

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NRHP Listed: 11/7/2024

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Bluefield Commercial Historic DistrictOther names/site number: VDHR #143-5083

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: Virginia Avenue, Spring Street, S. College AvenueCity or town: Bluefield State: VA County: TazewellNot For Publication: N/AVicinity: N/A

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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


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

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

		<u>9.27.2024</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>		
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.		
Signature of commenting official:		Date
Title :		State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☒
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☒

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐
- District ☒
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>35</u>	<u>4</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>35</u>	<u>6</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institution  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Department Store  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Warehouse  
SOCIAL: Meeting Hall  
GOVERNMENT: Post Office  
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing Facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institution  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Department Store  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant  
COMMERCE/TRADE: Warehouse  
SOCIAL: Meeting Hall  
GOVERNMENT: Post Office  
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing Facility  
HEALTH CARE: Medical Business/Office  
LANDSCAPE: Plaza

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Beaux Arts, Colonial Revival, Classical  
Revival

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style  
MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

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

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; CONCRETE; STONE; GLASS;  
TERRA COTTA

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District, which consists entirely of commercial and mixed-use resources, encompasses about 11 acres in the historic heart of the Town of Bluefield in Tazewell County, Virginia. The district is generally bounded by Graham Avenue on the north, Spruce Street on the east, Spring Street on the south, and S. College Avenue (S.R. 102) on the west. A few resources on the south side of Spring Street and the west side of S. College Avenue are included in the district. Whitely's Branch, a tributary of Beaverpond Creek, extends through the southern part of the historic district along Spring Street; the branch adjoins the creek west of the district, and flows north to its confluence with the Bluestone River. The commercial area occupies a relatively flat area with steep hills on the north, south, and west sides. The still-active tracks of the Norfolk Southern Railway (formerly Norfolk & Western Railway) run along the north side of the district and residential development is present on the east, south, and west sides. Most historic resources in the district are one- and two-part commercial block brick buildings of one to three stories with street level storefronts of large plate-glass windows, moderately embellished decorative brick details and cornices, and parapeted roofs. Some multi-story commercial buildings house mixed uses with commercial activities (e.g. store, business offices) on the first floor and residential or another use above. An example of this arrangement is the Harman Lodge No. 222 A.F. & A.M. (VDHR #143-5006), which houses a pharmacy on the first floor and meeting rooms on the upper floors. The two historic banks in the district, the Bank



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of Graham (VDHR #143-5005) and the First National Bank (VHDR #143-5003), diverge from the more vernacular commercial architecture and are notable examples of the Beaux Arts and Classical Revival styles, respectively. The 1940 U.S. Post Office, which stands near the center of the historic district, was executed in the Georgian Revival style, and retains its period mural, "Coal Mining," by New Deal artist Richard Hay Kenah (1907–1982). Even buildings that are primarily utilitarian in character, such as the Bluefield Monument Company (VDHR #143-5035), the New Method Laundry (VDHR #143-5083-0031), and a former wholesaler's warehouse (VDHR #143-5038), are not without architectural interest. Bluefield stands at the gateway to the Pocahontas coalfields to the north and was an important rail connection to points east and west. The town historically served as a commercial, financial, and industrial center for the coal operations and associated coal towns. Although coal operations no longer are the primary economic activity in the area, the town continues to serve as a center of government and commercial activity for this region. The historic district consists of 40 resources with 35 contributing buildings, 4 non-contributing buildings, 1 non-contributing site (park), and 1 non-contributing structure (bandstand). The contributing resources were constructed between 1895 and about 1970, and represent Bluefield's industrial and commercial growth during that period. Most are primary resources and there are very few secondary resources. Non-historic resources were either built after the 1895–1973 period of significance or are historic resources that lack sufficient integrity to convey their historical appearance.

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## Narrative Description

### *Location and Setting*

The Town of Bluefield is located at the eastern end of Tazewell County, Virginia, a mountainous region in the north-central portion of Southwestern Virginia that is characterized by a series of generally east-west ridges with early settlement occurring in the intervening valleys. Bluefield stands between East River Mountain on the south and Little Stone Ridge on the north. In 1964, the town sponsored a municipal nickname contest with the winning entry, submitted by Bill Osborne, proclaiming Bluefield as "Virginia's Tallest Town" with an elevation of 2,612' above sea level.<sup>1</sup> The town's topography consists of rolling hills and flat lands along the river and creeks (Figure 1). Primary roadways include U.S. Route 460 (C. Jefferson Stafford Highway) and U. S. Route 19 (Virginia Avenue). In 2020, Bluefield's population was 5,096 (84% White only; 7% Black only; 6% two or more races; <3% other).<sup>2</sup>

The Town of Bluefield obtains its water primarily from the Bluestone River, which flows through the town from the west, then north to the New River (in West Virginia). Beaverpond Creek, a tributary to the river, flows north along the west side of the commercial historic district to its confluence with the river. The creek flows through a concrete-edged channel, part of which is an underground culvert. The downtown area historically has suffered significant recurrent flooding, which has negatively affected business development

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Osborne's family came to Bluefield in 1911; he was a 1929 graduate of Graham High School, and was associated with the Chicago House Furnishing Company, a local furniture store. Louise B. Leslie and Dr. Terry W. Mullins, *Images of America: Bluefield, Virginia* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009); "'Virginia's Tallest Town' is Nickname," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1964:2. Almost immediately, Bluefield's claim was met with opposition. Others cited Troutdale in Grayson County as the state's "tallest" town at an elevation of 3,067'. "'Tallest' Slogan Meets Opposition," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 18, 1964:1. The Town of Bluefield continues to use this nickname on its logo. Tazewell County has five mountains over 4,000' in height; East River Mountain has a height of 4,363'.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau, Bluefield, town, Virginia, Profile, P8: Race. Accessed at <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALDHC2020.P8?g=160XX00US5108152>.

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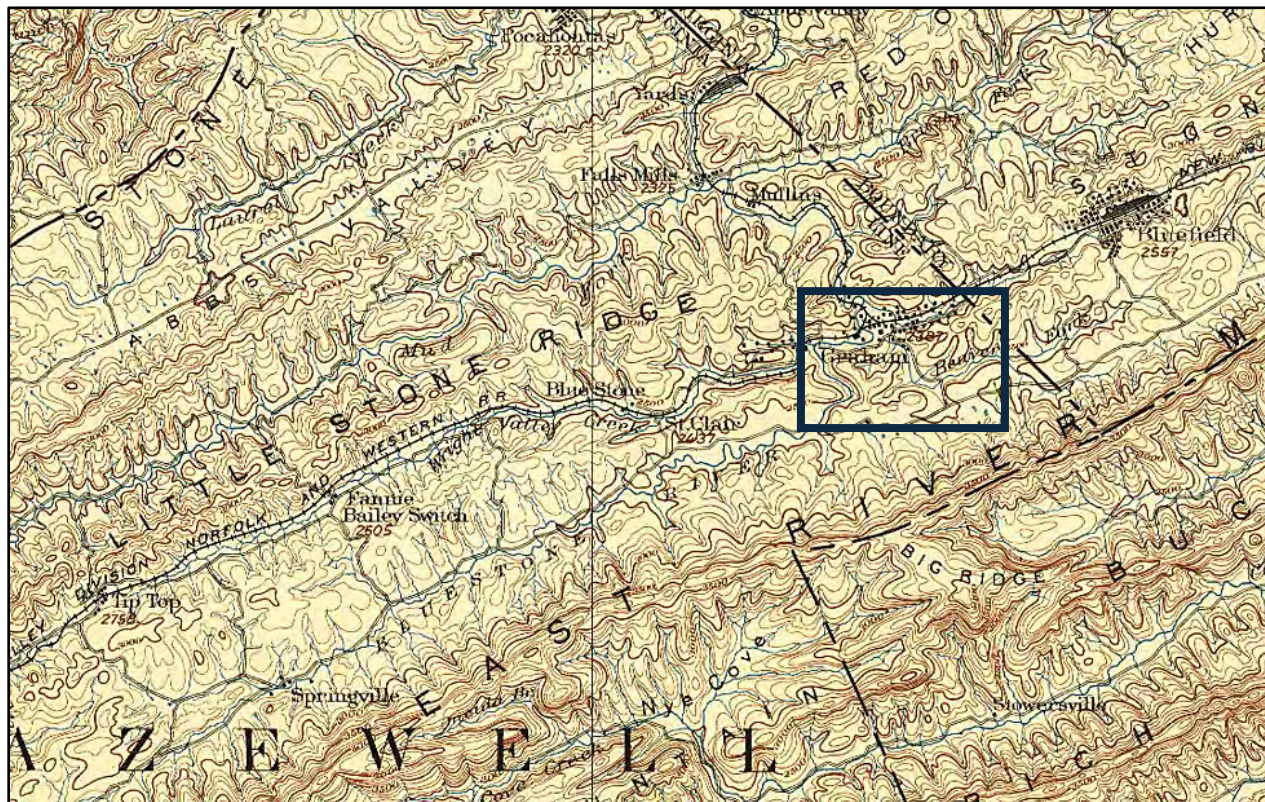


Figure 1. Detail, U.S.G.S. Topographic Map, Pocahontas, VA, 1887 Showing Location of Graham (Bluefield), Va-WV state line, and general topography in area.

and has resulted in the loss of historic buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The historic district lies less than a mile southwest of the West Virginia line, which separates the “sister cities” of Bluefield, Virginia and Bluefield, West Virginia. Incorporated in 1884 as the Town of Graham, residents voted in 1924 to change the name to Bluefield. The two communities are linked primarily by U.S. Route 19 and U.S. Route 460.<sup>4</sup> South College Avenue runs north from U.S. Route 460, through the downtown area, and continues north to the coal mine communities of Falls Mill and Pocahontas.

#### *Street Layout and Resource Distribution*

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District boundaries include only commercial resources, although the area is surrounded by residential properties and a number of churches. The district extends along Virginia Avenue (U.S. Route 19), which is the historic heart of the commercial area and is a primary road connecting

<sup>3</sup> According to a Flood Insurance Study conducted for the Town of Bluefield in 1978, significant flooding occurred in the downtown area in 1955, 1957, 1963, 1964, and 1972. Impacts from flooding, including a 2003 event, resulted in the decision to demolish the Town Hall (built in 1951) at the corner of S. College Avenue and Virginia Avenue. In addition, several commercial buildings along Walnut Street and the western end of Virginia Avenue were demolished. Due to the loss of historic resources, these areas are not within the present historic district boundaries. Flooding continues to be a concern in the town.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. 19 also is known as Virginia Avenue on the Virginia side and Bluefield Avenue on the West Virginia side. The roadway is part of the Trail of the Lonesome Pine, a scenic route through Virginia’s coal country.

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to the West Virginia side. The streets are laid in a gridded pattern: Virginia Avenue, Graham Avenue, and Spring Street extend east-to-west; S. College Avenue and Spruce Street run north-to-south.

The north side of Virginia Avenue consists of an intact, visually cohesive row of buildings from S. College Avenue on the west to Graham Avenue on the east. Most buildings in the row date from the 1920s, with one infill building dating to about 1950 and one building dating to 1895. The majority of the buildings are twentieth-century vernacular one- and two-story brick structures, most with flat or shed roofs concealed behind parapet walls, with first-level storefronts featuring centrally located entrances and large plate-glass windows. Four additional contributing buildings associated with industrial/manufacturing uses are located on Virginia Avenue east of its intersection with Graham Avenue.

Bluefield's notable historic bank buildings include the Bank of Graham (built 1907) and the First National Bank of Graham (built 1916); these buildings stand on the south side of Virginia Avenue at prominent corners with Spruce Street and S. College Avenue, respectively. A third bank, which is a non-contributing building, is located near the center of the block, as is the Bluefield Post Office (1940).

Initially, Spring Street did not extend through to S. College Avenue, presumably due to the presence of Whitely's Branch, a tributary to Beaverpond Creek. After the branch was channelized in the late 1960s, the street was extended west. Because of this late development, some buildings along this street date to the later years of the period of significance (1950-1973). A notable exception is the New Method Laundry building, which dates to 1938. Only three buildings in the district face onto S. College Avenue, but all are contributing resources.

#### *Architectural Description*

Many of the historic brick and stone commercial buildings in the Bluefield Commercial Historic District dating from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries replaced earlier frame buildings. Some frame buildings burned, but some were simply replaced with more permanent structures. Into the late 1930s, detached dwellings still stood on Virginia Avenue; most were later replaced with commercial buildings, although a few, not within the historic district, are still extant. Some of the multi-story commercial buildings have historically provided office space and shop areas on the ground floor and living units above. This practice continues in a few of the Virginia Avenue buildings.

The oldest building in the historic district, and one of the most architecturally notable, is the three-story **Harman Lodge #222 A.F. & A.M. Masonic Lodge** (VDHR #143-5005, 566 Virginia Avenue), chartered in 1866 and built in 1895 (Figure 2). Standing at the northeast corner of Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue, this building has anchored the heart of the commercial area for almost 130 years. A large panel inserted on the facade of the building identifies the lodge, its charter date, and the building's construction date. In 1899, the Graham Supply Co., a general merchandise store, occupied the first floor of the lodge. That space was later occupied by The New Graham Pharmacy, which continues to operate there. The lodge's meeting room and main hall are on the upper floors of the building. The lodge's decorative masonry work is some of the most elaborate in the district.



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*Figure 2. Detail of Harman Lodge No. 222 Showing Plaque on Front of Building and Decorative Brick Detailing.*

The building's three-bay-wide facade is characterized by the first floor commercial space, which is accessed from the angled entry porch at the southwest corner of the building. Large, modern metal-framed, fixed storefront windows occupy the center bay, which originally held the entrance to the commercial space. Entry to the upper lodge rooms is by a set of stairs accessed in the easternmost bay. Notable elements on the facade include the building's pressed metal cornice with end consoles and brackets; beneath the cornice are rectangular panels, an end bay panel featuring rows of offset bricks in a zig-zag pattern, and a wide span of corbelled brick brackets. The multi-part arched window surrounds on the third floor level have ornate diamond-faceted arches and stone impost blocks joined to form a stone belt course. Similarly faceted brick panels are inserted below the windows openings. The rectangular window openings on the second floor are detailed with a belt course of rock-faced stone at the lintel level and stone sills. Historical photographs show that faceted brick panels were present beneath the second floor windows, but appear to have been removed or covered by a modern cornice that extends to the building adjacent to the east (see Additional



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Documentation 1). This element may have been installed as part of a late twentieth-century modernization of the first-floor storefront.

The building bays at the south and west corner of the building reflect similar detailing and project slightly from the main wall. The rectangular window openings on the second-floor level of the west elevation have rock-faced stone sills and lintels, and openings on the third floor feature brick segmental arches with stone impost blocks and stone lintels. A late-twentieth-century, one-story brick addition extends from the rear of the building. Historical photographs of the building show that the original commercial entrance was centrally located on the south elevation, but by 1940 had been moved to the southwest corner. Also, a domed cupola originally stood atop the roof, but was removed in the early twentieth century.

About 1920, a two-story, **brick double-commercial building** (VDHR #143-5023) was built at the opposite end of Virginia Avenue (500-504 Virginia Avenue), and at an equally prominent corner with Graham Avenue (Figure 3). The site was particularly advantageous since the N&W Railroad depot stood north across the street. The storefronts have been modified and, although not as architecturally elaborate as the Harman Lodge, this building exhibits the commercial architecture of the period with two, four-bay-wide sections with corbelled brick brackets supporting the cornice and a parapet roof with tile coping along the sides. The southeast corner entrance retains its tile floor. This building historically housed a pharmacy and at present, a restaurant occupies a portion of the building.



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*Figure 3. Commercial Building at 500-504 Virginia Avenue, Looking North. Note corner entrance.*

The one- and two-story buildings that complete the north side of the **500 block of Virginia Avenue** are examples of vernacular and commercial style structures that represent the early-twentieth century economic development in the area (Figure 4). This adjoining row of buildings also is a good representative of the regional commercial architecture of the time. The one- and two-part commercial buildings feature street-level storefronts of enframed window walls, with recessed entrance bays, decorative window details, and decorative brickwork that enhance the exterior walls and cornices of the buildings. Although some storefronts have been altered or replaced in-kind, most second stories are well-preserved with exposed, unpainted brick facades and unaltered detailing. Storefront alterations that may be incompatible and alterations to upper floors, such as applied screens, are reversible and historic materials are likely intact beneath these superficial changes. Modern awnings have been recently installed on several buildings. Resource examples that reflect minimal alterations to the façade include the contributing buildings between 508 and 530 Virginia Avenue (VDHR #143-5024/5028), and 538 Virginia Avenue (VDHR #143-5007).



*Figure 4. View looking Northwest Along 500 Block of Virginia Avenue.*

As noted, four contributing buildings in the historic district stand east of Graham Avenue and are related to industrial and manufacturing activities or to transportation-related commercial use. The historic **Bluefield Monument Company**, (VDHR #143-5025, 430 Virginia Avenue), was founded in 1922 and is still in operation (Figure 5). The stonecutting complex on Virginia Avenue houses an office, manufacturing facility, and a display yard. Located on the eastern end of the commercial area, the monument company was conveniently located near the historic N&W Railway freight depot that formerly stood near the northwest corner of the property. The one-story brick office wing on the west end of the complex faces south onto



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Virginia Avenue and holds two door openings and a fixed glass window. The stretcher bond brick wall is embellished with a corbelled cornice, rowlock window sills, and a stringcourse of soldier bricks. Additions to the office include the construction of a metal-clad gable roof over the original parapeted shed roof, and a one-story, single-bay, metal-clad, shed-roofed wing at the back (north) and a gable-roofed workshop on the east. The display yard stands at the eastern end of the shop and is defined by a grid of steel beams (possibly part of a crane system for lifting materials/stones). The area is partially covered by an extension of the workshop's gable roof. Signage is affixed to the south elevation of this wing and also at the east end of the structure over the display yard. A steel-frame, metal-clad manufacturing building was added to the complex early in this century. The continued presence of the monument company in the historic district is a significant reminder of this important and successful century-old industry.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 5. Looking Northwest at the Bluefield Monument Co. Complex, late 1960s. Source: Eastern Region Coal Archives, Bluefield, WV.

The now vacant **warehouse** (VDHR #143-5038, 416 Virginia Avenue) that stands east of the monument company is first depicted on the 1938 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map and is noted as a wholesaler of crackers, biscuits, and cookies. Earlier maps (1893–1903) indicate that this was the site of the cattle pens, which gave rise to the town's first name of "Pinhook." The pens were removed and by about 1908, a railroad spur was built through this parcel and extended to the freight and passenger station on the west side of present-day Depot Street (then known as Hawk Street, which did not connect to Virginia Avenue). The two-story, brick warehouse was built with access to the railroad siding, as evidenced by the two platforms on the rear (north) of the building. Constructed with steel trusses and finished with interior plaster walls, the large warehouse (75 feet deep by 150 feet wide) features a common bond brick pattern with every fifth row laid in Flemish bond, metal industrial windows, and a flat roof with parapet and terra cotta tile coping. Trucks or other vehicles were used in the distribution business, as evidenced by the presence of wooden

<sup>5</sup> Greg Jordan, "Bluefield Monument Company Celebrates 100 Years in Business," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 22, 2023:A-1, A-7.

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overhead doors on the west and south elevations of the warehouse. This building is an important reminder of Bluefield's historical role as the main regional distribution center of goods that arrived primarily by rail. Built in the early 1930s, the **Bluefield Farm Bureau** (VDHR #143-5083-0020, 316 Virginia Avenue) was an important cooperative organization that primarily served, and continues to serve, the area's farmers (see Additional Documentation 2). First housed in the "Old Graham Grocery Building" [approximately at 357 Virginia Avenue, no longer extant], the Farm Bureau constructed its three-story brick building about 1935.<sup>6</sup> Like the nearby warehouse described above, the Farm Bureau building was serviced by a railroad siding that accessed a coal shed on the west side of the building. The remnants of that shed (Figure 6) are present within the fenced side yard, an area identified on the 1938 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map as the "coal yard." The complex also included a service station that stood at the southwest corner of the property in what is now the side yard.



*Figure 6. Remnants of Coal Shed at Bluefield Farm Bureau, Looking Northeast.*

The historic steel and masonry building is clad with brick laid in a six-course common bond and is covered by a flat roof with terra cotta coping. The Sanborn map notes that the building had steel beams and posts and plastered walls on the interior. The building is 60 feet wide by 100 feet deep with window openings on all three levels that mostly hold multi-paned, metal frame awning windows. A concrete/concrete block ramp extends along the south side of the building and leads to the loading platform on the west side, which is covered by a flat canopy with metal tie-back rods. Wooden sliding doors open from the storeroom onto the ramp and platform. Painted signage is located above the first floor window openings. A one-story, metal-

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement for Farm Bureau Store, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 26, 1930:8; "Improvements," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 13, 1935:8.



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clad wing was added to the west side of the building and presently serves as the main store entrance. Construction of the Farm Bureau building in Bluefield during the Great Depression speaks to the continued importance of agriculture in the area during the early twentieth century and was another amenity that drew customers to the town.

Graham/Bluefield also served as an important financial center for area residents, as well as operators in the coalfields. In 1890, the **Bank of Graham** (VDHR #143-5006, 501 Virginia Avenue) was established in 1890 with Alexander St. Clair as the president, and in 1902 the bank came under the direction of Isaac T. Mann of Bramwell, West Virginia, who was also president of the Bank of Bramwell and a founder of the Pocahontas Fuel Company, among other business interests. Having occupied other buildings in town, the bank purchased the parcel at the prominent southwest corner of the intersection of Virginia Avenue and Spruce Street and built its striking Beaux Arts-style building. A newspaper article in 1906 announced to bidders the availability of plans for the construction of the new Bank of Graham building; however, no architect was identified in the article. A pre-construction newspaper account from 1905 gave details on the bank's appearance and location, as well as its fortification:

The bank has [will have] its own home quarters specially construction for its requirements a modern two story brick building with stone trimmings detached by itself in the business section, thus safeguarded from fire. A large fireproof safe with inner steel burglar proof money chest protected by infallible time locks furnishes adequate protection against burglary or loss.<sup>7</sup>

The Graham Town Council granted a permit for the building on September 5, 1906, and by October 16, 1907, the construction of the new building was nearing completion (Figure 7). The detailed design and overall quality of the stonework strongly suggest that an architect, whose name at present is not known, was involved in the execution of the building's design. The building is clad with a combination of rock-faced ashlar and brick laid in a seven-course common bond. A stone panel on the entrance porch facade (north elevation) retains engraved script lettering identifying the building as "Bank of Graham." The stone and plaster ornamentation that distinguishes the building includes stone voussoirs above the round-arched first floor windows, stone lintels and sills at the second-floor window openings that are joined to form belt courses, rectangular stones panels with classical cartouches in bas relief, and a multi-part stone cornice. A brick one-story wing to the west side dates from the mid-twentieth century, and a drive-through window was added to the east side of the building in 1965, reflecting its continued use as a bank and the institution's adaptation to its patrons' increased automobile usage. In 1964, the Bank of Graham merged with the Farmers Bank of Clinch Valley at Tazewell (later, Bank of Tazewell County and now National Bank), which later constructed a new bank building further west at 511 Virginia Avenue (VDHR #143-5064).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "The Banking and Financial Resources: The Bank of Graham: A Grand Monetary Bulwark," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, February 21, 1905:3.

<sup>8</sup> "Neighborhood News: Graham," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 5, 1906:5; "Gossip of Graham," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, October 16, 1907:7; "Change in VA. Side Bank," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, July 5, 1964:41; Stubby Currence, "Bluefield is a Happy, Busy Place of 5,000 People," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 15, 1969:11.

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Figure 7. Bank of Graham, ca.1910, Looking South. Source: Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, VA.

A few years after the Bank of Graham built its new building, the **First National Bank** (VDHR #143-5003, 601 Virginia Avenue) built its Classical Revival-style, temple front building on the west end of the commercial district (see Additional Documentation 3). The building project announcement in the October 26, 1916, issue of *Manufacturers' Record* estimated construction costs at \$15,000. Materials included pressed brick, granite base, a Barrett specification roof (a built-up roof of tar and a slag or gravel surface), concrete and marble floors, steam heat, and electric lights. The Bluefield, WV architectural firm of Pedigo & Garry designed the bank, and the Graham-based firm of Leedy & Janutolo (also seen as Janutalo) constructed it (Figure 8). Tom K. Leedy was a brick mason and as partner in another firm (Leedy & Barnett, contractors) built the 1913 Graham High School. Italian immigrant Joseph Janutolo was a building contractor also was noted for his masonry skills; he built the 1910 St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Graham (also designed by Pedigo & Garry) and "thousands of dollars' worth" of coke ovens in the Pocahontas coalfields.

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*Figure 8. First National Bank at Graham Under Construction, ca. 1916. Source: Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, VA*

Although no longer in use as a bank, the First National Bank appears to have been minimally altered over the years. The two-story, buff-colored brick building features a temple front (north elevation) comprised of a stone Ionic distyle “in antis” portico. The stone entablature carries incised lettering identifying the building as “First National Bank.” The portico’s at-grade floor is paved with marble tiles. The brick parapet that extends across the front of the building has a centrally located gable. The brick east side elevation features a stone base that rises to form the sills of the first floor window openings, which retain their original wooden sashes. Four brick pilasters set atop the stone base and topped with stone capitals delineate the building bays on the east elevation; the pilasters carry a stone entablature incised with lettering identical to that on the north elevation. The rear elevation is of exposed red brick. At one time, the west side elevation was a party wall to adjoining commercial buildings; an early twenty-first century flood resulted in the demolition of the adjoining buildings, leaving the bank’s west, unfenestrated elevation exposed. Currently, the bank building is partially occupied by a communications business.

Located near the historic Bank of Graham, the **Bluefield Post Office** (VDHR#143-5080, 507 Virginia Avenue) is a notable example of Georgian Revival-style design. The post office is the only federal building in Bluefield and occupies a prominent location on the town’s main commercial street. In 1938, the federal government authorized plans for a new post office building in Bluefield, which had occupied other buildings

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in the town on the west side of S. College Avenue and on the south side of Virginia Avenue. Recollections of the first post office identified it as a “frame shack” with a “cat hole” cut in the side for outgoing mail drops.<sup>9</sup> The Bluefield Post Office is an important surviving architectural public works project from the early twentieth century and the mural on the interior of the building is a significant example of New Deal-era public art in Southwest Virginia. Post offices in Appalachia, Christiansburg, Radford, Rocky Mount, and Tazewell also are known to have murals from the period.<sup>10</sup> The post office, which is owned by the federal government, is still in use.

In February 1939, the federal government purchased the property for the new post office, which consisted of three lots west of the Bank of Graham.<sup>11</sup> A store and dwelling on the site were demolished. Lack of funding delayed the construction, however, until August 1940. As the building’s cornerstone notes, the building was completed under Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury. L. B. Gallimore, Inc., of Greensboro, North Carolina, was the winning construction bidder. Construction photographs show the building largely completed by March 1941 (Figure 9). Dedication services for the completed post office were held on May 10, 1941, with Virginia Governor J. H. Price in attendance (see Additional Documentation 4).<sup>12</sup>

The one-story (plus basement) Bluefield Post Office is of concrete block and brick construction and is covered by a hipped roof with a flat deck that is clad with slate shingles. A shed-roofed dormer at the back of the roof provides natural lighting for the workspace of the main floor. Copper-clad chimney flues project from the east and west interior ends of the roof ridge. The five-bay-wide facade (north) holds a centrally located entrance consisting of a pair of metal and glass commercial doors with a tall transom and sidelights with paneled wooden aprons. The entrance is enframed by engaged, fluted colonettes that carry an arched beam with 13 stars, and a federal eagle sitting atop the door opening. The flanking openings hold eight-over-twelve replacement sash windows, except for the bay just west of the entrance, which has been converted to a door opening for accessibility needs. The building bays are defined by brick pilasters and each window opening features a multi-part brick segmental arch, a cast stone sill, and a granite apron. First floor windows on the side exhibit the same treatment. Applied gold letters along the top of the facade spell out “United State Post Office Bluefield Virginia.” Granite steps access the front entrance, and a concrete ramp has been added on the west side of the steps. The engraved cornerstone is at the northeast corner of the building.

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<sup>9</sup> “First Post Office of Virginia Siders Little Frame Shack,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 27, 1941:25.

<sup>10</sup> The Marion Post Office, Smyth County, has a New Deal-era plaster sculpture. The Stuart Post Office, Henry County, has a fresco painting. Source: Nancy Lorange, “New Deal/WPA Art in Virginia,” 2017. Accessed at <http://www.wpamurals.org/virginia.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Tazewell County Deed Book 138:248 (for Lots 4 & 5, Block 41).

<sup>12</sup> “Contractor Here,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, July 18, 1940:5. L. B. Gallimore (1909-1981) also built the 1937 post office in Appalachia, Wise County, Virginia (VDHR #164-5818), which is a Colonial Revival-style building and a contributing resource in the Appalachia Commercial Historic District (VDHR #164-5003). During the 1930s, Gallimore’s firm completed several post offices for the federal government, including those in Belmont, NC, and Mullins, SC. See Davyd Ford Hood, “United States Post Office/Kings Mountain Historical Museum (CL0295),” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Kings Mountain, Cleveland County, NC, 2014.

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*Figure 9. Bluefield Post Office Construction Nearing Completion, January 19, 1941. Source: Lisa Byrd.*

The historical significance of the post office is heightened by an intact New Deal-era lobby mural completed by Richard Hay Kenah (1907-1982). Kenah was born in Pennsylvania and attended Antioch College and the Chicago Art Institute, graduating in 1932. In 1936, Kenah moved to Washington, D.C., where he found work as an artist with New Deal-era federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Treasury's Section of Fine Arts (SFA). His best-known works are the murals he completed for three post offices under the aegis of the SFA: Tobacco Auction (1939) in Louisburg, North Carolina; Ohio Harvest (1940) in Bridgeport, Ohio; and Coal Mining (1942) in Bluefield, Virginia, for which Kenah received payment of \$700. Kenah attended the post office dedication in 1941, and in July 1942, the mural (tempura on canvas) was installed by Kenah with assistance from Postmaster Sidney Barnett. The south end (right) of the mural depicts businessmen and miners looking over drawings for coal mines with women in the background carrying lunch baskets, and a guard talking to a miner (Figure 10). A railroad coal car stands behind them, and three buildings are depicted in the background: the post office itself, the First National Bank, and what appears to be the cornice of the Bank of Graham. The north end (left) of the mural depicts an underground scene of



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Figure 10. Detail, South End, "Coal Mining" Mural in Bluefield Post Office.  
Source: *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*.

men working in the mines and a tippie and coal carts above ground. The mural is installed directly above the entrance to the postmaster's office.<sup>13</sup>

The former **New Method Laundry Building** (VDHR #143-5083-0031, 104 Spruce Street), stands at the northwest corner of Spruce and Spring streets in the southern part of the historic district. The building was constructed about 1930 for the laundry business founded in 1923 by F. W. Johns and C. L. Weeks. The laundry building is depicted on the 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map and is noted as having steel trusses, plastered interior walls, and a concrete floor. The building currently houses the Bluefield Cleaners, which was begun in 1947 by brothers and returning servicemen Warren and Diluard Shrewsbury.<sup>14</sup>

This one-story, industrial laundry building is of masonry and steel construction clad with red brick laid in a seven-course common bond and is covered by a low-pitched gable roof with a monitor roof on top. Numerous brick chimneys and ventilators pierce the roof surface. The building originally faced Spruce

<sup>13</sup> Kate Coil, "Mural Depicts Depression Era in Coalfields," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 13, 2011; Christopher M. Akers, "New Deal Art in Tazewell County Post Offices," Typed manuscript, n.d. Copy on file, Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, VA; Maryland Historical Trust Inventory, Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form, PG:83-51 Richard Hay Kenah House, 2000 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, MD. Form prepared by Thomas Gross, The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 2016. In 1983, the Virginia historical Landmark Commission [Virginia State Historic Office] determined that the Bluefield Post Office was eligible for individual listing in the NRHP.

<sup>14</sup> "Bluefield Cleaners Able to give Expert Service to Customers," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 19, 1948:6.

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Street, although the present customer entrance is on Spring Street. Large vehicular openings are present on the east of the building, which facilitated the transfer of laundry to and from delivery vehicles. A shaped parapet wall and painted signage distinguish that end of the building; a similar shaped parapet is on the west end of the original building. The building also retains large multi-pane, metal-framed industrial windows. The New Method Laundry is a significant resource in the historic district and is a reminder of the service industry that developed in Bluefield during the early twentieth century and which continues to serve the region.

The historic district also includes a good example of Recent Past architecture in the former **Dairy Queen** (VDHR #143-5066, 510 Spring Street) building on the south side of Spring Street. The first Dairy Queen restaurant, a frozen custard and fast food chain, opened in 1940 in Joliet, Illinois. The company began to offer franchises around the country and by 1955, the company expanded to 2,600 stores. Bluefield's Dairy Queen opened in 1968, dating to the last years of the commercial historic district's period of significance. Opening day notices made note of ample customer parking, both on site and at the municipal lot across the street. The building's identifiable form historically is associated with the Dairy Queen stores and Bluefield's example includes the use of the company's trademark angular gambrel roof with wide overhanging eave. The building currently houses a local restaurant, and retains its historical form. The building is an example of national chain stores that began to arrive in Bluefield in the 1960s.

#### Integrity

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District comprises a collection of intact historic resources that continue to convey their historical interrelationship, appearance, and character, and that collectively retain good overall integrity. The historic district boundaries include the most intact group in the historic commercial corridor with resources dating from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century. The contributing buildings relate to the early development of the town and the various shops, services, and offices that developed here as Graham/Bluefield established itself as an important commercial center for the county. Unique and important architectural designs include the Harman Lodge #222, the Bank of Graham, the First National Bank, and the U.S. Post Office. Historic buildings reflecting popular commercial architectural forms and details from the early to mid-twentieth century primarily are found on the north side of Virginia Avenue, with other examples on Spring Street and S. College Avenue. Historic buildings relating to Bluefield's industrial and manufacturing history are found on Graham Avenue, Virginia Avenue, and Spruce Street. By the mid-1950s, most of the detached dwellings along Virginia Avenue had been replaced by commercial buildings. This collection of historic buildings provides a visual continuity in Bluefield's downtown area and presents a pleasing historical streetscape. The historic district's integrity of design, materials, and workmanship is evident in the many fine brick and stone buildings along its streets. The historic district's integrity of setting and location also is highly intact. The downtown retains its historical gridded street pattern, which was laid out by 1889, and which was influenced both by the hilly topography of the area and the presence of the railroad tracks (on the north side of the district).

The boundaries exclude areas, particularly on the west side, that have lost historic fabric due primarily to flooding. Only a few buildings have been demolished in the historic district. The current Graham Square Park (VDHR #143-5070), at the southeast corner of S. College Avenue and Virginia Avenue, was formerly the site of the vacant three-story Chicago House Furnishing Co., which was demolished in 1993. Although a significant historic business, the demolition has provided a site for public gatherings and for open space in the downtown area and is enhanced by a gazebo and a large metal fabricated LOVE sign that includes the town's name. The sign is one of the Virginia Tourism Corporation's LOVEworks program, which draws on the Commonwealth's 53-year old "Virginia is for Lovers" tourism campaign and is associated with the recent development of regional tourism into the coalfields and natural areas of the county. Several unused

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industrial related buildings on the east of Virginia Avenue, including the former Graham Grocery Warehouse and the Eclipse Roller Mill, were demolished about 2018 and the site was redeveloped as a Dollar General Store (VDHR #143-5083-0019, 404 Virginia Avenue).

Although the railroad played an essential role in the development of Graham/Bluefield, no standing structures associated with that industry (e.g., depot, section house) are extant; therefore, the current railroad tracks are located outside of the district. Buildings in the historic district that historically had physical connections to the railroad and may still retain those elements, including the Bluefield Farm Bureau, the warehouse on Depot Street, and the former Bluestone Bedding Corporation on Graham Avenue, are so identified in the historical survey.

### Inventory

The following is a list of resources listed alphabetically by street name and numerically by address number. VDHR historic district numbers are listed for each resource, as are numbers previously assigned to individual resources. All resources, both primary and secondary, have been considered either contributing or non-contributing based upon their physical integrity and direct association with the historic district's areas of significance (Community Planning and Development, Commerce, and Architecture). Non-contributing resources are those that postdate the period of significance or lack historic integrity. The NRHP status and location of the individual resources are keyed by number to the attached Sketch Map.

#### College Avenue, South

111 S. College Avenue      **143-5083-0037**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5043*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1935  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

132 S. College Avenue      **143-5083-0038**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5045*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, 1950  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

134 S. College Avenue      **143-5083-0039**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5046*  
*Primary Resource:* Office/Office Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Ranch, Ca 1963  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

#### Graham Avenue

104 Graham Avenue      **143-5083-0022**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5042*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, 1965  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

110 Graham Avenue      **143-5083-0023**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5041*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1952  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

124 Graham Avenue      **143-5083-0024**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5040*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1903  
Contributing      *Total:*      1

#### Spring Street

103 Spring Street      **143-5083-0030**      *Other DHR Id#: 143-5044*  
*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1980  
**Non-contributing**      *Total:*      1



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130 Spring Street      **143-5083-0036**

*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, 1973  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

144 Spring Street      **143-5083-0035**

*Other ID #:* 143-5066

*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, 1968  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

248 Spring Street      **143-5083-0033**

*Primary Resource:* Warehouse (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1965  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

### **Spruce Street**

103 Spruce Street      **143-5083-0032**

*Primary Resource:* Office/Office Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1965  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

104 Spruce Street      **143-5083-0031**

*Primary Resource:* Other (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1930  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

109 Spruce Street      **143-5083-0034**

*Other DHR Id#:* 143-5065

*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1960  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

### **Virginia Avenue**

316 Virginia Avenue      **143-5083-0020**

*Primary Resource:* Warehouse (Building), Stories 3, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1935  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

*Secondary Resource:* Shed (Building)  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

325 Virginia Avenue      **143-5083-0021**

*Other DHR #:* 143-5014

*Primary Resource:* Service Station (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca. 1950  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

404 Virginia Avenue      **143-5083-0019**

*Primary Resource:* Store (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 2018  
**Non-contributing**      *Total:* 1

416 Virginia Avenue      **143-5083-0018**

*Other DHR Id#:* 143-5038

*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1935  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

430 Virginia Avenue      **143-5083-0017**

*Other DHR Id#:* 143-5035

*Primary Resource:* Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1925  
Contributing      *Total:* 1

*Secondary Resource :* Warehouse (Building)  
**Non-contributing**      *Total:* 1

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500-504 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0016</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5023</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
501 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0029</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5006</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Beaux Arts, 1906		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
507 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0028</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5080</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Post Office (Building), Stories 1, Style: Georgian Revival, 1940		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
508-512 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0015</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5024</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
511 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0027</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5064</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: International Style, 1973		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
514-516 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0014</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5025</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
520 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0013</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5026</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1935		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
524 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0012</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5027</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca. 1925		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
526-528 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0011</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5028</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1925		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
530 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0010</b>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Mixed (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
532 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0009</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5029</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
534 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0008</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5030</i>
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950		
	Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1

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538-540 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0007</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5007</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
542-544 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0006</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5031</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1908			
		<b>Non-contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1
544-546 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0005</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5032</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
552 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0004</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5033</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
560 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0003</b>		
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
562 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0002</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5034</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1923			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
566 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0001</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5005</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 3, Style: Italianate, 1895			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
601 Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0025</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5003</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Classical Revival, 1916			
		Contributing	<i>Total:</i> 1
Virginia Avenue	<b>143-5083-0026</b>	<i>Other DHR Id#: 143-5070</i>	
<i>Primary Resource:</i> Bandstand (Structure), Stories 1, Style: Vernacular, Ca 1995			
		<b>Non-contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1
<i>Secondary Resource :</i> Park (Site)			
		<b>Non-contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE  
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
   
   
   
 

**Period of Significance**

1895–1973  
   
 

**Significant Dates**

1895  
1906  
1916  
1940

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
   
 

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
   
 

**Architect/Builder**

Pedigo & Garry, architects  
Leedy & Janutalo, builders  
Simon, Louis A., Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury  
L. B. Gallimore, Inc., builders

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District comprises the historic commercial core of this late-nineteenth-century town in Tazewell County in southwestern Virginia, and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at a local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Community Planning and Development, and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. In the area of **Commerce**, the historic district reflects Bluefield's continued importance as a center for shops, professional offices, financial institutions, restaurants, medical offices, and supply stores. Since its incorporation in 1884 as the Town of Graham, Bluefield has been a primary shopping, financial, and distribution center for the surrounding agricultural population, as well as the area's manufacturers and the coalfields to the north. The majority of buildings in the historic district were constructed between 1895 and 1920, representing the Reconstruction and Growth Period and the World War I to World War II Period. Although dwellings, churches, and schools are found on the surrounding streets, all resources in the historic district are commercial buildings. The historic architectural resources in the district are a tangible link to the town's beginnings and continue to reflect their use for commercial purposes.

As a property that is eligible in the area of **Community Planning and Development**, the district's historic architectural resources reflect the growth and prosperity experienced in the town with the late-nineteenth-century rise of area coal mining operations and the expansion of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. In 1884, the town was incorporated as Graham, and in 1924 the name was changed to Bluefield and is a sister city to Bluefield, West Virginia, which borders the town to the east. The first recorded plats for the town from 1890 laid out a gridded street network that remains intact today, although some street names have been changed. The 1880s extension of the Norfolk & Western Railway's New River Division through the small community and north to the newly opened Pocahontas-Flat Top coalfield, and the subsequent (1891) extension of the line's Clinch Valley Division (with its terminus in Norton, Wise County) brought unprecedented economic growth and opportunity to the region. Bluefield is differentiated from Tazewell's other incorporated towns since it was not founded by a coal company, as were Pocahontas (by the Southwest Improvement Co., which in 1917 became known as the Pocahontas Fuel Co.) and Richlands (by the Clinch Valley Coal and Iron Company), and was not developed as a government center like the county seat of Tazewell (formerly known as Jeffersonville). Although Bluefield's history is tied to the expansion of the railroad into the coalfields, the town's identity as a commercial district has survived the decline of both of those influences. Active railroad tracks are located north of the district; however, no architectural resources associated with the railroad are extant. Until the last half of the twentieth century, Bluefield was the most populous town in the county—a distinction currently held by Richlands. The decline in active businesses in the historic district can be attributed to a shift to shopping malls located near the U.S. Route 460-bypass, which was built in 1979 and located south of the historic downtown; however, in recent years, new businesses have joined established businesses in the historic downtown.

In the area of **Architecture**, the Bluefield Commercial Historic District is eligible as a concentration of historic architectural resources that are unified by plan, visual continuity, and physical development. The district's resources are located on Virginia Avenue, Graham Avenue, Spring Street, and S. College Avenue and include distinctive examples of the Georgian Revival, Classical Revival, and Beaux Arts styles of architecture. These examples include the Harman Lodge No. 222 A. F. & A. M. (1895), the federally-owned Bluefield Post Office (1940), the Bank of Graham (1907), and the First National Bank building (1916). In addition, there are numerous intact one- to three-story Commercial Style buildings dating from the early twentieth century that retain decorative brickwork and add to the visually cohesive district. The Period of

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Significance extends from 1895, the construction date of the oldest resource, to 1973, by which time all extant historic resources were built. The Bluefield Commercial Historic District has historically suffered flooding from Beaverpond Creek, which runs along the west side of the district, and its tributary, Whitley's Branch, which runs east-to-west through the district. Recurrent flooding has resulted in the loss of historic resources on the west side of S. College Avenue, which is generally excluded from the district boundaries.

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

Justification of Criteria

*Criterion A: Commerce*

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Commerce for its important role as a primary commercial center that has served the nearby coalfields and rural areas from the town's incorporation in 1884 to the present. Many of the area's initial businesses were associated with manufacturing and industry, but by the 1880s, Bluefield (then known as Graham) stood at the junction of the Norfolk & Western Railway's New River line and Clinch Valley line, which engendered the establishment of numerous stores and led to the locality's incorporation as a town. An 1893 map of the town depicts the presence of grocery stores, drug stores, general stores, and a publisher ("hand printing") in the area of the present historic district. A post office and bank also had been built. Within a decade, Graham's streets were more densely populated with additional stores and services, and by 1920, the commercial district took on much of its present appearance. The town's brick and stone buildings replaced earlier frame buildings, and provided a more unified and substantial appearance. Notably absent from the town were saloons; Graham did not allow the sale of alcohol and, perhaps for this reason, never had a reputation as a rowdy, entertainment center for area coal miners as some other coalfield-area towns did. Maps and photographs from the 1940s through the 1960s show the streets densely built with adjoining rows of stores, offices, banks, and other businesses. In 1940, the federal government began construction of the Bluefield Post Office on Virginia Avenue, adding to the importance of the town to local residents. Banking was, and remains, an important service offered in the town, as represented by the Bank of Graham (1907), the First National Bank (1916), and the present National Bank (1973).

*Criterion A: Community Planning and Development*

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development as a town that was incorporated in 1884, and reflects the growth and prosperity brought to the area by the extension of the N&W Railway and the opening the Pocahontas coalfields in the northern part of the county. The town also benefitted from the presence of the Bluestone River, which provided both drinking water and water for industrial uses. In 1866, the area encompassed by the Bluefield Commercial Historic District was known as Pinhook. The name is said to have derived from the cattle pens located in the area, which historical maps depict at the east end of the present district on a site currently occupied by a former wholesale warehouse. In 1884, the Graham Land & Improvement Company incorporated the town as Graham, and submitted a series of plats with the Clerk of the Circuit Court laying out streets. Much of the present historic district occupies lots in Blocks 40 through 46 on Plan D of the Town of Graham—an area bordered on the north by the N&W Railway.<sup>15</sup> The railway's combination freight and passenger depot was built north of Graham Avenue. Although some street names have been changed, the town's initial grid has not been altered significantly. In the late-1960s, Spring Street, on the south end of the historic district, was extended west to connect with S. College Avenue. At the time of its incorporation, Graham had a population of about 1,800; in 1923, when voters chose to change the name to

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<sup>15</sup> "Plan D of the Town of Graham, Tazewell County, Virginia," Tazewell County Deed Book 29:29, 1890.

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Bluefield, the town had a population of about 8,000. While Bluefield's growth is historically tied to the presence of the railway and the coal mining interests to the north, its commercial growth was centered around stores, service industries, manufacturers, and professional services owned and operated locally. The majority of the architectural resources in the historic district were constructed between 1895 and 1920, with additional commercial buildings added primarily between 1940 and 1970.

*Criterion C: Architecture*

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a concentration of buildings that are unified by their historical development that conveys a visual sense of the overall historic environment and their shared commercial purpose. The historic district comprises 39 properties associated with commercial activities that reflect nationally popular architectural styles, as well as regional expressions of commercial architecture executed in brick and displaying notable decorative work. The Harman Lodge No. 222 A.F. & A.M. is the oldest building in the district. Erected in 1895, the lodge building holds a meeting room on the second floor and the main lodge hall on the third floor. The first floor has historically been rented as commercial space and continues to house the "New Graham Pharmacy." The two-part commercial block building is executed in brick and holds a modernized storefront on the first floor, and impressive decorative brickwork above including diamond-faceted arches and stone impost blocks at the window openings, wall panels featuring rows of offset bricks in a zig-zag pattern, and a wide span of corbelled brick brackets beneath the pressed metal cornice. The building occupies a highly visible and important position in the historic district at the northeast corner of the intersection of Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue.

Two bank buildings on the south side of Virginia Avenue are also notable for their well-executed architectural designs. The Bank of Graham, constructed in 1907, is a striking mass of rusticated stone and brick at the southwest corner of Virginia Avenue and Spruce Street designed in the Beaux Arts style. Distinguishing features on the building include rectangular stone panels with classical cartouches in bas relief, and a multi-part stone cornice, stone voussoirs above the round-arched first floor windows, and stone lintels and sills at the second-floor window openings that are joined to form belt courses. The First National Bank, located diagonally to the southeast from the Harman Lodge and built in 1916, is the only example of Classical Revival-style architecture in the historic district. The two-story, buff-colored brick building features a temple front (north elevation) comprised of a stone Ionic distyle "in antis" portico. The stone entablature carries incised lettering identifying the building as "First National Bank." The Bluefield, WV firm of Pedigo & Garry designed the bank and Graham-based firm of Leedy & Janutolo was awarded the construction contract. Although research has not yet revealed an architect for the Harman Lodge or for the Bank of Graham, the style, form, and details of those buildings suggest that a skilled hand produced the designs. In 1940, the federal government built the Bluefield Post Office on Virginia Street, providing the south side of the street with a prominent, centrally located government building executed in the Georgian Revival style. The five-bay-wide brick building is topped by a hipped roof with a shed-roofed monitor at the back. The centrally located entrance is enframed by engaged, fluted colonettes that carry an arched beam with 13 stars, and a federal eagle sitting atop the door opening.

The majority of buildings in the district are designed in the Commercial Style and are one- to three-story brick buildings with parapeted roofs. These resources are one- and two-part commercial blocks featuring street level storefronts of large plate-glass windows and the exterior walls and cornices exhibit decorative brick work. The intact row of adjoining commercial buildings on the north side of Virginia Avenue (500 block) maintains a standard setback from the street, which provides the street with an attractive visual cohesiveness. Wide concrete sidewalks extend along the fronts of the buildings.



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Current research has not determined the names of the builders or architects for most of the buildings in the historic district. Newspaper articles, city directories and some published works mention several firms and contractors who were active in the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and some may have been involved in the projects for Bluefield's commercial buildings. The Bank of Graham's design, in particular, suggests an architect's involvement. It may be that the financiers of these projects, some of whom were from Philadelphia or associated with Pennsylvania-based coal interests, hired Philadelphia-based architects. The Bluefield Post Office was completed by Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury, and L. B. Gallimore, Inc. of Greensboro, North Carolina was the builder.

Alexander B. Mahood, one of the most distinguished of Bluefield, WV's architects, designed the buildings for Bluefield College (outside of the historic district). Mahood was known for his Colonial Revival and Beaux Arts-style designs, but has not been identified with any of the buildings in the historic district. Area architects, builders, and contractors listed in resources consulted for this nomination include Pedigo & Garry, architects (WV-based, designed the First National Bank); Lindley Johnson, architect (Philadelphia-based, designed Hotel Graham for Graham Land & Improvement Co.); George R. Ragan, architect (Roanoke-based, designed first Graham High School 1913, Morton Residence 1914); Walter Raymond, architect (associated with George Pearson of Philadelphia, designed "new" Graham High School 1955); E. L. Shufflebarger, architect (Morton residence, 1909) Joseph Janutolo (who built the First National Bank), builder and stone mason; Leedy & Barnett, builders; T. E. Nash, builder; I. T. Frye, contractor; and Corte Construction Co. Firms that produced building materials in Bluefield include Wright and Mathews (1920s), a marble and concrete dealer that also made concrete blocks; and Graham Reconstructed Stone Company (1920s), which also produced concrete blocks; and East River Dunbrick Co. (1960), which produced concrete brick. Additional research may provide information connecting the firms with the extant resources.<sup>16</sup>

## Narrative Statement of Significance

### Introduction

The Town of Bluefield is located at the eastern end of Tazewell County, Virginia, which borders West Virginia on the east and north sides. Tazewell County's historic settlement patterns were heavily influenced by its mountainous terrain, namely a series of generally east-west ridges, as well as transportation routes. Initial settlement occurred in the narrow valleys with fertile limestone soil. Late-nineteenth-century towns like Graham (now Bluefield) served growing populations in the nearby Pocahontas coalfields as supply centers and as commercial, financial, and industrial hubs. Bluefield also supplied the agricultural areas in the southern part of the county and nearby manufacturing interests (flour mills, planning mills, and iron foundries) along the Bluestone River.

In 1890, just prior to its incorporation, the town had a population of 1,021. By 1900, the population had grown only modestly to 1,554; yet the influx of over 500 residents over ten years represents sizable growth for the period. It grew quickly in the 1910s and 1920s to reach almost 5,000 in 1930. Bluefield's population reached its height around 1980, when it had nearly 6,000 residents. Historically, the town's population has been predominantly White; the 2020 census indicates that the population current reports as 84% White

<sup>16</sup> "Graham, Virginia—A Nature Blessed Community," Graham Daily News Industrial Section of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, March 28, 1915:13-20; John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond, VA: New South Architectural Press, 1997).

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only; 7% Black only; 6% two or more races; <3% other.<sup>17</sup> Tazewell County has five incorporated towns: Bluefield (1884), Cedar Bluff (1895, rechartered 1912), Pocahontas (1884), Richlands (1892), and Tazewell (formerly Jeffersonville, 1866). Although Bluefield remained the county's largest town throughout much of the twentieth century, in 2020, its population (5,096) was slightly outpaced by that of Richlands (5,261).<sup>18</sup>

### *Development Overview*

Explorers visited the mountainous region that became Tazewell County, Virginia in the early-eighteenth century, with the first permanent European settlers arriving in the 1770s. Tazewell County was formed in 1799 from parts of Russell and Wythe counties, and part of Logan County [now West Virginia]. In 1866, the county seat of Jeffersonville (renamed Tazewell in 1892) was incorporated. The county's economy was based almost exclusively on agricultural pursuits into the late nineteenth century, when the railroad and coal mining became important economic factors. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the county was lightly commercialized, with small crossroads villages supplying the surrounding agricultural areas, much of which was found in the southern half of the county where rich farmlands sit atop limestone deposits.

Tazewell County represents the eastern end of the Southwest Coal Region of Virginia, which includes Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise counties, with about 15% of the county containing coal—all of which extends along the northern border. Since the earliest explorations in the region, coal had been known to exist in the northern part of the county, but the deposits were not accessible due to the difficult terrain and a lack of transportation routes. Although commercial exploitation of Tazewell's coalfields did not occur until the 1880s, coal was used locally by blacksmiths and other residents.<sup>19</sup>

The Bluefield Commercial Historic District encompasses the historic commercial core of the present-day Town of Bluefield. The town was initially known as Pinhook (also seen as Penhook), and named for the cattle pens located near the railroad tracks (now the site of a brick warehouse), and a post office was first established at the site about the mid-nineteenth century. The 1880s extension of the Norfolk & Western (N&W) Railroad's New River branch line through the small community, which then extended north to the newly opened Pocahontas coalfield, and the subsequent (1891) extension of the line's Clinch Valley Division (with its terminus in Norton, Wise County) brought unprecedented economic growth and opportunity to the region.<sup>20</sup>

Within the next few decades, industries, manufacturers, and local merchants were established near this junction. In 1883, the village took the name Harman, after Col. Edwin H. Harman who fought for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. At the time of its incorporation as a town in 1884, the area again changed its name to Graham, after Thomas Graham who was a surveyor for the railroad and who, as

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<sup>17</sup> Gibson Worsham, *Historic Architectural Survey of Tazewell County, Virginia*. Prepared for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors, [2001], 22; United States Census Bureau, Bluefield, town, Virginia, Profile, P8: Race. Accessed at <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALDHC2020.P8?g=160XX00US5108152>.

<sup>18</sup> In 2020, Tazewell County had a population of 40,429, ranking it 44<sup>th</sup> out of Virginia's 95 counties and 38 independent cities.

<sup>19</sup> Walter R. Hibbard, Jr., *Virginia Coal: An Abridged History and Complete Data Manual of Virginia Coal Production/Consumption from 1748 to 1988* (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Center for Coal & Energy Research, 1990), 26. By contrast, 90% of the land in Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise counties contain coal (Hibbard, 2).

<sup>20</sup> N.B. In 1881, the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad was sold under foreclosure and renamed the Norfolk & Western Railroad. The N&W changed its name to Norfolk & Western Railway in 1896 after it was sold under foreclosure and reorganized. On December 31, 1990, N&W became a subsidiary of Southern Railway, which then changed its name to Norfolk Southern Railway.

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a founder of the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company, was also involved in the development of the town of Pocahontas. Although coal was not located in the immediate vicinity of the town, its merchants and residents benefitted from the demand for goods and services in the nearby coal towns, access to expanded markets, and the relative wealth that accompanied these developments.

One history of Virginia's coalfields notes the difference in development between the Southwest Coalfield and other areas:

Unlike the Commonwealth's other coal-bearing regions, Southwest Virginia depended on outside investment to finance not only its rail transportation network, but [to] provide the capital equipment and manpower necessary to exploit the region's vast quality coal. Railroads were built by far-away corporations specifically to fire their equipment and haul the remainder to distant markets; mining companies were formed by non-resident entrepreneurs.<sup>21</sup>

This outside investment also fueled the development in Graham/Bluefield and led to the construction of manufacturing plants, banks, and other commercial properties, but local residents also undertook the establishment of businesses, such as grocery stores, hardware stores, and other specialty supply stores.

#### Late Nineteenth Century

In 1866, the community that became Bluefield was known as Pinhook, a name derived from the presence of cattle pens in the small community. Located in a lightly commercialized, farming area, Pinhook offered general merchandise stores.<sup>22</sup> Farming continued to be the primary economic pursuit in the county into the 1880s. Chataigne's *Virginia Business Directory* for 1880-1881 recorded that "the grazing of cattle comprises one of the principal sources of revenue to the inhabitants. Large deposits of coal and other minerals are found in this county, much of which, however, lies undeveloped, on account of its remoteness from public highways."<sup>23</sup> No Pinhook businesses are listed in the gazetteer, however, and the village is not listed among the 23 post offices in the county. This may suggest that the village was quite small at the time.<sup>24</sup> In the early 1880s, the village was briefly known as Harman, named after Tazewell native and Confederate Col. Edwin H. Harman, who was killed in 1864 at the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain in Pulaski County, Virginia, during the American Civil War.<sup>25</sup>

#### Industrial Boom

Coal was known to exist in the northern part of Tazewell County since the eighteenth century, but difficult terrain and a lack of railroad or other transportation routes delayed commercial extraction of the deposits. An early promoter of the industrial potential that lay in the undeveloped mountains was former Confederate

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<sup>21</sup> Hibbard, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Louise Leslie, *Tazewell County* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 1982), 279.

<sup>23</sup> Chataigne, J. H. (J. Henry), *Chataigne's Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer* (Richmond, VA: Baughman Bros., 1880), 490.

<sup>24</sup> Several county histories indicate that there was post office at Pinhook, but this could not be confirmed through post office records. A 1924 newspaper article, printed about the time Graham was renamed Bluefield, stated "The town was once Pinhook, but no one seems to know whether the post office was Pinhook or Harman at that time." Harman was derived from the name of a family living in the area and the article described "stubborn resentment" when the Grahams of Philadelphia arrived and changed the name from Harman to Graham. "Pioneers Recall Time Graham was Harman," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 15, 1924:41.

<sup>25</sup> After the town became Graham, the name Harman was applied to another area and post office outside of the town limits.

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major and topographical engineer Jedediah Hotchkiss. In 1873, Hotchkiss was hired to complete a survey around Flat Top Mountain that encompassed about 500,000 acres that included parts of Mercer, McDowell, and Wyoming counties in West Virginia, and the northern part of Tazewell County, Virginia. While conducting the survey, Hotchkiss' assistant discovered a seam of coal 13-feet deep in the area that would become known as the Pocahontas coalfield. With this evidence of untapped coal deposits, Hotchkiss was successful in persuading a group of Philadelphia capitalists, headed by Thomas Graham, to purchase some of the best land in the area.<sup>26</sup> Economic depression in the following years, however, stalled development of the area.

In 1880, Hotchkiss began publication of *The Virginias: A Mining, Scientific, and Industrial Journal Devoted to the Development of Virginia and West Virginia* that presented information concerning the mineral deposits in the two states and "how they may be made profitable." As historian Ronald Eller notes, Hotchkiss's efforts paid off:

As a result of this publication and Hotchkiss's persistent promotional work, in 1881 the Philadelphia backers of the newly created N&W Railroad became interested in the Flat Top coal fields. Following a personal inspection of the area by Vice-President Frederick J. Kimball, the N&W began development of the area.<sup>27</sup>

The late nineteenth century coal economy and the expansion of the railroad into Tazewell County attracted industrialist from outside areas and some of Bluefield's most successful enterprises were headed by individuals from Richmond, Philadelphia, and as far away as Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

In 1882, N&W selected Bluefield, West Virginia, over Graham as the location of its new repair shops, yards, and regional headquarters for the Pocahontas Division, which extended into the coalfields. The West Virginia city was selected, in part, due to its location on a summit, which facilitated N&W's natural gravity switching system.<sup>29</sup> Railroad executive Frederick Kimball wrote to J. Dickinson Sergeant, a Graham businessman and land owner, downplaying the impact of the company's decision on future development in the Town of Graham: "I should not...consider that it [the choice of Bluefield] should in any way compete with or interfere with the development of...Graham where there is plenty of level ground...and water for manufacturing purposes...and where will be the junction between our Clinch Valley and our New River divisions."<sup>30</sup> As Kimball predicted, Graham did thrive as the junction point of the N&W's New River Division, which extended north to the company's Pocahontas coalfields, and the Clinch Valley railroad,

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880-1930* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 50-51.

<sup>27</sup> Eller, 51.

<sup>28</sup> In 1898, John Patterson Cameron, a native of Aberdeen, Scotland, purchased C.P. McWayne's Graham Plow & Foundry Co. and renamed it "Thistle Foundry & Machine Corp.," in honor of his Scottish heritage. Thistle was a cast iron foundry that made castings for the coke ovens for the region's coalfields. N & W Railroad, which built a spur into the foundry complex, was one of the primary customers since they owned most of the coal mines. The foundry, one of the county's oldest industrial businesses, remained active into the early twenty-first century.

<sup>29</sup> C. Stuart McGehee, "Bluefield," e-WV, the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 10, 2023. Accessed online at: <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/562>. Bluefield, WV, which was not incorporated until 1889, experienced rapid urbanization between 1887-1888 that outpaced its infrastructure. One history noted that rail traffic increased that year by over 300% and by 1900, the population was 10,000.

<sup>30</sup> Ed Wolfe, Charles H. Wilson, Jr., and Paul Mandelkern, *Norfolk & Western's Clinch Valley Line* (Pittsburgh, PA: HEW Enterprises, 2013), 28-29.

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which continued southwest to the line's terminus at Norton, Wise County, Virginia, where it connected to trains headed west.

In 1883, N&W trains carried the first coal out of Pocahontas, through Graham, and to the railroad's depot in Radford (see Additional Documentation 5). In 1886, N&W built its coal piers at Lambert's Point in Norfolk, and eventually shipped Pocahontas coal there for shipment to larger markets.

#### Town Charter

The Virginia General Assembly granted a charter for the Town of Graham that went into force on January 28, 1884. The town operated under a mayor-council organization. Later amendments to the town charter increased the size of the town council, made administrative changes, or added territory to the town boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

Most county histories credit Thomas Graham—a Philadelphia-native, railroad engineer and surveyor, and land speculator—with the creation of the town's street layout. Together with his sons, John and Walter, Graham established the Graham Land and Improvement Company, which sold lots in the town. A chain of title and deed review, however, conducted for the Harman Lodge No. 222 in 1951 indicated that J. Dickinson Sergeant, who conveyed property for the construction of the lodge, was "the first one to lay off land at Graham into town lots." The report stated:

J. D. Sergeant was the first one to lay off land at Graham, Va., into town lots. He had a survey made, & map made of lots laid off, but has never had his map recorded. This was prior to Acts of 1887-8, Virginia Assembly, p. 553, requiring same to be recorded.<sup>32</sup>

In 1890, Sergeant conveyed 80 acres to the Graham Land and Improvement Company, which became the central part of the Town of Graham and included the historic district area. Submitted as "Plan D of the Town of Graham," the town's gridded street plan, presumably following those previously laid out but unrecorded by Sergeant, was formally established (see Additional Documentation 6). The plan included excepted parcels that had been previously conveyed by Sergeant to others, including the Harman Lodge's prominent parcel.<sup>33</sup>

The original street names in Graham's commercial area were Wisted (also seen as Wister or Weister) Avenue (present-day Virginia Avenue), Spring Street, Spruce Street, Tazewell Avenue, and Morton Avenue (present-day S. College Avenue). In the present historic district area, Graham Avenue was later added as a street, and Hawk Street was later extended across the railroad tracks and became Depot Street.

The railway continued with its plan to use Graham as a distribution point to the coalfields to the north and southwest, and in 1891 built a station and signal tower there when the Clinch Valley line opened. A freight

<sup>31</sup> Virginia and Virginia General Assembly, *Acts Passed At a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: [s.n.], 1884), Chap. 4, January 28, 1884, p.53ff. [Hereafter referred to as "Acts of Assembly"]. Amendments to the town charter to increase the boundaries and amend various sections of the original charter were passed at the General Assembly sessions of 1891/92; 1893/94; 1895/96, 1897/98, 1899/1900, 1901, and 1910. Accessed online via the Library of Virginia's Legislative History in Virginia database at: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008885427>.

<sup>32</sup> Smith and Perry, "J.M. McCall ETALS, in Trust for Harman Lodge No. 222 AM&AF," [1951]. Copy reviewed at Harman Lodge No. 222 AM&AF, Bluefield, VA. This document traces the chain of title for the lodge property back to 1798 when it was first granted by the Commonwealth to Joseph Davidson.

<sup>33</sup> Tazewell County Deed Book 25:154-157 (February 8, 1890).

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station, then a passenger station stood on the south side of the tracks near the current location of the Bluefield Monument Co. The next decade would see a boom in building and investment in Graham businesses.

Transportation connections in Graham were not limited to the train. In 1894, the Graham-Bluefield Electric Railway company received a charter from the General Assembly to operate an electric railroad to carry passengers and freight from Graham westward to the state line. The company was headed by John H. Dingee, Walter Graham, John Graham, Jr., Walter S. Graham, and William J. Haines.<sup>34</sup> It is not clear whether the line was built, or if the interest was sold, but by 1910, an electric streetcar was operating between West Graham (an area west of the commercial district and the location of many local industries and dwellings) and Bluefield, West Virginia. Another line ran between Princeton and Bluefield, WV (1915), and by 1920, the lines were consolidated and operated as the Tri-City Traction Co.<sup>35</sup> The trolley tracks are clearly visible in historical photographs of Virginia Avenue and are depicted on period maps. The trolley ended service in 1937, but was soon replaced by a bus line that offered area transportation services.

### Early Businesses

The 1893 Chataigne's business directory provides a list of Graham's earliest businesses, services, and manufacturers. At the time, the town had two attorneys, a blacksmith, a boarding house, a drugstore, a physician, six general merchants, and three lumber/shingle producers. The Bank of Graham, chartered in 1890, had established itself on present-day S. College Avenue (then known as Morton Street), where W.L. Nash's general mercantile store, established in 1885, also stood. C.P. Greever's livery stable stood on the north side of present-day Virginia Avenue, and the Graham Hotel, financed by the Graham Land & Improvement Co., stood on a hillside overlooking the town to the east.<sup>36</sup> The 1897 business directory for Graham added two builders/carpenters, a dentist, two druggists, a hardware store, an additional physician, and a local newspaper operated by G.J. Holdbrook known as the "Graham Galaxy."<sup>37</sup>

The early businesses, even many of the industrial enterprises outside of the commercial area, were housed in frame buildings. The 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map is the first depiction of the Town of Graham, and illustrates the burgeoning commercial district with stores, churches, and dwellings lining the primary streets (see Additional Documentation 7). It is notable that except for a couple of buildings (one church, the Bank of Graham, and the iron-fronted commercial building known as the Bane Block), the town's buildings were of frame construction. These buildings would be replaced in the early twentieth century by more permanent brick and stone structures.

In 1895, the **Harman Lodge No. 222 A.F. & A.M.** was constructed at the prominent northeast corner of Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue. Chartered in 1866, the lodge built its handsome three-story building on land it acquired from J. D. Sergeant in 1890. Not only did this building represent an important fraternal organization, but it also provided commercial space on its first floor level. This arrangement

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<sup>34</sup> John H. Dingee was also listed as one of the principals on the 1894 charter for the stockholding Graham Water Company, that was authorize "to furnish and supply...water, gas-light, power and heat" to municipalities, businesses, and individuals in Tazewell or in the Town of Graham and elsewhere. Acts of Assembly, Chap. 145, February 6, 1894, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Wolfe et al., 31; Leslie, 287. The Tri-City Traction Co. was headquartered in Princeton, WV.

<sup>36</sup> Chataigne, J. H. (J. Henry), *Chataigne's Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer* (Richmond, VA: J. H. Chataigne & Co. Publishers, 1893).

<sup>37</sup> Chataigne, J. H. (J. Henry), *Chataigne's Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer* (Richmond, VA: J.L. Hill Print Co., 1896).

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continues to the present time with the New Graham Pharmacy occupying the street level store. The Harman Lodge is the oldest building in the historic district.

In 1899, S.N. Huffard built the three-story Chicago House Furnishing Co. building at the southeast corner of Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue, directly across the street from the lodge. An extremely successful local business, the firm remained under family ownership through the late twentieth century. The building remained at this location until it was demolished in 1993 and is now the site of the Graham Square Park (VDHR #143-5070).

#### Early Twentieth Century

The Bank of Graham was chartered in 1890, and erected a brick building on S. College Avenue, near its intersection with Tazewell Avenue. At the time, it was one of the few brick or stone buildings in the town. In 1906, the **Bank of Graham** received a permit to construct its Beaux Arts-style building at the southwest corner of Virginia Avenue and Spruce Street. The bank's building site had been occupied by a boarding house that was demolished around 1903. The site was just south of the N&W depot—an advantageous location providing convenience and visibility. Completed in 1907, the building's architectural style was an elegant addition to the street and the rusticated stone and brick walls conveyed a sense of security within its walls.

As if to balance the street, in 1916, the **First National Bank** built its Classical Revival-style building at the opposite end of Virginia Avenue at the southwest corner of the intersection with S. College Avenue. This building is one of two for which the architects have been identified. The Bluefield, WV, firm of Pedigo & Garry is credited with the design. The tall two-story buff brick building has a pedimented temple front of stone with large Ionic columns. As with the Bank of Graham, the building conveyed both elegance and security. Although they are no longer used as banks, both buildings retain their historic character and appearance and contribute to the architectural significance of the historic district. The Bank of Graham was recently sold for reuse, and the First National Bank houses a communications company.

During first the two decades of the twentieth century, new businesses opened along Graham's streets providing citizens with a selection of dry goods, housewares, and specialty shops. In 1907, Dudley & Frazier, one of the largest and most popular of the general merchandise stores in Graham, opened at the corner of Tazewell Avenue and S. College Avenue. The same year, S. H. McMullen and his son, Allen, opened their general mercantile store on S. College Avenue near the intersection with Virginia Avenue. The store had a wide range of items including dry goods, notions, shoes, produce, groceries, produces, tobacco and "other needful things in the home."

By 1908, a town hall had been added to the jail, which stood at the corner of Virginia Avenue and Walnut Street (outside of the district area), and across from the post office and newspaper offices. The Hotel Graham, operated by Squire J. Boyd, stood proudly at the northwest corner of Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue. In 1912, J. H. McMullin opened the City Meat Market on S. College Avenue, which carried fresh meat, "fancy groceries, vegetables, fruits, produce, etc." In 1913, T. A. Osborne had purchased a brick general merchandise store on Virginia Avenue from the previous owner W. J. Cole & Co. Osborne's store carried dry goods, notions, shoes, and groceries.

An enthusiastic newspaper account of Graham's construction during 1914 hailed the year as "the most important period of history in Graham, both in municipal improvements and in the natural growth of the

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town.”<sup>38</sup> The article estimated that new construction costs totaled over \$200,000, and the outlook for the coming year was as encouraging. The Bluefield Telephone Company (housed in part of the Bank of Graham) improved its equipment and provided 24-hour service and Appalachian Power Company enlarged its facilities to improve service. Infrastructure improvements included a sanitary sewer system and a new water system consisting of a modern hydro-electric pump and steel water tank. Grade crossings at the railroad tracks were improved and “several hundred yards” of sidewalks were installed, though more were needed. The Bank of Graham was lauded for planting ornamental shade trees in front of its building, which also provided beautification along the street.<sup>39</sup> A new high school and numerous dwellings also were erected within the corporate limits. In the historic commercial area, the three-story brick Graham Hardware Company (formerly on S. College Avenue, not extant) was completed at a cost of \$15,000, and Squire J. Boyd’s brick department store (“The Model”) was completed at a cost of \$12,000. The Eclipse Roller Mill Company purchased a large concrete block building east of the downtown commercial area. The mill, which ground wheat and corn, continued operations until 1930; the building was demolished about 2018 and the site was redeveloped as a Dollar General Store (VDHR #143-5083-0019, 404 Virginia Avenue).

The article also noted that African-American residents had built numerous new houses and “the colored section of town [north of the railroad tracks] is building up quite rapidly, showing that our colored population is progressing. The colored citizens are working hard for the establishment of a new school house, and they are entitled to it. They are also building a new church.”

The 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map shows the historic district area as almost fully developed (see Additional Documentation 8). Significant buildings that lined Graham’s streets were the Harman Lodge, the Chicago House Furnishing Co., the First National Bank, the Bank of Graham, the N&W depot, a drugstore at the intersection of Virginia Avenue and Graham Avenue, two mattress manufacturers on Graham Avenue, and several general stores. There were also several dwellings along Virginia Avenue, but as the area became more highly commercial in character in the coming years, the houses were demolished.

Buildings in the historic district that were historically associated with industrial-type uses or manufacturing are located primarily in the east end of the district area and within access of the railroad tracks that run along the north edge of the commercial core. From the earliest days of the town’s development, industries located near the railroad for ease of transporting its products, or along the Bluestone River for access to the water supply. Often, the building sites took advantage of both. The east end buildings include the Bluefield Monument Co.’s work shop and display yard built in 1922; the two-story brick distribution warehouse, built about 1938 at the former site of the town’s cattle pens on Depot Street, with platforms on the north side to facilitate shipments to and from the railroad; and the three-story brick Bluefield Farm Bureau warehouse that was built in 1935 and included a railroad siding for coal shipments.

Industrial manufacturing buildings also were built on Graham Avenue (earlier called Railroad Avenue) and had access to the railroad tracks via elevated platforms. One such enterprise was the Virginia Confectionary Company--a bakery and candy factory--that appears on the 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map. Located near the train tracks, an elevated platform connected the building to a siding along the tracks to facilitate loading and unloading.<sup>40</sup> By 1923, the building was occupied by the Bluestone Mattress & Bedding Manufacturing Co. At the turn of the twentieth century, the town had two mattress companies that were

<sup>38</sup> “Graham Daily News,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 3, 1915:5.

<sup>39</sup> “Planting Shade Trees,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 14, 1914:5.

<sup>40</sup> The platform is depicted on the fire company’s map, and on Norfolk & Western Railway Drawing Y-4104, “Platform Built at Graham by Graham Candy Company,” 1902, Norfolk & Western Historical Society, <https://www.nwhs.org/archivesdb/detail.php?ID=218275>.



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located on Graham Avenue: the Graham Mattress Co., which was founded in 1894 by Orrick A. Metcalf that also manufactured brooms, and Bluestone Mattress and Pillow Co., established around 1903 by William Mitchell. Mitchell, a Richmonder who arrived in Graham in 1893, also was the founder of Mitchell Transparent Ice Co. and the Graham Ice Cream Company, located outside the district area and no longer extant. Mitchell's interests were later consolidated as the Graham Manufacturing Corp., and around 1932 a subsequent owner renamed the company the Bluestone Bedding Corp., which is retained in the painted



*Figure 11. Commercial Building on Graham Avenue Constructed in 1903 as Virginia Confectionary Co. and Later Occupied by Bluestone Mattress and Pillow Co. which became Bluestone Bedding Corp.*

signage on the front of the building (Figure 11). At present, the building is occupied by an electrician, Millsap Electric.

In the 1920s, as transportation modes evolved towards vehicular access, new industrial buildings were built along Spring Street in the southern part of the historic district. In 1923, F. W. Johns and his brother-in-law, T. H. Ellison, both of Norfolk, established the New Method Laundry in Graham. Originally located on N. College Avenue on the north side of the train overpass (outside of the historic district), the firm built a new building at the corner of Spring Street and Spruce Street in 1938 (VDHR #143-5083-0031, 104 Spruce Street). The one-story, brick laundry reflects an industrial character as a long, low building with parapet end walls, a monitor roof and rows of metal-frame industrial type windows. The east end of the building held large overhead doors to facilitate trucks; additional overhead doors were installed on the south side of the building. The building continues in use as Bluefield Cleaners, a laundry business founded in 1947 by brothers and returning servicemen Warren and Diluard Shrewsbury. About 1950, another distribution

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warehouse was built on the south side of Spring Street and east of Spruce Street (VDHR #143-5083-00033, 248 Spring Street). That building, featuring two large vehicular openings on its facade, also continues to be used as the Bluefield Food Products warehouse.

### Town of Bluefield

In 1923, local officials began to discuss changing the name of Graham to Bluefield. Those in favor of the change pointed to “the advantages that at once would be brought about by a change from the commercial and business standpoint.” It was felt that the name change would engender closer cooperation with the West Virginia city of the same name. Opponents of the name change were accused of sentimentality.<sup>41</sup> At the 1924 session of the Virginia General Assembly, a bill was approved to change the name to Bluefield. The bill took effect upon the approval of residents at an election held June 10, 1924. By a margin of 64 votes, the name change was approved and officially occurred on July 1, 1924.<sup>42</sup> To commemorate the occasion, a ceremonial municipal “marriage” of the two Bluefields was held and attended by the governors of both states. The lavish celebration included the actual marriage of a couple—Emma Smith of Bluefield, WV, and Lorenzo Yost of Graham.<sup>43</sup>

The year before the towns merged, Bluefield College opened for classes as a private college founded by the Baptist General Association of Virginia. The school, then a two-year junior college, became a four-year college in 1975, and in 2022 achieved university status. The campus of about 900 students is located outside of the historic district in the southern section of town but has had a dramatically positive impact on businesses in Bluefield since its founding.

The 1940 Polk city directory for Bluefield, Virginia, included a description of the town aimed at allaying any concerns that prospective residents or investors might have about moving to the coal region. The description noted that there was no coal mine within 12 miles of the town and its appearance was not “pock marked with mine openings, and its skyline made up largely of towering mine tipples.”<sup>44</sup> Bluefield was growing, but in a manner presumed to be pleasant to look at (Figure 12). In 1941, figures for the previous year’s industry and commercial businesses were presented at the annual Chamber of Commerce meeting. Bluefield was noted as having 60 retail stores that employed 104 individuals, and had receipts of over \$1.3 million. The town’s 8 wholesale houses had 84 employees with sales of about \$1.4 million. The data indicated that “Bluefield, Va, is keeping pace with its sister city as a jobbing center.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> “Proposed Change of Name Favored,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 16, 1923:23.

<sup>42</sup> Acts of Assembly, Chapter 215, March 14, 1924, p.320; “Battle of Ballots will be Waged Today,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 10, 1924:9; “Graham Votes to Take Name of Bluefield,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 1924:1.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart McGehee, “The Wedding of the Bluefields,” *Goldenseal Magazine* Vol. 29 No. 2 (Summer)2003:25-29.

<sup>44</sup> *Polk’s Bluefield (Mercer Co., WV) City Directory Including Princeton, WV and Bluefield, Va* (R.L. Polk,1940).

<sup>45</sup> “Opportunities Virginia Side Offers Industries Emphasized at Dinner Given by C of C,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, October 19, 1941:22.

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Figure 12. Looking East Along Virginia Avenue, ca. 1945.  
Source: *This is Tazewell County, Virginia* (1945).

#### Bluefield's African-American Businesses

Bluefield's population historically has been predominantly White, but the coal and railroad operations of the late nineteenth century also attracted European immigrants and Black residents. Throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, the town and county, as well as the Commonwealth of Virginia, remained a racially segregated society, which was reflected in separate churches, schools, businesses, and neighborhoods. Bluefield's African-American residents built homes and churches on the hillside north of the downtown commercial area, as well as beyond the downtown area. The historically Black neighborhood that developed north of district area and north of the railroad tracks included dwellings, churches, and stores. In 1907, the town directory listed S. J. Bampfield, M.D., as a Black physician with his office at the corner of Thayer and Wilson streets. Other Black residents in the neighborhood worked in the N&W shops, or as grade foremen, cooks, and brakemen.

In 1925, the north Bluefield neighborhood became the location of the county's sole high school for Black students, which was built on Thayer Street. When the county's schools were integrated in 1965, the Tazewell County High School, as the school was known, was used as the Graham Junior High School until 1981. About 1985, the school was converted for use as apartments. The school has a notable association with

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Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson (1918-2020), a math and music teacher at the school in the 1950s, who went on to a distinguished 33-year long career with NACA/NASA. As a physicist, Ms. Johnson calculated trajectories for lunar launch and return missions.

An interview with Paul Thomas Williamson, included in a book of oral histories on Black heritage in Tazewell County, provides insights into the struggles of Bluefield's African-American residents during the twentieth century. Mr. Williamson described jobs he had as a youth and young man working on a farm, doing construction work with the Works Progress Administration, and as a coal miner for 44.5 years. He then went into business for himself as a general contractor. He recalled that the first hard-surfaced road in town was Virginia Avenue, and the rest were gravel. Mr. Williamson recalled:

They had grocery stores all up and down the street. They had hardware stores and two drug stores here in Bluefield, Virginia. We had five Barber Shops at different times.

One time we had a big insurance company here—that was run by a black man. We had a grocery store and an undertaking parlor owned by black men. A black man owned the first pop factory—called Red Rock. We had a black stone mason that made ci[n]der block. We had pool rooms owned by black people. This was all back in the 1920s.<sup>46</sup>

The location of some of these businesses may have been on the north side of the railroad tracks along Sargeant Street (not extant). Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps from 1930 and 1938 depict grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and boarding houses along the street. A 1907 newspaper article reported that the Red Rock Ginger Ale company, headed by John Froe, was “branching out” and had received a new delivery truck.<sup>47</sup> In 1924, the newspaper reported that construction was “progressing nicely on the new Red Rock Ginger Ale building on Sargeant Street by Graham colored men.”<sup>48</sup> The building was expected to be in use by that summer. In 1925, a published obituary for Charles Barnes noted that he had worked for many years as the janitor for the Bank of Graham. His funeral, it was said, was “largely attended by both white and colored friends.”<sup>49</sup> These and other newspaper accounts and personal stories indicate that although Bluefield's Black residents faced obstacles to education and work opportunities, many created businesses and provided services that contributed to the town's growth and quality of life.

#### Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century to Present

On April 4, 1959, the last passenger train travelled through Bluefield. The loss of railroad service, however, was quickly supplanted by the rise in automobile travel through Bluefield's historic commercial area and automotive businesses, including several gasoline and service stations, were built along Virginia Avenue. The ca. 1950 service station (VDHR #143-5014, 325 Virginia Avenue) at the eastern end of Virginia Avenue is a good example of the stations that were built during that period. Buildings in the historic district that date to between 1950 and 1970 include the row of one-story offices on Spring Street (ca. 1965, VDHR #143-5083-0032), a detached commercial building (ca.1970, VDHR #143-5083-0036, 130 Spring Street), the former Dairy Queen on Spring Street (1968, VDHR #143-5066), and the two buildings at the southwest corner of Spring Street and S. College Avenue (1950, VDHR #143-5045, ca. 1963, VDHR #143-5046).

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Bane Peery and Ross Weeks, Jr. (ed.), *Cause I'm Colored: The Black Heritage of Tazewell County, Oral History Interviews* (Tazewell, VA: Historic Crab Orchard Museum & Pioneer Park, 2001), 221.

<sup>47</sup> “Gingerale (sic) Plant Branching Out,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, August 24, 1921:6.

<sup>48</sup> “Ginger Ale Building,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 25, 1924:31.

<sup>49</sup> “Funeral of Colored Man,” *Bluefield Dailey Telegraph*, October 27, 1925:7.



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Two important developments occurred in the early 1960s that, while located outside of the historic district, greatly added to the overall quality of life in Bluefield. In 1961, the town updated its water system to a state-of-the-art facility. The new treatment plant, which replaced 1940s facility, stood at the site of the former plant on the banks of the Bluestone River on the west end of town. Another important development that occurred in the early 1960s was the creation of the Fincastle Country Club and Golf Course located in the Double Gates area at the base of East River Mountain. Headed by local businessmen from both Virginia and West Virginia, the golf course opened in 1961 and was soon followed by a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a club house. This amenity remains active and currently is owned and operated by the Town of Bluefield.

An assessment of Bluefield's businesses in 1965 found only one building vacant in the commercial core along Virginia Avenue. Among businesses that had recently moved into the area were Graham Jewelry, Utt Refrigeration, Bonanza Discount, Virginia Side Motors and Custom Enterprises, a printing firm, and professional offices. It was also at this time that Spring Street was extended west to connect with S. College Avenue, which was viewed as a municipal improvement.<sup>50</sup> A 1967 advertisement supporting the local high school sports team identified many of the businesses in the district area, including: M. E. Blaylock Insurance Agency (544 Virginia Avenue); Central Television (520 Virginia Avenue); Chicago House Furnishing Co. (531 Virginia Avenue); Fisher-Trenton Pharmacy (532 Virginia Avenue); Graham Jewelry (510 Virginia Avenue); R. P. Harman and Co. (538 Virginia Avenue); Neel's Men's Shop (528 Virginia Avenue); Nehi Bottling Company (409 Virginia Avenue); New Graham Pharmacy (566 Virginia Ave.) New Method Laundry (Spruce Street); Southwest Virginia Bank (108 Spruce); and Time Finance Company and Weisiger Insurance Agency (601 Virginia Avenue, former First National Bank).<sup>51</sup>

In June 1979, U.S. 460, which formerly extended through Bluefield along the same path as U.S. 19/Virginia Avenue, was removed from U.S. 19 through Bluefield. At that time, a new expressway was constructed from its eastern junction with S.R. 720 [Hockman Pike] east to the West Virginia line.<sup>52</sup> This resulted in the construction of strip shopping malls near U.S. 460 and with larger, national store chains moving into the area. Small, local businesses in the historic commercial area suffered, and some closed.

In 2004, the town hall building that stood across S. College Avenue from the Harman Lodge was demolished when significant structural deficiencies in the building were discovered. Years of flood inundation from Beaverpond Creek had severely compromised the 1951 building and other buildings on the south side of Virginia Avenue. The difficult decision was made to move the town hall out of the commercial area, where it had stood since the town was incorporated. The demolition, carried out as part of a Federal Emergency Management Agency flood mitigation project, also included the demolition of an automotive garage and nearby commercial buildings (Calloway Building and Rutherford building) that also were located in the flood plain. The former town hall site was renovated into a new green space known as Jack Asbury Park. As part of the project, the town constructed a new town hall and municipal building in the southern part of town near Graham Middle School on a site donated by Leatherwood Farms.

The historic architectural resources in the Bluefield Commercial Historic District represent the commercial core of the town, dating from 1895 to about 1970. Major anchors in the town include the Harman Lodge No. 222 and its associated commercial space housing the New Graham Pharmacy and the U.S. Post Office.

<sup>50</sup> "New Businesses Moving into Bluefield," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1965:5.

<sup>51</sup> Advertisement, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 8, 1967:11.

<sup>52</sup> [Dave Strong], Virginia Highway Index: U.S. Highways: US 460, January 30, 2022. Accessed online at <http://www.vahighways.com/route-log/us460.htm>.

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Banking is still represented in the historic district by National Bank (VDHR #143-5064, 511 Virginia Avenue), built in 1973, which is a later manifestation of the merger of Bank of Graham and the Bank of Tazewell County (1964). Bluefield Cleaners currently occupies the 1931 building formerly occupied by New Method Laundry. The row of adjoining brick commercial buildings along Virginia Avenue houses a variety of locally owned businesses including medical supply, insurance agents, attorney offices, printing services, dress shops, antique shops, and pet care. Restaurants also are present in the commercial area, including Margaret's Country Corner (VDHR #143-5023, 500 Virginia Avenue) and The Roasted Bean coffeehouse (VDHR 143-5044, 103 Spring Street); in March 2024, a Princeton, WV, frozen custard business, Evan's Sweets, moved into the former Dairy Queen, built in 1968 (VDHR #143-5066, 510 Spring Street). Graham Square (VDHR #143-5070, Virginia Avenue and S. College Avenue) is a municipal park located on the former Chicago House Furnishing Co. site that is used as a gathering site for local events and festivals.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** VDHR #134-5083

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** approx. 11

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.253490    Longitude: -81.271410



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2. Latitude: 37.254340      Longitude: -81.266460  
3. Latitude: 37.252570      Longitude: -81.268350  
4. Latitude: 37.251580      Longitude: -81.271290

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927      or      ☐ NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

The boundaries of the district are shown on the enclosed sketch map (1"=200') as prepared by Tazewell County GIS. The boundaries encompass the historic commercial core of the Town of Bluefield, which primarily includes resources on Virginia Avenue, Graham Avenue, Spring Street, and S. College Avenue. This area contains the greatest concentration of Bluefield's historic commercial resources and includes the portion of downtown that was platted in 1890 by the Graham Land & Improvement Corp as Plan D of the Town of Graham.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic district boundaries have been drawn to encompass the largest concentration of historic commercial resources in the Town of Bluefield. Residential and religious resources have been excluded. Although additional commercial development formerly stood west of S. College Avenue and on Walnut Street, much of this land is now vacant due to demolitions following recurrent flooding. Where possible, vacant land has been excluded in the district and only a few resources of modern construction have been included.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Debra A. McClane/Architectural Historian  
organization: Debra A. McClane, Architectural Historian  
street & number: 4711 Devonshire Road  
city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23225  
e-mail: dmcclane1@verizon.net  
telephone: 804/233-3890  
date: May 20, 2024

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Bluefield Commercial Historic District  
City or Vicinity: Town of Bluefield  
County: Tazewell County State: VA  
Photographer: Debra A. McClane  
Date Photographed: January 22-24, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 1 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0001<br>Harman Lodge No. 222, 566 Virginia Ave., looking northeast     |
| 2 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0002<br>Commercial buildings, 500-520 Virginia Ave., looking northwest |
| 3 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0003<br>General view looking north-northeast along Virginia Ave.       |
| 4 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0004<br>Bluefield Monument Co., 430 Virginia Ave., looking northwest   |
| 5 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0005<br>Warehouse, 430 Virginia Ave., looking northeast                |
| 6 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0006<br>Bluefield Farm Bureau, 316 Virginia Ave., looking north        |
| 7 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0007<br>Bank of Graham, 501 Virginia Ave., looking south               |
| 8 of 22 | VA_TazewellCounty_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict_0008<br>First National Bank. 601 Virginia Ave., looking southwest      |

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- 9 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0009  
Bluefield Post Office, 507 Virginia Ave., looking southeast
- 10 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0010  
Detail, right side of post office mural, looking east
- 11 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0011  
Detail, left side of post office mural, looking east
- 12 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0012  
New Method Laundry/Bluefield Cleaners, 104 Spruce Street, looking northwest
- 13 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0013  
Service Station, 325 Virginia Ave., looking east
- 14 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0014  
Former Dairy Queen, 144 Spring Street, looking southwest
- 15 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0015  
General view, Graham Square Park and Virginia Ave. beyond, looking northeast
- 16 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0016  
Looking east along Virginia Ave. from Walnut Street (west edge of district)
- 17 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0017  
General view looking north-northeast at Graham Square Park and 500 block of Virginia Ave.
- 18 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0018  
General view looking northwest along Virginia Ave.
- 19 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0019  
Looking west along Graham Ave. Railroad embankment to right.
- 20 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0020  
Looking north along Spruce Street from Spring Street
- 21 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0021  
Looking north-northeast along S. College Ave.
- 22 of 22 VA\_TazewellCounty\_BluefieldCommercialHistoricDistrict\_0022  
View of commercial historic district from Tazewell Ave. (outside of district), looking north-northwest

### Figures

- Figure 1. Detail, U.S.G.S. Topographic Map, Pocahontas, VA, 1887 Showing Location of Graham (Bluefield), Va-WV state line, and general topography in area.
- Figure 2. Detail of Harman Lodge No. 222 Showing Plaque on Front of Building and Decorative Brick Detailing.
- Figure 3. Commercial Building at 500-504 Virginia Avenue, Looking North. Note corner entrance.
- Figure 4. View looking Northwest Along 500 Block of Virginia Avenue.
- Figure 5. Looking Northwest at the Bluefield Monument Co. Complex, late 1960s. Source: Eastern Region Coal Archives, Bluefield, WV.
- Figure 6. Remnants of Coal Shed at Bluefield Farm Bureau, Looking Northeast.
- Figure 7. Bank of Graham, ca.1910, Looking South. Source: Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, VA.
- Figure 8. First National Bank at Graham Under Construction, ca. 1916. Source: Graham Historical Society, Sanders house, Bluefield, VA
- Figure 9. Bluefield Post Office Construction Nearing Completion, January 19, 1941. Source: Lisa Byrd.
- Figure 10. Detail, South End, "Coal Mining" Mural in Bluefield Post Office.

Bluefield Commercial Historic District  
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Figure 11. Commercial Building on Graham Avenue Constructed in 1903 as Virginia Confectionary Co. and Later Occupied by Bluestone Mattress and Pillow Co. which became Bluestone Bedding Corp.

Figure 12. Looking East Along Virginia Avenue, ca. 1945.

Additional Documentation

1. Harman Lodge No. 222 A.F. and A.M., ca. 1900.
2. Advertisement announcing opening of Bluefield branch of the Farm Bureau.
3. Advertisement for First National Bank of Graham, VA.
4. Program for Post Office Dedication, Bluefield, VA, May 10, 1941.
5. Southwest Virginia Coalfield Rail System Map, showing rail network throughout region.
6. Plan "D" of the Town of Graham, Tazewell County, Virginia, filed by the Graham Land & Improvement Company (1890).
7. 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Graham, VA, showing approximate area of Bluefield Commercial Historic District.
8. 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Graham, VA, showing approximate area of Bluefield Commercial Historic District.
9. 1950s view looking east along Virginia Avenue.
10. 1960s view looking east along Virginia Avenue.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Bluefield Commercial Historic District

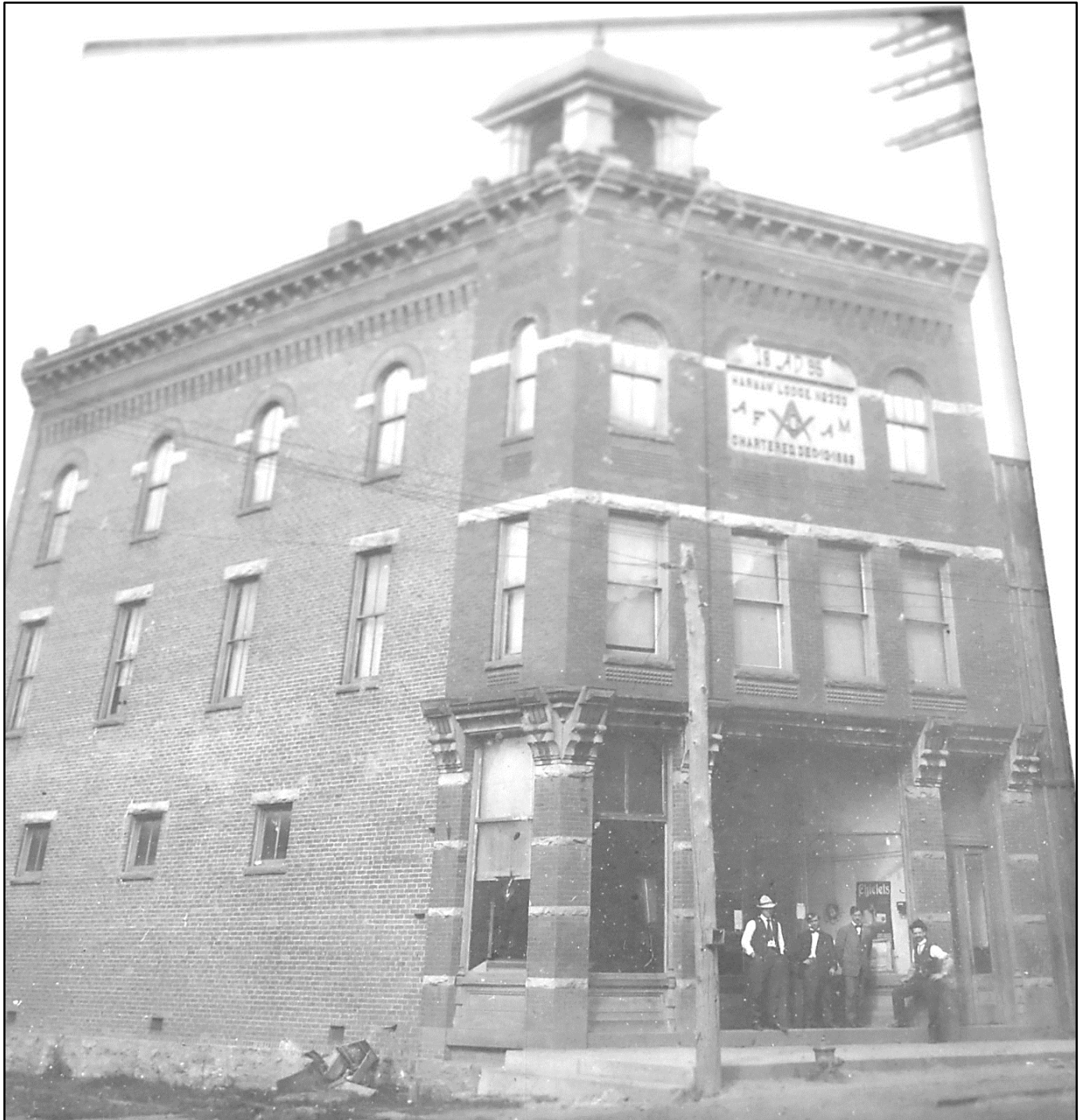
Name of Property  
Tazewell County, VA

County and State  
N/A

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Page 1



1. Harman Lodge No. 222 A.F. and A.M., ca. 1900. Courtesy Harman Lodge No. 222.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bluefield Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

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N/A

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Page 2

*We Recognize The Chain Stores As Legitimate Business Competition And Ask No Favors. We Are Going To Get Your Business On The Merits Of Our Service, Quality And Price.*

**If You Wish to Save Money Trade With**

# **The Farm Bureau Store**

**Which Opened Saturday**

## **BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA**

**HOW YOU CAN SAVE**

The Farm Bureau is a co-operative, non-profit organization, owned by those patronizing it, operating mainly to furnish farmers their supplies at cost and to sell farm products. No dues are charged and our services are open to all who wish to save by trading with us. The same price and treatment to all. We buy in car load lots direct from the manufacturer, wire fence, roofing, cement, plaster, paint, farm machinery, feeds, flour and meal, fertilizers, seeds, etc., and sell for cash, without delivery service, at far below what you pay others. We keep a record of each patron's purchases and at the end of each year refund all net profits in proportion to patronage in the form of common stock with voting rights and 6 per cent dividend. If you wish to save money come and trade with us. If you do not wish to save do not come.

We are opening a branch house at Bluefield, Va., in the old Graham Grocery Co. building and will be ready for business on and after Saturday, January 25th. This will be known as the Bluefield Farm Bureau. We recognize the chain stores as legitimate business competition and ask no favors. Considerations due is a matter for the consumer to decide. We are going to get your business on the merits of your service, quality and price. We buy the best and sell as cheap or cheaper than any one else. Our methods are such that we can give the public the greatest service. That, and not profits, is the object of the business.

We are glad to say to the members of the Farm Bureau, both at Richlands and Tazewell that your organization made wonderful progress in 1929. The membership grew rapidly, sales increased over all previous years to \$340,000.00, and according to our agreement with patrons we will refund over \$9,000.00 representing all net profits and dividends for 1929. With the new branch at Bluefield we should exceed half a million in 1930, and save our patrons in first cost and refunds at least \$75,000. Everybody is invited to trade with us.

# **FARM BUREAU STORE**

**In Old Graham Grocery Co. Building**  
**BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA.**

2. Advertisement announcing opening of Bluefield branch of the Farm Bureau.

Source: *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 26, 1930:8.

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**National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Bluefield Commercial Historic District

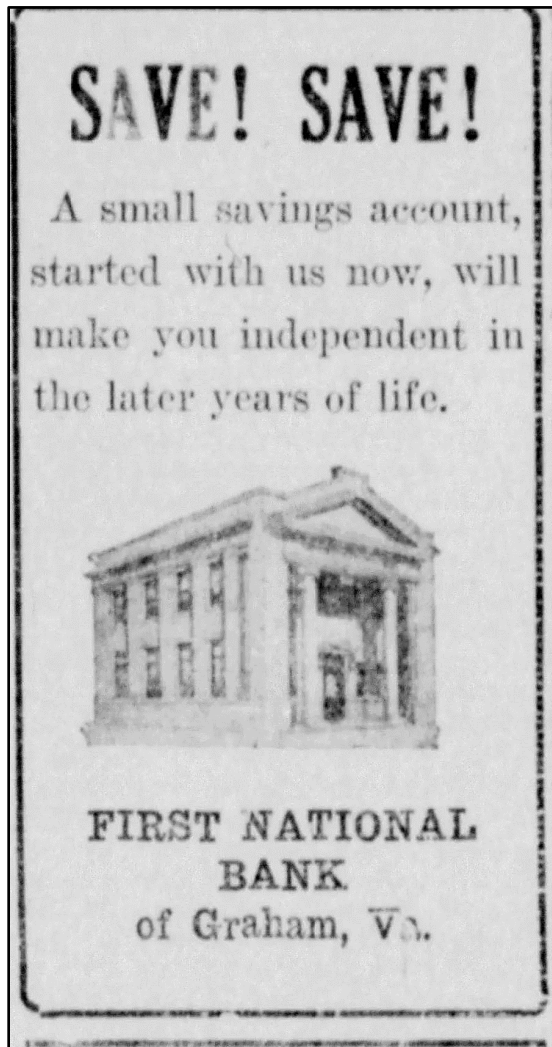
Name of Property  
Tazewell County, VA

County and State  
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 3



3. Advertisement for First National Bank of Graham, VA.  
*Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 28, 1920:5.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Bluefield Commercial Historic District

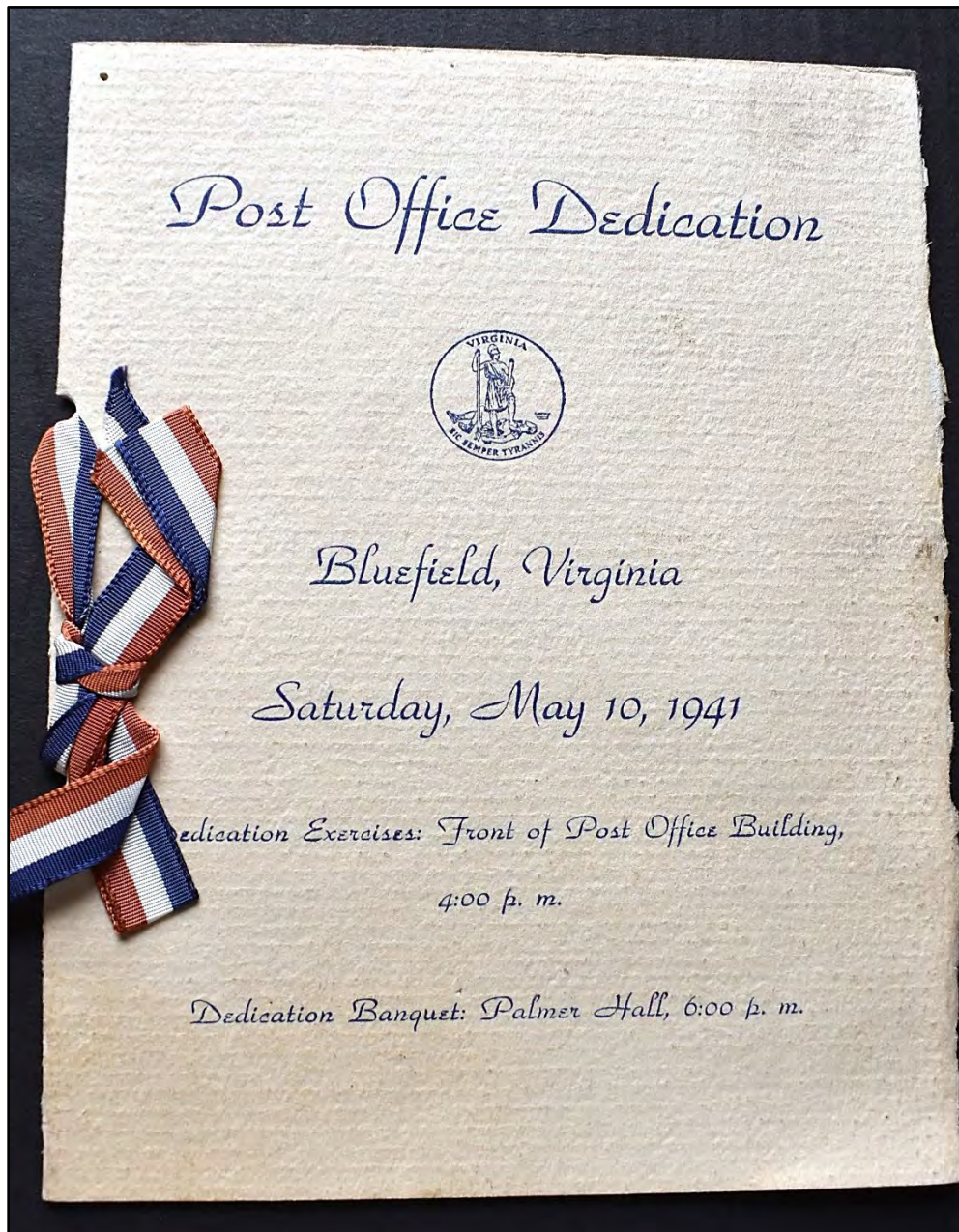
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Tazewell County, VA

County and State  
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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4. Program for Post Office Dedication, Bluefield, VA, May 10, 1941.  
Courtesy Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, VA.



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Bluefield Commercial Historic District

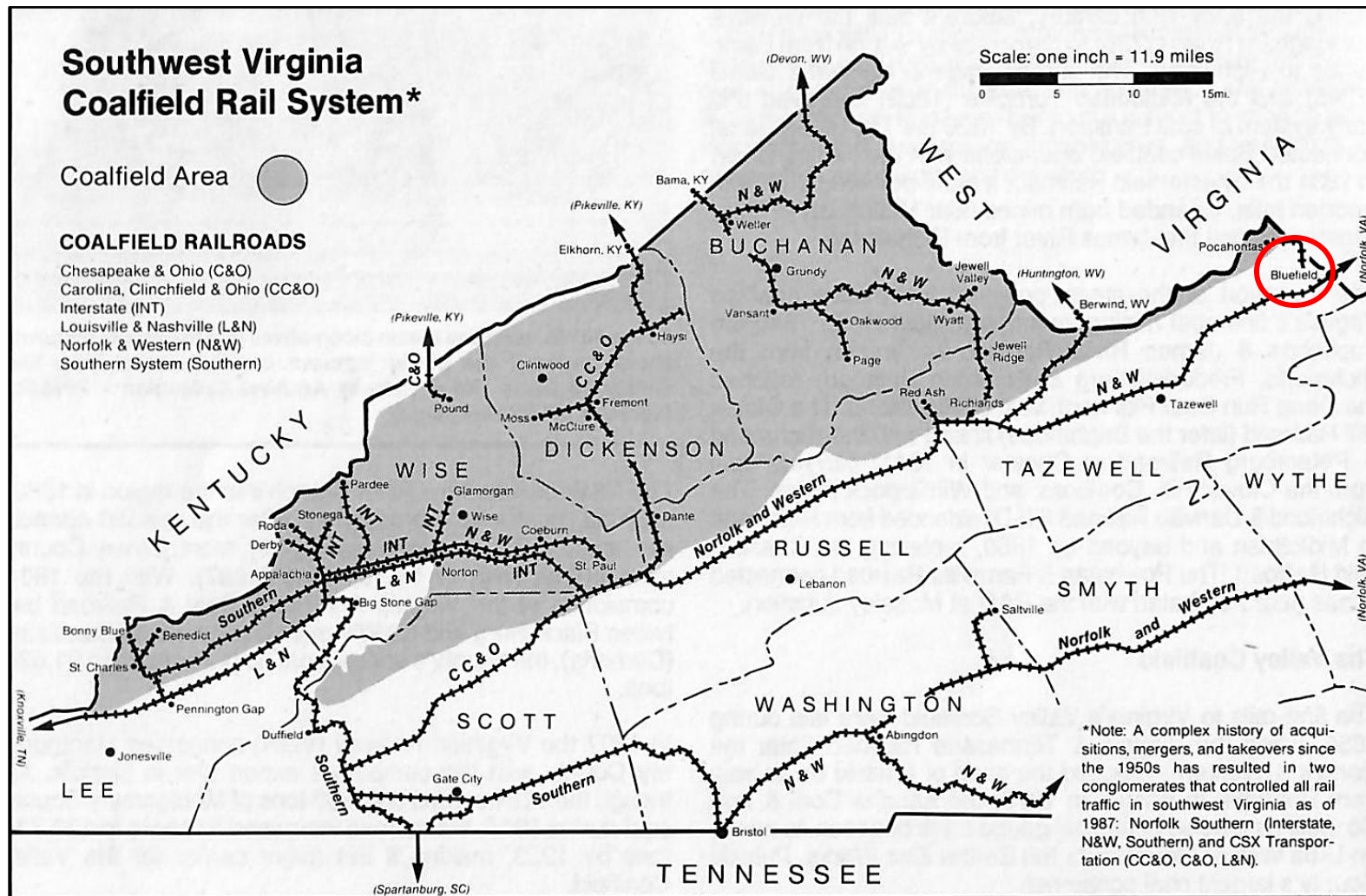
Name of Property

Tazewell County, VA

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



5. Southwest Virginia Coalfield Rail System Map, showing rail network throughout region. Source: Hibbard, 4.

United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation Sheet

Bluefield Commercial Historic District

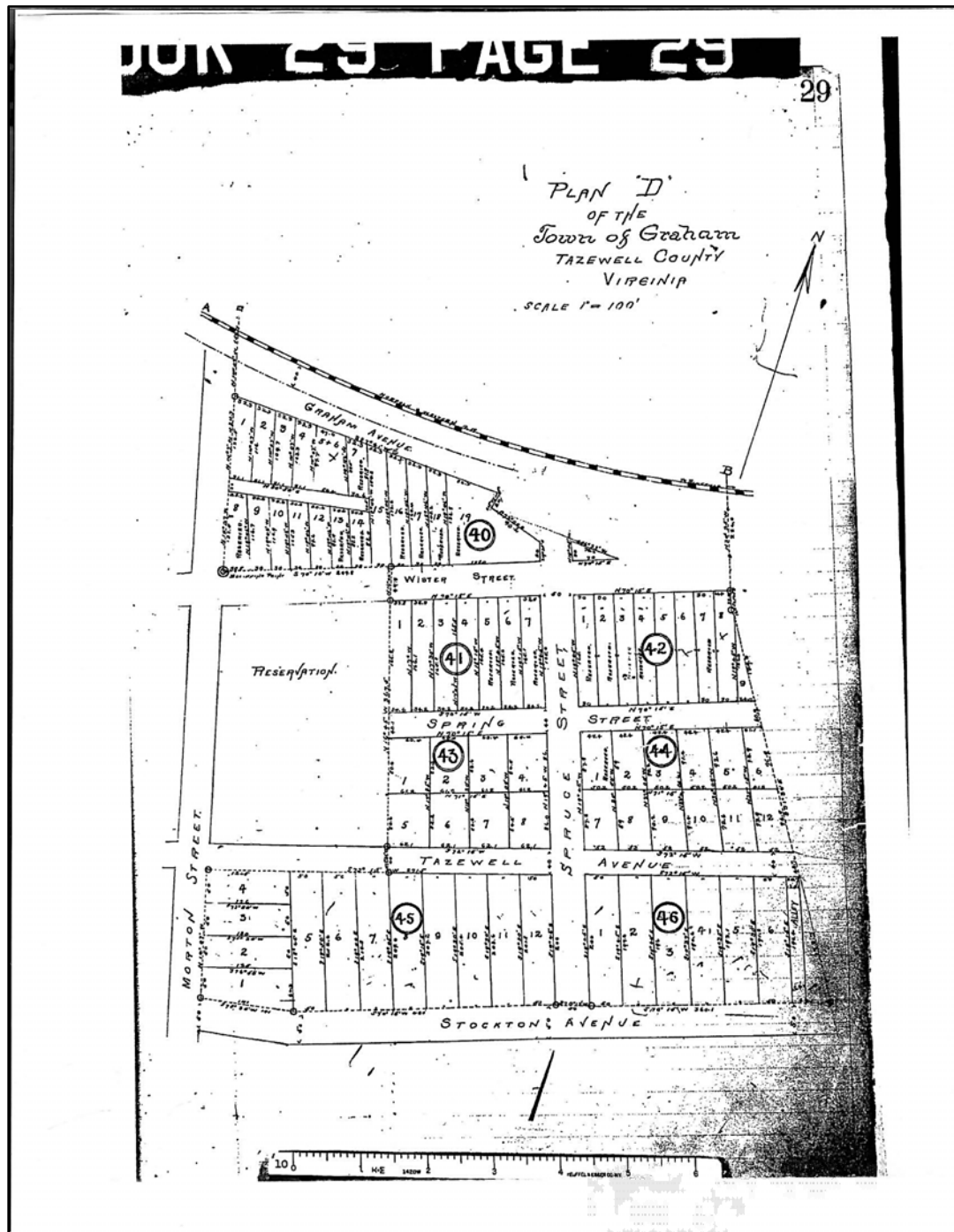
Name of Property  
Tazewell County, VA

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N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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6. Plan "D" of the Town of Graham, Tazewell County, Virginia, filed by the Graham Land & Improvement Company. Most of the land in the Bluefield Commercial Historic District occupies this plat.

Note: Wister Street is now Virginia Avenue and Morton Street is now S. College Avenue.

Source: Tazewell County Deed Book 25:154-157 (February 8, 1890).



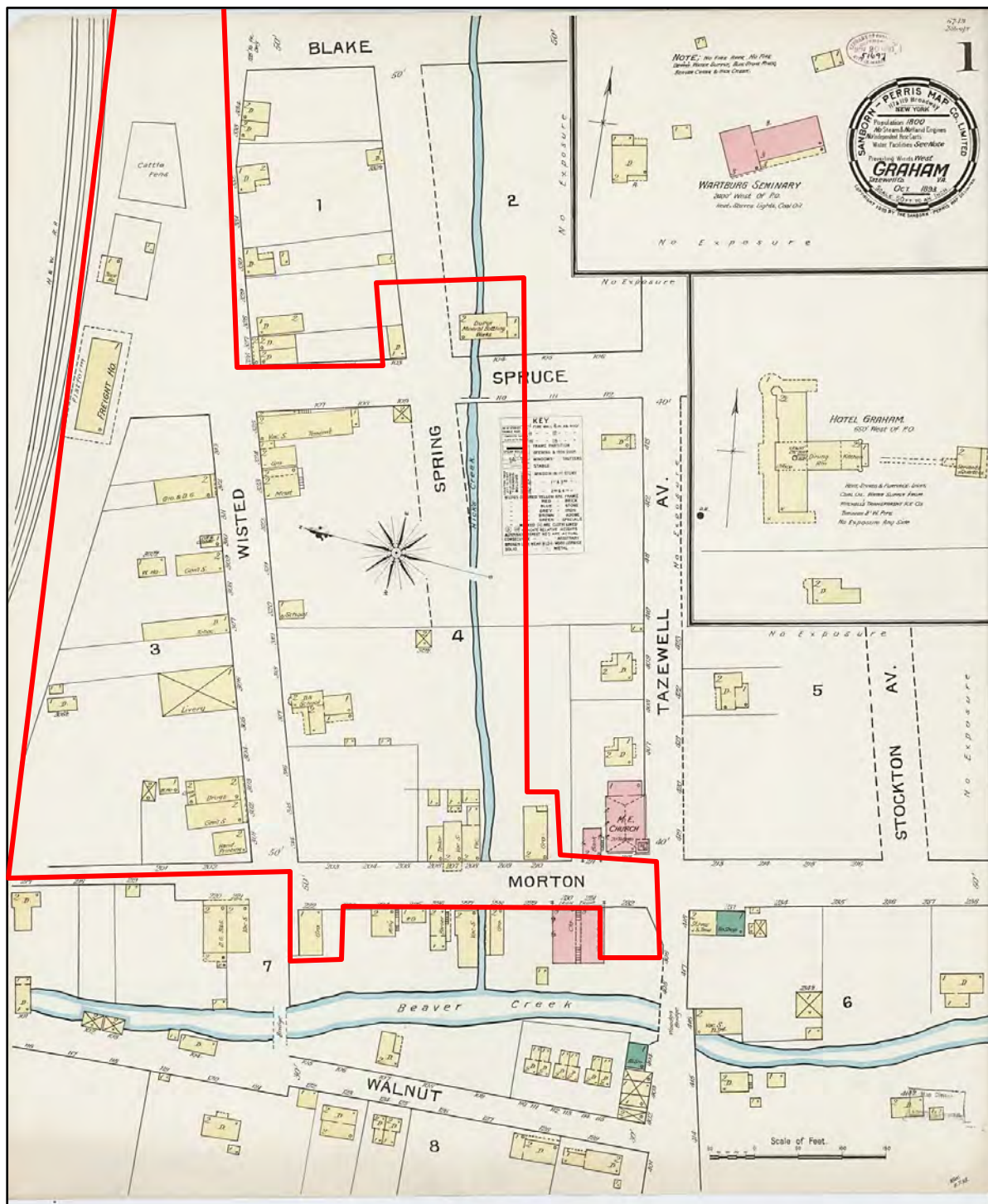
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Bluefield Commercial Historic District

Name of Property  
Tazewell County, VACounty and State  
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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7. 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Graham, VA, showing approximate area of Bluefield Commercial Historic District (red outline).

Note: Wisted Street is now Virginia Avenue and Morton Street is now S. College Avenue.

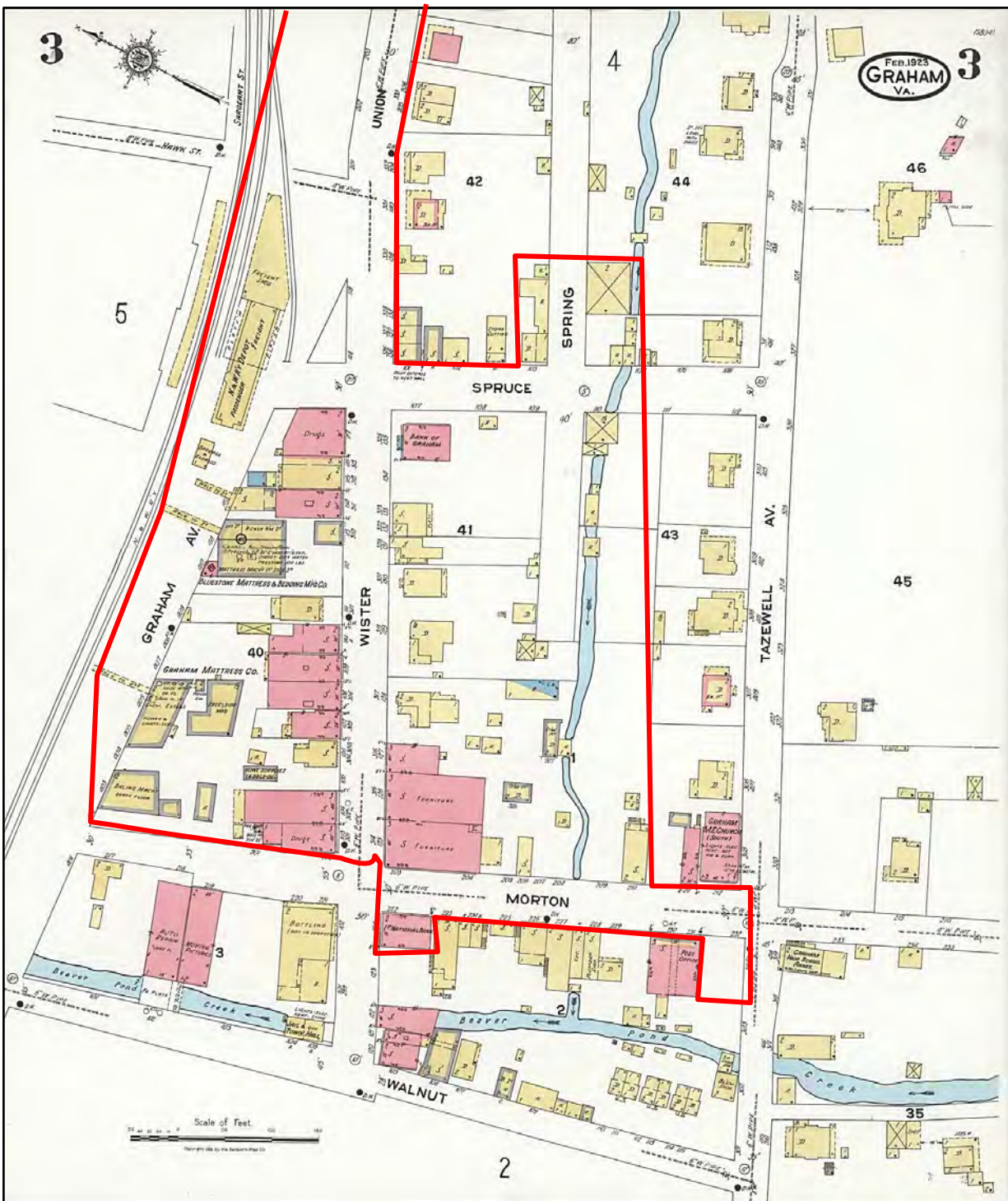
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Bluefield Commercial Historic District

Name of Property  
Tazewell County, VACounty and State  
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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8. 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Graham, VA, showing approximate area of Bluefield Commercial Historic District (red outline). Note: Wister Street is now Virginia Avenue and Morton Street is now S. College Avenue.



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Bluefield Commercial Historic District

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9. 1950s view looking west along Virginia Avenue.

Courtesy Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

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Name of Property  
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10. 1960s view looking west along Virginia Avenue.

Courtesy: Graham Historical Society, Sanders House, Bluefield, Virginia.



Location Map

Bluefield

Thayer St

Graham Ave

Virginia Ave

Spring St

Tazewell Ave

S College Ave

Appomattox St

Blake St

Walton St

102

19

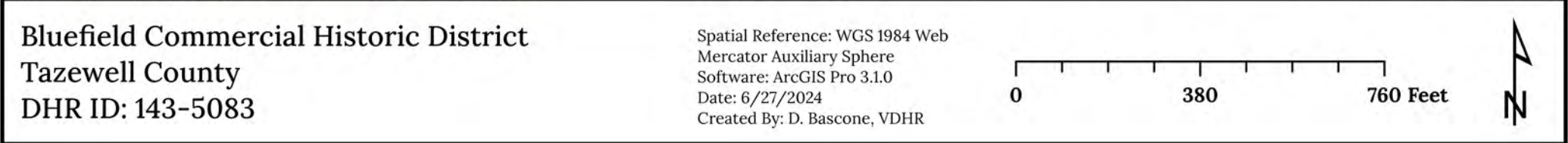
2603 ft

Bluefield Commercial Historic District  
Tazewell County  
DHR ID: 143-5083

Spatial Reference: WGS 1984 Web  
Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
Software: ArcGIS Pro 3.1.0  
Date: 6/27/2024  
Created By: D. Bascone, VDHR

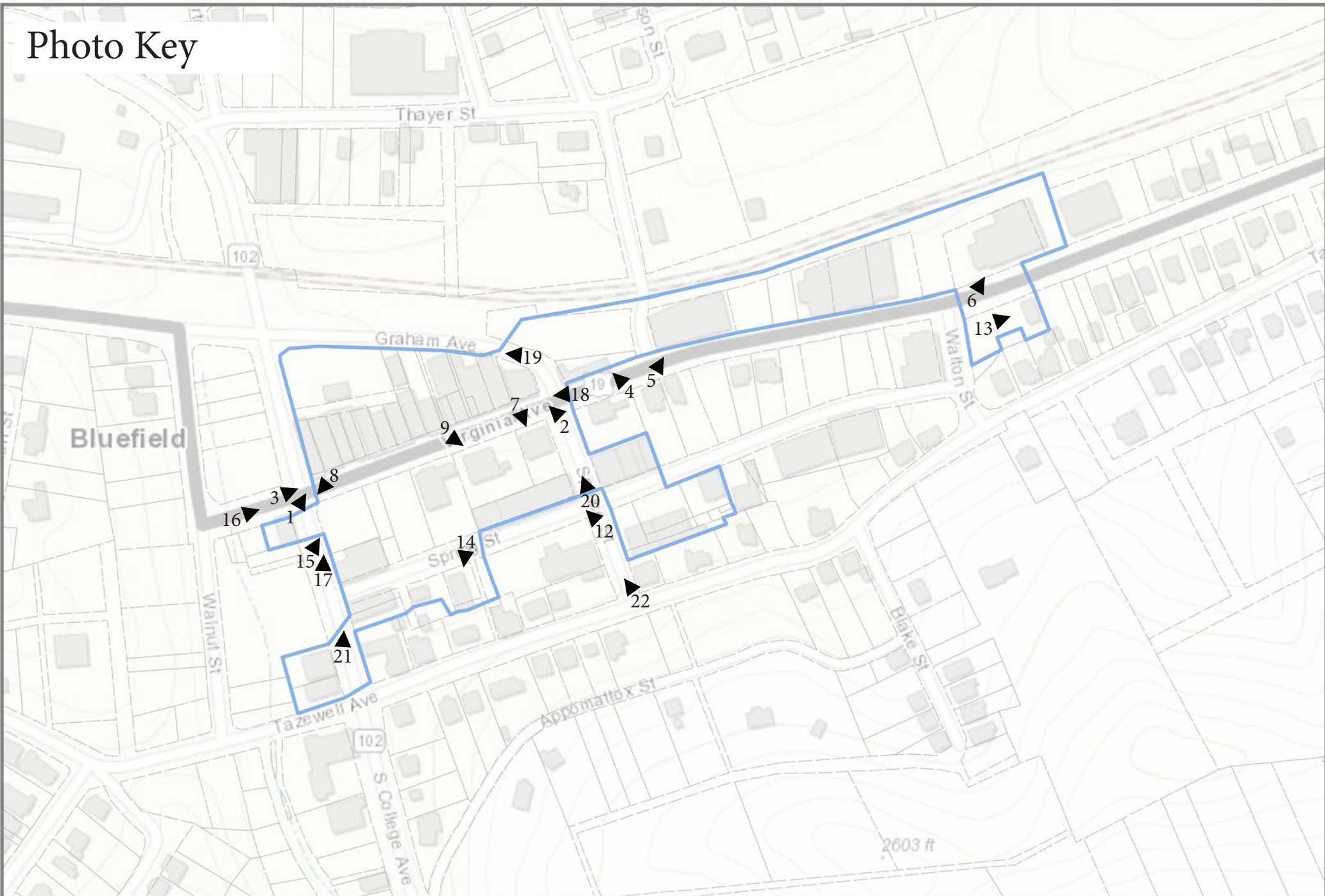
Bluefield Commercial Historic District  
Tazewell County  
DHR ID: 143-5083

Spatial Reference: WGS 1984 Web  
Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
Software: ArcGIS Pro 3.1.0  
Date: 6/27/2024  
Created By: D. Bascone, VDHR





# Photo Key



Bluefield Commercial Historic District  
Tazewell County  
DHR ID: 143-5083

Spatial Reference: WGS 1984 Web  
Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
Software: ArcGIS Pro 3.1.0  
Date: 6/27/2024  
Created By: D. Bascone, VDHR

0 380 760 Feet



# Town of Bluefield Historic District

- Contributing
- Non-contributing
- District Boundary
- Roads
- Waterway
- Parcels

DHR Label = (143-5083-XXXX)

Map by Brad Gibson,  
Addressing Coordinator,  
Tazewell County - 2024/05/15  
Data source: Tazewell County  
Engineering Department and  
Debra McClane  
Projection information:  
Lambert Conformal Conic,  
NAD 83, Virginia State Plane  
South

