



**PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

**Purpose of Evaluation**

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

Seeking recognition of the town's historic significance to foster awareness and promote revitalization.

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

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

**1. General Information**

District name(s):  Clinchco Historic District (339-5003)

Main Streets and/or Routes:  Dickenson Hwy (Rt. 83); Clinchco Main Street

City or Town:  Town of Clinchco

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

**2. Physical Aspects**

Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Town  x  Village \_\_\_\_\_ Hamlet \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

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

At its western extent, the proposed district reaches as far as 16311 Dickenson Hwy (Rt. 83) to include a single-family frame house on the north side of the road and the south side of the McClure River. East of this house and across river is a row of four significant two-story duplex houses and a couple neighboring houses on the north side of the 300 block of Banner Street. The district boundary then follows the northerly bend in the river and highway nearly up to the bridge over the river on Big Ridge Road, to include the northernmost resource, a one-story frame house at 17029 Dickenson Highway. On the east side of the district, the boundary extends to include several contributing houses on the south side of the 100-300 blocks of Mill St. The southernmost part of the district includes all resources on Palmer and Gilmore streets, and the center of the district includes the central locus of town where the town hall and post office are located, including Clinchco Main St., Lytton Circle, Adams St., Matthews-Stuart Circle, and Carson St.

### 3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Few discernable styles are present.

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:

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If any builders or developers are known, please list here: Clinchfield Coal Co.

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): c. 1917 and later

Are there any known threats to this district? Vacancy, neglect, remodeling

#### **Narrative Description:**

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district.

The architecture of the district is characterized primarily by its collection of modest frame houses built between the town's inception in 1917 and the 1930s. Most of the houses follow the same design: narrow, one-story front-gabled frame houses with cutaway corner porches, and are approximately the same size. Most are one-story; others are embanked in the steep topography and include a basement story; and several two-story examples also exist, mostly along Main Street near the centrally located town hall. Foundations are constructed of brick, concrete block, or poured concrete. An occasional non-distinctive box-like one-story modular house dating to the 1950s-1980s or mobile home appears among the older houses. Nearly all buildings are clad with vinyl, aluminum, or rolled asphalt siding and have either asphalt-shingle- or modern crimped-seam sheet-metal-sheathed gable roofs; front-gable roofs being predominant. Only a handful of houses have uncovered weatherboards. Some of the older houses have decoratively corbeled brick chimneys emerging near the center of the roof or against an exterior side wall.

Some of the most notable and best-preserved residential buildings are the four very similar two-story frame multi-family houses situated just west of the town center, on the north side of Banner Street. Each had two corbeled brick central interior chimney stacks, although the chimneys of one house (346 Banner St.) have been removed. All four houses have one-story full-width hip-roofed front porches.

The most iconic building in town, the old post office, now in essentially ruins, was a handsome two-story brick building with a concrete foundation, numerous doors and windows spanned by soldier-brick headers, and corbeled brick belt course on the facade. The exterior walls remain generally intact, but the roof and most windows and doors are gone.

The one church at the center of town, the Clinchco Freewill Baptist Church on the south side of Main Street, may date to the 1950s; yet its exterior components: vinyl siding, windows and porch, and asphalt-shingle roof, are all considerably more recent. Near the north end of the district, fronting onto Dickenson Highway, is the most architecturally imposing building in the district: a well-preserved Classical Revival brick church likely dating to the 1950s.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

The proposed Clinchco Historic District, located in the McClure River Valley among steep mountain slopes and coalfields, is almost exclusively residential, save for the town hall, the post office and two churches. There are few if any viable commercial buildings or currently operating businesses. Both Dickenson Highway (Route 83) and an active railroad line follow the river through the valley.

#### 4. District History and Significance

The Town of Clinchco is a small, central Dickenson County historic coal town, which, like other coal towns in Appalachia, has suffered from a very poor local economy for a long period of time. Its built heritage has suffered as a manifestation of enduring economic hardship and gradual, but steady population loss. The vast majority of buildings in town are houses, most being the very small, narrow, one-story front-gabled frame houses with cutaway corner porches, seen (or once seen) in other nearby coal communities like Trammel and Dante. They cannot be characterized as the iconic shotgun house, but are similar in several respects. There are a good number of well-preserved houses in the district, but in general, where historic integrity does remain mostly intact, condition tends to be poor; while the houses that remain occupied and receive regular maintenance tend to be covered with substitute materials, namely vinyl siding, vinyl porches, and replacement doors and windows. A number of the house porches have been enclosed. A few houses are burned out, but not cleared away. The most iconic building in town, the old post office, is now a ruin, and a poignant reminder of the town's short-lived era of prosperity. While acknowledging the importance of coalfields history and culture as well as the steadily increasing rarity of historic mining-related resources in Virginia, the compromised condition and historic integrity of many resources within the potential Clinchco Historic District must factor into the district's evaluation. It is the opinion of the surveyor, however, that these factors have not yet overwhelmed the positive points weighing for historic district eligibility. Therefore the district is recommended eligible under Criterion A in the area of Mining/Extraction and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Other criteria and areas of significance may also apply.

##### Historic Background:

The town, formerly known as Moss, was named for both the Clinchfield Railroad and the Clinchfield Coal Corporation. The population was 337 at the 2010 census, down from 424 at the 2000 census. The Clinchco post office was established in 1917 [Wikipedia, November 2020].

Clinchco got its start as an old coal mining town in the late 1800s. From the very beginning, Clinchco was rich with cultural diversity, as the mines attracted workers from all over the world. Some of the original structures from the first coal camp in Dickenson County are still standing, including a bath house and a coal mining family's open fireplace. Clinchco was originally known as Moss, VA. Historians debate whether the town was renamed for the Clinchfield Railroad, or if the name was intended as a contraction of the Clinchfield Coal Co. Clinchco was the birthplace of World War II hero Staff Sergeant Darrell C. "Shifty" Powers. He learned to shoot from his father, who was an excellent shot with his rifle and pistol. Powers spent a lot of time outdoors hunting game in the Clinchco area before joining the Army and volunteering as a paratrooper. Powers was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, in the 101st Airborne Division. The Battalion is more commonly known as "Easy Company." In 2001, HBO debuted a miniseries based on the history of Easy Company. [Reproduced here verbatim from "Our History" <https://clinchcova.net/services>].

Dickenson County was formed in 1880 from Russell, Wise, and Buchanan Counties. The district was named for William J. Dickenson, a delegate to the general assembly, who played a major role in establishing the new county. This formation came as a result of demands from the inhabitants that they be represented by a county government closer to the people. In 1880, Delegate Dickenson sponsored the bill in the House of Delegates to establish Dickenson County as the one-hundredth county in Virginia. Dickenson County has since become known as "Virginia's Baby." The rough mountainous terrain has greatly influenced the development of the Dickenson County area. Early settlers located along stream beds where the best farm land was to be found. The streams also served as a much needed water supply to the pioneers. The first settlements in Dickenson County were Sandlick, Haysi, Holly Creek (Clintwood), and Nora. All of these communities were developed along the streams in the area [<https://dickensonva.org/156/History-of-the-County>, Nov. 2020].







Union  
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Faith Bible  
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Clinchco

1400

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