

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

# 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.

LISTED  
VLR 9/15/2016  
NRHP 11/22/2016

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Blue Ridge Hall  
 Other names/site number: Blue Ridge Hotel; DHR ID# 011-5096  
 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: 11593 Lee Highway  
 City or town: Fincastle State: Virginia County: Botetourt  
 Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  X

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

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

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

national       statewide       local  
 Applicable National Register Criteria:  
 A      \_\_\_ B       C      \_\_\_ D

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of certifying official/Title:** **Date**  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
**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**

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

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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

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: hotel

DOMESTIC: secondary structure

AGRICULTURE: animal facility

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

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure

AGRICULTURE: storage

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

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

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

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD, STONE, CONCRETE, METAL,  
SYNTHETICS: vinyl

### 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

Blue Ridge Hall (ca. 1836) occupies a 9.28-acre parcel at the junction of US Highway 11 and the former Fincastle and Blue Ridge Turnpike (current State Route 606) in southeastern Botetourt County, Virginia. The south-facing two-story frame house has a symmetrical five-bay front, a metal-sheathed side-gable roof, a coursed rubble limestone foundation, and brick end chimneys. A two-story rear wing, built in the 1930s, has an enclosed two-tier side porch. Later exterior features include a 1950s two-story single-tier Colonial Revival front porch and 1980s vinyl siding. The interior features Federal mantels, a center-passage stair with winders, and molded trim. Near the house stand a ca. 1945 garage, a 1990s storage building, and a ca. 2000 shed, all of which are non-contributing buildings as they postdate the property's period of significance.

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### Narrative Description

#### *Setting*

The house occupies a ridge between Looney's Mill Creek, a branch of the James River, and a branch of the creek known as Beckner Branch. The approximately eight-acre parcel surrounding

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

the house includes a lawn area with large deciduous trees including silver maples and a pecan and, beyond, rolling pasture land. Interstate 81 passes downhill to the north and is visible in some directions, screened in others. The Blue Ridge Mountains are visible to the south and Purgatory Mountain is visible to the northeast.

### *Inventory*

1. House. Ca. 1836; 1930s; 1950s. Contributing building.
2. Garage. 1940s. Non-contributing building.
3. Shed. Early 1990s. Non-contributing building.
4. Storage building. 1915; 1990s. Non-contributing building.

### *House Exterior*

Blue Ridge Hall is a Federal-style, two-story, side-gabled, five-bay, single-pile, central-passage, frame dwelling with a two-story rear ell. The dwelling's principal exterior feature is its monumental single-tier porch that covers the middle three bays of the front façade. The Colonial Revival porch, built in the late 1950s, has square wood columns of the type popularized by Mount Vernon and Tara in the movie *Gone with the Wind*. The columns stand on poured concrete bases which in turn rest on a poured concrete floor with a concrete stoop and step in front of the entrance. The porch's shed roof has a beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling and may have been reused from the two-tier porch that formerly stood at the same location.

The exterior end brick chimneys, which are painted, have corbelled caps and small stepped shoulders at the first and second-story ceiling levels. The east chimney, which is Flemish bond, has a poured concrete base and, spaced along its shaft, metal reinforcing straps. A brick flue rises through the interior of the rear wing. The first-story windows of the original front part of the house have nine-over-nine sashes whereas the second-story windows are nine-over-six. The center second-story front window, converted from a doorway in the 1950s, has six-over-six sashes. Most windows have false shutters. The front entry has a four-pane transom and a simple 1950s Colonial Revival treatment at the top. There are small four-pane square windows in the original house gables. The 1930s rear wing has three-over-one windows, singly or in pairs. The wing's enclosed side porch has two-pane windows over the stair, which was originally enclosed, and three-over-one windows added when the rest of the porch was enclosed in the 1950s. From the enclosed porch extends a 1950s flagstone patio with a low stone wall at its back corner. Attached to the wall are the ruins of a limestone chimney that formerly belonged to a nineteenth-century kitchen at the location. Adjoining the patio is a poured concrete pump house of low profile with a metal cover. A nineteenth-century cistern, not readily visible above ground, adjoins the rear wing on its west elevation.

### *House Interior*

The interior has standard period finishes such as board floors, plaster and lath wall and ceiling finishes, and beaded baseboards. Most rooms have chair rails with simple cap moldings and

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

beaded lower edges, and between the chair rails and baseboards some rooms have plaster finishes, others board wainscots. Doors are six-panel with flush beaded panels on their principal faces. The wide center passage contains a single-run stair with a simple square newel at its foot, capped by a ball finial and pegged to the handrail which is supported by rectangular balusters. The string is beaded as are the vertical boards that form the spandrel under the string. The stair has winders at the top and the closet under it was made into a powder room in the 1980s. Nicks in the outer paint layers have revealed earlier olive drab paint on the risers and dark brown paint or stain on the treads. At the back of the passage French doors open into the dining room in the rear wing.

The east or right-hand downstairs room has a mantel with a single frieze panel and narrow pilasters with symmetrically molded recessed panels on their faces. The mantel shelf is supported by a stack molding consisting of out-stepping quarter round moldings accentuated by narrow recesses between them. On the floor and ceiling are traces of a former corner stair (also visible in seams in the floor boards of the room above). The west or left-hand downstairs room has two windows on each of its three outside walls. Its mantel is tripartite in design with narrow tablets at the ends of the frieze, over the pilasters, and a wide tablet at the center of the frieze. The pilasters are narrow and plain and the stack molding under the shelf is formed of moldings with a variety of profiles. The shelf, which has a molded edge, steps out over the three frieze tablets (the mantel shelf in the east room also steps out but only at the ends).

The upstairs center passage has a finished stair to the attic. The stair has winders at its base, a tall square newel with beaded corners, a molded cap, and rectangular balusters. The stair is mostly open underneath, with an underside and small spandrel sheathed with beaded boards, and the space under it is accessed through a two-panel door. The mantel in the east upstairs room has a framed fireplace surround (the fireplace itself is blocked), three panels in the frieze, and a stack molding under the shelf. The west upstairs room, which was partitioned into storage rooms in recent decades, has a mantel with a tall frieze with two panels. The attic is divided into three finished rooms, with the center room having the stair which has a solid board railing. Beaded batten doors open from the center room into the end rooms and each is constructed with wrought nails with irregular heads. A small, low batten door in the east attic room, which is also constructed with wrought nails, opens into a long, low, unfinished space across the front of the attic in which are visible rafters with straight, regular saw marks (indicating they were machine-sawn) and roof boards with multiple cut nails protruding through, left over from former wood-shingle roofing. The fastening method at the top of the rafters was not readily apparent.

The rear wing has two rooms on the first floor, a larger dining room against the original house and a smaller kitchen at the end. The kitchen finishes are modern. At the end of the enclosed porch on the east side of the ell is a reused dogleg stair with beading on the upper edge of the closed string and on the edges of the treads. The railing that pens the top of the stairwell has tapered square newels. At the south end of both levels of the porch are visible the original beaded weatherboards of the front part of the house. The lower-level porch floor is concrete whereas the upper-level floor has beaded floor boards, presumably reused interior sheathing boards from an unknown building. The basement under the wing, which has exposed poured concrete walls and

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

a non-historic flagstone floor, contains a long nineteenth-century counter from the store that once stood on the property. The wooden counter has turned legs, molded trim, and, affixed to the top of one of the legs, a small advertisement for Eisenlohr's Cinco Cigars. The wing's attic, accessible through a pull-down stair, reveals reused hewn rafters from an unknown building that are butted and nailed to a ridge board that is itself a reused beaded board. The rafters formerly had lapped and pegged collar beams; these were removed and pieces of wood wire-nailed into the lap notches, but the peg holes and some sawn-off pegs survive. A few joists visible in gaps in the floor have whitewash on them, evidence that they too were reused. The laths of the walls in the front section attic are visible from the rear wing attic and they appear to be split.

The original section of the house also has a basement, a partial one under the west end. The space has whitewashed stone walls and log ceiling joists, hewn on two faces and also whitewashed. At the west end is a stone and brick fireplace with the brickwork supported by a curved iron lintel. On the basement room's back elevation is the pegged wooden frame of a former opening, now infilled, that may have been a window or possibly a vent. The hewn log floor joists appear to continue in the crawlspace under the center and east end of the house.

#### *Non-contributing Resources*

The one-story frame garage stands beside Route 11 to the southeast of the house. It has a metal-sheathed hip roof, vinyl siding, board sliding doors on tracks, and a cinder block foundation. A late 1940s photo shows the garage, which was probably relatively new at the time since cinder block experienced its first regional popularity in the 1940s (although it saw limited use in the 1930s).

The one-story prefab-type frame shed, probably built in the early 1990s and located in the northeast corner of the yard, has an asphalt-shingle gambrel roof and T1-11-type siding. In the meadow near it is a concrete floor or foundation remnant from a milkhouse and granary building.

In the east corner of the nominated parcel is a one-story frame building constructed for the growing of shitake mushrooms, probably in the 1990s. The building has a "broken" gable roof form with clerestories facing east, metal roof sheathing, and particle-board and T1-11-type siding. The building stands on the poured concrete foundations of a barn constructed ca. 1915. The building currently serves for storage.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

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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



Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

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**Period of Significance**

ca. 1836-ca. 1940

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**Significant Dates**

ca. 1836

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

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**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

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**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

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Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

**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.)

Blue Ridge Hall in Botetourt County, Virginia, was built about 1836 at the intersection of a regional turnpike and the Great Road, the main artery of the Valley of Virginia. The two-story Federal-style house was built for politician George W. Wilson and was afterward owned by US Representative Nathaniel H. Claiborne and, from 1849 to 1890, by businessman and farmer Samuel Obenshain. The house served as an ordinary and stagecoach stop known as the Blue Ridge Hotel and the property was the location of the Blue Ridge Post Office. Blue Ridge Hall is locally significant under Criterion A in the Commerce area of significance as an antebellum hotel and stagecoach stop. The property is also locally significant under Criterion C in the Architecture area of significance for its Federal mantels and other notable details. The period of significance extends from the completion of the house about 1836 until ca. 1940 when the dwelling's rear wing was completed.

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

*Historic Context*

*Criterion A: Commerce*

Blue Ridge Hall stands on land that belonged to the estate of Thomas Wilson in the early 1830s. The apparently undeveloped house site was purchased by George W. Wilson in September 1834 for the sum of \$825. The deed for the property described it as the dower tract assigned to Thomas's widow, Mary. An 1830 plat described a dower tract of 150 acres, however the 1835 county land book listed Wilson as the owner of only 31 acres at the location. No value of buildings was given for Wilson's tract but a year later buildings valued at \$2,000 stood on it and a marginal note in the land book entry stated "\$2000 added for Buildings." This likely represents Wilson's construction of Blue Ridge Hall, which dates to the period stylistically. An additional \$200 was added to the value of buildings in 1837. It may be that Blue Ridge Hall was completed in 1835, the date an associated post office was established, although as noted the house was not added to the tax rolls until 1836.<sup>1</sup>

George W. Wilson (1802-78) was an up-and-coming political and business leader at the time. During his career he represented Botetourt County in the Virginia House of Delegates and in 1849 he was a director of the Fincastle and Blue Ridge Turnpike, which was established in 1833. Construction of the turnpike, which linked the Botetourt County seat to Bedford County over the Blue Ridge, appears to have been the precipitating factor in the construction of Blue Ridge Hall for it crossed the Great Road (current US Route 11) at the point where Wilson would build his house. In April 1835 the Blue Ridge Post Office opened, possibly in the store that stood to the

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<sup>1</sup> Botetourt County land books; Deed Book 20, p. 644; Surveyor's Book 4, p. 188.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

west side of the house and which appears to be portrayed on an 1864 map. The store may have been rebuilt in 1882.<sup>2</sup>

In 1837 Wilson married Susan Magdaline Claiborne (1819-95), the daughter of Nathaniel H. Claiborne, who would become the second owner of Blue Ridge Hall in 1841 when George and Susan sold the property to him for the sum of \$4,000. The 1841 transfer is the earliest found deed reference to the property as the Blue Ridge Hotel. Nathaniel Herbert Claiborne (1777-1859) belonged, according to his obituary, “to a family that has furnished numerous members of Congress.” His brother, William C. C. Claiborne, served as the first US governor of Louisiana. Nathaniel’s own political career began with his election to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1810, representing Franklin County, and included service in the US House of Representatives from 1825 to 1837. According to historians John and Emily Salmon, during his House of Representatives term Claiborne was known as a “watchdog of the treasury” owing to his fiscal conservatism. Botetourt County land books, which list the place of residence of property owners, suggest Claiborne lived some of the time at Blue Ridge Hall and some of the time in Franklin County, presumably at his plantation Claybrook where he died in 1859. His wife was Elizabeth Archer (Binford) Claiborne (ca. 1799-1880).<sup>3</sup>

In 1849 Samuel Obenshain purchased the Blue Ridge Hotel and 150 acres from Nathaniel and Elizabeth Claiborne for the purchase price of \$3,500. Obenshain (1812-1890; name spelled Obenchain in the deed and some other period records) belonged to a family who owned a number of farms in the Looney’s Creek and Back Creek vicinity of southern Botetourt County. The 1850 census lists Obenshain as a merchant and owner of \$4,760 in real estate. Obenshain’s wife was Ann Elizabeth Hardy Obenshain (1828-1858), the daughter of Thomas Hardy, who was a tollgate keeper on the Fincastle and Blue Ridge Turnpike. Living with the couple were two young sons, Zachary T. and Marcus D., and a merchant named Walton Obenshain. Samuel Obenshain was known as “Hotel Sam” to distinguish him from other Samuel Obenshains in the vicinity. The 1850 census slave schedules list a Samuel Obenchain Jr. as the owner of seven enslaved people, including two adults and five minors.<sup>4</sup>

Samuel Obenshain made another large investment shortly before purchasing Blue Ridge Hall. In 1848 he and partners George and Robert Waskey, known as the firm of Waskeys and Obenshain, were in the process of erecting a “manufacturing mill” in the town of Springwood (then known as Jackson) on the James River near Blue Ridge Hall. This is likely the mill of “Ro Waskey” that is enumerated in the 1850 industrial census schedules, a water-powered merchant mill also known as Jackson Mills that produced \$12,000 in flour annually in 1850. The association

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<sup>2</sup> *Governor’s Message and Annual Reports of the Public Officers of the State*, 33; Vassar, “Early Roads,” 4; “Arch Mills Post Office,” *Fincastle Herald*, May 11, 1882; Gilmer, “Botetourt Co. Va.”

<sup>3</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 26, 1837; Salmon and Salmon, *Franklin County*, 101; *Historical Magazine* (November 1859), 352; Botetourt County land books; Deed Book 25, 523.

<sup>4</sup> Botetourt County Deed Book 29, p. 548; Jennings, *1850 Census*, 210; Vassar, *Life along Back Creek*, 52; Obenshain, “Blue Ridge Hall;” US Census.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

between Obenshain and the Waskeys may have dated back to the 1830s and it continued until the firm dissolved in 1880.<sup>5</sup>

Ann Obenshain died in 1858 and two years later Samuel married Lucy A. (Halley) Obenshain (1837-1920). Lucy's Civil War reminiscences were published in a newspaper article in 1918. "She had a brother and a step son in the Civil War [the step son was likely Zachary T. Obenshain]. She gave all her spare time to the knitting of socks and [scarves] for the Southern boys during the four [years'] struggle . . . The yarn she used for knitting in those days was taken from the sheep's back, raised on the farm [and] hauled to Bonsacks [and] made into rolls, brought back home and spun by hand before ready for use . . . The food situation at one time was so critical that only the products from cane were obtainable for eating purposes. The seed part was used as a substitute for coffee, the seed was also ground into flour and molasses made from the cane and used on the cakes made from the flour." The 28<sup>th</sup> Virginia Volunteer Regiment organized in the Mill Creek community, as the area around Blue Ridge Hall and nearby Mill Creek Baptist Church are known, and is said to have drilled in the coach yard on the east side of the house during the Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

Obenshain family ledgers detail the operations of the family general store and stagecoach business, though not the hotel. The store accounts date from the 1850s to the 1870s. Entries include the sale of sugar, soda, tobacco, dry goods and notions such as calico, flannel, and skirt braid, and other items as diverse as plow points and a coffee pot and "1 bunch flowers." The stagecoach business involved the collection of fares for travelers headed to such regional destinations as Buchanan, Lexington, Bonsacks, Goshen, and Staunton. A September 1862 entry refers to "carrying mail." Notes in the Brugh Collection which appear to reflect research or reminiscences by Geraldine Obenshain (1915-2010) state that "Blue Ridge was a tavern and inn operated by Samuel Obenshain. Also horses were stabled at Blue Ridge for coach changes." The coach lot is said to have been situated on the east side of the house, between the house and two barns (or a barn and stable) shown in old photos. It appears Samuel Obenshain may have operated the stage business or a portion of it as an agent for a Col. M. G. Hannan. The two corresponded in 1868, Obenshain asking if it were permissible for a certain passenger to travel on the stage at half fare and Hannan approving the request. Obenshain noted that the passenger would "do a great deal of traveling" at half rate and argued that the "stages are seldom crowded and some pay is better than none."<sup>7</sup>

Court records and business directories detail aspects of the property's postbellum history. In October 1865 Obenshain was licensed to "keep a house of private entertainment at his house

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<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Mangus Obenshain Collection, "Samuel Obenshain & Ann Elizabeth Hardy" notebook; US census; Botetourt County Deed Book 40, p. 368.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph B. Obenshain personal communication with the author, May 2016; Obenshain, "Blue Ridge Hall;" Geraldine Mangus Obenshain Collection, "Samuel Obenshain & Ann Elizabeth Hardy" notebook.

<sup>7</sup> Obenshain Family Collection; Brugh Collection volume 5, p. 236.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

called the Blue Ridge Hotel.” He renewed the license under the name Blue Ridge Hotel on a more or less yearly basis into the early 1870s. Several of the licenses noted that he was “sober and of good character,” a standard requirement of innkeepers during the nineteenth century, and some referred to his business as an ordinary. The hotel was a going concern in 1880 when a directory listed it as the hotel of S. Obenshain and Company. This was the name of Obenshain’s general merchandise store, which had a branch in Springwood beginning in 1879. Samuel and his sons Zachary and Marcus operated the Blue Ridge Post Office at various times. The post office name was changed to Arch Mills in 1887 and was last operated by Zachary’s wife, Virginia (Jenny) Obenshain, until it closed in 1907. After Samuel’s death in 1890, Lucy Obenshain was assigned a dower right in a portion of his lands. Samuel’s son Boyce Putney Obenshain (1871-1958) acquired the property in 1906. The hotel was not listed in an 1893 business directory and the last reference to a “Blue Ridge Hotel” discovered in court records dates to the 1890s, though by that time the name may have been more a reference to a landmark than to an operating business.<sup>8</sup>

B. P. Obenshain, whose wife was Ida A. (Shockley) Obenshain (1874-1909), made various improvements to the property. The 1915 land book lists the addition of a “new barn” which boosted the value of improvements from \$700 to \$870 (the barn foundation survives incorporated into a modern building). The current rear wing was added in the early 1930s. Its side porch, used by the family as a sleeping porch (open-air sleeping was considered healthy for the lungs), was partially open on both levels until the 1950s when windows were added. Also in the 1950s a pair of Mennonite missionaries from Pennsylvania stayed at the farm for an extended period and built the rock wall and flagstone patio beside the house. B. P. Obenshain was a successful farmer and president of the Bank of Troutville, located in the nearby town of Troutville. He served as Botetourt County sheriff from 1919 to 1923 and is believed to have been the first Republican officeholder in the county, establishing a longtime family association with the Republican Party. B. P. Obenshain’s grandson and the brother of current owner Joseph B. Obenshain, Richard D. Obenshain, ran to represent Virginia’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District in the US House of Representatives in 1964, ran for Virginia Attorney General in 1969, served as co-chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1975-1976, and ran as the Republican candidate for the US Senate in 1978 (he died in a plane crash while campaigning). B. P. Obenshain’s great-grandson Mark D. Obenshain ran as the Republican candidate for Virginia Attorney General in 2013.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Chataigne, *Chataigne’s Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1880-81*, 132-133; Chataigne, *Chataigne’s Virginia Gazetteer and Classified Business Directory, 1893-94*, 281; “Arch Mills Post Office;” Obenshain, “Zachary T. Obenshain,” 180; Botetourt County Deed Book B, p. 368; County Court Order Book 4, pages 440, 492, 595; County Court Order Book 5, pages 155, 405, 522, 564; County Order Book 6, p. 188; Geraldine Mangus Obenshain Collection, “Samuel Obenshain & Ann Elizabeth Hardy” notebook.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph B. Obenshain personal communication with the author, May 2016; Obenshain, “Blue Ridge Hall;” Botetourt County land books; Brugh Collection volume 7, p. 65.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

The house continued to evolve during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Interior modifications were made in the 1980s including a kitchen remodeling and the installation of central heating. In 2000-2001 a second-floor bedroom in the rear wing was subdivided into bathrooms. A porch column destroyed in a storm was replaced in the early 2000s. The earliest documented reference to the house as “Blue Ridge Hall” appears to date to about 1966, although the name may have been in use earlier.

### *Architectural Context*

#### *Criterion C: Architecture*

Blue Ridge Hall was historically the Blue Ridge Hotel, and yet its form, with a symmetrical five-bay front and center-passage plan, is that of an elite dwelling of the antebellum period. This is in part due to the fact that the house doubled as a private home, but also because many Virginia hostleries of the era and earlier were domestic in appearance, albeit larger than most houses. A close match to Blue Ridge Hall in form, scale, and date is the original portion of the 1834 Central Hotel in New Castle, the county seat of neighboring Craig County. The Central Hotel began as a two-story brick building described as having four rooms, which suggests it had a center-passage plan. The hotel may have been built in conjunction with the opening of the Cumberland Gap Turnpike (also known as the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike), which would give it another affinity with Blue Ridge Hall: strategic placement on a major regional artery. The Central Hotel was enlarged by the addition of a third story and rear wing in the 1850s when New Castle was made the Craig County seat. Closer to home, though later, was Fincastle’s Hayth’s Hotel, which may have opened in 1878. Hayth’s Hotel, which apparently survives in part, was a sprawling affair with a triple-decker porch facing the courthouse square. Hayth’s Hotel was large to begin with—it originally boasted thirty beds—and it grew still larger in 1895 with the addition of a three-story annex containing a large “music room.” A hotel that stood in the Botetourt County village of Amsterdam in the early twentieth century was also a rambling building of frame construction wholly or in part. If the Blue Ridge Hotel only ever had a one-story rear wing and no other additions or extensions, then it never grew to the size of the Central, Hayth, and Amsterdam hotels. It apparently only had capacity for a small number of guests, perhaps stagecoach passengers waiting for connections, though some guests may have lodged in other buildings, the store or possibly even the barn, or may have camped on the grounds.<sup>10</sup>

A feature that may relate to hotel use is the former corner stair that rose from the east first-floor room to the room above. Some contemporary Virginia houses had a second-floor room known as a “traveler’s room” which was accessible by stair from the room below but had no connection to other second-floor rooms, an arrangement which separated the family from guests. Examples of the arrangement in Virginia include the Bowling and Mildred Eldridge House (1822-1823; formerly in Halifax County) and the Finney-Lee House (1839; Franklin County). However, the upstairs room at Blue Ridge Hall appears to have always had a doorway into the second-floor

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<sup>10</sup> Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, 126-127; Lee, *Buildings of Virginia*, 169-170; Heffelfinger, “New Castle Historic District,” *Around Town*, 56-57; Niederer, *Town of Fincastle*, 56-57; Obenshain, “Frontier Settlement of Amsterdam,” 47.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

center passage. The passage door has the same beaded flush panel treatment as other original doors.<sup>11</sup>

The lateness of Blue Ridge Hall's construction during the main phase of the Federal style explains the Greek Revival influence seen in the first-floor east room mantel's pilasters. These are symmetrically molded (Greek Revival) as opposed to asymmetrically molded (Federal). There is a hint of Georgian influence in the framed fireplace surround of the second-floor east room mantel. Rather than being evidence of earlier fabric—the mantel is otherwise similar to other Federal mantels in the house—the Georgian influence may be the consequence of the fact the mantel was in an upstairs room (a house's simplest or least current mantels tend to be in the upstairs). Likewise, in some contexts a second stair like the one formerly in the east room might indicate an earlier house incorporated in a mostly later house. However the construction of Blue Ridge Hall appears to be of a piece throughout, with consistent first-floor floor structure and attic framing from gable to gable, suggesting the original portion was built in one campaign. Also, tax records do not indicate an earlier building at the location.

There are clues to the original configuration of the rear of the house. The current rear wing appears to date entirely to the 1930s without bodily incorporating fabric from what may have stood at the location earlier, although it does contain a reused stair, rafters, and floor boards of uncertain provenience. Family tradition maintains that a one-story wing extended to the rear, and this is supported by the presence of an original doorway on the back wall of the first-floor east room, which probably opened onto the porch of the former wing. The lack of a corresponding original door on the back wall of the room above suggests the earlier wing lacked a second story. The kitchen, which was a separate one-story weatherboard-sided building which stood off the end of the early and later rear wings, survived into the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

A ca. 1915 photograph of the property (Figure 1) shows the dwelling's appearance with a two-tier front porch (replaced during the 1950s) and prior to construction of the two-story rear wing in the 1930s. But for the replacement of the porch, the dwelling's main block is virtually unchanged. A frame building to the left (west) of the primary dwelling is believed to have been the store, rebuilt in the 1880s, that also included a post office. The barn and attached silo that stand to the right (east) of the dwelling were removed at an unknown date, with the extant 1990s storage building constructed on the barn's foundation. Just visible between the house and barn, behind trees, is a front-gabled building that may have been the milk house and granary, the foundations for which remain extant near the early 1990s shed. An intriguing aspect of this photograph is the presence of two heavy timber posts with connecting overhead lines; these appear to be telephone poles, indicating that Blue Ridge Hall had telephone service at a relatively early date.

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<sup>11</sup> Pezzoni, "Bowling and Mildred Eldridge House;" Pezzoni, "Finney-Lee House," 12.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph B. Obenshain personal communication with the author, May 2016.

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State



Figure 1. Ca. 1915 photo of property, view looking northeast.



Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

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Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
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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, Richmond, Virginia;  
Brugh Collection, Fincastle Library, Fincastle, Virginia

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR ID# 011-5096

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** approximately 8 acres

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: 37.473120                      Longitude: -79.794750

2. Latitude:                                      Longitude:

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone: 17 Easting: 606590 Northing: 4147820

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

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

The nominated area corresponds to Botetourt County Tax Map Section 75 parcel 74A. The true and correct historic boundary is shown on the attached Sketch Map/Photo Key and Tax Parcel Map.

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

The nominated area corresponds to the modern parcel on which Blue Ridge Hall stands, and further encompasses the property's historic setting as well as all known resources associated with the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni

organization: Landmark Preservation Associates

street & number: 6 Houston St.

city or town: Lexington state: VA zip code: 24450

e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net

telephone: (540) 464-5315

date: June 6, 2016

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

- **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

All photos common to:

Name of Property: Blue Ridge Hall

City or Vicinity: Fincastle County: Botetourt State: Virginia

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni Date Photographed: May 2016

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

Photo 1 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0001

View: West and south elevations of house. View looking northeast.

Photo 2 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0002

View: West elevation of house. View looking east.

Photo 3 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0003

View: East and north elevations of house. View looking southwest.

Photo 4 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0004

View: First-floor center passage and stair.

Photo 5 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0005

View: First-floor east room mantel.

Photo 6 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0006

View: First-floor west room mantel.

Photo 7 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0007

Blue Ridge Hall  
Name of Property

Botetourt County, Virginia  
County and State

View: Second-floor attic stair.

Photo 8 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0008

View: Second-floor east room mantel.

Photo 9 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0009

View: 1930s rear wing second floor enclosed porch.

Photo 10 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0010

View: 1930s rear wing rafter.

Photo 11 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0011

View: Ca. 1945 Garage and 1990s Shed.

Photo 12 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0012

View: Setting looking northeast from dwelling.

Photo 13 of 13: VA\_BotetourtCounty\_BlueRidgeHall\_0013

View: Setting looking northwest from dwelling.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications 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.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



**LOCATION MAP**

**Blue Ridge Hall**

**Botetourt County, VA**

**DHR No. 011-5096**

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Latitude: 37.473120

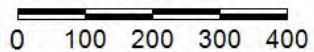
Longitude: -79.794750



**Historic Boundary**



Feet



1:4,514 / 1"=376 Feet

**Title: Blue Ridge Hall**

**Date: 8/11/2016**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

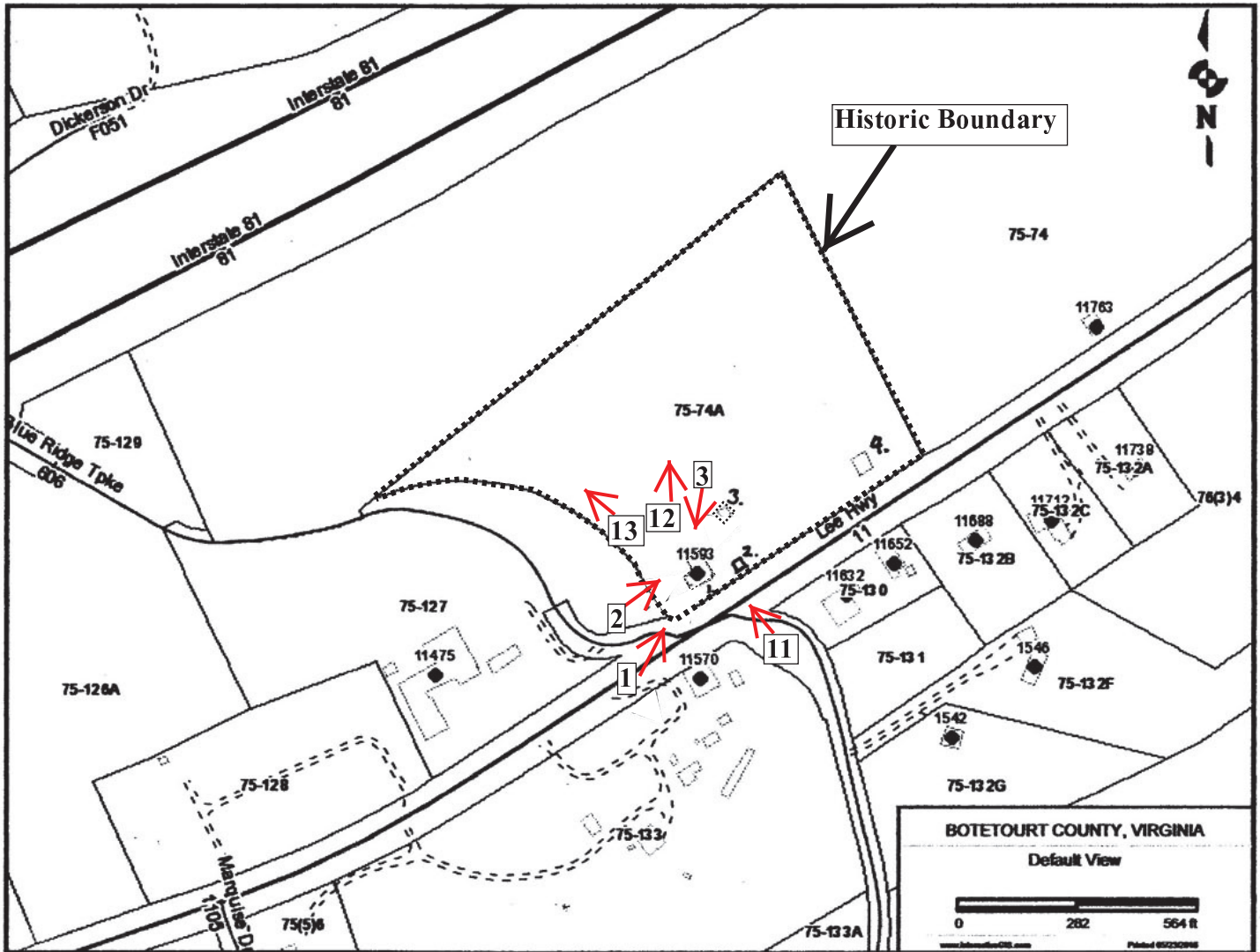
*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

# Blue Ridge Hall

Botetourt County, Va.

DHR No. 011-5096



Nominated area is parcel 75-74A.

### Inventory

1. House. Ca. 1836; 1930s; 1950s. Contributing building.
2. Garage. 1940s. Non-contributing building.
3. Shed. Early 1990s. Non-contributing building.
4. Storage building. 1915; 1990s. Non-contributing building.



### Photo Locations

Photos 4-10 are interior views of dwelling