

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Approved NRHP:
8/24/2015

Mountain Road Historic District 2015 Update

Name of Property Halifax, VA

County and State N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Introduction

The following continuation sheets provide additional documentation for the Mountain Road Historic District [VDHR) File #230-0078], located in the town of Halifax, the courthouse seat of Halifax County, Virginia. The Mountain Road Historic District was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1983. The 88-acre district consists of 30 primary resources, including residential and institutional properties that are significant in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture from the early 1800s to the early 1900s. The original district boundaries extended one-half mile west along Mountain Road from Academy Street to Mimosa Drive, which served as the corporate town limits at the time of the 1983 nomination. The Town of Halifax Court House Historic District (VLR 2008; NRHP 2011) extends along Main Street just east of the Mountain Road Historic District.

In May 2003, a windshield survey was conducted to investigate the potential of expanding the original district to the west and south to include buildings beyond the earlier town limits. In addition to the ca. 1843 Halifax Academy, the 1935-1939 Halifax High School, and the 1938 Halifax Library, the proposed expansion area includes several residences associated with the Cosby family, master builders of the Halifax Courthouse and other significant buildings in the town and existing Mountain Road Historic District. In 2015, a nomination was prepared for the Mountain Road Historic District 2015 Boundary Increase.

As part of the survey and nomination of the Mountain Road Historic District 2015 Boundary Increase, resources within the original Mountain Road Historic District were resurveyed to verify their condition and document all significant secondary resources in order to create an accurate inventory for the historic district. In addition, the period of significance was extended from 1934 to 1965 to better reflect the continued development of the area through the mid-20th century. The contributing status of resources built between 1934 and 1965 within the original district boundary have been updated to reflect the expanded period of significance to 1965.

These continuation sheets for the Mountain Road Historic District 2015 Update do not repeat information previously included in the 1983 district nomination. The additional information included in this update is limited to information that was not included in the initial nomination. All new information is organized by section headings as listed in the current NRHP nomination form with parenthetical reference to the original nomination headings where applicable.

Section 5: Classification

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

49
1
0
0

14
0
0
0

buildings
sites
buildings
objects

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50

14

Total

Section 6: Function or Use

Historic Functions

- AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural outbuilding
- EDUCATION: school
- DOMESTIC: single dwelling
- DOMESTIC: secondary building
- RELIGION: religious facility
- RELIGION: church-related residence
- SOCIAL: clubhouse

Current Functions

- AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural outbuilding
- DOMESTIC: single dwelling
- DOMESTIC: secondary building
- RELIGION: religious facility
- SOCIAL: clubhouse
- VACANT/NOT IN USE

Section 7: Description

Architectural Classification

- EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal
- MID-19TH CENTURY: Greek Revival
- LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne, Stick/Eastlake
- LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival
- LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials

- FOUNDATION: BRICK, CONCRETE
- WALLS: WOOD (weatherboard), BRICK, STUCCO
- ROOF: ASPHALT, METAL (tin), STONE (slate)

Summary Description

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The 1983 National Register nomination for the Mountain Road Historic District includes 30 primary resources with eight buildings listed as non-contributing due to their post 1933 date of construction, making them less than fifty years of age at the time. The nomination, however, notes that these non-contributing buildings all retained the scale of the earlier contributing buildings in the district. Three of these buildings were built within the expanded period of significance (1934-1965) and they continue the same development pattern of the earlier buildings in the district. Two of these buildings are large residences situated on spacious lawns with mature landscaping that continue the park-like ambience of Mountain Road established by Dabney Cosby Jr. in his 1840s designs for three of the earliest residences in the district. The third property is the 1962 St. John's Episcopal Church Parish House, which is located next to the church and continues the scale and siting of the other institutional buildings nearby. These three buildings are now more than 50 years old and considered to be contributing resources to the district.

It should be noted again that the remaining five non-contributing buildings, constructed between 1967 and 1981, also continue the traditional development patterns characteristic of the Mountain Road Historic District. Two of these non-contributing houses, Giant Poplars, built in 1967 at 530 Mountain Road, and Woodland, built in 1974 at 471 Mountain Road, replaced earlier buildings that burned; each property includes earlier secondary buildings and original landscaping that date to the 19th century that contribute to the district. The five non-contributing buildings that currently are not 50 years of age should be reevaluated in the future.

Architectural Analysis

The Colonial Revival style gained popularity throughout the nation with the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876, the Columbian Exposition in 1893, the Jamestown Bicentennial in 1807 and the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1930s. This style is the predominant style in the Mountain Road Historic District with 11 of the 30 properties built between 1822 and 1981 exhibiting elements of this style. Several of the earlier houses were remodeled in the 1960s with Colonial Revival-style porticos replacing their original porches. Examples of these "updated" houses include the ca. 1820 Seven Oaks (615 Mountain Road), the 1822 Thomas Jefferson Green House (442 Mountain Road) and the 1912 Watts Leigh House (136 Mountain Road).

All three of the resources constructed between 1933 and 1965 are designed in the Colonial Revival style. The St. John's Episcopal Church Parish Office, built in 1962 at 221 Mountain Road, is a simple, one-story building on a raised basement with a side-gable roof. Designed by the architectural firm Benton & Phillips, the concrete-block building is covered with stucco to complement the 1844 design by Dabney Cosby Jr. of St. John's Episcopal Church (197 Mountain Road) with its "rough-cast" stucco lined to simulate granite block. The Colonial Revival-style house at 543 Mountain Road, built in 1940 using brick salvaged from the ca. 1830 Banister Lodge, features Flemish-bond brick, a side-gable roof with dormers and a two-story, gabled entrance portico. The two-story, five-bay brick house at 630 Mountain Road, built in 1964, features a side-gable roof and a one-story, gabled entry porch. This property also includes a kitchen dependency dating to the 19th century.

In addition to the properties constructed between 1933 and 1965, a number of significant secondary

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resources, dating from the 1820s to the mid-20th century, contribute to the historic district. The most complete collections of secondary buildings are found at Grand Oaks (230 Mountain Road) and the Robert Holt Easley property at 415 Mountain Road. Grand Oaks, built in 1843 by Dabney Cosby Jr., features two one-story, frame dwellings located behind the house that may have originally served as slave quarters and were later used by Colonel Vaughan as his office and residence for his chauffeur. The frame stable, which appears to date to the early 1900s, is notable with its stalls surrounding an open paddock and with a front gable over the open entry. The ca. 1876 Robert Holt Easley House at 415 Mountain Road retains a full complement of domestic outbuildings, including a kitchen, double smokehouse, privy and well house as well as a separate summer house and office/billiard room. Although the main house at Woodland burned in 1970, the late-19th century stable and carriage house survive and are testimony to the Victorian style of the original house. These two frame buildings feature side-gable roofs with a prominent central gable with decorative scroll-sawn vergeboards and siding in the gable ends. Woodland also includes a unique secondary building in the ca. 1930 log house that was built for Craddock Edmunds, a well-known Southern poet. Two other properties in the district include former school buildings. The school at Giant Poplars, 530 Mountain Road, is known as the “Dooryard School” as well as “Judge Barksdale’s Office” and dates to ca. 1870. This one-story building features board-and-batten siding and a projecting gable roof over the entrance. A frame school is also located on the 1820 property of Seven Oaks at 615 Mountain Road.

Inventory

The inventory below is a full listing of all resources, including significant secondary resources, within the original Mountain Road Historic District (NRHP 1983). Generated using the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System (V-CRIS), the resource information is based on the 1983 survey and a field verification of all resources conducted by Hill Studio in 2015. Information listed for each resource includes the address, DHR ID number, primary resource type, architectural style, date of construction, secondary resource type and contributing or non-contributing status. The properties are placed in sequential order.

The properties constructed between 1933 and 1965 have been updated to reflect their revised contributing status within the expanded period of significance for the district and the address line of each of these properties is underlined. For the purposes of this survey, “contributing” was defined as possessing the capacity to convey reliable historic information about the physical and cultural development of Mountain Road in the Town of Halifax. A property was considered “contributing” if the primary resource was constructed in or before 1965 and the resource retained sufficient integrity dating to the period of significance for the district. A property was determined to be “non-contributing” to the historic district if the primary resource was constructed in or after 1966 or the primary resource was altered to a level that any historic integrity it might have possessed was significantly destroyed or obscured.

Mountain Road

80 Mountain Road 230-0047 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0002*

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Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 1.5, Style: Craftsman, Ca 1920

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Garage (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

100 Mountain Road 230-0039 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0003*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Victorian, Queen Anne, Ca 1880

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

110 Mountain Road 230-0029 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0004*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Victorian, Queen Anne, Ca 1890

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

123 Mountain Road 230-0009 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0005*

Halifax Hiram Lodge 96

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Federal/Adamesque, 1828

Contributing Total: 1

133 Mountain Road 230-0004 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0006*

Halifax United Methodist Church

Primary Resource: Church/Chapel (Building), Stories 2, Style: Federal/Adamesque, 1828

Contributing Total: 1

136 Mountain Road 230-0021 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0007*

Watt Leigh House

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, 1912

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Garage (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Smoke/Meat House (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

160 Mountain Road 230-0042 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0008*

Magnolia Hill

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Greek Revival, Ca 1840

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Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Kitchen (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

167 Mountain Road 230-0031 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0009*

Carrington House

Primary Resource: **Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Victorian, Folk, 1881**

Contributing Total: 1

197 Mountain Road 230-0005 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0010*

St. John's Episcopal Church

Primary Resource: **Church/Chapel (Building), Stories 1, Style: Greek Revival, 1844**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Cemetery (Site)**

Contributing Total: 1

221 Mountain Road 230-0020 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0011*

St. John's Episcopal Church Parish House

Primary Resource: **Office/Office Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Colonial Revival, 1962**

Contributing Total: 1

230-234 Mountain Road 230-0003 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0012*

Grand Oaks

Primary Resource: **Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2.5, Style: Greek Revival, Ca 1843**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Secondary Dwelling (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Secondary Dwelling (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Stable (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Pool House (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

267 Mountain Road 230-0044 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0013*

Primary Resource: **Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2.5, Style: Colonial Revival, 1910**

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: **Carriage House (Building)**

Contributing Total: 1

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295 Mountain Road 230-0014 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0014*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 1, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1970

Non-contributing Total: 1

309 Mountain Road 230-0017 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0015*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2.5, Style: Vernacular, 1914

Contributing Total: 1

329 Mountain Road 230-0037 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0016*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Stick/Eastlake, Ca 1898

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

349 Mountain Road 230-0041 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0017*

Lovelace-Covington House

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1901

Contributing Total: 1

370 Mountain Road 230-0023 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0018*

Edmunds House / Chastain Home for Gentle Women

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, 1885

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

389 Mountain Road 230-0026 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0019*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 1, Style: Stick/Eastlake, Ca 1880

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Secondary Dwelling (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

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415 Mountain Road 230-0024 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0020*

Robert Holt Easley House and Office

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Stick/Eastlake, Ca 1876

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Kitchen (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Privy (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Smoke/Meat House (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Well/Well House (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

442 Mountain Road 230-0030 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0020*

Thomas Jefferson Green House

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1822

Contributing Total: 1

471 Mountain Road 230-0025 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0022*

Woodland

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Neo-Eclectic, 1974

Non-contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Carriage House (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Stable (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Secondary Dwelling (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

484 Mountain Road 230-0006 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0023*

St. John's Episcopal Church Rectory

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Greek Revival, 1844

Contributing Total: 1

530 Mountain Road 230-0078-0024 *Other DHR Id#:*

Giant Poplars / Barksdale School

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Exotic Revival, Ca 1967

Non-contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Kitchen (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: School (Building)

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Contributing Total: 1

543 Mountain Road 230-0015 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0025*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1940

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Smoke/Meat House (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

575 Mountain Road 230-0016 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0026*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, 1968

Non-contributing Total: 1

580 Mountain Road 230-0045 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0027*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Vernacular, Ca 1840

Contributing Total: 1

610 Mountain Road 230-0078-0001 *Other DHR Id#:*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1981

Non-contributing Total: 1

615 Mountain Road 230-0049 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0028*

Seven Oaks

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Other, Ca 1820

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: School (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

640 Mountain Road 230-0043 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0029*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, 1964

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Kitchen (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

655 Mountain Road 230-0001 *Other DHR Id#: 230-0078-0030*

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1929

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

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Section 8

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Mountain Road Historic District, stretching along Route 360 in the Town of Halifax, Virginia, depicts the gradual evolution of this rural Southside area from large tracts of farmland owned by prominent county leaders in the 19th century to a mid-20th century community established around the county seat. The district continues to serve as a premiere residential neighborhood and institutional center for the town. Comprised primarily of residential properties ranging in date from the 1820s to the mid-1960s, the district is characterized by large lots with well-designed and constructed houses set back from the road and surrounded by mature landscaping. Institutional buildings, including the Halifax Hiram Lodge 96 (1828), Halifax United Methodist Church (1828) and St. John’s Episcopal Church (1844), are concentrated at the east end of the district, just west of Main Street and the 1839 Halifax Courthouse. Whether the properties along Mountain Road have a rural 19th-century character or a 20th-century suburban development pattern, they are strongly connected by the road itself with its historically significant role as a main artery leading into the courthouse town and its park-like character of large, gracious lots with substantial houses and mature landscaping.

The Mountain Road Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning & Development as it represents the residential and institutional growth along Mountain Road in the Town of Halifax. It is also locally significant under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Landscape Architecture as it is highly regarded for its distinguished mid-19th- to mid-20th-century collection of well-designed residential and institutional buildings with mature landscaping, which retains the park-like setting established by Dabney Cosby Jr. in his design of several of the earlier residences. The district is significant for the period from the 1820s, representing the construction of the earliest houses and institutional buildings, through 1965, which is the traditional cutoff for properties where significant activities continued into the more recent past.

Historical Background

Halifax County was formed from Lunenburg County in 1752 and William Ghent received a grant for a large tract of land on what is now Mountain Road in 1755.¹ Halifax County was later subdivided in 1766 to form Pittsylvania County and the county seat of Halifax moved 14 miles east from Peytonsburg to Faulkner’s (or Hawkin’s) Crossing. After several petitions from residents to move the court to the south side of the Banister River, the General Assembly finally ordered that the court be moved to land offered by John Boram in 1777. This land, located on the south side of the Banister River on what is now Toot’s Creek, was located near the geographical center of the county with a spring of excellent water”.² John Boram’s land became known as Banister Town and later Halifax. At this time, Thomas Ghent owned a large tract of land along what is now Mountain Road. Ghent’s one-story, hall-and-parlor house, built ca. 1774, survives as the rear section of Seven Oaks (615 Mountain Road), built ca. 1820. By 1784, plans were approved for the construction of a new courthouse and prison. A second new courthouse was constructed in 1803 and the General Assembly established the town of Banister in 1817.

In addition to the county seat, Banister became the commercial, social and religious center of the county. By 1830, there were several taverns in operation as well as the ca. 1828 Halifax Masonic Lodge (Hiram

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Lodge 96, 123 Mountain Road) and St. Mark's Episcopal Church, also built ca. 1828 at 133 Mountain Road. The land along Mountain Road continued to be settled by prominent Halifax County families, including the Barksdales, Easleys, and Ghents. Thomas Ghent's 1774 Seven Oaks was greatly enlarged ca. 1820 with the addition of a two-story, double-pile frame house with central passage. Further east, William Bailey built "Four Chimneys" (now known as the Thomas Jefferson Green House, 442 Mountain Road) in 1822. This house later served as the rectory for Reverend John Grammer of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in the early 1840s while St. John's Church and Rectory were being built.³

The town grew rapidly, with a population of approximately 250 by 1835, including three attorneys and three physicians, according to Joseph Martin in his 1835 gazetteer. In his description of the post village and county seat, Martin noted:

"Besides the usual county buildings it contains 25 dwelling houses, with a number of out houses, mechanics' shops, etc, two spacious houses of public worship, one Episcopalian and the other Methodist, a large and handsome Masonic Hall, which has lately been erected of brick in an elevated and advantageous situation above the middle of the village, several handsome and commodious taverns, three general stores, and one grocery."⁴

In 1838, after numerous repair orders, the court contracted Dabney Cosby Sr. and his son, Dabney Cosby Jr. to construct a new courthouse. Dabney Cosby Sr., who had worked on the University of Virginia with Thomas Jefferson, had recently completed courthouses in Sussex and Goochland counties.⁵ The Greek Revival-style Halifax County Courthouse (8 South Main Street) was completed by September 1839 and continues to operate today. The Cosbys remained in the Halifax area to construct several houses and churches, including the Greek Revival-style St. John's Episcopal Church (197 Mountain Road) in 1844 and St. John's Rectory (484 Mountain Road) in 1845. The Cosby family were members of St. John's and are buried in the cemetery there. With the construction of the new Episcopal Church, the former St. Mark's Episcopal Church at 133 Mountain Road was sold to the Courthouse Presbyterian Church, who worshipped there from 1845 to 1875.⁶

Dabney Cosby Jr. established the pattern of large houses set back on gracious lawns that gives Mountain Road its distinct character with his design and construction of three Greek Revival-style residences in the early 1840s. In addition to the 1845 St. John's Rectory (484 Mountain Road) Cosby Jr. designed and built Magnolia Hill (160 Mountain Road) in ca. 1840. James S. Easley, business partner to James Bruce and one of Halifax County's wealthiest land owners, and his wife Elizabeth Holt Easley purchased Magnolia Hill in 1843.⁷ Located just west of Toots Creek and the courthouse, this property was originally a much larger tract of land, as evidenced by several spring stones associated with it that survive, but are not part of the property (or the district) today. Grand Oaks (230 Mountain Road) was built in 1843 by Cosby Jr. for William Holt, Clerk of Court in Halifax County, and his wife Phoebe Ferguson Holt – parents of Elizabeth Holt Easley of Magnolia Hill. The brick kiln used by Cosby for these buildings may have been located on the property of the 1880s Edmunds House/Chastain Home (370 Mountain Road) as county court records indicate Cosby sold a house on this property, but not the lot with the kiln, to Elisha Barksdale in 1841.⁸

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Other prominent citizens of Halifax County living along Mountain Road at this time included Thomas Stanhope Flournoy, member of the United States Congress (1841 to 1857), who purchased Seven Oaks (615 Mountain Road) in 1841. Thomas Jefferson Green, a prominent attorney in Halifax County and member of the building committee for the Halifax County courthouse, purchased “Four Chimneys” at 442 Mountain Road in the 1850s.⁹

By 1853, the population of Banister had grown to about 600 according to the *1855 Statistical Gazetteer of The State of Virginia*, in which Richard Edwards refers to Banister as “the capital of Halifax.”¹⁰ Edwards also notes that Banister was the terminus of three stagecoach lines, with Mountain Road providing a connection to Danville. However, the Civil War and the coming of the railroad would change the development of land in Halifax and along Mountain Road during the second half of the 19th century.

Although the end of slavery changed the way the large plantations of Halifax County were farmed after the Civil War, Banister continued to develop as the county seat. With a population of 700 in 1885, it was incorporated as a town by the General Assembly in 1887. In 1890, the Lynchburg & Durham Railroad was completed at the south end of town and new commercial and industrial growth began to develop in that area. Reflecting this shift, the name of the town was changed in 1890 from “Banister,” after the river, to “Houston,” named for William C. Houston Jr. of Philadelphia, the treasurer of the construction company which built the Lynchburg & Durham Railroad.¹¹

Along Mountain Road, many of the large antebellum tracts of land began to be subdivided as a result of changes in farming practices after the war, as well as a demand for more residential development along this desirable route leading into town. Mountain Road continued to be developed by many of the leading citizens of the county with well-designed and well-constructed houses situated on large, landscaped lots. *The 1907 Halifax Handbook* described Houston as a town with a population of 800 and boasting that Mountain Road was “one of the most beautiful streets in Virginia.”¹²

Robert Holt Easley, son of James S. Easley of Magnolia Hill, built a Victorian-era house on Banister Farm (415 Mountain Road) in 1876. Easley, an attorney, served as president of the Bank of South Boston and mayor of Halifax.¹³ In addition to numerous domestic outbuildings, the property includes a one-story frame building, constructed ca. 1880, which served as his law office and billiards room.

A portion of Banister Farm was further subdivided when Robert Holt Easley sold land to Edward Shaeffer to build Woodland (371 Mountain Road) in 1901. As stipulated in the deed, when Shaeffer decided to sell Woodland in 1912, it returned to the Easley family, being purchased by Robert Holt Easley’s son, James Stone Easley. Easley was Halifax County’s Commonwealth Attorney, founder and president of the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, Halifax County Man of the Year (1955) and State of Virginia’s Outstanding Citizen in 1957.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the elaborate Queen Anne-style house burned in 1970 but the carriage house and stables, which were also designed in the Queen Anne-style, remain.

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During this period of growth in Halifax and further development of Mountain Road, Howard W. Cosby, son of Dabney Cosby Jr., carried on the family tradition of designing and building substantial brick houses for Halifax's leading citizens. In the 1880s, Captain Henry Edmunds built the Edmunds House/Chastain Home at 370 Mountain Road on land that was once part of the Barksdale property. This house and the 1881 Carrington House (167 Mountain Road) are attributed to Howard W. Cosby. Watt Leigh, president of the Bank of Halifax, built the Colonial Revival-style house at 136 Mountain Road in 1912. While local tradition credits Howard W. Cosby as the builder, it is possible that the design was influenced by the architectural firm of Heard and Caldwell as they designed the Bank of Halifax on Main Street in 1911 for Watt Leigh. Three other presidents of the bank have lived in this house.¹⁵

Several other prominent citizens of Halifax either built or remodeled earlier houses on Mountain Road at the turn of the century. Judge John Riely purchased Seven Oaks (615 Mountain Road) in 1875 and updated it once again by adding a two-story front addition with a Victorian porch. In 1901, Dr. William Lovelace built the Colonial Revival-style house at 349 Mountain Road. Lovelace practiced as a dentist in Halifax County for 60 years and served as the town's mayor for 28 years. The Lovelace-Covington House has remained in the family for five generations and Lovelace's grandson also served as mayor for 36 years. Grand Oaks (230 Mountain Road) was purchased in 1917 by Hannah Vaughan, wife of Colonel Ira Vaughan. The Vaughans came to Halifax from Philadelphia for Colonel Vaughan to oversee the construction of the hydroelectric dam and power plant on the Banister River. Grand Oaks was remodeled in the Colonial Revival style with the addition of a two-story portico, dormers and side wings.¹⁶

1934 to 1965 (Expanded Period of Significance)

By the 1930s, the town's modern infrastructure was well established with electrical and telephone companies as well as the Banister River Dam in operation. A new Halifax High School for white students and the Halifax County Library were built on Mountain Road just west of the historic district in the late 1930s. It was also during this period that the Halifax Hiram Lodge 96 invited the Halifax Women's Club to share the use of their ca. 1828 meeting hall. Another significant change was the conversion of the 1880s Edmunds House at 370 Mountain Road to the Chastain Home for Gentle Women in 1949.

Industry in the Town of Halifax also diversified during this period with the introduction of the textile industry as Carter Fabrics was established in 1940, followed by the Halifax Worsted Mills (later Burlington) in 1947. The Craddock-Terry Shoe Corporation built a plant on South Main Street in 1946. These new industries brought many jobs to the area. As testament to the town's growth, a new Municipal Building/Fire Station and water tower were constructed by 1950 on North Main Street near the intersection of Mountain Road. As a result of this continued growth in the town of Halifax after World War II, the area along Mountain Road continued to develop as well.

The two churches in the district, Halifax United Methodist Church and St. John's Episcopal Church,

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both experienced growth in their congregations and expanded their facilities during this period. Halifax United Methodist Church, built ca. 1928 at 133 Mountain Road, added a library, office and classrooms to the rear of the chancel in 1950. Another two-story addition with a new entrance was added in 1974. St. John's Episcopal Church built a one-story parish house on an adjacent lot at 221 Mountain Road in 1962. The new parish house, constructed of concrete block, was covered in stucco to match the original 1844 church designed by Dabney Cosby Jr.

The growing popularity of the automobile impacted the town of Halifax and Mountain Road in the mid-20th century. As both Main Street (Route 501) and Mountain Road (Route 360) began as stagecoach routes connecting Halifax to Southside Virginia and beyond in the 19th century, these roads continued to serve as major thoroughfares in the 20th century. By the 1930s, automobiles were becoming more common and the roads of Halifax and South Boston were paved. The late-19th-century Lord Halifax Hotel, located at the juncture of Main Street and Mountain Road, experienced a revival during this period of automobile travel before being demolished in the 1950s for a service station. The intersection of Main Street and Mountain Road featured two service stations by the mid-20th century—the ca. 1935 Republic Crown Station (60 Mountain Road) and a ca. 1950 Shell Service Station across the street (demolished). Another business related to these highways was the bus station (demolished), which was located at the corner of Mountain Road and Maple Avenue.¹⁷ The impact of the automobile on residential development along Mountain Road after the 1930s is evident in a more direct relationship between the residences and the road in their siting and orientation as well as the presence of driveways leading to a garage.

As the population of Halifax continued to grow after World War II, the large rural tracts of land owned by prominent families in the 19th century were further subdivided to provide more building lots along Mountain Road as it became a premiere residential street. This new development differed from the earlier residential properties of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which were more reflective of the rural origins of the area with large houses set back from the road, sometimes with a long “approach drive,” and surrounded by domestic or agricultural outbuildings. The mid-20th century residences tended to be more closely oriented to the road but still featured large, well-designed and constructed houses sited on spacious lots and surrounded by well-established landscaping. In many cases the large trees date back to a time when much of the land along Mountain Road was covered in woods.

Colonial Revival continued to be the most popular style for houses along Mountain Road. The land associated with Seven Oaks was subdivided for the construction of three additional houses while carefully maintaining the ancient grove of oaks believed to date to the 17th century. Bonbrook (655 Mountain Road) was built in 1929 by Richard Coles and Pocahontas Edmunds using materials salvaged from Springwood, the Coles family home. To the east of Seven Oaks, the Edmunds-Cage House (543 Mountain Road) was built in 1941. Designed in the Colonial Revival style with a two-story portico, the house was constructed of bricks from Banister Lodge, the ca. 1830 plantation home of William Howson Clark.¹⁸ Nostalgia also inspired the ca. 1930 construction of a rustic log house by James Stone Easley on the Woodland property for his relative Craddock Edmunds. Edmunds was a well-known Southern poet who achieved great acclaim in 1937 for his work.

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Other residential neighborhoods that developed in Halifax after World War II tended to be less auspicious in their siting, size, and style. Most of these houses were built for the managers and workers associated with the new industries and were located in subdivisions off of the main thoroughfares. These houses are typically a smaller, simpler version of the Colonial Revival or Ranch style. While the lots were often large, they do not feature mature landscaping or retain the cohesive, park-like character that distinguishes Mountain Road Historic District.

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1981 "Halifax County Courthouse." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

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Section: Photographs:

Property: Mountain Road Historic District 2015 Update
Location: Town of Halifax, Halifax County, Virginia
Photographer: Katherine Coffield, Hill Studio
Date: February 2015
VDHR File #: 230-0078

Photo 1 of 6: Edmunds House/Chastain Home for Gentle Women, view SE

Photo 2 of 6: Thomas Jefferson Green House, view SW

Photo 3 of 6: Grand Oaks, view south

Photo 4 of 6: Mountain Road - 100 Block, view east

Photo 5 of 6: Halifax United Methodist Church and Halifax Hiram Lodge 96, view NE

Photo 6 of 6: St. John's Episcopal Church, view NW

Endnotes

¹ www.oldhalifax.com

² Cook, 1972: 9.

³ Halifax County Historical Society, 2015

⁴ Martin, 1835:184-185.

⁵ Cook: 13

⁶ Halifax county Historical Society

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Edwards, 1855:16

¹¹ *The Daily Virginian*, 1/8/1891

¹² Morrison 1907: 22-23 12

¹³ www.oldhalifax.com

¹⁴ Halifax County Historical Society

¹⁵ *ibid*

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¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Hill Studio, 2008: Section 8 Page 19

¹⁸ www.oldhalifax.com