

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

LISTED ON:	
VLR	12/16/2010
NRHP	03/01/2011

# 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. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

### 1. Name of Property

historic name High Banks  
other names/site number Helm-Clevenger House; DHR File No. 034-0109

### 2. Location

street & number 423 High Banks Road  N/A not for publication  
city or town Stephenson  vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Frederick code 069 zip code 22656

### 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

[Signature] Signature of certifying official/Title  
2/7/11 Date

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

### 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:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	District
<input type="checkbox"/>	Site
<input type="checkbox"/>	Structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
2	0	sites
0	2	structures
0	0	objects
3	2	<b>Total</b>

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

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

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure: garden shed

DOMESTIC: secondary structure: equipment shed

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural  
outbuilding: barn

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural  
outbuilding: ice house

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure: garden shed

DOMESTIC: secondary structure: equipment  
shed

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural  
outbuilding; ruin

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural  
outbuilding; ruin

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COLONIAL: Georgian

MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: Greek Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE: Limestone

walls: STONE: Limestone

roof: METAL: Tin

other: WOOD: Weatherboard

High Banks  
Name of Property

Frederick County, VA  
County and State

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**Narrative Description**

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(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

See continuation sheets.

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**Narrative Description**

See continuation sheets

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

- 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.

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

**Period of Significance**  
ca. 1753 - 1944

**Significant Dates**  
ca. 1753; ca. 1858; 1920; 1944

**Architect/Builder**

Thomas Helm; James D. Stillwell (1978; 2000)

**Period of Significance (justification)**

High Banks  
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The period of significance extends from the date of the original construction (ca. 1753) until 1944, which marks the end of the property's ownership by the Clevenger family, who owned and operated High Banks continuously from 1849 until 1944, a period of 95 years, and under whom the last historic alterations took place.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

See continuation sheet.

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

See continuation sheets.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

See continuation sheets.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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High Banks  
Name of Property

Frederick County, VA  
County and State

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See continuation sheet.

**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 Archives , Richmond, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR #034-0109

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Approximately 70 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17</u>	<u>752580</u>	<u>4344140</u>	3	<u>17</u>	<u>753270</u>	<u>4343830</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>17</u>	<u>753000</u>	<u>4344200</u>	4	<u>17</u>	<u>753160</u>	<u>4343600</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

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

The boundaries of High Banks are denoted as Frederick County tax parcels 56 A1A and 45 27, as indicated on Frederick County, Virginia, Information Technologies, GIS Division, GIS map, a copy of which is attached.

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

The nominated property includes approximately seventy acres surrounding the house that remains of the ca. 478-acre farm dating to the mid-eighteenth century. It includes a long frontage on Opequon Creek, a major mid-eighteenth-century settlement area, and rolling farmscape behind the house and barn ruins, all held as protected land from the subdivision development of much of the area. The owners are considering an easement on the property.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/title James C. Massey, architectural historian, and Shirley Maxwell, historian  
Organization Massey Maxwell Associates date September 19, 2010  
street & number P. O. Box 263 telephone 540-465-4566  
city or town Strasburg state VA zip code 22657  
e-mail masmax@shentel.net

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Frederick County, VA  
County and State

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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**Photographs:**

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

See continuation sheets

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**Property Owner:**

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

name.

Mr. and Mrs. James D. Stillwell/Mr. and Mrs. Lowell A. Burkett

street & number 423 High Banks Rd./111 Denny Lane telephone 540-662-4483/540-723-6527

City or town Stephenson/Winchester state VA zip code 22656/22603

**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 18 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.

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### 7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

#### SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

High Banks is a mid-eighteenth-century (ca. 1753) two-story-plus-basement, center-hall, double-pile, stone house, measuring 28 feet 4 inches by 40 feet 4 inches. It has two compatible additions, one on the east and the other at the rear of the house. The original block is three bays wide and two bays deep. The east addition is a one-story, two-bay by three-bay frame addition with a wraparound porch (2000) that replaces an early wing that burned in 1920. The 1978 frame rear wing is two stories, one bay by two bays. The historic core of the house is limestone, rough-dressed ashlar on the façade and dressed rubble on the sides and rear. The façade stonework is exceptionally fine, and the west wall has an unusually large relieving arch in the stonework as viewed from the west elevation. Following partial structural failure ca. 1850, the center portion of the second-floor façade wall was rebuilt, and a new, shallow-pitched roof was installed. The interior was re-trimmed in late Greek Revival style ca. 1858, and a one-bay by two-bay front entrance porch was added. The original structure survives in the basement's large, stone fireplace supports connected by a massive summer beam, large original joists, and wide yellow pine floorboards of the first floor. The house sits on a high bluff overlooking Opequon Creek, an important settlement path. Once at the center of a 478-acre farm, the property now comprises approximately seventy acres. There are two contributing sites containing ruins on the property: the foundation and partial wall of a post-Civil War bank barn and an eighteenth-century icehouse pit, both of stone. There are two non-contributing recent structures: a garden shed and equipment shed, both of frame construction and built in the late twentieth century.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

High Banks is a mid-eighteenth-century two-story-plus-basement, center-hall, double-pile, stone house, measuring 28 feet 4 inches by 40 feet 4 inches. It has two compatible additions, one on the east and the other on the north, the rear of the house. The original block is three bays wide and two bays deep. On the east, a one-story, two-bay by three-bay addition (constructed in 2000) with a wrap-around porch replaces an early wing that burned in 1929.

The main block of the house is of rough-dressed ashlar limestone on the façade and dressed-rubble limestone, 18 inches thick, on the sides and rear. It is an early example of the form and materials that were used in the Shenandoah Valley in the eighteenth century. The east side, originally in stone, was partly rebuilt in brick following a fire in 1929, but the corners survive in the original stone. Following a structural failure that probably occurred some time in the 1850s, the center part of the stonework on the second-floor façade was rebuilt, reusing the original stone in a random pattern. The west wall, which is original, has a large relieving arch across the original chimneys, a rare feature, which is visible on the exterior of the dwelling.



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The present roof is a very low-pitched gable roof, sheathed in standing-seam metal. It replaced the original steep gable following a partial structural failure and rehabilitation ca. 1858 in the style typical of that period. The mid-nineteenth-century cornice has flat dentils.

There are four brick interior chimneys, two each on the east and west walls and a modern, brick exterior chimney stepped in the eighteenth-century manner on the back of the rear addition.

The west elevation addition and rear wing are clad in weatherboard. These wings were designed and built by the present owner, James D. Stillwell, AIA, in 1978 and 2000.

The windows are six-over-six-light double-hung-sash wood, ca. 1858, with wood lintels and sills, mostly 1858 replacements with some matching modern replacements. Louvered wood shutters flank the windows in the original block.

The two modern wings have six-over-six, double-hung-sash wood windows except in the kitchen which has a triple four-over-four double-hung grouping on the front and a double four-over-four-light window on the east elevation with louvered wood shutters. The rear porch is screened; the kitchen porch is open with a wood railing.

The front entrance and porch are placed slightly to the left of center of the façade; it probably dates to 1858. The porch has paired Tuscan columns flanking the stairs. The entablature has a double cornice--the upper of sawtooth blocks, the lower with dentils and topped by a plain pediment.

The front door is modern with six panels. It is surrounded by a three-light transom and five-light sidelights, installed in the ca. 1858 rehabilitation. On the facade, to the right of the front door, is a wide basement entrance under a segmental stone arch with a vertical-board door in the original frame with stone cheeks, concrete steps, covered by a modern wood hatch cover.

Basement windows in the original stone house portion are covered by angled horizontal wooden bars. There are two on the front, two on the west elevation, with one closed in, and two on the rear--one closed in and one converted to an access hatch. They have arched stone lintels.

### INTERIOR

First floor. The original stone mid-eighteenth-century house is an early example of a center-hall, double-pile house in the Shenandoah Valley. It has a center passage with a large double living room to the left and two rooms to the right, now a dining room and office.

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First-floor hall. The hall is 6 feet 8 inches wide and extends to the rear of the house, where the doorway matches the ca. 1858 front doorway and sidelights but without a transom. The trim on both doorways is a bulky Greek Revival design typical of the 1850s. This was the original rear door. It is now an interior door opening to a cross hall in the 1978 addition. The wood floor boards in the center hall are 9 ½-inch-wide yellow pine and were probably reset during the ca. 1858 rehabilitation. The staircase is in two flights with a landing and was rebuilt in the ca. 1858 rehabilitation with a simple turned newel, square balusters, and scrolled stair ends. Under the staircase is a flight of stairs to the basement, not original, probably dating after the main staircase was rebuilt. In the front of the hall, doors to the left and right are in their original openings, while a single door at the rear of the hall opens to the rear room on the right. All the doors have Greek Revival-style pilaster trim with plain corner blocks. There is a double, ca. 1858 baseboard and a modern cornice.

Living Room. The left or west side is in one double-size room the depth of the house, 13 feet 7 inches by 24 feet 6 inches. A large fireplace is centered on the west wall, with a simple, ca. 1858 mantelpiece and a modern, brick hearth. In the fireplace is a cast-iron Frederick County Marlboro Furnace "Lord Fairfax" fireback, believed to be original to this location, though cast after 1770 when Isaac Zane purchased the mold.

There is a double baseboard, probably ca. 1858, and 10- to 11-inch yellow pine floorboards, probably original except on the east side of the room, where they are 9 to 9 ½ inches, probably reworked in the ca. 1858 rebuilding. There is a modern cornice.

Dining Room. The first-floor front room on the right is 16 feet by thirteen feet 2 inches. Along the east wall is a fireplace that was probably installed in ca. 1858, replacing the original angled corner fireplace, as indicated by the basement fireplace supports. The mantelpiece is a simple 1850s Greek Revival design with a new brick hearth. A small cupboard is built in at the left side of the fireplace. On the east wall is an early, but probably not original, doorway with a modern door leading to the early east-wing addition and now opening to the modern porch. There are original interior doorways to the hall and the rear room. In most of the room the flooring is the original 9 1/2- to 11-inch boards, except near the fireplace where the boards are presumably from the ca. 1858 rehabilitation.

Rear Room. The rear room was a kitchen from 1929 until the 2000 addition was built, but its original use is not certain. It is the smallest of the original rooms, at 11 by 16 feet. In 2000 a lavatory and closet were installed in the western part of the room, with the balance of the space becoming an office. The east wall has an old fireplace with an 1850s Greek Revival-style mantel and hearth of old bricks. As in the dining room, the floor boards near the fireplace are narrower, probably from the ca. 1858 rehabilitation, when the fireplaces were changed from their original angled configuration to flush on the east wall. There are three doorways: one to the hall and dining room and one to the east addition, now a modern kitchen.

Kitchen. The location of the original kitchen is not known; architectural evidence indicates that it was not in the basement, as the basement has no fireplaces. The two rooms on the east side have small fireplaces that

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would not normally be considered large enough for a cooking fireplace in this period. The kitchen may originally have been in a separate building and later moved to the early-nineteenth-century addition that was lost in the 1929 fire.

Additions

The two-story rear addition was built in 1978 and connected to the original portion through the original back door opening which was kept in place. The addition includes a family room/library, kitchen and storeroom, rear stairs, and on the west side, a large, one-story screened porch. The family room/library has a large fireplace mantelpiece and brick hearth and is part of an exterior brick chimney. There is an exterior door to the rear west porch. The second floor has a bedroom and bath.

The one-story, east side addition was built in 2000 and replaces an old, but not original, wing that shows in a 1912 photograph; that addition burned in 1929. It was in rubble stonework, two stories high, 22 by 28 feet. The fire damage resulted in the partial rebuilding of the house wall in brick on this side. The kitchen occupies the same footprint as the early wing and subsequent open porch; it now contains a modern kitchen with door to the new office, a rear door, and an east door to the new porch.

Main House, Second Floor

The second floor is in a center-hall plan with two rooms on each side. A bathroom was installed in 1973 in the front of the hall, replacing an older storage room. The staircase railing has plain rectangular balusters and turned newels dating from the ca. 1858 rehabilitation. At the stair landing, midway in the rise, an original window opening has been converted to a doorway to the rear wing. The flooring in the hall is irregular, probably as a result of repairing the original wide boards in the ca. 1858 rehabilitation. The hall has five doors, opening to four bedrooms and to the front bathroom. The bathroom door is an historic, probably eighteenth century, six-panel door. The two west rooms have had their fireplaces walled over. There was originally a fireplace in the rear room and probably a small one in the front, as most of the walled area is in the rear room. The floors are original, 9- to 13-inch boards, except near the hall doors, where they are similar to the hall floorboards, probably part of the ca. 1858 work.

The east side has two rooms, with doors to the hall. They are original except for the ca. 1858 replacement of the fireplaces and mantels. The rear room has a decorative, early-nineteenth-century mantelpiece in a style known locally as a "Winchester mantel", with wide shelf and knife-edge moldings, paneled frieze, Tuscan columns on a base, and an old brick hearth. It is possible the mantel was installed subsequent to the ca. 1858 rehabilitation. The front room has a simple ca. 1858 Greek Revival-style mantel and modern hearth. There are three small closets pre-dating 1972, set out from the rear door opening to the hall and the two bedrooms. Both rooms have a modern cornice. The flooring is original 9- to 13-inch boards except near the hall door and near the relocated fireplace (ca. 1858). The front bedroom has the same flooring pattern and modern double-hung sash with ca. 1858 trim, front and side.

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There is no attic under the low, shallow-pitched, ca. 1858 gable roof, only a crawl space without access.

### Basement

The basement extends under the full, original 1750s house. The basement is one large, original space. It is of 1750s construction, with fireplace foundations and timber framing. Only the staircase to the first floor is historic but post-dates the ca. 1858 rebuilding. There is no evidence of a stair in another location. Probably there was no interior connection, as is occasionally seen in other early Germanic houses, such as the Snapp House at Rt. 11 and Rt. 601 near Strasburg. The west fireplace support is large, 4 to 7 inches deep by 7 feet 6 inches wide, with heavy timbers supporting the firebox above. The unusual stone relieving arch in the west wall is centered over these supports, evidence that the arch was structural and not a former entrance. The original supports for the angled-back-to-back fireplace are on the east wall, extending out 5 to 9 inches in stonework, with stone arches angled to the original east exterior wall, and heavy timbers supporting the fireplace above, a feature seen in some of the area's early Germanic and English-derived houses. The construction under the first floor is original, with a massive 9-inch-square walnut summer beam extending east to west from the angled-fireplace foundation wall to above the center of the west fireplace lintel. There is a center 10-inch-square post and, at the west fireplace, an 18-inch-square brick pier shy of the fireplace beam that is the later support for the failed end of the original girder.

The first-floor joists are 6 by 7 inches at 2 feet on center. There is no historic framing around the stair but cut ends of old joists suggest that there was no original stair to the basement. There is a wide, exterior door in the front wall, 3-10 inches wide with a vertical-board door with historic hinges and frame.

The floor is modern concrete; the original floor was exposed dirt.

There is only a crawl space under the 1978 addition, none under the east wing.

### Secondary Resources

#### Bank Barn Ruins (Contributing Site)

The stone foundation of a post-Civil War bank barn is located northwest of the main house and is now used as a corral.

#### Icehouse Pit Ruins (Contributing Site)

Located southeast of the main house is a circular stone icehouse pit, approximately 15 feet in diameter by 12 feet deep. The ruin is not sheltered but is an open pit and most likely dates to the eighteenth century.

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**Garden Shed (Non-Contributing Structure)**

A late-twentieth-century frame garden shed with a side-gabled, steeply-pitched roof is located northeast of the main house. The two-bay structure is covered with a metal roof and includes a two-bay porch.

**Tractor-Equipment Shed (Non-Contributing Structure)**

A late-twentieth-century three-bay tractor-equipment shed is located to the north of the main house. The side-gabled structure has three open bays and is covered by a metal roof.

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N/A

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## 8. SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

High Banks (the Helm-Clevenger House), 423 High Banks Rd., near Stephenson, in northeastern Frederick County, Virginia, was constructed ca. 1753, by Thomas and Margaret Helm, second-generation settlers of early Frederick County. Built of local limestone, it is a two-story, three-bay house with a raised basement, with a center-hall, double-pile Georgian plan. The interior layout and basement structure are unchanged from the 1750s construction period. Repairs and modernizations made ca. 1858 included reconstruction of a portion of the front wall using the original stones, replacement of the 1750s roof with a roof of shallower pitch, and the addition of late-Greek Revival porch and trim on the interior. Architecturally compatible additions in 1978 and 2000, designed by the current owner Architect James D. Stillwell, replaced a nineteenth-century wing destroyed by fire in 1920 and added a modern kitchen and side porch. High Banks is significant at the local level under Criterion A (broad patterns of history) in the area of Exploration and Settlement as it represents the growth of a prosperous and rapidly developing English-speaking community on Virginia's predominantly German western frontier. It is significant under Criterion C (architecture) as a largely intact, well-preserved, and well-cared for Georgian center-hall, double-pile stone house of a distinctive type that characterized building in the northern Shenandoah Valley during the settlement period, blending an English house plan with Germanic building techniques. The character and quality of repairs and alterations made ca. 1858 are strong evidence of the persistence of this building tradition, rather than a detraction from it. The present approximately 70-acre farm on gently rolling land is located on Opequon Creek, where a thriving farming community was established in northern Frederick County and what is now Clarke County in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century. The property contains two contributing sites – a post-Civil War bank barn and an eighteenth-century icehouse pit, both of stone; two non-contributing structures include a frame garden shed and an equipment shed built in the late twentieth century. The period of significance ranges from ca. 1753, the date of construction, to 1944, when High Banks passed out of the 95-year ownership of the Clevenger family.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

High Banks, 423 High Banks Road, Stephenson, Virginia, in northeastern Frederick County, was constructed ca. 1753. It is a two-story, center-hall, double-pile house built of local limestone. It is one of nineteen extant stone houses in Frederick County built between 1750 and 1789, and one of only four surviving Frederick County stone houses with a Georgian center-hall, double-pile form.<sup>1</sup>

High Banks's first owners, Thomas and Margaret Neill Helm, were members of prominent settling families of the northern Shenandoah Valley, and their prosperous farm was located along Opequon Creek, an important Frederick County waterway. The Helm and Neill families were among many English, Irish, and Scots-Irish immigrants who entered the northern Shenandoah Valley around the same time as the German Jost Hite, the leading promoter of settlement by Rhineland farmers in Virginia's Great Valley, and his partner, Robert

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N/A

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McKay. In 1731 Hite had received a 100,000-acre land grant from Thomas, Lord Fairfax, proprietor of Virginia's Northern Neck, in return for which he guaranteed to bring one hundred families into the area. The Helm and Neill families, however, were probably more closely associated with Alexander Ross, an Irish joiner-turned-land speculator who had made an arrangement with the colonial government that was similar to Hite's—a large land grant in return for a hundred settlers in the area. Ross and his partner, Morgan Bryan, had delivered seventy by 1734. While the German families gravitated to the limestone-rich lowlands of southern Frederick and what is now Shenandoah County, the English, Irish, and Scots-Irish often chose land in the northern section, close to where Ross had helped to establish a Quaker meeting at Hopewell. Settlement along the Opequon was thriving by the 1750s.<sup>2</sup>

Margaret Helm was the daughter of John Neill, an Irish immigrant who had prospered in Virginia. Thomas's family had been in Virginia for more than a generation, having emigrated from Lancashire, England to settle first in New York. Thomas's grandfather, Leonard Helm, had built his house, Helmsly, in 1733 not far away in what is now Clarke County.<sup>3</sup>

It seems likely that the High Banks house was built soon after Thomas Helm received two Fairfax land grants on Opequon Creek. The first grant, for 320 acres, was given to Thomas and Margaret in December 1751 by Margaret's father. The second, containing 269 acres, was received in January 1752, by assignee, John Moses. The land was on both sides of Opequon Creek; a portion of it was located in present-day Clarke County.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of 25, Thomas Helm was wealthy enough to build a substantial stone house on his land. His farm operations included a sawmill on the south side of Opequon Creek, as well as a still house. He was active in community affairs, serving as deputy sheriff, road overseer, justice of the county court, and captain of the county militia.

At his death in 1778, Thomas Helm's income was reported to be 13,746 pounds. His estate was divided among his nine children. The youngest child, Thomas, Jr., who was ten years old when his father died, received the greater portion--269 acres on the west side of Opequon Creek. His inheritance included the house, mill, and still house, as well as a 320-acre tract on the east side of Opequon Creek.

In 1800 Thomas Helm, Jr., sold his 478-acre plantation to James McDonald in return for 2,400 pounds and land in Kentucky. Several members of the Helm family, including Thomas's mother, had already moved there. When McDonald defaulted on the mortgage, the Opequon farm was sold at auction.

After the auction, the farm went through a series of owners in the early nineteenth century, winding up on the auction block again and again because of mortgage defaults. In 1807 John Clark purchased the 478 acres including the house, still house, and mill.<sup>5</sup> At Clark's death in 1816, the property was divided into two parcels, which were sold separately at auction.

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In 1819 the 282-acre parcel on which the house was situated was purchased by John Clevenger, who defaulted on the mortgage in 1831, resulting in the property being repossessed by Clark's executors, who transferred ownership to Walter and Abigail Tanqueray. The property was described as having a "dwelling on the high bank"<sup>6</sup>. Tanqueray, shown in the U.S. Census of 1830 as the owner of twenty slaves, died only a year after his purchase of High Banks, and in 1836 his widow sold 205 acres, referred to in the deed of sale as "the Clevenger tract' and including the house and mill, to Peter Cain for \$10 per acre.<sup>6</sup>

In 1849, the tract was purchased by John Clevenger's son, Thomas E. Clevenger, and his wife Mary, after which High Banks remained in Clevenger family ownership for 95 years. It was apparently at some point during the Clevengers' tenure that the property came to be called "High Banks". According to a handwritten memorandum of agreement between Thomas Clevenger and his neighbor Henry Seevers in 1844, Clevenger had rented land from Seevers in order to plant corn, wheat, oats, rye, and clover adjoining land "on which Peter Cain now lives."<sup>7</sup>

Physical evidence indicates that the front wall of the house suffered substantial structural damage at some point, probably in the mid-nineteenth century. Frederick County land tax records appear to support this supposition, as the property disappears from the tax rolls for a number of years, suggesting that the house may have been uninhabitable for some time after the damage occurred. The front wall was subsequently rebuilt, probably ca. 1858, using the same stone that had been used in the original construction. The original steep roofline was lowered, and the frame Greek Revival-style front porch was probably added at the same time. The interior of the main block of the house was also modernized, adding late-Greek Revival trim typical of the 1850s, while retaining the original plan and interior structure, as well as most of the original wide-board flooring.

During the Civil War, the Third Battle of Winchester raged near High Banks in September 1864. Although no military actions took place on the property, Union troops crossed the Opequon ford at High Banks on their way to battle, moving back and forth for the period of a week.<sup>8</sup>

In 1872, Thomas Clevenger's nephew, Benjamin Franklin Clevenger, bought the land from his uncle. An inventory of his estate compiled after his death in 1916, reveals that the farm included a barn, smokehouse, corncrib, and wheat granary. In 1944, Clevenger heirs sold the property to Frank and Rose Bell. Subsequent owners included J. H. and Frances Landbeck, Fred and Ann Glaize, and Mr. and Mrs. Lowell Burkett.

The present owners and occupants, James D. and Rebecca B. Stillwell, purchased the property with Mrs. Stillwell's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lowell Burkett, in 1972. They added another fifty acres to the farm in 1975. A two-story wing housing a kitchen, which had been added at the east side of the house, probably in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century, was destroyed by fire in 1929 and subsequently rebuilt. A modern



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kitchen, office, and porch were built in 2000 using the same footprint as the earlier wing. Mr. Stillwell, an architect, designed the addition.

The High Banks property now consists of 70 acres, all in Frederick County, which are used for pasturing cattle. The only extant evidence of the farm's early outbuildings consists of the foundation and partial walls of a large bank barn located northwest of the house and a stone icehouse pit southwest of the house. The house has been thoughtfully rehabilitated and carefully maintained by the Stillwells, and they have expressed a desire to place their house and land under a preservation or conservation easement.

### ANALYSIS OF ORIGINAL CA. 1753 STONE HOUSE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

The original ca. 1753 stone house is distinctive in its Germanic stonework and anglicized center-hall or center-passage plan, a combination seen in several Shenandoah Valley houses after about 1750. The local limestone set in semi-ashlar on the primary façade, emphasized at the corners by more prominent stones, but with a coarser rubble side and rear, is common in German stonework along the settlement path from Germantown, Philadelphia, through Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and beyond. The basement windows have segmental arches, while the upstairs have plain walnut lintels, a pattern often found after ca. 1750. Most distinctive, perhaps even unique, is the large relieving arch on the west elevation of the house. Architectural evidence in the basement, where there are fireplace foundations, suggests it was not an opening.

The original side-gable roof, perhaps a steep 45 degrees in the Germanic tradition of the area, is perhaps shown on the rough sketch attached to an 1836 indenture between Tanquary and Cain. Whether the drawing was a careful representation of the house or a generic one, it indicates that it was what was normally seen. The massive chimney supports in the basement, especially the two diagonal fireplaces on the east wall, are notable but not unusual in eighteenth-century dwellings of this type, being found in both German and English use. The massive 9-inch-square summer beam spanning the basement, with large 6-inch by 7-inch joists, was also typical of this period of construction—for example at the Snapp House and Harmony Hall both in Shenandoah County. The wide cellar door is a common Valley Germanic feature, although usually more of a walk-out, as at Bowman and Snapp, though the grade here shows some indication of alteration. In sum, the masonry and structure are typical of the best in Germanic construction of the era and in this area and a remarkable intact example of this construction. It is an early example of the center hall/passage plan, which is not found before ca. 1750 in the Pennsylvania-Maryland-Virginia progression of settlement, although of course it is seen in Virginia Tidewater mansions at an earlier date.<sup>9</sup>

The center-hall plan, with one large room on one side and two on the other, is usually viewed as an anglicization of the Germanic three-room plan of the early eighteenth century without a hall, such as the stone Froman House in Frederick County, the Frye House in Shenandoah County, or the well-known Herr House and Fort Zeller in Pennsylvania, among many, or others in log in Frederick County. The plan is almost

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identical to Harmony Hall, for example, while larger houses such as the Snapp House are true double-pile houses with five-bay fronts. High Banks has maintained its basic plan on all floors.

The key to understanding the flow of history in the house relates to the partial structural failure and subsequent rehabilitation. The area of concern--the center portion of the front wall at the second floor--is of the same stone as the rest of the house, raising first the possibility that it was originally constructed with plain rubble here. Some twenty houses of similar construction were examined with the same basic pattern as High Banks, from Pennsylvania to the Shenandoah Valley, and none exhibit this type of stonework, leading to the conclusion that this portion was rebuilt using the same stone. This partial structural failure resulted in the modernization and rehabilitation of the interior, primarily the central section on the first and second floors, and the replacement of the steep gable roof with the low gable now in use. The structural failure was not due to a fire, as no charred wood was in evidence during the current owner's work on the house, and the structure of the first floor is intact. Perhaps the problem was decay, a lack of maintenance, or storm damage. It was occupied in 1848, according to the deed of that year to Thomas Clevenger. An examination of tax records indicates a period in the early 1850s during which no tax was assessed on the buildings, only on the land. In 1858 tax was again levied on the building, suggesting a period when the house was abandoned or uninhabitable, followed by repair and return to use. This is consistent with the late Greek Revival period trim--simple, bulky, and plain--reinforcing these indications from tax records. The repaired floors are indicative of the limited extent of heavy rehabilitation. The new staircase and extensive use of new trim and sash suggests a general updating of the house and its decoration of the house rather than just repair. This may also explain the use of an almost-flat roof, fashionable at that period.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to emphasize the survival in original form and material of the basement, structure, and first-floor joists and flooring. These features reinforce the fact that much of the rehabilitation was done for the sake of modernization rather than out of necessity.

The early east wing is clearly an addition, as the 1912 photograph, the only surviving record, indicates. It is lower to the ground and probably without a basement, two bays wide, stone, and with a post-Civil War front porch, with scrollwork ornament on the posts and a jigsaw-work railing on part. It is possible this dates to the ca. 1858 rebuilding with the porch added later, in the 1870s or 1880s. However, since the original house apparently was without an inside kitchen, a much earlier date is possible--perhaps late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century--in order to provide a much-needed kitchen within the house itself. Inside kitchens were generally not found until the nineteenth century. As there is no evidence to indicate which hypothesis is more probable, an early-nineteenth-century date is more likely. The wing burned in 1929, causing part of the east wall of the house to be rebuilt in brick, as it survives today. This lost wing was replaced by a porch in the same location in 2000, with a three-sided open porch.

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The house sits on a prominent bluff, high above Opequon Creek, an important path and settlement area. The road in front of the house drops down to an old ford across the creek (later VA Rt. 660), which was until recently a working ford across to Clarke County but now abandoned, along with a former pedestrian bridge. In the eighteenth century, the original High Banks property extended into Clarke County. At the ford there was originally a sawmill; a gristmill was at a nearby ford on a different plot. This crossing was used by troops during the Civil War Battle of Third Winchester.

In front of the house is a partial trace of the original oval entrance drive to the house. To the north (rear) is rolling farmland; to the east are woods. Beyond the present property to the north lies Devil's Backbone, a notable local geological feature extending roughly east-west in northeast Frederick County.

There are two contributing sites near the house containing ruins, shown on the site plan (Additional Data 1). One is the ruins of part of the stonework and ramp of an old bank barn. The second is a stone remains, fifteen feet in diameter and twelve feet deep, of an old ice pit. There is no indication of the original icehouse cover. There are two non-contributing modern structures, ca. 1978 (Additional Data 1): a frame garden shed with a recessed open porch and gable roof and a frame gable-roofed equipment shed open on the south side.

### Archaeological Potential

Although no formal archaeological investigations have been conducted at High Banks, the potential could exist for the location of former eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings, material culture of the domestic and agricultural lifeways of the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries, as well as Civil War-related artifacts.

### End Notes

1. Maral S. Kalbian, Frederick County, VA: History through Architecture, [Winchester]: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1999. High Banks is House No. 034-0109.
2. Warren R. Hofstra. The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2004.
3. T. K. Cartmell, Shenandoah Valley Pioneers and Their Descendants, Frederick County, Virginia, from Its Formation in 1738 to 1908, (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1989, reprint of 1909 edition), p. 407.

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4. "1752 Composite Plat—High Banks, Patent Land Owned by Thomas Helm." Drawn by James D. Stillwell, Jan. 25, 2000. Accompanying Preliminary Information Application for VA Landmarks Register for High Banks. Submitted March 31, 2009.
  5. Clark's mill is noted on the 1809 Charles Varle "Map of Frederick, Berkeley and Jefferson Counties Situated in the State of Virginia". ( Philadelphia: Benjamin Jones, 1809).
  6. Deed Book 61, pp. 88-91
  7. A copy of the agreement is in the Stillwell files, Frederick County, Virginia.
  8. The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003. Reprint of the 1891-1895 original), pl. 69, pp 178-179.
  9. See Richard Webster, Pennsylvania Architecture, the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1933-1990, Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2000.
  10. See Kalbian, op. cit.

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### 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

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\_\_\_\_\_. The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2004.

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Webster, Richard, "The Architecture of Pennsylvania" in. Pennsylvania Architecture, the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1933-1990. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2000.

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**10. UTM References (cont.)**

5. 17 752540 E  
4343740 N

**ADDITIONAL DATA**

1. Sketch Plan
2. Photo Locations
3. Area Map and Sketch Plans
4. Sketch Plan, Original and Additions
5. Façade of House before 2000
6. Basement Plan
7. First-Floor Plan
8. Second-Floor Plan
9. Frederick Co., VA, Tax Parcel Map, Parcels 56-A 1 and 45-27
10. Photocopy of 1912 photograph of High Banks

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Name of Property: High Banks (VDHR File No. 034-0109)

City or Vicinity: Stephenson

County: Frederick State: Virginia

Photographer: James C, Massey

Date Photographed: 2009

Negative Number: 24872

Negatives stored at: Virginia Department Of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

Photo: 1 of 8

View: House façade looking north

Frame: 2

Photo: 2 of 8

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View: House façade and west elevation, looking northeast  
Frame: 11

Photo: 3 of 8  
View: House, west elevation, detail of large stone relieving arch  
Frame: 14

Photo: 4 of 8  
View: House, north and west elevations, looking southeast  
Frame: 16

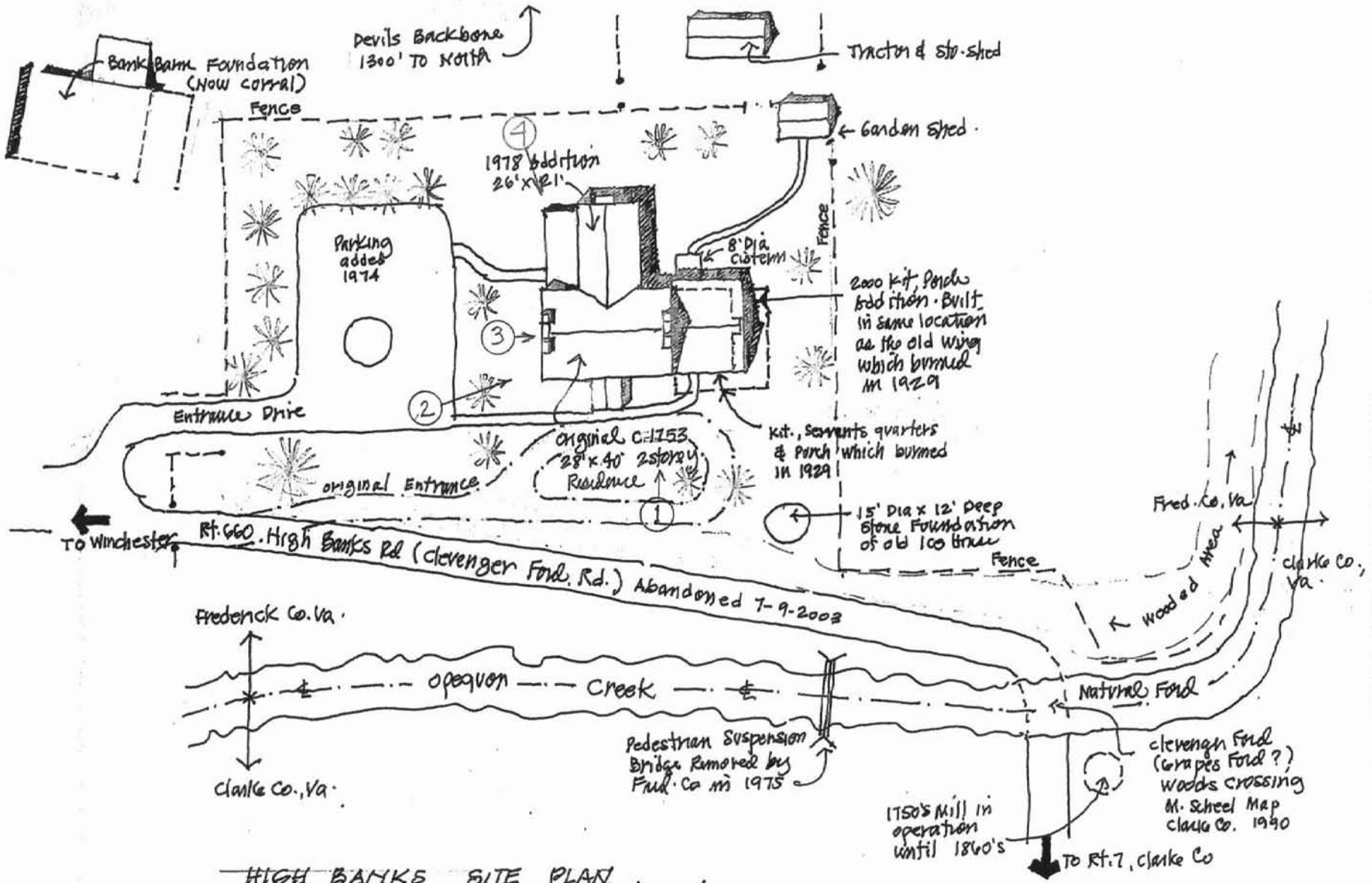
Photo: 5 of 8  
View: House, first-floor stair hall looking north  
Frame: 22

Photo: 6 of 8  
View: House, first-floor west living room, looking northwest  
Frame: 21

Photo: 7 of 8  
View: House, second-floor northeast bedroom with "Winchester" mantel looking east  
Frame: 26

Photo: 8 of 8  
View: House, basement, original east-side diagonal fireplace supports and transverse summer beam, looking northeast  
Frame: 32



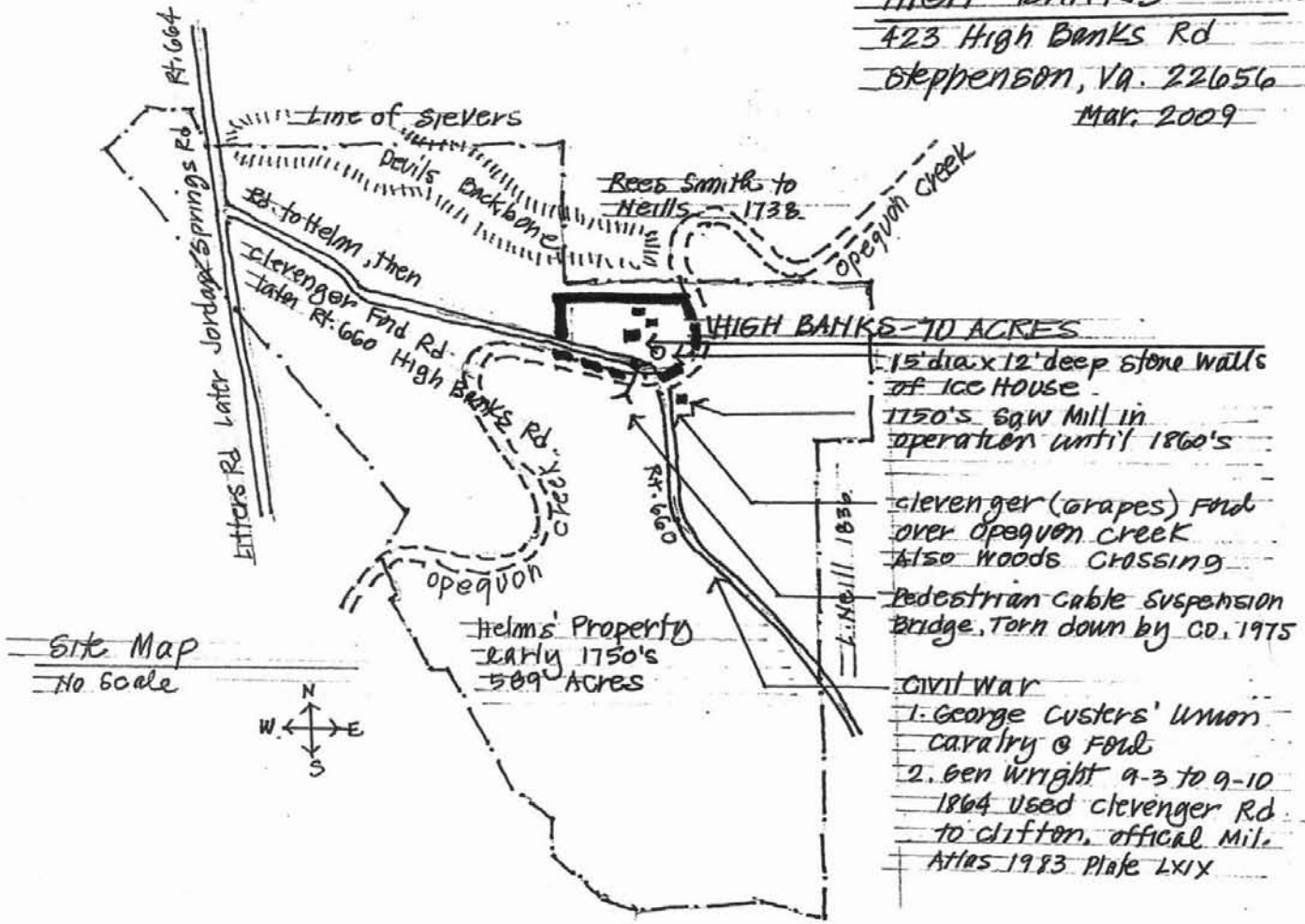


**HIGH BANKS SITE PLAN**  
 March 2009 Scale 1" = 20'  
 James D. Stillwell  
 Rev. 7/10/10

N  
 W E  
 S

← Jordan Springs Sulphur Spring Resort

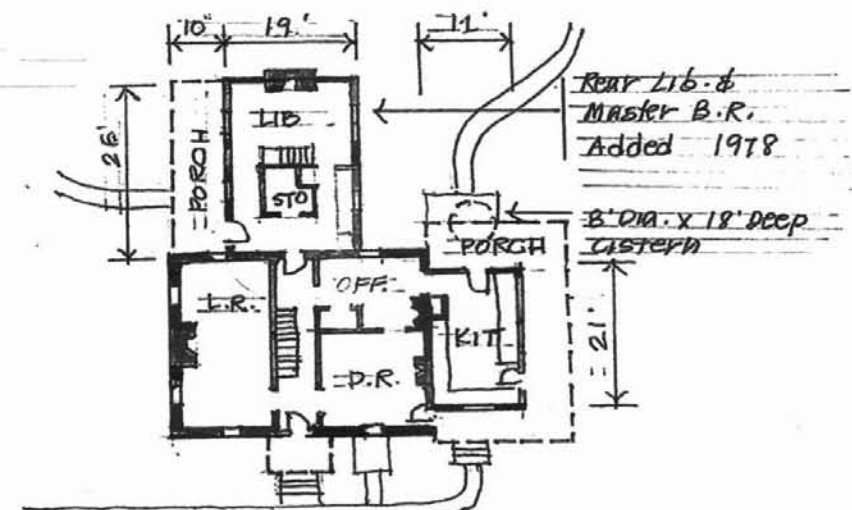
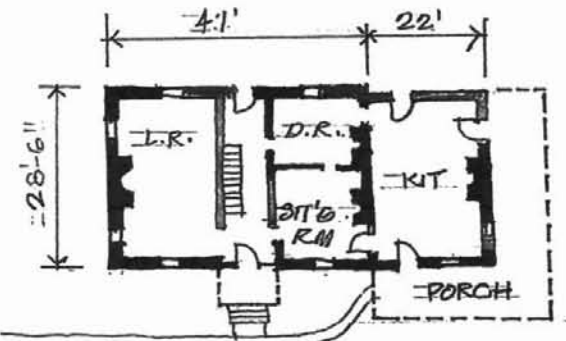
HIGH BANKS  
423 High Banks Rd  
Stephenson, VA. 22656  
Mar. 2009



- 15' dia x 12' deep stone walls of Ice House
- 1750's saw Mill in operation until 1860's
- Clevenger (grapes) Fnd over Opequon Creek
- Also Woods Crossing
- pedestrian cable suspension Bridge, Torn down by CO. 1975
- Civil War
  1. George Custers' Union Cavalry @ Fnd
  2. Gen Wright 9-3 to 9-10 1864 used Clevenger Rd to Clifton, official Mil. Atlas 1983 Plate LXIX

Site Map  
No. 604e

SKETCH PLANS:



FRONT

orig house  
circa 1753  
built by Thomas Helms

Kitchen & upstairs  
B.R. Burned in 1929  
Wing probably built after 1753

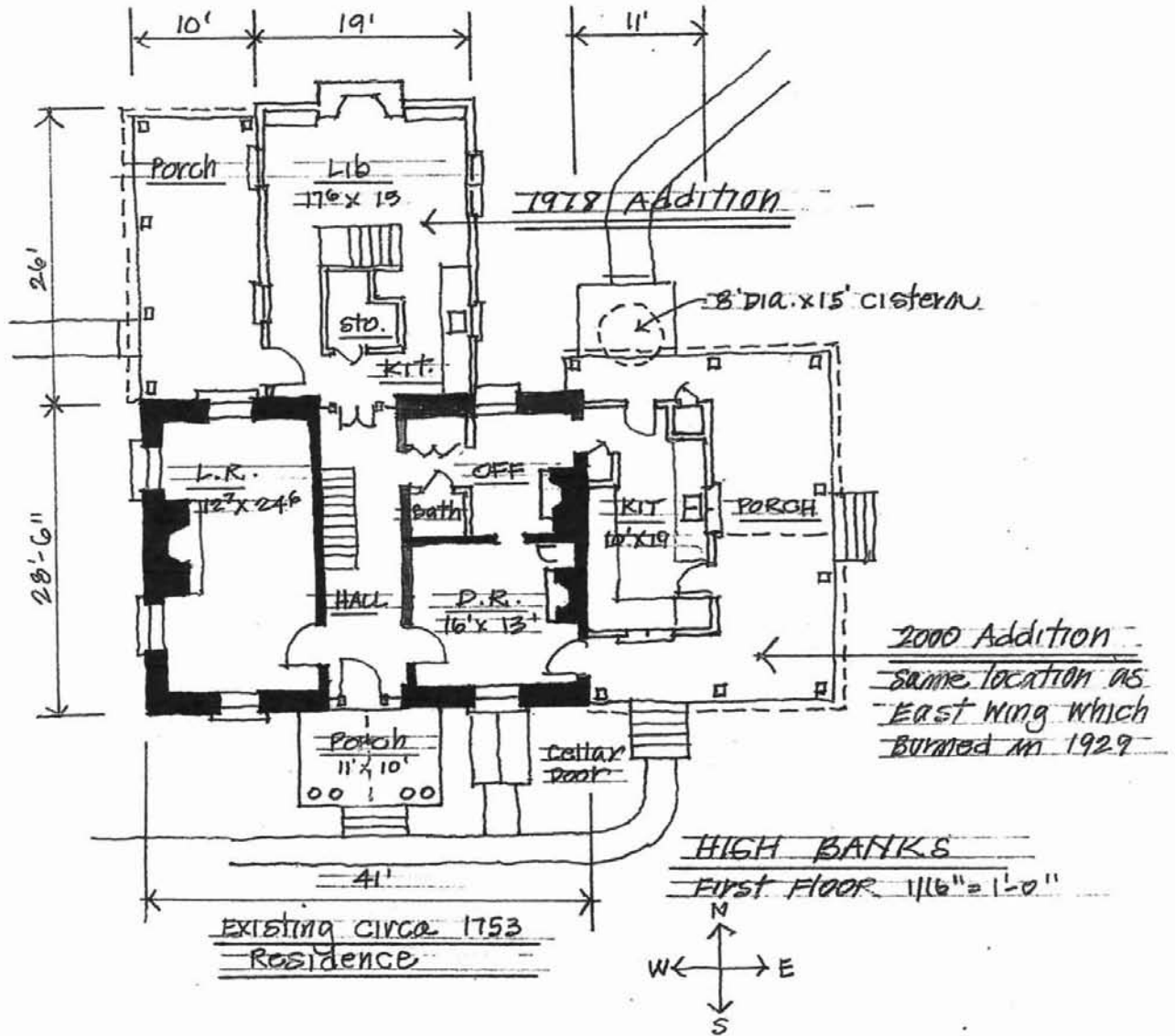
FRONT

orig 1753 House  
NO change

KIT & Porch  
Addition  
2000

CURRENT LAYOUT  
MARCH 2009 Rev. 7/10/10  
James P. Stillwell

SKETCH PLAN - ORIGINAL AND ADDITIONS



HIGH BANKS  
473 High Banks Rd.  
STEPHENSON, VA. 26656  
J.D. Stillwell March 2009  
 Rev. 7/10/10

FACADE BEFORE 2000 ADDITION



HIGH BANKS  
FRONT ELEVATION SCALE

8-22-78.  
REV. 3-31-09  
Rev. 7/10/10

BASEMENT PLAN  
No Scale

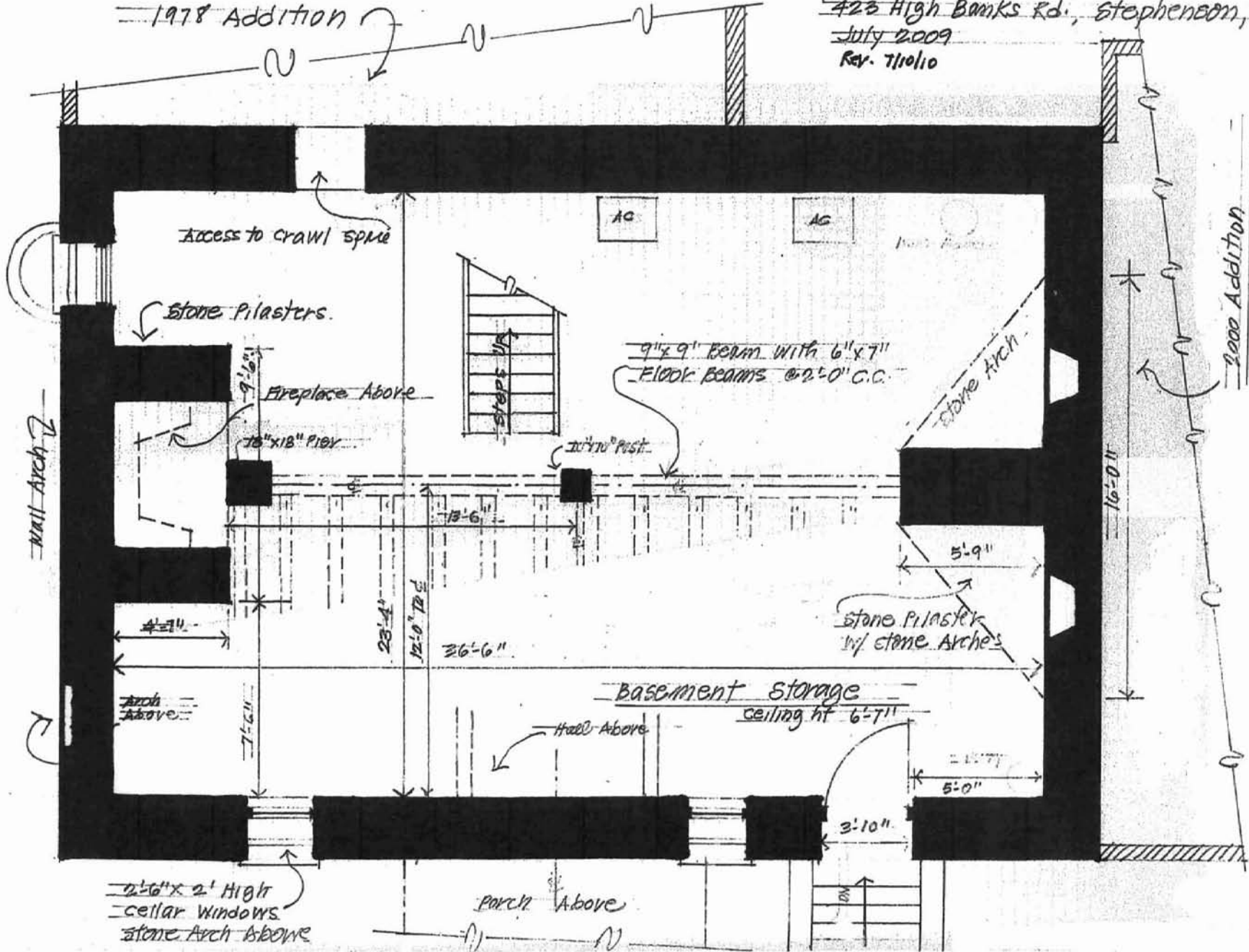
HIGH BANKS

425 High Banks Rd., Stephenson, Va. 22656  
July 2009  
Rev. 7/10/10

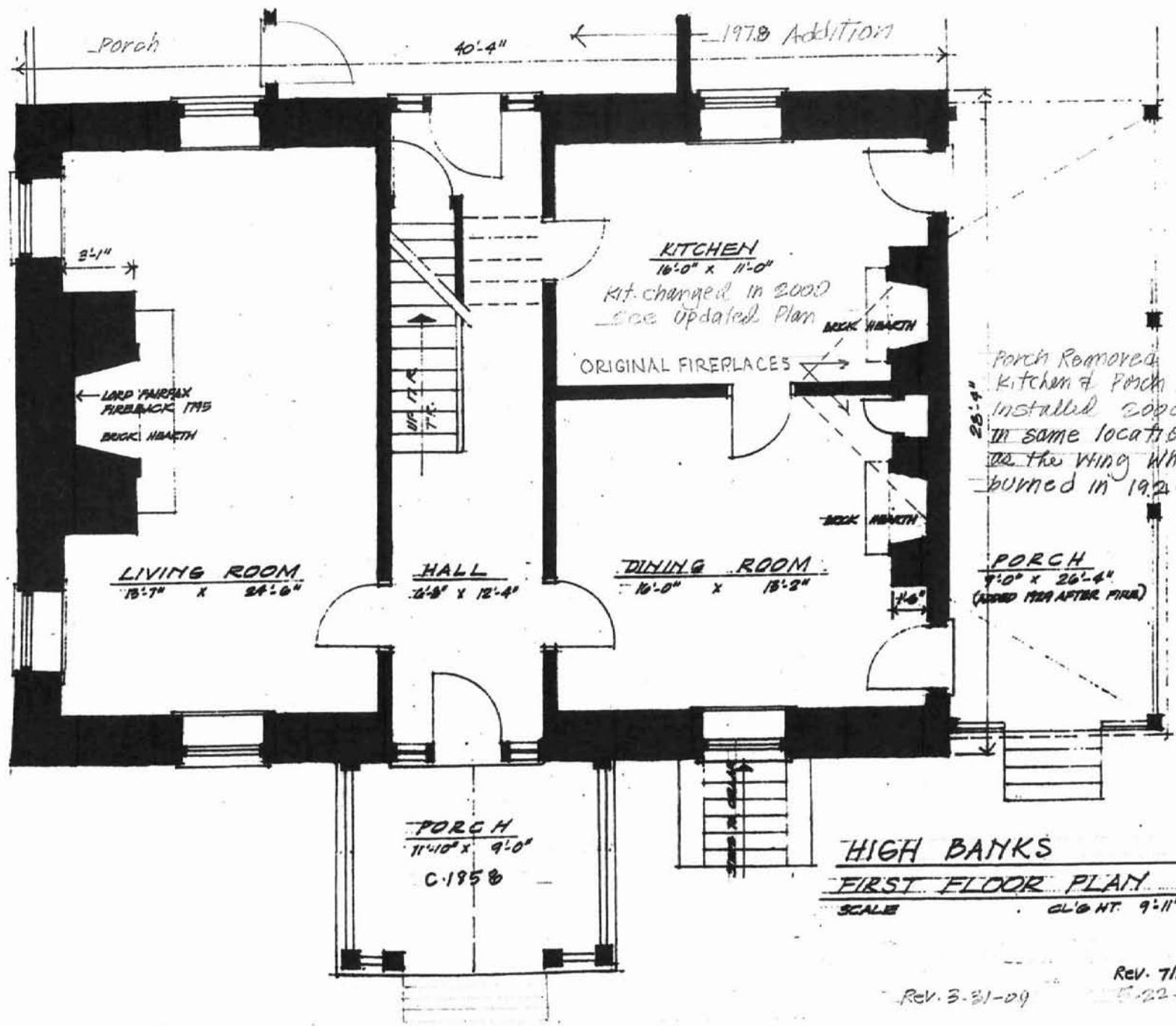
1978 Addition

2000 Addition  
(Poured concrete with 261  
SS wall, 201 stairs)

BASEMENT PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



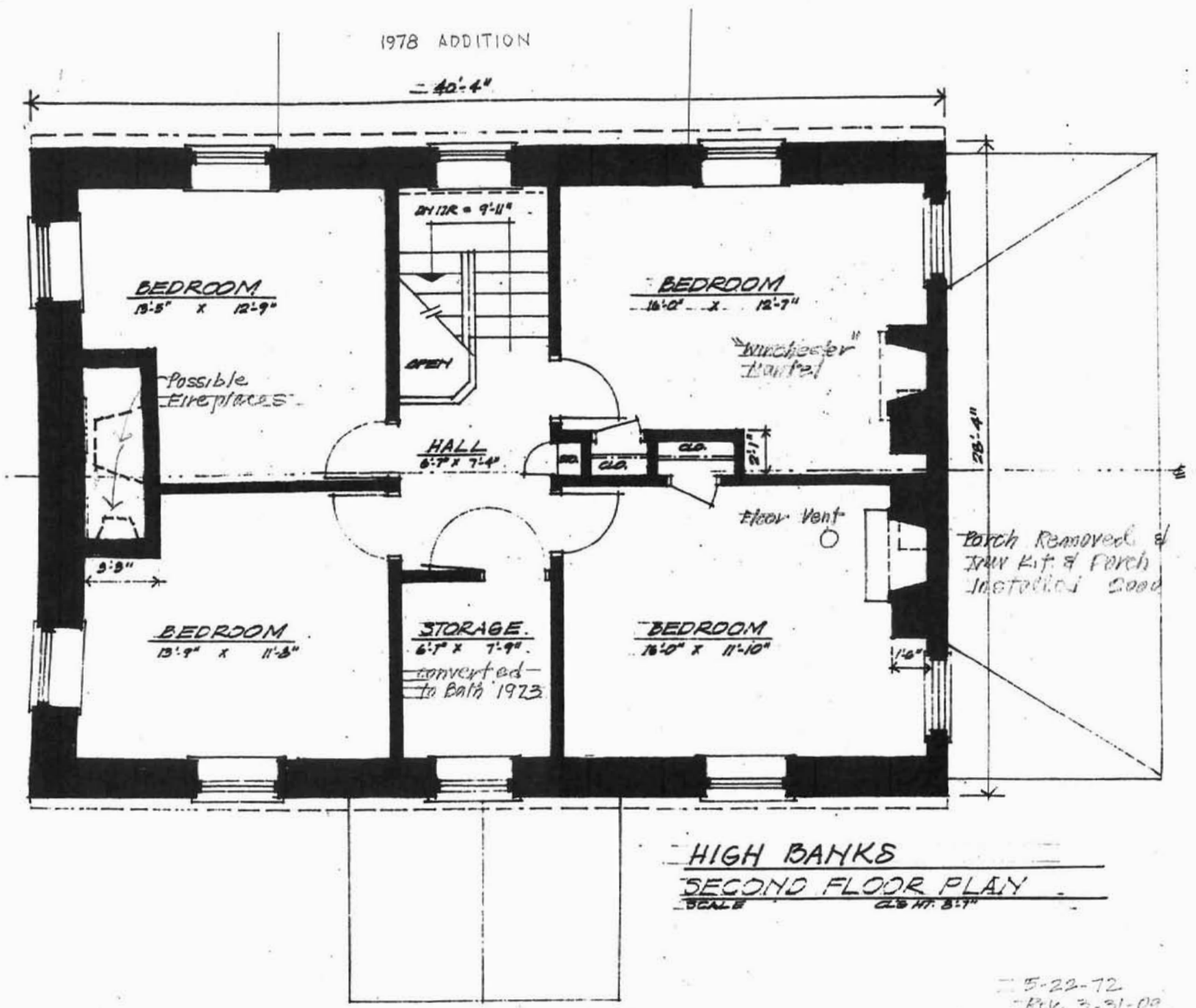
Porch Removed & New  
Kitchen & Porch  
Installed 2000  
in same location  
as the wing which  
burned in 1929

**HIGH BANKS**  
**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**  
SCALE CL'G HT. 9'-11"

Rev. 3-31-09  
Rev. 7/10/10  
5-22-72



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



5-22-72  
Rev. 3-31-09  
Rev. 7-10-10



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



HIGH BANKS

034-0109

FREDERICK CO. VA.  
STEPHENSON QUAD.

- 1) 17 752580 E  
4344140 N
  - 2) 17 753000 E  
4344200 N
  - 3) 17 753270 E  
4343830 N
  - 4) 17 753160 E  
4343600 N
  - 5) 17 752540 E  
4343740 N
- NAD 83