

VLR-4/28/95

NRHP-417/75

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 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 an 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 ROCKBRIDGE INN

other names/site number VDHR #81-399

2. Location

street & number N. side Valley Road at jct. with S.R. 743 ☐ not for publication N/A

city or town Natural Bridge ☐ vicinity

state Virginia code VA county Rockbridge code 163 zip code 24578

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ 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 38 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Quinn D. McRae, Jr. 3/1/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF MONUMENTS & REGISTERS  
Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Rockbridge Inn  
Name of Property

Rockbridge County, VA  
County and State

### 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

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	0	objects
1	3	Total

#### Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

#### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

### 6. Function or Use

#### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: hotel

#### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structures

### 7. Description

#### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MIXED

#### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

WOOD: weatherboard

roof METAL

other \_\_\_\_\_

#### 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.
- ☐ **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.)

Property is:

- ☐ **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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

TRANSPORTATION

### Period of Significance

1821-1890

### Significant Dates

1821-1823

circa 1841

1880-1890

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### 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

### Bibliography

(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: VA Dept. of Hist. Resour  
221 Governor St., Richmond, VA 23219

Rockbridge Inn  
Name of Property

Rockbridge County, VA  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 1 1/2 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17</u>	<u>629040</u>	<u>4168400</u>
Zone	Easting	North	ing
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	North	ing
4			

☐ 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 Dianne and Joseph Pierce, Consultants

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 7/5/94

street & number P.O. Box 899 telephone (508) 693-3053

city or town West Tisbury state MA zip code 02575

### 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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Nancy Skidmore

street & number Route 1 Box 399 telephone (703) 291-1355

city or town Natural Bridge state VA zip code 24578

**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.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Rockbridge County, VA

## Summary Description

Rockbridge Inn was built between 1821 and 1823 by John Galbraith on land that almost certainly already contained other buildings including a dwelling. The two-story brick house built by Galbraith functioned as a dwelling as well as a stagecoach stop and tavern on the Valley Road. The house was added to around 1841 with a large four-room frame wing to the north of the original section. Although the property deteriorated steadily over the next forty years, in the 1880s the house was remodeled. The two-story porches, the windows, and some interior detailing such as mantels and doors date from this period. Few changes were made to the house after the 1880s. The house retains interior detailing from all three of its major building campaigns, including fine Federal mantels and the cantilevered stair. The house as it now exists is the sum of its approximately 60-year architectural evolution.

## Architectural Analysis

The earliest configuration of the building now known as Rockbridge Inn was a five-bay, two-story brick structure with a pitched roof. This building, begun in 1821 and completed in 1823 by John Galbraith as a tavern and residence, was constructed in Flemish bond using bricks produced on the site. Although the brickwork has been reworked in many areas, much of the original masonry is still evident. The bricks are very regular in size, and the pointing is extremely fine. The original structure had a double-pile, center-passage plan, with a symmetrical front facade and two interior chimneys on each end. The structural members evident under the house were hand-hewn.

The interior of the building retains some of the features from the early 19th century. The wide, mitred, door- and window-moldings, wide baseboard with ogive top, heavy chair rail, cornices, and much of the wide pine flooring date from the earliest period of construction. The straight-run stair on the west side of the entrance hall, with its distinctive cantilevered structure, showing no visible means of support, may be original to the house, although much of its detailing, including the square Eastlake newel, dates

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(Architectural Analysis, contd.)

from the 1880s remodeling. The stair features delicate balusters, two per step, turned and tapered in an hourglass configuration, as well as carved panels with a scroll motif along the stringer.

Doors (including the pocket doors between the front and rear rooms on each side of the hall) in the original section of the house feature four indented panels with raised centers, with the larger panels on top. Hardware largely dates from the early twentieth century. The front hall, as well as the rooms on the back (north) side of the original section have a chair rail; a narrow cornice is found in all of the rooms on the first floor. The second floor has a cornice and chair rail only in the hall.

Sometime around 1841, as suggested by a \$500.25 increase in the assessed value of the property's buildings, an addition was made to the north side of the house, consisting of two large and two small rooms on each floor, with a small connector (which may have been a porch originally) between old and new sections. There is an interior chimney between the two rooms. The 1841 wing of the house has fluted trim with bullseye corner blocks, and the doors are five-panel. The baseboard is also fluted. Flooring is narrower in this section, and runs north-south, as opposed to the east-west direction of the flooring in the older wing. Structural members here were circular-sawn.

When Colonel Henry Chester Parsons owned the property in the 1880s, most of the remaining alterations were made that gave the house its current appearance. Most notably, Parsons added the double-story porches encircling the south, east, and west facades of the house. These porches, likely modeled from those at the Natural Bridge Hotel (also owned and remodeled by Parsons), may have been constructed by the same builders who worked at Parsons's Natural Bridge properties. The wooden porches, seven bays on the south facade, six on the east, and six plus four on the west, have turned wooden posts. The second story of the porch has a railing in an x-and-cross configuration; there is no railing on the first level. Some small curving brackets remain on either side of the porch posts. The porches have shallow hipped roofs and tongue-and-groove wood ceilings.

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(Architectural Analysis, contd.)

The 1880s remodeling also included adding clipped end gables with two-over-two double-hung sash windows. The front received a clipped gable with paired two-over-two windows.

Also in the 1880s, the windows were remodeled. The wood double-hung sash windows in the new wing are a simplified Queen Anne configuration of one large center pane with eight small edge panes, over two panes. In the original section, the windows on the front facade are also wood double-hung sash, with one large center pane encircled by small square panes, over two panes. On the east and west facades, the windows are a mixture of the same Queen Anne-style windows as on the front, along with some one-pane wood sash casement windows with fixed transoms having one center pane and encircling smaller panes. On the east facade on the second floor, two additional windows were added on the left and right sides. The other windows on this and the west facade are paired on each floor at the center of the facade. The masonry around all the window openings shows evidence of alteration, probably indicating that the 1880s windows are a larger size than those there previously.

The front door frames on the first and second floor appear to be original to the house, although the doors themselves, with their one large pane over two heavily-molded indented panels, probably date from the 1880s remodeling. Likewise, the three-light transom and two-light sidelights probably date from this period.

Although the appearance of any porch that existed prior to the 1880s is unknown, there are some clues as to its appearance. The fact that the second-floor door, being identical to that on the first floor, appears to predate the 1880s porches may indicate that a prior porch likewise had two stories, or at least a roof deck of some sort. In addition, a description of the house from 1867 (when the property was sold at auction to relieve the estate's indebtedness) mentions a "portico" whose roof had fallen in. The previous porch, then, may have been a one-bay portico over the central front door, with a flat roof, perhaps with a railing.

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(Architectural Analysis, contd)

The wood mantels on the interior of the house reflect the several periods of construction and remodeling that Rockbridge Inn underwent. The mantels in the second floor rooms on the west side of the original house date from the earliest period of construction and show evidence of the Federal style. The one in the southwest corner room is particularly fine, with delicate detailing including indented side panels, herringbone-pattern carving, and wide overhanging shelf. The other early mantel, in the northwest corner room, is a much more simplified Federal form. Two mantels show heavier Greek Revival styling: one in the northern room on the west side of the original section's first floor, and one in the northern room on the east side, second floor. These two mantels, although not the same, with their classical forms and heavy moldings, likely date from the circa 1841 remodeling. All of the other mantels in the house probably date from the 1880s renovations. These mantels, also not identical to each other, exhibit Eastlake detailing, chamfered edges, and spindle brackets.

Small additions and alterations have been made to the house in the twentieth century, such as a two-story cinderblock appendage in the corner between the north and south wings on the east side, and small enclosures of the porches on the west side of the north wing.

The entire house now has a standing-seam metal roof.

In addition to the main house on the property, there are two outbuildings dating from the early twentieth century: a shed-roofed wooden garage, and a gable-roofed wooden shed. The assemblage of farm buildings that once occupied the site, including a very large barn northwest of the house, is not extant. The gazebo to the northeast of the house was added by the Skidmores in 1992.



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ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

### Statement of Significance

Rockbridge Inn embodies the distinctive characteristics of an early stagecoach inn and tavern in western Virginia. Built between 1821 and 1823, the two-story brick tavern is located along the route of the old Valley Road, one of the primary north-south transportation routes linking Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., with lands west and southwest. Rockbridge Inn played a significant role in the development of Rockbridge County and the Shenandoah Valley, serving as a stop on the stagecoach route for travelers and for tourists visiting Natural Bridge. The inn has been associated with events and people very important to Rockbridge County. It was built by John Galbraith, a large landowner in the county. At one time it was owned by Colonel H. C. Parsons, the primary developer and promoter of Natural Bridge. It was Parsons who was responsible for the 1880s addition of the distinctive double-story porches which wrap around the building, as well as for other remodeling that took place at the same time; 1890 being the end of the period of significance of the property. The 4.5-acre site consists of the main tavern/residence and two noncontributing outbuildings.

### Historical Background

The land where Rockbridge Inn now stands was once part of a large 1,000-acre plantation owned by James Gilmore. Gilmore and his wife Martha were early settlers in the Rockbridge County area, listed as taxpayers as early as 1764.(1) The Gilmore family played an important role in the creation and development of Rockbridge County. John Gilmore served on the first court and vestry of the newly-formed county in 1778. The Gilmore men were appointed surveyors and keepers of some of the earliest roads in the area in one of the first acts of the elected officials of the county. (2) They served in leadership in the local militia, served as constables, sheriffs, and deputies, and were among the earliest tavern owners in the area.

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(Historical Background, contd.)

When James Gilmore died in 1782, he left the property to his two younger sons, Joseph and William. The plantation contained 961 acres at the time, later reduced to 905 acres. In 1803, Joseph Gilmore lived in a home known as View Mont, a two-story brick house covered with wood. William Gilmore lived at Gilead, a one-story wooden dwelling with a stone foundation.(4) Either of these houses may have been the original residence of their father James, or there may have been two new dwellings built on the land left by James Gilmore. After the acreage was increased to 1,017 acres, the brothers divided the land between them, each receiving 508.5 acres. After further transactions, Joseph sold his land to John Wallace, and William sold his land to John Allen in 1818. Allen in turn sold the property to John Galbraith in 1821.(5)

John Galbraith was a large landowner in the area, and was listed as a taxpayer in the county as early as 1782. He purchased a vast tract of land originally part of the Borden Grant, the earliest land grant in the area (November 6, 1739). Land was later purchased from Galbraith's estate for the construction of Virginia Military Institute.

In 1821, Galbraith began construction on Galbraith Tavern, now known as Rockbridge Inn, with construction completed by 1823. Tax figures from the period attest to the construction of a significant dwelling on the site.(6) Galbraith knew that the main stage route would be running past his property along the old Valley Road, later the Valley Turnpike; Galbraith built the tavern to accommodate those traveling along the stage route. Galbraith Tavern, operated by Galbraith for over 20 years, was a place for changing horses and the last stop of the stagecoach before Natural Bridge, a favorite tourist spot.

The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia was settled primarily by Scotch-Irish and Germans from Pennsylvania, with settlement beginning in the 1730s. The settlers, mostly farmers, travelled along an "ancient buffalo trail or Warrior's Path, which much later became

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(Historical Background, contd.)

the Valley Turnpike.(7) This route at one time was referred to as the Pennsylvania Road or the Great Wagon Road or the Carolina Road.(8) The first white men in the Rockbridge area used the "Great Path," which was in the basic location of the Valley Turnpike.(9) The Valley Turnpike, one of the most famous of several roads constructed during the 1830s, was incorporated in 1834 and used for much north-south travel. It later became known as the Lee Highway and U.S. Route 11.

The stagecoach was the primary means of land transportation in the early 1800s, carrying both passengers and mail. The stagecoach traveled north and south in the Shenandoah Valley, with one of its first routes in the area along the Plank Road between Lexington and Buchanan. The Plank Road was so named because planks were laid across the road in an effort to smooth out the ride and avoid the mud and holes. Mirando, a tavern owned by the Matier family, was the stopping point between Lexington and Buchanan, for food and for a change of horses. Later, when the Galbraith Tavern was built, the primary route was changed and the stages stopped at Galbraith Tavern on its runs.(10)

A copy of a pocket map entitled "Mitchel's Map of Virginia," dated 1837, was found in the desk of John Beeton, a former resident of Lexington. In it, the few stagecoach routes through the Valley are mapped. There was a route from Richmond to Lexington and on to Charleston, West Virginia. There was a stage that travelled between Lexington and Staunton, and another between Lexington and Salem, a distance of 58 miles, three times a week. The route was described by James McClung: "Going southwest to Salem, what is at present known as the Natural Bridge road is followed to the old Galbraith Place and thence proceeds on to Pattonsburg (now Buchanan) on the James River." (11) Galbraith Tavern is the only stage stop that McClung specifically mentions, thereby indicating its prominent role in the transportation system. At both Salem and Staunton the stage coaches connected with other stage lines, thereby making travel from one town to another quite possible.

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ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

(Historical Background, contd.)

Galbraith Tavern was a significant meeting location in Rockbridge County. The commissioners of roads and other governmental bodies often met at the tavern, as evidenced by advertisements and minutes of those meetings.

Galbraith was forced to sell the tavern in 1845 to pay off bonds to which he was obligated. The Lexington newspapers, The Gazette and Valley Star, as well as the Staunton Spectator newspaper carried the advertisement for the sale:

By virtue of deed of trust made by John Galbraith to William Taylor and James D. Davidson, on the 17th of February, 1843, and on record in the Clerk's office of Rockbridge, I shall proceed on the 14th day of May next, on the premises, to sell at public auction, a tract of land in said County--430 acres, more or less--This tract lies on the main Valley Road, 12 miles from Lexington, 2 miles from Natural Bridge, and within 4 miles of James River, which is navigable at all seasons for boats conveying **seventy** or more barrels of flour. The improvements consist of a large two story Brick House, with ten rooms in it conveniently arranged, a good Brick Kitchen, Smoke House, and Ice House, all in good repair, and a large log stable. The house has been occupied for many years as a tavern, and is, as well from its situation, as its arrangement, admirably adapted to that purpose. In addition to the improvements above mentioned, which are situated on the road, there is near the centre of the farm a large log barn with sheds on three sides, and a dwelling house two stories high built of hewed logs and a good kitchen, so that the purchaser if he does not choose to occupy the building on the road may rent it out as a Tavern. About 230 acres of the land are cleared, the balance is well timbered--consisting of black oak, walnut, poplar and hickory. The cleared land is in a good state of cultivation, about 35 acres of it are well set with clover, there are about 25 acres of good meadow all of which can be watered from the stream which passes through it.

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The whole land is enclosed with a good fence and the fields may be so arranged as to have water in each. The neighborhood is a good one and entirely healthy. It is seldom that so desirable a tract of land is in the market. (12)

Thomas Welch purchased the property at the auction; however, title transfer was not completed until 1853. After Welch's death, Jonathan Pougue purchased the property at auction in 1854 though he never lived there. He and his heirs rented the property out for use as a farm. It is unclear whether the property was used as a tavern following its sale by Galbraith. It was operated as a farm, experiencing very hard times during the late 1850s and the Civil War. Pougue died in 1862, deeply in debt. In 1867, a lawsuit was filed by the guardian of Pougue's children demanding that the property be sold to help alleviate the indebtedness of the estate. Depositions during the case describe the property as in a state of disrepair. The kitchen had fallen down, the portico had been without a roof for 18 months, the windows were without glass, and the outbuildings were in bad condition. (13) The farm had depreciated in value ever since Pougue had purchased it. The farm was auctioned off, being purchased by John Pougue, Jonathan's brother.

The stagecoach continued to be the primary source of transportation in the area following the Civil War. A description of the stage routes was made by William B. Wills, who drove stages for 18 years beginning in 1871:

The stage ran from Buchanan to Natural Bridge, where connection was made with trains. The stage line was known as the Harmon Line. Roads in those days were no joke, commented Mr. Wills. Often, in rainy seasons, a coach would sink almost axle deep in mud. The trip from Buchanan to Natural Bridge required a day and it required another day to travel by stage from Natural Bridge to Lexington. There were no holdups in those days, he said, although all drivers carried a weapon.

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Usually, however, the gun was kept in a duffle sack with other supplies. Mr. Wills said he remembers as a boy seeing iron ore hauled in wagons bound for Buchanan to be loaded in boats adding that many persons were thus kept busy. (14)

John Pougue also died in debt, and the property was again sold in order to alleviate indebtedness. A number of people purchased the farm but within a year or two defaulted on the bonds. The heirs of John Pougue remained the legal owners of the property until 1897 when Maud Parsons paid the Pougue heirs off completely.

One of the owners of the property during this time was the Natural Bridge Forest Company, which bought the farm on August 30, 1888. The Natural Bridge Forest Company also owned Natural Bridge. H. C. Parsons was the president and chief stockholder of the company.

Colonel H. C. Parsons was a very prominent man in Rockbridge County in the 1880s and 1890s. He was not especially popular in the county as he had served in the Union army during the Civil War, being wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg. Parsons formed a company to build the old Richmond-Allegheny Railroad, later the James River Division of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad and now CSX, which ran from Richmond to Clifton Forge. He purchased land for this venture from the failing James River & Kanawha Co. in order to build the railroad in the tow-path of the canal. It was during this construction period that Parsons became interested in the Rockbridge area. (15) He purchased Natural Bridge in 1881, becoming its tenth owner.

"No one has ever done so much to improve the property as did Colonel Parsons." (16) He made the most significant contribution to the development of Natural Bridge as a vacation retreat, park and resort in its history, developing perhaps the largest privately owned park in the United States at that time. (17) He built roads and highways through the woods for horse vehicles and bridle paths.

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He kept 40 or 50 boarding horses at the stables of Natural Bridge, both for his daughters and for the travelling public. He operated the Natural Bridge Stage from Natural Bridge Railroad Station to the Natural Bridge for his guests. He expanded the grounds, built Appledore Cottage and the Pavilion Hotel, improved the old Jefferson Cottage, and added both ends of the Forest Inn Hotel. (18) These buildings were for dining, dancing and lodging. The Natural Bridge area is still a very significant tourist attraction in the economy of Rockbridge County.

Parsons transferred the ownership of Natural Bridge in 1884 to the Natural Bridge Forest Company, which he ran expertly during the next years. In 1890, the Natural Bridge Forest Company transferred much of the land received from the Parsons family to the Natural Bridge Park Company, reserving the Parsons, Natural Bridge, and the Gatehouse for the Parsons family themselves. The Natural Bridge Park Company expected a land boom to occur around the park and the town of Glasgow. It laid out building lots and envisioned a populous resort community. The boom never occurred, only a few lots were sold, and the company had to concentrate its activities on the Natural Bridge itself.

Parsons was responsible for renovating the old Galbraith Tavern. During his ownership double-story porches were added to the building on three sides; porches extremely similar to those added to a hotel at Natural Bridge. The windows were enlarged, and the attic dormers were added probably at the same time. The stair detailing, and possibly its structure, date from this remodeling as well. Parsons also installed in the building one of the first electrical systems in the area.

H. C. Parsons died tragically in 1894, murdered by a train conductor whom Parsons had reported for insolent behavior. Parsons left everything, including the old Galbraith property, to his wife Nellie and his daughters. Mrs. Parsons continued to live at Jefferson Cottage, probably spending time at the Galbraith property as well. Her two daughters Gretchen and Maud also inherited the property; in 1901 Nellie Parsons bought the interest of Maud

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(Historical Background, contd.)

Parsons McCluer and owned the property in conjunction with her daughter Gretchen. In 1904 a Deed of Partition of Tenants in Common was recorded, dividing the property between Nellie Parsons and Gretchen Parsons Brinton. Nellie received the western portion of the property, 168 acres, and Gretchen received the eastern portion, 56 acres and the primary residence.

Nellie Parsons sold her property to George W. Parsons in 1905, who wanted the property to become a full-time farmer. It is believed but not documented that he was a relative of H. C. Parsons. He lived in the house 200 yards from the tavern until he bought it in 1919, shortly after his marriage to Mary Elizabeth Williams. Ms. Williams had previously lived in the tavern as a boarder when she had first moved to Rockbridge County to become the first woman principal of Natural Bridge School.

Parsons renamed the tavern Rockbridge Inn and operated it as such in conjunction with the farm. The Inn was popular with visitors to Natural Bridge. The Lee Highway, the primary road for travelers, passed right in front of the Inn, following the route of the Great Valley Road. In addition, the Parsonses used the inn as a boarding house for local school teachers. Even during the Great Depression, the Parsonses were able to make ends meet from the income from the Inn.

In 1936, the Lee Highway was slightly re-routed, cutting the Rockbridge Inn off from the main transportation route for the first time in its history. The road moved because of a political maneuver by J. Lee Davis, manager of the Natural Bridge, and Mr. Anderson, State Road Commissioner. According to family legend, The Natural Bridge Hotel was losing business to the local inns, including Rockbridge Inn, and Davis wanted to recapture that business. His ploy was to re-route the primary flow of traffic away from the inns, and he was successful in convincing Anderson to do just that. Rockbridge Inn was effectively put out of business as an inn; it continued to rent rooms to boarders, but the tourist boom was over.



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(Historical Background, contd.)

At the death of G. W. Parsons in 1952, Rockbridge Inn passed to his wife, then to his three children following her death. In 1968, Nancy, the youngest of the three, acquired Rockbridge Inn and eight acres as her share of the property, while her two brothers shared the remainder of the farm. The farm property was later divided between George Parsons and Peter Parsons's widow. The farm is used as a cattle farm today, and Rockbridge Inn is the residence of Nancy and her husband Louis Skidmore.

Rockbridge Inn has played a significant role in the development of Rockbridge County. It was a prominent component in the transportation system in the area as it was developing; it has very close association with Natural Bridge, an important resource in the county; and it was a part of the lives of many people who made great contributions to the development of the area.

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ROCKBNRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

ENDNOTES

1. Morton, Oren. History of Rockbridge County, Virginia (Staunton, Virginia: The McClure Co., Inc., 1920), p. 465.
2. Rockbridge County Order Book, 1778 - 1784, p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 7-13.
4. Mutual Assurance Society, Reel 4, Volume 37, Policy No. 617R.
5. Rockbridge County Land Book, 1813-1821.
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7. Dabney, Virginus, Virginia: The New Dominion (1971), p. 94.
8. Morton, p. 161.
9. Davis, J. Lee and Tompkins, E.P. The Natural Bridge and Its Historic Surroundings (Natural Bridge, Virginia, 1939), p. 2.
10. Moore, Hoda, Works Progress Administration of Virginia Historical Inventory, Rockbridge, 1936, p. 71.
11. McClung, James, "Old Stage Route", Works Progress Administration of Virginia Historical Inventory, Rockbridge, 1936, p. 2.
12. Lexington Gazette, April 3, 1846.
13. Rockbridge County Bill File 257-1 and 257-4, April 9, 1867.
14. Mills, William B., quoted in "Octogenarian Tells of Stage Coach Days on Valley Highways," (1911?).
15. Davis, J. Lee, Bits of History and Legends Around and About the Natural Bridge of Virginia from 1730 to 1950 (Natural Bridge, Virginia: Natural Bridge Co., 1949), various pages.
16. Ibid., p. 79.
17. Ibid., p. 79.
18. Ibid., p. 79.

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Rockbridge County, VA

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ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Rockbridge Inn property consists of approximately 4.5 acres, with boundaries corresponding to those of the parcel owned by Nancy Skidmore, parcel #2A1, tax map #106.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The tax parcel boundary encompasses the house and enough surrounding land to suggest the historic context of the property.

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ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ARE OF:

ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, Virginia  
VDHR File Number: 81-399  
Dianne Pierce, Photographer  
April, 1994

All negatives are stored with the Department of Historic Resources collection at the Virginia State Library and Archives.

1. VIEW OF: Front (south) and east facades, looking northwest.  
NEG. NO.: 13636  
PHOTO 1 of 10
2. VIEW OF: Front (south) facade, looking north.  
NEG. NO.: 13633  
PHOTO 2 of 10
3. VIEW OF: East facade, looking west.  
NEG. NO.: 13636  
PHOTO 3 of 10
4. VIEW OF: West facade, looking northeast.  
NEG. NO.: 13633  
PHOTO 4 of 10
5. VIEW OF: North and west facades, looking southeast.  
NEG. NO.: 13636  
PHOTO 5 of 10
6. VIEW OF: Stair hall, first floor.  
NEG. NO.: 13634  
PHOTO 6 of 10

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ROCKBRIDGE INN  
Rockbridge County, VA

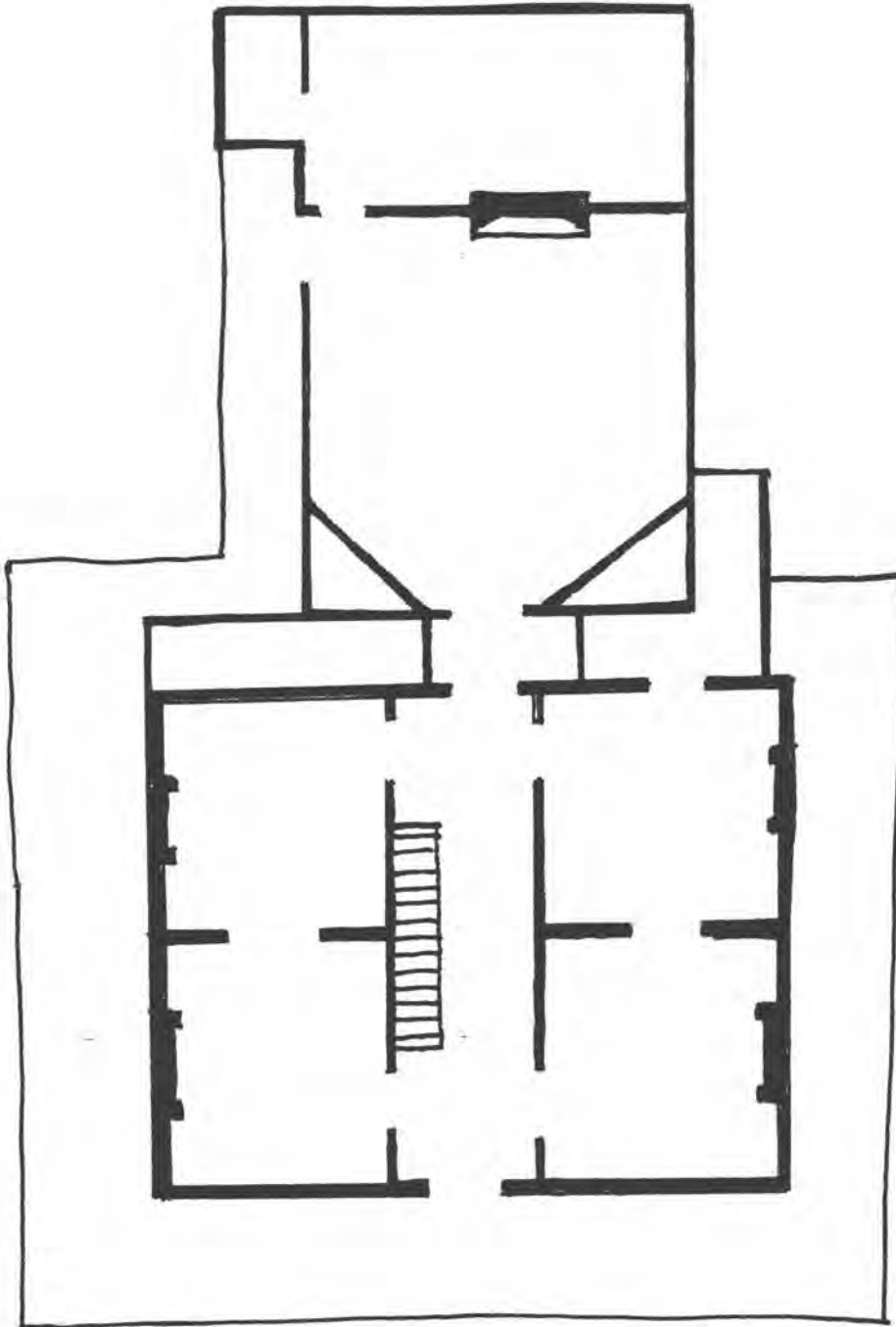
(Photographs, contd.)

7. VIEW OF: Mantel, southeast corner bedroom, second floor.  
NEG. NO.: 13635  
PHOTO 7 of 10
8. VIEW OF: Mantel, southwest corner bedroom, second floor.  
NEG. NO.: 13635  
PHOTO 8 of 10
9. VIEW OF: Interior doors and trim, dining room (central room,  
north wing).  
NEG. NO.: 13634  
PHOTO 9 of 10
10. VIEW OF: Garage and shed outbuildings, looking west.  
NEG. NO.: 13633  
PHOTO 10 of 10

# ROCKBRIDGE INN

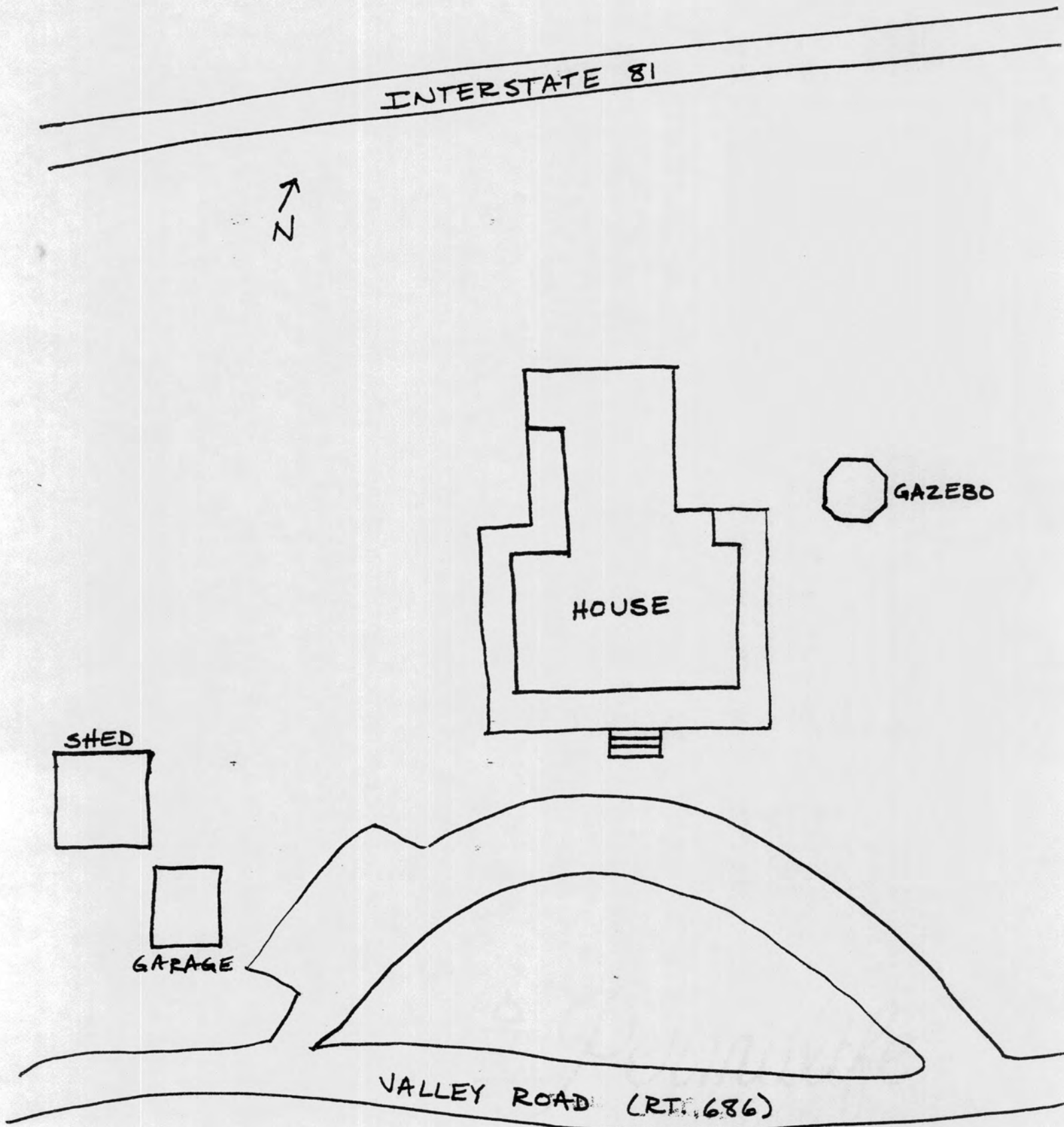
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(Not to Scale)

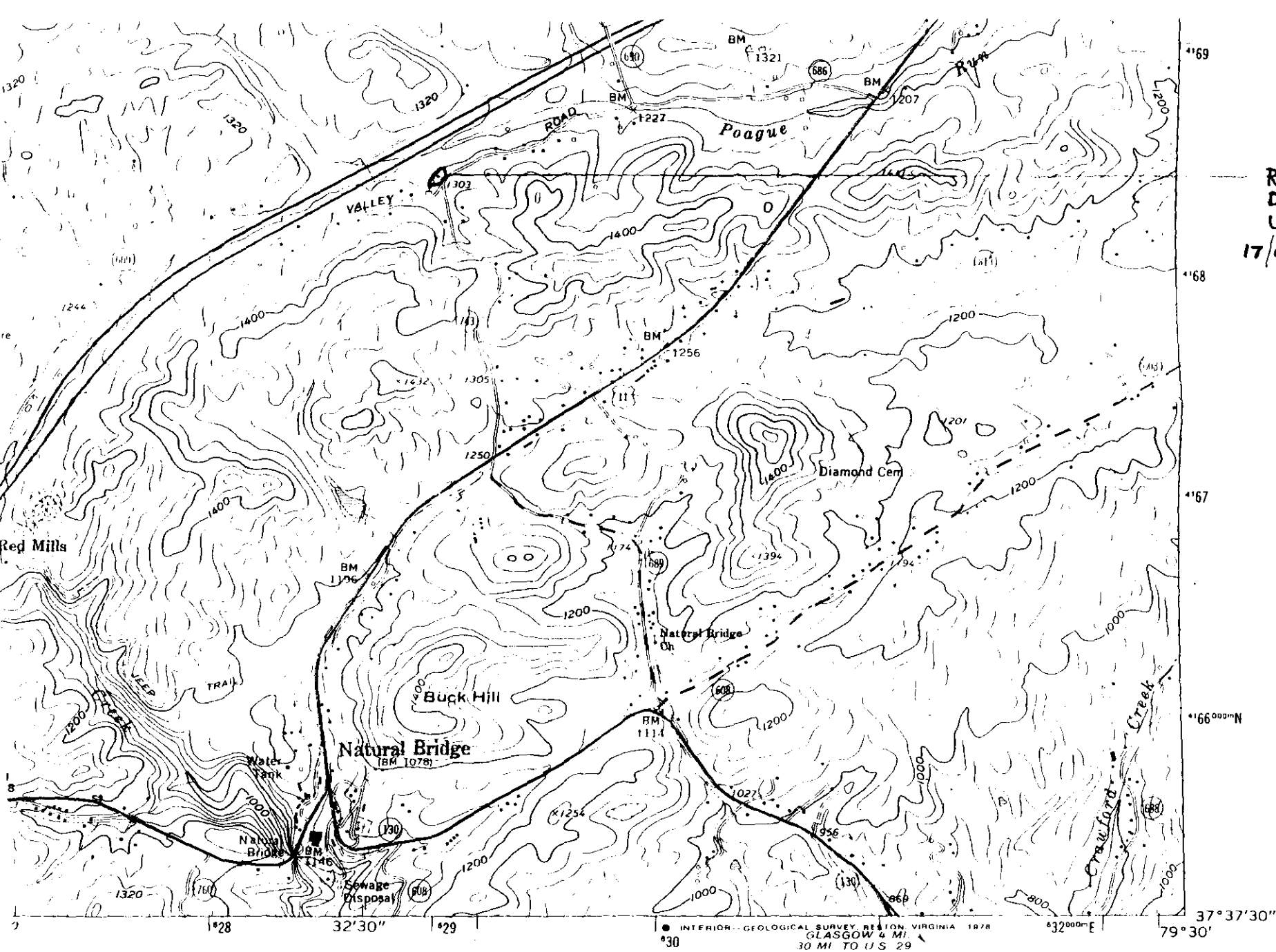


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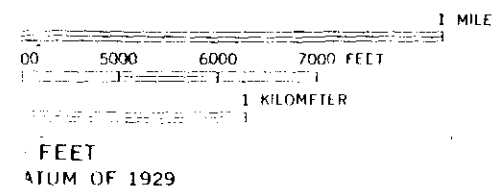
SKETCH MAP  
(Not to scale)







Rockbridge Inn  
 DHR# 81-399  
 UTM References  
 17/627040/4168400



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy duty	—	Light duty
Medium duty	- - -	Unimproved dirt

( ) Interstate Route ( ) U. S. Route ( ) State Route

(SNOWDEN)  
 5159 III SW