

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 PropertyHistoric name: Pennington Gap Commercial Historic DistrictOther names/site number: DHR #281-5002Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: W. Morgan Avenue, E. Morgan Street, Magnolia Street, Main Street, N. Kentucky StreetCity or town: Pennington Gap State: VA County: LeeNot For Publication: Vicinity: **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 ___ C ___ D_____
Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
DateVirginia 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
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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:

☒

Public – Local

☒

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☐

District

☒

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>32</u>	<u>5</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>32</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

SOCIAL: meeting hall

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style
MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE, BRICK, METAL, SYNTHETICS

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 Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District encompasses the commercial core of the town of Pennington Gap that served both the local population as well as residents of the surrounding rural areas and nearby coal camps of Lee County. Located at the lowest and flattest area of the Powell River Valley, Pennington Gap provided a natural access point to the rich natural resources in the surrounding region. The approximately 8.84-acre district includes the ca. 1890 Cumberland Valley Branch Line of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, which remains an active line running through the center of the district, as well as the commercial, social, and entertainment resources constructed during the first three quarters of the twentieth century. The district is generally bounded by Anderson Street to the east, Stanberry Street to the west, the railroad tracks to the south, and terminates at 215 Main Street to the north. The surrounding areas are largely residential in character. The one- and two-story masonry buildings comprising the town's commercial core include small-scale stores and office buildings, a movie theater, a former social hall, two former automobile dealerships, and two former service stations that are sited along sidewalks and curbs with no setbacks. Architecturally, the buildings represent the evolution of the Commercial style throughout the twentieth century and reflect the socio-economic character of a modest working-class town in rural Appalachia. The district comprises 37 buildings, of which 35 are primary resources and two are secondary resources. Of the total resources, 32 are contributing with a moderate level of integrity and five are non-contributing; thereby giving the district integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

Narrative Description

The Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District is located in the incorporated town of Pennington Gap in Lee County, Virginia. The southwestern-most county in Virginia, Lee County is bordered by Tennessee

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to the south and Kentucky to the north and west. The Cumberland Mountains and Powell River extend through the county, creating a topography characterized by rolling hills, fertile valleys, and steep mountain ridges. The northern section of the county features rich natural resources of coal and timber, which historically served as the main economic driver, while the southern section is more agricultural featuring small-scale subsistence farms. The Wilderness Road – the trail used by Native Americans, frontiersmen, and pioneers to access the western frontier through Cumberland Gap – also extends through Lee County and is known today as Route 58. Although Pennington Gap is the largest of the three towns in Lee County, Jonesville serves as the county seat. Located in the northern end of the county at the lowest and flattest area of the Powell River Valley, the incorporated town limits of Pennington Gap occupy 1.5-square miles at an elevation approximately 1,500 feet above sea level. Two major roads, US Route 421 and US Route 58A (Morgan Avenue) intersect at the east end of town. The main line of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, operated since 1971 by the Seaboard Coastline Railroad, runs along the southern boundary of the district with a spur line, the Cumberland Valley Branch, extending north-south through the center of town. Cane Creek, a tributary of the North Fork of the Powell River, flows south of the district, parallel to the main railroad line.

The district is generally laid out in a grid pattern, although the side streets are angular as they follow the topography of the surrounding mountains. The topography throughout the district is hilly with the lowest point occurring at the intersection of Morgan Avenue and Kentucky Street. Morgan Avenue (US Route 58A) is the main artery through the district, extending east to west. Cross streets include N. Kentucky Street, Main Street (formerly Railroad Avenue), and S. Johnson Drive. A portion of Magnolia Street, which runs parallel to Morgan Avenue, is included in the district. Although the combination freight and passenger depot, constructed by 1893 at the intersection of Joslyn Avenue, Kentucky Street, and Main Street (formerly W. Railroad Avenue), has been demolished, the Cumberland Valley Branch continues as an active rail line through the center of the district. All streets feature curbs and sidewalks with gooseneck metal streetlights. Short blocks of primarily one- and two-story commercial buildings sited at grade with no setback characterize the district. Many of the buildings feature historic, flat, metal awnings and non-historic fabric and pent awnings that extend over the public sidewalks. The Lee Theater (281-5002-0001) stands as the only three-story building and the sole surviving entertainment resource in the district.

Commercial Resources

The commercial core of town developed from the establishment of the railroad in 1890 well into the third quarter of the twentieth century with resources in the historic district dating between ca. 1925 and ca. 1965. Most of the growth in Pennington Gap occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, when the lumber and coal industries flourished throughout Southwest Virginia. Many of the commercial buildings erected in Pennington Gap during that time – such as hardware stores, grocery and dry goods stores, a bank, drug stores, automobile dealerships and repair shops, and an undertaker – provided a full complement of goods and services to the residents of town as well as the miners, loggers, and farmers of the surrounding rural area and coal camps. Except for the Lee Theater (281-5002-0001), all resources in the district are commercial in function. The majority of these operated as small-scale, local retail stores with even the one social hall featuring a commercial retail space on the first floor. Five of the commercial resources were associated with national companies and often reflected their corporate branding in either their building design or signage, including the ca. 1930 Chevrolet dealership (281-5002-0022), the ca. 1945 Exxon service station (281-5002-0020), the ca. 1950 Ford dealership (281-5002-0016), the ca. 1950 Texaco Service Station (281-5002-0034), and the ca. 1965 Piggly Wiggly grocery store (281-5002-0023). Influenced by the Main Street Commercial style, the majority of the commercial buildings in the district are modest in detailing and materials as they reflect the socio-economic means and practical values of the working-class residents of Pennington Gap and the surrounding rural area.

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The historic district includes sixteen commercial buildings constructed between ca. 1925 and ca. 1941 that represent the period of development prior to World War II. The majority of these resources functioned as commercial businesses or stores, including: the ca. 1930 Odd Fellows Hall at 179 N. Kentucky Street (281-5002-0005), which featured a commercial storefront on the first floor; the ca. 1938 “five & dime” store at 133 Main Street (281-5002-0010); and the ca. 1930 Chevrolet dealership at 41798 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0022). Featuring brick facades articulated with corbelled brick at the roofline and either segmental-arched or soldier-brick lintels over upper-story windows and recessed entrances flanked by large display windows, the commercial buildings in the district built during this period are typical examples of the Main Street Commercial style during the early-twentieth century. The ca. 1925 store at 41751 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0017) exemplifies this style with a façade of extruded brick, segmental arches surmounting the upper-story windows, corbelled brick detailing the roofline, and transom windows extending across the storefront. The two-story brick store at 41830 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0027), built ca. 1930, is another example with brick corbeling at the roofline, a row of soldier bricks above the windows, and a recessed central entrance flanked by sidelights, a transom, and plate-glass display windows on a tiled bulkhead. The two-story ca. 1940 commercial building at 149 Main Street (281-5002-0015) is a later example of the Main Street Commercial style built prior to World War II. The evolution of the style is evident in the parapeted roof, which continues to feature corbelled brick detailing, industrial steel-sash upper windows, aluminum-frame storefront windows flanking the recessed central entrance, and a flat metal awning extending across the storefront.

The national sense of prosperity following World War II was experienced in Pennington Gap as well with the town’s population reaching a peak of 2,090 in 1950. This growth is evident in the fifteen commercial resources constructed in the decade immediately following the war, including the ca. 1950 Gibson’s Clothing Store at 103 Main Street (281-5002-0007), the ca. 1945 Exxon service station at 41780 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0020) and the ca. 1950 Ford dealership at 215 Main Street (281-5002-0016). The three additional resources constructed in the 1960s demonstrate the continued vitality of Pennington Gap as a commercial center for the region. Notably, the ca. 1960 Texaco service station at 41709 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0034), with its classic “icebox” design, and the ca. 1965 Piggly-Wiggly grocery store at 41815 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0023) represent the growing presence of national companies with their easily recognized brands in Pennington Gap. The three new automobile-related resources also reflect the growing dependence on automobiles for transportation during the second half of the twentieth century.

The Main Street Commercial Style continued to dominate the architectural character of Pennington Gap during this period. The use of new materials – such as concrete, steel, aluminum, and plate glass – along with a more simplified aesthetic with minimal detailing marked a subtle evolution of the style. The rows of ca. 1945-1952 commercial buildings along the north side of the 41600 block of W. Main Street – including 41669 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0029), 41679 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0030), 41685 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0031), 41691 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0032), and 41699 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0033) – are a relatively intact collection of one- and two-story commercial buildings that reflect this evolution of the style. The buildings feature facades characterized by brick veneer, aluminum-frame plate glass storefront windows, and second-story window openings with rowlock brick sills. The ca. 1950 one-story commercial building at 41773 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0018) is a similar, but smaller scale, example of the style with modest corbeling at the roofline and a brick soldier course above the storefront. The plate glass storefront windows, which rest on a tiled bulkhead and flank a recessed central entrance, are sheltered by a historic flat metal awning.

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Several new resources related to the sale and service of automobiles were built in the district during this period as the automobile became the preferred mode of transportation nationally as well as in Pennington Gap. The one-story, former auto showroom at 215 Main Street (281-5002-0016) was built ca. 1950 for Ford Motor Co. and is architecturally distinctive with its brick corbeling along the roofline, brick pilasters dividing the façade into three distinct bays, and two aluminum-frame storefront systems. Industrial influences are clear in the multi-light, industrial steel sash windows on the rear elevation and the garage bays on the façade as well as the south side addition. Located at the prominent intersection of E. Morgan Avenue and Kentucky Street, the former Texaco service station (281-5002-0034), built ca. 1960 at 41709 W. Morgan Avenue, is a classic example of the “icebox” design developed by Walter Dorwin Teague for the Texaco brand in 1937. It is one of the most prolific station types in the country. Although the building no longer functions as a Texaco service station, the easily recognizable design is still relatively intact.

The Piggly Wiggly grocery store, built ca. 1965 at 41815 E. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0023), is an example of a typical grocery store constructed in the post-World War II era. The one-story brick building features inset entrances at the front corner and a horizontal band of aluminum-frame windows spanning the façade. Representative of this national chain of grocery stores, a metal pylon sign with an angled post extends through and above the awning.

Entertainment/Recreational Resources

Pennington Gap not only served as a commercial and transportation center for the surrounding rural areas and coal camps, but as a social and entertainment center as well. Historically, the town featured such attractions as a movie theater, a bowling alley, a miniature golf course, two fraternal meeting halls, and a baseball field; however, only two of these resources remain extant in the district while the baseball field continues to be used as part of a larger town park outside of the district. The ca. 1930 fraternal meeting hall at 179 N. Kentucky Street (281-5002-0005) is an example of a resource in the district constructed for social purposes. This former Odd Fellows Hall is a two-story building that features exterior rock face concrete block walls, upper-story windows, and a central front entrance. The original fenestration pattern remains evident although the door and window openings contain non-historic materials. Historically, a commercial entity occupied the first story while the meeting hall was located on the second floor.

The sole surviving entertainment-related resource in the historic district is the Lee Theater at 41676 W. Morgan Avenue (281-5002-0001). Constructed 1945–1946 in the Moderne style with Art Deco influences, this three-story masonry building features wide brick pilasters edging the brick façade. A brick parapet with modest brick corbeling embellishes the roof line. The recessed, double-leaf entrances flank the ticket window. A replica of the historic marquee was installed ca. 2013. The original terrazzo floor remains intact in the lobby. This prominent building serves as an anchor to the district as the tallest building in town as well as regional attraction.

Statement of Integrity

The majority of the resources in the historic district retains integrity of location and setting, as the resources continue to occupy their original lots along Morgan Avenue, Kentucky Street, Main Street, and Johnson Drive with the railroad tracks extending north-south through the district. While some of the commercial buildings have been modified, they continue to provide sufficient integrity of feeling and association in the district to reflect the historic role of the town as a commercial center for the surrounding areas. Most of the buildings have a moderate level of integrity of design, workmanship, and materials due to alterations. In spite of the removal of original fabric and features and/or the introduction of additions and new materials, the historic vernacular designs of the commercial and entertainment buildings remain evident, and the

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buildings retain sufficient integrity to convey their historic functions, forms, and dates of construction. As with most evolved districts that are over 100 years old, there are instances of storefront remodeling, replacement doors and windows, and the addition of pent roofs, pent awnings, and fabric awnings. However, these alterations are not cumulative to a point that obscures the historic form, building type, and period of construction of the contributing resource. In limited cases where the historic form or design of a building constructed within the period of significance (ca. 1890–1973) has been altered to such an extent that it no longer conveys its historic function or period of construction, the historic resource is identified as non-contributing. Alterations of this magnitude are limited and include significant changes to roof forms, changes to the size and/or shape of historic window and door openings, and covering of the facade with non-historic materials such as stucco. Only one resource dates to after the period of significance and is identified as non-contributing.

INVENTORY

The following inventory lists the resources within the Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District. It is organized alphabetically by street name and then numerically by street number. Each entry provides the address, building name (if applicable), date of construction, architectural style, current building use, VDHR File number, and the contributing status within the district. Whether a building is considered contributing or non-contributing was determined based on its physical integrity (intact historic materials) as it supports the historic district's significance under Criterion A (Commerce and Entertainment) during the Period of Significance (ca. 1890–1973). Resources are keyed to the Sketch Map/Photo Key by their numerical street address.

JOHNSON DRIVE

South 119 Johnson Drive **281-5002-0002** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total: 1*

KENTUCKY STREET

North 137 Kentucky Street **281-5002-0003** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940**
Contributing *Total: 1*

North 171 Kentucky Street **281-5002-0004** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1960**
Contributing *Total: 1*
Secondary Resource: **Other (Building)** **Non-contributing** *Total: 1*

North 179 Kentucky Street **281-5002-0005** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Meeting/Fellowship Hall (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Contributing *Total: 1*

MAGNOLIA STREET

163 Magnolia Street **281-5002-0006** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total: 1*

MAIN STREET

103 Main Street **281-5002-0007** *Other DHR Id#:*

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Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950**
Contributing *Total:* 1

117 Main Street **281-5002-0008** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1941**
Contributing *Total:* 1

128 Main Street **281-5002-0009** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Contributing *Total:* 1

133 Main Street **281-5002-0010** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1938**
Contributing *Total:* 1

134 Main Street **281-5002-0011** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total:* 1

140 Main Street **281-5002-0012** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1925**
Contributing *Total:* 1

144 Main Street **281-5002-0013** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940**
Contributing *Total:* 1

148 Main Street **281-5002-0014** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1925**
Contributing *Total:* 1

149 Main Street **281-5002-0015** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940**
Contributing *Total:* 1

215 Main Street **281-5002-0016** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Automobile Showroom (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950**
Contributing *Total:* 1

MORGAN AVENUE
East 41751 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0017** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1925**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41773 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0018** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41779 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0019** *Other DHR Id#:*

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Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Non-contributing *Total:* 1

East 41780 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0020** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41790 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0021** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 2012**
Non-contributing *Total:* 1

East 41798 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0022** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Automobile Showroom (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Non-contributing *Total:* 1

East 41815 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0023** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Other, Ca 1965**
Contributing *Total:* 1
Secondary Resource: **Shed (Building)** **Non-contributing** *Total:* 1

East 41822 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0024** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41826 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0025** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41829 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0026** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41830 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0027** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930**
Contributing *Total:* 1

East 41844 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0028** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950**
Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41669 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0029** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41675 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0030** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**
Contributing *Total:* 1

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West 41676 Morgan Avenue **281-5001** *Other DHR Id#:* 281-5002-0001
Primary Resource: **Theater (Building), Stories 3, Style: Moderne, 1946**

Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41685 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0031** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**

Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41691 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0032** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1945**

Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41699 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0033** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, 1952**

Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41709 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0034** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Service Station (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1960**

Contributing *Total:* 1

West 41733 Morgan Avenue **281-5002-0035** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: **Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940**

Contributing *Total:* 1

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or 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

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance

ca. 1890–1973

Significant Dates

1892

1946

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District in Lee County, Virginia, is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, and Entertainment/Recreation. The district comprises the historic commercial core of the town of Pennington Gap, which served as the primary transportation, business, and entertainment center for residents of the surrounding rural area and coal camp communities. Situated at the lowest and flattest point along the Powell River Valley, Pennington Gap provided a natural access point to the wealth of natural resources, particularly coal and timber, in the northern section of the county. Initially platted in the early 1890s by the Pennington Gap Land Improvement Company and chartered as a town in 1892, Pennington Gap developed around the Cumberland Valley Branch of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. Although the depot has been demolished, the pivotal role of the railroad in the development of the town and the coal industry is evident as the main railroad tracks run along the southern boundary of the district with a spur line connecting to St. Charles extending through the center of town. Resources in the district comprise commercial buildings, two service stations, a social hall, and a movie theater. The extant resources, constructed between ca. 1925 and 1965, represent the period during which Pennington Gap served as the transportation, commercial, institutional, social, and entertainment center for the rural area and coal camps of the northern region of the county. Although Pennington Gap is the largest town in the county, its architectural character reflects the modest means of the working-class mining, logging, and agricultural communities it served. The period of significance for the Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District begins ca. 1890 with the construction of the railroad and the platting of the town by the Pennington Gap Land Improvement Company. As the town continued to serve in its role as the transportation, commercial, institutional, social, and entertainment center for the northern region of Lee County with the rail line remaining active and the population continuing to increase in the 1970s, the period of significance extends to 1973 as the fifty-year mark for a district that continues to have significance during the recent past. This period also encompasses the significant dates of 1892, when the town was officially chartered, and the 1946 opening of the Lee Theater.

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

Justification of Criteria

Criterion A: Commerce

The Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Commerce for its important role as the largest town in Lee County and the primary commercial and transportation center in the northern section of the county that served the surrounding region of mining camps, farms, and logging operations from the 1890s through the 1970s. Located at the lowest and flattest area of the Powell River Valley, Pennington Gap provided a natural access point to the coal and timber resources of the region. This prompted the Louisville and Nashville Railway to extend its line to Pennington Gap and construct the Cumberland Valley Branch to St. Charles and the surrounding coalfields in the early 1890s. With the railroad providing freight and passenger service to the region, numerous mining camps sprang up in northern Lee County. The Pennington Gap Improvement Company formed in 1890 “for the purpose of purchasing, acquiring, holding and conveying lands and interest” and “erecting and maintaining bridges, dams, dwellings, structures, stores, storehouses, offices and hotels.”¹ Between 1900 and 1910, the population of Pennington Gap nearly doubled from 399 to 792, as it grew to become the center for commercial activity and transportation services for the northern section of the county. While the coal towns

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typically had their own commissary or company store, Pennington Gap served as a centralized location at a transportation hub of roads and rail lines with a full complement of commercial enterprises that provided goods and services to town residents as well as the surrounding rural and mining communities. By 1910, businesses and institutions in Pennington Gap included a hotel, several general stores, a laundry, a hardware store, a bank, grocery stores, several churches, a school, and the sole licensed undertaker in the county. As the population nearly doubled again between 1910 and 1930 from 792 to 1,553, the businesses and associated services provided by the town increased as well. By 1933, the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps recorded the town as having several stores, a bank, drug store, three automobile sales and/or service enterprises, a filling station, hotel, bakery, dry cleaning business, and a "prints and Oil" store, as well as a movie theater, bowling alley, and miniature golf course. Civic infrastructure and institutional buildings in town, but largely outside of the district, included two schools, a post office, a hospital, and several churches. In addition to the nearby mining camps, there were three enterprises associated with the lumber industry, including two planing mills and a lumber yard, on the outskirts of town.² With 33 of the 35 resources in the historic district associated with commerce, the Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District clearly reflects the important role the town played as a commercial center for the region.

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

The historic district is significant on the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation as it served as the primary location for leisure activities for both town residents and inhabitants of the surrounding rural area and mining camps. Entertainment and recreation were especially important in Appalachia as a much-needed escape from the dangers of coal mining and the hard life of the working class residents. As the largest town in Lee County and the commercial center for the northern section of the county, Pennington Gap offered entertainment and recreation to the surrounding region in addition to the goods and services provided by its commercial businesses. By 1933, the town included a movie theater, bowling alley, miniature golf course, and a baseball field. Following the destruction of the original movie theater by fire, the prominent Laningham family built a new "state-of-the-art" theater in 1946. The Lee Theater was reported to be "a real asset to the town of Pennington Gap and one of the best show houses in Southwest Virginia."³ Baseball was another popular distraction from the work of the coal mines and many towns and coal camps fielded teams in either the coalfield or the minor league. The Town built Leeman Field in 1933 and supported a local baseball team, the "Pennington Miners (formerly the Pennington Gap Lee Bears)," a minor-league team that competed in the Appalachia and the Mountain States leagues from 1937 to 1951.⁴ These various entertainment and recreational activities provided escape from the hard and dangerous labor of the coal mines, lumber mills, and tobacco farms while also promoting a sense of friendly competition and a sense of community. While the bowling alley and miniature golf course are no longer extant and Leeman Field is located outside the district, the prominence of the Lee Theater stands as testimony to the importance of entertainment and recreation to the residents of Pennington Gap and the surrounding area.

Criterion A: Transportation

The Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Transportation as the establishment of the town was directly related to the extension of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in the early 1890s. The town served a critical role as the primary transportation center for the northern section of Lee County. Located at the lowest and flattest area of the Powell River Valley, Pennington Gap provided a natural access point to the rich natural resources of the region. Prior to the arrival of the railroad in Lee County, the vast coal and timber resources were relatively undeveloped as there was no economical access to markets. In the early 1890s, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad extended its line from Corbin, Kentucky to Norton, Virginia, with a stop in Pennington Gap, and constructed the Cumberland Valley Branch through the center of town to connect to St. Charles and the

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coalfields. With the railroad providing freight and passenger service to the northern section of Lee County by way of Pennington Gap, numerous mining camps sprang up in the area. With the construction of a combination freight and passenger depot (demolished) at the intersection of Railroad Avenue (now Main Street), Kentucky Street, and Joslyn Avenue by 1893, Pennington Gap served as the primary transportation hub for the surrounding area of mining camps, farms, and logging operations. The railroad also created local jobs as well as the consumer demand for and shipment of commercial goods and services that supported the town as the primary center of commerce for the region. Although the depot is no longer extant, the still-active main line forming the district boundary to the south and the branch line running through the center of town support this area of significance, as the rail lines clearly demonstrate the historic relationship between the railroad and the critical role of Pennington Gap as a regional transportation center from its establishment in the early 1890s to the present.

Historical Background

Early Exploration and Settlement

Prior to European settlement in southwestern Virginia, the land that would become Lee County was primarily inhabited by the Siouan tribe. By 1711, the Siouan's had left Southwest Virginia and the area was devoid of Native American settlements, although both the Cherokee and Shawnee tribes continued to travel through the region by way of the Great Warrior Path and use the entire Great Appalachian Valley as hunting grounds.⁵ The first European explorers in the area that would become Lee County came in 1748, with Dr. Thomas Walker and Col. James Patton to survey the 120,000 acre Patton land grant. Walker returned as part of the Loyal Land Company in 1749 to survey an additional 800,000 acres and noted a lack of settlements in this area of the colony apart from a sporadic homestead.⁶ Utilizing the Great Warrior Path for his travels, Walker discovered the pass in the mountains where Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee now meet and named this "gap," along with the river that creates it, after the son of King George II, the Duke of Cumberland.⁷ In 1769, Captain Joseph Martin, an agent of Walker, led a group to Powell's Valley and established a fort known as Martin's Station on the banks of a creek near what is now Rose Hill.⁸ Located approximately 24 miles southwest of Pennington Gap, this was the first recorded European settlement in what would become Lee County as well as the most western one in the colony at the time. However, the settlement was soon abandoned due to attacks by Native Americans. Martin would not return to Martin's Station until 1775 after Lord Dunmore's War resulted in the movement of the Shawnee border further west to the Ohio River.⁹

Daniel Boone, a prominent frontiersman from Pennsylvania, also ventured into the area that would become Lee County numerous times during the 1770s as he led settlers to the western frontier. In 1775, Boone led an expedition for the Transylvania Company to widen the Great Warrior Path through the Cumberland Gap to encourage settlement in Kentucky County, Virginia. After Boone linked this path to a trail he laid out from the North Carolina and Tennessee borders, it became known as the Wilderness Road and US Route 58 now follows this route. The efforts of Martin and Boone to explore and settle the region were pivotal to the future establishment of Lee County.¹⁰

Formation and Settlement of Lee County

In 1792, Lee County was carved out of Russell County and named after Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee III, who served as a Revolutionary general and became the ninth Governor of Virginia in 1791. As governor, Lee handled various conflicts between white settlers and Native Americans in western Virginia. Jonesville became the county seat and first official town in the county in 1794.¹¹

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Growth in Lee County continued at the turn of the nineteenth century around the Wilderness Road. Although the majority of those traveling this route ventured on into Kentucky and Tennessee, many stopped and settled in Lee County. The 1800 census reported the population of Lee County as 3,538 with many of these early settlers cultivating small-scale subsistence farms in the valleys of the region.

The 1803 Louisiana Purchase and the end of the War of 1812, which halted the British support of Native American attacks on settlers, resulted in a resurgence in the settlement of the western frontier.¹² As an increased number of people journeyed through the region, many chose to settle within Lee County rather than venturing further west. Between 1800 and 1820, the population in Lee County grew from 3,538 to 4,256, in spite of a decrease in size with the formation of Scott County in 1814. Petitions to the General Assembly relating to surveying, building, or improvements of roads continued into the second quarter of the nineteenth century, signifying the expanding development of Lee County. The population increased to 10,268 in 1850, more than doubling since 1820. By 1860, the population had grown to 11,032, despite the creation of Wise County out of Lee County in 1858. With the creation of Wise County, Lee County was reduced in size to its current boundaries.

Transportation Improvements and the Export of Natural Resources

Transportation routes continued to make a major impact on the development of Lee County following the Civil War. Prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, transportation in the county continued to be difficult with wagon roads providing the primary routes for travel. Agricultural products and timber, which were often shipped along the Powell River, served as the main economic driver. The Wilderness Road (current US Route 58) was not adopted as a public road in Virginia until 1870, thereby making state funds available for improvements to this primary route through the region.¹³

With the construction in the 1890s of two railroads that allowed for the exportation of the region's natural resources, the economy of Lee County, particularly in the northern region, shifted from subsistence agriculture to the mass exportation of coal and timber. Engineers who had traveled to survey Southwest Virginia during the Civil War discovered the vast wealth of natural resources in the region. Many wrote books and other publications to attract Northern capitalists and industrial interests to Southwest Virginia. In 1881, C.R. Boyd, a civil engineer, authored a book describing the natural resources of the region, including Lee County, based on his survey work. Boyd urged citizens of Virginia to utilize the state's vast natural resources to boost the economy through Northern capital to prevent financial and political ruin during Reconstruction. Boyd wrote, "In the iron ores and splendid areas of almost unparalleled coal veins, with matchless timber, there are possibilities far beyond the actual necessities of Virginia. Only one condition has been wanting for years—simply accessibility to markets."¹⁴ Boyd estimated, based on his and others observations, that there were 75 square miles of coal beds in Lee County and that they were of great quality and quantity.¹⁵ He also noted that the North Fork of the Powell River, which flowed through the area known as "Pennington's Gap," provided access to the coal area "throughout its extent by easy grades descending to a common point, at the above-mentioned gap."¹⁶

Northern capitalists began acquiring massive amounts of mountain land and built railroad lines to export the natural resources, ultimately making the previously isolated Appalachian coal fields accessible to markets.¹⁷ The demand for coal skyrocketed as the expanding railroads, iron mills, and steel mills that drove the Industrial Revolution of the late-nineteenth century became more reliant on the power of coal. By 1886, coal surpassed wood as the nation's foremost energy source.¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, two major railroads traversed Lee County and coal was sold and shipped to wider markets via the Louisville and Nashville and the Southern rail lines. The Virginia and Southwestern Railway linked St. Charles to Bristol and from St. Charles branch lines spread to various coal camps. The main line of the Louisville and

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Nashville Railroad passed through Pennington Gap between Corbin, Kentucky and Norton, Virginia by the early 1890s. A spur line known as the Cumberland Valley Branch extended from Pennington Gap to St. Charles and the surrounding mining camps.¹⁹ The Louisville and Nashville Railroad also extended to other rail lines serving major cities around the Southeast, thereby connecting the coal fields of Southwest Virginia to markets as far as Atlanta, Birmingham, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Memphis.²⁰

Development of Pennington Gap

Around 1790, Edward Pennington came to the region from North Carolina. He erected his first home along the banks of the Powell River, approximately two miles east of the community of Dryden. Pennington later purchased land on the south side of the gorge, where Pennington Gap is currently located, and constructed a log house (demolished). Pennington died around 1861.²¹ Meanwhile, Michael Friel bought a large tract of land from Michall Myers and John Zion between Pennington's land and Cane Creek. The Pennington and Friel land would become the Town of Pennington Gap.²²

The town was first established as "Graham" on September 30, 1879, with Zachariah T. Yearly as the Postmaster. The name of the town changed to Pennington Gap on March 27, 1883, named for Edward Pennington. The name changed again on November 6, 1883, to "Han."²³ On March 18, 1890, a group of Lee County businessmen submitted a petition to the circuit court to form the Pennington Gap Improvement Company. This organization was established "for the purpose of purchasing, acquiring, holding and conveying lands and interest" and "erecting and maintaining bridges, dams, dwellings, structures, stores, storehouses, offices and hotels."²⁴ The name changed back to Pennington Gap in 1891 and the town was formally chartered after the Cumberland Valley extension of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad was established through the town. The act to incorporate Pennington Gap was approved February 15, 1892, with William S. Hurst serving as mayor and W.N.G. Barron, F.R. Stickley, E.W. Pennington, J.C. Noel, A. Johnson, D.H. Howard, and J.F. Skaggs appointed as councilmen.²⁵ A combination freight and passenger depot (demolished) was located along the Cumberland Valley Branch line of the railroad at the intersection of Joslyn Avenue, Kentucky Street, and W. Railroad Avenue (now Main Street).

With the construction of the railroad, Pennington Gap began to grow around the turn of the twentieth century and become a commercial and civic hub for the surrounding area. Asa Johnson, a wealthy businessman from Ohio, and his family moved to town around 1893 to capitalize on the coming of the railroad. Johnson was the first depot agent and was later succeeded by his daughter, Myrtle. Asa Johnson built the first hotel in town at the corner of E. Morgan Avenue and N. Johnson Drive (demolished). It was a sophisticated, three-story building with a general merchandise store on the first floor. The Johnson family also opened a laundry business as well as a planing mill and lumber shed. The family was active in the community and donated to the construction of a Methodist-Episcopal church in town as well as other civic organizations.²⁶ Danel Carr came to Pennington Gap around this time as well and built a new church and parsonage in town. His grandson, Reverend S. E. Bratton, also served as a minister in town.²⁷ James E. Laningham opened the J.E. Laningham Hardware Store on Railroad Street (now Main Street) at the turn of the century. According to his daughter, "he would open the store early in the morning so the miners could get their supplies before going to the mines. Someone would come in and manage the store so he could go up to the mine he co-owned."²⁸ Laningham was a successful coal businessman, acting as the superintendent of Black Mountain Coal Company and holding an interest and acting as superintendent at Penn-Lee Coal Company. Additionally, Laningham served as a consignee for the Texas Oil Company in Lee and Wise counties. Apart from his business interests, Laningham also became the first licensed embalmer and undertaker in Lee County. He purchased an ambulance to take Lee County citizens to the hospital in Big Stone Gap prior to the formation of Lee General Hospital.²⁹

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In 1900, the population in Pennington Gap was 399, but would grow significantly in the upcoming decades as the coalfields developed. In 1905 and 1906, development of coal mines began to occur at a rapid pace. Mines around St. Charles were the first to start large scale coal production in Lee County. Charles W. Bondurant, born in Bristol, Tennessee, was one of the first Lee County coal magnates. He opened mines around Pennington Gap, traveling via the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to the town and then venturing into the coalfields on foot or horseback. Bondurant was so influential in developing northern Lee County into a coal center that St. Charles is named for both him and his office assistant, Saint John.³⁰ Meanwhile, Charles Perin Page, a capitalist from New York City, also leased lands in Lee County for the mining of coal and production of coke in 1905. Perin agreed to build a railroad from his mines to connect with either the Louisville and Nashville or the Virginia and Southwestern Railroad. In 1906, he incorporated the Keokee Coal and Coke Company and hired the Black Mountain Railroad to construct rail lines to connect the Keokee mines to the Virginia and Southwestern Railroad. In 1907, 198,913 tons of coal were mined in Lee County, marking the first year of significant coal production. By 1910, there were eight major coal employers in Lee County, including Black Mountain Collieries Company, Black Mountain Mining Company, Bondurant Coal and Coke Company, Dominion Coal Company, Pennington Coal Company, Inc., Virginia Lee Company, Darby Coal and Coke Company, and Keokee Consolidated Coke Company.³¹ The presence of these coal companies in northern Lee County attracted men to the area to work in the mines. These men and their families settled in the area, including in Pennington Gap.

Along with the coal industry, the local timber industry flourished at the turn of the twentieth century as local lumber products were transported along the same rail lines to wider markets. Mills and lumber sheds were constructed throughout town, including the Pennington Lumber Company, a prominent enterprise in the town. According to the August 3, 1907, issue of "American Lumberman," Pennington Lumber Company was rapidly growing in production and sales and "has begun construction of lumber sheds 60x120 feet at its plant in Pennington."³² The major timber products were railroad and mining ties and coal props.³³

Another key industry in the area apart from coal was tobacco cultivation. The tobacco grown in Lee County was of the Burley variety rather than the Bright leaf tobacco popular throughout Southside Virginia. Burley tobacco is a light, air-cured variety of tobacco and is grown on small-scale farms. Tobacco barns used for hanging tobacco leaves dot the rural landscape around Pennington Gap. Since 1949, Pennington Gap has hosted an annual Tobacco Festival to celebrate the harvest of this important crop.³⁴

As the coal, lumber, and tobacco industry surrounding the town developed, so did Pennington Gap.³⁵ The first bank opened in 1907 and later merged with banks in Dryden and St. Charles to form the Lee Bank & Trust.³⁶ J.R. Gibson & Sons, a general merchandise store, and Moore & Graham, an early grocery store, were opened around this time along Morgan Avenue.³⁷ In 1910, the population of the town had risen to 792, almost doubling in size. Pennington Gap also became an educational center for Lee County citizens. A number of schools and private academies were formed in town, many of them affiliated with local churches. The earliest school met in a church called Macedonia south of the depot. The Pennington Gap Improvement Company deeded land for a public school to the Lee County School Board of Trustees in July 1891. This one-room log building also served as First Baptist Church. Two rooms were later added to the school. The school was known as Lee Baptist Institute, and it functioned as the main institution for higher education for both the surrounding county and nearby states. The Lee County School Board withdrew from Lee Baptist Institute in 1912, and began building a new public school on West Morgan Avenue, west of the commercial district.³⁸

The coal industry around Southwest Virginia experienced unprecedented growth in the 1910s and 1920s as World War I created increased demand for coal. Lee County's population in 1920 reached approximately

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30,000 residents, with only 2.7 percent being Black residents. The populace was most dense in the coal towns of northern Lee County and the local economy was almost fully dependent upon coal mining and coke production. By 1923, coal production in the county totaled 1,0224,668 tons.³⁹ In 1930, coal production in Appalachia accounted for 80 percent of the nation's total.⁴⁰ The timber industry continued to thrive during this period as well. By 1923, there were 43 small circular sawmills operating around Lee County.⁴¹

As the coalfield population grew, Pennington Gap quickly developed into the area's commercial, social, and entertainment center. In 1920, the town's population totaled 940. By April 1933, Pennington Gap had a population of 1,553 residents and the full complement of building types characteristic of a Southwest Virginia town in the first half of the twentieth century. The 1933 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps recorded businesses such as the Pennington Hotel, a Chevrolet dealership (281-5002-0022), an automobile repair shop, a dry cleaner, a drugstore, a bank, a filling station, a printing store, a prints and oils store, and a variety of other stores located along Morgan Avenue, Railroad Avenue, Kentucky Street, and Joslyn Avenue. Additionally, a town hall, post office, Masonic Hall, and Odd Fellows Meeting Hall (281-5002-0005) were also located downtown, signifying its additional importance as the civic center for the town. Entertainment and recreation facilities—such as a movie theater, bowling alley, and miniature golf course—were also erected in downtown Pennington Gap as well as a baseball field on the outskirts of town. Thus, the town functioned not only as the commercial and community center for the surrounding area, but the entertainment and recreation hub as well. Miners and their families could travel to Pennington Gap to spend their leisure time, purchase various goods, and fulfill their social needs. Religious and institutional resources such as churches, the Lee General Hospital, Pennington Gap Grammar School, and Pennington Gap High School, were also built in Pennington Gap outside of the commercial core to serve the religious, educational, and healthcare needs of the region's citizens as well. Pennington Gap additionally functioned as an industrial center, with three lumber companies scattered around town.⁴²

Although coal production at the local coalfields declined in the 1930s, Pennington Gap continued to grow and develop as the railroads, roads, and highways in the area were improved.⁴³ The population steadily increased throughout the decade and by 1940, there were 1,990 residents in town. In 1946, the locally prominent Laningham family funded the construction of the Lee Theater (281-5002-0001) on W. Morgan Avenue, which replaced the previous theater on Railroad Avenue that had burned down. The new theater opened on May 26, 1946, to the excitement of awaiting crowds. The local newspaper reported,

One and all experienced a feeling of just pride in this new hometown theatre as the parades beneath the 1500 hundred flickering lights and neon finishes [of] the marquee, walked down the carpeted aisles, took a look at the beautifully decorated walls, then seated themselves to gaze ahead at the large electrically equipped screen flashing back at them the wonderful scenes in 'Love and Learn' starring Jack Carson, Robert Hutton, and Martha Vickers. The new theatre is as it has been represented—a real asset to the town of Pennington Gap and one of the best show houses in Southwest Virginia.⁴⁴

Ron Carson, founder of the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center in Pennington Gap, notes that "typical of the times, the theatre was racially segregated originally. African Americans were confined to the balcony and to their own segregated restrooms."⁴⁵ Although census records list the total non-white population of Lee County in 1950 as 410 (1.13 percent of the 36,106 total population) with only thirty-five Black residents reportedly living in Pennington Gap, legally sanctioned segregation during the era of Jim Crow was practiced as evidenced by the segregated movie theater.

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The town continued to grow after World War II. In 1950, the population reached 2,074 residents. The commercial vitality of the town was evident with the expansion of the former J.R. Gibson & Sons, one of the earliest local retail stores, with the 1950 construction of Gibson's Clothing Store (281-5002-0007). Between 1945 and 1960, the role of the town as a center for automobile sales and services increased as well with the addition of a ford dealership (281-5002-0016) and two service stations operated by Exxon (281-5002-0022) and Texaco (281-5002-0034). The population dropped in 1960 to 1,799 but rose again in 1970 to 1,886. During this time, the first large-scale grocery store operated by a national chain, the Piggly-Wiggly grocery store (281-5002-0023), came to town in 1965. In the mid-twentieth century, Pennington Gap served as one of the leading tobacco markets in the region and began celebrating this heritage in 1949 with the annual Pennington Gap Tobacco Festival. With five tobacco warehouses in operation in the 1970s, the town continued to serve as a regional tobacco market. Even today, Cornell & Diehl, Inc. sells a variety of tobacco called "Pennington Gap," to celebrate the town's importance in the tobacco market.⁴⁶ Although the Louisville and Nashville Railroad was obtained by the Seaboard Coastline Railroad in 1971, the railroad continued to operate through town and remains an active line today. While the primary economic driver for the town and surrounding region has shifted away from coal, Pennington Gap continues to be the largest town in Lee County and serve as the commercial and transportation center for the region.⁴⁷

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U.S. Federal Census Records: 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970.

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:

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

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR File No. 281-5002

10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property 8.84

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

A. Latitude: 36.759588 Longitude: -83.028888

B. Latitude: 36.759847 Longitude: -83.028676

C. Latitude: 36.759780 Longitude: -83.026184

D. Latitude: 36.758979 Longitude: -83.025484

E. Latitude: 36.758312 Longitude: -83.026560

F. Latitude: 36.757553 Longitude: -83.027960

G. Latitude: 36.757931 Longitude: -83.028526

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

NAD 1927

or

☐

NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

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

The historic boundary includes all tax parcels as shown on the attached Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District Sketch Map/Photo Key, which shows the district's true and correct historic boundaries.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic boundary for the Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District comprises the area of Pennington Gap most closely related to the town's commercial development between ca. 1925 and 1973. All remaining historic commercial resources as well as the district's historic setting as a commercial center captured within the boundary.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kate Kronau & Alison Blanton
organization: Hill Studio
street & number: 120 Campbell Avenue SW
city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24011
e-mail: kkronau@hillstudio.com
telephone: (540) 342-5263
date: September 14, 2023

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.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District

City or Vicinity: Town of Pennington Gap

County: Lee County

State: Virginia

Photographer: Katie Gutshall and Kate Kronau

Date Photographed: March 2023

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

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Photo 1 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0001
Main Street, view SE

Photo 2 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0002
41830 and 48126 E. Morgan Avenue, view SE

Photo 3 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0003
Lee Theater, view SE

Photo 4 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0004
N. Kentucky Street, view NW

Photo 5 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0005
W. Morgan Avenue, view NE

Photo 6 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0006
E. Morgan Avenue, view east

Photo 7 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0007
Magnolia Street, view NE

Photo 8 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0008
215 Main Street, view NW

Photo 9 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0009
E. Morgan Avenue, view SW

Photo 10 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0010
W. Morgan Avenue, view west

Photo 11 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0011
41815 and 41829 E. Morgan Avenue, view west

Photo 12 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0012
Main Street, view south

Photo 13 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0013
E. Morgan Avenue, view west

Photo 14 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0014
S. Johnson Drive, view north

Photo 15 of 15: VA_LeeCounty_PenningtonGapCommercialHistoricDistrict_0015

Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District

Lee County, Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

Main Street, view north

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

¹ Bales, *Early Settlers*, p. 1256.

² Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1933.

³ “Large Numbers Attend Opening of Lee Theater,” *Powell Valley News*, Pennington Gap, May 23, 1946, quoted in Pulice, “Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District PIF,” p. 5.

⁴ Jeff Bossert, “Coalfield Teams Dominated Southwest Virginia, Neighboring States,” *Radio IQ*: October 31, 2022, <https://www.wvtf.org/news/2022-10-31/coalfield-baseball-teams-dominated-far-southwest-virginia-neighboring-states>, accessed August 10, 2023.

⁵ Ralph M. Brown, “A Sketch of the Early History of South-Western Virginia,” (*The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1937), p. 504-505.

⁶ Kenneth E. Stuck, Christopher L. McDaid, Charles M. Downing, and Anne S. Beckett, “A Phase I Cultural Resource Survey of the Proposed Route 640 Project, Lee County, Virginia,” (The College of William and Mary, 1994), p. 5; Brown, “A Sketch of the Early History,” p. 508.

⁷ M. Secrist, *Lee County, Virginia: History Revealed Through Biographical and Genealogical Sketches of its Ancestors*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), p. 9.

⁸ Mize, “History and Heritage Made Accessible,” p. 14.

⁹ Secrist, *Lee County, Virginia: History Revealed*, p. 12; Brown, “A Sketch of the Early History,” p. 506; Mize, “History and Heritage Made Accessible,” p. 14.

¹⁰ Mize, “History and Heritage Made Accessible,” p. 18.

¹¹ Mize, “History and Heritage Made Accessible,” p. 19.

¹² Mize, “History and Heritage Made Accessible,” p. 23.

¹³ Stuck, “A Phase I Cultural Resource Survey,” p. 6-7.

¹⁴ C.R. Boyd, *South-West Virginia Showing the Mineral Deposits of Iron, Coal, Zinc, Copper and Lead. Also, the Staples of the Various Counties Methods of Transportation, Access and Etc.*, (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1881), p. 213.

¹⁵ Boyd, *South-West Virginia Showing*, p. 215.

¹⁶ Boyd, *South-West Virginia Showing*, p. 216.

¹⁷ Crandall A. Shiflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. xi.

¹⁸ Shiflett, *Coal Towns*, p. 27.

¹⁹ Giles, “The Geology and Coal Resources,” p. 2, 9.

²⁰ Charles B. Castner, “A Brief History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad,” *Louisville & Nashville Railroad Historical Society*, <http://www.lnrr.org/History.aspx>, accessed August 29, 2023.

²¹ Secrist, *Lee County, Virginia: History Revealed*, p. 17.

²² Secrist, *Lee County, Virginia: History Revealed*, p. 17.

Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Lee County, Virginia

County and State

²³Hattie Byrd Muncy Bales, *Early Settlers of Lee County, Virginia and Adjacent Counties, Volume II*, (Greensboro, NC: Media, Inc., Printers and Publishers, 1977), p. 1252.

²⁴Bales, *Early Settlers*, p. 1256.

²⁵Bales, *Early Settlers*, p. 1256

²⁶Etta Green, "Historical Sketches of Southwest Virginia Publication 4 – 1968: Some Pioneer Leaders in Lee County's Progress," <https://vagenweb.org/lee/HSpubl29.htm>, accessed August 29, 2023.

²⁷Green, "Historical Sketches," <https://vagenweb.org/lee/HSpubl29.htm>.

²⁸*Lee County, Virginia: A Pictorial History*, (Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society, 2004), p. 133.

²⁹*Lee County, Virginia: A Pictorial History*, p. 133; Green, "Historical Sketches," <https://vagenweb.org/lee/HSpubl29.htm>.

³⁰<https://vagenweb.org/lee/HSpubl29.htm>

³¹Giles, "The Geology and Coal Resources," p. 10.

³²*American Lumberman*, August 3, 1907, quoted in Mike Pulice, "Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District PIF," (Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2022), p. 4.

³³Giles, "The Geology and Coal Resources," p. 181.

³⁴Pulice, "Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District PIF," p. 4.

³⁵Giles, "The Geology and Coal Resources," p. 10; Eugene W. Cox, Joyce Cox, and Michael J. Pulice, "Keokee Store No. 1," (DHR File No. 052-0066, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, July 2006), Section 8, page 5.

³⁶*Lee County, Virginia: A Pictorial History*, p. 152.

³⁷*Lee County, Virginia: A Pictorial History*, p. 167.

³⁸Bales, *Early Settlers*, p. 1257, 1261.

³⁹Giles, "The Geology and Coal Resources," p. 10.

⁴⁰Shiflett, *Coal Towns*, p. 30.

⁴¹Giles, "The Geology and Coal Resources," p. 190.

⁴²Sanborn Insurance Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, "Town of Pennington Gap, Lee County, VA: 1933," (New York, NY: Sanborn Insurance Company).

⁴³Stuck, "A Phase I Cultural Resource Survey," p. 9.

⁴⁴"Large Numbers Attend Opening of Lee Theater," *Powell Valley News*, Pennington Gap, May 23, 1946, quoted in Pulice, "Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District PIF," p. 5.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Bales, *Early Settlers*, p. 1252.

⁴⁷Castner, "A Brief History."



Legend

County Boundaries

TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Pennington Gap Commercial

Historic District

Town of Pennington Gap

Lee County, VA

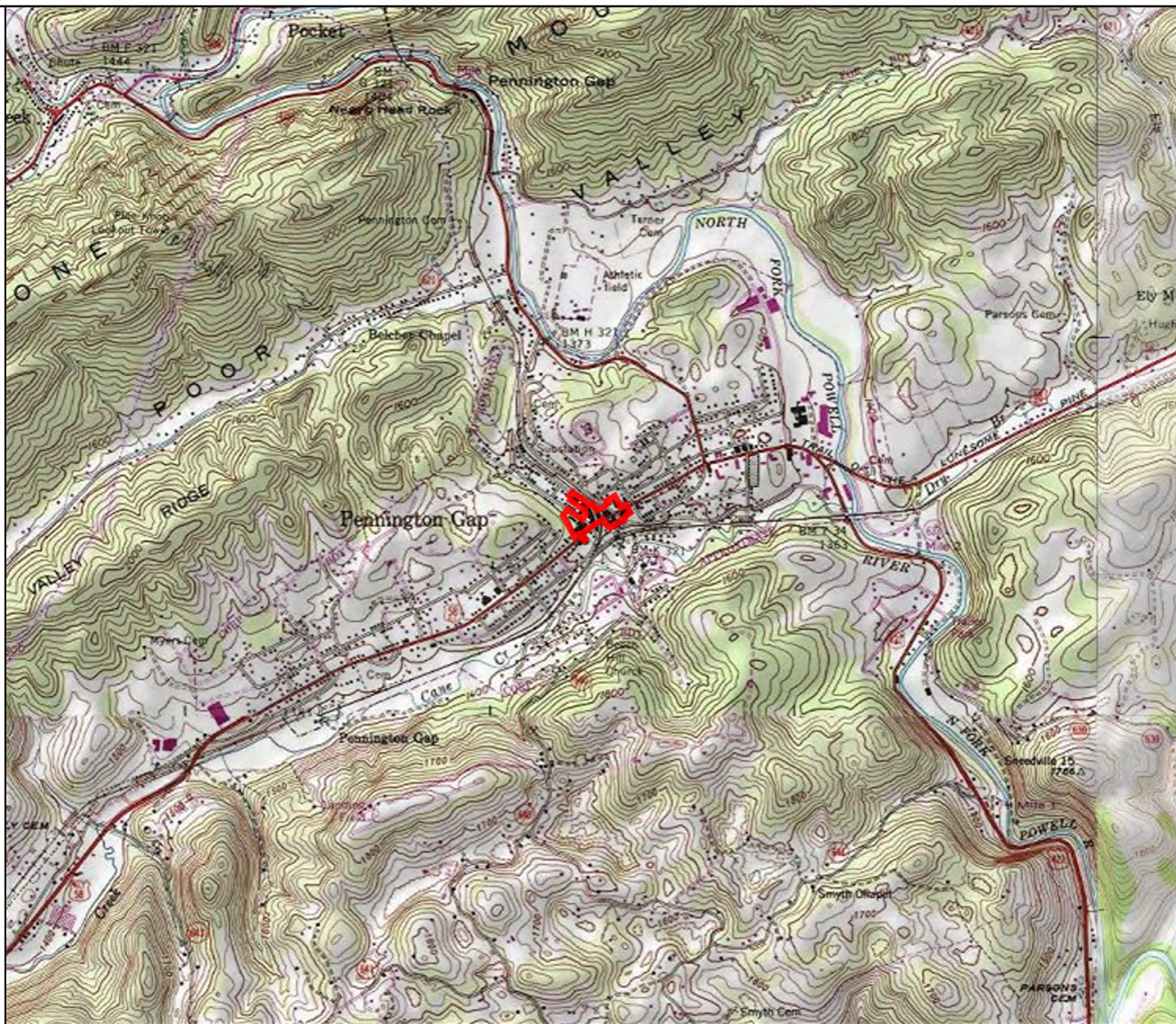
DHR No. 281-5002

Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 600 1200 1800 2400
1:36,112 / 1"=3,009 Feet



Title:

Date: 11/17/2023

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

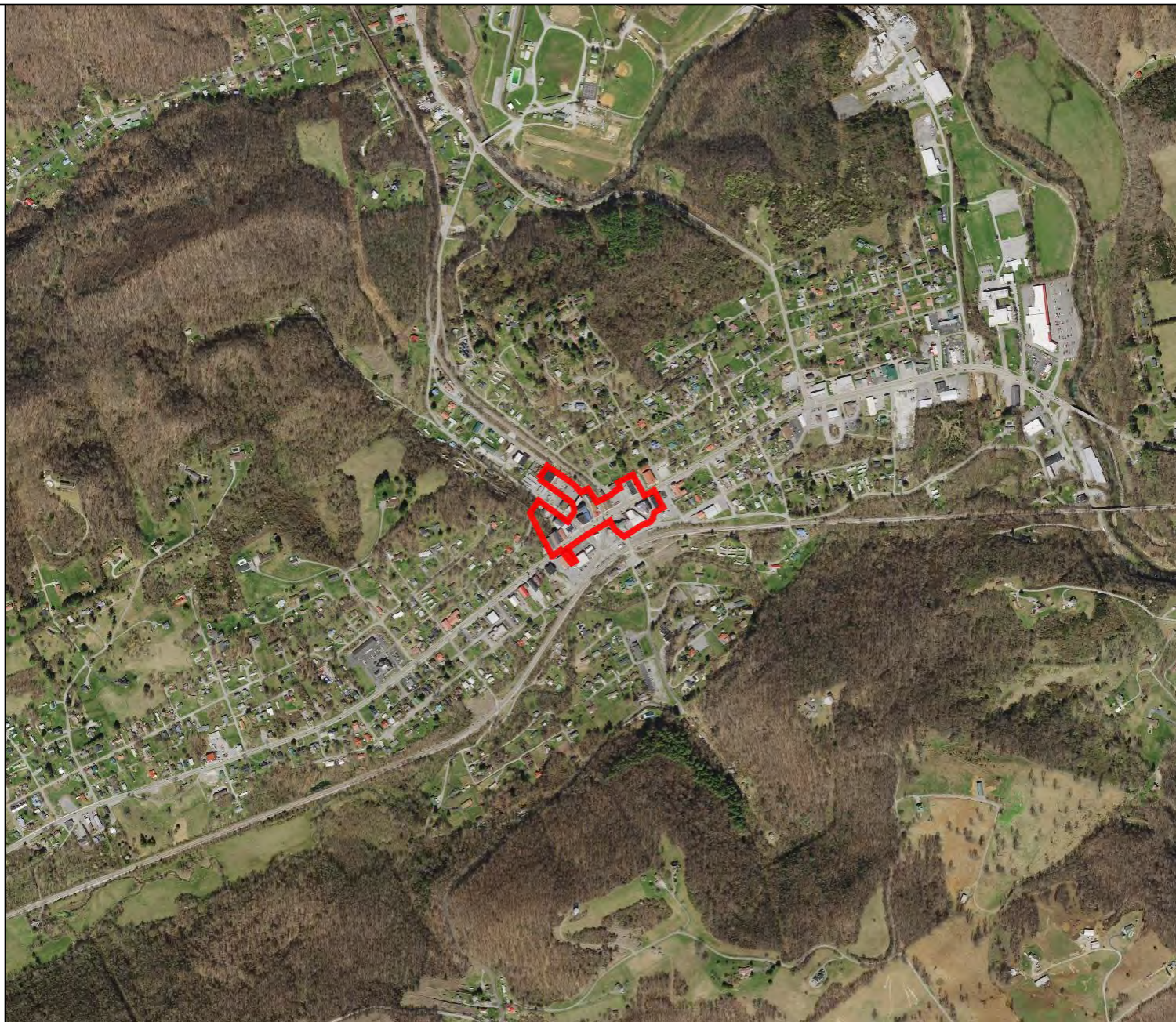
Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.



Legend

 County Boundaries

AERIAL VIEW - VICINITY
Pennington Gap Commercial
Historic District
Town of Pennington Gap
Lee County, VA
DHR No. 281-5002



 Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 500 1000 1500 2000
1:18,056 / 1"=1,505 Feet

Title:

Date: 11/17/2023

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Legend

 County Boundaries

STREET MAP

**Pennington Gap Commercial
Historic District
Town of Pennington Gap
Lee County, VA
DHR No. 281-5002**

 **Nominated Boundary**



Feet

0 200 400 600 800
1:9,028 / 1"=752 Feet



Title:

Date: 11/17/2023

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Digital Location Map

Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District
Lee County, VA
VDHR ID# 281-5002
Pennington Gap, VA

A. Latitude: 36.759588 Longitude: -83.028888

B. Latitude: 36.759847 Longitude: -83.028676

C. Latitude: 36.759780 Longitude: -83.026184

D. Latitude: 36.758979 Longitude: -83.025484

E. Latitude: 36.758312 Longitude: -83.026560

F. Latitude: 36.757553 Longitude: -83.027960

G. Latitude: 36.757931 Longitude: -83.028526

WGS84

Map Source: VCRIS



Feet

0 50 100 150 200
1:3,000 / 1"=250 Feet

Title: Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District

Date: 8/28/2023

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

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Legend

 County Boundaries

AERIAL VIEW

Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District

Town of Pennington Gap

Lee County, VA

DHR No. 281-5002

 Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 50 100 150 200
1:2,257 / 1"=188 Feet

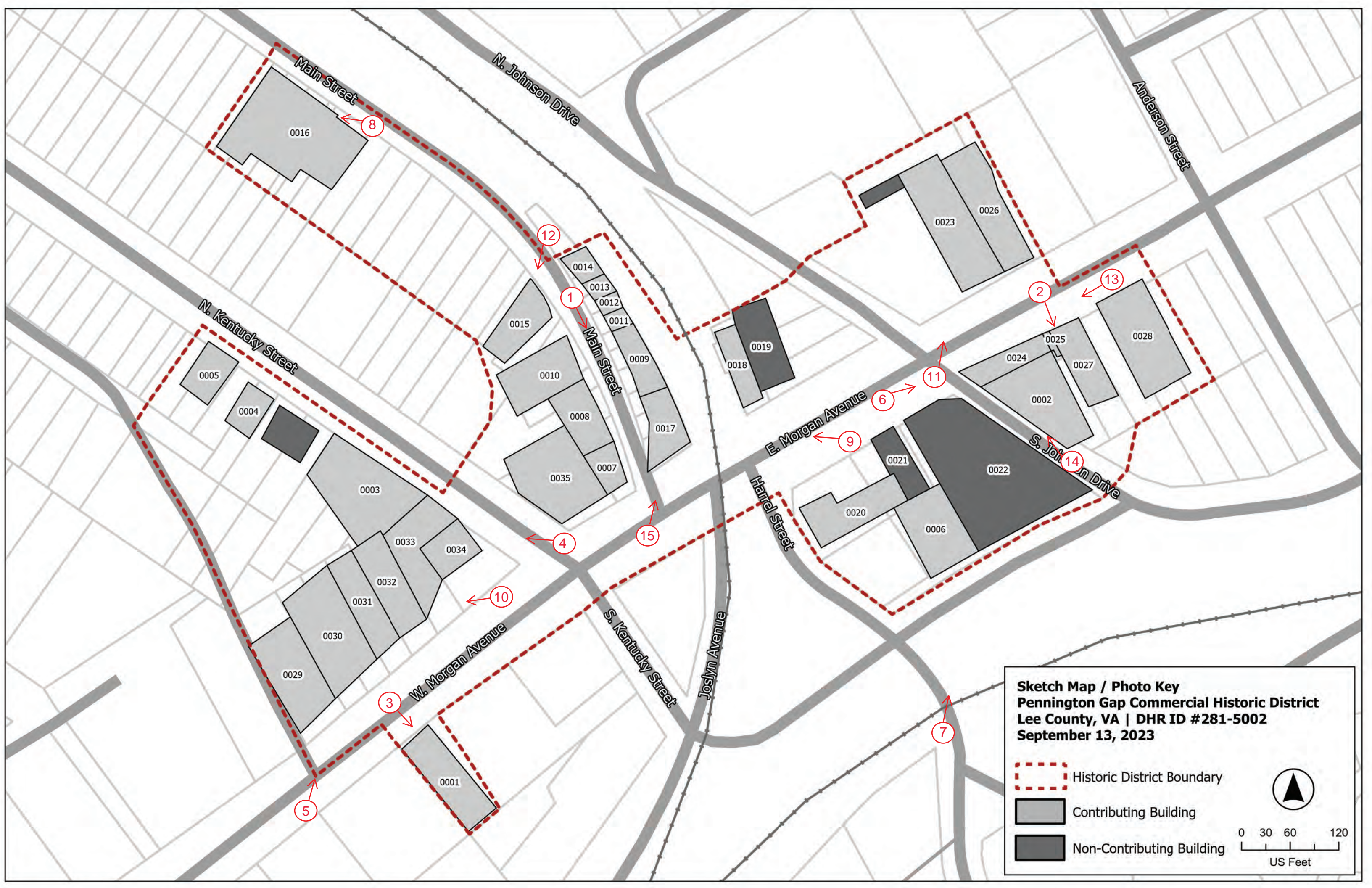


Title:


Date: 11/17/2023

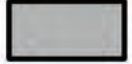
DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

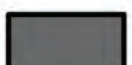
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Sketch Map / Photo Key
Pennington Gap Commercial Historic District
Lee County, VA | DHR ID #281-5002
September 13, 2023

 Historic District Boundary

 Contributing Building

 Non-Contributing Building



0 30 60 120
US Feet



















THE DUSTY MONKEY
ANTIQUES / JEWELRY GALLERIE & More

William's
Cunnington Gap
L.C. HIGH

THE DUSTY MONKEY
1000









