

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Paxton HouseOther names/site number: DHR ID# 081-0307Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 240 Sales Mill RoadCity or town: FairfieldState: VACounty: RockbridgeNot For Publication: ☐ N/AVicinity: ☒ X**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 at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

    A     B X C     D**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

**Signature of commenting official:****Date****Title :****State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government**

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Georgian

Federal

Victorian

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD, BRICK, STONE, METAL

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Paxton House, located at 240 Sales Mill Road on the outskirts of the village of Fairfield in northern Rockbridge County, Virginia, is a two-story Federal-style brick house built ca. 1820. The five-bay house has a coursed rubble limestone foundation, a metal-sheathed side-gable roof, a two-tier front porch, and a one-story back porch. Notable exterior stylistic features include a partially surviving cove cornice, stucco lintels over the first-story windows and entries (with keystone motifs in the front lintels), and Victorian detail on the porches (with some apparently original detail on the front porch). The two-room-deep center-passage plan interior has plaster-finish walls and ceilings, wood floors, Federal and late Georgian detail, and a stair with folk embellishments. The approximately 10.001-acre nominated area includes a twentieth-century frame barn on an older stone foundation and the poured-concrete foundation of a second barn and silo accompanied by a poured-concrete cistern. The nominated area, which is currently used for pasture, has a number of shade trees but is largely open in character and slopes down to Sales Mill Road on the east side. Across the road is Marlbrook Creek, a tributary of the South and James Rivers. The setting is rural, with wood lots and pastures and a scattering of historic and modern buildings within view of the house. The house stands at about 1,675 feet above sea level.

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## Narrative Description

### *Inventory*

1. Paxton House. Ca. 1820; ca. 1900. Contributing building.
2. Barn. 19<sup>th</sup> c.; second quarter 20<sup>th</sup> c. Non-contributing building.
3. Barn and silo foundation and cistern. First half 20<sup>th</sup> c. Non-contributing structure.

### *House Exterior*

The **Paxton House** (inventory no. 1) is constructed of brick laid in two different bonds. The south-facing front and west gable end are Flemish bond and the north and east elevations are 5:1 common bond. The brickwork on all elevations includes randomly placed, partially vitrified bricks, and all elevations have received successive applications of red oxide wash with penciling on the mortar joints. (Examination of the joints, particularly near entrances, failed to reveal pencil-written or carved dates, initials, or inscriptions; likewise for the bricks.) A notable feature of the brickwork is the presence of mouse-tooth cornices in the eaves and crossing under the gables. The gaps between the bricks are filled with mortar, and there is evidence the mortar was painted white in contrast with the red-washed projecting corners of the bricks. Originally this would have created a dramatic checkered appearance, and though the mortar was later reddened with wash, it still appears lighter than the brickwork, and in places the wash has almost entirely worn away, creating a semblance of the original effect.

The mouse-tooth cornices run under cove cornices that survive at the top of the south and north elevation but are missing, or were never built, on the gable ends. The coves are sheathed with a modern (probably mid-twentieth-century) material painted white. A cornice outrigger visible through a hole in the front porch second-tier ceiling has several nails projecting from its curved section. These probably attached laths for stucco, though it is possible they attached former sheathing boards. Where the cove cornices crossed or would have crossed under the gables are multiple wood blocks set into the brickwork and at the top of the bands are inset brick courses, all features that would have facilitated the attachment of the cornices. Another notable feature of the house's brickwork is a small segmental-arched niche at the top of the west gable. The arch springs from slightly inward projecting impost bricks. The niche recess is stuccoed with traces of white-painted finish coat. Presumably the niche once contained a date or other inscription but no trace of such an inscription is now visible. Other brickwork details include filled putlog holes and twentieth-century brick and concrete caps on the two interior gable-end chimney caps designed to keep rail from falling down into the chimneys.

The five-bay front elevation is symmetrical, with two windows to either side of entries that open onto the first and second tiers of the front porch. The first-story windows and entry have jack arches rendered with stucco to simulate stone arches with keystones. These windows, and all the principal windows in the house, have replacement two-over-two wood sashes from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The rear (north) elevation is also five-bay, but there is an

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entry only on the first story and it and the window above are shifted in response to the interior stair placement, which makes the elevation asymmetrical. The first-story rear windows were lowered in response to the addition of the current rear porch and perhaps other considerations. The original stuccowork over the two first-story end windows (which mimics jack arches but without the keystone motifs over the front windows) was left in place and new stucco added under it, creating extra-tall stucco areas over the windows. The brickwork over the two windows under the porch is painted white. The front and back first-story entries have four-pane transoms and early-twentieth-century screen doors with sawn details. The front first- and second-story doors are six-panel. The first-story back door is a modern replacement. The first-story front door has an ornate cast-metal knob of apparent late-nineteenth-century manufacture.

The gable-fronted two-tier front porch, which shelters the center bay on each story, appears to be original but with a Victorian remodeling in the late nineteenth century. Original or apparently original fabric consists of the cove cornice and decorative frieze board at the top of the second tier. The cove cornice is an extension of the cornice on the rest of the front and, like it, is sheathed with modern material. The frieze board has an undulating wave-and-trough design with a center pendant point (the design is similar to an interior stair detail described below). The porch supports and pilasters on both tiers are in the form of thick boxed square columns with chamfers. The columns are connected by Victorian sawn balustrades. The porch stands on a concrete slab supported by a coursed limestone rubble foundation with poured-concrete steps projecting in front. The hip-roofed one-story back porch covers the center three bays of the elevation. It has square posts with sawn brackets that extend up into the porch frieze. Under the frieze, attached to the sides of the posts and mostly surviving, are spindle brackets. Other features of the back porch include a slatted ceiling with narrow beaded boards, brick foundation piers with modern lattice between, and concrete steps.

### *House Interior*

The interior is organized around the center passage, accessed at the front through the front door, which on its inner side is constructed of vertical beaded boards secured at top and bottom by long strap hinges. The center passage has a paneled wainscot and crown molding (details that are common throughout the downstairs) and a beaded peg rail with simple dowel-section pegs. The doors opening into the passage are six-panel, a common door-panel arrangement throughout the house. The stair, which consists of a long lower run and a short upper run, has a paneled spandrel below double string boards. The railing has a turned lower newel with a turned finial, turned balusters, and double-curved tread brackets which in concert create an undulating pattern ascending the stair. Each tread bracket is incised with a fylfot next to a swirl like the f-hole on a violin. Under the landing, and tying in to the undulating line of the tread ends, is a horizontal undulating board below a stack molding. At the landing is an unusual composite newel/support consisting of two sections. The lower section is a relatively standard turned newel which receives the railing coming up the stairs. The square-section top of this lower section is pegged to the square-section bottom of the upper section. This bottom part of the upper section receives the upstairs stair railing and serves as the base for a graceful turned posts which supports the landing

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of the attic stair. The paneled spandrel encloses a basement stairway entered through a four-panel door under the landing.

The four downstairs rooms are of unequal size. On the right side of the passage the front room is small and the back room large, whereas on the left side the front room is large and the back room small. The small rooms have late Georgian architrave mantels with floating shelves and the large rooms have tripartite Federal mantels. The small rooms have presses with paneled doors on either side of the chimney. The front (southwest) large room has no presses beside the chimney, whereas the rear (northeast) large room has a press on the left side of the chimney.

The Federal mantels in the large rooms are nearly identical in form and detail. Each has tall center frieze tablets and tablets at the ends of the frieze that are continuations of the pilasters below, with a molding at the bottom of the frieze and a thicker stack molding at the top of the frieze consisting of an ovolo molding above a cavetto molding. The tablets are ornamented with parallel gouges grouped so as to create a cruciform arrangement. Running at the top of the frieze and tablets is a narrow band ornamented with alternating reeding and incised x forms. The pilasters are ornamented with double reeded strips. The differences between the mantels are as follows. The northeast room mantel has rows of shallow dimple-like dots at the bottom of the tablets; a center tablet that dips below the line of the molding that defines the lower edge of the frieze; and a notch below the center tablet where a stove flue once passed. The southwest room mantel has somewhat more elaborate pilasters, with tiny fillet moldings capping off the tops of the reeded strips and little clusters of shallow incised dots above and below the reeding.

The late Georgian mantels in the smaller rooms are more simply ornamented, the one in the northwest room with a heavier shelf molding that incorporates a reeded ovolo molding as its lowest register. The four fireplaces mostly retain brick fireboxes, surrounds, and hearths, elements that experienced varying degrees of repair and alteration over the years. Between the southwest and northwest rooms is a large opening with a simple frame suggesting the opening was created in the twentieth century, perhaps in the 1970s when the house was converted to apartments. The southeast room was divided into a bathroom and kitchenette in the 1970s (the partition creating the division and other features of this conversion have been removed).

One of the house's most enigmatic features is found in the northeast room. The press in this room, to the left of the chimney mass, has three sections or compartments, each with its own door. The upper section is similar to other presses in the house in that it contains several shelves. The floor of the middle compartment is constructed of several boards that have been drilled with a (mostly) regular grid of small holes, 324 in total (some holes have been lost to cracking or deterioration of the boards). Around the boards is a raised molded frame or lip. This perforated surface is positioned above a wooden hopper or funnel in the lower compartment. The hopper extends less than half the distance to the bottom of the compartment and has a small amount of deterioration at its base. (Interpretation of this feature as a built-in sugar chest and/or a possible icebox is presented in section 8.) Another feature of note in the northeast room appears in the wainscot of the wall on the other side of which a stair descends to the basement. The feature is a frame of plain wood that appears to be wire-nailed together. It may once have been open to the

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basement stair, or have had a demountable panel, but is now permanently closed. It is possible the framed opening served as a passthrough for transferring food from the basement kitchen to the first-floor room, however its apparently modern construction and similarity to other openings in the basement suggest instead that it served to distribute heat in the house by letting heat from the basement (with its cooking fireplace and former stove) rise into the upstairs.

The plan of the second story mirrors that of the first, though there are only two fireplaces, in the southwest and northwest rooms. The chimney masses in the southeast and northeast rooms have stove flue thimbles, and this and the fact original chair rails and baseboards cross their fronts indicates they formerly and presumably originally had stoves instead of fireplaces (chair rails and not wainscots are typical in the upstairs). The southwest room has a Federal mantel without the normative tripartite form but with pilasters that rise in two stages from the base to the shelf molding. The pilasters have molded panels on their fronts (two panels per pilaster). The shelf molding features a cavetto molding above an intricately carved molding with tiny dentils above a row of shallow oval dimples which alternate with incised two-part lines. The mantel in the northwest room is more Georgian in character with a wide flat architrave articulated with narrow molding strips and beading and with a molding-defined frieze panel and a suggestion of pilasters. The room has presses to either side of the chimney and peg rails with knobbed pegs. The doorway at the front of the second-story center passage has a door with an inner face of beaded vertical boards crossed by rows of nail heads and secured at top and bottom by long strap hinges with complex cusped and pronged ends. The second-story southeast room has a shower stall related to the room's conversion to a bathroom in the 1970s.

### *House Attic and Basement*

The attic has one of the house's most unusual features: a post-and-beam underframe that serves in place of collar beams to augment the structure of the common rafter roof. The underframe is hewn, and its connections are made with mortise-and-tenon joints. The rafters are notched into the tops of the beams and secured with pegs. In addition to its structural function the underframe was used to hang items; most of its beams are studded with either cut or wire nails and draped with wires that could be used to dry sheets or for other purposes (at least one cut nail with a domical augmented head is present). The rafters are up-and-down mill-sawn and are lapped and pegged at the ridge. Another constructional feature appears where floor boards have been pulled up to reveal up-and-down mill-sawn joists with regularly spaced holes used in connection with laying down the floor boards. The points of numerous small cut nails project through the roof boards, evidence of former wood-shingle roofing.

At the two ends of the attic rise and combine the chimney flues of the fireplaces and stove flues in the rooms below. The flues rise diagonally and irregularly across the gable walls, and they have been parged with twentieth-century cement. Both sets of flues are reinforced by wooden props that support lintels below the upper, combined parts of the flues, which emerge as single chimney caps at each end of the roof. A prop at the east end was carefully sawn with angled and straight sections to conform to the irregularities of the flue beside it. The attic stair has two runs with a turned newel at the landing and turned balusters along the lower run (which is enclosed on

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the second-story center-passage side by a vertical beaded tongue-and-groove partition). Above the stairwell is a beaded vertical board partition. The boards of the partition are mostly unpainted, though some are partly smeared with whitewash in such a way as to suggest they were reused from another context. On the boards is a small amount of graffiti including the numeral 2, the characters 33W (or EEW) in an arched band, and a partial name (Anson \_\_\_\_skin). In the attic are two crates of wire-nailed construction that suggest they date to the very end of the nineteenth century or the (early) twentieth century. One, a trunk with a sheet-metal-clad lid, contains what appear to be mainly mid-twentieth-century school papers. The other, thinner and squarer in form, contains sheets of window glass that may be spare panes for the house's two-over-two windows.

The basement, which was historically used for cooking and storage and perhaps other activities, has partially parged brick walls, a poured-concrete floor, and hewn ceiling joists which, along with the undersides of the floor boards above, are whitewashed. The brick chimney base in the northeast corner has a fireplace spanned by an iron lintel and a stove flue thimble above. The brick chimney base in the southeast corner has a segmental-arched niche. The bases under the southwest and northwest chimneys are stone and are not as tall as the brick chimney bases, reflecting the crawlspace character of the west side of the basement. An exterior entry is located between the northeast and southeast chimney bases. The entry has a vertical board door hung on long spade-tipped strap hinges and with a wooden latch and a cutout window. The wood latch is attached to the door with wrought-headed nails. There are a few basement partitions of horizontal tongue-and-groove with doorways and ceiling-level openings for ventilation or heat flow.

### *Other Resources*

The **barn** (inventory no. 2) is a one-story timber-framed building of bank barn form on an older stone foundation. The building has slatted and wire-nailed vertical board siding, a metal-sheathed side-gable roof with a hay bonnet at the north end, and openings on the sides for former hay mow doors. The structure, exposed on the interior, consists of four braced bents that support and rigidify scarfed plates that in turn support the common rafter roof. A hay fork/carrier rail extends the length of the barn at the apex of the roof, projecting under the hay bonnet and with part of the hay fork/carrier still attached. The sills resting on the foundation include heavy hewn timbers with multiple mortises of various kinds, some with the pegs still in them, that may survive from the earlier building at the spot or may have been reused from another building. The coursed rubble limestone foundation, which has partly collapsed, is open facing the road (on the east side) and has large window or vent openings at each end and large quoin stones (most evident at the northwest corner). The foundation is built on exposed bedrock at the south end, and though it is built into a bank in bank barn fashion there is no obvious sign of a former ramp on the upslope side. The superstructure overhangs the foundation on the east side where it is supported by wood posts inserted ca. 2021.

The **barn and silo foundation and cistern** (inventory no. 3) consists of a poured-concrete retaining wall (indicating a former bank barn form) and footer outlining the footprint of the

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former barn; a round poured-concrete footer for the former silo that stood at the south end of the barn; and a poured-concrete cistern. The cistern has a long rectangular form with a barrel-vaulted concrete roof with a square manhole. It is situated upslope from the barn foundation and presumably received rainwater from the barn roof.

*Integrity Analysis*

The Paxton House retains good overall integrity. The house remains at its original location, and though it has lost its historic-period complement of domestic outbuildings it retains remnants of historic-period farm buildings and its mostly undeveloped rural setting appears much as it would have during the period of significance. To the northwest is development associated with the town of Fairfield, which was in existence when the house was built. The house possesses good exterior integrity in that it retains most of its historic design, materials, and workmanship. The principal modern change is the replacement of the original cove cornice material with new material, though the coved profile of the cornice has been retained. The house possesses good interior integrity with its original plan arrangement, decorative mantels, doors, stair, and trim intact. The house possesses integrity of association in that it is directly linked to the historical developments that formed it.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### 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 grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

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**Period of Significance**

Ca. 1820

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**Significant Dates**

Ca. 1820

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

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**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

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**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Paxton House, located in Rockbridge County, Virginia, is a finely detailed Federal-style brick farmhouse with many notable architectural features. The house, built ca. 1820, is thought to have been built by the Paxton family and was later associated with the Gessinger/Gisiner and Sale families. The house has cove cornices, stucco jack arches with keystone motifs over doors and windows, a gable inscription niche, and a two-tier front entry porch with a mix of original and Victorian detail. The interior features Federal and late Georgian-influenced mantels, a stair with fylfot and italic letter *f* carving, strap hinges with decorative terminations, and multiple peg rails. Unusual features include what may be a built-in sugar chest, contained in a press in a room interpreted as the dining room, and a Germanic underframe roof structure. The Paxton House is eligible under Criterion C in the architecture area of significance for its architectural refinement and notable features. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a period of construction and possesses high artistic value. The period of significance corresponds to ca. 1820, the period of the house's construction based on stylistic evidence. The property is eligible at the local level of significance.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### *Historic Context*

The Federal and vestigial Georgian style of the Paxton House suggests construction in the early nineteenth century, and one interpretation of early deed and land book (property tax) records points to the same timeframe, perhaps ca. 1820. The house may stand on a 303-acre tract owned by Samuel Paxton Sr. (d. ca. 1832) in the 1810s and 1820s and described in land books as adjoining the town of Fairfield (the house stands about a half mile from Fairfield's main street, within sight of the town's modern outskirts). In 1818 Paxton's 303-acre tract was valued at \$127 inclusive of buildings. Land books from around 1820 are missing from the Rockbridge County Courthouse collection but the 1822 land book listed buildings valued at \$1,200 on the 303-acre tract. The substantial increase in value likely represents the construction of a house about 1820. The \$1,200 value remains constant through 1839, by which date the tract was described as belonging to Samuel Paxton Sr.'s heirs, after which the value of buildings fluctuated. For example, in 1845 the value stood at \$600, in 1849 \$100 (probably an error), and in 1853 \$1,600.<sup>1</sup>

Land book records reference the property's proximity to Fairfield. They describe the 303-acre tract as adjoining Fairfield and continue to do so after 1824 when Samuel Paxton Sr. transferred approximately 160 acres to Samuel Paxton Jr, leaving a remainder of 143 acres. The tract transferred to Samuel Jr. mentions it joining Samuel Sr. but not Fairfield, indicating Samuel Jr.'s tract was the more southerly portion. Reconstruction of the boundaries for the property transferred to Samuel Jr. in 1824 produces some congruence with modern property lines to the

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<sup>1</sup> McElroy and Pulice, "Samuel Paxton House;" Rockbridge County land books.

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south of the house, which may be evidence that the acreage retained by Samuel Sr. was located in the area where the house stands. The house and its current 10-acre parcel are approximately 2,000 feet from the nearest point of Fairfield's back property lines (the back lines of lots that appear to constitute the original town), so a 143-acre tract including the house could easily have adjoined them. In 1809 Samuel Paxton Sr. and his wife, Sarah, sold their son James Paxton 103 acres described as adjoining Fairfield.<sup>2</sup>

An interesting possible reference to the house is provided by Paxton family genealogist W. M. Paxton, who published his work in 1903. Paxton described a Samuel Paxton who, he believed, was born in 1748 and died about 1807. Paxton wrote: "Samuel married Sarah Coalter. They lived near Fairfield, Rockbridge Co., and his old brick house, one and one-half mile South-east of Fairfield, yet stands." Paxton went on to note that Samuel Paxton owned a mill and slaves and was an elder in the Presbyterian Church. The Paxton House is located to the southeast of Fairfield, but it is about a half mile from the town instead of a mile and a half, and there were other Paxton houses in the vicinity that W. M. Paxton may have had in mind. Samuel Paxton Sr. died about 1832, not about 1807. Still, it is possible W. M. Paxton had some of his facts and distance wrong but was nevertheless referring to the Paxton House.<sup>3</sup>

Another clue to the date of the Paxton House is provided by its brickwork. Architectural historian Michael Pulice, a national specialist in historic brick, notes: "The presence of frogged bricks, e.g. in the chimney mass surrounding the basement fireplace, suggests a house construction date of 1825 or later" (by frogged bricks is meant bricks with indentations on their bed faces which facilitated mortar adhesion). The brickwork would therefore suggest a date slightly later than ca. 1820, though it is possible the house is an extremely early example of the use of frogged bricks. The Pennsylvania cultural influence discussed later in the report may account for the discrepancy. The 1824 division of the property could relate to construction of a new house. Regarding the \$1,200 value of buildings in the 1820s, it should be noted that a mill stood near the house in the 1860s, and if a mill existed in the 1820s, its value may be reflected in the \$1,200 value. Samuel Paxton Sr.'s will, signed in 1827 and amended in 1832, refers to a mill.<sup>4</sup>

The 1860 "Map of the County of Rockbridge, Virginia," based on surveys made by Virginia Military Institute Professor William Gilham and drawn by VMI cadet W. N. P. Otey, indicates the house and, across Marlbrook Creek, "Gessingers Mill." No Gessinger has been found in county deed records, however a John S. J. Gisiner of Shenandoah County bought and sold a number of Rockbridge County properties in the 1850s-1870s period. In 1852 Gisiner agreed to purchase a merchant mill near Brownsburg from Thomas S. Paxton and others, and a Gisiners Mill appears adjacent to Brownsburg on the 1860 map. In 1875 John S. J. Gisiner and his wife, Rachel, sold a one-acre lot with a house on it near Fairfield, but one acre is too small to be the

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<sup>2</sup> Rockbridge County land books; Deed Book F, p. 450; and Deed Book O, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup> Paxton, *Paxtons*, 170.

<sup>4</sup> McElroy and Pulice, "Samuel Paxton House;" Michael Pulice personal communication with Dan Pezzoni, March 2023; "Map of the County of Rockbridge, Virginia."

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Paxton House property. Whether it was a Gessinger or a Gisiner who was associated with the house in the mid-nineteenth century, or whether the names are versions of the same name, has not been determined. The 1860 map shows two Paxtons near the Paxton House location: a Moore Paxton to the west and “Paxtons” to the south. A slightly later 1860s map labels the house “Gessinger” and the mill “Mill.” This map also shows Paxtons in the vicinity: W. O. Paxton at the 1860 Moore Paxton location and two Paxtons and a mill at the 1860s “Paxtons” location. Susan Sale acquired the property in 1890 and conveyed it to her daughter Louise Sale Cassady Johnson in 1940. The current owners acquired the property in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

### *Criterion C Architecture Area of Significance Discussion*

The Paxton House is a notable example of the Federal style in Rockbridge County. The style takes its name from its popularity during the years of the early American republic. The earliest houses in the style appeared in the late 1700s with most examples built in the first half of the 1800s. In rural areas like western Virginia the style tended to appear later than in urban style centers, and its influence also persisted longer. In Rockbridge County, based on documented examples, the style enjoyed peak popularity from the 1810s to the 1830s, the period during which the Paxton House was built. Though the Federal style as a name has federal associations, architecturally it is a development of the Adam style, a classical revival style promoted by the Scottish architects Robert and James Adams and a favorite of eighteenth-century British aristocrats. Like other classical revival styles that were manifestations of the more general classicizing project of the Renaissance, the Federal style adopted the vocabulary of columns, lintels, arches, moldings, and symmetrical arrangements of the original Greek and Roman classical style, but it rendered those elements with greater delicacy and elaboration than they were treated by the preceding Georgian style and subsequent Greek Revival style. The Federal style achieved delicacy through the attenuation of forms—mantel pilasters, for example, are typically less robust than those in Georgian and Greek Revival mantels—and elaboration through the use of multiple intricately carved moldings and motifs. Architects and craftsmen who worked in the Federal style were also fond of pronounced tripartite arrangements. For example, many Federal mantels feature tablets at the center and ends of the frieze to create a three-part design. The Federal style, like many traditional styles, blended with styles that came before and after it, and this hybridization is evident in aspects of the Paxton House, as discussed below.<sup>6</sup>

A distinctive exterior feature of the house is the cove cornice. The cornice has been reworked by the replacement of the original sheathing material with modern material, but the replacement was done in such a way that the cornice retains its historic character. Missing, however, are extensions of the cornice across the east and west gables. That such extensions existed or were intended is indicated by provisions in the brickwork made to receive them such as the indented brick courses and numerous wood nailing blocks. Evidence to suggest the cornice extensions were in fact constructed (rather than intended but not built) includes the presence of nail holes in some of the nailing blocks (visible in telephoto photos; also at least one surviving nail) and the

<sup>5</sup> “Map of the County of Rockbridge, Virginia;” Rockbridge County Deed Book CC, p. 220, and Deed Book VV, p. 108; “Rockbridge Co., Va., Section no. 3;” McElroy and Pulice, “Samuel Paxton House.”

<sup>6</sup> Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 24, 28-29.

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slightly different color of the brickwork that would have been concealed by the cornice on the east gable end, suggesting the bricks there were shielded from exposure by a cornice for a time. Also, it would be odd for the builder not to have completed the cornices when the house was completed in every other sense.

Cove cornices are present in traditional Virginia architecture but their occurrence is rare compared to their prevalence in southeast Pennsylvania and parts of other Mid-Atlantic states that belong to the zone of Pennsylvanian cultural influence. Gable-crossing cove cornices are even less common in Virginia but are relatively common in the Pennsylvanian cultural zone. An example of their occurrence outside of Virginia is the John Churchman House in Cecil County, Maryland, which has an original 1745 brick section with a wraparound cove cornice. Though it is uncertain whether the wraparound part of the Churchman House cornice is original, and the house has undergone restoration, historic photos indicate the cove treatment was present by the ca. 1900 period. In Virginia, the 1754 house known as Abram's Delight in Winchester has a cornice that crosses at the base of the gable, though the cornice is boxed rather than coved. Abram's Delight is associated with the Society of Friends (Quakers) and in fact served double duty as a Friends meetinghouse. Wraparound coved cornices are related to the wraparound pent roofs of houses in the Pennsylvanian cultural influence zone, for example New Jersey's 1765 Thatcher House.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor that might have contributed to the wraparound cove cornices on the Paxton House was the popularity of pedimented gables in classically-influenced houses of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century period. The bottom edges of the pediments are not typically defined by cove cornices (mainly due to the rarity of cove cornices), but a cove cornice can create the pediment effect, and this was what essentially occurred with the front porch gable of the Paxton House. The flush-boarded porch gable is not given any special treatment, unlike the portico pediment of the 1818 Lexington (Rockbridge area) house known as Stono, which has modillions and a fancy lunette, but then flush boards were a common finish treatment for the tympanums of pedimented porches in the area, for example as seen on the porches of Thorn Hill (ca. 1793) near Lexington, which date to different periods. (One Thorn Hill porch, an early and possibly original pedimented one-story entry porch, shares with the Paxton House front porch a decorative frieze board, a rare survival from the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century period.) In the same vein of classical allusion, the mouse-tooth cornice with its separated rather than continuous projecting elements may have been meant to evoke dentils. Also contributing to the classical revival character of the house are the front first-story windows and entry with their parging meant to evoke splayed jack arches with keystones, a treatment (either parged or actual stone)

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, "John and George Churchman House," 1-2; Kalbian, *Frederick County*, 13-14; Shoemaker and Craig, "Thatcher House." Architectural historians Michael Pulice and Aubrey Von Lindern confirm that in their experience gable-crossing elements like pent roofs and cornices are relatively common in the vernacular domestic architecture of the Pennsylvanian cultural influence zone (personal communications with the author, March 2023).

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occasionally seen on Georgian and Federal brick houses in the region, for example the ca. 1815 Lynchburg house Point of Honor and the 1818 Augusta County house Folly.<sup>8</sup>

The architectural focal points of the interior are the house's complete complement of six mantels and the center-passage stair. The chief mantels are the ones in the two large downstairs rooms, which because of their size and placement can be interpreted as the main parlor (the southwest room) and the dining room (the northeast room). The mantels in the two rooms, which are Federal and tripartite, are nearly identical in form and detail. Such similarity is unusual in Federal-style houses where mantels are typically variable. The minor, almost trivial differences between the mantels begs the question: if the mantels were meant to harmonize, why not make them exactly the same? The gougework and other, lightly incised detail on the mantels are typical of the finer work in the Federal style, with little of the folk elements and exaggeration sometime seen in Rockbridge County and especially prevalent in the counties just to the north, Augusta and Rockingham. Greater variety of form and detail is seen in the house's other mantels, which are not tripartite but instead tend to follow late Georgian architrave or "picture frame" compositional arrangements. The Georgian style was only recently eclipsed by the Federal style at the time the Paxton House was built, which partly explains why it was relegated to the smaller and less public upstairs rooms of the house.

Folk influence is more evident in other interior decorative treatments, especially the stair. The stair tread brackets have two decorative devices, lobed pinwheel forms known as fylfots and curved forms reminiscent of an italic letter *f*. Fylfots occasionally appear in Virginia domestic architecture, for example the ca. 1820 Rockbridge County house Level Loop, built nearby and at the same time as the Paxton House, which has fylfots carved on the frieze tablets of a Federal-style mantel. Fylfots are generally associated with Pennsylvania German culture, but by the early nineteenth century they were also common in mainstream British-derived culture. In addition to its visual appeal the form may have an apotropaic or protective talismanic function in architectural contexts. The ca. 1770 Halifax County house Cedar Grove has fylfots inscribed on a corner post that were concealed in the finished house, indicating they were not meant to be seen but were present nonetheless, similar to the nails, nailed scraps of leather, and other special items sometimes deposited in the wall cavities of Virginia houses. The visible Paxton House fylfots may similarly have been meant to confer good luck on the house and its occupants.<sup>9</sup>

The italic letter *f* designs are similar to the f-holes present on the front of violins and fiddles. The violin form with its characteristic f-holes developed in northern Italy in the sixteenth century and the holes were also present in the instruments that circulated in America at the time the Paxton House was built. Fiddle f-holes may have provided the model for the carver of the Paxton House stair treads. If so, whether there were meanings in addition to aesthetics as may be the case with the fylfots is uncertain. It should also be noted that scrolled forms were commonly used for tread

<sup>8</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*, 175; Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 26, 29-30, 248; Loth, *Virginia Landmarks Register*, 48, 290.

<sup>9</sup> Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 29; Pezzoni, "Cedar Grove," 17-18; Pezzoni and Rakes, "Mead's Tavern Interim Historic Structure Report," 32-33; "North Fork Valley Rural Historic District 2021 Additional Documentation," 74.

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brackets, and the Paxton House figures may simply reference those forms. Also folk in inspiration, but generally more normative, are the different decorative ends of the strap hinges throughout the house, especially the complex pronged and cusped end of the hinges on the upstairs front porch door.

Other interior features are not folk per se but reflect the idiosyncratic ingenuity of the individual or individuals who built and finished the house. An example of this is the composite newel/support at the top of the main stairs, which provides anchor points for the rising and landing balustrades and support for the landing of the attic stair. Another creative solution is the post-and-beam frame in the attic, which strengthens the roof rafters in lieu of collar beams. The feature is somewhat similar to a queen-post truss in that the rafter couples are supported at two points rather than at a single point (the ridge) as in a king-post truss, but by using a frame with beams that support multiple rafters at a time rather than individually the framer economized on lumber and also created a more open, functional attic space. (The numerous nail hooks indicate that the attic was used for hanging/storing items.) Economy is also seen in the arched niche built into the base of the southeast chimney, which saved bricks and also provided an elevated storage area.

Another example of inventiveness is the drilled boards/hopper feature in the chimney-side press of the first-floor northeast room. The feature most likely served as a built-in sugar chest. Sugar chests were articles of furniture designed for the storage and preparation of sugar, which in the colonial and postbellum periods was usually purchased in hard cone form. Grains or pieces of sugar needed to be cut from the cone, and in some sugar chests this was done with an attached hinged blade or cutter inside the compartment holding the sugar. Sugar chests also often had perforated bottoms through which the pieces of sugar fell and were collected in a drawer. Though sugar chests with hopper-form collectors have not been identified, the Paxton House feature is otherwise very like the common sugar chest arrangement. Another detail of the Paxton House feature points to sugar chest use and that is indentations centered on the sides of the frame around the perforated boards. Crossing the boards between the two indentations is a large crack or cut. Though there are other, narrower cracks across the boards, this one appears to be the result of damage—possibly from a blade hinged at the indentations repeatedly striking the boards.<sup>10</sup>

Another possible use of the feature was as an icebox, a built-in version of the portable manufactured iceboxes (generally known as refrigerators) that were commonplace by the late nineteenth century. The existence of a built-in icebox in the Paxton House would imply the presence of a nearby icehouse. Ice houses for the storage of ice or snow for summertime food preservation and cooling were constructed in Virginia by the end of the colonial period. The royal governor Lord Botetourt had one at Williamsburg in the 1760s. Thomas Jefferson constructed one at Monticello in 1802. Jefferson made a study of the form, for example devising an apparatus for draining the meltwater that accumulated at the bottom of the pit-like structure. Jefferson initially used his mountaintop icehouse to store ice cut on the Rivanna River; later he

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<sup>10</sup> Wenger, Mark. Email correspondence with Michael Pulice, December 13, 2022.

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built another icehouse by the river to store river ice, which was inedible, and converted the icehouse at his residence to storing compacted snow, which could be safely consumed in drinks. The occupants of the Paxton House would have been able to harvest ice from their millpond; if so, they would likely have stored the ice in a structure of semisubterranean form like Jefferson's and most icehouses constructed in Virginia and the South in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Farm icehouses passed out of use in the second quarter of the twentieth century when rural electrification enabled the widespread adoption of electrically-powered mechanical refrigerators.<sup>11</sup>

The drilled boards/hopper feature is conceivably icebox-like in several ways. Disposal of meltwater was an important secondary function of manufactured iceboxes, which was achieved in one of two ways: 1) by manually removing the water in a collecting tray or basin, the most common way; or 2) by channeling the water by pipe to the outdoors. The drilled boards/hopper feature would have been well suited to function in the first way, the meltwater dripping through the holes and funneling through the hopper to a collecting vessel below. The system would have relied on gravity, which is an aspect of a second feature of manufactured icebox design also present in the drilled boards/hopper feature: cold air, which is denser than warm air, falls. Cold air from the ice would flow through the hopper to the compartment below where comestibles could be placed for cooling. Manufactured iceboxes placed the ice in an upper compartment for the same reason. The drilled boards/hopper feature would have had the added benefit of using the collected meltwater, which was still cold, to cool the lower compartment. Despite the evidence that can be interpreted to support an icebox function, a sugar chest function seems most likely, however it is conceivable the feature had both uses.

Vestiges of early paint colors are visible in the Paxton House and more may survive under later paint. A section of chair rail in the first-floor southeast room that was covered by an intersecting partition believed to have been added in the 1970s and now removed has dark gray paint that may be first- or second-generation. A similar color is visible where paint has flaked off the mantel frieze in the first-floor northeast room and elsewhere in the house. The walls, doors and exposed ceiling structure of the basement were repeatedly whitewashed, and the board partition in the attic has traces of whitewash, though the partition boards may have been whitewashed when they were in an earlier context. A scrap of early to mid-twentieth-century floral wallpaper survives in the first-floor northeast room. The most intact early finish appears to be on the six-panel door between the first-floor northeast room and the top of the stair to the basement, which has brown (possibly grained) rails and stiles and cream or light tan panels. This door also has early latching hardware.

The underframe roof structure is similar to that of the ca. 1800 Lewis Shuey House [NRHP 1983] in Augusta County, which adjoins Rockbridge to the north. The log Shuey House is one of two Germanic Flurkuchenhaus-plan houses known to survive in Augusta County, and the National Register report for the house notes that it "has the county's only known German-style

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<sup>11</sup> Theobald, "Some Cold, Hard Historical Facts;" McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello*, 296, 302-303; Stanton, "Ice House;" Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 80-81, 93.

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common rafter roof system with heavy underframe.” The Paxton House roof system is clearly related to this structural form, however it is simplified compared to Shuey House roof, which has collar beams and diagonal bracing of the uprights.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McCleary, Scarlett, and Cote, “Lewis Shuey House.”

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Wenger, Mark. Email correspondence with Michael Pulice, December 13, 2022.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**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, Richmond, Va.

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR ID# 081-0307

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 10.001 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

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**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.878500 Longitude: -79.279528
2. Latitude: 37.878500 Longitude: -79.278861
3. Latitude: 37.877750 Longitude: -79.277667
4. Latitude: 37.876611 Longitude: -79.277139
5. Latitude: 37.875861 Longitude: -79.278917
6. Latitude: 37.877139 Longitude: -79.280056

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary corresponds to Rockbridge County tax parcel no. 39-A-45B. The tax parcel information was obtained from the Rockbridge County Commissioner of Revenue Office on October 10, 2023.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the modern tax parcel on which the Paxton House stands. The boundary includes two historic-period resources in addition to the house which are non-contributing owing to age and/or integrity from the period of significance. A portion of the property's historic setting and all known associated historic resources have been included within the historic boundary.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni  
organization: Landmark Preservation Associates  
street & number: 6 Houston Street  
city or town: Lexington state: Virginia zip code: 24450  
e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net  
telephone: (540) 464-5315  
date: October 10, 2023

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

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- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Paxton House

City or Vicinity: Fairfield County: Rockbridge State: Virginia

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni Date Photographed: March 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 19.

West and south (front) sides, view facing north.

2 of 19.

South (front) and east sides, view facing west.

3 of 19.

West side, view facing northeast.

4 of 19.

North and west sides, view facing east.

5 of 19.

Niche in west gable, view facing northeast.

6 of 19.

Stair in downstairs center passage.

7 of 19.

Downstairs southwest room.

8 of 19.

Downstairs southwest room mantel center frieze tablet.

9 of 19.

Downstairs northeast room.

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10 of 19.

Downstairs northeast room drilled boards/hopper feature viewed from above.

11 of 19.

Downstairs northeast room drilled boards/hopper feature viewed from below.

12 of 19.

Downstairs northwest room.

13 of 19.

Newel and attic stair support at landing between first and second floors/

14 of 19.

Upstairs northeast room.

15 of 19.

Underframe roof structure.

16 of 19.

Basement cooking fireplace and whitewashed ceiling structure.

17 of 19.

Niche in the base of the southeast chimney in the basement.

18 of 19.

Barn north and west sides, view facing east.

19 of 19.

Cistern, view facing southeast.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

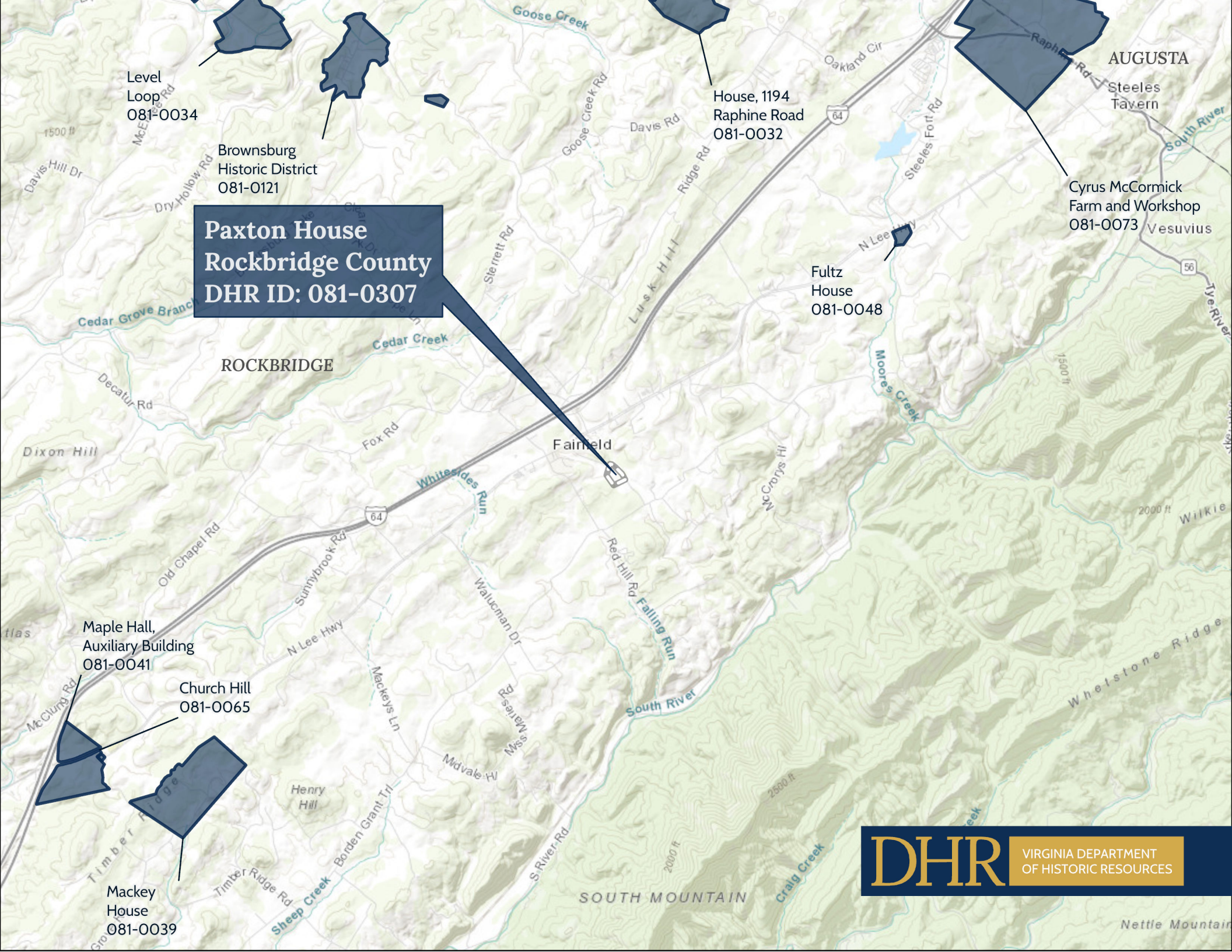
- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

**Paxton House**  
**Rockbridge County**  
**DHR ID: 081-0307**



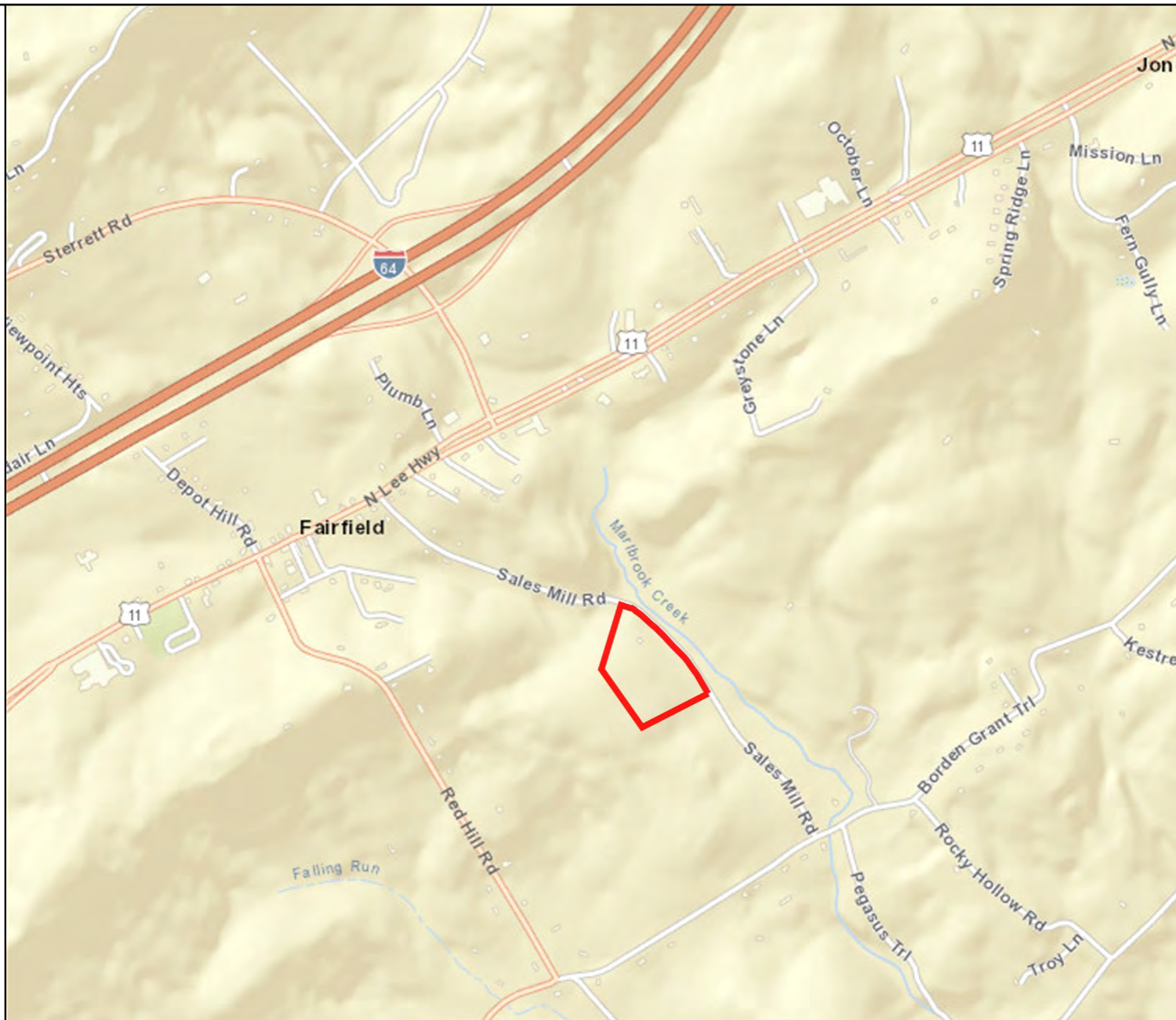
**Paxton House**  
**Rockbridge County**  
**DHR ID: 081-0307**





## Legend

County Boundaries



Feet

0 500 1000 1500 2000

1:18,056 / 1"=1,505 Feet

**Title:**

**Date: 1/21/2024**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

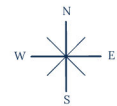
# Paxton House

## Rockbridge County

### DHR ID: 081-0307



Sources: VDHR 2024, VGIN 2024, ESRI 2024  
Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years and the representation depicted is based on the field observation date and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general illustration purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses.



Paxton House  
Rockbridge County  
DHR ID: 081-0307



DHR

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  
OF HISTORIC RESOURCES



## Legend

 County Boundaries

## AERIAL VIEW - VICINITY

**Samuel Paxton House**  
**Rockbridge County, VA**  
**DHR No. 081-0307**

 Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 500 1000 1500 2000

1:18,056 / 1"=1,505 Feet



**Title:**

**Date: 1/21/2024**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

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