

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

VLR 9/5/07  
NRHP 10/29/07

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 Fries Boarding Houses  
other names/site number VDHR # 220-5015

2. Location

street & number 362 and 364 Grayson Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Fries vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Grayson code 077 zip code 24330

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 )

McCarter Susan Sept. 14, 2007  
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)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing
2 0 buildings
0 0 sites
0 0 structures
0 0 objects
2 0 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 multiple dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
roof asphalt shingles
walls weatherboard
other

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

=====  
**8. Statement of Significance**  
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**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

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

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

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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)

Community Planning & Development  
Industry  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** c.1905 – 1957

**Significant Dates** N/A

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

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** N/A

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

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
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(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** less than one acre

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

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	501900	4	63280	2

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 Sherry Joines Wyatt  
 organization Historic Preservation Consultant date 2007  
 street & number 21 E. Main Street, Suite 202 telephone 540-381-3336  
 city or town Christiansburg state VA zip code 24073

**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 Jack and Laura Butler  
 street & number 1305 Kilmory Drive telephone 919-467-6437  
 city or town Cary state NC zip code 27511

**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**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   7   Page   1  

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**Summary Description**

The two twin boarding houses located at 362 and 364 Grayson Street in the mill village of Fries are near the center of town and overlook the town's commercial area and the river further downhill. The boarding houses are large, two-story, frame buildings resting on full-height stuccoed brick basements. The side-gable buildings have brick interior end chimneys and gabled dormers on their Grayson Street facades (north). The houses feature modest Colonial Revival architectural features. The houses are banked with the primary elevation facing Grayson Street and a secondary basement-level entry facing the broad lawn on the town side of the buildings (south). This southerly elevation at 362 Grayson Street carries an original double-level porch while that of 364 has been altered with a single porch supported by double-height square posts. Shed-roof porches shield the entry level at the Grayson Street elevations. The interior of the houses features a central hall plan on all three levels with simple mantels, molded door and window surrounds, picture rails, and heavy turned newel posts. The house at 362 Grayson Street displays a remarkable level of integrity with no significant alterations. At 364 Grayson Street, there have been some modifications such as the porch remodeling, the covering of original weatherboard with vinyl siding in the late twentieth century, and the replacement of the original windows. Despite these changes, however, the overall form of this boarding house is clearly discernible and the entry (north) facade is relatively intact. Additionally, the interior of 364 Grayson Street is well-preserved.

**Detailed Description**

The town of Fries follows the basic design tenets for mill villages with streets laid out in a rough grid accommodating 300 original worker houses on the very steep northeastern bank of the New River. The brick mill building (demolished) was located near the dam at the north end of town. Overlooking the dam and the mill are a handful of large dwellings originally inhabited by the mill management. Main Street, the primary commercial street, and Railroad Avenue run south from the mill, roughly paralleling the river and are nearest to the river. On Main Street, is the former Washington Hotel. Several commercial buildings are located here as well, though several have been altered since the historic period. Near the center of town, adjacent to both Main Street and to the residential area is the Lyceum (aka YMCA, now the town hall) built in 1910. Further uphill to the east, located roughly in the center of town, are two company-built boarding houses with broad lawns facing the Lyceum.

The boarding houses, which were built as twins, are large two-story frame buildings resting on full-height stuccoed brick basements. The buildings have side-gable roofs, brick interior end chimneys, and gabled dormers on their Grayson Street (north) facades. The buildings are banked with the primary entry to each from Grayson Street being on the first floor, or middle level, of the building. A full-width, one-story, shed-roof porch supported by plain posts shields the entry on both houses. There is a secondary, single basement entry on the south elevation of each building facing broad lawns opening towards the Lyceum, the commercial area, and the New River.

The interior plan is very well-preserved in both buildings. All three levels of the houses have wide center halls. On the first floor (middle level) there are four rooms, two at either side of the hall, each with a corner fireplace. In 362, the northeast room serves as the kitchen while at 364, the northwest room is the kitchen. On the upper floor of each house there are three rooms on each side of the hall; a large center room flanked by smaller rooms located under the sloping roof at the front and rear of the house. In both houses, some of these small rooms have been converted into

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   7   Page   2  

---

bathrooms. In the basement of each boarding house, one room (on the south side) is found at either side of the hall. There are additional rooms at the rear (north side) of the basements. At 362, there is one unfinished, dirt-floored room and two small bathrooms on the north side of the house, while 364 has a modern laundry and bathrooms in its northern basement rooms.

Both houses retain most of their plaster walls and ceilings, though drywall has been added in some areas as needed for repair. The original maple flooring on the middle and upper levels of each house is intact and in excellent condition. The interior wood trim in both houses is largely intact and is modest with simple molded door and window surrounds, wide baseboards with simple cap molding, and picture rails throughout the entry and upper levels. The interior doors each have seven panels with three over three vertical and a center horizontal panel. The heavy newel posts at each floor level in both houses are turned and the railings have square balusters.

The boarding house at 362 Grayson Street retains a remarkably high level of integrity being virtually unaltered from its historic appearance. In addition to the features described above, the house has its original four-over-four windows and weatherboard siding on the upper two floors. Spanning the southern elevation is a double-tier porch serving the basement and middle levels of the building. Subtle Colonial Revival styling is evident in the Tuscan columns supporting the porch as well as in the dormer on the Grayson Street facade.

At 364 Grayson Street, the original siding has been covered with vinyl siding in the late twentieth century and the original windows have also been replaced. The original two-story porch has been removed and replaced with double-height square posts. A Colonial Revival pediment has been added above the basement entry and the door in the middle (entry) level has been replaced by a window. Despite these changes, the overall form of this boarding house is clearly discernible and the entry (north) facade is largely unaltered with its original shed roof porch and gabled dormer. Further bolstering the integrity of this boarding house is the well-preserved interior where the plan, floors, trim, and most of the mantels are original to the house and match those found next door at 362 Grayson Street.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   8   Page   3  

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**Statement of Significance Summary**

The town of Fries is located on the New River, in the northeastern section of Grayson County, near the border of Carroll County. Fries developed as a company town for the Washington Mills Company, which was founded by Colonel F. H. Fries and W. C. Ruffin in 1901. The location of a cotton mill in southwestern Virginia was unusual, but was part of a thriving industrial economy that developed in the county during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Washington Mills Company planners conceived of a self-sufficient town. The early plan for Fries included a depot, a commercial area, 300 one-story workers' houses, larger houses for management, and two large boarding houses. By 1910, a town social center, the Lyceum was added. Fries was also serviced by water and sewer, as well as, a street light system.

The two boarding houses, extant and well-preserved, illustrate the complexity of the company's design for the town. They stand out among the smaller one-story mill workers houses because of their prominent location overlooking the river, the commercial area, the Lyceum, and the site of the mill, as well as by their large, two-story presence. Further, the succession of operators and boarders in each of the boarding houses illustrates the rapid changes and mobile population within a growing mill town during the early twentieth century. This transient character was an important feature of the booming early years of Fries' history and is highly significant.

The Fries Boarding Houses are eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for their association with the planning and development of the town and their significance in the history of local industry, particularly the housing of textile workers at the Washington Mills Company plant. The period of significance begins ca. 1905, the estimated date of construction, and ends in 1957, since the mill closed after the fifty-year cut-off in 1988.

**Historical Background**

Grayson County, located in southwestern Virginia, was formed in 1792 from a portion of Wythe County. The county's topography includes rugged mountainous lands and rich creek and river valleys. The New River winds along the southern border of the county at the North Carolina line before turning northward to continue through the eastern section of the county. Though agriculture was the primary feature of the county's economy through much of the nineteenth century, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a wave of industrialization beginning with the establishment of woolen mills in Mouth of Wilson, Old Town, and Elk Creek by 1884.<sup>1</sup>

Textile mills, particularly cotton mills, were built in large numbers throughout the South during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Colonel Frances H. Fries (1853-1931) was part of this trend. He established three textile mills, two in Mayodan, North Carolina in 1897 and the Washington Mills Company at Fries, Virginia in 1901. Colonel Fries was a member of a prominent textile family in Salem, North Carolina. Typical of textile entrepreneurs of his day, Fries was involved in finance and transportation as well as manufacturing. He held the executive position with the Roanoke and Southern Railway during its construction between Roanoke, Virginia and Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and he organized the Wachovia Loan and Trust Corporation in Winston-Salem in 1893.<sup>2</sup>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   8   Page   4  

The establishment of a cotton mill in southwestern Virginia was somewhat unusual as mills were more often located in the Piedmont regions of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The manner in which Colonel Fries learned of the Grayson County site is interesting. Local tradition holds that on an 1898 trip to Dobson, North Carolina, James "Pipe" Carico struck up a conversation with another horse trader as they conducted their business. The pair discussed the possibilities of water power on the New River in Grayson County near Carico's home in the Steven's Creek community. Through a series of connections this information found its way to Colonel Fries who visited the site, called Bartlett's Falls, in early 1900 and found it to have excellent water power potential. F. H. Fries and W. C. Ruffin, who was associated with Fries' Mayodan mills, began purchasing land from Carico, Bartlett, and many other landowners in 1900 and on July 13, 1901, the two men and their wives transferred the land to the Washington Mills Company for the sum of \$26,029. Interestingly, the Washington Mills Company was actually chartered in New Jersey, where Fries was the company's president and Ruffin the secretary-treasurer.<sup>3</sup>

One of the first steps in creating a mill at Fries was to achieve railroad access. The Norfolk and Western Railroad was located in neighboring Carroll County and was extended to the mill site in 1901, probably through Fries' personal connections with the railroad industry. An additional branch line was extended to Bonaparte (now Galax) in 1903 fueling the flush of industrialism in the county, and by 1911 Galax was a prominent center in the furniture making industry. The Marion and Rye Railroad (later Virginia Southern) was constructed to Troutdale in 1906 and that town, connected to the nearby timber lands, became home to a chair factory and furniture factory by 1911.<sup>4</sup>

At Fries, construction of a 39' high dam was begun in April of 1901. The large, brick mill building, 300 workers' houses, and commercial buildings soon followed and the mill opened in February of 1903. Captain R. P. Henry, the company's first engineer, is thought to have designed most of the early construction. The Town of Fries was incorporated in 1902 with its own political unit of mayor and council, a rarity among textile mill villages. In 1929, the town's government and tax base were described as follows: "Practically all houses are owned by the Washington Mills, Inc. and all public improvements are made and paid for by the company. The town has no budget and incurs no expense as a corporation. There is a flat license schedule of \$5.00 for merchants. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

The town flourished during the early twentieth century and had a population of 1,775 in 1910, making it the largest town in Grayson County, followed by Galax with a population of 755, and Troutdale with 431 people. Washington Mills was the only cotton mill in Grayson County in 1911. *Hill's Directory*, of that same year, shows that Fries supported a number of professionals including three attorneys, three physicians, and two dentists. There were two churches, a Methodist and a Baptist. The numerous businesses included a bank, eight general stores (including the large Washington Mills Store), a grocery, two hotels, a livery stable, and three watchmakers/jewelers.<sup>6</sup>

The railroad was the life line of the town delivering raw cotton and other materials, and transporting the finished cotton cloth out. It also provided transportation for incoming workers and for county residents coming to do business in the Fries commercial district. George Jennings, who arrived at the Fries depot in 1904, recalled, in 1976, that "Plenty of times I would leave here [Fries] on the train for Pulaski and there was barely standing room. Fries was a boom town then." The number of travelers through the area is suggested by the two hotels in operation in 1911, one owned by Benjamin Dobyns and the other called Hotel Washington.<sup>7</sup>

The 1910s was a prosperous time for textile mills throughout the South, and Washington Mills grew accordingly with large expansions in 1912 and 1919, adding additional equipment, manufacturing space, and workers.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   8   Page   5  

The town's population reflects this growth reaching about 2,000 people in 1920, then leveling off to 2,100 in 1930. Galax, with a population of 3,500 in 1929, superseded Fries as the county's largest town during the 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

By 1929, there were four textile plants in Grayson County including the Fields Manufacturing Company woolen mill in Mouth of Wilson, Galax Knitting Company, H. E. Gordon Company in Galax, and Washington Mills in Fries. Washington Mills was the largest of these, employing nearly three-quarters of the county's textile workforce. Thus, more than 600 workers and their families needed accommodations in a town designed with only 300 workers' houses. This required some workers to live outside the town in nearby communities, such as Blairtown. Many other employees boarded with families in town or at the two company-built boarding houses. The 1910, 1920, and 1930 census shows one or two boarders living with many families in Fries. H. Douglas Turner, who grew up in Fries during the 1930s and 1940s, recalled that his family was one of several who kept boarders. "Of course, they paid a little rent," Turner wrote, "but Mom had to feed them and do their washing." Turner describes the tight quarters in the family home as: "It was always hard to get out of a warm bed in the winter months so the 'boarders' would have a place to sleep. They were third-shift workers and after 7:00 a.m., everybody had to be out."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the practice of private families keeping a few boarders, the original design of the Town of Fries included two twin boarding houses. The boarding houses are labeled on a 1921 drawing entitled "Washington Mills Tenements."<sup>10</sup> Built by the Washington Mills Company, the twin boarding houses are situated next to one another on Grayson Street. The impressive rear elevations of the boarding houses face the river, mill, and commercial district with two-story porches. They are centrally located within the town, near the site of the mill and across the street from the Lyceum (YMCA) building. This location along with their size and architectural detail is suggestive of their importance within the mill town's hierarchy. The exact date of the boarding houses is unknown, but they likely date to the first phase of village construction between 1901 and 1910.

In 1910, the boarding houses appear in the census as #61 and #62 Railroad Avenue.<sup>11</sup> At #61 is Elizabeth Wyrick, a 53-year old widow who lives with her two daughters, son-in-law, son, daughter-in-law, and two male boarders. Both of the boarders, as well as Wyrick's son, son-in-law, and daughter are weavers at the mill. The house at #62 is occupied by Sarah Proctor and four female boarders, all of whom are cloth inspectors at the mill. Although Proctor is listed as being married, her husband is not in her household. The occupation for Wyrick and Proctor is listed as "keeps boards," and the place of their employment as "boarding house."<sup>12</sup>

The transient nature of both the boarders and the boarding house keepers, especially during the early years of the mill's history, prevents us from learning much about their activities. It is notable, that while this was a prosperous time for the mill, neither of the twelve-room boarding houses were full in 1910. In the case of Elizabeth Wyrick, her large immediate family probably occupied much of the space; there were seven people living in her house. At Sarah Proctor's house, however, there were only five people. In comparison, #57 Railroad Avenue, which was one of the workers' houses located nearby, was occupied by Jasper Wilmoth, and his family along with a boarder. This made five people living in what was likely a four-room house. Also of note is the age of the boarders in both of the boarding houses. Ranging from 18 to 23, and hailing from Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama, these young men and women represent the lure of economic opportunity available at the growing mill. During this era "public work," or non-farm work, became increasingly common among Southerners.<sup>13</sup>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   8   Page   6  

The 1920 census gives us little clear information about the status of the boarding houses. The house at #166 Grayson Avenue appears to have been a boarding house and is headed by Thomas Rakes, a 62-year old laborer who lives here with his wife and granddaughter. Also in the household is a servant, Ida Williamson, whose occupation is listed as “cook,” and her place of employment as the “boarding house.” Williamson is married with an infant daughter, but her husband is not listed. Following Williamson is a list of eighteen boarders: one married couple, ten single men, one widower, two single women, and two widows (one with her infant daughter).<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to discern if all of these people lived in one house or if Rakes was operating both boarding houses under the same address.

In 1930, the boarding houses are thought to appear as #154 and #156 Boarding House Street. At #154, W.R. Snow, an oiler in the weaving department, was head of a household of eleven people including his wife and their two children and seven male boarders. Five of the boarders and Snow's son worked as weavers, and the two other boarders were laborers. Emma Copeland, age 56, was the head of the household at #156. She is recorded as the “cook” at the “boarding house.” In her house were her three children and thirteen boarders: Dwight Porter, 22, a carder; Eva Leath, who was a 29-year old widow with three children; Garnett Bedwell, 19, a weaver; siblings Sidney and Nora Ayers (a laborer and a spooler); 37-year old Edgar Vaughn, a shop hand; Herman Brown, a laborer, age 16; Myrtle Farlow, 35, a spooler; Vernon Shumate, a laborer, age 18; and Stewart Owen, 17, a laborer.

Because of the inconsistent house numbering in the census, it is not possible to discern which boarding house was which to this point. However, by the mid-1930s, Bruce Smith, the town's fourth chief of police, was operating the boarding house now numbered as 362 Grayson Street. His brother Willie and their sister, Elizabeth also resided there. Elizabeth Smith, was a teacher and librarian. In fact, several school teachers lived at each of the boarding houses in addition to mill employees. The Smith family had quarters on the second floor of the house, and they employed a cook who provided meals for the tenants. The Smiths were long-time residents of Fries. Their father, Andrew J. Smith was the town's second chief of police serving from 1907 until 1922, when son Willie took over. In 1929, the position was transferred to Andrew Smith's younger son Bruce, who served as chief until 1972. By the 1960s, this boarding house, locally known as the Smith Boarding House, was no longer operating as a boarding house. Bruce Smith still resided upstairs but Maggie Lambert rented the basement-level rooms.<sup>15</sup>

Next door at 364 Grayson Street, the boarding house is thought to have been operated by Victoria Edwards around 1911 or 1912. Edwards was married, but her husband was then working in the Colorado gold mines. Oral tradition states that “Granny” Reece operated this boarding house from 1928 until 1937, but these dates are not substantiated by the 1930 Census. Like the Smiths, Reece provided meals to boarders, which included packing a lunch for mill workers. After Reece, the house was operated by Katherine Rook Davis, a widow with six children. Charlie and Bell Funk subsequently operated the boarding house. The house was purchased from the company by the Funk's daughter Helen Funk York and her husband Julius for \$5200 in February of 1962. It is thought to have been the first house in town to be sold by the company. The elder Funks lived in the house until the 1990s, although they had not taken boarders for many years previous.<sup>16</sup>

As the Washington Mills Company matured and the cotton mill boom of the first quarter of the twentieth century waned, the population of Fries fell slightly between 1920 and 1940 from around 2,000 to 1,677 people. During the war years of the early-1940s, however, the town experienced a brief resurgence. Avery Bond remembers the town being very crowded during the war, as the mill operated on three shifts. She recalls that both boarding houses

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   8   Page   7  

were full of “people from everywhere.” Company records from the war era reflect steady wage increases and large numbers of employees. In early 1944, mill workers included ninety-seven spinners earning about forty cents an hour, 184 semi-skilled weave room workers earning about forty-six cents an hour, and seventeen fixers whose wages were about fifty-two cents an hour.<sup>17</sup>

The social life of the town was very rich and centered around the churches, school, and the Lyceum, built in 1910. The building was renovated and reorganized as the YMCA in 1923. It was the only gymnasium in the Carroll-Grayson county area and contained a movie theater. In 1948 a new lobby, bowling alley, kitchen, library, and game room were added.<sup>18</sup> Here are a few of the items listed as Fries news in the January 18, 1937 edition of the *Galax Gazette* that illustrate the active town life: A Girl Scout troop has been recently organized in the girls' lobby of the YMCA; the Community League was to meet at 7:30 that evening; a book social was scheduled that evening at the YMCA; and the Fries Garden Club had recently held their first meeting of the year. Music had been an important activity since the town's early history. A “Cornet Band” was organized by E.A. Robinson and Bill Williams about 1907, and a town band was still functioning in 1953.<sup>19</sup>

The booklet commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Washington Mills Company in 1953 gives a picture of Fries. At this time, the plant employed 1,100 people and produced more than fifty million yards of sheeting and print cloth each year on more than 2,000 looms. The town, still flush from wartime development, was home to 1,700 people, 323 more than in 1940. The attitude of the company towards its employees is reflected in the dedication of the commemorative booklet: “To those . . . many men and women have enrolled to provide a better living for themselves and [their] families than would have been possible otherwise, we dedicate this booklet.”<sup>20</sup>

By the 1980s, the Washington Mills Company, which had been operated by Rigel Textile Company and finally by the Mount Vernon Corporation, and most of its southern counterparts were struggling to compete with overseas factories. The plant closed in 1988 and in 1990, the town's population was only 690 people.<sup>21</sup>

While the details in the history of the boarding houses are sometimes vague, their importance in the community is clear. The transient nature of the population in the booming early years of Fries is an important part of the town's history. The boarding houses represent this population, while the succession of operators and boarders illustrates rapid changes in a growing mill town during the early twentieth century. The importance of the boarding houses is also reinforced by their role during the 1918 influenza epidemic. Both of the boarding houses were used to house men who were not ill. These men worked burying the dead and carrying supplies to the sick.<sup>22</sup>

The boarding houses are illustrative of the complexity of the Washington Mill Company's town planning. The company did not merely establish a mill and build housing, it created a self-sufficient town with banks, businesses, and a variety of lodging. Both boarding houses that were conceived of as part of the original town plan are extant and remain notable among the smaller one-story mill houses because of their prominent location overlooking the commercial area, the Lyceum, and the site of the mill.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section  8  Page  8

- 1 Gibson Worsham, *A Survey of Historic Architecture in Grayson County, Virginia*, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2002.
- 2 Ibid, 14; and Adelaide Fries, *Forsyth: The History of a County on the March*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1976), 168, 195.
- 3 Avery Bond and Martha Nichols, *Town of Fries* (Collinsville: Collinsville Printing Company, c. 1976), 15 and "Abstract No. 29," Fries Textile Plant Records (1900-1988), Virginia Tech Special Collections.
- 4 Sherry Joines Wyatt, "Dr. Virgil Cox House National Register Nomination, 2003," Virginia Department of Historic Resources.
- 5 Bond and Nichols, 16. and 24; "Industrial Survey: Grayson County, Virginia" in Dr. Julian Burruss, *Industrial Survey for Southwest Virginia*, Vol. I, 1930, 51; and "Historical Background, Town of Fries, Collected 1953 for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," text for commemorative booklet, Fries Textile Plant Records (1900-1988), Virginia Tech Special Collections.
- 6 *U.S. Census* 1910, Burruss, 11, and *Hill's Virginia Gazetteer and Classified Business Directory, 1911*, accessed at New River Notes website.
- 7 Bond and Nichols, 32, and *Hill's Directory*.
- 8 Bond and Nichols, 20, Burruss, 11, and *U.S. Census* 1920.
- 9 H. Douglas Turner, "Looking Back," in *Reunion '86, Fries, Virginia*.
- 10 Burruss, 51.
- 11 The addresses and street names for the town change with each census, making positive identification of the boarding houses within the census listing difficult.
- 12 1910 *U.S. Census*.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 1920 *U.S. Census*.
- 15 Bond and Nichols, 27; Avery Bond, telephone interview by author, May 2006; and Twaughne Gunter, interview by author, May 2006.
- 16 Harold "Greek" Davis, interview by JoAnn Gunter, May 2006; information provided to JoAnn Gunter by Mike Reece, son of "Granny" Reece; and deed in the possession of Twaughne and JoAnn Gunter dated 20 February 1962.
- 17 Worsham; Bond, interview; and "Historical Background."
- 18 Bond and Nichols, 48.
- 19 *Galax Gazette*, 18 January 1937 and "Historical Background."
- 20 "Historical Background."
- 21 Jackie Roop Sharp, "Industry Comes to Grayson County," in *Bicentennial Heritage* (Independence: 1908 Courthouse Foundation, 1995), 83.
- 22 Ibid.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section   9   Page   9  

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Fries Boarding Houses  
Grayson, VA**

Section 10, Photographic Data Page 10

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**Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the Fries Boarding Houses consists of Lots 25A1-A-4 and 25A1-A-5 as defined by Grayson County, Virginia and shown with a heavy line on attached map labeled "Boundary."

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary of the properties is the same as that shown on the original subdivision map made at the time the company sold its property within the town and is marked #363 and #364 on the attached photocopy of a portion of the original subdivision map labeled "Map No.2, Washington Mills Company, Fries, Grayson County, Virginia, 1959."

**Photographical Data**

All photographs are of:

Fries Boarding Houses, Grayson County, Virginia, VDHR File #220-5015

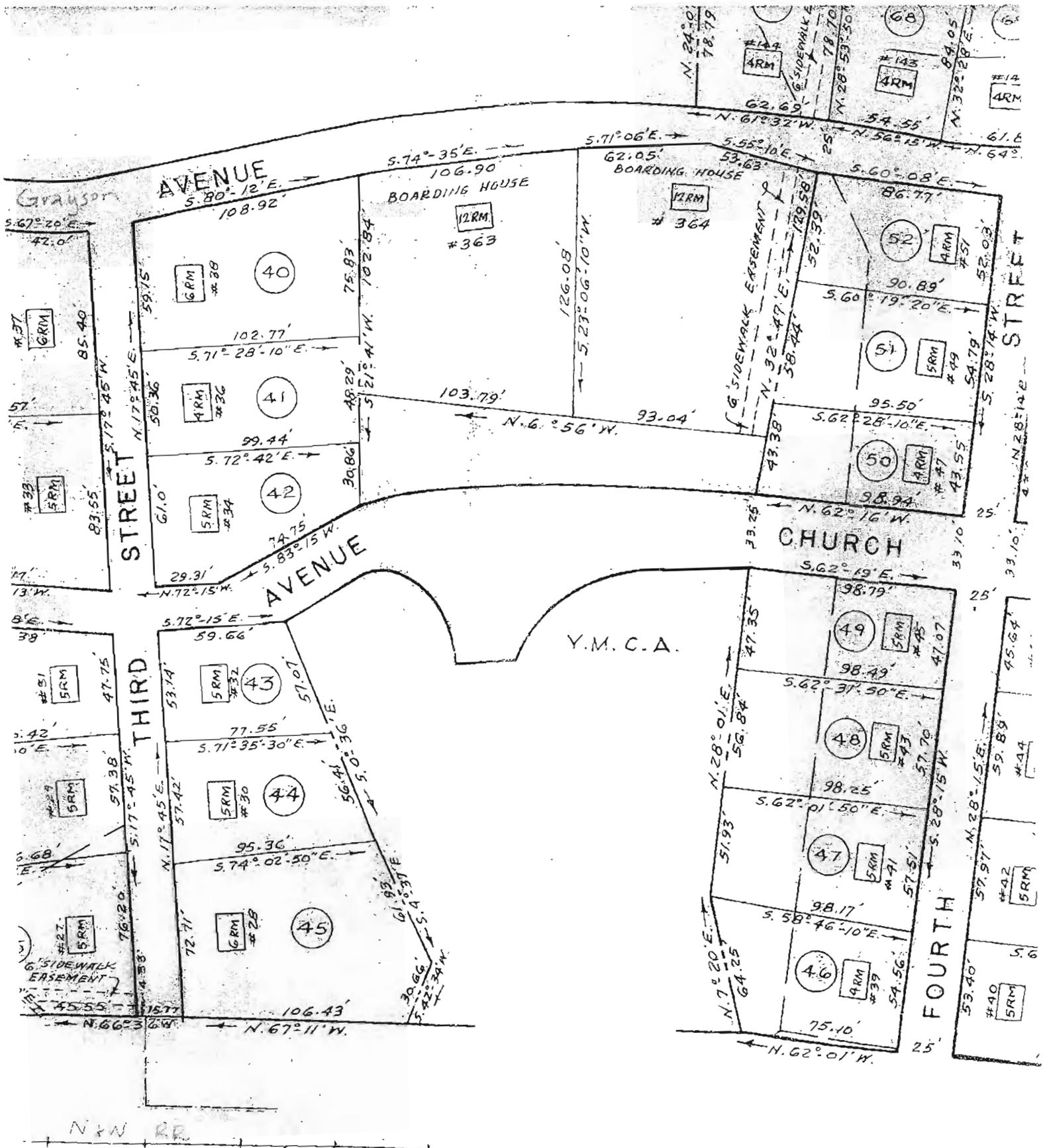
Date: 2006

Photographer: Sherry Joines Wyatt

Digital Images stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond

1. 362 & 364 Grayson St., south elevations
2. 362 Grayson St., north elevation
3. 362 Grayson St., south elevation
4. 362 Grayson St., interior
5. 364 Grayson St., north elevation
6. 364 Grayson St., south elevation
7. 364 Grayson St., interior

Map No 2  
 Washington Mills Co.  
 Third Grayson Co. GA  
 1959

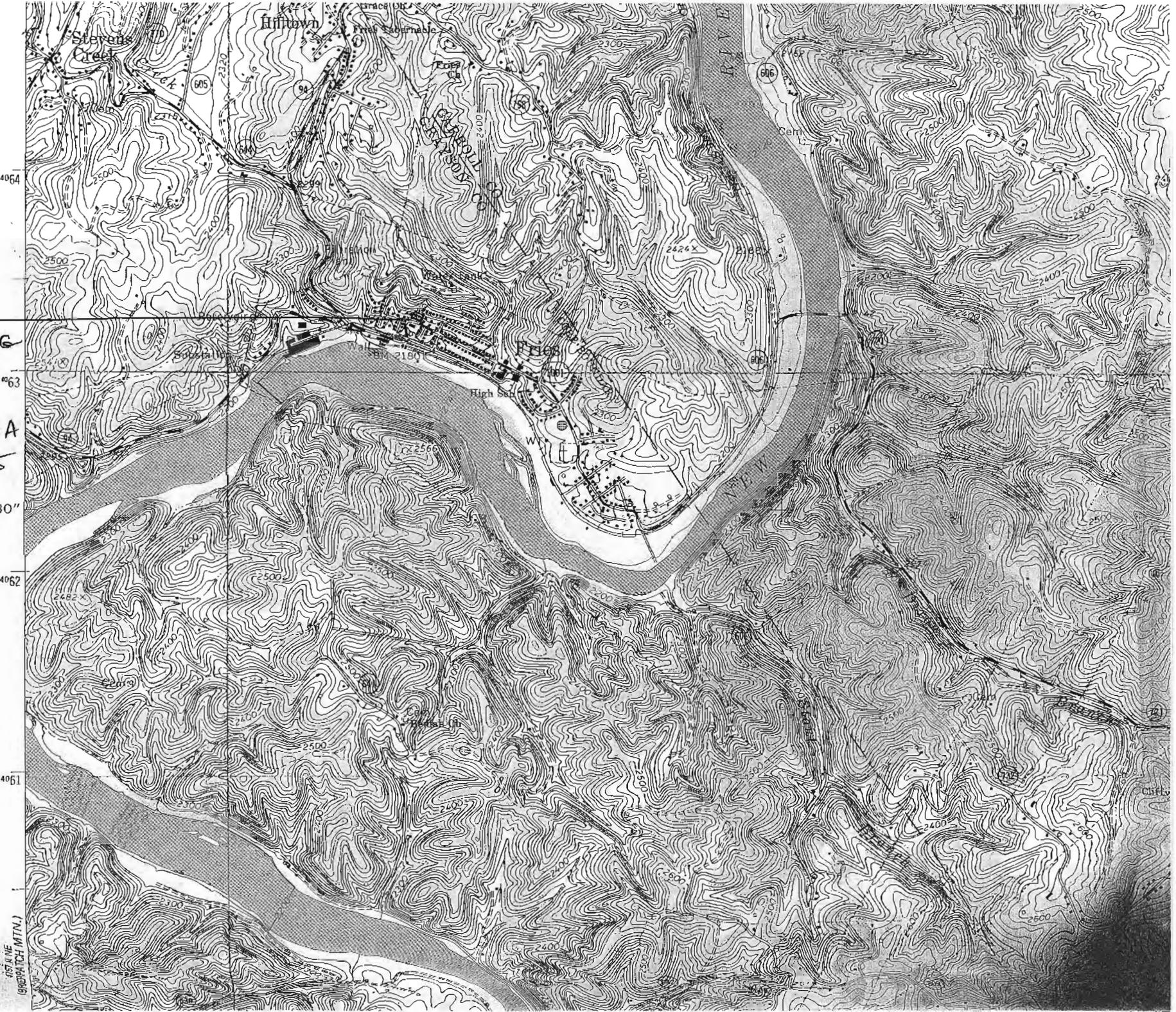




GALAX QUAD

RIES BOARDING  
HOUSES  
RIES TOWN  
RAYSON CO, VA  
220-5014/SDIS

UTM 42'30"  
ZONE 17  
501900E  
4063280N



501900E  
4063280N