



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 071-0033

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

Acquired Property recently.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes X No

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes X No

1. General Property Information

Property name: Miller House "Sharswood"

Property address: 5685 Riceville Rd

City or Town: Gretna, VA

Zip code: 24557

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Pittsylvania County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building x Site Structure Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 124.38 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town Village Hamlet Rural X

Briefly describe the property's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

2014 survey: The site is dominated by the house, which stands at the highest prominence overlooking a deep front lawn. The setback from Riceville Road (Rt. 640) is more than 300 feet. Significant secondary resources include the following (distances taken from the original main block of the house using aerial imagery): 65 feet southeast is the office building; 70 feet southwest, a sheltered well; 100 feet west of (directly behind) the house, a kitchen building; 130 southwest, a brick smokehouse; 260 feet southwest, a barn. Other resources include a shed 66 feet west, a metal car port 40 ft. southwest, and an unusual late-20th-century sheet metal dwelling 135 ft. south-southwest. An annotated aerial view is included with this survey.

### 3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Gothic Revival Style (Carpenter Gothic)

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Alexander Jackson Davis, Architect

If the builder is known, please list here: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of construction (can be approximate): Mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century-early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1850s

#### **Narrative Description:**

DHR Western Region architectural historian Mike Pulice made site visits to Sharswood on January 14 and January 31, 2014. Extensive interior and exterior photographs, site plan, and kitchen plan from the site visits are on file at DHR. The narratives below were authored by Pulice following his site visits and were entered into the department's architectural survey database.

**Sharswood House description:** The Charles E. Miller House, "Sharswood," is a two-story frame house, originally clad with typical horizontal weatherboards over which vinyl siding has been applied. The house has a symmetrical three-bay façade with three steeply pitched front gables, the center gable being the largest/tallest and the flanking gables of equal size/height. The brick foundation of hand-made brick laid in common bond incorporates a full basement. The interior placement of the fireplaces/chimneys, much less the octagonal ceramic chimney pots, would have been a major distinction from other houses of the 1840s and 1850s in the region.

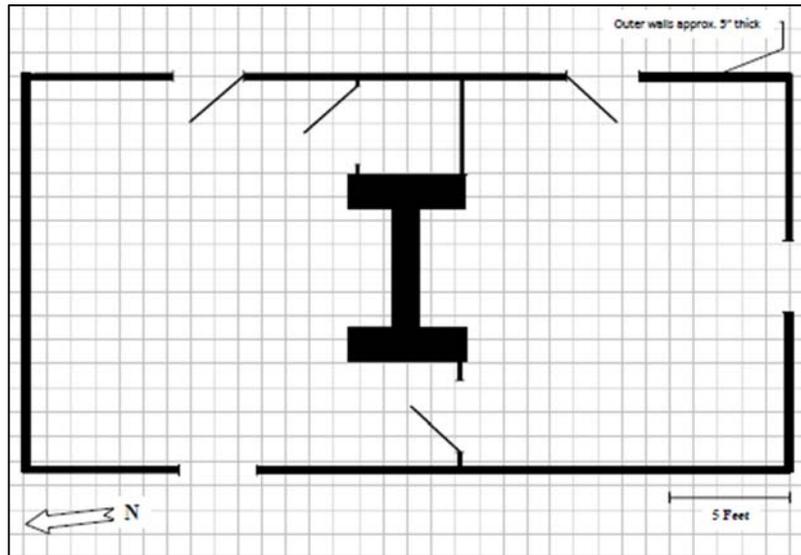
Sharswood is physically intact and its character is generally well preserved. The use of modern substitute, exterior materials such as vinyl siding and snap-system metal roof, and the one-story addition that wraps around the south side and rear elevations, have made some visual impact. Nevertheless, the design of the original house structure remains unchanged, with several forms of scroll-sawn vergeboards, towering finials, clustered octagonal chimney pots, octagonal porch columns, and diamond-paned casement windows with drip moldings, all well maintained. The vinyl siding has the same traditional width-of-reveal as the original weatherboards it covers, and was carefully applied, avoiding removal of decorative features.

The house interior consists of a single-pile center-passage plan with central staircase. The interior woodwork is generally modest in character. The first-floor south fireplace mantel is extremely plain like those of the many Greek Revival houses built during the same period, but has a hidden compartment behind the right-hand pilaster, which is itself a small door. The first-floor north fireplace mantel, however, is a unique piece featuring carved Gothic motifs such as lancet arches within pilasters. The molded window and door trim, and the baseboards are more robust and otherwise unlike that of Greek Revival houses. The interior doors have four-panel configurations, small brass knobs, and built-in key locks.

#### Sharswood Kitchen Description

After the Sharswood house was built in the 1850s, the dependency located directly behind the house probably served as a kitchen and wash house. However, it been erected at least 50 years earlier, possibly as the original house on the property. The building measures 32 feet by 16 ft. 4 inches, the long axis oriented north-south (see plan drawing below). The height of the first story, from the top of the uncoursed fieldstone foundation to the loft floor, is 11 feet, 3 inches. Numerous architectural clues indicate the building was standing by no later than the first decade of the 19th century- though it could even be considerably older. These clues include: meticulous mortise-and-tenon braced timber framing with massive L-shaped "guttered" corner posts; the exclusive use of hand-wrought rosehead nails throughout the building; single-piece "struck" window and door casings/molded trim; and the massive central double

fireplace formation of stone and brickmasonry construction. The stone/brick fireplace mass measures 7' 9" wide (east-west) by 5 feet deep. The south firebox measures 5 ft. wide, 2 ft. deep and was originally 4 ft. tall (from floor to the base of the massive stone lintel which is now broken and laying on the floor). The north firebox has similar dimensions except it is only 21 inches deep. Several of the struck window casings are stored in the south room.



Sharswood Kitchen

The building contains no staircase and there is no evidence it ever had an internal stair. The loft was apparently reached via a ladder through the tall opening in the south gable end. The roof framing consists of lapped and pegged rafter pairs with lapped cross ties and let-in diagonal purlins. The stout rafters measure about 4 inches by 5 inches. Mid-nineteenth-century and later material, such as circular-sawn loft floorboards and some sawn lath in the north room of the building is also present, but most material appears to be from the original construction.

The hewn-square sill logs measure just over 11 inches thick. The floor joists measure 7.5 by 4 inches and are spaced 2 feet on-center. The principal upright and diagonal framing members measure 7.5 by 3.75 inches; the common members measure 2.75 by 3.75 inches. Some, if not all of the larger members were hewn square leaving visible adze marks, while the smaller ones were pit sawn. All uprights are mortised into the sill, the larger ones held by wooden pegs. The two identical (front) door openings, 11 feet apart and each about 6' 2" inches from their nearest building corner, measure 6.5 feet tall by 3 feet wide, and have struck, molded casings.

The two window openings (on south and west elevations) are also about 3 feet wide. The building is a highly significant and rare survival. Because of its robust framing and sophisticated construction, the building remains structurally stable; however, deterioration has reached most of the building fabric. The weatherboards are in generally poor condition and parts of the interior are exposed to the elements.

### Sharswood Smokehouse Description

The gable-roofed smokehouse, which measures 14 feet 5 inches square, appears to predate the ca. 1850 main house by at least several decades and is likely contemporaneous with the kitchen building, the chief indicators being the glazed-header Flemish bond pattern with double-struck mortar joints (on all four elevations). Brickmasonry with these characteristics is consistent with late 18th century norms, while inconsistent with 19th century brickwork in the region. The bricks measure (in inches) 7 1/2 - 7 3/4 x 2 1/2 (tall) x 3 1/2 (wide). The 20th-century cement parging around the base of the building exterior bears the

inscribed date 10/5/38. A frame shed addition was added to the smokehouse's north elevation in the early 20th century. Within the shed, the north brick wall of the smokehouse has been protected from the elements and never whitewashed, and is especially well preserved. Surviving meathouses/smokehouses have become rare, and brick examples are all the more rare in Pittsylvania County and surrounding areas.

#### Sharswood Office Description

This weatherboarded frame outbuilding, thought to have been built to serve as an office, stands off the front southeast corner of the main house. The 20-foot-wide by 18-foot-deep building has a steeply pitched side-gable roof clad with standing-seam tin, and an interior end chimney topped with a small octagonal chimney pot, presumably made of terra cotta and painted white, like those of the main house. The chimney and numerous architectural other clues suggest the office was erected in tandem the main house. In the rear elevation is a diamond-light casement window like those of the house, and the Carpenter-Gothic porch is of a similar style to the house. The office interior has a single room on the main floor with a boxed stair to the loft in the northwest corner, and fireplace centered in the east wall.

The loft is lighted by very small four-over-four sash in the gable ends. The dependency's brick basement/foundation, built into a steep slope, is open to weather on the south elevation, and is used as a garage for farm equipment. There is indication it was built that way originally, but a whitewash border on bricks suggests there may have been folding doors or a sliding door at the opening. There were window or vent apertures (now infilled with later bricks) centered within the east and west elevations of the basement.

Underlain by uncoursed stonemasonry, the brickwork is laid in 3-course common bond, which became very rare after the early 1830s. Other Pittsylvania County examples of its use include the c. 1800 brick section of the prestigious house, Little Cherrystone, near Chatham, built entirely of 3:1 bond; and the also prestigious c. 1833 house, Dan's Hill, near Danville, which features 3:1 bond only on its secondary elevations.

The basement brickmasonry, comprised of relatively uniform hand-made bricks measuring 8 x 3 (tall) x 4 (wide) inches, and overhand-struck mortar joints, is different from the kitchen chimney or the smokehouse masonry. Some of the bricks are partially glazed or fire-darkened, but not uniformly. The office masonry could not be compared with the main house foundation/basement, which is parged inside and out. Moreover, the stout 7 ¾ x 4-inch floor joists seen in the office basement are vertically mill sawn, unlike those of the kitchen, but cannot be compared with timbers in the house, which are not viewable in any part of the house.

#### Sharswood Barn Description

An early twentieth-century gable-roofed weatherboarded frame barn in fair condition stands about 100 feet southwest of the smokehouse. It has some surviving jigsawed Carpenter Gothic vergeboard decoration on its gable ends and a shed extension on the north side. At least one other currently unsurveyed, yet significant farm building stands further to the west. The farmyard behind the house is recommended for further survey.

#### 4. Property's History and Significance (2014 survey)

##### Surveyor Assessment (VCRIS)

Sharswood is one of the premier historic domestic sites in Pittsylvania County, with extant resources dating to the 18th century and an outstanding and unique Gothic Revival-style house designed by the originator of rural Gothic Revival houses in America, Alexander Jackson Davis himself in 1848. It is the only known building in Pittsylvania County designed by Davis. The property [appears to be] eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

##### Property Notes

In Amelia Peck's 1992 book, *Alexander Jackson Davis, American Architect, 1803-1892*, p.113, Sharswood is listed among Davis' personal designs, done in 1848, as "Charles E. Miller House, Chalk Level, Pittsylvania County, Va. Gothic Revival Cottage."

Fitzgerald's book notes that in the 1850s the house was "supposedly" built for Charles E. Miller and Nathaniel Crenshaw Miller, "to whom the land was deeded by Nathaniel's father, William Miller of Walnut Grove, Halifax County in 1838. The acreage was part of a crown grant for 2,400 acres to the Crenshaw family, which sold it to William Miller in 1820 for 2,000 pounds..." "The Miller bachelors...operated a grist mill and two sawmills near Mt. Airy...The Millers are buried in the churchyard of St. John's Episcopal Church in Mt. Airy."

##### Architectural Discussion

Sharswood was designed A.J. Davis in 1848 and probably completed by the end of 1850 or soon thereafter. The house shares many similarities with the Gothic Revival-style designs Davis was well-known for, first published in 1837. His designs were further popularized by A. J. Downing's books in the 1840s and 1850s, and "Cottage Villas in the Rural Gothic Style" were constructed (mostly in rural areas) throughout the US. Unlike most examples, Sharswood is no mere pattern book copy. It has unique combinations of elements that mark architect Davis' personalized touch.

There are a few other Gothic Revival houses (extant or documented) in the county, e.g., Fairytale Cottage in Chatham [DHR 187-5001-0154] and Locust Hill near Altavista [071-5153], but Sharswood is almost certainly the earliest example, and in terms of rich Carpenter Gothic detail and elegance, is rivaled only by nearby Woodside [071-5376], which is now threatened by vacancy and long-term neglect. Locust Hill, built ca. 1859, is documented as the work of local craftsman Enoch Johnson, while the builder of Sharswood and the other local Gothic Revival houses remains undocumented. The possible connection between each house and Johnson is worthy of future investigation.

##### Sources

- 1) Davis, Alexander Jackson. *Rural Residences, Etc.* New York, 1837.
- 2) Fitzgerald, Madelene Vaden. *Pittsylvania: Homes and People of the Past.* Homeplace Books, 1987: 6-7.
- 3) Peck, Amelia, Alexander Jackson Davis, *American Architect, 1803-1892.* 1992: 113.
- 4) Wells, John and Robert Dalton, *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary,* 1997:106.

**5. Property Ownership** (Check as many categories as apply):

Private:  Public\Local \_\_\_\_\_ Public\State \_\_\_\_\_ Public\Federal \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property** (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Fredrick K. Miller

organization: \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: 4997 Riceville Rd

city or town: Gretna state: VA zip code: 24557

e-mail: Fmill01@hotmail.com telephone: (707)344-5145

Legal Owner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 16 Jul, 2020

*•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••*

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Karen L. Dixon

organization: \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: 4997 Riceville Rd

city or town: Gretna state: VA zip code: 24557

e-mail: Karen.Dixon@djj.virginia.gov or Rexroth04@yahoo.com

telephone: (717)919-9002

**6. Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager

name/title: David Smitherman, County Administrator

locality: Pittsylvania County

street & number: 1 Center Street

city or town: Chatham state: VA zip code: 24531

telephone: (434)432-7710