

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name: Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn

other names/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: Box 358, State Rt. 2

not for publication N/A

city or town: Newell

vicinity X

state West Virginia code WV

county Hancock

code: 029

zip code 26032

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Susan M. Pierce 10/29/02
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn, Hancock County, West Virginia

4. 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

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Non-contributing

 1 0 buildings

 0 0 sites

 0 0 structures

 0 0 objects

 1 0 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

N/A

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn, Hancock County, West Virginia

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Agriculture Sub: Processing, Storage

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Work In Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat. Other: Apple Barn

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Limestone

roof: asphalt shingle

walls: brick

other: wood

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

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.

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn, Hancock County, West Virginia

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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Architecture

Agriculture

Commerce

Period of Significance

1897-1930

Significant Dates

1897

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hellings, Nathan

Narrative Statement of Significance

(See Continuation Sheets)

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn, Hancock County, West Virginia

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

(See continuation sheets)

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

Name of repository: Hancock County Public Library, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries, National Register of Historic Places

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References

Wellsville Quadrangle

17 528523E 4491639N

Verbal Boundary Description

(See Continuation Sheet)

Boundary Justification

(See Continuation Sheet)

)

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn, Hancock County, West Virginia

1. Form Prepared By

name/title: Barbara E. Rasmussen, Ph.D.

organization: Historic Preservation and Research date: July 1, 2002

street & number: 224 Wilson Avenue

telephone: 304 292 7652

city or town: Morgantown state: WV zip code: 26501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs:

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name: Mountaineer Gaming Group, Inc.

street & number: State Rt. 2, Box 358 telephone: (304) 387-8335

city or town: Chester state: WV zip code: 26302

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7, Page 1

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

Nathan Hellings' Apple Barn, description

Nathan Hellings' apple barn is located near the southern edge of a small beach along the Ohio River, on the property of The Mountaineer Racetrack and Gaming Resort, State Rt. 2 in Newell, West Virginia. The site has been traditionally known as Baker's Bottom, named for the early pioneer who settled there in 1773. It is midway between Pittsburgh and Wheeling, traveling by water. Hancock County is the northernmost county in West Virginia, and Newell is near the tip of that county. In 1892, the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis Railway was constructed along the Ohio River. In 1897, when the barn was constructed, a siding connecting the barn to the railroad was added.

The barn measures 97 feet, two inches by 45 feet 10 inches and stands approximately 41 feet tall. The walls are 18 inches thick, constructed of two rows of yellow brick with a very small insulating air gap incorporated between them. According to the intent of the designer, there were three floors: the upper was an ice chamber and the others were storage rooms. At the time of its construction, it was "one of the largest fruit houses in the nation."¹ The barn stored all manner of perishable items, but was predominately used to hold and process the Willow Twig apple grown in Hancock County. The building was designed to help regulate the atmosphere inside. It has tightly fitted windows and doors, substantial insulating walls, and roof ventilation. It re-interprets an earlier technology that was designed to extend the life of stored fruit by regulating temperature and oxygen, discussed below.

Exterior

The original single gable slate roof was replaced with asphalt shingle in 1996. Box gutters were roofed over and aluminum gutters and down spouts were added then, also. Ornate wooden brackets support the roof overhang. A surviving photo from 1901 shows five cupolas across the ridge line, but those have been replaced by modern attic vents.²

The building faces east to west, perpendicular to the Ohio River. Land access to the barn is via the east elevation, where there is a sloping dirt road that allows entry to the second floor, and descends to allow access to the bottom level. On this elevation, there are three bays with a decorative diamond pane gable light. A double door provides entry from the road. Brick corbeling accentuates the architrave. Each bay rests on a stone lintel and is

¹J.H. Newton, G. G. Nichols, and A. G. Sprankle, *History of the Panhandle: Historical Collections of the Counties of Ohio, Brooke, Marshall, and Hancock, West Virginia, with Illustrations*, (Wheeling: J.A. Caldwell, 1879), 447, 438.

²L.C. Corbett, *Apple Districts of West Virginia*. Bulletin 75, West Virginia University Agricultural Extension Station, Morgantown, WV 1901.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7, Page 2

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

trimmed by a rough brick voussoir.

Window sashes are double hung, 2/2, originally protected by arched paneled shutters attached with massive pintle strap hinges. The shutters are damaged, but their teal blue color is still evident. Windows are boarded over from the inside to weatherproof the building. Some brickwork has been damaged, however the building is sound and reasonably well weatherproofed.

Each of the building's elevations are recessed in three panels with the effect being brick pilasters with stepped brick corbeling across the top. The principal facade faces west, to the river and the rail siding. The corbeled brick motif is echoed there except that the lower level is on grade, with three bays, allowing for a center double door entry, flanked by windows, also shuttered in the same motif as the east elevation. The third story on this elevation is more decorative, with a stylized central Palladian window. The north elevation contains three bays and eight recessed wall panels, accented by corbeled brick at the top and brick pilasters accenting the panels. There is no entry from this elevation. The south elevation has four bays consisting of two windows and two cargo doors with steep concrete ramps into the barn's ground level. This elevation was the working entrance for the for the barn. The foundation is cut limestone. Two bays have concrete ramps leading inside, and there was space to the south of the beach for wagons pulled by draft animals to queue up for unloading their barrels of apples.

Interior Description

The barn's main floor has three loft entries along each long wall of the structure, and a loft entry in the center. The ceiling of this chamber is unsupported from below, resulting in a huge room unencumbered by pillars. The floor of this level is probably tongue and groove yellow pine, a wood that is durable enough for commercial use but less expensive than oak, cherry or walnut hardwoods. Modified queen post truss roof construction and a double ridge beam allow for the suspension of the ceiling by the device of long metal rods, each more than twelve feet long, spaced about six feet apart in parallel rows the length of the barn. This unusual construction technique was used in high style construction during the 1840s in England, and in the construction of indoor riding rings.³ Some roof trussing has square head nails that probably came from the La Belle nail works in Wheeling.⁴

Typically, ice would have been stored in the loft to keep the barn cool. There is little evidence that much ice was stored in the loft of this barn because there are no water stains on the walls. The construction probably would

³James Newlands, *The Carpenter and Joiner's Assistant*, Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1869.

⁴Interview: Larry Sypolt, Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology, April 25, 2001, Morgantown, WV.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7, Page 3

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

not have held the weight of a full supply of ice.⁵ There is no access to the third story other than via ladder through one of the loft entries.

The ground level is broken in to smaller rooms, with horizontal tongue and grooved wooden plank walls. The board walls are painted in bright white and teal blue. The floor joists visible from this level are 10 inches on center. The joists are supported by American steel I beams with wide flanged bottoms, manufactured at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Mill in Pittsburgh. The flooring on the ground level is brick. There are narrow tracks in the bottom level of the barn that were used to guide small cars from room to room. According to Mrs. Alice Mitchell, a descendant of the Nessly family, there were tracks in the bottom level of the barn to allow for small cars to be pushed into the barn She remembers playing there as a child, in the 1940s.⁶

⁵Interview: Emory Kemp, Ph.D., director of the Institute for the History of Industrial Archaeology, at West Virginia University, April 30, 2001, Morgantown, WV. Professor Kemp is a noted authority on bridge truss construction.

⁶Interview. Alice Mitchell, May 25, 2001, New Cumberland, West Virginia.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 1

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

Historical Significance, Section 8

Nathan Hellings' Apple Barn is historically significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the agricultural history of Hancock County and the region's commercial growth. Baker's Bottom was associated with apple culture and agriculture from its initial settlement in 1773 until brick making and petroleum drilling gradually captured the available land and labor supply by the first half of the twentieth century.

The barn is also historically significant under National Register Criterion C for its architecture, which represents a commercial design intended to utilize air currents, riverside location, and ice to further the storage life of fresh fruit, particularly apples. It was an early step in the technological growth that led to modern refrigeration chambers with carefully regulated atmospheres and temperatures.

As early as 1819, French researchers were investigating the impact of temperature and oxygen supply on the keeping qualities of apples. The theory, investigated then by Jacques Etienne Berard, held that fruits deprived of oxygen, kept at low temperatures would not ripen so quickly, yet the information was not put into commercial use for nearly one hundred years.⁷ By keeping the storage facility cold, and allowing the natural carbon dioxide emitted by the fruit to lower the oxygen content, Berard had hit upon the theory that ultimately would be implemented in the early twentieth century.

In 1865, Benjamin Nyce of Cleveland, Ohio, constructed a reasonably air-tight barn, and cooled it with ice – much the same as with Hellings' later design. Nyce filtered the atmosphere in his barn with a special filtering paste of his own invention. He patented his design, but would not allow others to use it, so there is no record of any expanding use of his system. This technology was the latest available information on aiding the keeping quality of fruit. Hellings' may have tried to combine long-keeping apple strains with his own patented barn system, relying on cold storage, if not atmospheric control. His apple barn was constructed to be extremely tight, with tongue and grooved floors, basement interior walls, and ceilings, and double exterior walls. Hellings' barn was used as much for processing as for storing, though this early attempt at atmospheric control was part of the ongoing efforts to prolong the keeping qualities of fresh produce.

Early Agricultural Endeavors

All of the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia was originally included in Ohio County, and at one time, agriculture dominated the economy. Owing to population growth, Brooke County was formed from Ohio County in 1797, signifying enough settlement to require a courthouse with the traditional day's ride. Northern Brooke County was isolated, and served by only rudimentary roads. Farmers there were dependent upon the Ohio River

⁷August 19, 2002. [Http://www.goodfruit.com/link/March15_96/feature9.html](http://www.goodfruit.com/link/March15_96/feature9.html).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 2

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

for travel and communication. Water transportation remained easier than overland travel and the Ohio River was a busy public highway that brought many westward bound travelers past the farms on the Virginia shores. The landing on Baker's Bottom on Nessly's farm was a popular landing site and resting place long before the formation of Hancock County. Locals often subsidized their incomes by rescuing travelers along the river.⁸

After the American Revolution it was part of a larger conveyance to Revolutionary War veteran Jacob Nessly who permanently settled on the site. Nessly came to the region in 1785, with a Virginia land patent for his military service, and rapidly expanded his holdings and his influence in the Northern Panhandle. Until the advent of modern roads and trains, this beach would have been important for his farming business. From here, he shipped goods to market by water. He amassed thousands more acres of land and became a prominent distiller, farmer, and citizen. His heirs entered the orchard business and constructed the massive apple barn for storage, processing, and shipping their harvest.⁹

The newly settled territory was populated by those who understood the importance of apples to their survival. The fruit provided drink, vitamins, alcohol, and food. Healthful cider became a mainstay in the frontier diet because in many cases it was safer than water to drink. Because apples were so important, farmers early on began to devise ways to preserve their harvest. They processed many apples into cider. Some were dried. Other apples were stored in various ways to make the crop last through the winter. The fruit became part of the culture and folklore of the regions where they were produced.¹⁰ Apples were stored in a variety of ways. The floors of tobacco barns were heaped with apples which were then covered over with leaves. Unheated rooms or attics that hovered just above freezing, dug pits covered with hay or straw, and earthen banks of apples stored with sweet potato vines were among the earliest means of keeping the produce through winter. This particular technique, popular in southern regions, preserved the potato vines as well. Eventually these methods gave way to the root cellar, an earthen mound with an entry. Dirt floored root cellars kept the temperature constant at about 50-55 degrees. More common in the mountainous regions than in the Piedmont or Tidewater regions, cellars could hold produce in barrels, boxes, bins, or in piles on the floor. Root cellars were popular well into the twentieth century. Eleanor Roosevelt specified that both fruit trees and root cellars be provided for those who resettled in her rural homestead communities that were constructed in the Great Depression.

⁸Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis and the Opening of the American West*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 110.

⁹J.H. Newton, G. G. Nichols, and A.G. Sprankle, *History of the Panhandle; Historical Collections of the Counties of Ohio, Brooke, Marshall, and Hancock, West Virginia, with Illustrations*, (Wheeling: J.A. Caldwell, 1879), 447, 438.

¹⁰A fuller discussion of the important role of the apple in early agriculture can be found in Creighton Lee Calhoun, Jr., *Old Southern Apples*, (Blacksburg, VA: The McDonald and Woodward Publishing Co.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8, Page 3

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

A substantial expertise arose in the business of harvesting and storing apples. They were picked when ripe, but not too ripe, in the late, but not too late, fall. Farmers paid attention to the advice of their almanacs, and many of them would only harvest their crop at a waning moon. Careful handling was essential, because bruised fruit would not keep. To capture the bounty of less than perfect apples, farmers relied upon cider pressing and distilling. Frontier women would gather around great pans of apples and prepare them for drying. They were peeled, cored, and sliced horizontally before they were set to dry. Perfectly dried apples were a good source of cash for southern families in the years after the Civil War.

In many suitable places, apple production became a big business. The rise of the commercial apple industry in Hancock County triggered a short but impressive building spurt for the area. Acting on the long held notions of cool dry storage facilities, six large storage and processing barns were built to accommodate the orchardists. In about 1878, Nathan Hellings, a partner in the local firm of Mahan, Hellings, and Brother, patented a barn construction technique that was executed four times in Hancock County. The buildings were huge. Three of them were constructed of stone, and a fourth, located on Baker's Bottom was constructed of yellow brick. We are not aware of Hellings barns in other locales, although he had business interests in Philadelphia, also. His partner, J.L. Mahan, was an heir of Christian Brenneman, who was the son-in-law of Jacob Nessly.

This barn is the surviving example of four barns constructed according to Hellings' patent. The other three were executed in stone and have been demolished. There at least one stone barn extant in Hancock County, but it has not been attributed to any builder. The Cowl Farm stone barn probably predates Hellings' work, and is smaller. It also was an apple processing facility. Floors and walls of the Cowl Barn (about three miles south of the Mountaineer property), indicate that it is probably older than the Hellings barn. They are random width rough sawn timbers, while the Hellings barn flooring is milled.

Wool "Growing" and Apple Trees

By 1845, the northern tip of Brooke County was demoralized by the condition of land transportation to the county seat at Wellburg (A National Register Historic District) and thus petitioned to form a third county, Hancock, with the town of New Cumberland as county seat. (The town of New Manchester did not acquiesce lightly.) It was a rural county, tiny by almost all standards, comprising only 86 square miles, and containing only three small towns: New Manchester, New Cumberland, and Chester. Newell and Congo are unincorporated communities.

Wool growing and diversified crops were the backbone of the county's agricultural enterprises. Both apple trees and sheep could flourish on the hilly terrain, while the terrace was reserved for small grain crops. Soon, apple orchards were among the major agricultural pursuits, ultimately becoming the dominant crop. A deeply respected local folklore tradition gives credit for the apple industry to John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed). Horticulture tells us that apples do not come true from seed, so the wandering plantsman had to have had some help along the way. However, from the days of Jacob Nessly, apples flourished in the county. All Hancock farmers were in some way engaged in the production of apples and apple products. Early on, cider was the most important. In addition, Nessly

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 4

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

erected a distillery and produced brandy. His descendants continued the enterprises he had mastered.

From the late 1870s, a few very large, commercial orchards were ascending. They were planted on the sloping hillsides above the river. The largest enterprise was the Mahan, Hellings, and Brother Fruit Company that operated on J.L. Mahan's property. It was this enterprise that constructed the brick apple barn on Baker's Bottom. Mahan and Hellings became prominent in the milling of lumber and flour, cooperage, and fruit production. Mahan's orchard alone consisted of 575 acres of land and contained 10,000 trees.¹¹ The Hancock County orchard business was dominated by about twenty large producers, including Mahan and Hellings.

Large brick homes, a few of which still stand along West Virginia State Route 2, evidence a once durable agricultural prosperity. The architecture varies, but reflects a number of motifs from high style residential construction of this era. Many homes were built before the Civil War. They have arched, heavily decorated window bays, Italianate roof brackets, steep gable roofs, and in some cases extraordinarily ornate parapets, entablature, bay windows, porches, widows' walks, and elaborate brick work. Because these large homes looked to the Ohio River, there was little need for road construction. Each of these large farms had private river access to ship out production. Before the construction of Route 2, the farms of the area ranged beside each other as rectangles of varying width, with houses and orchards on high ground, and fields along the river.¹² The highway's precursor was built circa 1910, and, according to historic photos, was a single lane dirt road.¹³

By the late nineteenth century, apples were big business in Hancock County, and processing barns were constructed as close to the water as possible, taking advantage of both water transportation and the new Pittsburgh, Cleveland Chicago and St. Louis Railroad. The air currents at river's edge also contributed to keeping the produce cool. Processing places such as Hellings' barn were sources of employment for Hancock County residents. Men served as apple pickers and the women took jobs as peelers and sorters.

According to L.C. Corbett, director of the West Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station in 1901, there were few people outside of the orchard regions of the state who fully appreciated the "intensity or magnitude" of the apple industry. The state's two panhandles were dominated by orchards, and for the Northern Panhandle, "Hancock

¹¹Newton, *History of the Panhandle*, 447.

¹²See records contained in Hancock County Deed Book K, when in return for easement to construct a rail line along the river, the farmers required that the PCCL Railroad provide unrestricted road access to the river front. Farmers usually ceded between thirty and sixty feet to the PCCL.

¹³These photographs are on file at the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office and at the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 5

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

County leads all others, both in the number and size of its orchards, as well as in the aggregate output.”¹⁴ Hancock County orchards ranged in size between “a few hundred trees” to the unusual number of 18,000 under single management. Many orchards consisted of 4,000 trees, and at least a few contained almost 9,000, Corbett wrote.

The 1896 apple crop for Hancock County was an “enormous 100,000 barrels of apples” or about 300,000 bushels. The crop was produced on a total land area of just 2,000 acres, yielding just less than \$250,000 which was shared by about twenty entrepreneurs in the county. One producer in New Cumberland, Corbett wrote, produced 70,000 barrels alone. The WVU professor cited the skill of the producers and the climatic advantages of the Ohio shores as part of the reason the crops were so successful. “The soils, climate and skill of the growers all seem to be the best possible for the development of a commercial apple industry. So far, the orchards in Hancock County have been remarkably free from both insect pests and fungus diseases. Corbett often compared the apple businesses of the state’s two Panhandles, suggesting that each region could learn something from the other.”¹⁵ Corbett noted that in 1899 the Bentley Sweet apple had been attacked by bitter rot, but that the infestation had not spread to other varieties. Researchers were tasked with developing a spraying program for the region, but “should no means of checking the disease be found, one of the most complete fruit developments in Eastern United States is doomed to more or less complete annihilation.”¹⁶ As it turned out, hardier strains of storing apples were as detrimental to Hancock’s orchards as bitter rot.

Corbett noted the six large storage warehouses in Hancock County. “The smallest of these houses has a capacity of 2,500 barrels, while the largest holds 35,000. Here, the fruit is stored from harvest until a suitable market offers, when the fruits are assorted, re-packed and sent to the South or East, according to the demand.”¹⁷ The large apple barns and their complex construction may have been an early attempt to lengthen the time that apples would keep. The locations of the barns – low on the river in at least two cases – took advantage of the natural breezes along the water, which grew cooler and cooler as the season progressed to winter. In combination with ice, the temperatures of the barn could be kept very low for extended periods of time. The surviving apple barn on the Cowl farm is not adjacent to the Ohio River, but it is sheltered deeply by evergreen trees, and sits close to an estuary. Cowl’s barn has an insulated and locking refrigeration door, added sometime after the barn was constructed.

Corbett pointed to the prevalence of the Cow Pea in the orchards to induce vigor and thrift to the trees. He also noted that (nitrogen-fixing, and bee-attracting) clover was increasingly being grown in the orchards,

¹⁴ L.C. Corbett, *Apple Districts of West Virginia*, Bulletin 75, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, April 1901, 83.

¹⁵ Corbett, *Apple Districts of West Virginia*, 83.

¹⁶ Corbett, *Apple Districts of West Virginia*, 83-4.

¹⁷ Corbett, *Apple Districts of West Virginia*, 84.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 6

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

overcoming an earlier difficulty in establishing that cover crop. Geography was an ally, as well. In 1898, a late spring frost nearly wiped out the state's entire crop, but the Hancock County orchards were not hurt. Updrafts from the valley kept the hillside orchards just warm enough to survive the cold snap.

The "Willow" apple earned special notice. Selections of this strain were sent to Europe by the West Virginia Horticultural Society in the early twentieth century. The apple was honored at a Paris Exhibition for its superior merit. Overall, the state's entire exhibit received second prize at the event. Hancock County producers grew the Willow Twig apple because of its long storing capacity. The speckled yellow fruit was not especially attractive for eating out of hand, but it was a reliable keeper. The Willow Twig strain is almost unknown in the twenty-first century. The winning apple was grown by Charles Brown's Sons, at Arroyo. Brown's barn was located south of the surviving brick barn, and was also a Hellings design.

Given the overall merits of West Virginia's apple production, Corbett wondered at the relatively small amount of land growers devoted to the crop. He reasoned that poor transportation discouraged the rise of orchards, and noted that recent improvements in that regard should encourage more production. Grazing of livestock in orchards, he wrote, would be a boon to farmers. Yet, most cattlemen had moved their herds to flat lands, leaving the orchard regions behind. He suggested sheep as an alternative, and for a while, the combination flourished in Hancock County. Observing that a crop of corn would come in with little effort on the part of the producer, Corbett warned his readers that horticulture was a higher calling. Raising fruit required a precise understanding of soil, exposure, suitable strains, and astute business sense. The existence of too many apple varieties was a problem, he said. "In fruit growing the skill and taste displayed by the shipper counts for more in making a market for his product than in any other branch of agriculture."¹⁸

However, not even the best among the Hancock orchardists could survive in the face of "oil fever" when it hit the farmlands of Hancock County. Oil wells arose relentlessly. When the brick yards and oil fields lured the pickers away, and improved varieties of apples were developed, the Hancock apple production ultimately slowed. This transformation of the local economy in Hancock County led to the decline of the apple industry there. By 1945, apple production along the Ohio River had dwindled to only 15 percent of the state's total. These orchards were located primarily in Hancock and Mason counties.¹⁹ The Eastern Panhandle orchards were not threatened by industrial development. In the Northern Panhandle, oil wells and brick making supplanted apple trees, transforming sections of Hancock County from a quiet farming region to a bustling industrial locale. By the time pomological

¹⁸Corbett, *Apple Regions of West Virginia*, 86.

¹⁹M.A. Abrahamson, *Income from Apples in the Eastern Panhandle*, Bulletin 328, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, January, 1947, 8; Homer C. Evans, *Competition and Apple Prices (With Emphasis on Processors in the Appalachian Area)* Bulletin 406, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, June 1957, passim.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Section 8, Page 7

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

research was investigating the use of inert gases to lower the oxygen levels in cooled storage facilities, the apple industry in Hancock County was in decline, but the focus on developing ways of prolonging the market season for fresh fruit had developed into a sturdy branch of the horticultural sciences.²⁰

Bricks, Oil, and Agricultural Decline

The purely agricultural tone of the panhandle slowly began to change with the discovery of clay banks in the northern portion of present Hancock County early in the nineteenth century, when John Gamble tapped the first clay vein along the Ohio River.²¹ Brick works opened rapidly all along the Ohio River in what is Now Hancock County. By 1832, there were at least four such establishments. At King's Creek the works built by Philip Beall also served as a tavern and ferry house. By the time of his death in 1844, Beall was shipping 1.5 million bricks a year to Louisiana.²² "Before the firebrick manufacturing," one historian wrote, "there were not fifty individuals living between King's Creek and the head of Black's Island." Throughout the 1830s, the brick industry grew rapidly, with river transportation of the bricks a major component of the industry's success. At that time, keel boats could carry a load of 20,000 bricks on a two-day voyage to Wheeling or Pittsburgh. Sometimes, shallow water made it necessary to pole the boats downstream or to tow them. Upstream travel was even more arduous in low water times. Boats generally departed from Freeman's Landing, which grew into a business center for farmers and brick makers. Some accounts say there were as many as 5,000 or 6,000 loads of brick descending to Wheeling on any given day. Brick making paid better wages than apple picking, so after the Civil War, the growing industry continued to place stress upon the work force of the county. Fewer and fewer pickers were available.

Labor was available at the rate of \$10 per month with board, or \$16 per month without. Flour cost \$2.50 a barrel. Pork cost two or three cents per pound. Beef was slightly more, at four to six cents per pound.²³ It was profitable for a worker to make bricks, and it was profitable for a community resident to take in a boarder, or two. By the end of the American Civil War, there were fourteen brick yards within a five-mile radius of New Cumberland, not including the ironstone or terra cotta factories. Their output was 6,800,000 bricks per year. Brick was a cheap building material that was in great demand. The Hancock County clay banks produced a yellow brick, evident in much of the construction along the upper Ohio River's eastern shore. The oil industry would enhance production for a while. Although there are many coal and petroleum deposits in Hancock County, only the oil and gas have been developed to any great degree, and that was for the firing of the brick furnaces.

²⁰August 19, 2002. http://www.goodfruit.com/link/March15_96/feature9.html.

²¹Brandt and Fuller, *History of the Upper Ohio Valley*. Madison: Brandt and Fuller, 1890,

²²J.H. Newton *History of the Panhandle*, 525.

²³Newton, *History of the Panhandle*, 525.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8, Page 8

Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn,

Hancock County, West Virginia

These rising industrial activities brought difficulty to the agricultural interests. Tariff policies chiseled away at the profitability of the wool farmers, with the result that farmers suffered from changing land uses. West Virginia's political leadership in the years 1870-1920 was far more sympathetic to the needs of extractive industry than to agricultural pursuits. Areas that were devoid of extractive resources received little notice and less help from state government. Inevitably, oil was discovered in Hancock's orchards. The Turkey Foot Oil Pool assured that the orchards were destined for decline. The 220,000 barrels of oil produced from some 100 wells were used to fire area brick makers' furnaces. At least six of those early wells were located on the Mountaineer Racetrack property, and were developed in 1906 to fuel the brick works.²⁴

The oil boom was followed by the oil bust. When the oil wells played out, the brickyards faded. The county's economic alternatives were limited. By the time of the Great Depression, the apple trees were gone, and Hancock County residents had little to fall back on. Most of the huge stone apple barns were torn down. One of Hellings' barns survived, mostly because the gigantic structure was built on a flood plain, that was not suitable for other construction. High water threatened permanent construction on Baker's landing, but the barn has withstood at least four floods, none of which caused much damage. The barn is a reminder of a proud horticultural heritage in Hancock County, too beautiful to destroy. It is a sad irony that it was constructed of the very material that led to the demise of the orchards it served.

In 1946, A.J. Boyle, president of the Charles Town Jockey Club, invested in the flat terrace along the Ohio River, and built the former Waterford Downs Racetrack in the years after World War II. Waterford Downs always struggled. Acquired by Mountaineer Gaming Group in 1998, the enterprise began to turn around. It brought many new jobs, and with it, new economic hopes for the rust belt community. Expanding interest in heritage tourism and the area's history has led to the decision to preserve, restore, and adaptively reuse the surviving example of Nathan Hellings' apple barns.

²⁴Otis Rice, *West Virginia*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 195; Ted Arneault, interview June 25, 2001; See also Eugene D. Thoenen, *History of Oil and Gas in West Virginia*, (Charleston: West Virginia Educational Foundation).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property **County/State**

Section number **9** **Page** **1**

Bibliography

Interviews

Arneault, Ted. Chief Executive Officer, Mountaineer Racetrack and Gaming Resort, Newell, West Virginia, June, 25, 2001.

Bywater, Mary. Wellsburg, West Virginia, May 25, 2001.

Kemp, Emory, Director, Institute for the Study of the History of Industrial Technology and Archaeology, Morgantown, West Virginia, April 30, 2001.

Maurer, Dale, General Manager, Mountaineer Racetrack and Gaming Resort, Newell, West Virginia, April - August, 2001.

Mitchell, Alice, New Cumberland, West Virginia, May 25, 2001.

Petit, Tamara. Director of Public Relations, Mountaineer Racetrack and Gaming Resort, Newell, West Virginia, April-August, 2001.

Sypolt, Larry, Institute for the Study of the History of Industrial Technology and Archaeology, Morgantown, West Virginia, April – July 2001.

Published Sources

Ambler, C.H., *West Virginia: The Mountain State*. New York: Prentice Hall. 1940.

Abrahamson, M.A. *Income from apples in the Eastern Panhandle*. Bulletin 328, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, January, 1947.

Ambrose, Stephen. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis and the Opening of the American West*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Bartram, Dick. *Good Fruit Grower: CA storage key to growth of state's apple industry*.
www.goodfruit.com/link/March_15_96/feature0.html

Brandt and Fuller. *History of the Upper Ohio Valley*. Madison: Brandt and Fuller, 1890.

Cashdollar, Roy. *A History of Chester: Gateway to the West*. Boyd Press. 1986.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property **County/State**

Section number **9** **Page** **2**

Corbett, L.C. *Apple Districts of West Virginia*. Bulletin 75, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1901.

Creighton, Lee Calhoun, Jr. *Old Southern Apples*. Blacksburg, VA: The McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company. 1995.

DeVoto, Bernard. Ed., *Journals of Lewis and Clark*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, rpt. 1997.

Evans, Homer. *Competition and Apple Price (With Emphasis on Processors in the Appalachian Area)*. Bulletin 406, West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station, Morgantown, West Virginia, June 1957.

Fisher, D.V. *History of Fruit Growing and Handling in United States of America and Canada: 1860-1972*. University Park, PA: The American Pomological Society. 1976.

Hukill, W.V. *Cold Storage for Apples and Pears*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1946.

Lee, Gregory Clark. "Economic analysis of controlled atmosphere apple storage in the Appalachian district," M.A. thesis, WVU, 1974.

Newlands, James. *The Carpenter's and Joiner's Assistant*. Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1869.

Newton, J.H., G.G. Nichols, and A.G. Sprankle. *History of the Panhandle; Historical Collections of the Counties of Ohio, Brooke, Marshall, and Hancock, West Virginia, with Illustrations*. Wheeling: J.A. Caldwell. 1879. Reprt. 1976.

Petit, Tamara. *Fifty Golden Years*. Newspaper Insert. May 9, 2001.

Rasmussen, Barbara. "Historic Resource Survey and National Register Nomination, Old Charles Town Historic District, Charles Town, West Virginia." Document. West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, Charleston, West Virginia. 1999.

Rice, Otis. *West Virginia*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 1984.

Thoenen, Eugene. *History of Oil and Gas in West Virginia*. Charleston: West Virginia Educational Foundation. 1964.

(NPS Form 10-900)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Name of Property County/State

Section number 9 Page 3

Walkup, O.O. *Complete Report of the Nessly Centennial at Brooklyn, W. Va., held Thursday, September 17, 1885, Together with Interesting Historical Gleanings in Connection with the Nessly Family.* Wellsville, Ohio: A.P. Howard, 1885.

Welch, Jack. *History of Hancock County: Virginia and West Virginia.* Wheeling: Wheeling News Printing & Litho. Co. 1963.

White, I.C. and G.P. Grimsley. *West Virginia Geological Survey, 1906 County Reports: Ohio, Brooke, and Hancock Counties.* Morgantown: np. 1906.

Williams, John A. *West Virginia: A History.* New York: W.W. Norton. 1984.

Public Records

Virginia Land Office Deed Book 48.

Hancock County Deed Book K.

Brooke County Deed Book 16.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property **County/State**

Section number **10** **Page** **1**

Verbal Boundary Description

Nathan Hellings' Apple Barn is located near the water's edge along the Ohio River, on property owned by the Mountaineer Gaming Group, Inc. The barn's footprint constitutes is boundary.

Boundary Justification

This boundary was selected to reflect the barn's isolation from other remnants of the area's apple industry and location within the boundaries of a non-related entertainment complex.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Hellings', Nathan, Apple Barn
Name of Property

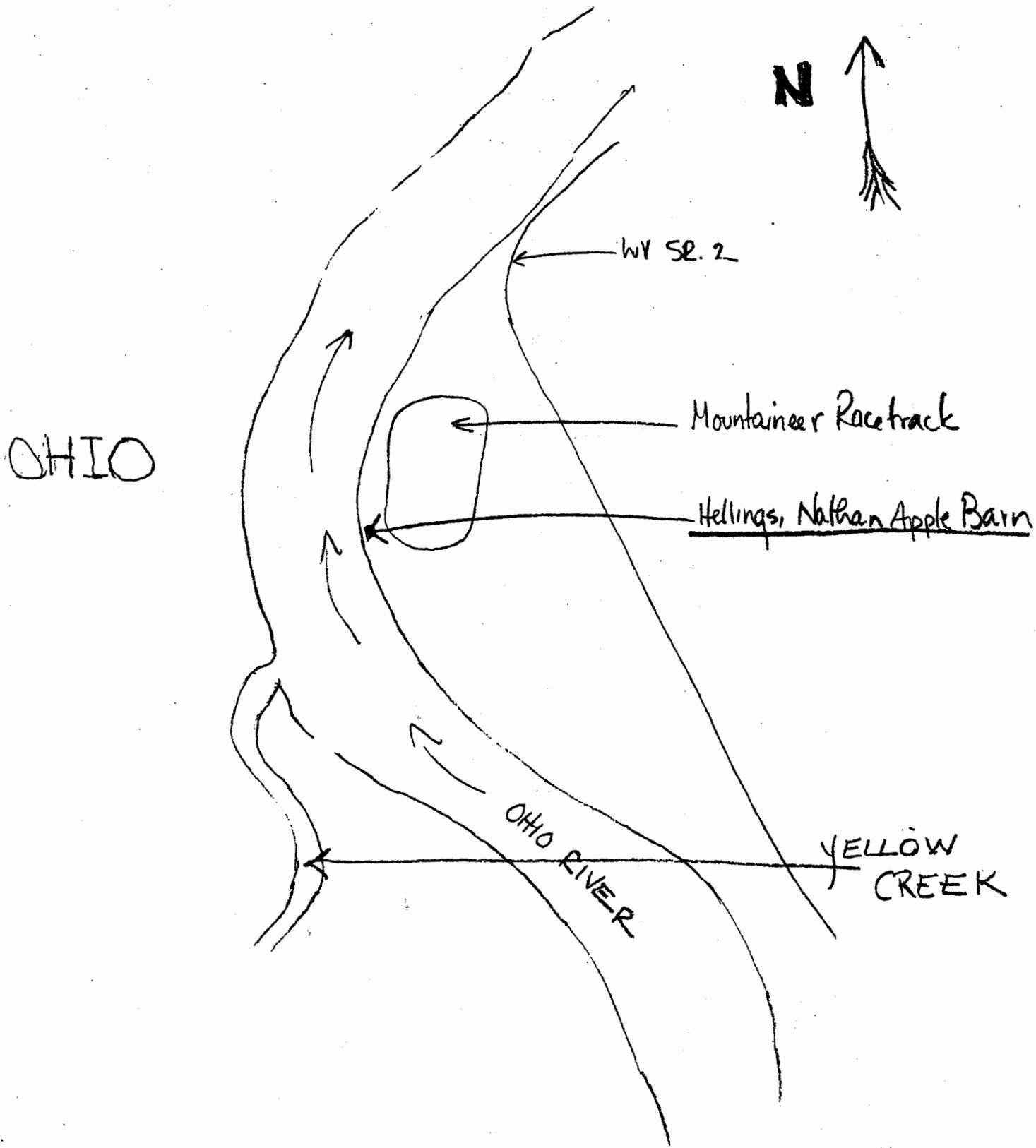
Hancock, West Virginia
County/State

Section number Photo Page 1

Name of Property: Nathan Hellings' Apple Barn
Address: Box 358, State Route 2
Town: Newell
County: Hancock

Photographer: Chuck Saus
Date: July 2000
Negatives: WV SHPO, Charleston, WV

- Photo 1 of 7: West elevation of the apple barn, camera facing east.
- Photo 2 of 7: South elevation of the apple barn, showing general environs, camera facing north.
- Photo 3 of 7: Window detail, south elevation, camera facing north.
- Photo 4 of 7: Double door detail, south elevation, camera facing north.
- Photo 5 of 7: West elevation gable-end detail, showing pseudo-Palladian window on third story, camera facing east.
- Photo 6 of 7: West elevation gable-end detail, showing third story window arrangement, camera facing east.
- Photo 7 of 7: West elevation detail, showing first story double door entry, camera facing east.
-



Sketch Map Baker's Bottom Hancock County, WV showing
Hellings, Nathan, Apple Barn

