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National Park Service

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Opequon Historic District
Frederick County, Virginia

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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Opequon Historic District is located in central Frederick County five miles southwest of Winchester at the junction of Cedar Creek Grade (VA Route 622), Miller Road (VA Route 620), and Opequon Creek. The village dates from about 1736, and is one of Frederick County's earliest settlements. The village originally comprised the homesteads of the Glass and Cartmell families, early pioneer settlers in the Shenandoah Valley. Over the next two centuries the settlement saw the addition of a mill and factory, stores, a church, a restaurant and residences—all clustered around the headwaters of Opequon Creek and Cedar Creek Grade, a road commissioned in 1745 that led from Winchester to Shenandoah County. Race Mills (ca. 1751, ca. 1812 additions, 1950s restoration), the oldest surviving building in the village was constructed by Joseph Glass II on the high ground south of the Opequon. Joseph Glass II also built the Glass-Rinker-Cooper Mill (ca. 1812, late 19th century addition), the second gristmill to be constructed at the head of Opequon Creek in the village; the first, built in 1757, was destroyed. Greenwood, the homestead of original settlers Samuel and Mary Glass, was built in 1736 and burned in 1943. Around 1910 a frame foursquare dwelling, the Steck House, was erected on the property. Nearby is a mill house (1738 or 1756), built over one of the springs where the creek rises. Homespun was built in 1771 by Nathaniel Cartmell III on the high ground north of Glass Mill. During the late 1800s Hodgson Store was built at the crossroads and the Second Presbyterian Church was built in 1939. Up the hill from the church on Miller Road (Route 620) is the Bleak House, built in the mid-nineteenth century and Tokes' Inn, built around 1880, a restaurant and catering establishment operated by Susan Tokes, a daughter of slaves from Greenwood. The village once included an additional house, a blacksmith shop and barrel factory (at the Glass Mill), a post office, which operated at the Hodgson Store from 1876-1948, a school in the church, a town hall and a second grocery store.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Race Mills, also known as the Glass-Rinker House, is the oldest building in Opequon village. The earliest part of the house, a central limestone block, was probably built soon after

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Joseph Glass received 250 acres on the south side of Opequon Creek from his father, Samuel, in 1751.¹ The original house consisted of a single room, 20' x 26', with a gable roof and interior end chimney. The structure had a dirt-floor cellar with a ground-level entrance centered between two windows.² It may have been constructed by or with Joseph's brother, Robert, who was the only one in the community with stone-working tools and probably served as the stonemason of the family.³ The original south wing of the house cannot be dated because all that survived into the twentieth century was the foundation of an apparently frame—possibly log—addition to the central unit, oriented in the same direction, and ending with a massive fireplace.⁴ In the 1950s Edward and Marjorie Copenhaver constructed a limestone south wing atop the old foundation in the same style as the central unit, and added dormers to both units of the house. Joseph Glass's son, Joseph II, acquired the house in 1812⁵ and it is believed that he built the north wing, 20' x 23', in stone with two full stories. At that time, the entrance door was moved to the location of a window on the west elevation, facing a staircase, and the room was divided to make an entrance hall. The original roof's shingles were later replaced with standing seam metal.⁶ The result is a stone structure of three units on the same axis, the roof ridge of the southern unit slightly offset because of the greater depth of the reconstructed room; the north wing is covered with stucco. An entrance porch shelters the front door and central window; a two-story porch extends along the rear of the central section and the north wing.

The Glass-Rinker-Cooper Mill was built around 1812 and is the second mill in this community.⁷ It was originally fed by a millpond still visible on the west side of Cedar Creek Grade near Greenwood and a headrace that flowed under the road, but was filled in during the 1950s. The tailrace has recently been connected to Opequon Creek and dammed to form a pond and waterfall. The mill is constructed of massive native limestone, with walls three-feet thick at the base tapering to eighteen inches at the top. The mill has a dirt floor and sits on one (or more) of the many springs in the region. Interior millworks include a husk frame with some of its axles, wooden gears and both pairs of millstones on the first floor, but the external waterwheel has been removed. Except for the wheel, the external and internal integrity of the structure has been faithfully maintained. The first, second, and third floors laid in chestnut oak planks are supported by single chestnut oak beams fifty feet in length. One of the cranes used to lift the stones for cleaning is dated 1838, inscribed by an auger, as well as chalk marks to keep count of flour bags. Attached to the mill is a late-nineteenth-century, two-story frame residence, of Victorian vernacular architecture, which incorporates the office of the mill as one of its rooms. A most

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unusual feature is the chimney flue, which rises from the office within the gable wall of the mill and incorporates two diagonal doglegs to avoid windows; nonetheless, the chimney draws very well.

Greenwood began as a large log dwelling that is believed to have been built soon after Samuel Glass's arrival in 1736. A log wing was added later in the century. The two-story structure was covered with weatherboarding around 1800.⁸ It was destroyed by fire in 1943. Around 1910 a foursquare frame house clad in stucco with a six-bay wrap-around porch with Tuscan columns (the Steck House) was built alongside the original house.⁹ The property remained in the Glass and related Baker families until 1880, when it was sold to the Wood-Steck family¹⁰, and then to the Marker Miller family in 1961.¹¹

The Millhouse, built in 1738 or 1756, is a 1 ½ frame structure on a limestone basement built over one of the sources of Opequon Creek.¹² The north end of the structure is stone enclosed and paved and is believed to be the wheel basin for the mill. A sunken garden adjacent to the house was originally the millpond, and there is archaeological evidence of a sluice gate one-hundred feet to the northwest to divert the creek into a short headrace.¹³

Homespun was built in 1771 by Nathaniel Cartmell III, the grandson of the original settler of the upper Opequon Creek area, Nathaniel Cartmell, Sr.¹⁴ It is a two-and-a-half-story limestone structure with a smaller log wing attached to the north. A 1771 datestone is located in the south gable end. In 1810, Nathaniel III's son, Martin, built a two-story addition on the rear of the house, the first floor of which was a drawing room and the second a ballroom. The addition became unsafe and was torn down around 1850.¹⁵ There are seven outbuildings, including a three-bay, frame bank barn.

Hodgson (Bayliss) Store is a two-story frame building built in the late 1800s.¹⁶ While the building always contained living quarters on its upper story, in about 1980 its commercial function was discontinued and it became a residence.¹⁷ Between 1876 and 1948, the store served as a post office. It was also a gas station with pumps in front at one time. At the end of the nineteenth century a billboard at the store advertising a brand of snuff showed a frog's head with a very prominent eye. When the signboard fell down, local boys nailed a part of the sign with the frog's eye to a tree, giving the community its local name of Frog Eye, which has lasted over a century.¹⁸

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The Second Opequon Presbyterian Church, a single-story brick building on a raised basement with a high-pitched roof, stained glass windows, and a wooden belfry, was built in 1939.¹⁹ A brick wing was built to the rear of the church in 1997. The original wooden church on the site, built by the Glass family in 1848 as the Opequon Union Chapel, also served as a school. The building fell into disuse around the turn of the century. In 1926 descendants of the original members of the church formed a Presbyterian congregation and met the following year with nine members. The old chapel was replaced by the current structure in 1939.

Tokes' Inn consists of a vernacular two-story, frame house dating from the late 1800s and a one-story, frame building that served as a restaurant. The house was built for John and Hester Tokes, former slaves from Greenwood. The restaurant is architecturally interesting because it is a pre-fabricated portable building with wooden weatherboarded vertical panels measuring three feet by nine feet and held together by steel bolts. According to oral history, the building was one of several purchased by the City of Winchester for use as temporary classrooms during the construction of Handley High School from 1919-1923. After the school opened in 1923, the building was dismantled and moved to the Tokes' Inn, where it served as a dining facility for the restaurant and catering business of Susan Josephine and Louise Tokes. The rear of the building also served as a small school for local children, both white and black, during the 1930s employing a teacher from Washington, D.C. who lived at the inn. The business, which had begun in 1918, continued in operation after Susan's death by her nephew George Davis and his wife Addie. The restaurant closed in 1998 upon the death of Addie.²⁰

Bleak House (Bageant House) believed to have been built by the Bakers of Greenwood, is a 1 ½ story, stucco-clad frame structure composed of a mid-nineteenth-century log core to which various rooms have been added. *Hammond's Edition of the 1885 Atlas of Frederick County, Virginia* lists the structure as the residence of J. C. Baker.²¹

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INVENTORY OF RESOURCES

2351 Cedar Creek Grade (0034-5037-0001), contributing resource: One-story, three-bay frame house clad with asbestos siding with a poured concrete foundation. Standing seam gable roof with a central chimney. Double hung windows with two-over-two sashes. Two outbuildings, contributing resources, consist of a frame privy with a shed roof and a vertical board shed/garage with corrugated tin gable roof.

Hodgson Store, 2412 Cedar Creek Grade(0034-5037-0002), contributing resource: Two-story, frame vernacular, gable-front building (early nineteenth-century) with vinyl siding, one-story side and rear additions (early twentieth-century), under a standing-seam metal roof.

Glass-Rinker-Cooper Mill, 2431 Cedar Creek Grade (0034-5037-0003), contributing resource: Limestone industrial building (ca. 1815) on stone foundation, 2 ½ story, with standing-seam metal roof and interior end chimney; rear wall clad in barn siding and placed on a stone foundation. Attached to two-story Victorian vernacular frame house (ca 1890s) on stone foundation with standing-seam metal roof and a central chimney; one-story front and two-story rear porches. Property also contains a wooden outhouse, a contributing resource.

Race Mills (Glass-Rinker House), 2463 Cedar Creek Grade (0034-5037-0004), contributing resource: Two-story, limestone residence on a stone foundation with a standing-seam metal roof, built in three sections: north two-story stuccoed section (ca. 1812) with stone gable-end chimney; middle one-and-a-half story stone section (ca. 1751) with stone gable-end chimney, dormer window and porch; south one-and-a-half story, stone section (1950s) with two dormer windows and gable-end chimney. Property also contains a stone well house and garage east of the main house, and a frame chicken house and red frame barn with stone foundation south of the main house, all contributing resources.

Homespun, 2368 Cedar Creek Grade (0034-5037-0005) contributing resource: Limestone dwelling (1771) 2 ½ story, with a metal gabled roof, pedimented portico, gable-end chimneys, and an oriel window. A 1½ story log wing extends from the east gable. Outbuildings include twentieth-century garage, machine shed, chicken house, barn, and three additional sheds, all contributing resources.

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Second Opequon Presbyterian Church, 107 Miller Road (0034-5037-0006), contributing resource: One-story, stretcher-bond brick vernacular church (1939) on cinder block foundation, pointed-arched and segmentally-arched windows, and wooden belfry topped by a spire.

115 Miller Road (0034-5037-0007) non-contributing resource: A one-story, frame with vinyl siding dwelling built in the 1990s.

117 Miller Road (0034-5037-0008), non-contributing resource: A one-story, frame ranch-style house built in 1992, a non-contributing resource.

129 Miller Road (0034-5037-0009), non-contributing resource: A two-story, brick Colonial Revival style dwelling, a non-contributing resource, was built in 1999 between the Bleak House and the church.

Bleak House, 137 Miller Road (0034-5037-0010), contributing resource: Stucco-clad frame dwelling (mid-nineteenth-century core with twentieth-century additions), 1 ½ story; a one-story, frame stable (built around 1995, non-contributing resource).

The Mill House, 170 Miller Road (0034-5037-0011), contributing resource: A 1 ½ story, two-bay frame structure (circa mid eighteenth century) on a limestone basement with gable roof.

Steck House, 190 Miller Road [Glass Spring Lane] (0034-5037-0012), contributing resource: Stuccoed frame foursquare (ca. 1910), 2½ story, with front and side porches with Tuscan columns and hipped-roof dormers on front and south side of metal roof. Property also contains the remains of a bank barn built on stone foundations associated with Greenwood, as well as a frame packing shed, chicken house, barn and three additional frame outbuildings, all contributing resources.

225 Miller Road (0034-5037-0013), contributing resource: A 1 ½ story, frame bungalow (inter-war period) with aluminum siding, three-bay porch, two-over-two and three-over-one windows;

227 Miller Road (0034-5037-0014), contributing resource: one-story, cinder block garage with an apartment on the second floor, built in the late 1940s.

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Tokes' Inn, 239 Miller Road (0034-5037-0015), contributing resource : Two-story, frame and log vernacular dwelling with aluminum siding (late nineteenth-century) with side porch: pre-fab dining hall attached consisting of wood sections held together by steel bolts, a contributing resource. A one-story brick outbuilding with partial stone foundation, a contributing resource, exists to the rear of the main house, a contributing resource.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Opequon has been a crossroads village surrounded by farm country in central Frederick County for over two and a half centuries. Situated at the junction of Cedar Creek Grade and Miller Road, the village consists of historic eighteenth-century stone and log structures from one of the first settlements in the Upper Shenandoah Valley. It also contains nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century buildings in a variety of architectural styles and forms, including a church, a mill and barrel factory, a restaurant, and a store/post office. Since 1745 the movement along Cedar Creek Road which became a turnpike in 1851 and is now known as Cedar Creek Grade, primarily involved the carrying of farm goods to Winchester and other towns of the Shenandoah Valley. During the Civil War, the turnpike was used by both Confederate and Union troops before and after the battles of Winchester and Fisher's Hill. Opequon retains its integrity as an early settlement and crossroads village that has changed little since the early twentieth century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The upper Opequon Creek valley was an area of movement in pre-colonial times. There are no identified traces of villages in the area, but plenty of arrowheads have been found nearby from the Early Archaic period (circa 8,000 B.C.).¹ Although the limestone soils were fertile, they were also often dry and susceptible to wildfire, augmented by the Native Americans' use of fire drives for hunting, and so, "when the country was first known to white people, (it) was one entire and beautiful prairie, with the exception of narrow fringes of timber immediately bordering on watercourses," according to Samuel Kercheval, the early-nineteenth-century historian of the Shenandoah Valley.² As such it was a marvelous hunting ground for various tribes, and a battleground when they contested each other's hunting ranges.

The area is marked by many Native-American names. Shenandoah comes from the name, Gherundo, an Iroquois chief in the late seventeenth century, who ventured into the hunting lands of Chief Opeckeenough, for whom the creek is named.³

European settlers came to the area for a number of reasons. They advanced to establish protection against the French and Indian raids on the agricultural plains east of the Blue Ridge. They continued the western flow in search of good farmlands for themselves. They responded to

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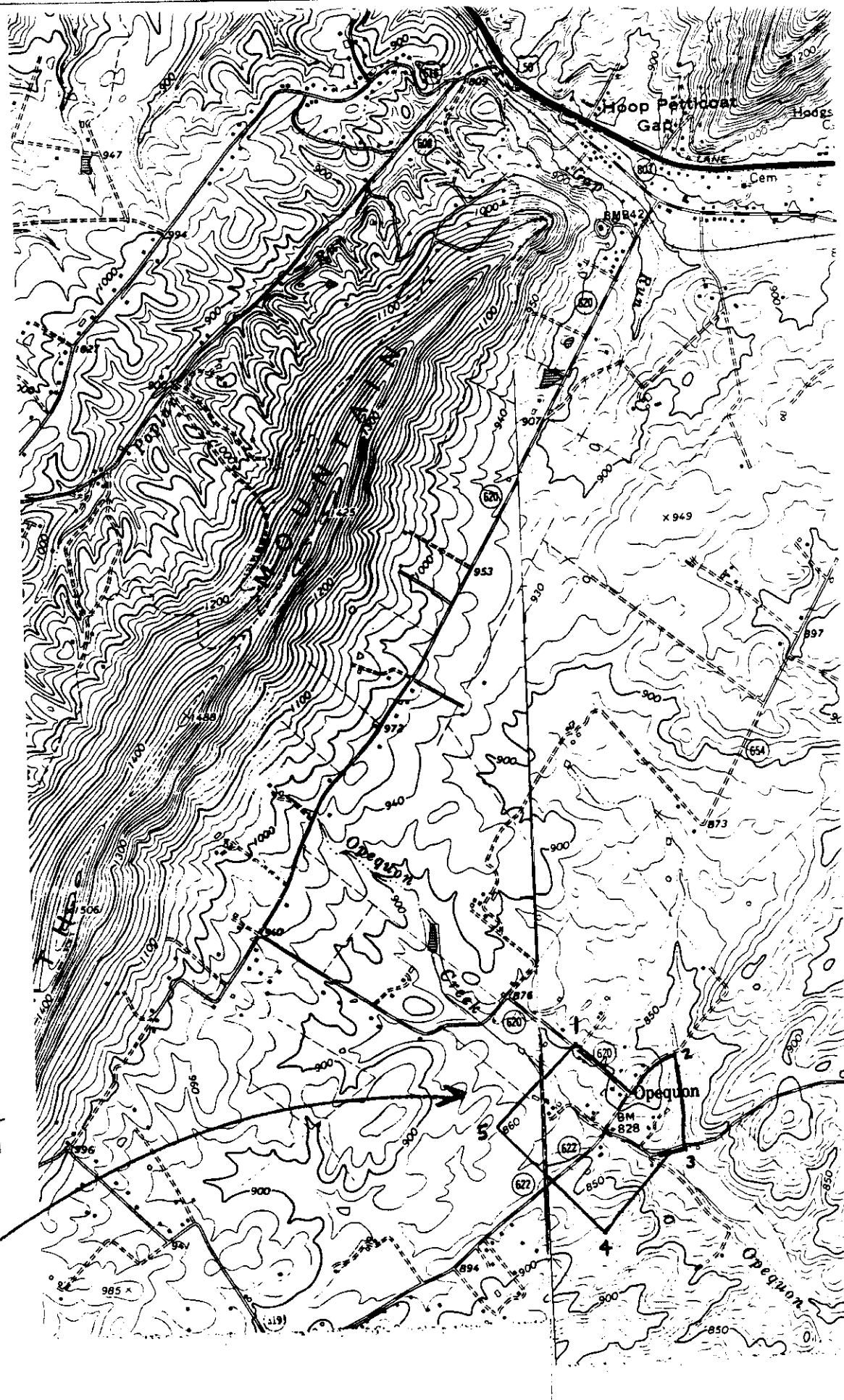
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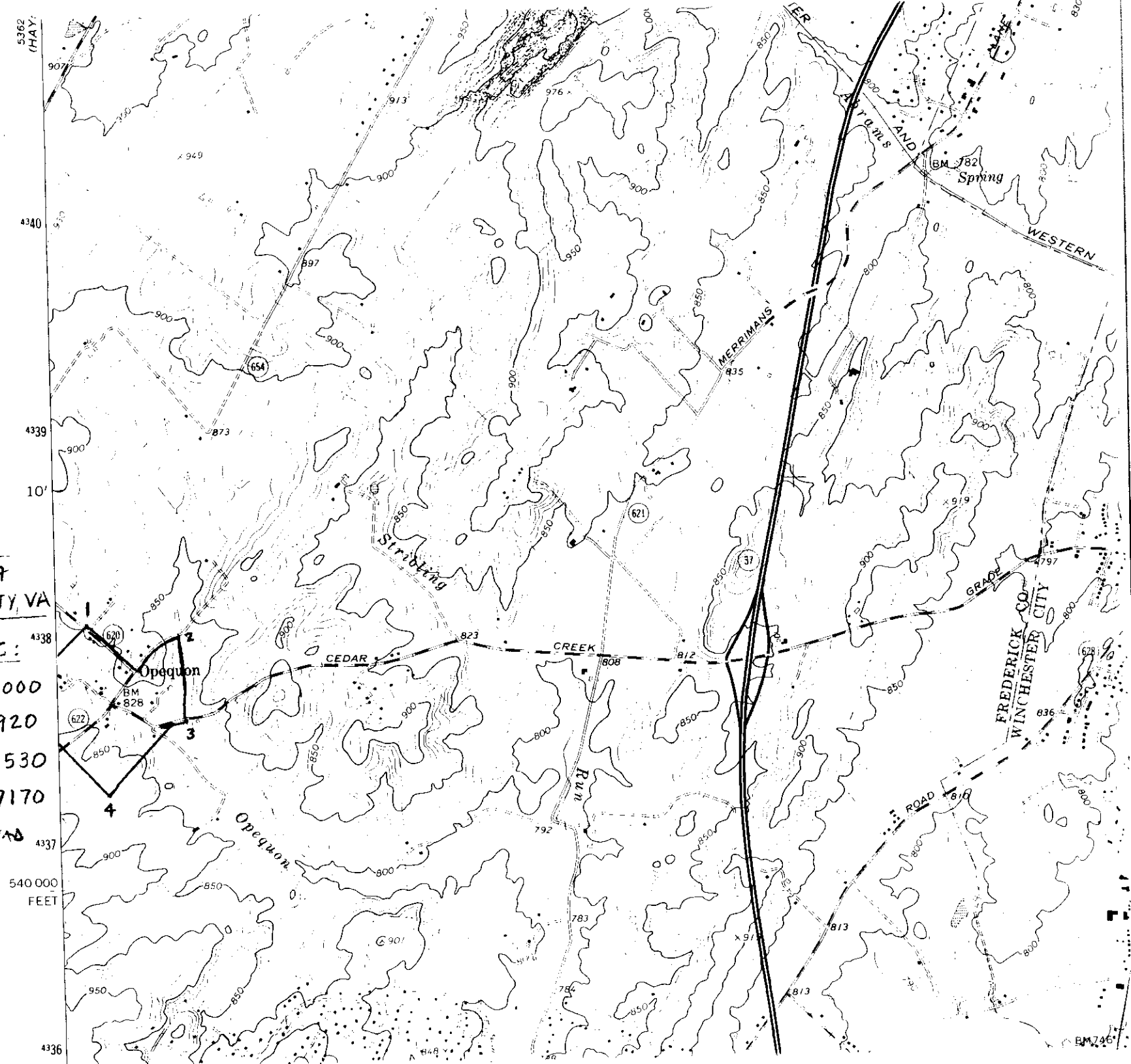
OPEQUON
HISTORIC DISTRICT
FREDERICK
COUNTY
VIRGINIA

OPEQUON HISTORIC
DISTRICT 34-5037
FREDERICK COUNTY, VA

UTM REFERENCES:

- 1. 17/737765/4338000
- 2. 17/738200/4337920
- 3. 17/738220/4337530
- 4. 17/737860/4337170

WINCHESTER QMS





OPEQUON HISTORIC
DISTRICT
FREDERICK COUNTY VA

UTM REF. 34-5037
5. 17/737420/4337620
HAYFIELD ROAD

OPEQUON 0.4 MI.
3.8 MI. TO U.S. 11

4340
4339
10'
4337
4336