

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

LISTED ON:
VLR 09/17/2009
NRHP 12/03/2009

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Willson House**
other names/site number Tuckaway; Wee Dornoch; VDHR File No. 081-0183

2. Location

street & number 367 Wee Darnock Way (SR 673) not for publication N/A
city or town Lexington vicinity X
state Virginia code VA county Rockbridge code 163 zip code 24450

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 10/16/09
Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____
Signature of the Keeper _____
Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 3 </u>	<u> 1 </u> buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 1 </u> structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
<u> 3 </u>	<u> 2 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling
 DOMESTIC secondary structure

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling
 DOMESTIC secondary structure
 AGRICULTURE animal facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

 Georgian
 Federal

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
roof Metal
walls Brick
other Wood, Concrete

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

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
CONSERVATION

Period of Significance 1812-1939

Significant Dates 1812, 1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) McCulloch, Ruth Anderson

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder unknown

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 14.36 acres

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

Zone	Easting	Northing									
1	17	631240	4	18	4360	2	17	631500	4	18	4480
3	17	631740	4	18	4260	4	17	631360	4	18	4100

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title J. Daniel Pezzoni
 organization Landmark Preservation Associates date June 25, 2009
 street & number 6 Houston Street telephone (540) 464-5315
 city or town Lexington state VA zip code 24450

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Susan and Douglas Putnam
 street & number 6238 Kellogg Drive telephone (703) 749-3817
 city or town McLean state VA zip code 22101

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary Description

The Willson House (1812) is located in central Rockbridge County, Virginia, surrounded by a rugged landscape of woods and pasture. The house faces northwestward, but for the purpose of the nomination is described as facing north. It stands partway up a low ridge that is a spur of Rich Hill, and the 14.36-acre nominated parcel lies at an elevation of between 1,300 and 1,400 feet above sea level. In front of the house, across the gravel bed of Wee Darnock Way (State Route 673), flows a branch of Whistle Creek, which is a tributary of the Maury and James rivers. Little House Mountain (3,386 feet) is a prominent landscape feature a couple miles to the northwest. The south boundary of the nominated area is defined by Turnpike Road (State Route 672), which was the Lexington and Covington Turnpike in the nineteenth century. The property itself is mostly pasture and yard area with rock outcroppings, stone walls, shade trees, and planting beds.

The Willson House is a Georgian/Federal two-story residence constructed of Flemish-bond brick on a limestone foundation. Centered on the five-bay façade is a one-story pedimented entry porch reached by a flight of expertly shaped stone steps. There are molded brick cornices on the front and back elevations as well as stucco lintels over the first-story windows. An apparently integral kitchen wing on the east end is one story in height with a garret. Other exterior features include a metal-sheathed gable roof, interior gable-end brick chimneys, a partially enclosed one-story back entry porch, and an enclosed back kitchen porch. The center-passage-plan interior has plaster wall and ceiling finishes, wood floors, paneled wainscots in the downstairs, and panel doors hung on strap or HL hinges. The mantels are Georgian/Federal and Federal in style. The kitchen has hewn ceiling joists and a long mantel for a large cooking fireplace that has been reduced by stone infill. Off the east end of the house stands a nineteenth-century brick smoke house that was enlarged by a 1920s or 1930s addition. Also on the property are an early twentieth-century garage, a 1970s stable, and a 1970s stone incinerator. Historic photos show no longer extant buildings such as a large mortise-and-tenon frame barn behind the house and a stone building by the spring to the east of the house, which according to some accounts functioned as a distillery.

Inventory

1. Willson House. 1812. Contributing building.
2. Smoke house. 19th c. Contributing building.
3. Garage. Early 20th c. Contributing building.
4. Stable. 1970s. Noncontributing building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

5. Incinerator. 1970s. Noncontributing structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Description (continued)

Detailed Description: Exterior

The dominant feature on the front of the house is the pedimented entry porch, which features horizontal and raking cornices with shaped and dentil moldings (the horizontal dentil molding is punched). The roof is supported by chamfered posts that may be replacements, and it has a board ceiling and poured concrete floor on coursed limestone rubble piers. The square balusters continue as a hand rail down the steps. The steps are constructed of brown sandstone. The bull-nosed treads consist of single blocks of stone and have ends modeled on the shaped tread brackets of wooden steps. The risers and ends of the treads are finished with parallel grooves (probably individually chiseled rather than patent-hammered), and the same treatment appears on some of the ashlar blocks that form the spandrel between the step ends and the ground. The lowest step is scored concrete. In the space under the porch floor the inscription "June [?] H. L. Bayne 1922 [or 23]" is written in the mortar. The porch shelters an entry with a four-pane transom, a six-panel door, and a wood and glass storm door. To each side of the door, and at the same level, are red-painted bricks on which the date 1812 has been painted in (now faded) black paint. Numerous names, initials, and dates have been scratched or written in pencil on the bricks and penciled mortar joints around the entry. These include the inscriptions "Sheilds," "HW" [probably for Hugh Willson], "WM[C?]," "C[F?]C," "M&LJ," and the date 1878.

The front and back elevations are crowned by molded brick cornices with a course of cavetto bricks above ovolo bricks together creating a cyma recta profile. The bricks on the north and west elevations are relatively regular in color. On the south rear elevation and especially on the east gable ends of the house and kitchen wing there are numerous randomly placed glazed headers. A crack in the brickwork at the second-story northeast corner has been attributed to a nineteenth-century earthquake. The first-story windows on the front and back elevations have white-painted stucco lintels, those over the front windows shaped and scored to suggest jack arches with keystones and voussoirs. The back window lintels do not have keystone projections. The first-story windows have nine-over-nine sashes and the second-story windows have six-over-nine sashes. A considerable amount of early crown glass survives. The south elevation windows retain louvered wood shutters, and one or more windows have twisted wrought iron hooks that attach to eyelets on the sill to hold the shutters open. The sills are said to be locust for durability. The coursed limestone rubble foundation has door and vent openings surmounted by segmental relieving arches in the brickwork above. The vents have horizontal wood bars with window sashes behind. There are small windows in the gables, and the projecting tops of the chimneys, which appear to have been rebuilt in the twentieth century, have corbelled caps. Slanting across the west gable end are ghost marks from former downspouts that presumably supplied water to an underground cistern.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Description (continued)

In addition to the front entry porch there are three other porches: a porch over the rear entry and front and back kitchen porches. The rear entry porch, which is hipped, may be a late nineteenth-century replacement of an earlier porch. It has square posts, a concrete floor, and a slatted ceiling. The west end of the porch was enclosed in brick to create a bathroom, probably in the 1920s or 1930s. The enclosure is shown as unpainted in a ca. 1940 photograph but has since been painted white. The entry sheltered by the back porch is similar to the front entry, with a six-panel door, a four-pane transom, and a wood and glass storm door. Written on the penciled mortar joints next to the door are a number of now-illegible names and initials. The kitchen front porch appears to be a reconstruction closely modeled on a porch, presumably original, that was present ca. 1940. It has a shed roof (ghost marks indicate the location of the earlier roof), chamfered rectangular posts that appear original (although whether to this porch or the front entry porch is uncertain), square balusters, and a stuccoed cinder block foundation. A 1978 photograph shows the porch with screening that has since been removed. The kitchen back porch has been enclosed to create the present kitchen. It has an engaged shed roof, weatherboard and stucco siding, two sets of three six-over-six windows, a batten door, a stone foundation, and evidence of one or more alterations occurring before the late 1970s. It is possible the porch enclosure incorporates a historic-period pantry.

Detailed Description: Interior

On the first-floor interior is a single front-to-back parlor on the east side of the center passage and two rooms on the west side (an arrangement hinted at by the three chimneys visible on the exterior). The principal decorative features are the Georgian/Federal and Federal mantels, three on each floor, and a mantel in the kitchen wing. The parlor mantel is the most ornamental. Its pilasters have recessed molded panels carved with fluting with little crescent interruptions spaced along the flutes. The tripartite frieze has end blocks similar to the pilasters in form and ornament, as well as a center tablet with a recessed molded panel with fluting in a triangular pattern. The top and bottom of the frieze is bordered with incised bands, the top band with a row of florets and the bottom band with delicate reeding. The fireplace surround is bordered by a cable molding, and the surround itself, which is iron or possibly concrete, is divided by beaded lines. The other five Federal mantels in the main section of the house have Georgian-influenced architrave forms with end blocks but no center frieze tablets. Several of the mantels repeat selected decorative treatments of the parlor mantel such as recessed molded panels, interrupted fluting, and incised patterns. The mantel in the kitchen wing spans an originally large fireplace opening. It has a simple surround and a molded cornice. The original brick jambs survive at each end, and have a single corbelled brick at the top of each under the wooden lintel, which is mostly concealed by the mantel cornice. The fireplace was infilled with limestone rubble to create a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Description (continued)

smaller fireplace in the 1970s. Some of the infill may date to the nineteenth century and is said to have formed one or more ovens. Iron cranes once existed in the fireplace. A wide concrete hearth extends in front.

The center passage has a two-run stair with square balusters and a square newel capped by a turned knob. The doors at each end of the passage have batten construction on the inner faces (their outer faces are paneled). These and other exterior doors are hung on wrought iron strap hinges with bulbous ends (the kitchen door hinges have pointed leaf-form ends). Most interior doors are paneled and hung on HL hinges (of which some may be twentieth-century reproduction hardware). On the second floor, the front northwest bedroom reveals traces of historic paint colors. There is evidence of black paint under more modern layers on the baseboard, although where the baseboard passes behind a radiator it appears to be painted an earlier layer of brown, suggesting the black paint is a Colonial Revival treatment dating probably to the 1920s or 1930s. The press in this room retains a shelf with a beaded edge. The front northeast room has a double-leaf door to a bathroom and closets that occupy the southeast corner of the second floor. The two-run attic stair in the center passage has a closet underneath that is entered through a two-panel door (one panel above the other) hung on HL hinges. The closet interior is virtually unaltered from original construction, with split lath, unpainted beaded baseboards, and the American-bond inward-facing brickwork of the front wall of the house. The stair strings have very regular straight saw marks indicating they were machine sawn. A loose nail, similar to other nails projecting from the woodwork, has a faceted wrought head on a cut shank. Many rooms in the house have molded wood cornices of uncertain date.

The kitchen (now used as a dining room) occupies the entire main level of the kitchen wing. To the right of the fireplace is a built-in cupboard that has the appearance of having been made out of a window. However, no trace of a window opening is visible on the exterior. The Gold Bond fireproof sheetrock used to build the cupboard suggests it was added in the middle decades of the twentieth century. When the paneled cupboard door is opened, the top part of the interior is taken up by a mass of unknown function. Also of unknown former function is iron hardware similar to a pintle that the cupboard shelf is built around. A ladder stair once rose from the kitchen to the garret, which retains remnant beaded board sheathing that suggests it was originally finished. It now has non-original board ceiling sheathing and painted brick end walls. The chimney mass is sloped and corbelled in order to shift its axis in line with the roof ridge. Multiple cut nails indicative of former wood shingle roofing project through the wide roof boards where the boards are visible. A six-panel door is stored in the garret. On the south or rear side of the kitchen wing is the present kitchen, created out of a former porch and with modern finishes. It communicates with the former kitchen through a doorway with very worn jambs.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Description (continued)

The basement under the main house is reached by a crude stair that was made out of a closet under the center-passage stair. The basement has log ceiling joists supported by a hewn summer beam that is in turn supported by a masonry wall that spans from the front wall of the house to the back. The basement has parged stone walls painted white and a modern concrete floor. The east basement room, which appears to have always been a single large space, has a beaded batten door at its north end. The door is presently hung on twentieth-century barn-type hinges, although there are ghosts of former strap hinges that line up with the ghosts of former pintles on the door frame (an indication the door is original to the opening). The initials CBP and other letters are painted on the door. The bottom of the door is repaired with a piece of packing crate with traces of a stenciled inscription. The space on the west side of the center wall was divided into two rooms along the line of the summer beam. The remnant of a vertical board partition survives, as does a crude batten door hung on strap hinges (the door, partition, and summer beam are encrusted with whitewash). The north or front basement room has a beaded batten exterior door hung on long strap hinges and fitted with a wooden lock box. The south or back room, which had no exterior doorway, has a wood barred vent through the center or interior brick wall. The lack of an exterior door and the presence of the vent suggest this room served as a root cellar. The attic has hewn common rafters without collar beams and an early twentieth-century board enclosure for a water tank. According to one account, the tank was filled by a ram on the creek to the north of the house. Another explanation suggests it served as a reservoir for a radiator heating system installed in the house in the early twentieth century.

Detailed Description: Outbuildings

Off the east end of the kitchen wing stands the smoke house, a one-story painted Flemish-bond brick building on a painted coursed limestone foundation with a metal-sheathed pyramidal roof. In the 1920s or 1930s the smokehouse was enlarged by an addition (now stuccoed) on the south side, extending the roof in gabled form (other additions from the 1970s were recently removed). Both sections have six-over-six windows, the one in the smokehouse presumably added when the addition was made. There is the base of a brick flue on the north side of the smoke house section, and a stuccoed cinder block flue on the east side of the addition. The addition has a batten door with a six-pane window and modern strap hinges. The interiors of both sections have standard gypsumboard wall finishes, and the addition has the same material as a ceiling finish. The original roof structure of the smoke house section is exposed, revealing its heavy, hewn, mortise-and-tenon framing. A center post rises to the apex of the pyramid. There are wide roof boards, many of them charred, through which project the cut nails of former wood shingle roofing. The added room features a simple brick mantel with a corbelled shelf, a fireplace, and a decorative metal grill above the fireplace opening. The room's concrete floor formerly had tiles. Off from the smoke house stands the incinerator, a painted stone structure of irregular tapering

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Description (continued)

form with sheet-metal doors on its sloping side.

The garage is a one-story frame building built into a bank. It has replacement beaded weatherboard siding and a metal-sheathed front-gable roof. The south end is open, and has modern folding lattice doors. The roof and wall structure is exposed on the interior. The stable is a rectangular one-story frame building with board-and-batten siding, a concrete foundation, and a metal-sheathed front-gable roof with overhanging eaves and gables. High on its walls are three-pane transoms reused as windows, and a large doorway on its east end has x-braced sliding doors. The interior has exposed roof and wall structure, horse stalls, and storage spaces. The stable occupies the approximate location of the former barn.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance

The Willson House, located in Rockbridge County, Virginia, meets National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture as a refined and well preserved example of a Georgian/Federal Rockbridge County plantation house. The Flemish-bond brick house, built in 1812 for Robert and Elizabeth Willson, possesses a beautifully crafted portico and stone steps, scored stucco window lintels, and molded brick cornices. The interior features paneled wainscots and Georgian/Federal and Federal mantels. The property also meets Criterion B in the area of conservation for its association with Ruth Anderson McCulloch (1876-1971), a principal founder of the Rockbridge Historical Society, which developed out of a meeting held in the house in 1939. The period of significance extends from the construction of the house in 1812 to 1939, the last year of Ruth A. McCulloch's association with the property. The Willson House is eligible at the local level of significance.

Acknowledgements

A number of individuals assisted the preparation and review of this nomination, foremost among them the owners of the property and sponsors of the nomination, Susan and Douglas Putnam. Others who contributed to the project included Col. Albert S. J. Tucker Jr., Lisa McCown, Leslie Giles, Charles Bodie, Mike Martin, and Jeremy Leadbetter, as well as Quatro Hubbard, Jean McRae, Michael Pulice, Kelly Spradley-Kurowski, and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

Historical Background

The Willson House stands on property owned before 1800 by Samuel Willson (d. ca. 1808; family name also spelled Wilson historically, but for consistency spelled Willson in this report). In 1805 Samuel and his son Robert Willson insured a two-story wood house with the Mutual Assurance Society, a Richmond insurance company. The house was valued at \$550, an adjacent barn was valued at \$150, and a building that may have been a wash house was not insured or valued. Upon Samuel's death his land passed to Robert, who apparently had the present house built in 1812. County tax records from the first two decades of the nineteenth century do not show an increase in value that would indicate construction, but the 1820 county land book lists buildings valued at \$1,300 already on the plantation's core parcel. This, plus stylistic features and the two 1812 date bricks that flank the front entry, which by the style of the numerals appear to be original or early, suggest 1812 as the likely date of construction for the Willson House. The fate of the earlier house insured by Samuel and Robert is unknown, as is its location; it may not have been located at the same site as the present house. In 1816 Robert Willson reinsured the barn for \$250, an increase that reflected the addition of a side shed. The new policy does not mention the dwelling in the 1805 policy nor does it mention the existing house. Policies have not been found for the existing house or for a stone building that formerly stood to the east of the house (see below).¹

An 1808 inventory of Samuel Willson's estate lists an assortment of livestock as well as two stills, sixty-five gallons of apple brandy, and miscellaneous distillery equipment. These items lend support to the tradition that the stone building that once stood on the property served as a distillery. The building, which stood near a spring at the east end of the nominated area, had a broadly gabled form and an unusual fenestration and door opening pattern that suggest it was not constructed as an agricultural building or a dwelling (although secondary use as a dwelling is possible). There does not appear to be a sufficient flow of water in the nearby creek for the building to have served as a mill. Its siting near a spring supports a distillery interpretation, although examination of the 1850 and 1860 industrial census returns has not identified a distillery operation owned by the Willson family at that time. It is perhaps notable, however, that the 1820 land book identifies "John Willson, Destiller," deceased, whose heirs owned two parcels on Whistle Creek not far from the Willson House. It is conceivable John Willson operated a distillery on Robert Willson's land. (Another Rockbridge County member of the Willson family, James, who did not live near the Willson House, was described as a "stiller" in 1820.) The stone building stood in ruinous condition when documented in 1978 for the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and has since been torn down. Its site may be represented by an overgrown area in the swale east of the house within the nomination boundaries. Samuel Willson's 1808 estate inventory also listed five slaves: Joe, an adult male; Suck (probably

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

Sukey), an adult female; Letta, a girl; and Daniel and Lewis, boys. In 1806 Willson also owned a slave girl named Silla.²

Robert Willson (ca. 1783-1851) married Elizabeth Willson (her maiden name as well as her married name) in 1801. In 1820 Robert Willson owned approximately 650 acres, a holding that increased to approximately 930 acres by the time of his death in 1851. The 1850 agricultural census return cites a smaller holding of 600 acres, of which 250 acres were improved and 350 acres were unimproved, both figures relatively large compared to other holdings on the census page. Willson's farm included the standard range of livestock, and it produced crops of wheat (700 bushels), corn (1,200 bushels), and oats (300 bushels). Also harvested on the farm was a substantial hay crop (twenty tons), which suggests the barn that formerly stood southwest of the house had been built by 1850. (A \$300 rise in the value of improvements in the late 1830s may indicate construction of this barn.) Like his father before him, Robert Willson owned slaves. The 1850 census lists five, with an adult male and female and three children. An inventory of Willson's estate in 1851 lists eight slaves: Charlotte ("supposed to be 60"), Isaac (45, "blind 1 eye"), Eliza (30), George (17), Mary (14), Jacob (14), Elizabeth (6), and Eliza's daughter Amanda (3). (The ages of several of these individuals in the census and inventory accounts approximately match.) A line of the estate sale record notes "1 old female slave Charlotte sold to Jno. Willson, he is to receive Twenty-five dollars for to keep her for life." There is no information on the location of a slave house or houses associated with the Willson House, although the garret of the former putative distillery building may have served the purpose.³

Robert Willson's son John Willson (ca. 1820-ca. 1852) was listed in the 1850 census as a farmer, like his father, and a resident of the Willson household, which also included relatives Margaret and Evelina Johnston. For much of the 1850s the farm was listed in tax records as belonging to the heirs of John Willson. In 1861 the Willson heirs had the plantation partitioned and the home tract was sold to Charles J. Brawley, who owned it until his death in 1889. An 1863 map labels the property "Blakey," which may be a corrupted version of Brawley. Still, the association with the Willson family remained strong and the property is labeled "Wilson Farm" on an 1883 map. J. P. Kearney of Killona, Louisiana, acquired the property in 1890 and sold it to J. D. and T. A. Crist in 1899. In 1919 the property was acquired by William A. Anderson, an attorney who served as Virginia's Attorney General from 1902 to 1910. In 1922 Anderson sold the property to his daughter, Ruth Anderson McCulloch, who lived there with her husband, Dr. Charles A. McCulloch, until they sold the property in 1939.⁴

Ruth Anderson McCulloch (1876-1971) grew up in Lexington and attended local and out of town schools to train for a career in teaching. She taught school in Richmond for a number of years before returning to Lexington in 1910, where her father had resumed his legal career after

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

his years in state office. On a visit to Buckingham County she met and later married a widower, Charles McCulloch, and for a number of years the couple lived and farmed in Buckingham County. In 1922 the McCullochs moved to the Willson House. The McCullochs named the Willson House Wee Dornoch, a name that presumably referred to the Scottish town of Dornoch, known for Dornoch Castle and the Royal Dornoch Golf Club. (Wee Darnock, the name of the road on which the house stands, is a modern misspelling.) There the McCullochs raised Charles's two children by his first marriage. The McCullochs also raised two step grandchildren, Susan and Nancy Burks. It was while at Wee Dornoch that Ruth McCulloch became involved in local historical efforts.⁵

Ruth McCulloch wrote two versions of a draft presentation entitled "How the Rockb. His. So. was Started" that are now in her collection at Washington and Lee University in Lexington. After opening with a discussion of events that had galvanized public opinion through American history, McCulloch wrote, "Here in Lex. in the early months of 1939 came such an awakening to the value of our historical heritage, inspired by the threat to tear down the oldest frame building standing within the limits of the town." The house, known as the Nannie Jordan House, stood on North Main Street between the Wilson-Walker House and the Troubadour Building. Interest in the house resulted from an examination of it by "archaeological architect" A. S. Lambert, then working with Colonial Williamsburg (the house was believed to date to the 1770s, the decade of Lexington's establishment). In June 1939 former Lexingtonian Houston Barclay visited the McCullochs at Wee Dornoch and told them of the success of the Wichita (Kansas) Historical Society in preserving that community's historic buildings. McCulloch wrote, "His description fired an impulse to try to band together in this community, those interested in preserving its historical landmarks . . . In trepidation, tho' hope, I asked a score of interested people to come to my country home on July 4th. They came. There is no written record of that little gathering." The group decided to form a historical society. At a second meeting three days later C. Cabell Tutwiler consented to serve as the chairman pro-tem. A third, "open" meeting was held in the Ann Smith School in Lexington on August 9 and twenty-nine people signed on as members. On the August 9 meeting the *Lexington Gazette* reported, "The need for such an organization has been evident for many years and has been advocated by a few loyal workers, the leader of whom was Mrs. Chas. E. McCulloch." McCulloch recalled that Hitler's invasion of Poland delayed immediate action by the newly formed organization but a fourth meeting in October 1939 was a "howling success."⁶

Ruth McCulloch served the Rockbridge Historical Society as its first Chairman of the Executive Committee and its first Chairman of the Program Committee. In the latter capacity she was responsible for arranging speakers for the quarterly meetings. Frances Lee Thurman, who read a paper on the Red House (John McDowell House) at the October 23, 1939, meeting, was the first

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

speaker. From an early date, perhaps from the outset, the RHS intended to publish the presentations, and consequently in 1941 it brought out volume one of the *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society*. McCulloch later wrote that she considered the *Proceedings* the society's "chief accomplishment." In December 1941, with the support of the William Watts Chapter of the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the RHS arranged with the Roanoke radio station WDBJ to broadcast a talk on the society (subsequently published in the *Lexington Gazette*). The address was read by Charles McNulty, a nephew of Ruth McCulloch, who referred to the recent attack on Pearl Harbor in his opening remarks: "In this time of strain and uncertainty, there comes a feeling of security in turning to the things of the past—the things and people that have made what is best of our present day." The address made the case for preservation: "The old homes, the old landmarks, the old burying grounds are falling to decay or are being destroyed for modern purposes. Old articles are disappearing: these remnants must be saved." By its tenth anniversary the RHS had a membership of over two hundred individuals, and it had acquired its first home, an eighteenth-century stone building on Randolph Street known as "The Castle." In 2009 the RHS owns two additional properties, the Sloan House and the Campbell House, the latter serving as the society's headquarters and museum. Volume 12 of the *Proceedings* was published in 2002. The society published an updated version of *Roads of Rockbridge* in 2009 and work on a county history by Charles Bodie is nearing completion.⁷

According to her biographer Charles Turner, Ruth Anderson McCulloch "is the one person whose influence and inspiration has kept the [Rockbridge Historical Society] alive and growing through the years." McCulloch was also a founder of the Blue Ridge Garden Club and was active in the local chapter of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (now Preservation Virginia), which is named the Ruth A. McCulloch Chapter in her honor. In late 1939, shortly after hosting the seminal meeting of the Rockbridge Historical Society at the Willson House, the McCullochs sold the property to Col. Albert Sydney Tucker Sr. and moved into Lexington. Colonel Tucker and his wife Mary renamed the property Tuckaway. During the 1940s Spanish artist Pierre Daura, who lived at Rockbridge Baths, was a house guest at Tuckaway and painted a number of canvasses there, including "Willow & Spring House, Tuckaway," and "The Big Barn at Tuckaway." The barn painted by Daura collapsed in a blizzard during World War II and was removed after the war. Other famous visitors to Tuckaway were writer Carson McCullers, who was a friend of Mary Tucker's, and playwright Edward Albee. McCullers and Albee met at Tuckaway in February 1962 to discuss the adaptation of McCuller's story *The Ballad of the Sad Café* for the stage. Col. Albert Sydney Tucker Jr. acquired the property in 1966 and moved in with his family in 1970. Albert Jr. constructed the incinerator and a stable for his daughter's horses within a few years of occupying the property. He had additions made to the smoke house/apartment so that it could serve as an apartment for his mother, Mary

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

Tucker. The stone building was in ruinous condition by then and stones from it were given to the Stonewall Jackson Foundation for use in the rehabilitation of the Stonewall Jackson House in Lexington. In 1986 the property was sold to the Hughes family and it was purchased by the present owners, Douglas Tomlines Putnam and Susan Terhune Putnam, in 2009.⁸

Architectural Discussion

One of the Willson House's architectural mysteries is the sequence of its construction. The kitchen wing reads as a separate section, and its large fireplace and other features have prompted speculation that the wing pre-dates the rest of the house. Other details, however, suggest the wing is integral with the house. For example, there is no seam in the brickwork on the north elevation where the house and wing join. Also, the distribution of glazed headers in the Flemish bond brickwork of the house and wing supports concurrent construction. The house and wing share the same hierarchical brickwork, with the glazed headers relegated to the south and east elevations and the more regular, unglazed bricks used on the west and north elevations, the sides that were most visible from the road. This suggests the house and wing were planned and constructed at the same time. Discrepancies in the construction of the kitchen wing such as its lower floor level and the slightly different form of the strap hinges on its doors may be explained by the difference in function. It is not inconceivable that the kitchen wing was built at the beginning of construction to provide a temporary dwelling for the Willson family, although nothing about its construction strongly supports or discounts such a possibility.

The 1812 date bricks that flank the north entry are a curious feature. Their location at the sides of the entry, rather than in a gable, on a chimney, or at a front corner is unusual. The fact that there are two dated bricks may indicate a desire for symmetry—or redundancy, in case one brick were to become illegible (as it happens, one of the bricks is more faded than the other). The 1812 date of construction is reflected in the transitional character of most of the interior mantels, which have a Georgian-inspired architrave form with a prominent frame (architrave) around the fireplace. These mantels are ornamented the same way as the Federal parlor mantel, which has characteristically Federal pilasters (instead of an architrave) and a tripartite frieze. The Willson House mantels are stylistically related to mantels in Stone House (Zachariah Johnston House), which has a gable stone dated 1797, and Mulberry Hill, dated ca. 1801. These houses have Federal mantels (extremely early for the style) with triangular fluting in their center frieze tablets. Another indication of an 1810s date for the Willson House is the preponderance of what appear to be hand-headed cut nails used in its construction. Such nails, which are transitional between completely hand-wrought and completely machine-made nails, had come into use in major northeastern cities by 1800 and remained common through at least the early 1810s.⁹

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 14

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

Aspects of the Willson House stonework and brickwork deserve mention. The shaped ends of the stone front steps are meant to evoke a similar treatment usually seen only in the woodwork of interior stairs. The name H. L. Bayne, which appears in the mortar under the front porch, probably refers to the stonemason or concrete worker (Bayne is a common Rockbridge County name), and the date that appears with the name, 1922 or 1923, suggests work such as the concrete porch floor was done shortly after Charles and Ruth McCulloch moved to the property. (The brick bathroom enclosure on the back porch also probably dates to their occupancy.) The molded brick cornices at the top of the north and south elevations relate to a Rockbridge County preference for such cornices. Architectural historian Pamela Simpson has studied molded brick cornices in the county and notes their popularity relative to other areas of Virginia. Approximately 43% of antebellum brick residences documented in a 1970s survey of the county had molded brick cornices. Use of the cornices was concentrated from the mid-1810s to the 1840s, which places the Willson House early in the phenomenon. Simpson notes an association of molded brick cornices with houses built by John Jordan and Samuel Darst, who were probably the Lexington area's most prominent brick construction firm during the period 1815 to 1824 (both men were active before 1815).¹⁰

Historic photographs show buildings that are now missing from the property. The largest of these was a barn that stood to the southeast of the house near the present stable. A photograph from ca. 1940 shows this to have been a log gable-roofed building, probably of bank barn form, and possibly with a forebay and straw shed on the downhill north side. An early 1940s painting of what appears to be the barn's west and south sides shows hip-roofed extensions on those and the north side. An 1899 deed referred to a "hay house" near one of the boundaries of the farm as it then existed (probably outside the present boundaries). A photograph from the 1940s or shortly after shows the former stone building and labels it "Spring house at Tuckaway." At the time the building was still under roof. By the date of a 1978 photograph the stone building was in ruinous condition, yet it retained a gable end chimney flanked at the gable level by at least one window. The 1978 photograph suggests the building interior may have been at least partially parged and its upper level shows evidence of having been heated by a stove or fireplace. Old photographs also suggest the former course of the road now known as Wee Darnock Way may once have passed closer to the house.¹¹

Endnotes

1. Rockbridge County tax records; Will Book 3, p. 99; Mutual Assurance Society records.
2. Rockbridge County tax records; Will Book 3, pages 99 and 151; U.S. census; Simpson, "Tuckaway."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 15

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Statement of Significance (continued)

3. Rockbridge County tax records; Will Book 12, pages 127 and 130.
4. Rockbridge County tax records; Rockbridge County Deed Book II pages 63 and 84; Deed Book KK p. 160; Deed Book 57, p. 65; Deed Book 88, p. 449; Deed Book 127, p. 227; Wright, "Tuckaway;" Carmichael map; "Rockbridge County (Section Number 1), 1863."
5. Turner, "Mrs. Charles McCulloch;" McCulloch collection.
6. McCulloch, "How the Rockb. His. So. was Started;" McCulloch, "Beginnings of the Rockbridge Historical Society;" Turner, *Mrs. McCulloch's Stories of Ole Lexington*, 64-65; *Lexington Gazette*, August 11, 1939.
7. McCulloch, "How the Rockb. His. So. was Started;" Tompkins, "Forward;" *Lexington Gazette*, January 1 and 8, 1942.
8. Albert S. J. Tucker Jr., personal communication; Turner, "Mrs. Charles McCulloch;" Hughes, "Wee Darnock (Little House);" Wright, "Tuckaway;" "Pierre Daura's Vision of Virginia;" Lynchburg College website; Savigneau, *Carson McCullers*, 301.
9. Lyle and Simpson, *Architecture of Historic Lexington*, 123, 127, 128; Edwards and Wells, *Historic Louisiana Nails*, 16-17, 50-51.
10. Lyle and Simpson, *Architecture of Historic Lexington*, 18-23; Simpson, "Molded Brick Cornice," 30, 32, 33.
11. Wee Dornoch photograph file; Tuckaway photograph file; Simpson, "Tuckaway;" Lynchburg College website; Rockbridge County Deed Book 88, p. 449.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 16

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carmichael, John. "The County of Rockbridge, Virginia." Map, 1883.

Edwards, Jay D., and Tom Wells. *Historic Louisiana Nails: Aids to the Dating of Old Buildings*.
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1993.

Hughes, Carol Turnbull. "Wee Darnock (Little House)." Report, 2006.

Lexington Gazette. Lexington, Va.

Lyle, Royster, Jr., and Pamela Hemenway Simpson. *The Architecture of Historic Lexington*.
Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977.

Lynchburg College website (www.lynchburg.edu).

McClung, James W. "Home of C. J. Brawley." Works Progress Administration of Virginia
Historical Inventory Report, November 3, 1936.

McCulloch, Ruth Anderson. "How the Rockb. His. So. was Started." Manuscript (ca. 1949) at
Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

_____. "The Beginnings of the Rockbridge Historical Society." *Proceedings of the
Rockbridge Historical Society*. Volume 3 (1949): front matter.

McCulloch, Ruth Anderson, Collection. Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and
Lee University, Lexington, Va.

Mutual Assurance Society Records. Library of Virginia, Richmond.

"Pierre Daura's Vision of Virginia." Exhibition catalog. Richmond: Virginia Historical Society,
2006.

Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society.

Putnam, Douglas. Personal communication, 2009.

Rockbridge County deed, tax, and will records. Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Va.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 17

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

Bibliography (continued)

Rockbridge County, Virginia, Heritage Book, 1778-1997. Rockbridge Baths, Va.: Rockbridge Area Genealogical Society, 1997.

“Rockbridge County (Section Number 1), 1863.” Map.

Rockbridge Historical Society records. Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

Savigneau, Josyane. *Carson McCullers: A Life*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Simpson, Pamela H. “The Molded Brick Cornice in the Valley of Virginia.” *APT* vol. 12 no. 4 (1980): 29-33.

_____. “Tuckaway.” Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey Form, 1978.

Tompkins, E. Pendleton. “Foreward.” *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society*. Volume 3 (1949): front matter.

Tuckaway photograph file. Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

Tucker, Albert S. J., Jr. Personal communication, June 24, 2009.

Turner, Charles W. “Mrs. Charles McCulloch.” *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society*. Volume 7 (1966-69): 7-8.

Turner, Charles W., ed. *Mrs. McCulloch’s Stories of Ole Lexington*. Verona, Va.: McClure Press, 1972.

United States Census schedules (free and slave population, agriculture, and industry).

Wee Dornoch photograph file. Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

Wright, Robin. “Tuckaway.” Report, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 18

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated area correspond to Rockbridge County Tax parcel 59-A-46C.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the 14.36-acre nominated area correspond to the boundaries of the present property (Rockbridge County Tax Parcel 59-A-46C) and encompass the historic resources presently associated with the property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Photos Page 19

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia

PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs are of:

Willson House
Rockbridge County, Virginia
DHR file no. 081-0183
Photos taken in June 2009
J. Daniel Pezzoni, Photographer
Negatives are stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, Virginia.

VIEW OF: North (front) and west sides of house. View facing southeast.
NEG. NO. 24593
PHOTO 1 OF 5

VIEW OF: South and east sides of house. View facing west.
NEG. NO. 24593
PHOTO 2 OF 5

VIEW OF: Front porch steps. View facing northeast.
NEG. NO. 24593
PHOTO 3 OF 5

VIEW OF: View of property from Turnpike Road (SR 672) showing (from left to right) garage, house, and smoke house with Little House Mountain in the distance. View facing northwest.
NEG. NO. 24593
PHOTO 4 OF 5

VIEW OF: Mantel in main (east) first-floor room.
NEG. NO. 24593
PHOTO 5 OF 5

filed 4/10/09
11-20

Willbrook Farm
556 Turnpike Road
Lexington, Virginia 24450
(540) 460-4600

September 10, 2009

Mr. Marc Christian Wagner
Director, Resource Information Division
Department of Historic Resources
Commonwealth of Virginia
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

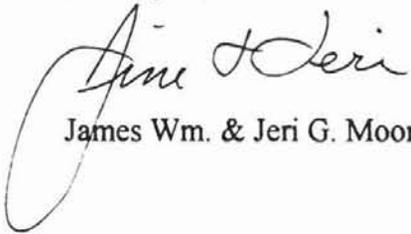
Re: Willson House, Rockbridge County

Dear Mr. Wagner:

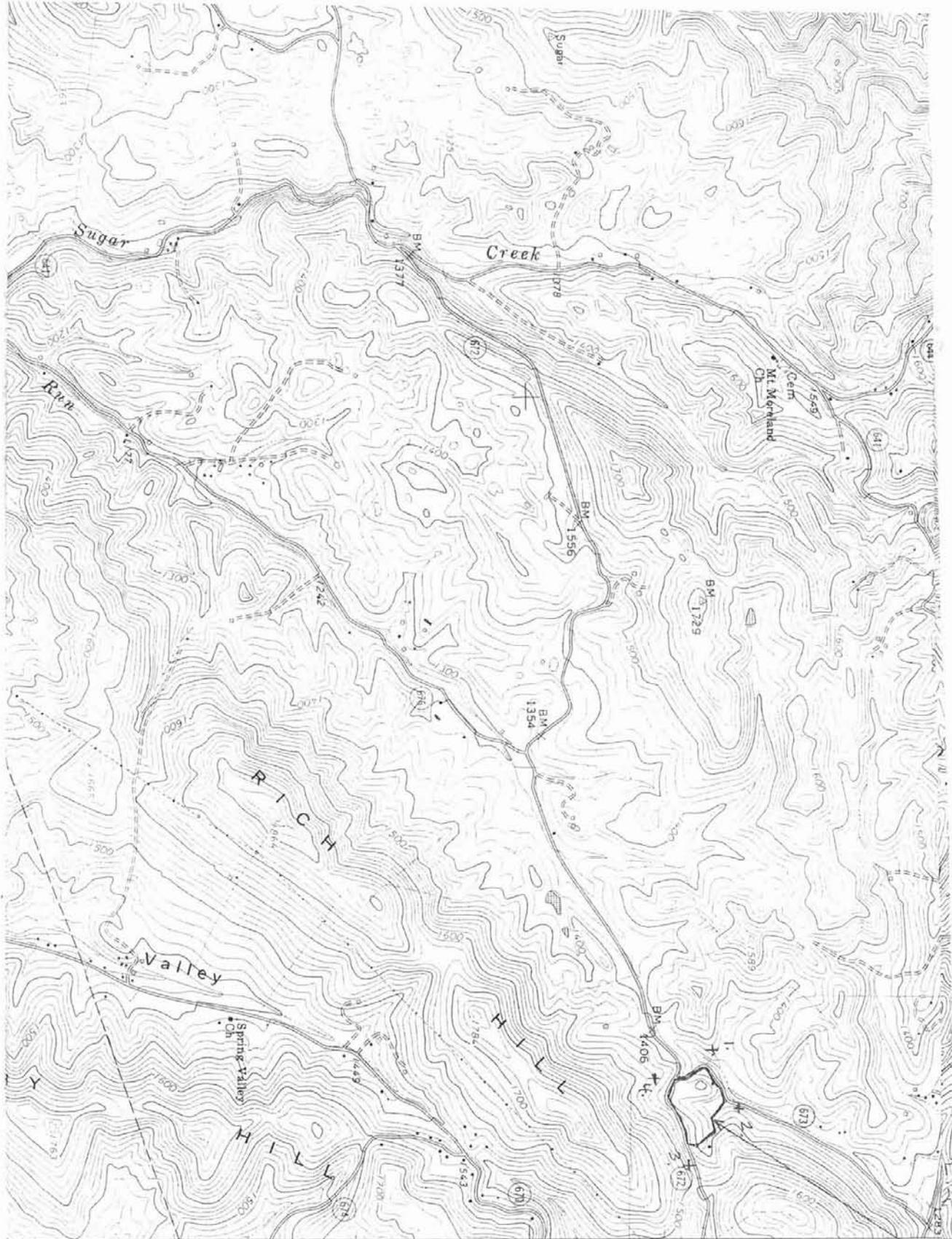
It is with great pleasure that we give our full support to the nomination of the Willson House to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

The Moore family settled in Rockbridge County before 1750, and it makes us proud to see such a keen interest pursued in our recognizing our county's landmarks.

Thank you,



James Wm. & Jeri G. Moore



4182
 4183
 47.30"
 4184
 LEXINGTON 3.2 MI
 4185
 UTM refs. (zone 17):
 1. E631240
 N4184360
 2. E631500
 N4184480
 3. E631740
 N4184260
 4. E631560
 N4184100

(081-0183)
 Rockbridge Co., Va.