



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL

PROPERTIES DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 002-1134

Purpose of Evaluation

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

This property was recently vacated by a tenant who had lived there for many years, providing an opportunity for inspection. To preserve it will require repair to the foundation, repair or replacement of some concrete blocks, and a new roof. In the course of research we realized that the school had significant historical value as a vestige of mountaineer culture in western Albemarle County prior to the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park.

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: Sugar Hollow School

Property address: 6326 Sugar Hollow Road

City or Town: Crozet

Zip code: 22932

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

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

Building x

Site

Structure

Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 1.74

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:

The Sugar Hollow School is situated in Sugar Hollow on the Moormans River, a beautiful state scenic river which flows out of the Shenandoah National Park. Several Sugar Hollow Road properties are held in conservation easement, and the schoolhouse parcel is surrounded by property owned by the Virginia Skyline Girl Scout Council, which operates Camp Sugar Hollow and hosts The Living Earth School. Following the road west from the schoolhouse leads you to the City of Charlottesville's Sugar Hollow reservoir and on into the park. The area surrounding the schoolhouse today is heavily wooded with picturesque views of the river.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): _____

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: _____

If the builder is known, please list here: _____

Date of construction (can be approximate): early 1920s

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

Although the schoolhouse has been altered on the interior to become a one bedroom, one bath residence, it still retains many period features such as its rusticated concrete block construction, hipped metal roof, hardwood floors, some interior wainscoting, and large double hung windows. The structure has not been modified by any permanent additions, although it now has a wood deck built along one side and part of the rear façade. One of the windows on the east side of the building has been replaced by a door onto the deck, however the schoolhouse retains seven of its eight original windows. The interior has a small wood-burning stove of undetermined vintage, which connects to a brick chimney. (See photos.)

Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

There is a small red-painted wood frame outbuilding on the western side of the schoolhouse. We do not know the age of the structure, although it is illustrated on the survey dating to 1951. (See photo and image of 1951 survey.)

4. Property's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

An Albemarle County deed dated August 21, 1896, records the sale of the land by Almon H. and Georgianna Wood of Amherst County to the White Hall School District of Albemarle County. For the sum of \$10, the Woods sold to the school district a quarter-acre tract of land on the banks of the Moormans River near the Ebenezer Church site, “for the purpose of locating a public free school.”

The schoolhouse is noted on the Frank Massie map of Albemarle County dating to 1907. It shows the Sugar Hollow School in the White Hall School District, annotated “No. 15” and marked “WS”—indicating that it was a school for white children. (See image of map detail attached.) The original wood frame school shown on the Massie map served the children of the Blue Ridge “mountain folk” of western Albemarle County beginning around 1901, until the existing concrete block school building replaced it in the early 1920s.

Although we have not yet received information from Albemarle County Public Schools regarding the Sugar Hollow School, we believe the existing building dates to the early ‘20s based on the materials used in its construction. Concrete blocks were first used in architecture in the mid-19th Century. In 1900, the first do-it-yourself concrete block molding machine was invented. This allowed for greater availability of concrete blocks as a building material. Rock face concrete block was affordable and durable, so it was quickly adopted and widely used as a construction material throughout the U.S. by the 1920s.

A childhood resident of Sugar Hollow, Arlene Carr Abell (b. 1910), recalls that the Sugar Hollow community built the new block schoolhouse themselves. Mrs. Abell, in a 1979 interview with Dorothy Noble Smith, now in the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection in the Special Collections of the Carrier Library at James Madison University, recorded this remembrance:

ACA: “...my grandfather had an orchard and he tanned hides.”

DNS: “...did people in Sugar Hollow peel bark?”

ACA: “Yes, my daddy did. And of course my grandaddy did too. That is the way they tanned their hides. ...And then they got out timber. Most everybody up there had a small orchard...and timber. And they had a one room schoolhouse.”

DNS: “Was that far away from home?”

ACA: “No, about a mile.”

DNS: “...roughly how many children were in that school?”

ACA: “Oh, about fifteen or twenty.”

Later in the interview she returns to the subject of the schools in Sugar Hollow:

DNS: “...the school that you went to was [made of]?”

ACA: “The first one was a little one room and it was weatherboarded. It wasn’t log.”

“I didn’t go to that school but a little while....”

“...then the people in the community got together and hauled sand and built a block schoolhouse. And it is still there, but of course somebody lives there [today]. It hasn’t been a school for a long time, and they taught from the first to the seventh grade.”

We have located a period photo from circa 1939 showing the Sugar Hollow School students, grades one through seven, posing beside the concrete block school building. The photo comes from the Via family; four children of Archie King Via are pictured in the photo. The boy standing second from the right in the second row, sporting aviator glasses, has been identified as Gerry Blencowe, a nephew of Arlene Carr Abell. (See image attached.)

An article by Andrew H. Myers, “The Creation of the Shenandoah National Park: Albemarle County Cultures in Conflict,” in *The Magazine of Albemarle History*, describes the features of modern life, such as the advent of the car and building of roads, that were starting to change the subsistence farming model that had existed for more than a century in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western Albemarle. The establishment of the Shenandoah National Park would accelerate the transition to modernity and ultimately displace that distinctive mountain culture.

In 1924 the Calvin Coolidge administration announced plans to establish a national park for the eastern United States, to rival the great national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite in the West. The idea was to preserve a large swath of land east of the Mississippi River for the recreational enjoyment of Nature by all Americans. The committee charged with selecting a new park location was interested in the Virginia Blue Ridge for its proximity to eastern population centers and the promise of spectacular scenery along a proposed skyline drive. Yet there was a problem: much of the land was populated by mountain homesteaders. The formation of the Shenandoah National Park would require the first ever use of eminent domain in the U.S., taking private property for the public good.

President Coolidge’s authorization for the park stipulated that Virginia would need to purchase the land and donate it to the federal government. Shenandoah National Park records from 1926-1928 show that the Sugar Hollow School was among the properties intended for inclusion in the park. Following the Great Depression, however, Virginia was unable to purchase as much land for the park as the state had originally planned to acquire. Of about 25,000 acres surveyed for the park in Albemarle County, some 16,000 acres were finally purchased.

After the state took possession of the land for the park through condemnation proceedings completed in 1936, almost all the homesteads, churches and schools in the park were razed, both to return the area to a more natural state and to prevent former residents from coming back.

Although we are awaiting confirmation from Albemarle County Public Schools, we believe the Sugar Hollow School continued in service into the early 1940s. By that time, after the Great Depression, the impacts of the chestnut blight, the increasing migration of country residents to cities, and finally the displacement of local inhabitants for the creation of the Shenandoah National Park, the use of the schoolhouse must have dwindled away.

In 1951, the Albemarle County School Board, determining that the site was no longer suitable for a school, sold the quarter-acre parcel that the White Hall School District had purchased in 1896, together with the adjacent property, then known as the Ebenezer Church lot, to a private individual. The 1951 survey of the property is found in deed book 296, on page 243. (See image attached.)

Appreciation for the people who gave up their land so that the Park could exist has been long in coming. During the period in which Virginia's leaders sought to create a new national park, the mountain residents were maligned as squatters and moonshiners—uneducated, violent and inbred—who would benefit by relocation. Today we know this view of the mountaineers was terribly unfair and inaccurate. Most of the residents of the Blue Ridge had deep roots there. They were landowners, hardworking and capable people with families, who cared about schooling their children and fostered productive local economies. In 2016, the Albemarle Blue Ridge Heritage Project dedicated a monument in the Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park of western Albemarle “to honor the sacrifices made by Albemarle County, Virginia residents and landowners who were displaced so that the Shenandoah National Park could be established.”

The Sugar Hollow School is a rare remnant of the Blue Ridge mountaineer culture as it existed in the early 20th Century. By a twist of fate, the school, which was slated to become part of the Shenandoah National Park, and would most likely have been torn down, still stands along the Moormans River. As Kristie Kendall, author of *These Hills Were Home*, has said, “As so many of the vestiges of mountain life were lost with the creation of the Shenandoah National Park, it's that much more important to have some... buildings remain as reminders of this important history and culture.”

References:

Green Peyton Map of Albemarle County, 1875.

Frank Massie Map of Albemarle County, 1907.

Albemarle County Deed Books

Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection in the Special Collections of the Carrier Library at James Madison University.

Beigie, Terry. “A View of the Past: Sixth generation son brings history to life at Albemarle home.” Daily Progress [Charlottesville], January 31, 2019.

Engle, Reed L. and Caroline Janney, A Database of Shenandoah National Park Land Records. U.S. Department of the Interior, 1997.

James, Phil. *Secrets of the Blue Ridge*. Whitehall, VA. Whitehall Media, 2010.

James, Phil. *Secrets of the Blue Ridge, volume two*. Whitehall, VA. Whitehall Media, 2013.

Lambert, Darwin. *The Undying Past of Shenandoah National Park*. Lanham, MD. Roberts Rhinehart Inc. Publishers, 1989.

Myers, Andrew H. “The Creation of the Shenandoah National Park: Albemarle County Cultures in Conflict.” *The Magazine of Albemarle County History*. Albemarle County Historical Society, volume 51, 1993.

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

Private: x 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: Margaret C. Gilges, Trustee, Gilges Family Trust

organization: _____

street & number: 701 Flordon Drive

city or town: Charlottesville state: VA zip code: 22901-7807

e-mail: peggygilges@mac.com telephone: cell 434 996-8496

Legal Owner's Signature: Margaret C. Gilges Date: 9/14/19
•• 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: Margaret ("Peggy") C. Gilges

organization: _____

street & number: 701 Flordon Drive

city or town: Charlottesville state: VA zip code: 22901-7807

e-mail: peggygilges@mac.com telephone: cell 434 996-8496

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 or City Manager.

name/title: Jeff Richardson, County Executive

locality: Albemarle County

street & number: 401 McIntire Road

city or town: Charlottesville state: VA zip code: 22902

telephone: 434 296-5841