

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: JOHNSTON - TRUAX HOUSE

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: 209 Seneca Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Weirton

vicinity: N/A

state: WV county: Hancock

code: 029

zip code: 26062

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

_____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

1

_____ Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related property listing: N/A

=====

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

=====

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.

William C. Lauer

Signature of Certifying Official

5/25/93

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

=====

5. National Park Service Certification

=====

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current : Domestic Sub: Multiple Dwelling

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7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification:

Other Description: Split-log cabin

Materials: foundation Stone roof Corrugated metal

walls Insul-brick/ other Log/wood

vinyl

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

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8. Statement of Significance

=====

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Exploration/Settlement

Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1785-1886

Significant Dates: 1785 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Johnston, Benjamin, Jr.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # N/A
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

State historic preservation office
Other state agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

17 537920 4475540

) Verbal Boundary Description: X See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: X See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Organization: WV State Historic Preservation Office Date: 22 March 1993

Street & Number: 1528 Market Street Telephone: (304) 238-1300

City or Town: Wheeling State: WV ZIP: 26003

Property Owner

Name: Vanessa Butler

Street & Number: 1976 South Military Hwy #90 Telephone: W (804)827-4382

City or Town: Chesapeake State: VA Zip: 23320

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JOHNSTON-TRUAX HOUSE, WEIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, HANCOCK CO.

The Johnston-Truax House is one of the remaining early resources in Hancock County. Constructed in 1785, the log core of the house was the cabin of Benjamin Johnston, Jr. who was an early homesteader in the Weirton area. The home later passed through several hands before being owned by the Truax family for over 100 years.

The property is located on the northeast side of Weirton's downtown and mill area, north of the main Pennsylvania Avenue throughfare and east of 20th Street. The house lies on the north side of Seneca Street on a large lot with the rear sloping down to trees and hillside. The neighborhood around the house which was part of the Johnson and Truax farm appears to have been subdivided into lots in the 1940s or 50s.

The house is currently a one-and-a-half story home with a one-story wing to the west. The cabin appears to have originally been a Hall and Parlor floor plan with the door opening into a main room with a side parlor or bedroom, and a overhead sleeping loft. When the Campbells made improvements about 1850 they added two rooms to the east side as well as a second floor for bedrooms across the entire length of the house. The stairs lead from the small side room in the log structure to the bedroom over the main room of the cabin. In 1886, the one story wing on the west side of the log cabin was added by the Truax's and contained three rooms.

The front or south elevation is five bays on the main section of the house and three bays on the west wing. The house has log walls probably covered with clapboard when the first frame addition was made in 1850. The home was covered with insul-brick at some point in the early 20th century and recently has had some vinyl siding over this. A full porch across the front of the house was added after the 1850's with a shed roof and a trap door in the porch floor to the cellar under the east rooms of the house. The west end of the porch was enclosed and now has a side door leading onto the porch decking and a large multi-light window facing the street. The size of the window openings vary on the house with multi-light double-hung windows on the first floor and short 1/1 double-hung openings on the second floor. The 1886 wing has a center door leading out to concrete steps with a 1x1 sliding window to the left and a 1/1 double-hung opening to the right. The gable roof of the house is corrugated metal on two levels with a shed porch roof.

The west elevation shows the one-story wing with a short 1/1 double-hung window near the front corner and two horizontal rectangular openings. There is a chimney at the gable peak. On the rear the roof line appears to have been changed with no eave on the rear gable extension. The rear or north elevation has the one-story wing forming a rear ell with the gable roof extending out with rolled asphalt. This wing has a center rear door and flanking 1/1 double-hung openings as well as a single window on the east side. To the left across the rear of the older section of the house is a new one-story shed addition with vinyl siding. Visible on the

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second floor are two 1/1 double-hung windows. The east elevation has no openings, with a brick chimney at the gable peak. Vinyl siding has been applied to this elevation as well as the first floor of the front facade.

The interior of the house has at present been divided into two apartments, with the one-story wing acting as one unit and the one-and-a-half story section of the house as the second unit. Time has seen the addition of modern facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms on the first floor. Except for the addition of one bathroom wall to create a hall, and closing a doorway into the 1886 addition; the interior floor plan seems to have changed very little for the last one hundred years. The log walls and stone foundation of the cabin are visible from inside an access panel and in closets. The large stone fireplace in the main room of the cabin has been enclosed behind a drywall but the depth of the interior space and the exterior chimney confirms its existence. The 1850s parlor on the east end has a fireplace mantel with trim moulding influenced by the Greek Revival period. Next to it is a built-in cupboard with panelled wooden doors. There are now two small narrow rooms between the parlor and the main room of the cabin.

A stairway now leads from the old parlor to the second floor and the two bedrooms. These two rooms have slanted ceilings near the outside walls with the lower walls brought out to create storage space. There are narrow openings leading to the windows that from the interior create a dormer effect. The wall and ceiling treatment on the interior of these two bedrooms is tongue and groove four-inch-wide boards.

The 1886 addition has one large center room with the rear ell being a kitchen and the front enclosed porch housing a bathroom. There is a fireplace on the west end of the house which is now used for a heating stove.

While the house has had a change of siding materials over the years, these alterations are reversible as are the enclosed porches and rear vinyl addition. The house itself with the 1785 log core, and the 1850 and 1886 additions, shows the evolution and growth of the home over 200 years of ownership. The house is one of a few known remaining log homes in Hancock County.

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The Johnston-Truax House is significant under Criterion A for the early settlement of Hancock County which later became part of Weirton; and Criterion C for the architecture of the hewn log cabin constructed on the property in 1785 and its evolution through additions from c. 1850 and 1886 which also contribute to the plan of the house. The period of significance is from the time the cabin was built in 1785 to when the last addition was placed on the house in 1886.

The area today known as Weirton was first settled in 1771 when Harmon Greathouse built the first cabin on 800 acres in the area that was to become Holliday's Cove, and later Weirton. His first name is still used for the name of Harmon's Creek, which is the southern boundary of the city. The largest original land grant in the Weirton area was made to Benjamin Johnston, Jr. on March 7, 1785 for two tracts of land in the County of Yohogania, Virginia, on the Ohio River. At the time Hancock County was a part of the Commonwealth of Virginia, under the governorship of Patrick Henry, Esq. who granted the land. The first tract of land included 1700 acres and is identified today as that covering the entire area where the Steel Works, Coke Plant, and Tin Mill are built (Northern section of downtown Weirton) including Brown's Island; to Kings Creek and east to what is now E. Simon Line. The second tract was granted the same day for 294 acres near present day 20th and Pennsylvania Avenue.

Benjamin Johnston built a log house in 1785 on his tract of 294 acres that he cultivated as a farm. The original plan of the log house appears to have been a Hall and Parlor with the main door opening into a large multipurpose room with fireplace, and a smaller private room used either as a parlor or bedroom was off to the side. This tract of land and home was later passed to Charles Moorehead, by Johnston on September 26, 1798. Charles Moorehead transferred the land to William and Elizabeth Moorehead who in turn sold it to Robert Campbell on April 3, 1850. His son, John Campbell, lived there until 1869. The Campbell's made many improvements, adding two rooms to the east end of the house with board siding and including two large windows. The east room was probably the new parlor with a fine mantel on the fireplace and a built-in cupboard next to it. This parlor had the formal doorway from the new porch leading directly into the room. The small room connecting this parlor to the log cabin is narrow with horizontal bead-and-board wood siding as the interior wall treatment. The second floor was probably also added to the house at this time with the stairs leading upward from the old parlor. The Campbells also added a cellar with stone walls under the new parlor with the trap door on the porch as the opening. A well 25 feet deep was hand dug in the front of the house. The farm was sold to George Hindman who passed it to Jane Adair Truax on April 1, 1871.

~~Jane Truax was a widow whose husband William had died in 1864. William had married Jane Adair on December 14, 1837 and together they raised ten children. After being a widow for almost seven years Jane bought the farm from Mr. Hindman. About six months later she also acquired a four-acre~~

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tract south of the farm, along what is now N. 20th Street, which had a house on it. Her oldest son William lived there and raised twelve children. This house was eventually dismantled about 1900 and the lumber used at the home place.

Jane Truax was known as a hard working and determined lady, who rode horseback to the Washington, Pennsylvania, Courthouse to make payments promptly on the farm which had cost her \$6,500. Her deceased husband, William, a former resident of New Jersey and Hanlin Station, PA, had saved enough for a generous payment on the property before his death, and Jane was not about to lose it.

After the deaths of seven children and marriages of the others, Jane asked her son Charles to build onto the original log farmhouse and he added three rooms on the west end about 1886. He lived in the house with his mother, wife Julia, and their nine children. Jane Adair Truax died in 1898 at 77 years of age and was buried at Three Springs Cemetery. The Truax family operated an orchard on the farm called Hill Top Fruit Farm with 42 varieties of apples on about 20 acres of land. They also raised peaches, grapes, berries, corn, grain, hogs and chickens.

Jane's granddaughter, identified in the WEIRTON DAILY TIMES (Dec 31, 1976) as Mrs. Lillian Jordan, was still living in the log home at the time of America's Bicentennial. She remembered the home being "heated with a huge stone fireplace where all the cooking was also done. The forests surrounding the home provided wood for the fireplace and later the hills yielded some coal for fuel. Eventually the fireplace was closed over and walled up when more modern heating and cooking modes came into being. The floors of the early additions are of oak boards about six inches wide. The rooms are tiny, especially the bedrooms. Mrs. Jordan was born in the home in 1889 and was the only daughter of Charles and Julia Truax." The Truax family owned the home for 110 years. In 1981, Mrs. Jordan passed away at age 93, having lived in the house all her life. A year later the home was purchased by the present owner, Vanessa Butler.

The Johnston-Truax House is one of the few known log homes dating to the early settlement of Hancock County. While the original log walls have been covered with modern materials, the core of the house and the additions from the 1850's and 1886 represent the evolution of a homestead in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT - LOG CONSTRUCTION

Log construction is recognized by architectural historians as one of the earlier building traditions brought by the German and Swedish immigrants to America. The building techniques were carried westward across the frontier. The Preservation Brief #26 on "The Preservation and Repair of Historic Log Buildings" gives a concise history of the evolution of historic log construction. The following is a short synopsis from this and other texts.

The building methods of early settlers were adapted to local materials, terrains and climates. Timber was prevalent in the Appalachian Mountains which includes all of West Virginia. Logs were either left in their round configuration or hand hewn into a squared form. Some of these logs are so expertly hewn that they are very smooth while others show the marks of the adz tools. Typically the Single Pen Plan was used which was basically a single square room with front and rear door and window openings. The Hall and Parlor was a single pen with a side room. This floor plan of log construction was more common in the South and used by English settlers. However, both the Hall & Parlor and the I-House form became a prototype to similar pre-railroad shapes executed with log walls. They also became more widely distributed as a part of the Midland folk tradition.¹ Other plans included the Saddlebag or Double-Pen that shared a common wall with a double faced chimney; or a Dogtrot Plan that had two single pen log homes facing each other and a common roof that left a breezeway open in between.

As families grew or the settler became more prosperous these log homes were either replaced or incorporated into a larger building. "Framed additions and porches were commonly added to log houses as local sawmills provided nearby sources of cut lumber. Similarly, many log houses were later covered with weatherboards, both to provide an additional seal and to make them appear more up-to-date."² Second stories were "added by removing the roof and gables, constructing a second floor, laying additional courses of logs, and building a new roof, or resembling the old one. Each generation of owners might expand an early log core building by adding on new log pens, or masonry or wood frame extensions. The addition of a rear ell, or infill construction to link a formerly free-standing outbuilding, such as a kitchen to the log main house was particularly common. Such a layering of alterations is part of the evolution of many log buildings".³

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Benjamin Johnston, Jr. built his hewn-log home in 1785 consisting of a Hall and Parlor floor plan. The hewn-logs were covered when the Campbell's acquired the homestead about 1850. They dug a cellar having hewn stone walls and over the cellar placed a fine square room with a small room adjoining the former parlor of the log house. Access to the cellar from the porch enables one to see the round logs of the 1850 floor structure and a small glimpse under the crawlspace of the hewn logs from the 1785 log construction on top of stone piers or the exterior foundation. Because the interior walls are plastered access to view the construction is severely limited but a opening in an interior wall has revealed hand-hewn logs for the former exterior wall of the former log parlor; and in the later parlor clapboard being used as the exterior cladding in the 1850 addition. (See floor plan with nomination for material location). The second story was added when the house was enlarged by the Campbell's and spans both the log structure and new addition.

The Truax's acquired the property in 1871, and in 1886 added the west wing to the home which had three rooms. This occurred when a son and family came to live with his mother and more room was desired. This addition was also a clapboard clad frame addition. The date of 1886 is when the period of significance ends. In the c. 1930s when the Truax's still owned the property the house was covered with insul-brick which has basically covered and preserved the original materials. Due to outside pressure the present owner attempted to improve the appearance of the home by vinyl siding but stopped the application when the home was threatened with demolition. Certainly the vinyl and insul-brick are reversible materials acting as a sheath for the frame additions and clapboard clad logs.

The Johnston-Truax House retains the key materials from the Period of Significance which runs from 1785-1886. The original log core is still intact, and the frame additions from 1850 and 1886 create the evolution effect which brings it to its current status. The modern materials applied in the 1930s and the recent vinyl are reversible and can be argued as further showing the evolution of the building. The house is one of the few known remaining log constructed buildings still in Hancock County and represents a threatened resource.

(NPS Form 10-900)

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FOOTNOTES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

¹McAlester, Virginia and Lee. A FIELD GUIDE TO AMERICAN HOUSES.
New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. p. 82.

² Ibid, p. 84

³ Bomberger, Bruce D. NO. 26 PRESERVATION BRIEFS: THE
PRESERVATION AND REPAIR OF HISTORIC LOG BUILDINGS. U.S. Department
of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, pp 4-5.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Plunkett, Ruth, "Weirton Heights House Built In 1785 Still In Use",
WEIRTON DAILY TIMES, Friday December 31, 1976.

Truax, Louis C. "My Life Story As I Have Seen Weirton Grow", parts taken
from the HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY, by Jack Welch.

Welch, Jack, HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY: VIRGINIA AND WEST VIRGINIA.
Wheeling, WV: The Wheeling News Printing & Litho Co, 1963.

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Deed Book 189/p 27, Hancock County Courthouse, New Cumberland, West
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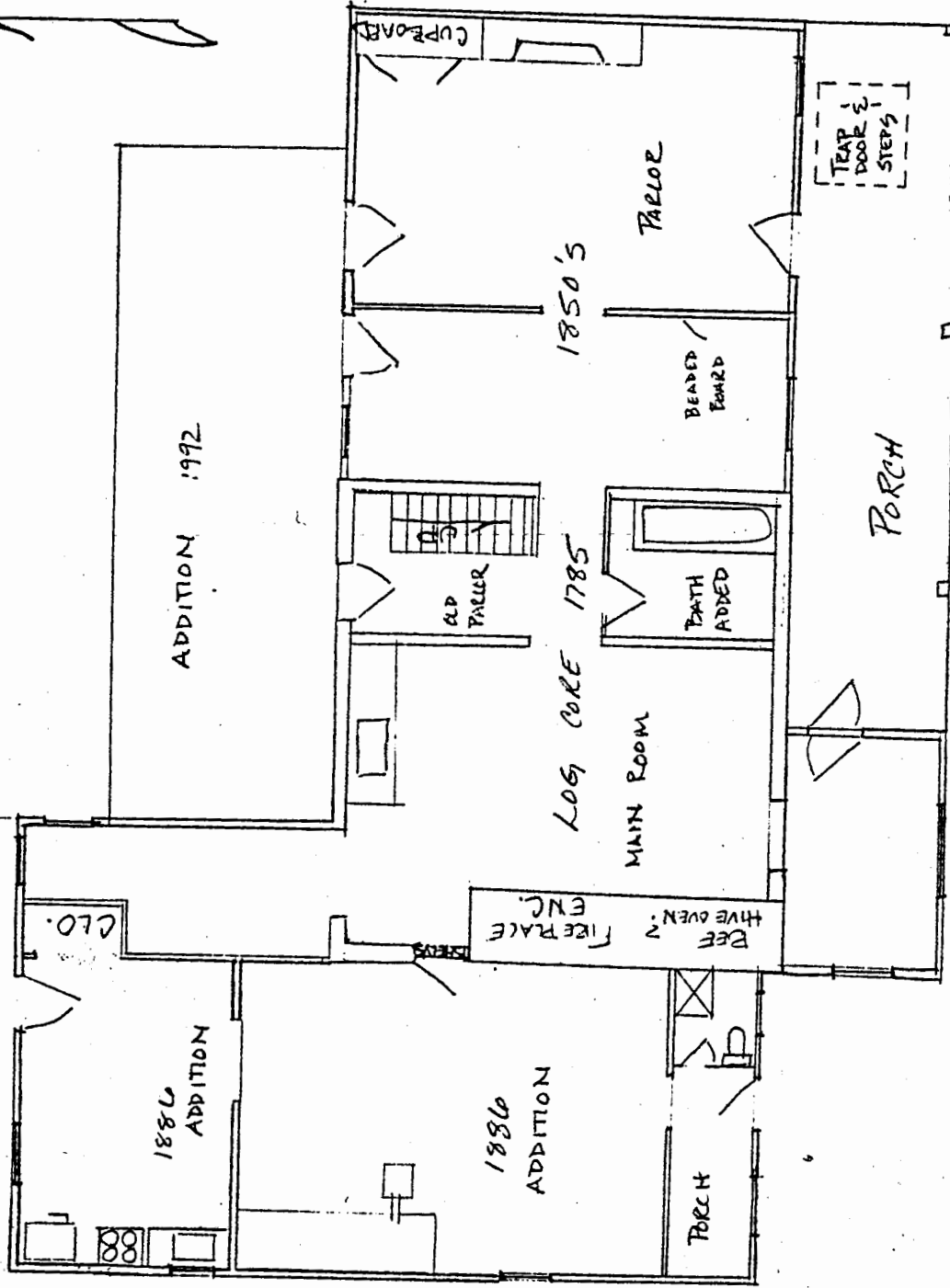
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point at the Northeast corner of the lands of George Truax; thence by the northerly line South $60^{\circ} 45'$ West for a distance of 168.98 feet to a point on the northerly line and the marker of the Northeast corner of Vanessa Butler's property; thence South $14^{\circ} 47'$ East for a distance of 291.14 feet to a point on the northerly line of the thirty (30) foot roadway; thence along the northerly line North $89^{\circ} 55'$ West for a distance of 167.3' to a point; thence North $8^{\circ} 45'$ West for a distance of 213.38 feet to a point; thence North $60^{\circ} 45'$ East for a distance of 143.8 feet to the starting point. The tract of land so described contains 0.87 acres, more or less.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the residence.

N



JOHNSON-TRUAX HOUSE

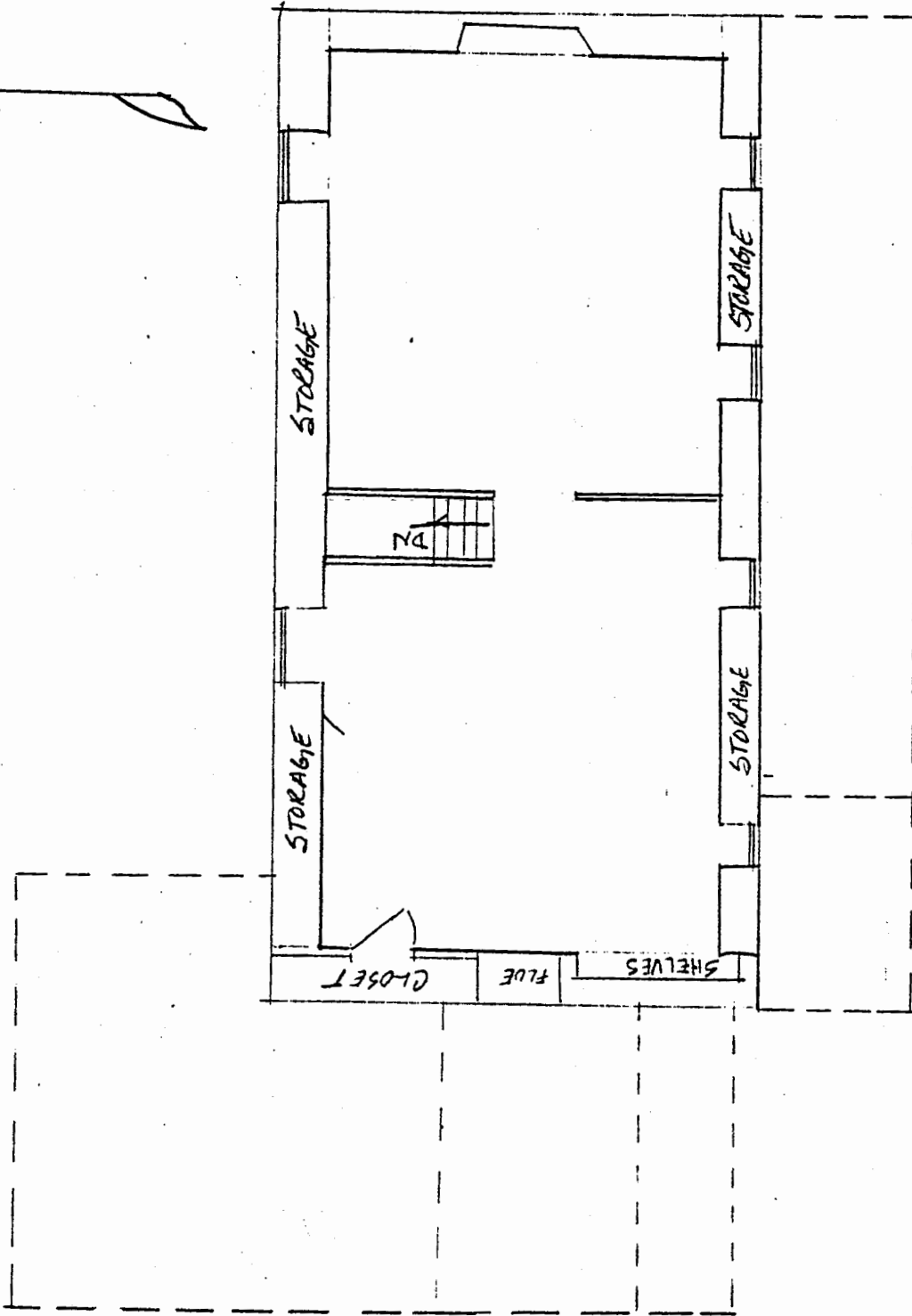
1ST FLOOR PLAN

209 SENECA ST, WEIRTON, WV
HANCOCK, CO.

3/1993

DWG NOT TO SCALE

N



JOHNSON - TRUAX
HOUSE
2ND FLOOR PLAN

209 SENECA ST. WEIRTON, WV
HANCOCK CO.

NOT TO SCALE

CS

TRUAX Addition

SKETCH/PHOTO MAP

Hancock County Tax Assessor Map

JOHNSTON - TRUAX HOUSE
209 Seneca Street
Weirton, West Virginia



5.6 Acs.

