

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Switzer, Nicholas, House

other names/site number Old Stone House; Switzerland

2. Location

street & number CR 5 and Waites Run

☐ not for publication

city or town Wardensville

☒ vicinity

state West Virginia

code WV

county Hardy

code 031

zip code 26851

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐  
does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

West Virginia Division of Culture and History

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ 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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Nicholas Switzer House  
Name of Property

Hardy County, WV  
County and State

## 5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		sites
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		structures
			objects
		1	Total
Name of related multiple property listing		Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register	
N/A		N/A	

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions	Current Functions
DOMESTIC==single dwelling	DOMESTIC==single dwelling

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification	Materials
Other: I-house	foundation Stone
	walls Stone
	roof Metal
	other Wood

Narrative Description  
See Continuation Sheets

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☐ **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

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B.** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **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.

### Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

### Areas of Significance

Architecture

### Period of Significance

1778

### Significant Dates

1778

### Significant Person

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Switzer, Nicholas (builder)

### Narrative Statement of Significance

See Continuation sheets

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

#### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Nicholas Switzer House  
Name of Property

Hardy County, WV  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.5 acres

UTM References: Wardensville Quad

1	17	709341	4328290			
	Zone	Easting	Northing			

### Verbal Boundary Description

See Continuation Sheets

### Boundary Justification

See Continuation Sheets

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	David W. and Billie G. Roberts (with Erin Riebe, National Register Coordinator, WV SHPO)				
organization	Property Owners	date	2008		
street & number	6629 Davis Ford Rd.	telephone	703-368-8402		
city or town	Manassas	state	VA	zip code	20111

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Property Owner

name	David W. and Billie G. Roberts				
street & number	6629 Davis Ford Rd.	telephone	703-368-8402		
city or town	Manassas	state	VA	zip code	20111

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### LOCATION and SETTING

The Nicholas Switzer House is surrounded by the George Washington National Forest with views of the Great North Mountain and Paddy Mountain and is nestled in the Capon Valley of West Virginia's Potomac Highlands. It is situated in Hardy County on the old East and West Road (Route 5), 1 ½ miles east of the Town of Wardensville, West Virginia. The house sits on 1.5 acres of mature trees, perennial gardens, open pasture and 25' stone outcropping walls along Waites Run Stream. The stream runs into the Cacapon River. The boundary includes the Nicholas Switzer House and the foundation of a spring house.<sup>1</sup>

### DESCRIPTION

#### *Exterior*

The Switzer House is a two-story I-house with a lower-level and attic constructed of uncoursed fieldstone in 1778. Larger cornerstones serve as functional quoins on the corners. The house faces west with its north elevation along the road. It was built into the slope of a hill, giving the appearance of three stories on the rear (east) and side (north) elevations. It is supported by a stone foundation and has a side-gable, standing seam metal roof with simple box cornice and returns. An interior stone chimney extends through the roofline at the north end of the gable.

The main elevation of the house is symmetrical with a centered door, lacking ornamentation. To each side of the door is a six-over-six, double-hung sash window. Two similar windows are situated directly above on the second story. The north elevation, along the road, has no windows or openings with the exception of two small, rectangular vents in the attic level under the gable. The south elevation has one window on the main story.

A two-story porch stretches across the rear, or east, elevation. It was constructed c.1880. The first story of the porch, at the basement level, is enclosed. The north half of the basement level porch has clapboard siding on the lower half and a row of screened windows on the upper half. The porch is entered through a wood screened door on the north end. The southern end of the porch is fully enclosed with a row of four-over-four, double-hung sash windows, creating an expansion of an interior room. The second story of the porch (at the main level of the house) is open-aired and protected by a shed roof. The roof is supported by squared wood columns. A simple, open wood balustrade runs the length of the porch. Fenestration on the rear elevation mirrors that of the front with an additional door and window at the basement level.

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<sup>1</sup> A small screened gazebo has been constructed over the foundation of the spring house. It has not been included in the resource count in accordance with Rules for Counting Resources, pg. 17 of the National Register Bulletin.

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### *Interior*

The house contains over 2100 square feet on three floors plus a high ceiling attic of another 700 square feet. It is built of solid native stone, hand hewn oak beams, planed pine timbers and wide pine flooring. The house includes solid single ply interior walls on the second floor with many boards up to 21" wide. The walls on all floors are solid stone and two feet in thickness. Each floor includes carefully shaped and molded beaded edging on the exposed wood beams, joists and pegged window casings, hand blown glass in the windows full of bubbles, writings, dates and other imperfections. All floors retain the original usable working fireplaces. The wide floors are original with the exception of the first floor, which initially sported only dirt for a floor.

Entering the sitting room on the lower level, through the ground floor screened porch, there is an extremely wide wood panel entrance door. This floor originally had a dirt floor and it is believed the wide opening was used to allow cattle to enter and contribute heat to the upper level of the house. The winder staircase on the west wall to the main floor was added sometime after this level was transformed from livestock shelter to a sitting room. A fireplace is located on the north wall of the room. A large diameter beam runs the length of exposed ceiling beams above the fireplace. The opening, located on the south wall, between the sitting room and the kitchen was cut through solid stone which allowed access to the kitchen from inside of the house. A bathroom located at the north end of the kitchen contains three walls of natural exposed stone.

The first floor winder staircase leads into the second floor living room. This room contains a fireplace on the north wall, two stone walls and two solid single 21" wide ply interior walls and built in cabinetry. The east wall of the room leads to the second floor porch. The south side of the room leads to two bedrooms, each containing walls of natural exposed stone. A large diameter beam runs the length of exposed ceiling beams above the fireplace.

The second floor staircase leads to a small entry area with one bedroom to the left or north side on the floor which includes a fireplace on the north wall and another bedroom to the right or south of the floor. The south bedroom contains the entrance to a third bathroom. All of the rooms on this floor contain solid stone walls, exposed ceiling beams and a large diameter beam which runs the length of exposed ceiling beams above the fireplace.

An accessible staircase from the third floor bathroom and bedroom on the north side of the floor leads to a large attic with a high peaked ceiling consisting of wood pegged roof rafters, wide floor boards and an electric self-contained water source heating and cooling system fed by the property's spring.

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### STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE

The Switzer House is locally significant under *Criterion C: Architecture* as an excellent local example of late eighteenth century, stone residential architecture in rural Hardy area. It retains a high degree of each of the National Register's seven aspects of integrity and is an excellent example of a builder (the property owner) using local materials and his Swiss German construction knowledge to construct a smaller, simpler version of contemporary residential architecture. The period of significance is 1778, the date of construction.

### BRIEF HISTORY

The Switzer House, also called "Switzerland," was built by immigrant Nicholas Switzer.<sup>2</sup> The Switzer family is of German and Swiss origin and was founded in America by three brothers, John, Valentine and Nicholas. In the mid 1700s the three brothers settled in Hardy, then Hampshire, County.<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Switzer arrived in America onboard the Ship Snow Squirrel, Captained by John Been, Master, on October 21, 1761.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Switzer built the large stone house in 1778. He married Barbara Michael in 1782 and raised 21 children in Wardensville.

Local lore states that the Switzer House was built on the site of a log cabin and fort where George Washington once stayed when he was surveying the frontier in 1748 for Lord Fairfax.<sup>5</sup> The house was also photographed and documented on an undated postcard having been known as the "Old Stone Mansion, Wardensville, W.VA. Built 1778 on site of previous log stronghold where Washington stopped."<sup>6</sup> Other local history notes the house was possibly used by confederate and union troops where they camped and received meals prepared in the house. It is said the troops had to disarm and lay their weapons on separate ends of the house before they were fed.

The house is dated by a signature stone with the builder's initials N.S. and the date 1778 located in the chimney. A second set of initials and date, A.B., N.S., H.D. and H.C. 1796 is located on the second floor level and is also visible from the ground and balcony of the present porch.

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<sup>2</sup> Hardy County Tour and Crafts Association. *Homes and Historic Building Tour and Schedule of Events*, Heritage Weekend 2003 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Burkholder, Cornelia Switzer. *The Switzers of Virginia and West Virginia*. Harrisonburg, VA, 1930. Genealogical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, microfilm XLTB7-102 1320567, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hardy County Tour and Crafts Association, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Old Stone Mansion, Postcard, date unknown.

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### CRITERIAN C: ARCHITECTURE

In 1786 an act by the Virginia General Assembly organized Hardy County from Hampshire County, originally part of Frederick and Augusta Counties (Virginia). The area was rich with limestone ridges making stone a logical choice as a building material especially since loose fieldstone had to be cleared from the land before farmed. With dense woods, the earliest houses were log with the stone used for foundations and chimneys. The use of stone for construction was commonplace among the German, English, and Scots-Irish settlers in the area.<sup>7</sup> The houses constructed entirely of stone are reminders of those that were built by the “wealthier minority” or the “rural gentry.”<sup>8</sup>

Early Germanic houses were typically designed for efficiency, reflecting Old World tradition. The dwellings were multi-functional, combining a house, threshing area, and a stable under the same roof. Spring houses were sometimes incorporated into the building as were meat-smoking rooms at the attic level. Practicality was standard. Many houses and barns were built into a ground slope. Known as a bank house or bank barn, they provided cool storage rooms and direct entrance into both lowest and main levels.<sup>9</sup> Like the earlier German Houses, the Switzer House was built into a bank giving the appearance of a two-story house from the main elevation and a three-story house on the rear. A wide entrance at the lowest level on the rear allowed for the easy access of cattle.

In the early 1700s, the typical plan of Germanic houses was an asymmetrical two-to-four-room layout with a chimney towards the middle of the house, but usually off-center. Entrance was directly into a primary living room without entering into a hall. Like the chimney and the layout, fenestration was normally asymmetrical. By the mid to late eighteenth century, however, many Swiss and German farmers began incorporating the popular Georgian center-hall plan. The I-house model was favored. Room functions shifted and fenestration became symmetrical.<sup>10</sup> In an article regarding similar houses in nearby Page County, Virginia author Edward Chappell explains how there was acculturation among the Swiss German community, as reflected in the evolving architecture, but it was essentially not all-encompassing.<sup>11</sup> While they modified their Old World patterns they were not exact copies of the fashionable English houses.

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<sup>7</sup> Maral S. Kalbian, *Frederick County, Virginia: History through Architecture* (Winchester: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; and Rachel Carley, *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Carley. *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p 40; and *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, *Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, *Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 27 and 42.



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The Switzer House in Hardy County reflects the patterns described above. It was constructed by a farmer of Swiss German descent. From its construction, it appears that Nicholas Switzer followed the building patterns common to other Swiss Germans in the area while incorporating some of the English architectural characteristics favored by the time the house was constructed in 1778. He utilized local fieldstone to construct a house into the sloping topography and combined living spaces with and a barn under the same roof. Unlike the earliest Germanic houses in the area, however, the Switzer House is symmetrical, has a fireplace on the gable end, and its floor plan reflects that of a Pre-Classic I-House (three bays wide, two rooms wide, and end chimneys).

The house and the setting were described by the great-granddaughter of the builder Nicholas Switzer during a visit in the late 1880s and again in the early 1900s.

Uncle Westrall Frye took me to the large, three-story stone house, built by Immigrant Nicholas Switzer, and the owners showed me through it. In 1924 this house was still occupied. There was a solid oak beam in the ceiling of the second story, which ran from gable to gable. This house was built, (Swiss fashion) up against a hill; the front door of the second story opened on the highway which was then the main thoroughfare to Winchester, Virginia. The lower story was one large room from end to end of the house. There was a great fireplace at the right hand side as one entered and just beyond a winding staircase led to the second story. When I visited the house in the early 1880's some of the steps were so worn as to show light through in places. The hill on the front and the little rivulet of clear mountain water from the nearby spring, together with a little wooded hill opposite the rear of the house, to my imagination, gave a fitting setting for the home of one whose ancestors had been Swiss Mountaineers, as indicated by the name Switzer.<sup>12</sup>

### SUMMARY

The Switzer House is an excellent surviving example of an eighteenth century stone house reflecting the trends of the local Swiss German immigrants during their transition from the strictly Germanic-influenced architecture to that incorporating the fashionable Anglo-American characteristics. It is a rare surviving example from the immediate area with excellent integrity.

<sup>12</sup> Burkholder, 10.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Appalachian Corridor H – Elkins to Interstate 81, Book 2 Single Historic Buildings in West Virginia, WV DOT, March 1995.
- Burkholder, Cornelia Switzer. *The Switzers of Virginia and West Virginia*. Harrisonburg, VA, 1930. Genealogical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, microfilm XLTB7-102 1320567.
- Carley, Rachel. *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.
- Chappell, Edward A. *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach. *Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986.
- Harding, James E., Historian, WV Department of Culture and History, Historic Properties Inventory Form, June 1978.
- Hardy County Tour and Crafts Association. *Homes and Historic Building Tour and Schedule of Events*, Heritage Weekend 2003 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration
- Kalbian, Maral S. *Frederick County, Virginia: History through Architecture*. Winchester: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1999.
- Miller, Leonard. Interview by David W. and Billie G. Roberts, fall 2007.
- Old Stone Mansion, Postcard, date unknown.

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated boundaries of the Switzer House property are shown on Hardy County Tax Map 274 Parcel 0068.0017.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nomination encompasses 1.5 acres of land. The nomination boundaries of the Switzer House is drawn to include the location of the contributing historic resource and enough property to provide for integrity of setting and feeling.

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Photographer: Erin Riebe

Date: May 2008

Photo 1 of 5    Front (west) elevation  
View facing southeast

Photo 2 of 5    Rear (east) and side (north) elevations  
View facing southwest

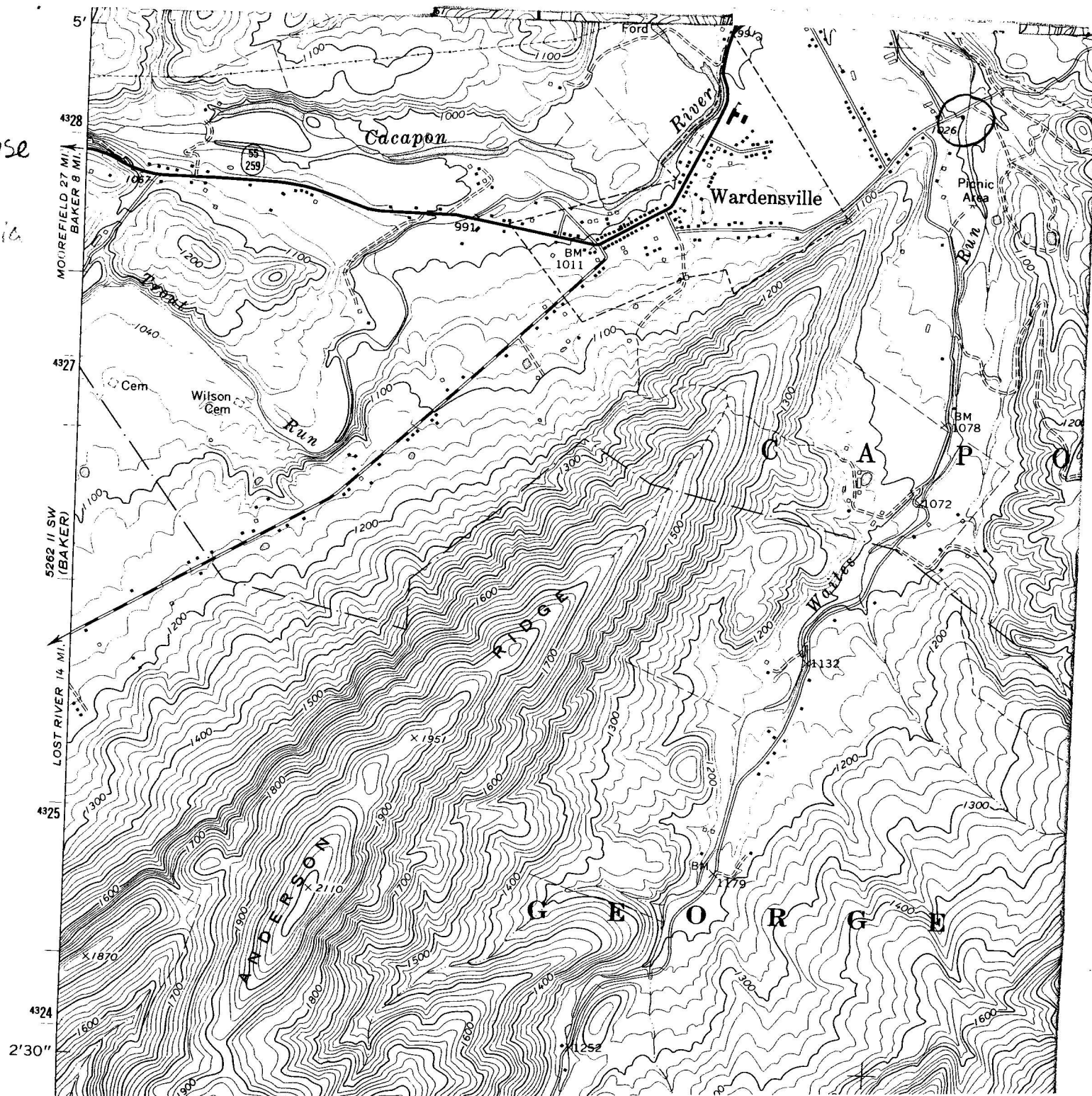
Photo 3 of 5    Front (West) and side (south) elevations  
View facing northeast

Photo 4 of 5    View of north wall on lowest level

Photo 5 of 5    View of north wall on main level

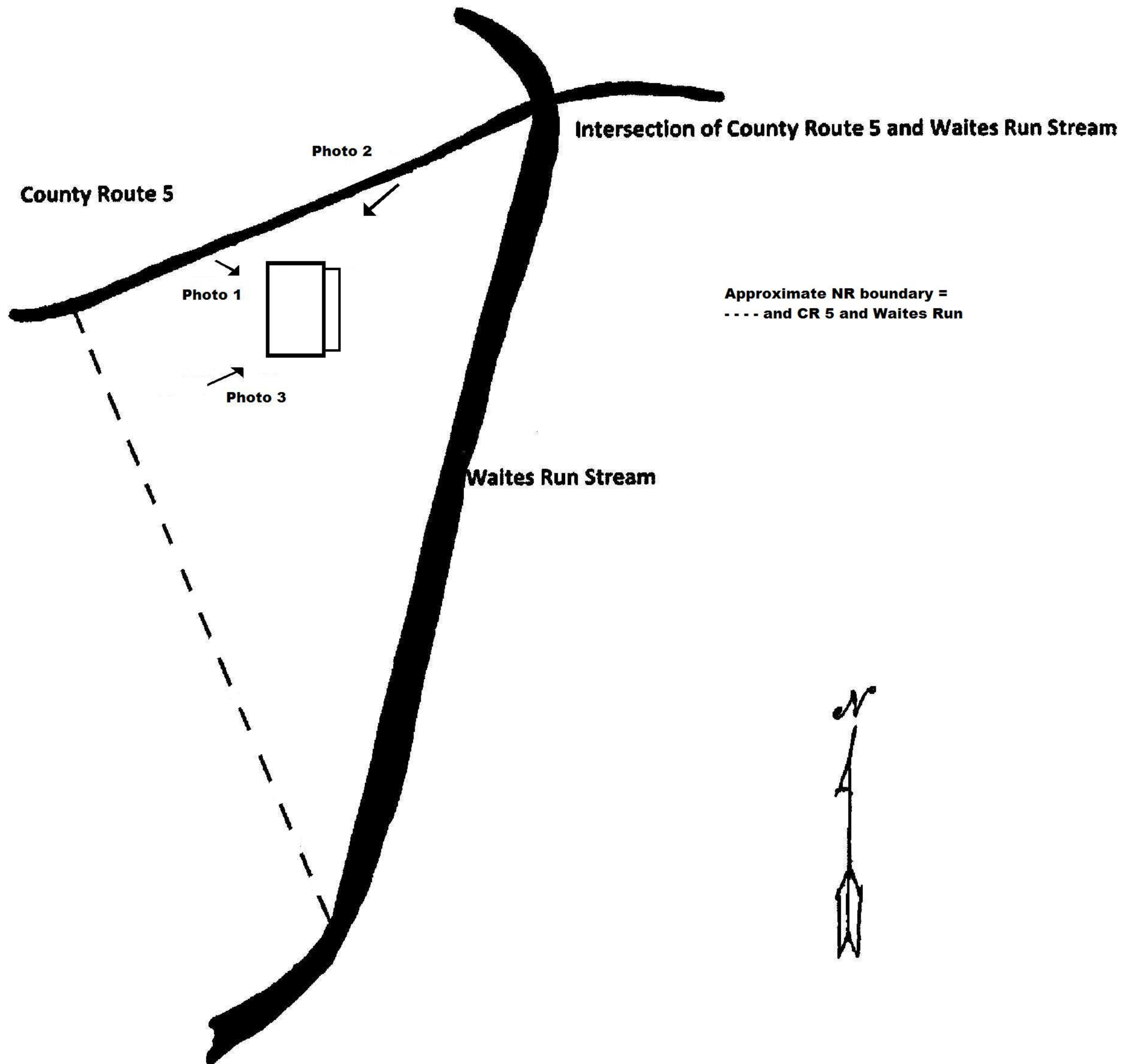
Old State House  
Hardy County,  
West Virginia  
(NAD 2+)

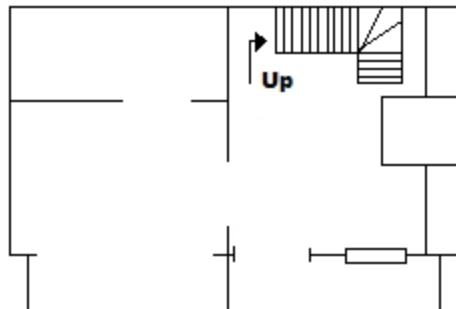
17 709341  
4328290



# Old Stone House

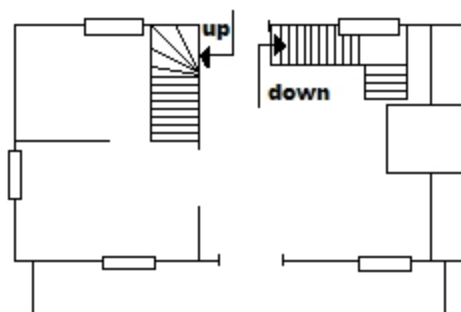
Capon District, Hardy County, West Virginia



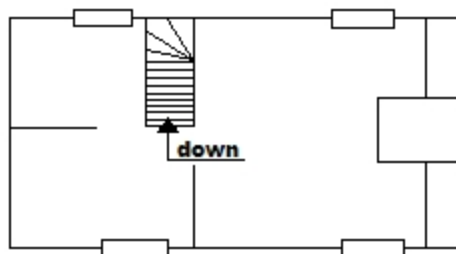


**Lower Level**

**Old Stone House  
Hardy County, WV**



**Main Level**



**Upper Level**



















