

VLR - 3-13-02  
NRHP - 5-30-02

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 Grassdale Farm  
other names/site number VDHR file no. 44-0010

2. Location

street & number 187 Spencer Penn Road (SR 695) N/A not for publication  
city or town Spencer vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Henry code 089 zip code 24165

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.)

  
Signature of certifying official/Title

  
Date

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/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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

**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**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count )

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>17</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>20</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	multiple dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
AGRICULTURE	animal facility
AGRICULTURE	storage
COMMERCE	department store
LANDSCAPE	garden

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	multiple dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
COMMERCE	business
LANDSCAPE	garden

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Greek Revival
- Italianate
- Colonial Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation      Brick
- walls            Wood
- roof              Metal
- other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with descriptions of property significance.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- Criteria A-G for property considerations.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

Ca. 1860-ca. 1950

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Architect/Builder

Bowles, Stanley (1940s work)

Taylor, Mr. (1940s work)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Documentation on file including preliminary determination, National Register listing, National Historic Landmark, and Historic American Buildings Survey/Engineering Record.

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office (marked X), Other State agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of repository:

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property approximately 90 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	588400	4052950	3	17	588820 4052440
2	17	588770	4052970	4	17	588590 4051980

 See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title	<u>J. Daniel Pezzoni</u>	date	<u>December 20, 2001</u>
organization	<u>Landmark Preservation Associates</u>	telephone	<u>(540) 464-5315</u>
street & number	<u>6 Houston St.</u>	zip code	<u>24450</u>
city or town	<u>Lexington</u> state <u>VA</u>		

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****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.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

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

name	<u>Harrison S. Toms, Contact</u>		
street & number	<u>187 Spencer Penn Road</u>	telephone	<u>(276) 957-5197</u>
city or town	<u>Spencer</u> state <u>VA</u>	zip code	<u>24165</u>

**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. 470 et seq.)**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

Grassdale Farm lies on the south side of US Highway 58 at the center of the southwestern Henry County, Virginia, community of Spencer. The property lies on the headwaters of a branch of Horsepasture Creek, a tributary of the Mayo, Dan and Roanoke river drainages. The approximately ninety-acre nominated parcel includes twenty-three resources as well as woods, hay fields, an orchard remnant, and a yard area shaded by numerous specimen trees and planted with boxwood. The principal resource is the main house, a two-story center-passage-plan frame dwelling of basically Greek Revival-style character with Italianate-style influence. The house probably achieved its present appearance by about 1880, although it likely contains antebellum fabric, and Colonial Revival-style interior detail was added in 1949. Clustered near the main house are a number of resources dating from the third quarter of the nineteenth century through about 1950. These include a one-story frame kitchen of conventional two-room center-chimney form, a compartmented one-story brick smokehouse, a two-story frame cook's house, and a one-story caretaker's house that incorporates a farm office. Beyond to the south is a one-story-with-garret square-notched log dwelling (possibly a slave house originally) and two late 1940s farm buildings. Another late 1940s farm building complex extends along the east edge of the parcel and includes the ca. 1948 story-and-a-half frame house of tenant Mack Watkins. The 1948 Spencer Store and Post Office, a story-and-a-half Colonial Revival brick building, stands near the intersection of Highway 58 and Spencer Penn Road (SR 695).

### Inventory

1. Main House. Ca. 1860; late 19th c. Contributing building.
2. Kitchen. 3rd quarter 19th c. Contributing building.
3. Smokehouse. Late 19th c. Contributing building.
4. Garage. Ca. 1949. Contributing building.
5. Cook's House. Late 19th c. Contributing building.
6. Playhouse. Ca. 1950. Contributing building.
7. Log Dwelling. 3rd quarter 19th c. Contributing building.
8. Poultryhouse. Late 1940s. Contributing building.
9. Barn. Late 1940s. Contributing building.
10. Greenhouse. Ca. 1950. Contributing building.
11. Garden. Ca. 1950. Contributing site.
12. Office/Caretaker's House. Late 19th c. Contributing building.
13. Mack Watkins House. Ca. 1948. Contributing building.
14. Barn. Late 1940s. Contributing building.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

---

**Description (continued)**

15. Granary and Corn Crib. Late 1940s. Contributing building.
16. Farm Outbuilding. Late 1940s. Contributing building.
17. Farm Outbuilding. Late 1940s. Contributing building.
18. Barn Foundation. Late 1940s. Contributing site.
19. Machinery Shed Foundation. Late 1940s. Contributing site.
20. Spencer Store and Post Office. 1948. Contributing building.
21. Playhouse. Ca. 1950. Noncontributing building.
22. Springhouse. Early 1990s. Noncontributing building.
23. Farm Outbuilding. Mid-20th c. Noncontributing building.

**Main House Exterior**

The core section of the main house is a north-facing, two-story, one-room-deep dwelling to which two-story ells have been added to the rear creating an overall U form. The house and ells are of frame construction and have weatherboard siding, metal-sheathed gable roofs, brick foundations, 6/6 windows (many with louvered wood shutters), and bracketed cornices (an Italianate influence). The cornices feature unusual brackets with double curved forms, recessed sides, chamfered edges, and simple ball-like pendants. Rising from the interior of the core section (on either side of a center passage) are parged brick chimneys with recessed panels in their stacks. The first-story front windows of the core section have projecting cornices and simple beveled surrounds; the second-story windows have only the beveled surrounds.

The dominant feature of the core section is a two-tier front entry porch of vernacular Greek Revival character. The porch tiers stand on octagonal wood columns with pronounced entasis and topped by box-like capitals from which extend small carved brackets with incised foliate decoration. In the flush-board porch gable is a rectangular vent with a center round hole from which lines radiate. Other porch features include sawn gable brackets with incised foliate decoration similar to that in the column brackets, matchboard ceilings, flat pilasters with entasis like the columns, and modern turned balusters on the second tier (replacing similar balusters). The first tier shelters a front entry with sidelights, a two-light transom, and a four-panel door. There is no entry opening onto the second tier, only a window.

The east ell has an exterior end brick chimney with stepped shoulders and header courses interspersed among stretchers. Along its east side extends a one-story glassed-in porch with a bathroom at the south end. The west ell is longer than the east one on account of an early two-story extension (with weatherboards attached with cut nails indicative of pre-1900 construction).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Description (continued)**

It has a one-story screened porch along its east side, and, on the west side, a small entry porch with square wood column, a late 1940s one-story dining room extension, and a one-story brick winter kitchen wing. The winter kitchen is of five and six-course American-bond construction and features segmental-arched 6/6 windows, a rectangular louvered vent in the gable, an interior gable-end brick chimney, cornice returns, and a glassed-in porch connection to the ell. The south elevation of the core section of the house between the two ells has a glassed-in porch on the first-story and an enclosure above.

**Main House Interior**

The interior is characterized by pine floors, plaster-and-lath walls and ceilings (many replastered in 1949), modern wallpaper on most walls, and four-panel doors, most with porcelain knobs but with pottery and metal knobs also on many second-floor doors. The front entry opens into a center passage containing a compact curved stair with square-section newels, rectangular-section balusters, and a simple molding that follows the steppings of the treads and risers. The center passage and the rooms to either side have 1949 walnut cornices. The east room features a mantel of simple Greek Revival pilaster form with a dentil cornice and a mid-twentieth century fireplace surround and hearth of green stone (similar stone is used for other fireplaces in the house). The west room features a similar Greek Revival mantel (without dentils) and 1949 walnut paneling with a dentil cornice on the chimney breast and to the sides. The recess to the left side of the chimney breast contains book shelves under an elliptical arch with a keystone-like device. An ornate electrified gasolier hangs from the ceiling. The first-floor rooms have window and door surrounds and baseboards with cyma moldings.

The interiors of the two ells are similar in plan. They are entered from the core section through transverse stair halls with exterior entries. The east ell stair features square-section newels, rectangular-section balusters, winders at its foot, and a closet underneath accessed through a two-panel door. The room beyond has a simple Greek Revival mantel with a brick hearth and late-1940s cornice and molded chairrail.

The west ell stair features square-section newels, rectangular-section balusters, and winders at its top (the stair may have replaced an earlier one with a different configuration). The dining room beyond contains a post-bellum mantel of Greek and Gothic Revival character. Recesses on the faces of the pilasters have peaked tracery-like details at their tops, and above them are heavy carved mantel brackets. The frieze has a decorative ogee-like lower edge, and there are moldings under the shaped shelf and at the bases of the pilasters. The dining room also has a walnut

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

**Description (continued)**

paneled wainscot and cornice that probably date to a late 1940s extension of the room. Beyond the dining room in the first story of the extension of the ell is the present kitchen, entered through a pantry with cabinets with decorative two-panel doors. The kitchen, which is said to have served as a "warming room" and "children's breakfast room," also has late nineteenth century cabinets with paneled doors and porcelain pulls as well as beaded matchboard walls and ceiling and modern wall and base cabinets and counters. The room in the brick wing served as the winter kitchen and is now used as a laundry and furnace room. It has plaster-on-brick walls, molded door and window surrounds, and two closets formed by beaded matchboard partitions.

The second floor has much the same character as the first floor with simple Greek Revival mantels but with several historic-period closets with two-panel doors, beaded baseboards, and a lack of 1940s woodwork. The attic, visible from a hatchway in a second-floor closet, reveals a common rafter roof structure with the rafters butted and nailed at the ridge and straight-sawn roof boards studded with numerous cut nails from a former wood-shingle covering (some of these shingles survive under the roof of the added west ell). A section of crawl space is visible under the stair hall of the west ell revealing hewn sills, sawn joists, and mortise-and-tenon construction. Log joists are reported under the first floor of the core section of the house and the walls are reported to be of hewn frame construction. A landscaped yard extends in front of the house to the road, and a boxwood-lined walkway extends on axis with the front entry. There are numerous shade and ornamental trees and scattered boxwood groupings on the grounds.

**House Outbuildings**

Directly behind (south of) the main house stands a one-story frame kitchen dating to the third quarter of the nineteenth century and possibly antebellum in date. The building has a metal-sheathed gable roof, weatherboard siding attached with cut nails, a stone foundation, 6/6 windows, a beaded batten door, exposed rafter ends, and a center brick chimney. Inside are back-to-back brick fireplaces with iron lintels, traces of whitewash on their faces, and modern raised brick hearths. The walls and ceilings have a mix of historic-period beaded matchboard and modern board sheathing. Between the kitchen and the west wing of the main house is a bell on a post and a well with a concrete cap and an F. E. Myers & Bro. Co. pump.

Off the west end of the winter kitchen wing is a late nineteenth century smokehouse of six and seven-course American-bond brick construction. The one-story building was used for smoking hog meat in the mid-twentieth century and later served as a woodhouse and for general storage. The presence of honeycomb brick vents in the gables and small rectangular vents at the eave and



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

**Description (continued)**

foundation levels with ornate cast-iron covers or replacement chicken wire attest to an original meat processing function. The smokehouse has a metal-sheathed gable roof, segmental-arched 6/6 windows, batten doors, and, on the three-compartment interior, whitewashed walls, wall-mounted wood shelves, and circular-sawn ceiling structure.

Off the west end of the detached kitchen is a one-story ca. 1949 garage of six-course American-bond brick construction with a metal-sheathed gable roof, novelty weatherboards in the gables, exposed rafter ends, segmental-arched 6/6 windows, and two wood and glass panel garage doors. To the east of the garage is a two-story frame cook's house with weatherboard siding attached with cut nails, a metal-sheathed gable roof, exposed rafter ends, a five-panel door, and 6/6 windows. The exterior brick chimney has pencilled mortar joints and is constructed with header courses randomly interspersed among stretcher courses. There is a one-story entry porch with screening above a novelty weatherboard skirt, and the one-room-plan interior contains an enclosed corner stair. In the 1930s the dwelling was occupied by cook Maggie Martin and her son John Martin.

Near the cook's house stands a deteriorated ca. 1950 playhouse of weatherboarded frame construction with an asphalt-shingled gable roof, a brick foundation, molded rakeboards, and a four-light window. Behind the garage is another mid-twentieth century frame playhouse that was salvaged from a construction site in Martinsville and moved to the farm in the mid-1990s. This Colonial Revival-style playhouse has novelty weatherboard siding, a hybrid gable/gambrel roof that engages a front porch with slender square posts with molded caps and bases, asphalt-shingle roofing, a poured concrete foundation, a four-panel door, and a six-light window.

Adjacent to the gable end of the main house east ell is a small ca. 1950 greenhouse or cold frame of poured concrete construction built partly below grade. The greenhouse has a gable roof with plate-glass windows on the south face and asphalt shingles on the north face, and insulated matchboard gable ends. Flagstone walkways link the rear of the main house to a ca. 1950 formal garden. The garden is rectangular in form and bordered by low brick walls and boxwood hedges. It features flower beds defined by rectangular and serpentine brick borders, a central concrete bird bath base, and concrete benches. The bricks came from the tobacco factory that once stood at Spencer.

To the east of the main house stands a one-story frame building that began as a one-room farm office (probably ca. 1880) and was shortly thereafter enlarged by the addition of a second room on the west gable end. The building served as a caretaker's house in the twentieth century. The

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Description (continued)**

building has weatherboard siding attached with cut and wire nails, a metal-sheathed gable roof, and two gable-end exterior brick chimneys, the west one apparently original to the building, the east one apparently more recently constructed of reused old and/or reproduction brick. The foundation under the east end is parged brick and the foundation under the west end is brick piers with cinder-block infill. There are two four-panel front doors, one sheltered under a modern porch with wood posts, exposed rafter ends, and a cinder-block foundation. Most of the 6/6 windows have plain trim but one on the east end has a delicately molded nineteenth century surround. The east end interior has a beaded flush-board ceiling, sheetrock walls, and a vernacular Greek Revival mantel. (The west end was not accessible to survey.) Near this building stands a small brick building built in the early 1990s with bricks from a historic springhouse that stood nearby and that had been destroyed by a fallen tree. The building has a steep metal-sheathed gable roof, novelty weatherboards in the gables, a poured concrete foundation, small segmental-arched four-light windows, and two-leaf batten doors in a segmental-arched opening.

**Farm Outbuildings**

The farm outbuildings are in two groups, a nearer group beginning just beyond the garage and cook's house to the south of the main house, the other larger group farther away along the east property line. The nearer group includes a one-story-with-garret square-notched log dwelling that appears to date to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, possibly the antebellum period. The deteriorated dwelling is the lone survivor of a row of similar dwellings that extended northward to the cook's house. According to family tradition the dwellings served originally as slave houses, and they were occupied as late as the 1930s. The log dwelling has a metal-sheathed gable roof, weatherboards in the gables (those on the north end attached with cut nails), concrete chinking, a crude stone foundation, an exterior brick chimney with stepped shoulders on the north gable end, 6/6 and four-light windows, and batten doors. The main body of the house is constructed of oak logs; the garret level is constructed of pine logs suggesting it is an early addition. The ceiling joists were raised one log in height (the notches that formerly received them are still visible), perhaps in response to the insertion of a board floor over an original dirt floor.

The one-room interior has whitewashed walls, a wood floor, and exposed round log ceiling joists that were raised in the past (original notches survive one log below the present position). In one corner is a winder stair in a vertical-board enclosure with remnants of a small closet underneath. The brick fireplace has an iron lintel and a vernacular Greek Revival mantel with tapered pilasters. The mantel appears to be an addition, as suggested by the fact that it is attached to the wall with wire nails and whitewash on the brickwork behind it suggests the bricks were originally

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 7

**Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.**

**Description (continued)**

exposed. In the whitewashed garret are log sapling rafters butted and nailed at the ridge, circular-sawn roof boards, and numerous cut and wire nails associated with former wood roof shingles.

Beyond the log dwelling is a late 1940s poultryhouse of board-and-batten frame construction with a cinder block foundation, metal-sheathed shed roof, and floor-level hatchways. This building may have been used for turkeys originally. Beyond this is a two-level late 1940s cattle and hay barn of board-and-batten frame construction with a cinder block foundation, a matchboard loft door, a rectangular louvered gable vent, exposed rafter ends, and feed troughs and hay drops inside.

The larger farm building group begins at its north end with a story-and-a-half tenant house with simplified Colonial Revival or "Victory Village" form and asbestos-shingled frame construction. The house was built about 1948 for tenant Mack Watkins and his family. The house has a poured concrete foundation, an asphalt-shingled gable roof, a gabled front porch on wood posts, a side porch with a screening above weatherboard walling, and 6/6 and 8/8 windows. South of the tenant house, beyond a gate, is a row of four farm buildings that were apparently built in the late 1940s. The northernmost of these is a small one-story weatherboarded frame building with a metal-sheathed gable roof but no foundation, suggesting it was moved to its location (and hence is classified as noncontributing). Next to this is a larger one-story weatherboarded frame building with an asphalt-shingled front-gable roof, a cinder-block foundation, a sliding matchboard door, and evidence for former double-hung windows. Next to this is a two-level granary and corn crib of asbestos-shingled frame construction with an asphalt-shingled gable roof, a sliding matchboard door, a gabled ridge ventilator, and a poured concrete foundation. The interior contains two slatted cribs, a concrete emplacement for a former motor, and a variety of grain chutes. Next to this building at the south end of the row is a one-story board-and-batten frame building with a metal-sheathed gable roof, a cinder-block foundation, and an upper hay loft reached by an exterior stair and with a hay drop below. Nearby is a second one-story board-and-batten frame building with a metal-sheathed gable roof, the concrete foundation of a machinery shed, and the concrete foundation of a large cattle barn that was demolished in recent years after it partially collapsed in a storm.

**Spencer Store and Post Office**

The Spencer Store and Post Office was built in 1948 using bricks from the demolished Spencer tobacco factory, which stood across Spencer Penn Road (SR 695). The story-and-a-half gable-fronted building has stretcher-bond walls (presumably brick veneer over frame) above a poured

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 8

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Description (continued)**

concrete foundation. Some bricks retain whitewash from their former context. The roof has asphalt-shingle roofing, a louvered vent in the front apex, and long shed dormers on the sides with asbestos-shingle siding and 6/6 windows. A porch extends across the front gable end and has a concrete floor, rustic log posts, triangular wood brackets at the two ends, and an exposed roof structure. Under the porch are a cast-iron pump (probably for kerosene), large multipane windows, and entries with transoms. The left entry opened into the post office (moved into another building in Spencer in 1999) and the right entry opened into the store. On the north side elevation are two original entry porches with hip roofs, poured concrete foundations, and replacement metal supports. These porches served two upstairs apartments. A modern deck serves a third entry that may have entered into a service station office. To the rear is a basement-level garage door and a concrete platform with a metal railing and the base of a former car jack manufactured by the U.S. Air Compressor Co. of Cleveland, Ohio. The first-floor interiors retain plain varnished pine doors and door and window surrounds, original textured plaster wall finishes, and modern drop ceilings. The present business tenant is Commodity Specialists Co.

**Integrity Statement**

Grassdale Farm possesses good integrity from the period of significance overall and in its constituent parts. The principal groupings of buildings--the main house complex, the two farm building groups, and the store and post office--have the basic appearance they had acquired by the end of the period of significance. Twenty of the twenty-three resources are classified as contributing, a strong ratio, and little new construction has occurred since the mid-twentieth century. The nominated parcel retains its agricultural character, although it is not as intensively farmed as it was during the period of significance. The property's setting also retains its historic integrity as a mix of farm and diffuse village development. A change of recent years is the four-laning of US Highway 58, which adjoins the north end of the nominated parcel.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

Grassdale Farm, located in the Henry County, Virginia community of Spencer, is an evolved rural property with notable architectural characteristics. Farmer, merchant and tobacco manufacturer David H. Spencer is the original owner of the Grassdale farmhouse, a two-story frame dwelling of vernacular Greek Revival and Italianate character that appears to date in part to the late antebellum period. Near the house stands a one-room log dwelling, possibly originally a slave house, as well as other secondary dwellings, a detached kitchen, and a farm office. D. H. Spencer and his son David W. Spencer manufactured plug tobacco at Spencer from about 1860 until the end of the nineteenth century, and they also operated a store and post office, a mill, and a blacksmith shop. A granddaughter of D. H. Spencer, Margaret Dillard Spencer, married Dr. John A. Shackelford of Martinsville and the couple moved to the farm in the late 1940s. The Shackelfords added Colonial Revival details to the house, erected several barns, and built the Spencer Store and Post Office, a Colonial Revival building constructed of brick from the former Spencer tobacco factory. Grassdale Farm is now owned by the descendants of the Spencers and Shackelfords.

### Applicable Criteria

Grassdale Farm meets Criterion C and is eligible in the architecture area of significance as the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of its type and period of construction. The main house is significant for its nineteenth-century vernacular Greek Revival-Italianate styling and for its 1949 Colonial Revival fabric; the 1948 Spencer Store and Post Office reinforces the Colonial Revival theme; and the domestic/farm complex as a whole is a significant collection of building types including log and frame secondary dwellings (including a possible slave dwelling), a detached kitchen, a compartmented brick smokehouse, a farm office, and multiple farm buildings. The period of significance extends from ca. 1860, the approximate beginning date for the evolution of the main house, to ca. 1950, embracing the period of the late 1940s during which Colonial Revival features were added to the main house and the Colonial Revival store was erected. Grassdale Farm is eligible at the local level of significance. Information in support of designation appears throughout the historic context.

### Acknowledgments

A number of individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Foremost among these were the owners of the property and the nomination's sponsors Margaret Shackelford Toms, Harrison Spencer Toms, and Elizabeth Murphy Toms, and former resident

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

Francis S. Leavitt. Others who provided assistance included Michael Pulice of the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, who accompanied the author on a site visit; the staff of the Henry County Clerk of Court office in Martinsville, Virginia; the staff of the Bassett Branch Historical Center in Bassett, Virginia; and June Ellis, Quatro Hubbard, John Kern, and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

**Historic Context**

The main house at Grassdale Farm, originally the home of David Harrison Spencer (1814-96), appears to have been built in phases during the nineteenth century. Henry County tax records show considerable construction activity at D. H. Spencer's 376-acre core Horsepasture Creek tract during the late 1850s. In 1857 buildings on the tract were valued at \$500. The value of buildings rose to \$1,000 in 1858, \$2,000 in 1859, and \$2,500 in 1860, a figure that remained constant into the post-bellum period. Some of the increase may be accounted for by the construction of D. H. Spencer's tobacco factory, which had been placed in operation by 1860 (see below). The sedate Greek Revival styling of the mantels in the front section of the house is consistent with construction in the late antebellum period (see architectural analysis below), although not inconsistent with an early post-bellum date. According to long-standing Spencer family tradition, the house or a portion of it had been built by the time of the Civil War. There is also a family tradition that the house was built as a wedding present for D. H. Spencer and his wife, Mary Waller Dillard (1824-1907), who married in 1843.<sup>1</sup>

A branch of the Spencer family settled in Henry County in the early 1780s. James Spencer Sr. and his son James Jr. appear to have moved to Henry from Loudoun County, where they resided in the late 1770s. James Spencer Jr. acquired land along Horsepasture Creek by 1783 and built a house on his land that year. James Jr.'s grandson David Harrison Spencer acquired property and influence during the mid- and late nineteenth century. In 1849 he served as a justice of the

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison S. Toms, Margaret S. Toms, and Francis S. Leavitt personal communication; Henry County tax records; Rigby, "Early Spencers of Virginia," 278; Parks, *History of Henry County*, 263; and Dodd, *Henry County Marriage Bonds, 1778-1849*. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources file for the property gives two dates: 1770 (apparently an error) and 1870. The 1870 date is given in an anonymous typescript that contains information provided by former owner Margaret Shackelford, a granddaughter of D. H. Spencer.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

peace. By 1850, according to the federal census of that year, he had amassed \$10,000 in real estate, and by 1860 (again according to the census) he possessed \$50,000 in real estate and forty-two slaves. The farm schedules of the 1860 census note that Spencer owned 1,500 improved acres and 900 unimproved acres on which were grown 13,000 pounds of tobacco, 1,500 bushels of corn, and crops of wheat, rye, and oats.<sup>2</sup>

David H. Spencer appears to have begun the large-scale manufacture of plug (chewing) tobacco at Spencer in the late 1850s, as suggested by tax records. The 1860 federal census lists Spencer as a "tobacconist" (he was a "farmer" in the 1850 census). With his neighbor and probable in-law George Dillard he operated the Spencer & Dillard Tobacco Factory, which employed twenty-eight male hands and three female hands in the production of 113,000 pounds of tobacco valued at \$27,300. The Spencer & Dillard concern ranked third in value of production among the twenty-seven tobacco factories listed for the county in 1860.

The Civil War and the economic dislocations that followed had negative consequences for Spencer's finances, for in 1869 he filed for bankruptcy and 600 acres of land including his house and tobacco factory were placed in the care of an assignee. In order to preserve the family business, operation of the tobacco factory was transferred to David's son David William "Bill" Spencer (1846-1910). The 1870 census industrial schedules note that the D. W. Spencer Tobacco Factory employed on average twelve male hands seventeen years old and older, four female hands sixteen years old and older, and fourteen "children and youths," and was in operation five months out of the year. The business used leaf tobacco, licorice (for flavoring the plugs), and plank and nails (probably for constructing shipping boxes). Value of production for the year was \$18,000, and the factory ranked fourth in value of production among the four Henry County tobacco factories enumerated that year. D. W. Spencer bought back the 600-acre home tract by 1874.<sup>3</sup>

The 1870 census population schedules provide additional information on the Spencer family and

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<sup>2</sup> Rigby, *Early Spencers of Virginia*, p. 273, 275, 278: "Bicentennial Collection," vol. 2, p. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Henry County Deed Book 17, pp. 239 and 483; Henry County tax records. It is interesting that D. H. Spencer was appointed an overseer of the poor a year after declaring bankruptcy (Pace and McGee, *Life and Times of Ridgeway*, 59).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

the family tobacco business. Twenty-four-year-old David W. Spencer was listed as the family "tobacco manufacturer," whereas his father was listed as a "farmer and merchant." David's younger brothers George, John and James H. worked in the factory with him. Enumerated under the same household heading as the Spencers were nineteen others, whites and blacks, including white tobacco prizer Thomas S. Hill, white tobacco picker Vincent Gilly, and ten-year-old black tobacco stemmer Abe Waller. (Hill and Gilly were listed as members of the Spencer household in the 1860 census.) Another household member in 1870, a black wagoner named Allen Fountaine, may have been directly involved with the family tobacco business. A number of black tobacco prizers, stemmers, pickers and rollers lived in the vicinity.<sup>4</sup>

Statewide business directories and other sources trace the history of the Spencer family tobacco business into the early twentieth century. An 1880 directory lists D. W. Spencer as a tobacco manufacturer at Spencer's Store, but directories later in the 1880s and in the 1890s identify the firm as D. H. Spencer & Son. Letterhead in use in the early 1890s identifies D. H. Spencer & Son as "Manufacturers of Henry County Chewing Tobacco" and lists nine brands including "Maggie Spencer," named after one of D. H. Spencer's daughters. A 1906 directory locates the firm of D. H. Spencer & Sons (plural) in Martinsville, with James Harrison Spencer (another son of D. H.) as president.<sup>5</sup>

After the Civil War the Spencer farm and tobacco factory formed the nucleus of the village that bears the family name. A Spencer post office was created in 1870 with D. H. Spencer's son Peter D. Spencer as its first postmaster (D. W. Spencer served later). The establishment of the Spencer post office coincides with the establishment of the Spencer family general merchandise business. D. H. Spencer's identification of himself as a merchant in the 1870 census is an early indication of this, and in an 1877 business directory D. W. Spencer was listed as a general

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<sup>4</sup> D. W. Spencer's brick office formerly stood in front of the main house and may have been balanced by another office or outbuilding on the opposite side of the front walk. The office was mistakenly torn down by a workman in the twentieth century (Margaret S. Toms and Mrs. Brooks Leavitt personal communication). There is also an account of "summer houses" or gazebos in the front yard during the late nineteenth century (Mah, "Tobacco Pioneer Built Spencer Home").

<sup>5</sup> Bassett Branch Historical Center collections; Mah, "Tobacco Pioneer Built Spencer Home:" and Pace and McGee, *Life and Times of Ridgeway*, 83.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

merchant at "Spencer's Store," Virginia. In 1878, according to a marginal note in the county tax records, "\$800 [was] added for Store house" on the 600-acre home tract. (The location and physical attributes of the pre-1878 Spencer store are unknown.) This was the two-story frame store and post office building that stood in the southwest corner of the intersection of US 58 and Spencer Penn Road (SR 695) until the late 1940s. The business was styled D. W. Spencer & Co. into the early 1910s and the Spencer Mercantile Co. thereafter, according to period business directories.<sup>6</sup>

Another family business of the period was a small grist mill that stood on Horsepasture Creek. The mill was built in 1880, according to tax records, and although it stood on a tract that D. H. and Mary Spencer had sold to D. W. Spencer in 1869, it is identified in period business directories as D. H. Spencer's corn and flour mill into the early 1890s. The mill last appears in an 1896 directory as belonging to D. W. Spencer. The Spencer's also owned a blacksmith shop. The economic life of the village of Spencer was enhanced by the construction of the Danville & Wytheville Railroad, which provided service to the community from 1883 to 1941. D. H. Spencer was a president of the line.<sup>7</sup>

David H. Spencer died in 1896, Mary Spencer in 1907, and David W. Spencer in 1912. Grassdale Farm passed to D. H. and Mary's daughter Mary Spencer (1860-1949). "Aunt Meck," as she was known to her nephews and nieces, married Henry C. Buchanan, who died relatively young. In 1925 historian Judith Parks described Mary Spencer Buchanan thus: "She is the owner of the old Homestead at Spencer and looks after business successfully and enjoys dispensing old Virginia hospitality with rare grace and elegance." She is remembered for her charity work in the community and for boarding teachers from the nearby Spencer Penn School. Living with

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<sup>6</sup> *Martinsville & Henry County*, 58. D. H. and Pinkney Spencer acquired the Horsepasture Store Tract in 1851, but tax records do not indicate that a building stood on the tract during the period (Henry County Deed Book 14, p. 33). The Spencer tobacco factory was used briefly as a school until the Spencer Penn School was built in the 1930s (Francis S. Leavitt personal communication).

<sup>7</sup> *Martinsville & Henry County*, 58; Tyler, *Men of Mark in Virginia*, vol. 4, p. 378; and Henry County Deed Book 17, p. 177. The Danville & Wytheville was referred to affectionately as the Dick 'n Willie and, somewhat more wryly, as the Delay & Wait (*Martinsville & Henry County*, 61).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 14

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Mary on the farm was her brother George Overton "Tobe" Spencer (1852-1930); his ca. 1880 farm office forms the core of the caretaker's house behind the main house. A frequent visitor to the farm during the Mary Buchanan period was her nephew Jefferson "Jeff" Penn, tobacco mogul and owner of the Chinqua-Penn Plantation located across the state line in Rockingham County, North Carolina. Jeff Penn's mother Annie Spencer Penn was born and raised at Grassdale Farm. Some of the boxwoods on the grounds of Chinqua-Penn are said to have been moved from Grassdale Farm.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1940s, as Mary Buchanan's health began to fail, her niece Margaret Spencer Shackelford (1897-1972) and her husband Dr. John Armstrong Shackelford (1893-1956) began to take an active role in the operation of the farm. Margaret was the daughter of James Harrison Spencer (1858-1916), who worked in the family tobacco factory as a youth and who founded the highly successful Martinsville tobacco manufacturing firm of Spencer Bros. in 1885. Regarded as one of Henry County and Martinsville's leading citizens, J. H. Spencer served on the board of directors of the 1907 Jamestown Exposition. Dr. Shackelford operated Martinsville's Shackelford Hospital with his father Dr. Jesse Martin Shackelford from 1921 to 1945. The Shackelfords first lived in a house known as *Cherry Lane* (now gone) located across Spencer Penn Road (SR 695) from the main house. In 1949 the Shackelfords hired contractor Stanley Bowles to rehabilitate the main house in anticipation of moving in and hosting a wedding reception breakfast for their daughter Blanche Harrison Shackelford (Mrs. Robert H. Chapman Jr.). Electricity and plumbing were added, the dining room in the west rear wing was extended, and an employee of Bowles's named Mr. Taylor installed Colonial Revival walnut paneling and cornices in several rooms (the woodwork may have been milled at the Danville Lumber Company). At about the same time the formal garden, greenhouse, and garage were added to the main house group.<sup>9</sup>

The Shackelfords resurrected the name Grassdale Farm, which resonated with a new agricultural

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret S. Toms, Harrison S. Toms, and Francis S. Leavitt personal communication; Hill, *History of Henry County*, 264-265; and Mah, "Tobacco Pioneer Built Spencer Home." Mary Buchanan referred to the property as The Homestead, although later generations discovered that Grassdale Farm was an earlier name.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret S. Toms and Francis S. Leavitt personal communication; Tyler, *Men of Mark in Virginia*, vol. 4, p. 378-79; *Martinsville Standard*, April 1899; and *Martinsville & Henry County*, 143.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 15

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

focus on cattle rearing. Dr. Shackelford was a president of the Blue Ridge Shorthorn Breeders Association and on one occasion traveled to Canada to purchase a prize bull named Kaydell's Royal Leader. With the help of his farm manager Thomas Minter and tenant Mack Watkins, Shackelford worked to improve the farm's productivity, and he built cattle barns, chickenhouses, a granary, and a machinery shed during the late 1940s. Dr. Shackelford also continued the family general merchandise business. In 1948 he hired Stanley Bowles to replace the frame store and post office with one built of bricks from the demolished tobacco factory. According to his daughter Margaret S. Toms, Dr. Shackelford hired students from Spencer Penn School to clean the bricks and the children made enough money to build a ball park at the school. Thomas Minter's son Sterling and his wife Mildred operated the store, and the upstairs apartments were rented out to school teachers such as Miss Lelia Smith and others. The store also contained the Spencer Post Office (until 1999) and included a service station function. After Dr. Shackelford's death Margaret Spencer Shackelford moved to Martinsville, and the house was rented to Brooks and Francis Shackelford Leavitt. After Margaret Spencer Shackelford's death in 1972, the Leavitts continued to rent the home from all four Shackelford sisters, of which Francis S. Leavitt is one. When the estate was divided, the Grassdale Farm home became the property of Margaret Shackelford Toms. The property is currently owned by Margaret Shackelford Toms and her son and daughter-in-law Harrison Spencer Toms and Elizabeth Murphy Toms.<sup>10</sup>

**Architectural Analysis**

Architecturally, the main house at Grassdale Farm is largely post-bellum in character, although tradition and some architectural evidence support a late antebellum date of initial construction. A family tradition holds that the house or an original section of it was built in 1843 as a wedding gift for D. H. and Mary Spencer. It is conceivable that the Greek Revival mantels in the front of the house date to the 1840s, although an 1850s or 1860s date would be more likely. Also, the relative lack of two-panel doors and the prevalence of four-panel doors points to the later decades. There is evidence that the front porch and associated Italianate-influenced bracketed cornice--features that are post-bellum in character--are not original to the house. The second tier of the porch is reached through a window rather than through a door, evidence that suggests the house did not originally have a two-tier porch, and the bracketed cornice extends to a rear addition to the house, evidence that suggests the cornice was added when the house was enlarged.

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret S. Toms and Francis S. Leavitt personal communication.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 16

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

One approach to dating the house and its enlargement and remodeling is to rely on the Henry County tax records as a guide. The tax records indicate two periods of general construction activity: the late 1850s and the late 1870s/early 1880s. The value of buildings increased from \$500 in 1857 to \$2,500 in 1860 and from \$2,000 in 1875 to \$5,300 in 1885. Some of the increases can be accounted for by other buildings (the tobacco factory and store, for example), but the increases also indicate periods during which the Spencer family finances permitted substantial construction activity. The two periods are also separated by years during which it would have been unlikely for the Spencer family to have initiated construction activity: the 1860s, when war and its aftermath deprived D. H. Spencer of personal property (slaves) and eventually his real property, presumably leading to his bankruptcy in 1869, and the early 1870s when the Spencer property was administered by an assignee.

A scenario that accords well with the architectural and historical evidence posits the construction of the front section of the Grassdale farmhouse (and probably all or a portion of the east ell) in the Greek Revival Style in the late 1850s or about 1860, and the enlargement and exterior remodeling of the house in a vernacular Greek Revival/Italianate idiom in the late 1870s or early 1880s. The earlier period would have been an opportune time for D. H. and Mary Spencer to build their house; between the 1850 and 1860 censuses their family grew from three children to nine, and the increase in the value of their real estate from \$10,000 to \$50,000 clearly indicates that they had the wherewithal to build. The later period falls during the ownership of D. W. Spencer, who, according to historian Judith Hill, "added greatly to the family fortune" after the Civil War. The late 1870s/early 1880s period also likely saw the construction of such wings and buildings as the winter kitchen, the smokehouse, the cook's cabin, and George Spencer's farm office.<sup>11</sup>

The Shackelfords provided another dimension to Grassdale Farm's architectural character when they added Colonial Revival fabric to the main house and built the store/post office and garden in the style. The work indicates an appreciation of Virginia architectural tradition. The 1948 Spencer Store and Post Office, with its brick construction and multi-pane display windows, calls to mind Colonial models such as the Prentis Store in Williamsburg and certain of the small-scale

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, *History of Henry County*, 263. It is also possible that a third major phase of construction is hidden within the building fabric: an enlargement of the front section of the house from one story to two at an early date. The presence of ornamental window hoods over the first-story windows and their absence over the second-story windows may hint at such a development.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section number   8   Page  17**

**Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.**

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

post-World War II suburban shopping centers that the Williamsburg restorations inspired. The ca. 1950 formal garden references the serpentine walls of the University of Virginia translated into flower bed borders less than a foot high.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 18

Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 19

**Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.**

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section number   9   Page  20**

**Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.**

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 21

**Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.**

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**UTM References (continued)**

5. 588270 4052250

6. 588090 4052590

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries of the nominated parcel are portrayed on the 1:200-scale map that accompanies the nomination.

**Boundary Justification**

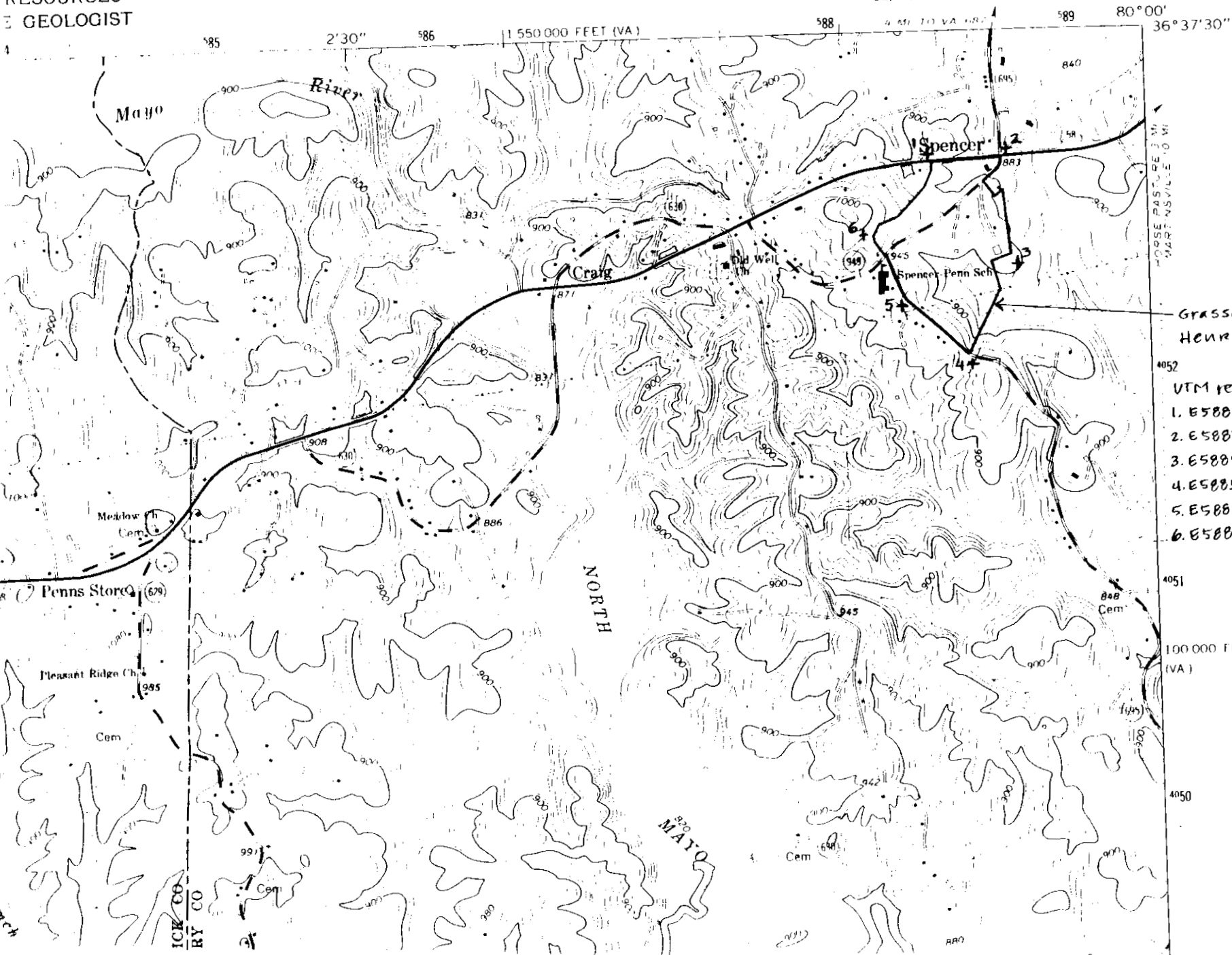
The boundaries of the nominated parcel correspond to the four adjacent tax parcels on which contributing resources associated with *Grassdale Farm* and owned by the nomination sponsors are located (Henry County tax map Section 58-3 parcels 91, 107, 107D and 107M).

VIRGINIA  
RESOURCES  
GEOLOGIST

SPENCER QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA - NORTH CAROLINA  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

SE/4 CRITZ 15' QUADRANGLE

5037 III NW  
(MARTINSVILLE WEST)



Grassdale Farm  
Henry Co., Va.

- 4052  
UTM refs (zone 17)
1. E588400 N4052950
  2. E588770 N4052970
  3. E588820 N4052440
  4. E588590 N4051980
  5. E588270 N4052250
  6. E588090 N4052590

4051  
4050