president and the central office was in Bristol, Virginia. Under Carter's leadership, VICC acquired furnaces at Buena Vista, Roanoke, Radford, Max Meadows, Grahams Forge and Bristol, Virginia, among others, as well as Crescent Horseshoe and Iron Company, and the Radford Pipe Works in Radford, Virginia. A new furnace was built in Ivanhoe. They also acquired nearly all the iron ore mines in Southwest Virginia and continued to operate them into the 1930s.²⁰

In 1908, the American Iron and Steel Institute printed the following: “Fosters Falls Furnace, Fosters Falls Virginia. Furnace on the Cripple Creek branch of the N&W RW. One stack, built 1881, abandoned in 1896, and revived and blown in in August, 1903; height increased 16 feet in 1906; present size, 50 x 10; closed top; cold blast; fuel, charcoal; ore, Sanders limonite; product, cold-blast charcoal pig iron for the manufacture of chilled rolls; annual capacity, 3,000 tons.—Active 1907.”²¹ The report of the furnace being abandoned from 1896 to 1903 may be erroneous, because the VICC is said to have introduced steam power to operate the bellows in 1899, immediately increasing iron production.²²

Even if the furnace did not go into blast some years, the mines in the area continued to operate, providing some business for the hotel and restaurant. There are also reports that the hotel was a popular resort destination, drawing tourists from as far as Roanoke. Nevertheless, business did become slow, for on June 12, 1900, a telegraph message from the vice president and general manager of the Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Company of Bristol, Tennessee, said “Would like to dispose of the Foster Falls property. Make stipulation that it be used for a hotel only.”²³

As shortages of manpower led to shortages of raw materials locally, and better sources of iron ore were discovered and exploited in the Great Lakes region and the American West, the mining and iron manufacturing industry gradually declined in Virginia beginning around the turn of the century. The technology used in Southwest Virginia became obsolete, and dams were washed out by floods, making the business unprofitable and putting some furnaces permanently out of blast. The final blast in Wythe County occurred at Foster Falls Furnace in 1914. Mining continued in the area, the iron ore being shipped to larger and more modern furnaces outside of the region. Small towns like Foster Falls, Speedwell, Cripple Creek and Ivanhoe continued to benefit until the Great Depression sealed the fate of the iron mining industry in Virginia. The last of the mines in Wythe County closed in 1930.²⁴ As the mines of Southwest Virginia began closing, the importance of the railroad declined in correlation. Passenger service was eventually eliminated, yet rail lines through other parts of the county remain active today.

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The company's intent to sell the hotel property was not accomplished for almost two decades. Finally, the transfer of the hotel with five acres—for the sum of one dollar—from the VICC to the Abingdon Presbytery, was recorded at the Wythe County Courthouse on Friday, July 4th, 1919.²⁵ On September 3rd, 1919, the Presbytery would open an “industrial school” for young women who were victims of poverty or abuse or were wayward or troubled. Dr. George H. Gilmer, superintendent of the Home Missions in the Abingdon Presbytery, is credited with founding the institution. At first, only young women between the ages of 14 and 20 were accepted. Presbytery records show that in 1921, the girls were taught cooking, sewing, housekeeping, basket making and gardening.²⁶ On August 30, 1921, the *Southwest Virginia Enterprise* reported, “The Presbyterian Industrial School has 28-30 children.”²⁷

In 1927, the *Kingsport Press* did a story on the school, reporting that “the Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Co. donated this property containing 5 acres and the splendid brick building to the Abingdon Presbytery for the purposes of establishing a home for homeless white girls. It opened in 1919 and has cared for 187 girls. It is opened all the year and a girl may enter any time as long as there is room. The girls are taught all kinds of housework and are given a limited education and good bible course and are taught safe and sane living. Homes or employment are found for them.” The 1927 report to Presbytery (found in the Presbytery minutes) stated that the home had 3 teachers and 40 pupils.²⁸

“Ms. Charlotte E. Webb was the director and principal since the beginning of the school and was there almost the full time until the 1940s. She died in June, 1977 in North Carolina,” former student Nannie Graham Sanders recalled in 1978. “Webb was a very dedicated, hardworking woman, working up to 17-18 hours a day on very little pay. She not only headed the school, but was very active in affairs outside of the school, which was very useful as a public relations representation and made people aware of the school. She watched over the children's health, and in the early days took children to Pulaski by train to see the doctor. In those days, several trains stopped at Foster Falls. Later she bought a T-model Ford and then they really got around.” Sanders also remembered, “At first, the young women had their own school at the home. Later, they attended public schools at Foster Falls, Austinville, and Jackson Memorial Highschool. The public teacher [at the home] left in 1930.”²⁹

With the public school system well established in rural areas under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration's New Deal, the need for churches to provide education was diminished, and Presbyterian schools throughout rural Appalachia closed. In 1938, the industrial school became an orphanage for boys as well as girls, called the Abingdon Presbyterian Children's Home. One of its central missions was to prevent the separation of siblings who had no safe and secure homes of their own. Education in the form of typical school studies was provided.³⁰ There was need for expansion, and old hotel/school building was fitted with two small, one-story appendages off of the back wing—one for storage and one for added living space. Two separate brick dependencies were also built—the dormitory for boys called “the boy's cottage,” and a laundry house with upstairs dwelling, perhaps for a laundress or custodian. On Sunday, September 29, 1940, the home was nearly destroyed by an early morning fire. The roof burned first and the outer brick walls are about all that survived. Soon thereafter, the building was rehabilitated without many of its original elements. The third floor, which was within the ½-story attic space enhanced with a large dormer, as well as the cupola and the upper level of the front porch were not replaced or reconstructed. The home reopened the following year on September 17th. In those days, Fosters Falls was a station of the Galax Division of the N&W

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Railway, with junction at Pulaski and daily train service. The children's home was immediately adjacent to the railway station.³¹

By 1962 the buildings had fallen into disrepair, and the children's home was moved to a new complex in Wytheville, leaving the old hotel largely vacant to this day, and the village suddenly very quiet except for the constant roar of the river crashing over the falls. In the 1970s and early 1980s the orphanage property was owned by Neuhoff Farms, a large cattle operation, and remained largely vacant. The hotel and other buildings were used somewhat for storage, while cattle grazed and swine scavenged the grounds. By 1981, only about 20 families lived in Foster Falls.³²

In 1986, Norfolk Southern Railroad donated the North Carolina Branch rail bed to the state as part of the *Rails to Trails Program* when they discontinued the line and removed the tracks. With the help and support of volunteer groups and chambers of commerce in the region, the New River Trail State Park was able to open in May 1987 with four miles of trail. Since then approximately 57 miles of trail, all within the state park, have been opened to the public, and the New River Trail has been designated an official National Recreation Trail by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Two festivals have been held annually at Foster Falls in recent years— Wythe County Heritage Day in June and the Foster Falls Railway Festival in early September.

In 2001, the North Carolina Branch of the N&W Railway was studied and recommended eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district unto itself, under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Industry. The Railway is historically significant as the primary mode of transportation for both people and natural resources in Southwest Virginia from 1882-1951, though to date, it has not been formally nominated to the state or national registers.³³

Endnotes

1. Anne Marie Webb, "The Foster Falls Hotel," 2.
2. Davis, "The Iron Age of Wythe County," 11.
3. Coke, a derivative of coal, became available to area furnaces later, beginning circa 1890. Coke-burning furnaces were called "hot blast" furnaces. Coke burned much hotter, dramatically increasing production capacity.

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4. Furnaces built later used steam power to operate bellows, and Foster Falls Furnace is said to have been upgraded to steam in 1899.
5. Davis, "The Iron Age of Wythe County," 11.
6. Ibid.
7. Ashley Neville, et al., "An Intensive Level Evaluation of the N. Carolina Branch of the N&W Railway," 2001.
8. U.S. Population Census for Wythe County, 1880.
9. Mary Kegley, "David Pierce of Poplar Camp." 1980. 10. McCreath and D'Invilliers, *New River – Cripple Creek Mineral Region*, 1887.
11. Davis, "The Iron Age of Wythe County," 15.
12. Directory to the Iron and Steel Works of the United States and Canada, 1890: 35.
13. Anne Marie Webb, 2.
14. *The Wytheville Dispatch*, March 15, 1889.
15. Kennedy, "Foster Falls Already had a Heyday." 1978.
16. *"The New 11 x 14 Atlas of the World"* Rand McNally Corporation, 1895.
17. Davis, 18.
18. Kennedy, "Foster Falls Already had a Heyday."
19. Wythe County Deed Book 45, page 145.
20. E. B. Jacobs. *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Co.* 1912: 116-118.
21. Directory to the Iron and Steel Works of the United States and Canada, 1908: 192.
22. Anne Marie Webb, 4.
23. Graham-Robinson papers at the UVA Alderman library, copy found in Chitwood Collection, Kegley Library.
24. Davis, "The Iron Age of Wythe County," 17.
25. Wythe County Deed Book 65, page 291.
26. Select Presbytery records are found in the Chitwood Collection, Kegley Library.
27. Newspaper article in the Chitwood Collection, Kegley Library.
28. Ibid.
29. Interview with Nannie Graham Sanders, 2-11-1978, in the Chitwood Collection, Kegley Library.
30. Anne Marie Webb, 5; and "The Foster Falls Years" *Southwest Virginia Enterprise*, March 29, 1995.
31. Charlotte Webb "A History of the Abingdon Presbytery Children's Home at Foster Falls." 1951.
32. Anne Marie Webb, 6; and Kennedy, "Foster Falls Already had a Heyday."
33. The railway branch DHR ID number is 077-5068. See Ashley Neville, et al., 2001.

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The NRHP boundary of the 16.5-acre nominated parcel is shown on the accompanying USGS quad map and GIS-produced aerial image.

Boundary Justification

The NRHP boundary of the nominated property, shown on the accompanying USGS quad map and GIS-produced aerial image, incorporates all of the extant, eligible resources within a concise area entirely within the New River Trail State Park that represent the commercial or industrial history of Foster Falls. Because the park may one day expand to include a number of historic, non-commercial/industrial-use resources, the boundary of the historic district has potential to be expanded. Additionally, there is potential for the discovery of archaeological sites and/or historic mining or landscape features outside of the current proposed boundary that at would justify further expansion of the historic district.

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Photographs

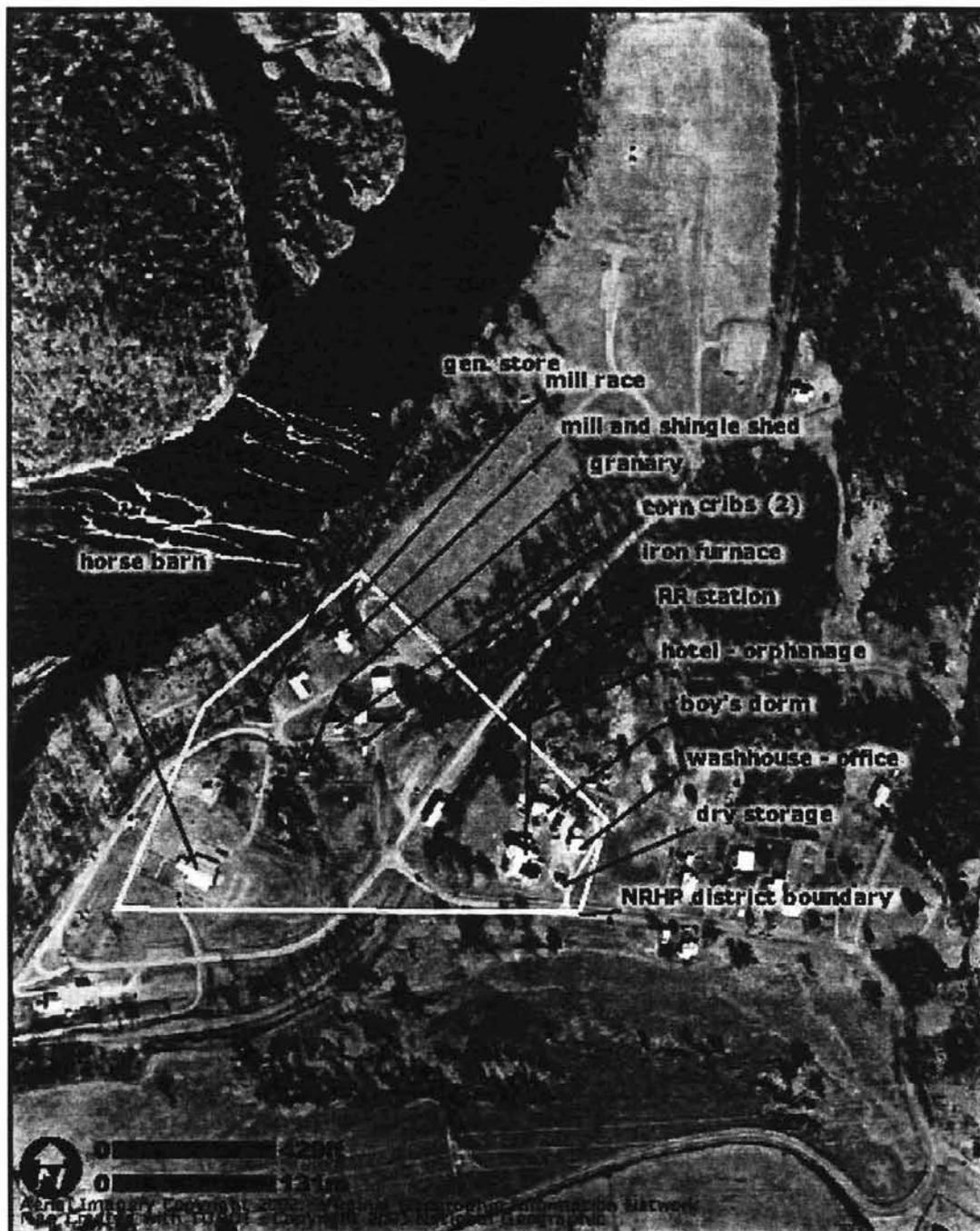
All Photographs taken November, 2008.

Michael J. Pulice, photographer.

Location of duplicates: VDHR, Richmond.

1. Foster Falls Hotel building and surrounding resources, facing northwest
2. Foster Falls Hotel building front wing, facing west-northwest
3. Foster Falls Hotel building facing east-southeast
4. Foster Falls Hotel building rear elevation, facing south
5. Board-and-batten Dry Storage building in front of Foster Falls Hotel building, facing south
6. Foster Falls Railroad Station, facing southeast
7. Foster Falls Iron Furnace, facing northeast
8. Foster Falls General Store, facing west
9. Log granary, facing northeast
10. Foster Falls saw mill & grist mill (left), and shingle shed (right)
11. Iron furnace and frame corncrib, facing east
12. New River flood plain, facing west from Foster Falls railroad station

Virginia Department of Historic Resources Data Sharing System, 05/01/2009



Virginia Department of Historic Resources - April 23, 2009
8:45 am

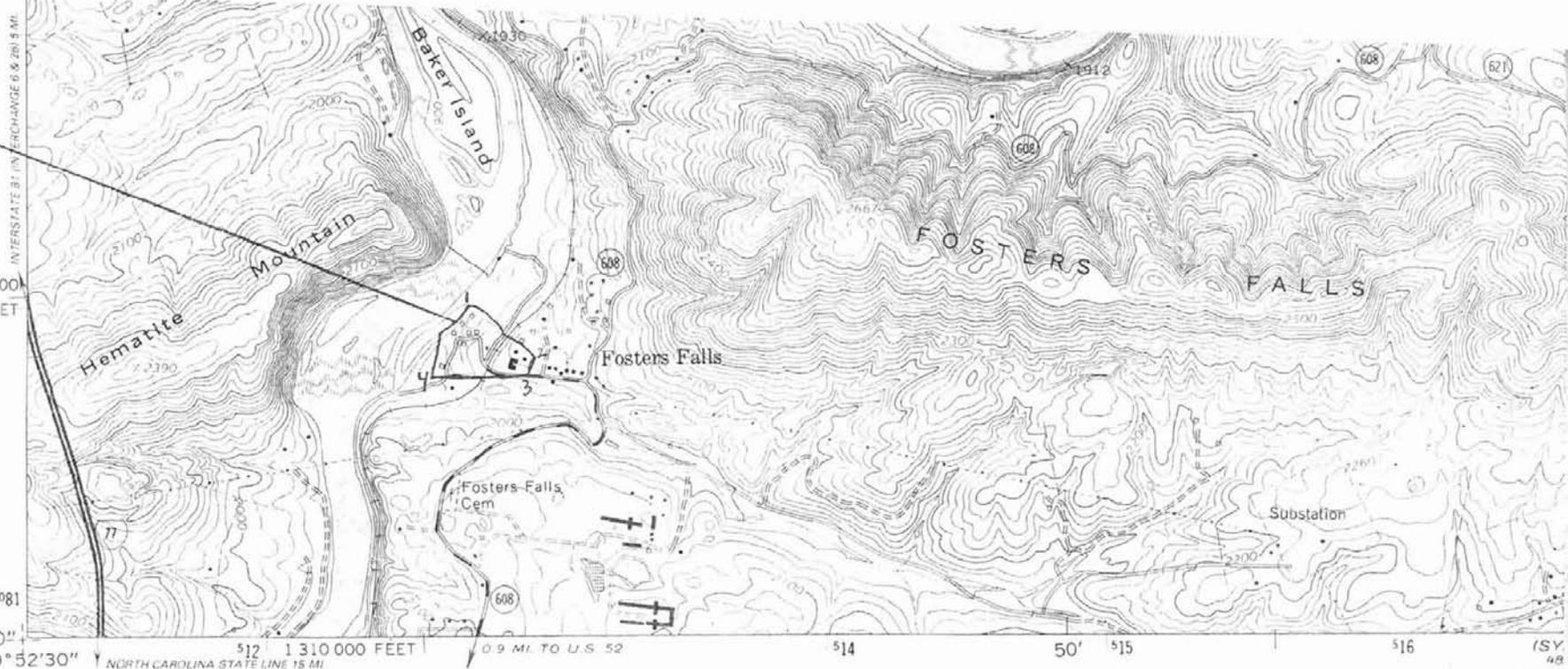
Foster Falls Historic District
Wythe County, Virginia
Contributing Resources

FOSTER
FALLS
HISTORIC
DISTRICT

WYTHE COUNTY,
VA

UTMS:

- 17/512736/4082001
- 17/512951/4081835
- 17/512928/4081760
- 17/512595/4081771



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

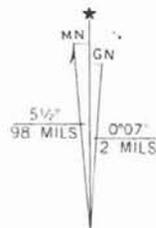
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1963. Field checked 1965

Polyconic projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks based on Virginia coordinate system, south zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17, shown in blue
1927 North American Datum

To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 9 meters south and 17 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map



CONTOUR IN
NATIONAL GEODETIC

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NAT
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICA
AND VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINERAL RE
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