

VLR - 3.14.01  
NRHP - 5-16-02

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name MONTPELIER HISTORIC DISTRICT

other names/site number: Montpelier Historic District, DHR File No. 042-5016

**2. Location**

street & number: VARIOUS PARCELS SHOWN ON 1" = 200' SITE PLAN  
city or town: Montpelier vicinity X  
state: VIRGINIA code: VA county: HANOVER code:

not for publication: N/A  
Zip: 23192

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide X locally. (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Catherine Kussner* March 29, 2002  
Signature of certifying official Date

**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
\_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper  
Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**Montpelier Historic District  
Hanover County, Virginia**

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
43	2	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
44	2	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: **TWO (2)** (42-85)

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

N/A

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**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

- |                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Cat: Domestic           | Single dwelling     |
| Commerce/Trade          | Business            |
|                         | Professional        |
|                         | Department Store    |
|                         | Restaurant          |
|                         | Warehouse           |
| Social                  | Meeting Hall        |
| Government              | Post office         |
| Education               | School              |
|                         | Library             |
| Religion                | Church              |
| Agriculture/subsistence | Processing: cannery |

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| Cat: Domestic  | Single dwelling  |
| Commerce/Trade | Business         |
|                | Professional     |
|                | Financial        |
|                | Department Store |
|                | Warehouse        |
| Social         | Meeting Hall     |
| Government     | Post Office      |
| Education      | Library          |
| Religion       | Church           |

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### 7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Colonial Colonial  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rev. Colonial Revival  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Am.

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Brick, concrete, stone  
Roof: Standing seam tin, slate shingles, asphalt shingles, built up roof, metal panels  
Walls: Wood weatherboard, brick  
Other:

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)  
SEE CONTINUATION SHEET, SECTION 7, PAGE 1.

### 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)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Commerce  
Education  
Religion

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Period of Significance: 1732-1950

Significant Dates:           1732 Sycamore Tavern constructed  
                                  1876 Old School constructed  
                                  1882 Church of Our Savior constructed  
                                  1929 Montpelier School constructed

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder:       LP Hartsook, architect  
                                  ES Hogue, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)  
SEE CONTINUATION SHEET, SECTION 8.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: Department of Historic Resources \_\_\_\_\_



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### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:

The Montpelier Historic District is a linear district along old Mountain Road, located in the western portion of Hanover County, 20 miles west of Richmond. Montpelier grew from the Colonial era stagecoach stop at “Sycamore Tavern” on the Richmond to Charlottesville road, now designated State Route 33, Mountain Road. By the turn-of-the-twentieth century, Montpelier had become a thriving commercial village serving its agricultural base, with Old Mountain Road providing a connection to commercial activity beyond. By the third decade of the twentieth century, additional growth in the village came as a result of expanding prosperity gained from surrounding agricultural and timber resources. Buildings reflecting the past three centuries are located in the district and are orientated to the east-west, toward Old Mountain Road.

Residences, agricultural buildings, stores, businesses, a church, schools and libraries illustrate the wide range of building types. Sycamore Tavern (individually listed in the National Register) is the only 18<sup>th</sup>-century building remaining in the district with all remaining buildings coming after the Civil War. The most impressive character of the district is the density of the quality and variety of 18<sup>th</sup>-, 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century styles and designs seldom found in a rural and agricultural setting. The district includes 46 contributing resources— two of which are already listed in the National Register of Historic Places— and 2 noncontributing buildings.

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### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS:

The oldest surviving, pre-Civil War structure in the village is the 1732 Sycamore Tavern, 17193 Mountain Road, a one-and-one-half-story house with a side gable roof and dormers at the front. (PHOTO 1 of 13) There is a full width, three-bay front porch and a two-room shed addition at the rear. The original east exterior-end chimney is Flemish bond and has tiled shoulders. An American bond chimney with two sets of sloping shoulders was built later at the west end. John Wood's 1820 Map of Hanover County refers to the building as Higgason's Tavern. Its current name is derived from its setting, surrounded by ancient sycamores, fronting Mountain Road. There is one outbuilding associated with the tavern. The tavern is individually listed on the National Register and now is owned by Hanover County.

The old school at 17116 Mountain Road is a small "L" plan one-story frame building. The exterior is covered with weatherboard and there are wide sculptured rake boards at the gable roof ends. (PHOTO 2 of 13) This is the earliest school in Montpelier, built in 1876.

The Church of Our Savior, built in 1882, is the only church in Montpelier. The one-story structure has three bays at the front with a pair of entry doors set in a tower with octagonal steeple defining the center bay. (PHOTO 3 of 13 and PHOTO 4 of 13) Double-hung windows designate the four bays along the sides that provide light into the sanctuary. The church is covered with weatherboard, above a two piece wood watertable, and shingles covering the steep pitched, gable roof. A series of additions to the rear and side have expanded the church, maintained by an active Episcopal congregation today. The formal design reflects the significance of the great awakening and revival of the earliest established church in Virginia.

The growth, development and prosperity of the nation at the turn-of-the-century are reflected in the residential, commercial and school buildings constructed around 1900. The Hobart Hardware is a one-story frame, three-bay, gable-end front building with a centered entry at the storefront and shed wings on each side. A large porte-cochere at the front extends to Mountain Road, and provides protection over the storefront. The store was built in 1900 to sell farm supplies. The shed wings have been used as a barbershop and a lawyer's office. Bob Winston, a local judge held court in the left wing of Hobart Hardware.

Across the road from The Church of Our Savior is the Grange Hall at 17091 Mountain Road, built in 1899 as the farmers' union hall. (PHOTO 5 of 13 and PHOTO 6 of 13) This two-story, three-bay front, frame commercial building features a storefront at the first floor center bay and wood double-hung windows at the side bays and at the second floor. A one-bay porte-cochere extends from the center bay out to Mountain Road, and protects the storefront entry. This building met both social and business needs in an agricultural economy. A part of the Grange

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Hall was used as the Montpelier Post Office during Roland Beasley's tenure as Postmaster. Just adjacent to Grange Hall is a grain shed at 17089 Mountain Road. This frame, one-story, front gable building is covered with hand split oak shingles with a double entry door centered in the front, protected by a gable hood held with brackets. There is also decorative framing at the roof in the gable end front, providing fine detailing on a simple agricultural structure.

To the east of the Old School is Doctor Stanley's house at 17112 Mountain Road. It was built as a doctor's residence and office in 1889 and now serves as an office building. This two-story frame Victorian style house (Photo 2 of 13) features projecting bays at the front and sides, with a closed pediment roof over each projecting bay. The closed pediments are covered with diamond shingles surrounding a wood louver into the attic. There is wrap around porch with Tuscan columns.

The old Jones homeplace at 17099 Mountain Road was also built as a residence in 1900 and is currently used as an office building. John Jones, the founder of a timber and lumber business still operating in Montpelier today, and a son, Ernest Jones, resided here. This two-story frame Victorian house has a projecting front gable bay set to one side and a seven-bay one-story porch along the remaining front of the building. The projecting gable has a diamond light into the attic. The porch has turned posts and scrollwork below the porch roof. The size, scale and fine design of these original residences reflects the wealth and significance of the village and the agricultural area economy.

The Hollins House, a two-story frame, "L" plan residence at 17141 Mountain Road (PHOTO 7 of 13) was built in 1900 reputedly by the Hargrove family. The three-bay front has double-hung windows with shutters and a first-floor center entry door set in a pilastered enframing with dentils at the head. Windows have flat wood trim with a drip at the head. The house is built closely fronting Mountain Road and there is a two-story gambrel-roof barn set behind the house.

Slaw's Store, built 1919 at 17084 Mountain Road (PHOTO 9 of 13) is another commercial building across the road from the Grange Hall building. The frame building has three bays; the center bay and one side bay are two stories while the other side bay is one story. The center bay at the first floor has a storefront with a recessed entry and a multi-light transom the full width of the storefront. There is a one story, one bay porte-cochere projecting from the center bay, extending to Mountain Road.

The Montpelier School (PHOTO 8 of 13) at 17205 Mountain Road was built in 1929. L. P. Hartsook was the architect and E. S. Hogue was the contractor. An earlier Montpelier High School had burned in 1928. The present school building served as a high school until the Patrick Henry Consolidated High School was built in 1959. The Montpelier School then served the



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elementary grades until 1981. In 1984 the County turned the school over to the Save Our School Foundation avoiding demolition and creating a center for arts and education. The one-story brick school building has a three-bay front. The center bay is a broad side gable, recessed back from the two end bays with gable fronts. The center bay has a large bank of double hung windows. The two projecting end bays feature a panel set in an enframingent with a pedimented hood. There are two entries at the front, through recessed arches between the center and two side bays. The building is an excellent example of an early twentieth century high school.

Over a short period of time in the 1930s, a number of significant residences were built that illustrate the wealth in the agricultural community. The Stone family built the two-story "Cotswold" style cottage at 17060 Mountain Road in 1934. The house has steep, multiple, gable roofs and a large brick chimney with shoulders at the front. The entry door has vertical boards with a round compass head set in a pilastered enframingent. The design and style of the residence is distinctive of an early twentieth-century American movement, more commonly found in urban settings.

At 17078 Mountain Road is "Norway" House (PHOTO 10 of 13), a Colonial Revival-style residence built in 1936 by Claude Isbell. Isbell was a merchant and owner of the adjacent Slaw's Store, and chairman of the local "Byrd" Democratic Committee. The two-story, side-gable, three-bay front has one-story projecting wings and brick chimneys at each end. The roof has a broad overhang with a scalloped pattern carved cornice. The one-story one-bay front porch has Tuscan columns supporting a front gable and a broken pediment roof protecting a paneled entry door with sidelights and a round head transom. The formal design of the house extends to the site with the building lot defined by a brick landscape wall with pedestals at the front and sides.

The significance of timber resources during the 1930s is evident in the community. Ernest Jones, son of John Jones, continued the timber business with his sons. The Jones family built a number of notable residences in the village during this period.

Ernest Jones built "The Oaks" at 17059 Mountain Road (PHOTO 11 of 13) in 1936. The name comes from the mature oaks surrounding the house. A wood board fence defines the house lot and provides a separation from adjacent cultivated fields and sawmill operations to the rear. This two-story, side-gable, three-bay front brick Colonial Revival-style residence has brick chimneys at each end. There is a one-story, one-bay wing with a wood railing above a flat roof, at each side. The entry door has sidelights and transom set in a pilastered enframingent. Windows are wood double-hung with wood louvered shutters.

The one-and-one-half story brick Colonial Revival-style residence at 17144 Mountain Road was built by Carlton Grey Jones in 1936. (PHOTO 12 of 13) The brick residence has a five-bay front

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of double-hung six-over-six windows flanking a center entry door set in a pilastered enframement. There are three dormers at the roof with brick chimneys at each exterior end. Windows have brick jack arch headers and there is a brick soldier course watertable at the first floor line.

At 17160 Mountain Road (PHOTO 13 of 13) is a Colonial Revival-style residence built in 1936 by Myrle S. Jones. This one-and-one-half story brick dwelling has a three-bay front with a one-story, two-bay wing at the north side. There are brick chimneys with shoulders at both ends of the one-and-one-half story section. The center bay has a paneled door with sidelights and transom set in a pilastered enframement. There are three dormers at the front set in a steep, side-gable, slate roof. An oversized porte-cochere has been added at the south end.

Herman B. Jones was the only member of the Jones family in the 1930s to build a house with wood. The Jones house at 17004 Mountain Road is a one-and-one-half story frame residence with side gable roof. The three-bay front features one-bay front porch with square columns and a broken pediment roof over the entry. Double-hung windows are at the side bays. There are two dormers in the roof.

John Duke Moody built the Colonial Revival-style residence at 17208 Mountain Road in 1936. This two-story, side-gable residence has a three-bay front with entry at the first floor center and double-hung windows at the sides and second floor. The windows have shutters. There are brick chimneys and one-story wings at each end. A one-story garage with cupola is connected to the northwest one-story wing. There is a Federal-style, one-story front porch with paired columns supporting a front-gable broken pediment roof. A one-and one-half story brick workshop and a one-story brick tool shed of the same era are part of this well developed complex.

In 1940, a Vocational-Agricultural building (17183 Mountain Road) was constructed to expand educational offerings at the Montpelier School. The one-story wood-frame, long, rectangular-plan building has paired double-hung windows with wide flat board trim and a drip at the head. The roof overhang has exposed rafter ends. The building has been converted into a meeting hall for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 394. Just to the west is a one-story cinderblock cannery, of the same era, with clerestory and double-hung wood windows.

In 1950 the County School Board erected a brick one-story cafeteria at 17203 Mountain Road. The long rectangular-plan building has paired double-hung windows. The building has been converted into a meeting hall for the Montpelier Ruritan Club.

At 17157 Mountain Road is a one-and-one-half story brick Colonial Revival-style house built in 1941. The three-bay front has a one-story two-bay wing at the side. Double-hung windows have

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louvered shutters. The center entry door has a projecting broken pediment hood supported by brackets.

Since 1960 there have been a number of new buildings constructed in the historic district, they all are orientated towards Mountain Road. The two noncontributing buildings in the district include:

1. A bank at 17109 Mountain Road, a 1986 bank building.
2. A house at 17182 Mountain Road, a 1975 Ranch-style residence.

## INVENTORY

1. **17004 Mountain Road**, a 1936, one-and-one-half story, wood frame, Colonial Revival-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resources include a 4-bay wood pole garage, a wood frame garage with a front gable roof and a small wood frame shed.
2. **17059 Mountain Road**, "The Oaks" a 1936, two-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resources include a 1-story brick garage with slate gable roof and a small wood frame shed with a standing seam tin roof.
3. **17060 Mountain Road**, a 1934, two-story, wood frame, Late-19<sup>th</sup> and Early-20<sup>th</sup> -century American Movement-style "Cotswold Cottage" single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a 1-story wood frame garage with a hipped roof.
4. **17068 Mountain Road**, a 1900, one-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, store/commercial building, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a small wood frame shed with a standing seam tin roof.
5. **17078 Mountain Road**, "Norway" a 1936, two-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style single family residence, CONTRIBUTING.
6. **17083 Mountain Road**, a 1948 one-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resources include two small wood frame sheds with gable roofs.
7. **17084 Mountain Road**, "Slaw's Store" a 1919, two-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, commercial building, CONTRIBUTING.
8. **17089 Mountain Road**, a 1900, one-story, wood- frame, local vernacular-style, grain shed building, CONTRIBUTING.
9. **17091 Mountain Road**, "Grange Hall" an 1899, two-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, store/commercial building, CONTRIBUTING.
10. **17098 Mountain Road**, "Church of Our Savior", an 1882, one-story, wood frame, Colonial Revival-style church, CONTRIBUTING. Secondary contributing resource (site) is a cemetery in the churchyard.

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11. **17099 Mountain Road**, a 1900, two-story, wood-frame, Late-19<sup>th</sup> and Early-20<sup>th</sup>-century American Movement-style office building, CONTRIBUTING.
12. **17109 Mountain Road**, a 1986, one-and-one-half-story, brick veneer, Colonial Revival-style bank, NONCONTRIBUTING.
13. **17112 Mountain Road**, an 1899, two-story, wood frame, Late 19<sup>th</sup>-and Early-20<sup>th</sup>-century American Movement-style office building, CONTRIBUTING.
14. **17116 Mountain Road**, an 1876, one-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, school building, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a small wood frame smokehouse with a standing seam tin pyramid roof.
15. **17141 Mountain Road**, a 1900, two-story, wood frame, Late-19<sup>th</sup> and Early-20<sup>th</sup> century American Movement-style single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a 2-story, wood frame barn with a gambrel roof.
16. **17144 Mountain Road**, a 1936, one-and-one-half-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a small woodshed.
17. **17157 Mountain Road**, a 1941, one-and-one-half-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING.
18. **17160 Mountain Road**, a 1936, one-and-one-half-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resources include two wood frame garages and three small wood frame sheds.
19. **17182 Mountain Road**, a 1975, one-story, brick veneer, Ranch-style, single family residence, NONCONTRIBUTING.
20. **17183 Mountain Road**, "VFW Post 394" a 1940, one-story, wood frame, local vernacular-style, meeting hall, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a one-and-one-half-story cinderblock cannery.
21. **17193 Mountain Road**, "Sycamore Tavern" a 1732, one-and-one-half-story, wood frame, Colonial tavern converted to library, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resource is a small "well/dairy" with a pyramid roof. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
22. **17198 Mountain Road**, a 1950, one-story, brick veneer, Ranch-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING.
23. **17203 Mountain Road**, "Ruritan Building" a 1950, one-story, brick, local vernacular-style meeting hall, CONTRIBUTING.
24. **17205 Mountain Road**, "Montpelier School" a 1929, one-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style school building, CONTRIBUTING.
25. **17208 Mountain Road**, a 1936, two-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style, single family residence, CONTRIBUTING. Contributing secondary resources include a one-and-one-half-story, brick workshop with a gable roof and a small one-story brick tool house with a gable roof.
26. **17212 Mountain Road**, a 1940, one-and-one-half-story, brick, Colonial Revival-style, commercial building/store, CONTRIBUTING.

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

Though the WPA's *Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion*, dismissively characterized Montpelier in 1940 as "a few houses, stores, and a post office,"<sup>1</sup> since the late nineteenth century this village has served as an important economic and social center for the local rural community, and manifested—more than many comparably sized settlements in Hanover County—a significant concentration of wealth derived from agriculture and the timber industry. Despite its modest size, the village of Montpelier represents, in microcosm, the development of western Hanover County in the years between the Civil War and World War II. The Montpelier Historic District is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, with significance at the local level, as it exemplifies the growth of this community as the commercial and social focus of the surrounding rural area. The District also is eligible under Criterion C, given the density and variety of 18<sup>th</sup>-, 19<sup>th</sup>-, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century architectural styles and designs rarely found in a rural village setting.

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### Historical Background

Before the village of Montpelier, there was Sycamore Tavern (42-5016-15). Situated on the Old Mountain Road (modern State Route 33) linking Richmond with Charlottesville, this establishment was the fourth stop for travelers leaving the capital, and supplied the first change of horses for westbound coaches. Though the early history of the tavern is not well documented, it appears to have been established in the early 1730s. Known by 1820 as “Higgason’s Tavern,” it appeared as a significant local landmark on John Wood’s map of Hanover County. After passing through numerous hands in the first half of the nineteenth century, the tavern was purchased by Reverend Silas Shelburne in 1859. Though it ultimately ceased serving travelers after the Civil War, the tavern has continued to serve as a public building to this day.<sup>2</sup>

With deep roots in English tradition, taverns played an integral role in Virginia’s social and economic life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From crowded city gathering places to cramped country homes, taverns filled a variety of roles in the pre-modern era, serving up food and drink, lodging travelers, hosting social and political groups, and offering a venue for news, gossip, and public debate. Above all, the size, character, and function of taverns in the Commonwealth were dictated by their setting. Taverns in urban centers such as Norfolk, Richmond, and Alexandria tended to be more specialized, with greater emphasis on providing a place of assembly, whether for carousing, politicking, or both. In contrast, rural taverns were geared more towards housing those travelers who, braving Virginia’s notoriously poor roads, were in dire need of a meal and a bed. As such, there was no “typical” Virginia tavern; rather, a variety of forms that fit the needs of its community.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of taverns in early Virginia was reflected in the highly regulated nature of this early “hospitality industry.” County governments jealously guarded their right to license these establishments. Aside from the obvious fiscal benefit of collecting fees from potential tavern keepers, local officials had a genuine interest in ensuring that taverns were well situated, and provided a minimum acceptable standard of service and accommodations. Almost without exception, rural Virginia taverns were situated along a principal thoroughfare, at a crossroads or near a ferry crossing. This consistency in location was as much the result of government regulation as the simple necessity of offering service at the most convenient location for travelers. In this regard, Sycamore Tavern was entirely typical, located along the main route between Richmond and Charlottesville, at the intersection of the road (modern State Route 715) leading north to the community of Beaverdam.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the best efforts of regulators, travelers were often disappointed with the conditions they found in many of Virginia’s rural inns. Through most of the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for “taverns” to consist merely of private homes opened to guests. In such situations

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privacy was virtually unheard of, with guests sharing meals, and even beds, with other lodgers and family members. One reluctant patron of Virginia taverns, noted architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe, frequently recorded the indignities he was forced to suffer while traveling. "A man who in his own family enjoys all the decencies of personal accommodation," he explained,

whose house is arranged to afford all the means of personal cleanliness, and that sort of privacy which personal cleanliness demands, must be shocked and tortured when he has to go through the half dozen or ten hours which intervene between his being set down at night by the stage at the very best tavern between New York and Norfolk, and being taken up again in the morning.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout most of the eighteenth century, Willie Graham of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation notes, most rural Virginia taverns could not be distinguished from other dwellings. Many exhibited the simple two-room hall-and-parlor floor plan, in which each room served a variety of functions. Privacy was necessarily limited, and communal bedding arrangements reflected the fact that sleeping had not yet acquired its current status as an "intimate act." However, by the latter part of the eighteenth century, particularly in urban centers, tavern design began to evolve away from the communal mode of accommodations toward a more segregated and private use of space. In fact, Latrobe's diatribe against the rude accommodations he was forced to endure is a perfect example of how these traditional institutions were not keeping pace with the increasingly "refined" and "modern" habits of the burgeoning middle class. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as taverns became larger, more specialized and compartmentalized, their nomenclature began to shift as well. Hoping to avoid the increasingly negative connotations of the term "tavern," proprietors began to favor the title "hotel."<sup>6</sup>

As with most other socio-cultural developments, the transformation of "tavern" into "hotel" occurred more slowly in rural areas than in cities. But in the years following the Civil War, changes in transportation and travelers' perceptions increasingly made establishments such as Sycamore Tavern an anachronism. No longer could this humble establishment meet the demands of privacy and "refinement" expected by a more discerning clientele, who now could travel quickly and in relative luxury between Richmond and Charlottesville by rail.

The same process of social and economic change in post-Civil War Hanover County that ensured the demise of Sycamore Tavern, however, was the driving force behind the development of the village of Montpelier. By the time Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House in April 1865, Hanover County, and much of Virginia, had suffered significant physical and economic damage from four years of war. Damage to the county's infrastructure—bridges, railroads, and buildings—the loss of manpower and draft animals, the neglect of agricultural land, and the emancipation of the slave population had a detrimental effect on Hanover's

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economic and social landscape in the postwar era. Over the following years, property values plummeted. Land that had sold for \$10 per acre before the war now fetched only \$1 to \$3. In fact, the real estate market was so depressed that during their 1869-70 session, the General Assembly enacted a law prohibiting the sale of land for less than 75 percent of its assessed value.<sup>7</sup>

Postwar agricultural difficulties prompted Hanover County farmers to seek alternative sources of income. The solution for many was to sell the timber on their land for cash. Some, like the local Jones family, would subsequently make their fortunes in lumbering. Timber money, in fact, helped spur the development of the village of Montpelier in the post-Civil War period. Between 1860 and 1890, the forest resources of many northern states had been badly depleted by intensive logging. With a growing demand for timber of all kinds, the South's forests became more attractive to timber interests. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, Virginia had a relatively well-developed railroad network suitable for shipping raw materials, and was covered with vast forests undisturbed since the Civil War. The most productive period of Virginia's timber industry lasted between 1905 and 1915, peaking in 1909 with production of more than 2.1 billion board feet of lumber. Hanover County, with its mix of loblolly pine and hardwoods, was an attractive location for logging during this period, and Montpelier would profit from this industry well into the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Though far removed from the plantation tobacco culture of the eighteenth century, farming continued to be a mainstay of the Hanover County economy in the decades following the Civil War. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, the focus of Virginia farming in this region had shifted to market gardening. In 1892, Virginia was shipping upwards of \$7 million in produce. Hanover County, in particular, was known for the quality of its fruits and vegetables, including the famed Hanover tomatoes and melons. It was during this resurgence of farming in the late nineteenth century that the tiny settlement of Montpelier emerged as a local service center, geared to serving the commercial—as well as the social and spiritual—needs of the surrounding rural district. Today, only a handful of Montpelier's original buildings survive, but they are representative of the important functions performed by this small community. The earliest school (42-5016-7), erected in 1876, is situated just a short distance from the village's first and only religious establishment, the Episcopal Church of our Savior (42-5016-5), built in 1882. The Grange Hall (42-5016-10), dating to 1899, embodies the importance of agriculture and the popularity of cooperative farming movements at the turn of the century. Established in 1867, the "Grange," or "Patrons of Husbandry," was a fraternal order dedicated to helping farmers to learn new agricultural methods. Though Virginians were initially slow to join, by 1876 the organization claimed 18,000 members throughout Virginia in 685 local chapters. Though the Grange had lost most of its power by the 1890s, it was replaced by similar



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organizations, including the Farmers' Assembly and Farmers' Alliance, and the annual Farmers' Institutes.<sup>9</sup>

The early twentieth-century Montpelier Farm Supply (42-5016-2), Slaw's Store (42-5016-4), established 1919, and the ca. 1900 grain shed (42-5016-9), are representative of the commercial enterprises that catered to area farmers. In conjunction with Montpelier's development as a regional service center, a number of typical late-Victorian dwellings (e.g. 42-5016-6, 42-5016-11, and 42-5016-13) were built to accommodate the owners of local businesses.

Just as Montpelier's Church of Our Savior and the Grange building represent important public institutions that served the surrounding district, the Montpelier School similarly would emerge as central community institution in the early twentieth century. After Montpelier's original high school burned in 1928, the Hanover County School Board purchased property, including Sycamore Tavern, from Travis M. Thompson, to build a new school. The one-story, brick building (42-5016-16) was designed by Richmond architect, L. P. Hartsook, and erected by builder E. S. Hogue in 1929-30. When it was completed, the new Montpelier High School signaled the transition between Virginia's old system of rural schooling represented by the town's original cramped schoolhouse (42-5016-7) and the new vision of the "modern" educational system.<sup>10</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century, William A. Link argues,

changing the function of schooling ultimately meant altering the environment of public education in at least three respects. First, rather than simply altering decisions, modernizers sought a wholly new process of decision making through the introduction of bureaucratic governance. Second, rather than simply building new schools or even new facilities, they insisted on school interiors and exteriors that reflected their view of education. Third, modernizers attempted to create an environment of learning in which rural students directly experienced the new relationship between schools and their society.<sup>11</sup>

The new Montpelier High School encapsulated these modernizing tendencies of the "Public School Movement" identified by Link. To begin with, the school was designed by county—not local—authorities, representing the strong bureaucratizing and standardizing impulse in Virginia education during this period. The design of the building itself, with its classrooms surrounding the central gymnasium/auditorium, and up-to-date physical plant and sanitary facilities, was intended to create an improved environment for learning. Finally, the school was intended to serve as a multi-purpose facility with public meeting space for the entire community, underscoring the desire to link education with the broader society.

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The physical evolution of the Montpelier School reflected the changing needs of the student body and the community over time. A vocational agriculture building (42-5016-18) was constructed to the rear of the main school building in 1940, and a cafeteria (42-5016-17) in 1950, so students no longer had to eat in the basement of the neighboring Sycamore Tavern. When the high school was consolidated with Patrick Henry High School in 1959, the building was taken over by the elementary school. The building was abandoned around 1980, and in 1984 the Montpelier School Board turned the building over to the Hanover County Board of Supervisors. Faced with the prospect of the building's demolition, community members formed the S.O.S. (Save Our School) Foundation, and acquired the building in 1988. After a complete renovation, the building was reopened in 1998 as the Montpelier Center for Arts & Education, featuring a ballroom, dance studio, conference and meeting rooms, rotating art exhibits and ongoing educational programs.

After the initial development of Montpelier as a rural village in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the most significant growth came in the form of residential development. Reflecting the continuing prosperity of the community's commercial and timbering interests, the homes built during the period 1936-1950 (42-5016-14, 42-5016-20, 42-5016-21, 42-5016-22, and 42-5016-29) represent a range of popular domestic forms, particularly the Colonial Revival style reminiscent of Hanover County's eighteenth-century plantation houses.

Today, the village of Montpelier includes an eclectic mix of architectural styles, building types, and flourishing local enterprises. The eighteenth-century Sycamore Tavern, still in use as the Page Memorial Library of Local History and Genealogy, stands within sight of the ca. 1930 Montpelier School, which itself has been preserved and transformed by concerned local citizens into a model community center. The late-nineteenth-century Church of Our Savior sits across the Old Mountain Road from the Bank of America, built in the 1980s. And adjacent to early twentieth-century agricultural stores are stately Colonial Revival homes built with the profits of the booming lumber business. Despite its modest size, the village of Montpelier represents, in microcosm, the social and economic life of western Hanover County in the years between the Civil War and World War II.

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**ENDNOTES**

1. Works Progress Administration, *Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion*, p. 498.
  2. Lancaster, *A Sketch of the Early History of Hanover County, Virginia*, pp. 24-25; Hanover County Historical Society, *Old Homes of Hanover County, Virginia*, p. 153.
  3. Rice, *Early American Taverns*; Rockman and Rothschild, "City Tavern, Country Tavern;" Graham, "Genteel Punches and Drunken Balls."
  4. Rice, *Early American Taverns*; Graham, "Genteel Punches and Drunken Balls."
  5. Carter, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, v. III, p. 84.
  6. Graham, "Genteel Punches and Drunken Balls;" Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, pp. 251-55.
  7. Kaplan, *Land and Heritage in the Virginia Tidewater*, pp. 153-56.
  8. Gottmann, *Virginia in Our Century*, pp. 235-242.
  9. Kaplan, *Land and Heritage in the Virginia Tidewater*, pp. 155, 176-77.
  10. Wuellner, "Montpelier High School."
  11. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place*, 149.
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Wuellner, Margarita J. "Montpelier High School (Montpelier Elementary School),"  
Architectural Survey, Land and Community Associates, Virginia Department of Historic  
Resources (#42-127), Richmond, 1991.

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### UTM References, continued

	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
5.	18	263020	4189230

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the Montpelier Historic District are shown on the attached map which has a scale of 1 inch to 200 feet.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Montpelier Historic District is linear with the boundary drawn along Mountain Road to include the largest concentration of historic resources within the village. This rural district boundary is also drawn to include the cultivated areas that provide a setting for the historic resources. The district, along Mountain Road, extends from the southeastern end of the village at "The Oaks" (17059 Mountain Road) to the northwestern end at Montpelier School. All resources are orientated facing Mountain Road and they include 9 residences, 3 stores, 1 grain shed, 1 tavern, 2 meeting halls, 2 office buildings, 2 schools and 1 church.

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**Additional Documentation, Photo List      Page 18**

**The following information is common to all photographs:**

Subject: Montpelier Historic District, Hanover County, Virginia

Date: September 9, 2000, Negative number 18073

Photographer: William Laffoon

Negatives filed: Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Richmond, VA

PHOTO 1 of 13. View of Sycamore Tavern (17193 Mountain Road) from Mountain Road with the Montpelier School (17205 Mountain Road) beyond to the right.

PHOTO 2 of 13. View of the Old School (17116 Mountain Road) with the old Dr. Stanley home (17112 Mountain Road) converted into an office building beyond to the right.

PHOTO 3 of 13. View of the sanctuary and steeple at the Church of Our Savior (17098 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 4 of 13. View of the entry and steeple base at the Church of Our Savior (17098 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 5 of 13. View from 17078 Mountain Road, looking northwest across the road, towards the grain shed (17089 Mountain Road) on the left, towards the Grange Hall at center (17091 Mountain Road), and towards Slaw's Store (17084 Mountain Road) to the right.

PHOTO 6 of 13. View from the churchyard at the Church of Our Savior (17098 Mountain Road) looking across the road towards Grange Hall (17091 Mountain Road).

PHOTO 7 of 13. View from Mountain Road, looking southeast towards 17141 Mountain Road.

PHOTO 8 of 13. Montpelier School. (17205 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 9 of 13. Slaw's Store. (17084 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 10 of 13. Norway House. (17078 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 11 of 13. The Oaks. (17059 Mountain Road)

PHOTO 12 of 13. View of 17144 Mountain Road

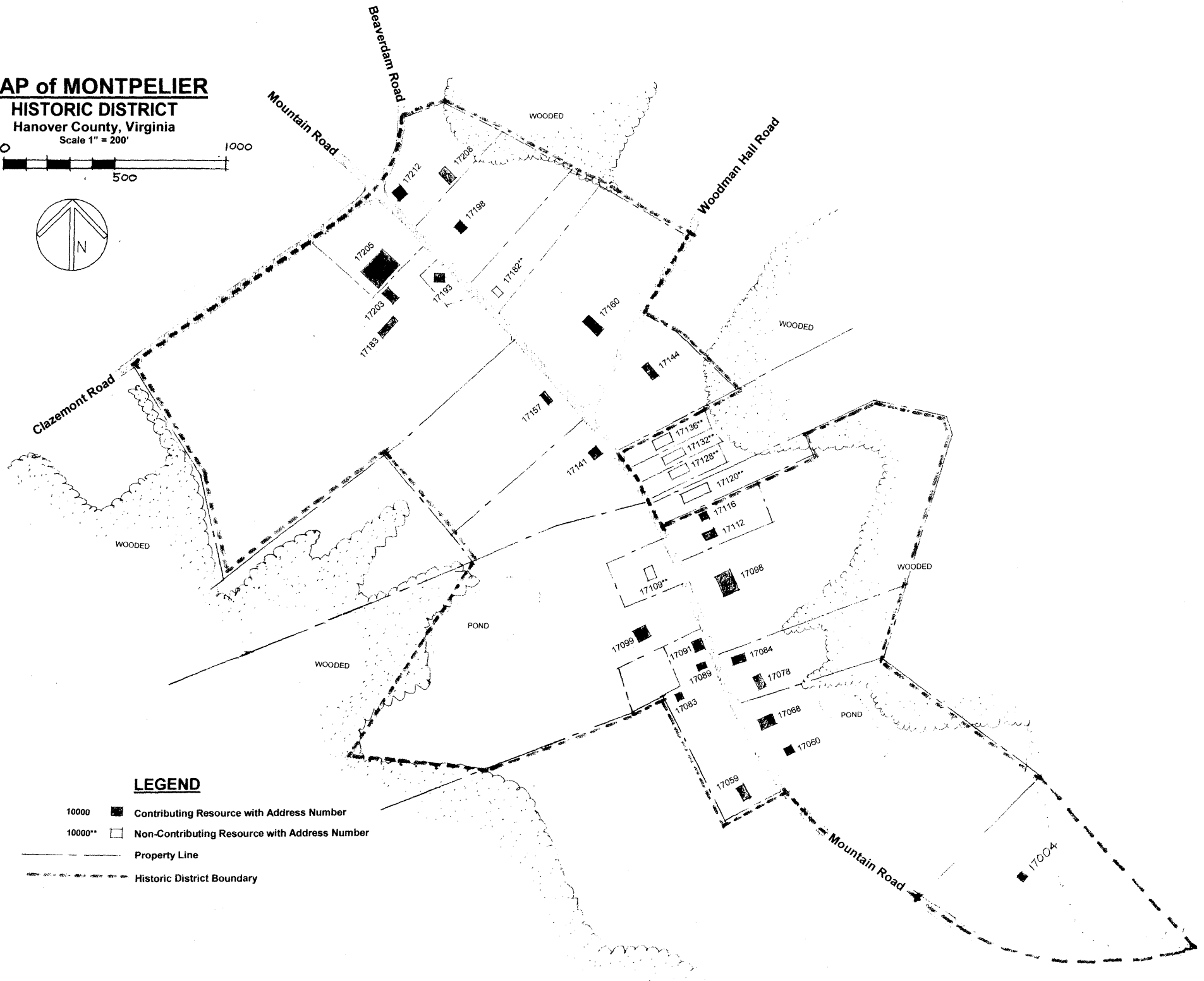
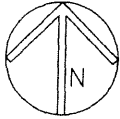
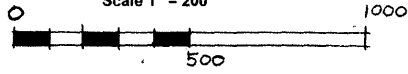
PHOTO 13 of 13. View of 17160 Mountain Road.

# MAP of MONTEPELIER

## HISTORIC DISTRICT

Hanover County, Virginia

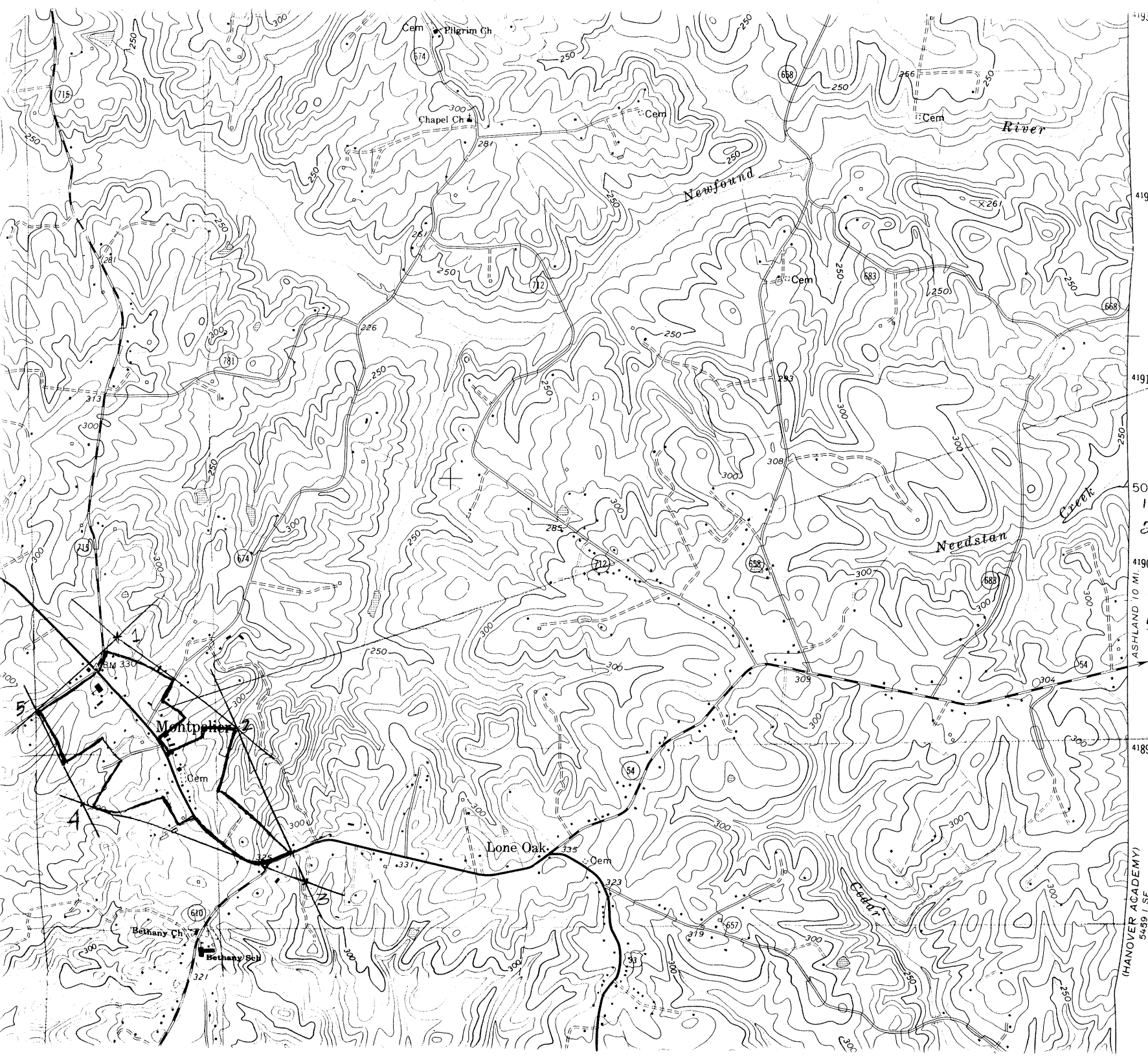
Scale 1" = 200'



### LEGEND

- 10000 ■ Contributing Resource with Address Number
- 10000\*\* □ Non-Contributing Resource with Address Number
- Property Line
- - - - - Historic District Boundary





4193  
4192  
4191  
50'  
4190  
ASHLAND 10 M.  
4189  
(HANOVER ACADEMY)  
5459 1 SE

Montpelier  
Historic District  
Hanover Co., VA  
Zone 18

	E	N
1)	263160	4189640
2)	264120	4189120
3)	264480	4188270
4)	263240	4188730
5)	263000	4189230