United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Rural Retreat Depot
Other names/site number: DHR No. 292-5001
Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: 105 Railroad Avenue
City or town: Rural Retreat State: VA County: Wythe
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** ___**statewide** _x_ **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

_x_ **A** ___**B** _x_ **C** ___**D**

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [x]

Public – Local [ ]

Public – State [ ]

Public – Federal [ ]

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) [x]

District [ ]

Site [ ]

Structure [ ]

Object [ ]

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions

TRANSPORTATION: Rail-Related: Train Depot

Current Functions

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE VICTORIAN: Italianate

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD; METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Rural Retreat Depot is prominently situated on Railroad Avenue at the center of the Town of Rural Retreat, only 20 feet north of the active rail line now operated by Norfolk Southern Corporation. The circa 1870 frame building possesses a high level of historic integrity and is among the oldest surviving rail-related resources in Virginia, as well as one of the most architecturally sophisticated Reconstruction-era railroad buildings erected outside of urban centers within the Commonwealth. Characterized by its symmetrical design—a projecting one-story front-gabled midsection and taller, square towers set back along each side elevation—the depot is a well-known and highly prized historic landmark in southwestern Virginia. An elongated one-story gable-roofed freight wing, extended in 1903, stretches from the rear of the building, along the tracks. The depot's notable Italianate-style architectural features include shallow hip roofs with deep, flared eaves; a full classical entablature (including a raking entablature on the front elevation) with modillioned box cornice and paired brackets near the corners; vertical board-and-batten cladding with a strip of scalloped trim along the top; and segmental-arched fenestration. After being taken out of service in the 1970s, the depot suffered from vacancy and neglect until 2011, when it was obtained by the Rural Retreat Depot Foundation. The Foundation has since made significant gains towards its long-term preservation.

Narrative Description

Rural Retreat, a town of 1,500 in western Wythe County, lies about 90 miles southwest of Roanoke along U.S. Highway 11, the old Valley Road, and just south of Interstate 81, which runs parallel to US 11. The Norfolk Southern Corporation railroad tracks extend east/west

through the center of the town. Centrally located on West Railroad Avenue, on the north side of the railroad tracks and immediately south of the Rural Retreat town square, the Rural Retreat Depot is situated at 2,516 feet above sea level, the highest elevation of any depot along the former Virginia & Tennessee (V&T) line between Lynchburg, Virginia, to Bristol, Tennessee. It is also said to be the highest railroad station between New York City and New Orleans [Striplin, 304]. The depot is a key contributing resource in the National Register-eligible, but not formally designated Rural Retreat Historic District, identified and evaluated by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 2001.

Constructed following the Civil War, the one-story, board-and-batten-clad Rural Retreat Depot is an architecturally sophisticated building with a high level of historic integrity. It faces east, and has a low-pitch front-gable roof running the length of the building, oriented east-west. Including the equal-sized, pyramidal-roofed towers situated on the building's north and south side elevations (directly across from each other), set back about six feet from the front of the building, the building takes an overall T shape. End to end, the depot measures about 105 feet, the 1903 section having added 50 feet to the length. The midsection (ticket master area) and the 1903 addition measure 25 feet in width. The front part of the building that historically served as a racially segregated waiting room for whites measures 16 feet wide and 30 feet deep. The flanking towers are 15½ feet square, but because they are partially inset, they add only about 16 feet to the overall width of the building.

The south tower is often clearly seen in historic photographs, while the north tower is usually obscured from view. Early photographs show the south tower was originally much taller, incorporating two floor levels. It had windows on the second floor, identical to those (still extant) on the first floor, and had a brick interior chimney built against the west wall of the tower (as did the north tower). The south tower may have been built taller to serve as a switch tower, although early depots were known to have towers with clocks and bells to signal train arrivals and departures [Worsham and Worsham, Section 8, Page 3]. The switchman, if stationed on the second floor of the depot tower before a separate switch tower was erected, would have needed good views of oncoming trains and be ready to operate switches to multiple tracks. By the late 1940s, however, the south tower had been truncated to one story in height, and all three of the depot's brick interior chimneys were cut off and covered at the roofline. The north tower is visible in a circa 1910 photograph, appearing only one-story tall, as it does today [Traser, 104].

The building foundation consists of heavy piers and beams with brick and mortar infill in limited areas. Though originally the roof was covered with slate shingles—remnant fragments of which can still be found on site—the gabled mid-section, freight wing and pyramidal-roofed towers are now covered with standing-seam sheet metal installed during the first half of the 20th century. Most of the depot's segmental-arched windows have six-over-six or four-over-four wood sash and paneled aprons, and most of the doorways have divided-light transoms, but much of the glazing is currently missing and a majority of the apertures remain boarded up. Some of the sash were removed after the depot ceased operation and the openings were boarded up for many years. Fortunately, the window openings were not modified, and recently several new in-kind wooden sash were donated and installed. The new sash and a fresh coat of paint—the first in several decades—represent significant progress toward restoring the depot's original appearance.

While the building was once white with dark-colored trim, the entire building is now painted white, which is a substantial improvement to its appearance after decades of neglect, weathered paint, and deterioration. The building has been recently stabilized, but a great deal of rehabilitation is still needed.

The symmetry of the depot's original design is minimally interrupted by a small, 15-by-7-foot shed addition on the north elevation, near the front corner of the building. Presumably added during the first quarter of the 20th century, possibly in 1903 at the time of the freight-room addition, the shed incorporating four separate restrooms with toilets was added. Three of the restrooms are lighted by small, square, four-light windows in the north wall. The fourth restroom, one of two accessed from the historically segregated waiting room for African Americans, might have been lighted by an alternative means such as carbide or acetylene-fueled lighting.

Even before the large, rear addition for holding freight constructed in 1903, the depot was of the type known as a *combination depot*, with areas for both passengers and freight [Traser, 104]. Typical of the Jim Crow-era South, it had racially segregated waiting rooms for blacks and whites, the former being a cramped space within the north tower, and the latter being the larger front-central room between the two towers. The principal entrance to the depot, through folding doors and into the main (white) waiting room, is just around the southeast corner from the front of the building. A luggage area, also once used as a telegraph office, was within the south tower. The ticket master area and ticket booth was housed in the original rear room, which after the 1903 addition became the center room of the building. The rear, westernmost room of the building was the freight area, which occupies at least half of the overall building's floor space. It has four large, segmental-arched freight-loading openings with sliding wooden doors, two on the south (track-side) elevation and two on the north elevation. A pedestrian entrance is located on the west elevation, near the southwest corner of the building. The freight room was lighted by only two windows (also segmental-arched), directly across from each other on the north and south elevations, centered midway between the freight doors. Though most are currently boarded up, the window and door openings have not been modified.

In the passenger areas, the walls and ceilings are treated with 5-inch tongue-and-groove boards, some scored and beaded to simulate narrower, 2 ½-inch matchboards, and some plain, unscored and unbeaded. The wall boards are oriented vertically, with chair rails and wainscoting of the same, vertical beaded boards or five-inch unbeaded vertical boards. The windows and tall interior doorways feature molded trim, and the doorways have two-light transoms. The freight room interior is utilitarian in character, with scuffed wooden flooring, exposed stud walls, and made-in-place roof trusses composed of two-by-six-inch rafters nailed to a ridgeboard, crossties, and diagonal braces. The large freight doors slide horizontally on rollers at the top.

The rear loading dock for freight and passengers was removed for safety reasons, the railroad tracks still being active. The loading dock extended along the length of the freight room and wrapped around the southwest corner, terminating at the middle of the west elevation. The dock was accessed from inside the building or by steps at each end of the dock.

The depot is a rare and distinctive example in its functional category; its historic character defined not only by unusual massing, but by the craftsmanship embodied in its decorative features. These include the aforementioned vertical board-and-batten exterior cladding; roof(s) with flared, extended eaves; the full, classically inspired entablature with paired brackets at the corners and continuous modillion cornice; segmental-arched doors and windows, and originally an attractive two-tone paint color scheme.

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 grave

[ ] D. A cemetery

[ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure

[ ] F. A commemorative property

[ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
TRANSPORTATION
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
Ca. 1870 – 1965

Significant Dates
Ca. 1870
1903

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

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Railroad history in Wythe County began with the arrival of the Virginia & Tennessee (V&T) Railroad in 1856. However, the circa 1870 Rural Retreat Depot is one of only two known surviving railroad buildings in all of southwestern Virginia that were erected during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. Moreover, the Rural Retreat Depot is undoubtedly one of the oldest surviving railroad-related buildings found anywhere in the Commonwealth. Therefore it has local significance under Criterion A in the area of Transportation for its association with the history of the V&T, Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio (AM&O), and Norfolk & Western (N&W) Railways, which played a significant role in the development of Wythe County and much of Virginia. It is also locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as a rare surviving post-Civil War rail-related facility designed in a variant of the Italianate style that has been called Railroad style. The depot is a very well-known and highly esteemed historic landmark, owing in part to the paramount importance of the railroad in the post-1850 history of the area and region. Though passenger service reportedly continued until the early 1970s, the Rural Retreat Depot was retired from freight transport around 1965. Therefore its period of significance extends from its construction circa 1870 through its closing for railroad freight business ca. 1965.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Transportation

As a rare intact survival of the Reconstruction-era transportation system in Virginia and a relic of the seminal V&T, the Rural Retreat Depot is significant in the history of transportation at the local level. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Virginia's railroads provided considerable public benefits, including millions of dollars in tax revenue generated mainly by hauling freight. The railroads' importance during Reconstruction and the Industrial Revolution cannot be overstated. As an important agricultural, timbering, mining, and iron industry province, Wythe County was dependent on the railroad and its few local depots to export its most valuable commodities. The Rural Retreat Depot accommodated freight and passengers, and its location helped make the Town of Rural Retreat a prominent center of American cabbage production by the turn of the twentieth century.

Railroad Background

The Virginia & Tennessee (V&T) Railroad was completed from Lynchburg to the town of Big Lick (later the City of Roanoke) on November 1, 1852, and by October 1856 had extended its tracks through Wythe County and the small community then known as Mount Airy, to Bristol, Virginia, a total of 204 miles. With its shops constructed in Central City (now the City of Radford), the V&T was, for a time, a successful venture.

The Civil War abruptly interrupted all expansion plans, and the V&T was essentially commandeered by the Confederacy to transport troops and wartime supplies. Much of the V&T, including its many depots, was destroyed in June 1864 by Union troops under General George Stoneman. See further discussion of the raid, below.

"Mount Airy Depot" appears on W. W. Blackford's 1856 Virginia and Tennessee Railroad map, a short distance southeast of the community of Mount Airy, which straddled the Wythe/Smyth county line. Although it was not yet part of the AM&O Railroad holdings, the V&T and the Mt. Airy Depot were located along part of the AM&O route between Norfolk and Bristol, and thus the depot location is shown on Colton's 1867 AM&O map, in this case simply as "Mt. Airy." [See historic maps at end of Section 8.]

After the Civil War, the railroad industry flourished through consolidation of smaller lines into larger rail networks. Some of the depots destroyed in the war were rebuilt between 1868 and 1870. In 1870, Virginia's Southside, Norfolk & Petersburg, and V&T railroads were consolidated into the AM&O Railroad. The 428 miles of track between Norfolk and Bristol were serviced by one carrier. In 1873, the AM&O undertook an ambitious program of improvements to its tracks, trestles, switching facilities, and depots, which could have included the combination passenger/freight station at the Wythe County town of Rural Retreat, formerly the home of Mount Airy Post Office. [Though possibly built as early as 1868, some sources place the station's construction in 1873.]

The high costs associated with improvements, however, placed a heavy financial burden on the railroad, as did extensive flood damage in 1873 and 1876. In 1876, the AM&O Railroad went into receivership and on April 4, 1881, the entirety of its assets was sold at public auction. Philadelphia banker Clarence H. Clark purchased the AM&O and a new moniker, the Norfolk & Western Railroad, was chosen. The N&W continued its operations along existing tracks, and also built or acquired new lines accessing the coalfields and timber operations of Southwest Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky.

By the early 1890s vast mining and timbering operations could be reached by the N&W network of tracks; however, the nationally severe economic recession of 1893–1894 caused reduced demand for industrial fuels and brought the N&W Railroad to the brink of collapse in 1895. The company reorganized as the Norfolk & Western Railway (as opposed to *Railroad*) with its headquarters in Roanoke, and the freight-hauling business rebounded. Nearly a century later, in 1982, the N&W combined with the Southern Railway to form the Norfolk Southern Railway, which maintains the active freight line on which the historic Rural Retreat Depot is located.

Criterion C: Architecture

As a rare intact example of an Italianate-style, combination passenger and freight station dating to the post-Civil War era in rural Virginia, the Rural Retreat Depot is highly significant in the architectural history of the Commonwealth. Because railroads in Virginia changed ownership after the war, many of them multiple times, and because architectural fashions changed rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Rural Retreat Depot provides an exceptional representation of rail-related buildings from its era of construction. Subsequent railroad

buildings, particularly those built after the 1870s, barely resembled earlier examples. Towers and Italianate detailing were a thing of the past, though board-and-batten cladding continued to be a mainstay for frame depots well into the twentieth century. Countless depots were built in rural areas by the N&W after the company's formation in 1881. Most of these had unmodified rectangular plans and simple gable roofs with deeply overhanging eaves and elbow brackets. Much more elaborate stations were built in especially prosperous small towns along the main line through the southern Valley of Virginia, such as Abingdon, Bristol, Marion, Pulaski, and Wytheville. Stylistically, railroad architecture in the United States became even more identifiable as its own separate category during the heyday of the N&W and its competitors.

Architectural Context and Construction Date

The early history of the railroads in southwestern Virginia is poorly documented, especially the years preceding the formation of the N&W in 1881. Because the V&T Railroad depot at Mount Airy was destroyed during the Civil War, some secondary sources place the depot's construction in 1866, the year immediately following the end of hostilities, and the year Mount Airy Depot and its surroundings became the Town of Rural Retreat. However, rebuilding the depot so soon after the war is not consistent with known economic conditions of the period. To the contrary, it appears the first 2-3 years following the war were a transitional period that preceded actual physical reconstruction of most infrastructures, especially those built with a sense of permanence like the Rural Retreat Depot. Other secondary sources place the date of Mt. Airy's construction at 1873, but fail to cite a primary source. Nevertheless, it seems likely that it was constructed before the end of 1873. Though the V&T as a commercial entity survived the war, it became part of the AM&O in 1870. The AM&O, however, fell on hard times during the Panic of 1873, continued to struggle thereafter, and very likely had no capital for new infrastructure going forward. The N&W was formed in 1881, incorporating the former V&T/AM&O lines and infrastructure, but also building dozens of new freight and passenger stations, none of which would bear any close resemblance to the Rural Retreat or Christiansburg depots.

The massing of the Rural Retreat Depot appears to have been unique, at least among documented examples of railroad buildings. For comparison, the only other extant Reconstruction-era depot in southwestern Virginia is the Christiansburg Depot, built on the same V&T/AM&O rail line, 56 miles northwest of Rural Retreat, and also reconstructed after its predecessor was destroyed by Union troops during the Civil War. The somewhat similarly designed Christiansburg Depot (NRHP 1985; DHR #154-0048-0001), is generally accepted to have been completed between 1868 and 1870, during the rebuilding campaign led by V&T president William Mahone, though the National Register nomination is not absolutely clear on the source of these dates. The two depots are physically alike in many aspects. In terms of massing, they appear to have been designed almost as opposites. The Rural Retreat Depot is composed of a projecting mid-section flanked by taller towers, while the Christiansburg Depot has an inset two-story tower-like midsection flanked by projecting one-story wings. Furthermore, the Italianate-style decorative features of the two buildings are very much alike.

The N&W inherited other early-period Virginia stations with similar Italianate detailing (although with dissimilar massing), in Concord, Ivor, Max Meadows, Salem, Shawsville, Suffolk, Vinton, and Windsor. Of these, the most similar to Rural Retreat's depot were the Max

Meadows depot (in eastern Wythe County), which had only one tower but was otherwise nearly identical; Salem's long-demolished station, which had flanking towers but round-arched fenestration; and Christiansburg's aforementioned former station, which features a central tower and segmental-arched fenestration [Traser, 79, 88, 99, 100, 104].

Published books such as Traser's *Virginia Railroad Depots* and Gilbert's *Crossties to the Depot* Series include historic photos of hundreds of Virginia depots outside of what became the N&W system, none of which resemble the Rural Retreat Depot in massing or exterior architectural treatments. Moreover, an excellent collection of historic photographs depicting approximately two hundred N&W depots and hundreds of other rail-related buildings is available for viewing online at the Virginia Tech Library Special Collections website. This collection allows easy comparison of early depot styles versus later styles employed by railroad engineers, though unfortunately, very few construction dates are documented.

Historical Background

The Town of Rural Retreat and the Depot

The earliest known local use of the name Rural Retreat is credited to a minister who performed marriages in the area. His records from 1826 in the Wythe County clerk's office were recorded at "Rural Retreat." The first local post office founded in 1833, in the vicinity of the Mount Airy community, also took the name Rural Retreat. The community that would become the Town of Rural Retreat was created after the railroad reached the area in December 1854. The post office was moved to the depot area in 1858 [Kegley, 2011:2-3]. The land for the station was conveyed to the V&T Railroad from Lewis D. Hancock, who had acquired the parcel the previous year. Prominent local landholder Solomon Buck also sold a parcel of land to the V&T Railroad. The station was first known as Mount Airy Depot, but when it was reconstructed after the war the name was changed to Rural Retreat Depot to coincide with that of the post office. The name change also eliminated confusion between Mt. Airy, Virginia, and Mt. Airy, North Carolina. The rail line's route was governed by the topography of the Great Valley, as was the Valley Road before it, also known as the Great Road (now U.S. Route 11). After breaking through the Blue Ridge west of Lynchburg, Virginia, the rail line simply followed the Valley from Big Lick (now Roanoke, Virginia) to Bristol, Tennessee, leading it in a northeast to southwest direction. Although local landholders typically desired a rail route in close proximity to their lands and many stood to profit from the railroad, there was little they could do to affect the route alignment. Construction of the depot immediately spawned growth of the town, as lots adjacent to the depot were sold in 1855 and 1856 and quickly built upon by local merchants.

1864 Civil War Raid on the Mount Airy (Rural Retreat) Depot

During the Civil War, the V&T Railroad played an important strategic role for the Confederacy as a major supply and troop movement route between Richmond, Virginia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. Union Cavalry raids in 1863 and 1864 temporarily interrupted railroad operations.

Late in 1864, however, Union forces made a concerted attack on the railroad, destroying infrastructure and rolling stock at key points along the line. On December 17, 1864, Union

Calvary, reportedly under the command of Col. Harvey M. Buckley, started a fire of hay bales that destroyed the Mount Airy Depot. Buckley and his 54th Kentucky Mounted Infantry Regiment are known to have taken part in Union Major General George Stoneman's Raid into southwest Virginia December 10–29, 1864, aimed at destroying Confederate infrastructure. [Some sources name the Michigan 10 Brigade as the depot's saboteurs.] The Union Cavalry's path of destruction led through Wytheville, to the nearby lead mines and smelting facilities, and through Mount Airy en route to Marion, Virginia, where a relatively minor battle known as the Battle of Marion took place on December 17th and 18th. They then captured and destroyed the strategically important salt works at Saltville, Virginia, on December 20th and 21st. The engagement with Confederate Major General John C. Breckinridge's troops became known as the Second Battle of Saltville.

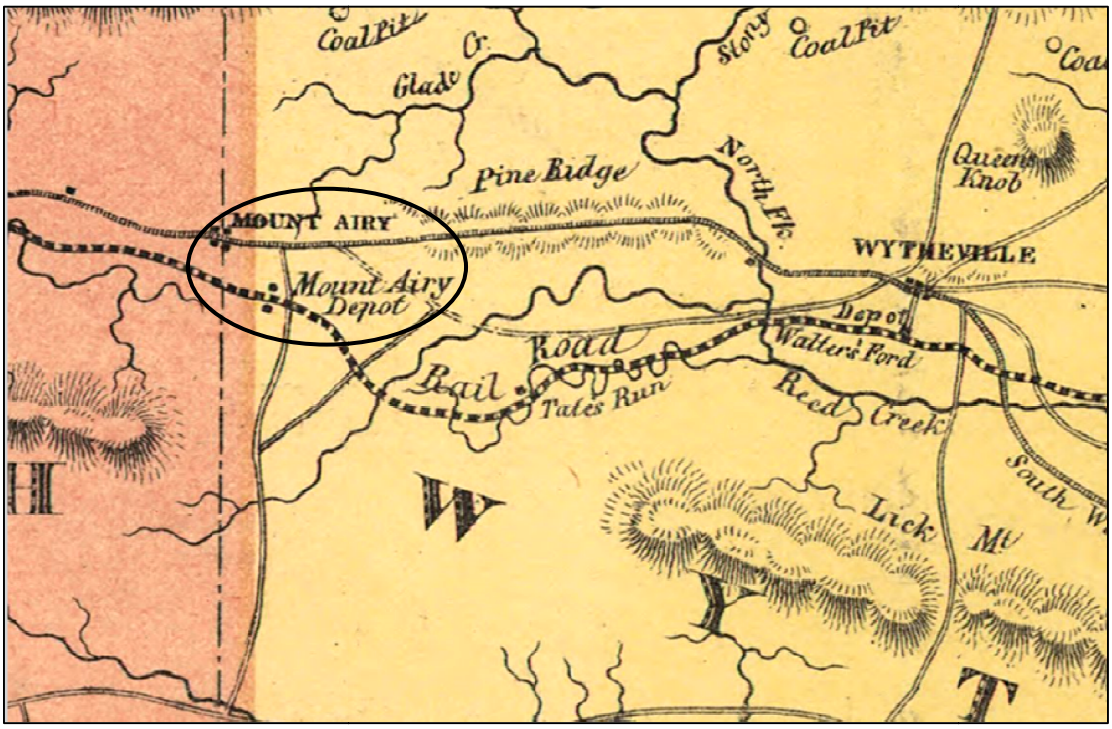
Rural Retreat /Depot in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

With many local items being shipped from the depot, the community swiftly grew in population with Rural Retreat building up around the depot. The depot was an important hub of agricultural, commercial, and personal traffic. The depot, which received all local mail for transfer to the post office, used a hook to catch bags of mail held out of trains as they passed hurriedly by. Adjacent to the depot were railroad tracks for various purposes: the main track, a station track for loading and unloading cars, a passing track, and a rail spur to a coal yard [Beckett, 4].

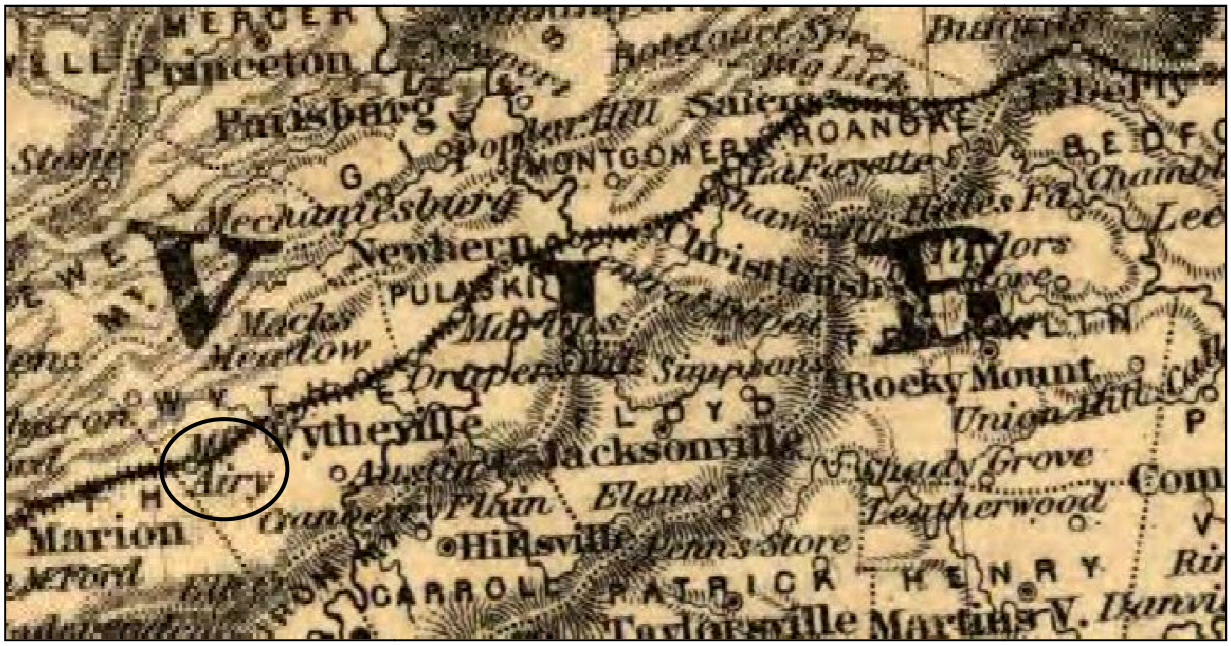
During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, western Wythe County was a leading cabbage production area in the United States, and the Town of Rural Retreat, with vast quantities of cabbage being shipped out of its depot, became popularly known as the cabbage capital of the world. In 1887, 313 railcar loads of cabbage were shipped from Wythe County, 299 of which were shipped out of Rural Retreat [Kegley, 2011:4]. In 1888, a Rural Retreat newspaper reported that over seven million pounds of cabbage had been produced in a single season [Traser, 104]. Local production shipped out of the depot continued to grow through the early- to mid-twentieth century. In addition to tons of cabbage, locally produced commodities included canned sauerkraut from a factory in the nearby Crockett community, beef cattle, pig iron from nearby furnaces, and bottled mineral spring water from Wyrick Springs. An 1892 article in the *Southwest Virginia Enterprise* noted that Rural Retreat was "growing as fast as any town could" [Beckett, 4]. The Town of Rural Retreat was incorporated in 1911. In 1913, the *Rural Retreat Times* reported that the town had fourteen stores, two hotels, a broom factory, a roller mill and power plant, motion picture theatre, two banks, three churches, numerous boarding houses, and one of the best schools in the state. The town's busiest period occurred between about 1916 and the mid-1930s, by which time the Great Depression had stymied economic growth nationwide [Kegley, 2011:4].

In 1957, O. Winston Link, the pioneer of night photography best known for his black-and-white photographs and sound recordings of the last days of steam locomotives on the N&W, captured an acclaimed nighttime photograph of the Birmingham Special steam engine as it passed the Rural Retreat Depot. Later published in his book, *Steam, Steel and Stars*, it is said to have been one of his favorite photographs.

Freight service at the Rural Retreat Depot ceased by around 1965, and passenger service was discontinued by the 1970s, after which the depot itself was transferred from the N&W into private hands. The railroad continued to hold the parcel on which the depot was located, a circumstance which, regrettably, was regarded by the building's owner(s) as a disincentive toward any capital investment in the building. Between the 1970s and 2011, the depot was provided no maintenance and allowed to deteriorate. Finally, in August 2011, the newly created Rural Retreat Depot Foundation obtained the deed to the depot. Within the few months that followed, the town of Rural Retreat obtained the depot parcel from Norfolk Southern Railroad and negotiated with the foundation for a long-term lease agreement that would provide for maintenance of the building.



Section of W. W. Blackford, "Map and Profile of the Virginia and Tennessee Rail Road," 1856.



Section of G. W. Colton and C. B. & Co. "A Map Showing the Atlantic Mississippi and Ohio R.R. and Its Connections from Norfolk to Cumberland Gap to Bristol," 1867.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Colton, G. W. and C. B. & Co. "A Map Showing the Atlantic Mississippi and Ohio R.R. and Its Connections from Norfolk to Cumberland Gap to Bristol," 1867. Library of Congress 1828-1900 Railroad Maps Collection.

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Link, O. Winston. *Night Trick on the Norfolk and Western Railway. 1957.*

_____ . *Steam, Steel and Stars: America's Last Steam Railroad.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987.

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Striplin, E. F. Pat. *The Norfolk & Western: A History*. Revised edition. Norfolk & Western Historical Society, 1997.

Traser, Donald R., *Virginia Railway Depots*. National Railway Historical Society, 1998.

Worsham, Gibson and Charlotte Worsham. "Christiansburg Depot, Christiansburg, Virginia." National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1985.

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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:
_x__ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 292-5001

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.893811 Longitude: -81.276450

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nomination applies only to the depot itself and a narrow margin of land around it. The boundary is shown on the accompanying map entitled "Rural Retreat Depot, Town of Rural Retreat, Wythe County, Virginia, Site Plan/Aerial View."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Because the depot is closely hemmed in by Railroad Avenue, which circles around the north, east, and west sides of the building, and by the railroad tracks on the south side, the proposed National Register boundary is drawn to include only the depot itself and a narrow margin of land around it. There are no other surviving resources historically associated with the depot.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael J. Pulice, Architectural Historian
organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources
street & number: 962 Kime Lane
city or town: Salem state: VA zip code: 24153
e-mail: michael.pulice@dhr.virginia.gov
telephone: 540-387-5443
date: April 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photo Log

Name of Property: Rural Retreat Railroad Depot

City or Vicinity: Town of Rural Retreat

County: Wythe State: Virginia

Photographer: Michael J. Pulice

Date Photographed: October, 2012 (photos 1-4) and January, 2014 (photos 5-9)

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1. Depot, east (front) elevation.
2. Depot, looking northwest.
3. Depot, looking south-southwest.
4. Depot, front section, looking north.
5. Depot prior to repainting exterior, looking east-northeast.
6. Depot, central interior, south passenger entrance, looking south-southwest.
7. Depot, interior, ticket windows, looking north-northwest.
8. Depot, interior, south tower, east (front) passenger entrance, looking east.
9. Depot, interior, freight room, looking west.
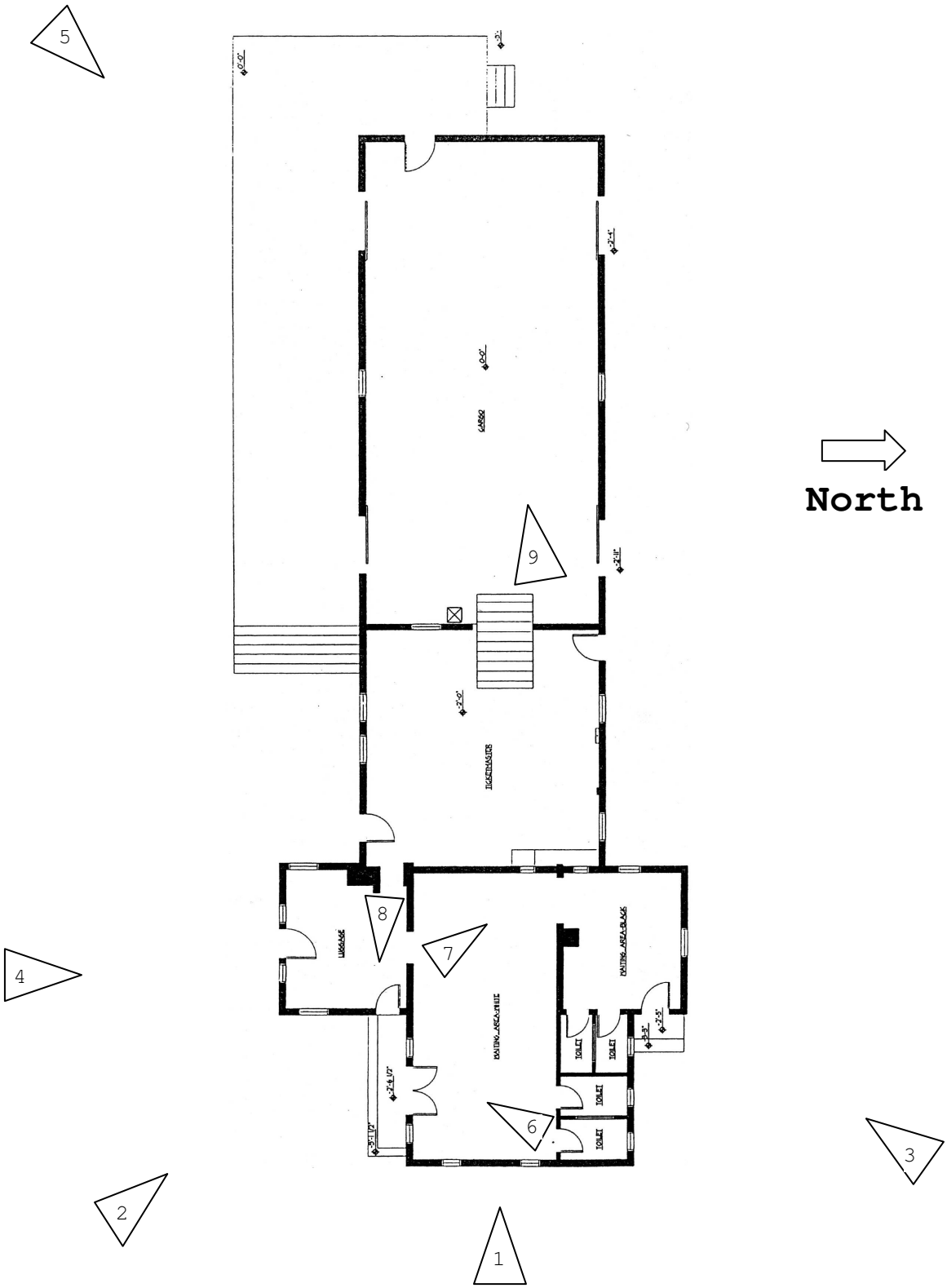
PHOTO KEY. [Plan drawing by The Lane Group, Wytheville, Va. Photo number and direction is indicated by numbered arrows.]