

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Jones, James Ellwood House

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: off Highway 52

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Switchback

vicinity: n/a

state: WV county: McDowell

code: 047

zip code: 24887

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>2</u>	_____ buildings
<u>1</u>	_____ sites
<u>2</u>	_____ structures
<u>1</u>	_____ objects
<u>6</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related property listing: n/a

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this

☒ 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

☒ meets

☐ does not meet

the National Register Criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.



Signature of Certifying Official

2/10/92

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property

☐ meets

☐ does not meet

the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

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5. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined-eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. Function or Use

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Historic: domestic Sub: single dwelling

Current : domestic Sub: single dwelling

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:
late 19th and early 20th century American movements

Other Description: n/a

Materials: foundation concrete roof asphalt
walls vinyl other stucco

Describe present and historic physical appearance. x See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: statewide.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,B,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : n/a

Areas of Significance: architecture
industry
social history

Period(s) of Significance: ca. 1900-1932

Significant Dates : n/a

Significant Person(s): Jones, James Ellwood

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
x See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet. x

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 #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository: Eastern Regional Coal Archives,
Bluefield, WV

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: four acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

		²³⁰	⁹²⁰			
A	<u>17</u>	<u>466920</u>	<u>4135230</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

From the merger point of Turkey Gap Branch and Elkhorn Creek, proceed east 400' to the house which sits in the center of a square 400' on each side.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes all of the property historically associated with the James Ellwood Jones house.

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11. Form Prepared By

=====

Name/Title: Stacy Sone, surveyor

Organization: WV-SHPO

Date: 1/2/92

Street & Number: Cultural Center

Telephone: 304-348-0240

City or Town: Charleston

State: WV ZIP: 25301

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The James Ellwood Jones house stands on a hill with a commanding view of the mountains over the once-bustling coal mining community called Switchback. The prominent coal operator's house is, in many ways, typical of other large houses built in the United States at the turn of the century. Its style shows the transition between the Victorian period and the simpler, functional houses built during the early twentieth century. Its magnificent display of stained glass windows, however, puts this house in a class by itself even compared to other coal operators' houses. Although the house has recently been covered with siding, it retains the visual quality necessary to convey its architectural significance because the form and features have not been obscured. It has undergone few other changes and it retains the characteristics that associate it with its original owner and the coal mining industry.

The two-story Jones house stands on top of an irregular plan and under an irregular roof. The roof is predominantly hipped but with intersecting gables and dormers.

The main entrance stands in the south facade behind a classically-detailed, pedimented porch. The door opens into one end of a large one story curved room that wraps around the house's west side. The windows in this section are the showpiece of the entire house. Each window is one of three vertical sections which together form a three part circle. There are roughly ten of these circles and each includes a stained-glass panel on its outer two edges. On the other side of the house's entrance, this one story room terminates in a segmental bay which contains double hung windows. The curved room covers most of the first floor on three sides of the house. Over the second floor is a lively mix of gables that intersect with a hipped roof.

The curved room wraps around to the west side and ends there in an open porch. A room on the second story sits above it and is an addition that Jones built for a nursery.

The house's utilitarian side is located on its east end instead of the typical location on the rear. Extending off of this side is a single story, parallel-gabled kitchen wing constructed of concrete block and covered with stucco. This wing is absent in an early photograph of the house but it was probably built soon after the house was constructed. It includes two doorways, a full-length shed porch with column supports, and double hung windows. A tall brick chimney extends over one roof ridge. A small shed-roofed room was an early addition to the end of the kitchen wing.

The Jones house has undergone few alterations since its construction date and nearly all were changes made by Jones. The current owners have

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occupied the house since the 1950's and have made no exterior alterations except for the recent addition of vinyl siding. The interior has changed little except for the conversion of the original kitchen into a sitting room. Inside and out, the house remains substantially unaltered from its original appearance. The siding is the most noticeable change but since it imitates the original material, it does not detract significantly from its architectural importance as a grand house built by a wealthy coal operator.

The surrounding grounds provide a magnificent setting for the Jones house. The yard is spacious and is dotted with trees that Jones had imported. These include a catalpa, beech, German Buckeye, and Japanese Maple. Other features of the yard include a concrete swimming pool built in the 1920's, a contributing structure; a circular fountain, a contributing object; and a classically-detailed, covered patio that is detached from the house, a contributing building. Jones maintained a terraced garden on a slope off the house's west side where he planted vegetables, grapes for wine making, and flowers. This garden is a contributing site on the grounds. Jones tended plants in a greenhouse during the winter months and this is an intact contributing structure. All of these features date to Jones' occupancy and the current owners have carefully maintained the yard so that it remains in its original pristine condition.

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The James Ellwood Jones house is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its historical association with southern West Virginia's coal mining industry; under criterion B for its association with James Ellwood Jones, one of the industry's most influential leaders; and under criterion C for its architectural significance. Well before the turn of the twentieth century, northern capitalists began to develop the southern West Virginia wilderness as the nation's industries demanded vast quantities of the high quality coal hidden beneath its rugged terrain. After the construction of railroads, McDowell County was quickly transformed into an industrial center known around the world for its highest quality coal. James Ellwood Jones, who grew up in southern West Virginia, became one of the county's most progressive business leaders in this newly developed Pocahontas coalfield. Jones was a respected businessman and an ambitious promoter of education and health facilities throughout the active industrial county. The house he constructed for his family at Switchback is evidence of his success and prominence in the community. A coal operator resided in most every mining community, but few of their houses in McDowell County survived after the coal industry declined. The Jones house is impressive but is most outstanding architecturally for its huge parlor that displays spectacular stained glass windows. The house has been well-maintained and stands as impressively as it did when Jones resided there.

Before northern businessmen discovered the value of southern West Virginia's coal, the area was sparsely settled and contained only a few scattered farms. Natives used the resource but because of its inaccessibility, the resource remained largely untapped. As the nation became more industrial-minded, however, capitalists from Pennsylvania began to explore ways to access the coal. Ambitious and farsighted businessmen began to acquire huge tracts of coal land in the great Pocahontas field, organized land holding companies, and constructed railroads into the isolated mountains. After the completion of a rail tunnel through Flat Top Mountain from Mercer County, large scale development of McDowell County forged ahead. Mines quickly sprang up all along the N & W line in the narrow valleys.

The tiny native population quickly proved inadequate for such a labor intensive industry. In order to satisfy the labor requirements, operators recruited workers from the older coalfields of Pennsylvania and then from Europe and the American South. The population grew phenomenally at the turn of the century as blacks and immigrants from Eastern Europe poured into the remote county.

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To accommodate these new arrivals, coal companies built entire self-sufficient communities. The construction of company towns was absolutely necessary in southern West Virginia. Unlike the northern coalfields where mining operations began in regions that were already settled, southern operations opened in sparsely settled areas with few organized communities. Good roads in southern West Virginia were scarce and the rugged terrain made the daily transportation of miners impossible. In response to these obstacles, companies had to establish their own communities to house their workers. The company town was the most logical solution because it provided efficient and inexpensive housing for a large labor force. Because of the lack of usable space in the narrow valleys, communities had to be carefully planned in order to accommodate all of the industry's necessary facilities.

The coal operator was the key figure in planning and establishing the mine complex and the residential community. Most of the early operators who came to the Pocahontas Coalfield were from out of state and had worked in coal mines in their home territory. Their familiarity with the operation gave the most ambitious and courageous workers the confidence to develop the southern West Virginia wilderness. On land leased from large northern-based land holding companies, the operator established mines and constructed company towns. They were important figures in the mining industry because of their active role in every aspect of the industry and community. Realizing the importance of the employees' satisfaction, operators built ideal communities for their workers complete with a store to supply all of their needs, churches, schools, recreational and health facilities, and often a clubhouse. Operators sometimes sponsored events and cultural activities to please their residents. Although some chose to distance themselves from the bustling activity and noisy mine operation, they still generally lived in the community which created a camaraderie between the miners and the operator.

Many coal operators in McDowell County won the praise of their employees by being outstanding and personal community leaders. Residents throughout the county regarded James Ellwood Jones as an exceptional operator whose interest extended beyond his own company and community. Unlike some coal operators, Jones was no stranger to southern West Virginia's coal mines. His father, Jenkin Jones, was a pioneer operator in the Pocahontas field and helped lay the ground work for the area's vast development. James was born in Pennsylvania where his father worked in the anthracite fields, but he spent most of his life in southern West Virginia. He began working in

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his father's mine at Caswell Creek in Mercer County, West Virginia, where he learned the industry's fundamental aspects. Jones left the mines briefly to attend Roanoke College in Salem, and then Columbia University where he studied mine engineering.

He enthusiastically returned to West Virginia where he bought control of the Norfolk Coal and Coke Company's five mines near Maybeury, McDowell County. During the 1910's, he sold his mines to the Pocahontas Fuel Company and became its Vice President and General Manager, a position he held until his death in late 1932.

Although Jones was a clever and successful coal operator of the Pocahontas Fuel Company, one of the state's largest producers, he is best remembered for his efforts to improve conditions in the remote county. One of his most clearly-focused missions was to provide a network of roads in McDowell County that would be accessible to all residents. He worked laboriously to pass legislation to improve roads and even financed the project himself. He served as a member of the county court for twenty-four years to see this project through to fruition. He also used his influence as a member of the court to establish the first county-wide, free dental clinic which earned nation-wide recognition. Jones was also a zealous supporter of public education. He financed higher education for a number of aspiring McDowell County students. He presented ten scholarships worth \$1,200 a year for students to attend West Virginia University in Morgantown.

His interest in helping people extended beyond the limits of McDowell County. In 1930, he launched a campaign to win a place in the United States Senate. Although he was unsuccessful on the national level, his influence and generous contributions locally made him one of the county's most notable coal operators. An article written several years after his death stated that Jones was, "a godfather to thousands of men and women of all races and stations whose lives he made more pleasant, and whose environment he improved in every way".

Like other successful coal operators in southern West Virginia, Jones built a large, distinguished house. He built the house during his years as the owner of the Norfolk Coal and Coke Company and he strategically situated it high on a hill over Switchback where he could see the entrances of all five of his area mines. Jones closely supervised the operations and frequently visited each of them. The house is large and impressive with its multi-gabled roofline, classical entrance, and

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spacious setting. It might seem rather modest for a wealthy coal operator, however, if it were not for the spectacular room that wraps most of three sides of the house. This room, which incorporates the house's main entrance on one end, is artistically and beautifully detailed from floor to ceiling. Easily, its most outstanding quality are the round window openings that feature magnificent stained glass panels on their side edges. The configuration is unusual but its pattern is such that it immediately wraps the visitor to the room in an array of extraordinary color. Dark wooden planks cover the floor and ceiling providing an interesting contrast to the light of the space between.

The house's surrounding landscape provides a pristine setting for the house. Jones maintained a terraced flower and vegetable garden located on a slope off the house's spacious yard. A circular pool with a fountain, a patio under a classically detailed roof, a swimming pool, and various imported trees are outstanding features that contribute to its setting. The house's location on the hill provided a spectacular view and gave Jones easy access to his mines. It was not that convenient though to travel to the coal community and the all-important company store. He cleverly suspended a cable down the hill between his house and the Switchback company store below so that he could receive merchandise without the time consuming trip to the bottom of the hill.

The Jones house has undergone few changes since the coal operator resided there. The curved room has been untouched and even Jones' original furniture still occupies the extraordinary space. Only a handful of McDowell County coal operators' houses remain in good condition. Others have fallen into disrepair and some have been altered so extensively that they have lost their association with the original owner and the mining industry. The current owners of the property have carefully maintained the house and grounds so that it retains the qualities that associate it with the coal industry and the prominent operator who resided there.

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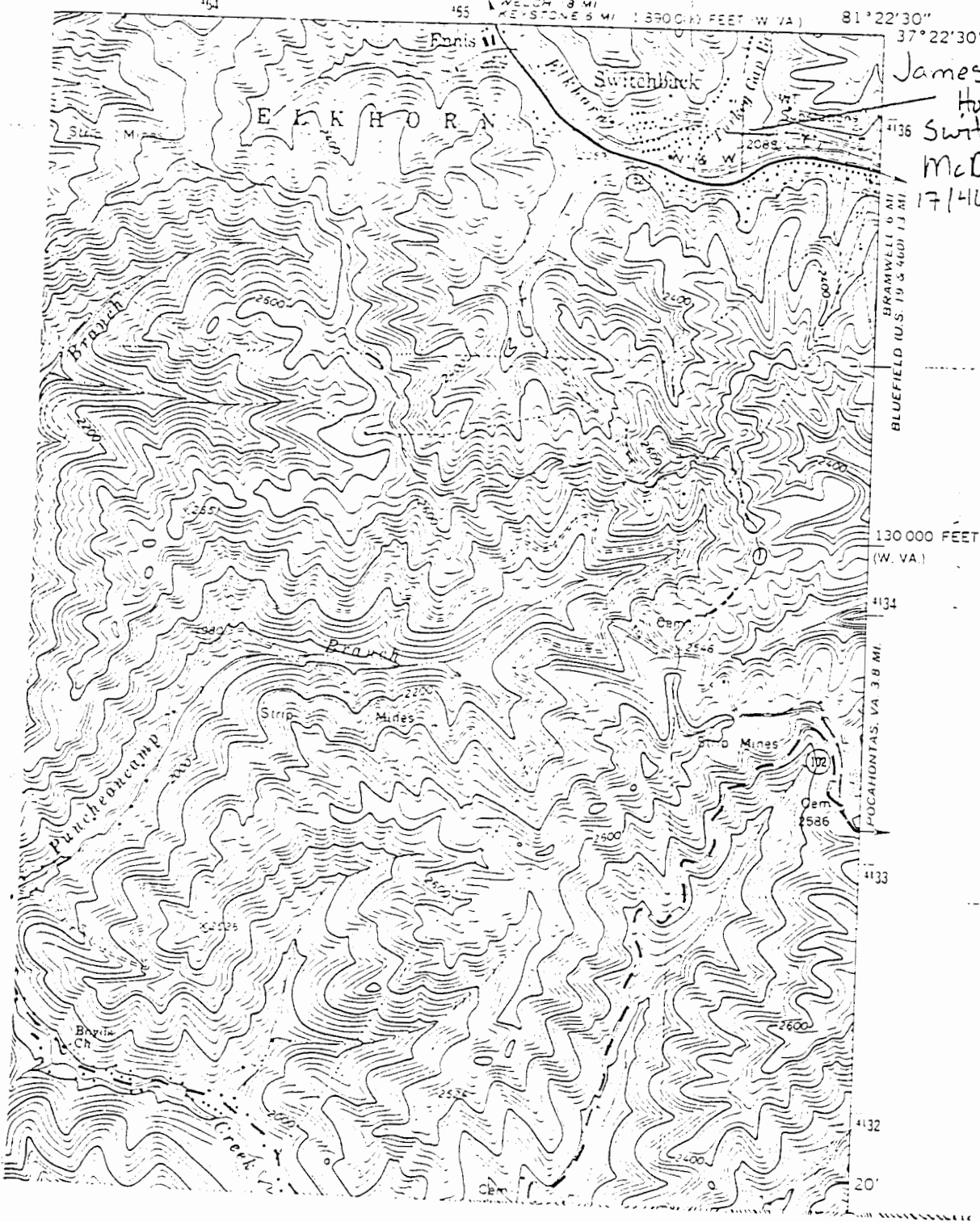
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James Ellwood Jones
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Switchback,
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