

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NRHP Listed: 8/12/2024

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: Columbian Paper CompanyOther names/site number: Buena Vista Paper Company; Bontex; DHR ID No. 103-5192Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1 Bontex DriveCity or town: Buena Vista State: VA County: Independent CityNot For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

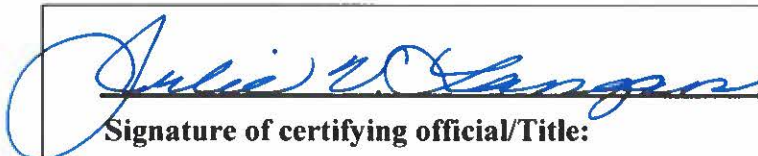
I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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:

X A B C D

	<u>7/2/2024</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	
Date	
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>	
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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY: manufacturing facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood; Brick; Metal; Stone; Concrete

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The Columbian Paper Company, located at 1 Bontex Drive in the City of Buena Vista, Virginia, is a historic paper mill with architectural fabric dating from ca. 1860 to the late twentieth century. The mill is located at the western approach to Buena Vista on a narrow site wafered between US Highway 60 and the Maury River. The approximately five-acre nominated area encompasses two buildings: the main mill building, a large cumulative agglomeration of mostly rectangular brick wings; and a smaller chip house. The sections of the main mill building are designated A through O on modern plans, a designation scheme adopted for the inventory. The chip house is designated Section X according to this scheme. Brick pier-wall construction with decorative corbelling and stone or poured concrete foundations are typical of the older sections of the mill proper. Later historic-period fabric often features plain, utilitarian brick construction and poured concrete foundations. Metal-sheathed gable roofs are standard, some with long monitor windows. Section M of the mill incorporates a ca. 1860 stone canal lock into its foundation. Common interior treatments include brick walls (typically painted), concrete or wood floors (some tile), and exposed wood or metal truss roof structures. In contrast to the generally utilitarian character of the main building's interior is the office portion of Section D, which has a number of architectural refinements described below. The mill's most recognizable feature, visible from miles around, is its tall brick smokestack.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The immediate setting is mixed urban/rural in character with steep wooded bluffs on the opposite side of the river and rows of historic-period houses nearby on the north side of US 60. Also on the north side of US 60 is the line of the Norfolk Southern Railroad. A branch of the Chesapeake & Ohio rail line formerly passed through the property, accompanied by a siding, and rails and railroad ties are visible around the nominated area. Also in the nominated area, but not individually enumerated in the inventory, are a number of generally small concrete and steel structures such as elevated walkways, and vestiges of various fluid retention features. The Columbian Paper Company stands at approximately 840 feet above sea level.¹

Inventory

1. Columbian Paper Company Main Mill Building (Sections A through O). Ca. 1860, ca. 1890 and later. Contributing building.

Section A (photo 3) at the east end of the building is a late twentieth century (post-1985) two-story wing with a poured concrete first story and a metal-sheathed second story with a shallow-pitched gable roof. The section is built into a bank so that its south side is two stories and its north side is one story. The south side of the first story has multiple garage bays separated by sections of vertical metal siding. A long concrete ramp with a metal railing rises to a large garage bay on the east end. An interior-illuminated sign reading Bontex is mounted on the east end of the north side, facing US Highway 60. A second, smaller concrete ramp and steps rise at the west end to a recess which shelters the entry to the office area at the east end of Section D. Section A appears to have been designed by Kinsey Shane & Associates architects (a drawing that appears to be a construction drawing bears the firm's name). The section does not appear in a photo that shows the mill complex inundated by the flood of November 1985. The section may have been built within a year or two after the flood.

Section B (photos 3, 4, 9, 10 and 12) consists of two parts: a one-story east part and a larger, two-story (but single level), west part. Based on Sanborn maps the west part appears to have been built between 1921 and 1945, though it is possibly a reworking of a brick wing built between 1908 and 1915. The 1928-45 Sanborn map lists its functions as machine shop, chipper building, and soda ash storage. The east part is identified as a blacksmith shop on the 1928-45 map, and it is either integral with the west part or an addition (probably the latter). It replaces an ironclad frame blacksmith shop which stood at the same location in 1921. The east end has pier-wall construction with simple corbeling at the top of the bays, large metal-framed industrial-type

¹ Another address for the property is 1040 West 29th Street. Note: The report references the 1899, 1904, 1908, 1915, 1921, and 1928-45 Sanborn maps. The mill is not depicted on the 1894 map. The 1928-45 map is the 1928 map annotated through 1945.

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windows, and cylindrical metal roof vents. The windows on the east gable end step up in size toward the center of the elevation in order to maximize the amount of interior illumination. The west part has pier-wall construction with dentil-like corbeling at the top of the bays, large metal-framed industrial-type windows, and a cylindrical metal roof vent. At the southeast corner is a large cylindrical metal tank on poured concrete supports. Other tanks and fluid retention features are adjacent, including the north end of a feature known as Reservoir 1 in Sanborn maps from the 1890s on. Section B has freight entries of diagonal beaded tongue-and-groove construction.

Section C (photo 3) is a roofed open-air loading dock serving Sections B, D, and E/F. The metal-sheathed front of the roof is painted with the motto "Our Objective/Safety-Quality-Production." The section is not indicated on the 1928-45 Sanborn map. Its construction suggests it was added in the mid-twentieth century, perhaps in the 1950s.

Section D (photos 2, 5, 7, 8, and 13) is built into a bank so that its south side is two stories and its north side is one story. The two-story south side is a series of early shed-roofed additions to a gable-roofed original part. The south side has a complex structure indicating an evolution which is also shown on Sanborn maps. Part of the elevation has a layer-cake appearance with the pier-wall construction of the first and second stories treated as different registers. Also, the piers of the two stories do not align. The other part of the elevation has continuous pier-wall construction (the piers extend from ground to roof without a break). The second story has large metal-framed industrial-type windows; the first story had similar windows which are mostly infilled with concrete block. Most of the windows on the north elevation have been reduced in size. Section D has a long monitor window with four-pane windows along the flanks and closed lunettes at the ends. The lower part of the section's east gable end, which a historic photo shows to have had windows and not an entry, is covered by Section A. The upper part is exposed, with stairstep corbeling and a closed round vent with keystone-like motifs at the four compass points. The one-story north elevation has historic-period non-original industrial-type windows that replace original segmental-arched windows with projecting arches (some bays have the outlines of these original windows where they have been filled in rather than replaced). A small, shed-roofed, concrete block laboratory projects at the northwest corner (the laboratory may belong to Section H). Section D's interior features a mix of manufacturing spaces and office interiors, the later with doorways with heavy molded cornices, a stair with square-section newels and balusters, paneled wainscots, and several doorway transoms. Near the interior entrance to the laboratory (which contains wooden base cabinets, a sink, and specialized equipment) is a large Toledo scale. Sanborn maps suggest a complex evolution for Section D, which first appears on the 1915 map as a freestanding one-story brick machine shop with a small area for office use at the east end. The section is almost certainly the building known to have been designed for the mill by Roanoke architect Homer M. Miller in 1910. The 1928-45 Sanborn map shows the section connected to the rest of the building.

Section E/F (photos 4 and 14) has two-story pier-wall construction with simple corbeling at the top of the bays, dentil-like corbeling in the east gable, multiple cylindrical roof vents, and large metal-framed industrial-type windows. The interior, which is divided in two by a thick brick wall (hence the designations E and F), features a mezzanine level and various inserted steel structures.

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Under the mezzanine is a partitioned-off space with novelty weatherboard-sided walls and multi-pane windows. A large segmental-arched doorway, now bricked up, formerly communicated with the space occupied by Section I. Section E/F appears to be portrayed on the 1921 and 1928-45 Sanborn maps and may be a reworking of a section built in 1892. In 1921 the east half was identified as a Recovery Department with a rotary burner and, at the location of the partitioned-off area, a Cutter Room. The west half was identified as an Evaporating Room and contained a number of digesters. The east half was also described as a Recovery Department on the 1928-45 map and featured the Cutter Room, though the rotary burner was not indicated. The west half was labeled Digester House on the map.

Section G (photos 1 and 4), the boiler house, was built between 1921 and 1945, probably in the 1920s. The boiler house is tall and narrow with common-bond pier-wall construction with variations in brick color suggesting different brick lots used in construction. Other features include large metal-framed industrial-type windows and, at the east end, a large garage bay. The section is built in part with bricks stamped with the "Glasgo" trademark. The tapering cylindrical brick smokestack with corbeled cap rises at the north end. The smokestack has an iron band just below the cap.

Section H (photo 15) has one story with pier-wall construction and simple corbeling at the top of the bays. The bays have metal-framed industrial-type windows above concrete block infill, indicating the current windows are not original. The roof has cylindrical and gabled vents. Section H's concrete floor has various machinery emplacements and rectangular vats. Suspended from the steel truss roof is a belt drive. A steel stair ascends to a doorway that provides access to the upper level of Section L. A lower level of Section L is accessed via a wide segmental-arched doorway. The 1928-45 Sanborn map appears to show the section in its current configuration with a Machine Room occupying the west end and a Finishing Room in the east end. The same functions are portrayed on the 1921 map, though the east end ("Finishing & Shipping") had a different form. The concrete floor of the east end is several feet higher than that of the west end, a change that may relate to the evolution of the section.

Sections I, J, and K (photo 16) are relatively small sections on the south side of Section H. Section I has a relatively modern steel wall/roof structure which suggests the section is a modern insertion in a space between older sections. Skylights provide overhead lighting. Section I stands at the location of the Bleach Room shown on the 1928-45 Sanborn map. Section K, which may be indicated as a storage room on the 1928-45 map, has heavy bolded wood roof trusses.

Section L (photos 6 and 17), which is one-story on the north side and multiple stories on the south side, has pier-wall construction with simple corbeling at the top of the bays. The bays have metal-framed industrial-type windows. Section L's steel roof trusses are supported by steel posts. The section, which contains several large cylindrical vats, is not indicated on the 1921 Sanborn map, but it does appear to be indicated on the 1928-45 map which describes steel columns and roof trusses and labels the section as a beater house.

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The small Section M (photos 6 and 11) differs from the rest of the building in several respects. It is constructed of unpainted buff-colored brick rather than red brick and has an angled corner facing the river. It sits above a canal lock with dressed limestone walls. Grooves for the former top or upstream gates of the lock are evident. The outer wall of Section M spans the end of the lock on a large segmental arch. Visible through the arch are gears and other waterpower-related equipment. The lock was originally Moomaw's Lock, associated with the North River Navigation Company Canal, a branch of the James River & Kanawha Canal. The lock dates to the late 1850s or 1860. Like Section L, Section M is not shown on the 1921 Sanborn map but it is shown on the 1928-45 map, which describes it as a bleach house. The subfloor area with gearing appears to predate the brick construction above.

Section N, which dates to the latter half of the twentieth century, has a steel structure and corrugated metal siding and roofing and contains a long concrete ramp that connects Section O to the upper level of Section L. Section O (photo 6), known as the pulp shed, has similar steel construction, suggesting it is of the same general vintage as Section N (which may have been considered part of the pulp shed). Section O's sides are open to facilitate the movement of materials. A modern poured concrete retaining wall projects from the north end of Section O. Sections N and O replace a long warehouse shown on the 1928-45 Sanborn map.

2. Columbian Paper Company Chip House (Section X). Ca. 1915 and later. Contributing building.

Section X (photos 2 and 5) is a concatenated linear building with one- and two-story sections of corrugated metal-sided frame construction with metal-sheathed gable roofs. The two-story section near the center has boarded-up second-story windows, several barred windows, and metal-clad doors on tracks. One track has "Sure Grip" hardware produced by the Myers company of Ashland, Ohio. The east end of the building is mostly gone, revealing a high poured concrete retaining wall on the back side (which adjoins US Highway 60) and a wooden roof truss. The earliest part of the building appears to be portrayed on the 1915 Sanborn map, which shows a metal-sided frame building labeled "Chip Ho[use]" and "storage." The building replaced an earlier chip house of similar construction which stood near the location of Section D. The earlier chip house was presumably torn down to make way for the construction of Section D, though it may survive as the current building, moved a short distance to its current location. The section is shown in more or less its current concatenated form on the 1928-45 Sanborn map, with functions (from east to west) indicated as lumber storage, carpenter shop, storage, and chip house, the latter apparently occupying the two-story section.

Integrity Analysis

The Columbian Paper Company possesses sufficient overall integrity for listing in the National Register. The majority of the main mill building's sections date or appear to date to the period of significance and occupy their original locations (most sections have experienced some degree of alteration since the period of significance). The second building in the complex, the chip house, also dates to the period of significance, and though there is a possibility it was moved early in its

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history, the move would have occurred during the period of significance and maintained the building's association with the complex. The mill complex possesses sufficient integrity of design, materials, and workmanship in that common character-defining historic features such as pier-wall brick construction, brick corbelling, monitors, and large industrial-type windows are retained (some of the latter have evolved over time). The most architecturally sophisticated features—the round keyblock vent surround and office interior of Section D—are retained, though the section's original segmental-arched windows have been replaced by historic-period industrial-type windows. Many interior spaces were modified or likely modified for uses other than paper manufacturing after the end of the period of significance, yet they retain the overall open character shown in Sanborn maps from the period of significance. Sections A and O, which postdate the period of significance, happen to be positioned at the east and west ends of the complex, which has a negative impact on overall integrity, though the resource's historic sections are still readily visible from most view angles. The resource retains the mixed urban/rural setting it possessed during the historic period. US Highway 60, which closely adjoins the resource on the north side, existed by the end of the period of significance, though it has been improved to modern highway standards. The survival of character-defining features and the high integrity of setting contribute to the property's sufficient integrity of feeling and association.

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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.)

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1892-1954

Significant Dates

1892

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Miller, Homer M.
Kinsey Shane & Associates

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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 Columbian Paper Company paper mill, located on the banks of the Maury River in Buena Vista, Virginia, is a historic industrial complex associated with Buena Vista's early history. Mill-related construction began under the Buena Vista Paper Manufacturing Company about 1890, but most of the mill dates to the Columbian period, which began in 1892 and involved a decades-long expansion program. Notable architectural features of the mill include pier-wall brick construction, decorative corbelling, a well-preserved historic office interior, and a smokestack. Also of note is a preexisting antebellum stone canal lock incorporated into the mill's foundations. The mill was used to make paper until 1954 when it was acquired by Bonded Fibers (also known as Georgia Bonded Fibers and later Bontex) and converted to other uses. The Columbian Paper Company is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the Industry area of significance for its role as one of Buena Vista, Virginia's, leading industries during the historic period. The period of significance extends from 1892, the apparent date of the earliest surviving mill-related construction (other than foundations), to 1954, when the focus shifted away from paper production. The Columbian Paper Company is eligible at the local level of significance for its association with Buena Vista's history.

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

Historical Background and Criterion A Industry Area of Significance

The Columbian Paper Company mill's initial physical development dates to the late antebellum period, well before the company was created in 1892. The mill was sited to take advantage of the water supply and waterpower potential of Moomaw's Lock, a stone canal lock incorporated into the mill's foundation. The lock and associated stone dam on the Maury River were built ca. 1860 for the North River Navigation Company (NRNC) Canal, a branch of the James River & Kanawha Canal which connected Richmond to the western part of Virginia. The NRNC Canal was opened to its terminus at Lexington, several miles upstream from Buena Vista, in November 1860, and Moomaw's lock and dam were therefore presumably completed in the late 1850s or 1860. According to one source, after the canal period the dam was raised several feet with stones taken from the upstream Ben Salem dam. The dam is referred to as Moomaw's Dam in most sources but at least one source (an 1892 deed) refers to it as Stratton's Dam.²

² Pezzoni, "Jordan's Point Historic District," 21; Trout, *Maury River Atlas*, 17; Lynn, "Buena Vista—After the Boom;" Buena Vista Deed Book 2, p. 98. Several individuals assisted with the preparation of the report, foremost among them Tom Roberts, Director of Community Development with the City of Buena Vista. James C. Kostelni, former President and Chief Executive Officer of Bontex, shared his reminiscences of the property's later history. Others who contributed to the project include Kristina Ramsey with the City of Buena Vista, Byron Faidley and Lisa McCown with the Washington and Lee University Leyburn Library Special Collections, and Michael Pulice with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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The NRNC canal works at Buena Vista were acquired by the Richmond & Alleghany Railway Company, which utilized the improvements for its branch line to Lexington. On October 1, 1889, the Richmond & Alleghany entered into a lease agreement with the Buena Vista Paper Manufacturing Company, chartered in August 1889, requiring the paper company to “build an establishment for the manufacture of wood pulp and other articles at [Moomaw’s Dam] within nine months.” The 1891 “Perspective Map of Buena Vista” shows the paper mill, which consisted of a multi-story building similar to a large merchant mill of the era and a long, single-story annex with a roof monitor. An illustration in the Brady Collection at Washington & Lee University’s Special Collections shows the two buildings from another angle, as well as a row of worker houses extending to the north of the mill. These houses, which presumably served as dwellings for paper mill workers, appear on the 1899 Sanborn map of Buena Vista at a location that would have more or less coincided with the current bed of US Highway 60 adjoining the mill property.³

Various lines of evidence suggest the Buena Vista Paper Company (as the name was often shortened in county records) utilized the waterpower potential of the lock and dam where it was sited. Physical evidence for such usage consists of gearing which survives in the subfloor of Section M, directly above the lock. It is conceivable the gearing served a former water-control function rather than a waterpower one, but documentary sources provide independent support for the use of waterpower by the plant. According to a September 1891 deed, S. Morgan Smith of the York Manufacturing Company of York, Pennsylvania, sold the Buena Vista Paper Company “one of his Sixty Six inch No. 2 Improved Success Water Wheels” along with pulleys, shafting, and other power transmission equipment. As late as 1919 a trade journal listed the power sources of the mill as water and steam.⁴

Another important consideration in the siting of the Buena Vista Paper Company’s mill was the existence of the nascent population center and rail hub of Buena Vista nearby. Named for an antebellum iron furnace in the vicinity, Buena Vista was platted in early 1889 with the expectation that its location at the junction of the Richmond & Alleghany and another important regional line, the Shenandoah Valley Railroad (soon to be absorbed by the Norfolk & Western Railroad) would attract industry and population. Important civic amenities were constructed in the first year of the town’s development boom, including the original Hotel Buena Vista, which opened July 1, 1889, and the Buena Vista Company office building, construction of which was

³ Bodie, *Remarkable Rockbridge*, 208; Rockbridge County Deed Book 54, p. 184; Lynn, “Buena Vista—After the Boom;” “Perspective Map of Buena Vista,” Brady Collection; Sanborn maps. Buena Vista historian Francis Lynn notes the existence of a pulp mill at Buena Vista in 1888 when the area was known as Green Forest. Lynn states that the Buena Vista Paper Company began operations in the summer of 1890 (Lynn, *Buena Vista: The Bud Not Yet Blossomed*, 4, 31). Some deeds reference 1888 agreements relating to the Buena Vista Paper Manufacturing Company (for example, Buena Vista Deed Book 23, p. 160). The Brady Collection illustration seems to show the houses at a different location than the 1899 Sanborn map.

⁴ Rockbridge County Deed Book 75, p. 218; Lockwood’s *Directory of the Paper, Stationery and Allied Trades* (1919), 207.

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announced in October 1889 and completed in early 1890. In February 1890 Buena Vista's population was reported to number 1,000 inhabitants. Assuming construction of the Buena Vista Paper Company mill began in late 1889 and was completed by mid-1890, the need for workers to build the mill and subsequently operate it would have contributed to the town's initial population growth. The president of the Buena Vista Paper Company in 1892 was B. C. Moomaw, presumably Benjamin C. Moomaw, a leading local landowner who was the original promoter of Buena Vista's town development. Other siting considerations included direct access to rail transportation—the Lexington branch of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad passed through the complex, with a dedicated siding for the mill—and proximity to forests in the Blue Ridge Mountains adjoining Buena Vista, a source of the wood which was the mill's chief raw material.⁵

In addition to the "Perspective Map of Buena Vista" and Brady Collection depictions of the original Buena Vista Paper Company mill buildings, the complex is shown on a March 1892 site plan, which depicts a third structure. Comparison of these sources to the depiction of the mill on the 1899 Sanborn map, the first Sanborn map to show the mill, suggests the original mill buildings were ironclad frame buildings that no longer survive as superstructures, though their foundations may be incorporated into current construction. This is the case for Section M, which the 1892 site plan shows with a canted corner, a feature retained by the existing section, the brick superstructure of which appears to date to the twentieth century.⁶

In 1892 the Columbian Paper Company acquired the interests of the Buena Vista Paper Company. In September of the following year the editor of the *Rockbridge County News* described the paper mill as he found it on a recent visit to Buena Vista:

The Paper company's plant is the largest of its kind south of Philadelphia. Thirty tons of dry poplar wood are reduced in the pulp mill attached, by mechanical and chemical processes, to pulp heavier than, but much like and as white as lint cotton. This is manufactured into the wood pulp of commerce. One-third of the product is consumed in the paper mill and the rest is sold to the trade. The mill works 100 hands [and] consumes a car of coal and a car of lime each day. The timber is largely brought in from the surrounding mountains and some of it is shipped in by rail. The establishment . . . has enlarged and grown to double size since the boom.

⁵ Pezzoni, "Buena Vista Downtown Historic District," 26-27; Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 180; Bodie, *Remarkable Rockbridge*, 209; Buena Vista Deed Book 1, p. 164. The second Hotel Buena Vista, also known as the Southern Seminary Main Building, and the Buena Vista Company Building, also known as the Old Courthouse, are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. One 1892 deed referred to the company's plant as a pulp mill rather than a paper mill (Buena Vista Deed Book 2, p. 98).

⁶ "Perspective Map of Buena Vista;" Isaacs, "Map Showing First dam above Buena Vista;" Brady Collection; Sanborn maps.

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Rockbridge County historian Charles Bodie notes that the Columbian Paper Company's hundred-man workforce ranked it among Buena Vista's largest employers at the time.⁷

Another account of the Columbian Paper Company's early years was published in a 1900 issue of *Paper Mill and Wood Pulp News*. The article noted that Hugh Burgess, Samuel H. Egolf, and E. L. Embree "of the old American Wood Paper Company, associated themselves with Philadelphia and Eastern capital, formed the Columbian Paper Company, and erected in 1892 the first soda fibre mill, and at this writing the only one, south of the Mason and Dixon line." Upon purchase of the Buena Vista Paper Company mill, Columbian's directors "immediately began the erection of the soda fibre department, and in the fall of that year the Blue Ridge fibre, that has since become favorably known, was first put on the market." The article described the company's manufacturing process: "After the wood is placed in the wood chopper it is mechanically carried through the whole process, not being touched by employees and tied up in rolls at the end of the dry machine, ready for market." In a 1938 reminiscence, longtime Rockbridge County resident Hugh A. White recalled the Columbian Paper Company and its impact on the local economy. "One of the most prosperous and permanent factories obtained at Buena Vista," White wrote, "was the Columbian Paper Company, which has operated steadily without being shut down entirely until this day, and that factory and the tannery [have] been the source of considerable wealth and means of livelihood in the use of various kinds of wood for paper and also tan bark."⁸

The Columbian Paper Company mill reflected national and local developments in the wood products industry. The exploitation of American forests and the conversion of wood into paper and other products dates to the colonial period. The first paper mill in Virginia was that of William Parks near Williamsburg, established in the 1740s. Mechanization, new chemical processes like soda pulping (referenced in the 1900 article), and rail transport of raw materials and finished products were hallmarks of the industry in the nineteenth century and were factors in the layout and outfitting of the Columbian mill. For example, the 1899 Sanborn map shows the chemical processing equipment known as digesters in which wood was converted to high-cellulose paper pulp. The establishment and early operation of the Columbian Paper Company mill coincided with the first large-scale lumbering operations in the mountains above Buena Vista in the 1880s and 1890s.⁹

Sanborn insurance maps trace the evolution of the Columbian Paper Company mill at six points in its history: 1899, 1904, 1908, 1915, 1921, and 1928-45. As noted above, the 1899 map shows the mill's original ironclad frame buildings. The 1899 map also shows large brick wings which were presumably built by the Columbian Paper Company as part of its 1892 retooling. These sections included a bleach room, an evaporating room with ranks of digesters, a recovery department with a cutter room, and a finishing and shipping section. Of these 1892 buildings, the evaporating room and recovery department may survive in altered form as Section E/F. The

⁷ *Rockbridge County News*, September 28, 1893; Lynn, "Buena Vista—After the Boom;" Bodie, *Remarkable Rockbridge*, 236.

⁸ *Paper Mill and Wood Pulp News*, February 17, 1900; *Rockbridge County News*, April 21, 1938.

⁹ Rawson, "William Parks;" Bodie, *Remarkable Rockbridge*, 245.

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evaporating and recovery functions continued through 1921 and the recovery function continued through 1945 (the 1945 map lists the former evaporating room as a digester house). The recovery department's cutter room is present from 1899 through 1945 and occupies the same location as the novelty weatherboard-sided room that currently stands in Section E/F. If Section E/F dates to 1892, it has been altered from its original height and appearance, as shown by comparison to a photo in the 1900 *Paper Mill and Wood Pulp News* issue. Section E/F nevertheless appears to represent the earliest surviving above-foundation fabric in the mill.¹⁰

The Columbian Paper Company's pier-wall brick construction, gable-roofed manufacturing halls, and other construction features were typical of large-scale industrial construction in Buena Vista during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1891, the year before brick construction appears to have commenced at the paper mill, the Alexander K. Rarig Company built a massive brick machine shop, boiler shop, and foundry complex at a location closer to the heart of town (the Rarig plant no longer survives). Like the paper mill, the buildings of the Rarig plant featured corbeling at the top of the bays between the piers and various arched openings, which at the Rarig plant included a large round-arched freight entrance and a round-arched lunette in the broad end of the building's roof monitor. The Rarig plant had stone foundations, as do some sections of the paper plant. The 1891 perspective map of Buena Vista and an 1892 street map showing major building outlines depict a diversity of early industrial buildings in the city. Virtually all of these are now gone or replaced by later industrial facilities. One of the few survivors (other than the Columbian Paper Company) is the Buena Vista Fire Clay Company at 527 East 29th Street at the eastern edge of the city. The plant consists of a drying building with multiple ventilation monitors along the gable roof ridge and a tapering square smokestack of red brick with lozenge motifs and other decorative details in buff brick.¹¹

The builders and architects involved in the various phases of the Columbian Paper Company's historic-period construction are largely unknown. An exception is Roanoke architect Homer M. Miller, who in 1910 prepared plans for a two-story building of "mill construction" measuring 32 by 180 feet which was to be built at the mill. The building's lean proportions and other clues indicate it is almost certainly the core portion of Section D. Section D happens to be the most architecturally refined of the mill's surviving wings, boasting such amenities as a round gable

¹⁰ Sanborn maps; *Paper Mill and Wood Pulp News*, February 17, 1900.

¹¹ Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 182; "Perspective Map of Buena Vista;" "Map of Buena Vista, Rockbridge County, Virginia, and New Additions." In 1892 it was reported that the Rarig works employed 160 workers at its peak (*Staunton Daily News*, February 14, 1892). The Buena Vista Fire Clay Company appears to be the most intact contemporary of the Columbian Paper Company mill, though systematic architectural survey of Buena Vista, should it occur, may turn up other comparably intact industrial buildings. The fire clay company's facilities appear on the 1899 Sanborn map as the Buena Vista Fire Clay & Roofing Tile Company. The decorative smokestack appears to be indicated on the 1899 map. In the twentieth century the plant was known as the Dickinson Fire Brick Company. The smokestack and drying building are the surviving elements from a former complex of buildings and structures. The drying building, though not small, is considerably smaller than the sprawling Columbian complex. A mid-twentieth century concrete block loading dock addition extends across the front of the drying building.

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vent with a keyblock surround and a well-appointed office interior. Section D housed the mill office, the area of the plant where visitors were received and hence the most appropriate location for architectural features meant to impress.¹²

Hugh White's 1938 reminiscence and the 1893 newspaper article attest to the Columbian Paper Company's importance to Buena Vista's economy, an assessment repeated in other accounts. A ca. 1928 analysis of the city's industries recorded the mill's workforce as 200 employees, the third largest in the city behind the Buena Vista Textile Corporation & Silk Manufacturer's Corporation (300 employees) and the South River Lumber Company (250 employees). In 1920, Rockbridge County historian Oren Morton listed the Columbian Paper Company among Buena Vista's leading industries. The total industrial workforce for the city reported by Morton in 1920, 550 workers, was less than half the total figure of 1,325 reported in the ca. 1928 analysis, which would suggest Columbian's workforce was smaller in 1920 as well. In January 1952, when the mill was operated by Piedmont Paper Products, Incorporated, the workforce numbered 83 employees, on a par with the workforce size at the beginning of the mill's operations in the early 1890s.¹³

Information on the mill's products is detailed in the pages of *Lockwood's Directory of the Paper, Stationery, and Allied Trades*. The 1906 directory listed "Card for Coating and Lithographing and Flat Writing [paper]" as Columbian's products. The 1919 directory was more expansive, listing "Card and Bristol Board, Linen Finished Papeterie in White and Colors, Tablet and Flat Writing [paper]." Three years later the product list had evolved to "Card Board, Postal Card, Index Bristol, Lithograph, Drawing, Loose Leaf, Envelope, Mimeograph, Tablet, Writing, and Papeterie."¹⁴

The Columbian Paper Company transferred the lease for the mill property to the Mead Corporation in March 1951. The mill was subsequently operated by Piedmont Paper Products, Incorporated, which appears to have been a Mead subsidiary. Piedmont manufactured Kraft paper at the mill, continuing the traditional focus on paper production. In June 1954, the Mead Corporation transferred the lease to Piedmont Paper Products, Incorporated, which promptly transferred the lease to Bonded Fibers, Incorporated. Bonded Fibers, also known as Georgia Bonded Fibers and later Bontex, was an outgrowth of the Georgia Leather Company, founded by

¹² Sanborn maps; *Manufacturers' Record*, January 20, 1910, p. 63; Wells and Dalton, *Virginia Architects*, 297. Round gable features were present in at least two other buildings in the complex that predated the building designed by Miller. The round feature in the Miller-designed building differs from these in having an architecturally sophisticated keyblock surround. The round gable features in the other buildings are apparently now missing or obscured.

¹³ Spotswood, "Buena Vista's [Key] to Industrial Possibilities," 17; Morton, *History of Rockbridge County*, 154; *Rockbridge County News*, September 28, 1893; Strickler, "Rockbridge County Industry on Full Schedule." Morton noted that the Columbian mill and most of the other industries in his list were owned by Pennsylvania interests.

¹⁴ *Lockwood's Directory of the Paper, Stationery and Allied Trades* (1906), 159; *Lockwood's Directory of the Paper, Stationery and Allied Trades* (1919), 207; *Lockwood's Directory of the Paper, Stationery and Allied Trades* (1922), 223.

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Hugo N. Surmonte in Newark, New Jersey, in 1933. According to James C. Kostelni, Surmonte's son-in-law, who joined the company in 1957 and later succeeded Surmonte as its president, the mill was converted to the production of a composite cellulose/latex material known as Bontex. The material was used for a variety of products from car engine gaskets to hat visors and shoe insoles. In 1963, Bonded Fibers was described by a local paper as having "grown from a relatively small to a large and important position in the country's business community" with domestic sales in excess of \$6 million. The Bontex mill continued in operation into the early twenty-first century but is now idle.¹⁵

¹⁵ James C. Kostelni, personal communication with the author, December 2023; *Roanoke Times*, October 12, 1994; *Buena Vista News*, December 19, 1963; Buena Vista Deed Book 21, p. 550; Deed Book 23, p. 160; Deed Book 23, p. 165.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
 X Local government
____ University

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Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Va.;
Buena Vista City Hall, Buena Vista, Va.

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR ID no. 103-5192

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 5 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.744289 Longitude: -79.365825

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

The Columbian Paper Company nominated area is defined by the property boundary along US Highway 60 on the north side; the low water line of the Maury River on the south side, referenced in Buena Vista deed 100000189 (2010); a line parallel with and 60 feet beyond the west end of Section O on the west side; and a line parallel with and 20 feet beyond the east end of Section A on the east side. The boundary is shown on the accompanying scaled map entitled "National Register of Historic Places Boundary Map, Site Plan & Photo Key."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Columbian Paper Company nominated area is defined to include the main mill building (Sections A through O) and an associated historic-period chip house (Section X) and to exclude resources that postdate the period of significance such as the water treatment plant to the east of the main mill building. Also excluded from the nominated area is the stone dam that extends from the main building across the Maury River. The dam in its original form was built for the North River Navigation Company Canal about 1860. Though the dam was used to supply water to the mill during the period of significance, a large modern water intake structure has been added to it. The boundary includes a portion of the property's historic setting and the key known historic resources associated with the property for the purposes of designation: the main mill building and chip house.

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

Columbian Paper Company
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e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net
telephone: (540) 464-5315
date: December 29, 2023

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.
- **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: Columbian Paper Company
City or Vicinity: Buena Vista County: N/A State: Virginia
Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni Date Photographed: varies
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: varies

1 of 18.

Smokestack as seen from US Highway 60 Maury River bridge with Blue Ridge beyond.
View facing east.
Date Photographed: May 2023.

2 of 18.

Main building and chip house with US Highway 60 in foreground. View facing southwest.
Date Photographed: May 2023.

3 of 18.

East end of main building with Section A on right and Section B on left. View facing west.

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Date Photographed: May 2023.

4 of 18.

Section G (boiler house), Section E/F, and Section B. View facing northwest.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

5 of 18.

Section D (left) and chip house (right). View facing west.

Date Photographed: December 2023.

6 of 18.

West end of main building with Section O in foreground. View facing east.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

7 of 18.

East gable end of Section D with round vent with keyblock surround. View facing southwest.

Date Photographed: December 2023.

8 of 18.

Section D south elevation. View facing northwest.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

9 of 18.

Section B north elevation. View facing southwest.

Date Photographed: December 2023.

10 of 18.

Door on north side of Section B. View facing south.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

11 of 18.

Moomaw's Lock under Section M. View facing east.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

12 of 18.

Section B roof structure.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

13 of 18.

Section D office interior.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

14 of 18.

Section E/F interior with encloser at location of cutter room under mezzanine.

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Date Photographed: May 2023.

15 of 18.

Section H interior.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

16 of 18.

Section I interior.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

17 of 18. Section L (upper level) interior.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

18 of 18.

Section O interior.

Date Photographed: May 2023.

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.

Columbian Paper Company

1 Bontex Drive, Buena Vista, Virginia
DHR ID# 103-5192

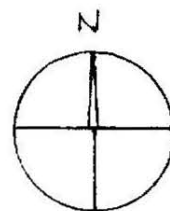
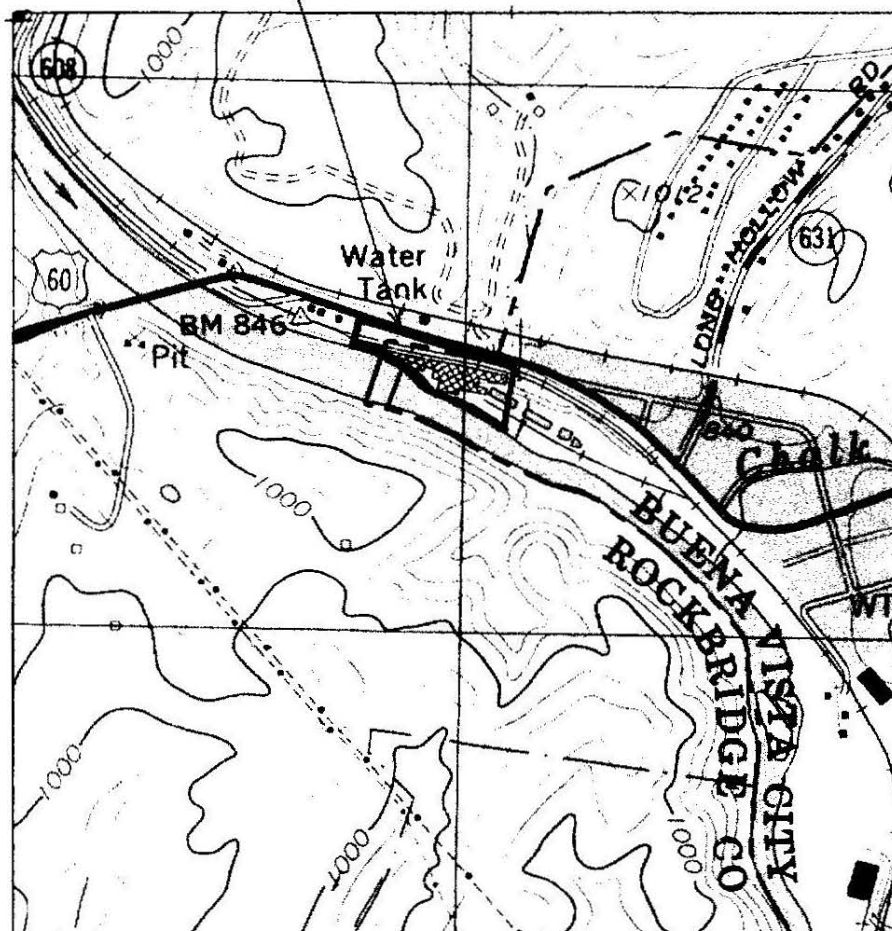
National Register of Historic Places Location Map

Latitude/longitude coordinates:

1. Latitude: 37.744289

Longitude: -79.365825

Location of NR property



0 1000 2000
Scale in feet (approx.)

Columbian Paper Company

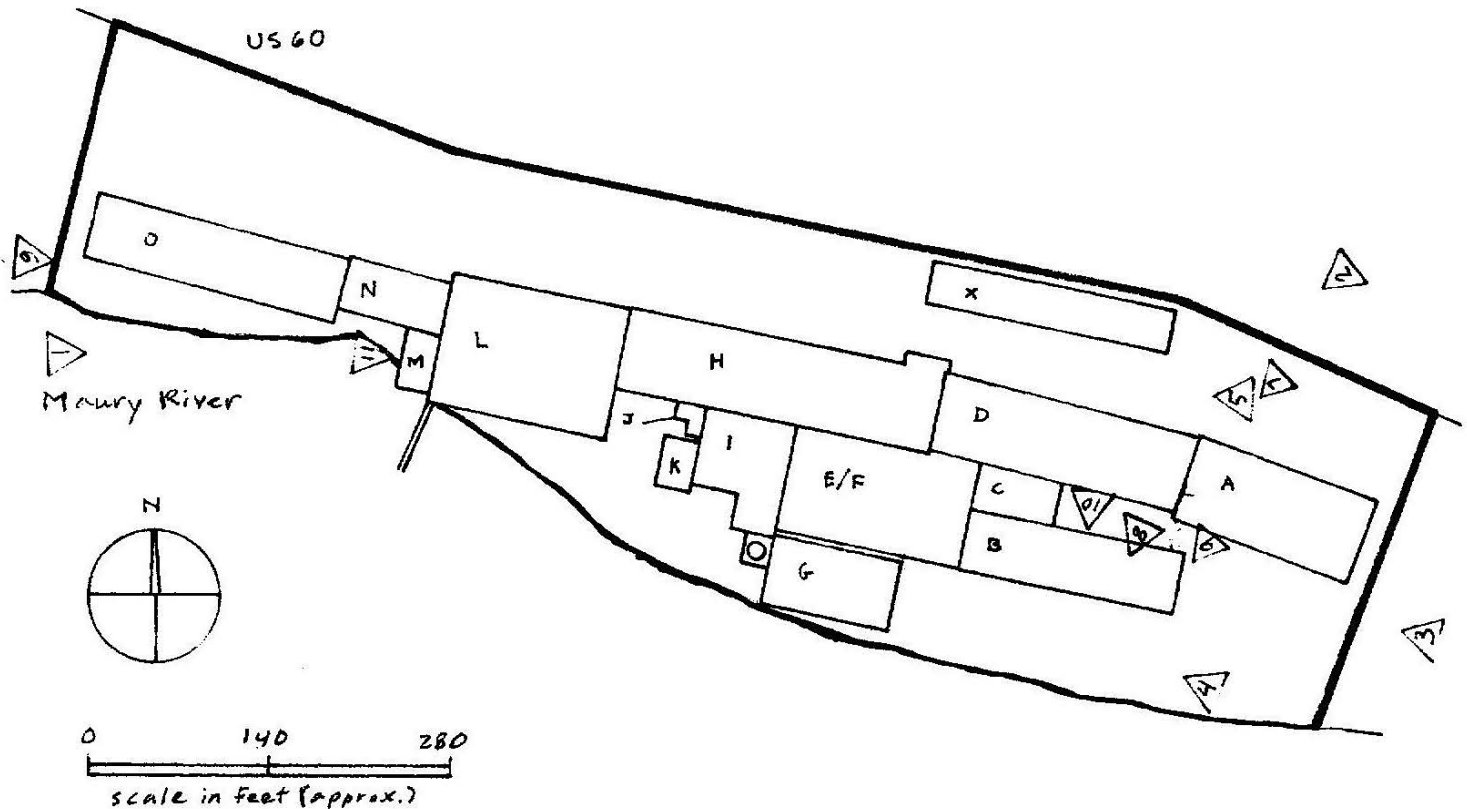
1 Bontex Drive, Buena Vista, Virginia
DHR ID# 103-5192

National Register of Historic Places Boundary Map, Site Plan & Photo Key

Triangular markers indicate number and direction of view of nomination photos and are keyed to the photo log in the nomination. Scale and placement of resources approximate.

Inventory

1. Columbian Paper Company Main Mill Building. Contributing building.
2. Columbian Paper Company Chip House. Contributing building.





Legend

County Boundaries

AERIAL VIEW

Columbian Paper Company

City of Buena Vista, VA

DHR No. 103-5192

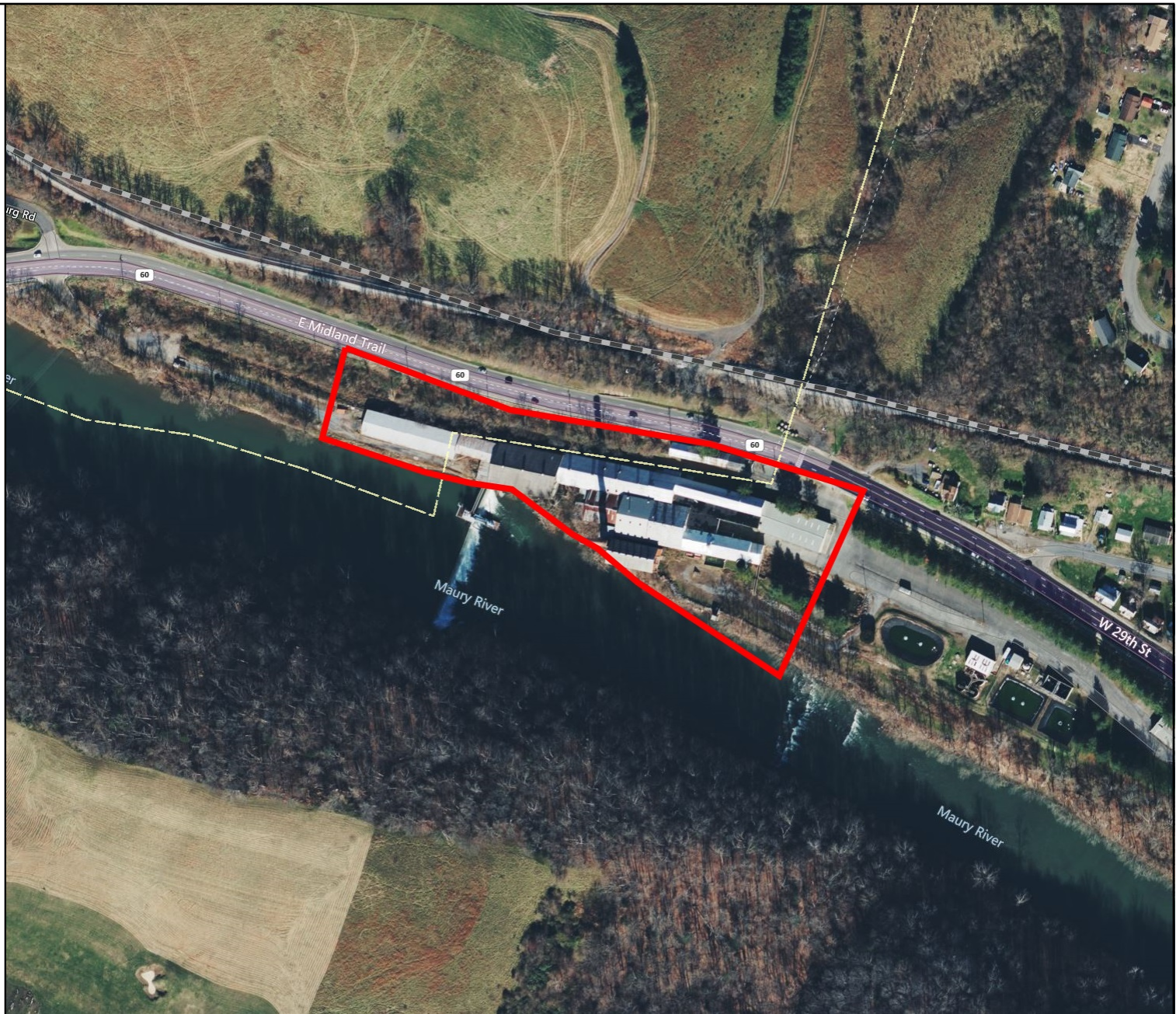
Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 100 200 300 400

1:4,514 / 1"=376 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.



Legend

County Boundaries

STREET MAP

Columbian Paper Cmpany

City of Buena Vista, VA

DHR No. 103-5192



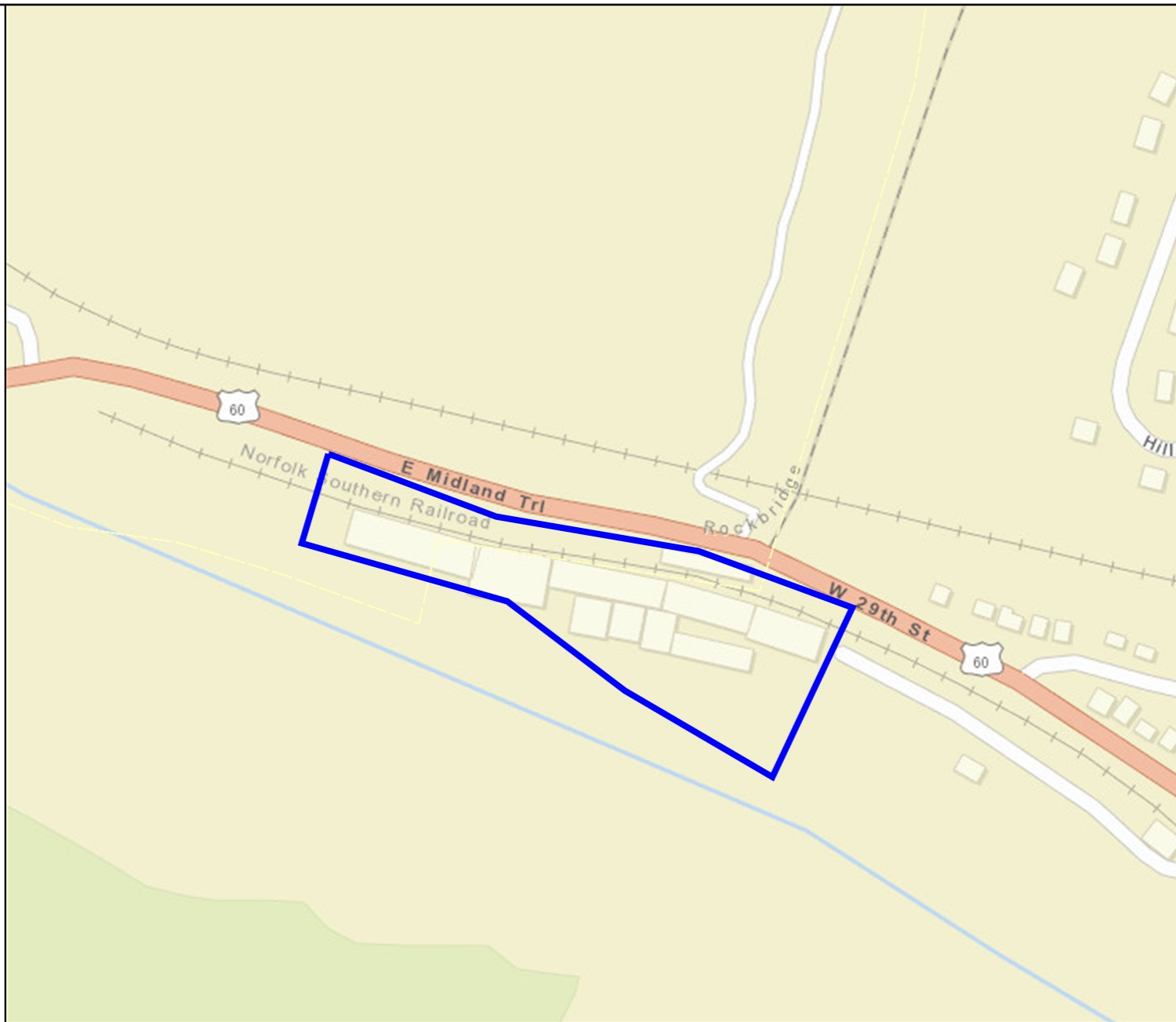
Nominated Boundary



Feet

0 100 200 300 400

1:4,514 / 1"=376 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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