

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 16). 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, architecture, 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 Bowling Eldridge House  
other names/site number Ridgecrest; VDHR File No. 41-81

**2. Location**

street & number W side SR 662, 1 1/2 mile N of jct. SR 659 not for publication N/A  
city or town Elmo vicinity x  
state Virginia code VA county Halifax code 083 zip code 24592

**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.)

Wayne C. Miller Signature of certifying official 6 July 1993 Date

**Director, 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 \_\_\_\_\_



**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

**EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation **BRICK**  
roof **METAL**  
walls **WOOD: Weatherboard**  
other **CONCRETE**

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)

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

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

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance **1822-1828**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates **N/A**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Cultural Affiliation **N/A**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder **unknown**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**
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(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
\_x\_ State Historic Preservation Office
\_\_\_ Other State agency
\_\_\_ Federal agency
\_\_\_ Local government
\_\_\_ University
\_\_\_ Other
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**
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Acreage of Property 0.4 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Table with 4 columns: Zone, Easting, Northing, Zone, Easting, Northing. Row 1: 1, 17, 667150, 4062800, 2, blank, blank, blank. Row 2: 3, blank, blank, blank, 4, blank, blank, blank.

\_\_\_ 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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**
=====

name/title J. Daniel Pezzoni
organization Preservation Technologies, Inc. date 7 May 1993
street & number P. O. Box 7825 telephone 703-366-7657
city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24019

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**Additional Documentation**  
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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 Lester and Janet Welch

street & number 14 Plum Grove Way telephone 301-869-8180

city or town Gaithersburg state MD zip code 20878

=====  
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 Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

The Bowling Eldridge House is located on Route 662 in the Elmo vicinity of southwestern Halifax County, Virginia. The south-facing, two-story frame house has a gable roof with metal sheathing, exterior gable-end brick chimneys, a brick foundation, beaded weatherboard siding, and an integral or early two-story ell with an exterior gable-end brick chimney and a pent room. Centered on the five-bay front elevation is a one-story porch that incorporates elements of an original two-story pedimented portico. The walls and ceilings of the interior are mostly finished in plaster and lath, the floors are wood, baseboards and other trim are molded and/or beaded, and doorways are typically hung with the original six-panel doors. The center-passage stair and door surrounds, mantels, chair rails, and other interior features are richly detailed in the Federal style. Near the house are two small twentieth-century outbuildings; on adjoining properties and outside the nominated parcel are a walled cemetery and tenant houses. The house retains most of its original fabric, although cosmetically it is in a state of disrepair. The present owners of the house plan to rehabilitate it as a residence.

### House: Exterior

The Bowling Eldridge House is of mortise-and-tenon frame construction with pegged joints. Major structural members such as the sills are hewn; secondary members such as joists are straight-sawn. The beaded weatherboards sheathing the house bear traces of white paint and are mostly attached with what appear to be cut nails, although in some areas (as on the west elevation of the ell) the boards have been reattached with wire nails. Running at the top of the front elevation is a cornice with dentil and cable moldings. The cornices of the rear elevation and ell have more conventional moldings. The exterior door and windows have intricately molded surrounds.

The masonry components of the structure include a badly deteriorated American-bond brick foundation. Parts of the foundation are completely missing above grade, and the corners were replaced with modern brickwork in the 1960s. Original sections of the foundation have simple vents formed by the removal of a single header brick. The ell foundation was constructed separately from the main foundation, and the original brickwork has been replaced in places with concrete blocks. The rear pent is supported by brick corner piers, as is the front porch. The house's three chimneys are constructed of stretcher-bond brickwork with occasional random

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header courses. The chimneys have stepped shoulders, detached stacks, and pencilled mortar joints. The base of the west chimney was encased in concrete in the 1970s to counteract deterioration of the lower bricks and mortar joints. Several iron rings protrude from the west chimney that formerly (until about 1970) supported the ground for a Franklin rod. The east chimney is presently pulling away from the house due to the movement of its foundation. Although only a crawl space exists under the main house, the area under the ell is excavated and the floor joists above the space are whitewashed, suggesting the former existence of a crude cellar. There is no observable evidence of there having been a fireplace opening into the cellar at the base of the ell chimney.

Originally, the first story of the house was fitted with nine-over-nine-sash windows and the second story with six-over-six-sash windows. Most of these original windows have been placed in storage in the house and replaced with modern sashes. The gables of the main house have apparently never had windows, although the ell gable has two small four-light windows. The house has four exterior six-panel doors on the first story and one on the second story that formerly opened onto the second tier of the front porch. The front door has recessed panels and poorly preserved graining similar to a better preserved finish on the second-story west room door. The two doors on the east elevation were formerly sheltered by small stoops of modern construction. There is no evidence of there ever having been a back porch associated with the doorway at the rear of the house's center passage.

The present one-story, hip-roofed front porch shelters the front entry and extends for approximately 20' along the front elevation. It is supported by the original chamfered posts and pilasters and has an early-twentieth-century beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling. Spanning between the posts are beaded handrails that formerly ran above simple balusters set on approximate 3-1/2" centers. Attached with cut nails to the lower ends of some of the porch posts are reeded boards. To the other posts are attached molding strips forming recessed panels. These treatments create a pedestal effect beneath the chamfering. Most paint residue on the porch components is white, although traces of green or blue paint survive on some components. On the wall under the porch is mounted a "Camels" thermometer of about 1960. Against the house wall under the porch are vertical boards that indicate the points of attachment for the original 12'-wide porch. Graffiti is carved and pencilled onto the weatherboards between these boards and the front entry but not outside the area defined by the boards, suggesting that the graffiti was made while the porch was in its original configuration. Based on the construction of the porch in its present configuration, the porch was probably altered in the early twentieth century.

**House: Interior**

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

The Bowling Eldridge House has a single-pile center-passage plan with two rooms of nearly equal size flanking the center stair hall on both stories. The first-story center passage has doorways at front and back and contains a two-run open-stinger stair. The stair balustrade has a ramped and eased handrail with beaded edges and grained surfaces. The hand rail is supported by slender turned newels and simple balusters. The lower ends of the newel posts resolve into turned pendants. At the ends of the stair treads are intricately carved spiral scrolls. Running beneath the scrolls is a single cable molding. The scrolls continue across the fascia of the landing between the two runs, but attached to the fascias of the second-story landing are linen-fold panels. Under the stair is a closet with replastered or repainted walls. The doorways leading from the center passage to the two first-story rooms have elaborate surrounds. Set into the pilasters forming the sides of the surrounds are slightly convex reeded surfaces. The pilaster caps feature carved lozenge motifs. The lintel has flat reeding. The chair rail in the center passage has chevron reeding.

The focal point of the first-story room on the west side of the center passage is an exceptional vernacular Federal mantel. This mantel was taken from an unknown dwelling and used to replace the original mantel. The original mantel was moved in the mid-twentieth century to a house in suburban Lynchburg, Virginia. It has been documented (see exhibit at the end of the report). The present mantel has a tripartite design with elliptical recesses in the center and flanking tablets that presumably formerly contained sunbursts, vine-like carved appliques in the frieze to either side of the center tablet, and intricately carved pilasters. The room's chair rail features complex linen-fold carving. The walls above the chair rail were formerly painted light gray and then light blue before the present white. The dado, now painted light blue, was formerly painted white and may once have been painted reddish-brown or grained.

The first-story room on the east side of the center passage retains its original mantel. The mantel is refined but less stylish than the one that was removed from the first-story west room. The mantel has a tripartite form with flush reeded panels with scalloped corners in the center and flanking tablets, fluted pilasters, a reeded strip below the frieze, a reeded strip and linen-fold molding above the frieze, and multiple bed molds under the mantel shelf. Other features of the room include a complex linen-fold chair rail that is similar to the one in the first-story west room, traces of white and light gray paint under the present green paint on the walls and ceiling, a door leading to the outside on the east end of the room, and a door with a step down leading to the first story of the ell.

The first story of the ell contains a single room. At the north end of the room is a tripartite mantel with alternating reeding creating a vertical striped effect in the center and flanking tablets, pilasters with convex reeded surfaces like those appearing in the doorways of the first-story



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center passage, and reeding and a dentil molding under the mantel shelf. The fireplace in this room is open and has a modern brick lining. In the southeast corner of the room is an open dog-leg winder stair with a closed stringer, slender reeded square newels, reeded trim, a faceted inverse tear-drop-shaped pendant, and a few surviving simple balusters. Under the stair is a short four-panel door with a convex reeded surround. The door opens into a closet with a brick-nogged outer wall, suggesting the space was once used to store perishable food. The walls of the room were apparently originally painted with several coats of red paint. Located between the two windows on the west side of the room are two narrow beaded wooden strips that may have served as surfaces for the attachment of nails or hooks. Other features of the room include a molded chair rail with a wood dado underneath, a door on the east side leading to the outdoors, and modern cabinetry and a sink relating to the room's most recent use as a kitchen. The room may have served originally as a dining room.

A late-nineteenth-century six-panel door on the north end of the ell room leads to a pent room that extends off the gable end of the ell. The east and west walls of the pent room, which served as a pantry, are lined with shelves supported by simple wooden struts and constructed with round-head nails. There is evidence of earlier shelving. The pantry presently contains a commode. Between the studs of the pantry walls is brick nogging that probably served to moderate the temperature of the room during hot and cold weather. The sills and joists forming the understructure of the room have a furry surface that may be salt damage from the former curing of meat in the room.

The second-story of the center passage in the main section of the house has doors with reeded surrounds leading to the former second tier of the front porch and the second-story west room. A tall window over the landing between the two runs of the stair also has a reeded surround as well as a linen-fold sill panel that picks up on the linen-fold treatment of the landing fascias. At present, and probably originally, no doorway leads from the center passage to the second-story east room. The second-story west room is accessed through a six-panel door with superb graining. The rails and stiles of the door have reddish-brown graining that may simulate mahogany. The recessed panels are painted yellowish-brown with rippled graining and a thin cream-colored border. The room also features a molded chair rail and a simple architrave mantel.

The second-story east room is accessible only through a small doorway that communicates with the second story of the ell. The room has a mantel, baseboard, and other trim and finishes similar to the second-story west room, but the chair rail is reeded. Scratched and pencilled onto the room's plaster walls are extensive graffiti. In addition to a depiction of a man in a straw hat smoking a cigar, a man on horseback, and other figures are written names and phrases such as

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

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"30 bushels wheat," "James M. Talbot," "John Anderson Smith," "Miss Julie Bally," "Miss Emma Chaney," "Willie Chaney," "Willie is the biggest fool," and "Old Robert Elliott 19 years 1920."

The second story of the ell is divided into two rooms. The south room is situated at the top of the ell stair and contains the base of a partly enclosed winder stair to the attic. The north room features a simple wood dado stained a dark brown and an early-twentieth-century Craftsman-style mantel with an original brick fireplace and hearth. Between the two rooms is a multi-panel early-twentieth-century door.

The attic of the main house block reveals a common rafter roof system with straight-sawn rafters that are lapped and pegged at the ridge and collar beams that are lapped and pegged to the rafters. Attached to the rafters are wide straight-sawn roof boards. On the outer surface of the plate on the south side of the attic are six mortises that formerly received roof members from the original front porch. The main attic has no floor and there is no evidence that it was used for anything other than storage.

The ell attic was finished at an original or early date and probably served as a bedroom, perhaps for a house slave or white servant. The ell attic is partitioned into a small room at the north end that is lighted by two small gable windows, and a smaller vestibule at the top of the stair from the second story. The room has molded and beaded baseboards and a vaulted plaster-and-lath ceiling. Pencilled on the knee walls and ceiling are numerous graffiti including depictions of a man on horseback and a devil and initials for LAC, HBC, LMC, WLC, and HSC. Pencilled on a wall elsewhere in the ell attic is the date 1877. The three rafter couples over the connection between the main and ell attics are lapped and nailed at the ridge, rather than lapped and pegged like the other attic rafters.

### Outbuildings

Located on the 0.43-acre nominated parcel with the Bowling Eldridge House are a number of landscape features and modern outbuildings. Directly in front of the house, to either side of an axis extending from the front entry, are a large boxwood and two mature deciduous trees. At the south edge of the parcel are a board-and-batten frame shed and a board-sheathed chicken house, both dating to the mid-twentieth century.

More features--several dating to the antebellum period--are located in the vicinity of the nominated parcel. A short distance behind the house to the north is the Eldridge Cemetery,

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enclosed by a finely constructed granite wall. The wall has large cap stones and large facing stones on its outer sides. One facing stone measures approximately 6'-9" long. The inner surface of the wall is constructed of coursed rubble. The cemetery wall was probably constructed in the 1850s after the death of Bowling Eldridge. The cemetery is believed to contain Bowling Eldridge's remains as well as those of other Eldridge family members. However, the only marked graves in the cemetery are indicated by crude, uninscribed fieldstone markers. The original grave markers were presumably removed or destroyed.

Across Route 662 from the Eldridge House is a one-story aluminum-sided former tenant house. The house is presently owned and occupied by the Ewell family and is believed to be log (Ewell interview). The house has a front porch, a two-bay front elevation, a stone chimney on the north gable end, a rear addition, and log floor joists under the front section. To the south of the Ewell House is a well that formerly served the Eldridge House. To the east of the Ewell House is a north-south road trace that represents the predecessor to Route 662.

Beyond the road trace to the east on the crest of a spur are a tobacco barn foundation, a log outbuilding, and an unoccupied log tenant house. The tobacco barn foundation is constructed of stone and has two stone fireboxes on its west side. The log outbuilding is square-notched with a whitewashed exterior and a metal-sheathed gable roof supported by log sapling rafters. The presence of wire nails and circular-sawn lumber suggest that this building is late-nineteenth- or twentieth-century in date. It may have served as a meat house, chicken house, or general storage building.

The tenant house is constructed of v-notched logs that are whitewashed inside and out and are chinked with wood slabs and mortar. The metal-sheathed gable roof is supported by log sapling rafters. The house stands on a crude rubble foundation. The front elevation features a doorway hung with a four-panel door and a window with a four-light casement sash and a batten shutter. On the west elevation is a six-over-six-sash window below a four-light window in the weatherboarded gable. Off the rear of the house extends a v-notched log shed room. The shed room has a wooden post foundation. A possible root cellar is hollowed out of the clay substrate under the shed room. The shed room has a batten side door, a six-over-six-sash window, and an unglazed window with a batten shutter. The one-room interior features two brick stove flues, a drum-like metal stove, and a boxed stair with batten doors to the steps and to a closet underneath. Despite the traditional form and construction of this dwelling, the use of circular-sawn lumber and round head nails throughout suggest a date of construction in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

## Integrity Statement

The Bowling Eldridge House has much the same appearance as it did when it was constructed in the 1820s. The basic form, interior room arrangement, and exterior and interior finishes and detailing remain virtually unaltered. There are several exceptions to this positive assessment. One is the reconfiguration of the original two-tier front porch, which was dismantled in the early twentieth century and rebuilt as a one-story porch. The house has lost two of its six original Federal-style mantels: one was replaced in the early twentieth century with a simple Craftsman-style mantel, and the other was removed to a house outside the area and replaced with a more vernacular Federal-style mantel of the same age as the house. A number of the window sashes on the front of the house have been put in storage and replaced with modern sashes. These losses, although significant, have not compromised the basic integrity of the house. The present owners of the Bowling Eldridge House are planning to restore the house as a residence in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

## Architectural Analysis

The archival source for the 1822-1823 date of the Bowling Eldridge House is reinforced by the Federal styling of the house. Both the documentary and architectural evidence suggest the ell may be slightly later in date. First, a rise in the value of buildings on Bowling Eldridge's landholding in the 1828 county tax assessment may indicate the construction of the ell. The ell has a separate foundation, and the awkward connection between the main house and ell--the difference in floor levels and the small door connecting the second story of the ell to the second-story east room of the main house--may indicate the ell was added. The linkage between the roof structures of the two portions is also suggestive. Whether the ell is an early addition or whether it is original, it seems likely that it was built by the same builder or construction team, considering the many similarities between the fine Federal styling of the ell and the main house.

Certain aspects of the spatial functioning of the Bowling Eldridge House and its immediate surroundings may be conjectured from the architectural fabric. The inaccessibility of the second-story east room from the rest of the main house suggests it was used by individuals other than trusted family members, a so-called "stranger room." The room may reflect the use of the Bowling Eldridge House as a house of public entertainment, a use further supported by the evidence that Bowling Eldridge and his son John C. Eldridge operated an ordinary during the early 1830s. Even if the house did not function as a licensed ordinary, it may still have served for the lodging of travelers. Close scrutiny during the restoration of the house may indicate whether the second-story east room was originally walled off from the center passage or whether

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

the condition was an early alteration. Another noteworthy feature of the house is the placement of two entries on the east elevation. The entries may suggest that a separate kitchen or other building closely associated with the day-to-day operation of the household was located on the east side of the house. Since the east elevation also faced the road, it may be that the east doors functioned as informal entries to the house.

The front of the Bowling Eldridge House originally commanded views of the Birch Creek valley, located to the south. Originally, the Eldridges would have surveyed their domain from a two-tier pedimented portico centered on the front elevation. A historic photograph of the house in the possession of an Eldridge family descendent shows this handsome portico. The chamfered posts recycled in the present porch supported a small, steeply pitched pediment bearing an elliptical window or carved panel. Lines radiating from the center of the ellipse are just visible in the photograph, suggesting either muntins or the rays of a sunburst carving. The photograph also shows wood shingle roofing, and the white paint is beginning to weather from the weatherboards, suggesting the photograph was taken during the period when the house served as a tenant dwelling.

The Bowling Eldridge House shares several features with a nearby plantation house of roughly the same age. Elm Hill, located approximately three miles southeast of the Eldridge House, is believed to have been built around 1810 by Henry Edmunds (Bowling Eldridge purchased his property from another member of the Edmunds family in 1818). Like the Eldridge House, Elm Hill is a two-story, five-bay, center-passage-plan house of graceful proportions, although unlike the Eldridge House, Elm Hill is constructed of brick. The downstairs mantels in Elm Hill are more lavish than those in the Eldridge House, although one features sunburst motifs in the frieze that are like those appearing on the mantel now removed from the Eldridge House (see exhibit at the end of this report). More alike are the linen-fold chair rails at both the Eldridge House and Elm Hill--similar enough to suggest they were the work of the same finish carpenter. Aside from this one instance, it is difficult to determine the architectural affinity of the Eldridge House to other houses in Halifax County, since the county has not been comprehensively surveyed.

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

The Bowling Eldridge House is a well-preserved example of a Halifax County plantation seat dating to the early nineteenth century. The two-story frame house features sophisticated Federal styling such as a dentil cornice, remnants of a two-tier pedimented portico, intricately carved mantels, trim, and stair detailing, and several six-panel doors with superb graining. According to tax records, the house was built in 1822 or 1823 by tobacco planter and mill owner Bowling Eldridge (1786-1850) and his wife Mildred Baker Gaines Eldridge (1794-1868). At its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, the Eldridge plantation included nearly a thousand acres and was sustained by more than seventy slaves. Following the Civil War, after the last Eldridge family member moved to Texas, the house entered a century-long period of neglect as a tenant house on an absentee-owned farm. In the 1960s the house passed back into Eldridge ownership, and is presently being stabilized in preparation for restoration.<sup>1</sup>

### Justification of Criteria

The Bowling Eldridge House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of architecture. The house is eligible for the fine Federal-style detailing of its exterior and interior and for certain plan and structural features. The period of significance for the property extends from 1822 to 1828, the period during which the house was built. The house is eligible at the local level of significance.

### Historical Background

Bowling Eldridge was born to Aristotle and Nancy Eldridge of Brunswick County, Virginia, in 1786. In 1809, Eldridge married Mildred Gaines.<sup>2</sup> Bowling and Mildred Eldridge moved to Halifax County in December 1814 or January 1815 when Eldridge purchased two large tracts adjoining the town of South Boston on the Dan River.<sup>3</sup> Eldridge purchased the Birch Creek property on which he later built his house in 1816 from James and William F. Edmunds of Brunswick County.<sup>4</sup> Halifax County tax records indicate that Eldridge built his two-story frame dwelling in 1822 or 1823, when the value of buildings on his 616-acre holdings jumped from zero dollars in 1822 to \$1,232 in 1823. The value of buildings jumped again to \$1,850 in 1828, an increase that may represent the construction of other buildings on the property or possibly the

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

addition of the two-story ell to the Eldridge House (discussed in the architectural analysis section of this report).

In 1820, according to the federal census of that year, the Eldridge household included Bowling and Mildred and their first four children, as well as thirty-one slaves. The Eldridge household grew steadily over the following decades. Bowling and Mildred's eleventh and last known child was born in 1835, and all but one child apparently outlived their father. The Eldridge slaveholding also increased, to fifty-eight slaves in 1840 and seventy slaves in 1850. An 1849 draft of Bowling Eldridge's will may list as many as seventy-nine slaves, although the final 1850 version of the will lists sixty-seven or sixty-eight slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Bowling Eldridge's two wills list his slaves by name, as do various deeds and court proceedings concerning the purchase or infractions of his slaves. Deed records suggest that Eldridge's slaves were generally purchased in family groups of three or five individuals from neighboring landowners. Most slaves remained on the Eldridge plantation for many years; a slave woman named Nancy and her son William were purchased by Eldridge in 1837 and may still have been living on his plantation in 1850.<sup>6</sup> The one slave for whom the 1850 will listed an occupation was Lafayette, a blacksmith. Bowling Eldridge willed Lafayette to his son Richard F. Eldridge; interestingly, a slave named Lafayette belonging to Richard had been accused of breaking into Richard's store in 1843.<sup>7</sup> In his will, Eldridge also stipulated that his heirs make an effort to keep the family of his slave Moses together in any future sales or inheritances.

The 1850 and 1860 censuses record the ages and sex of the Eldridge slaves. In 1850, of a total of seventy slaves, thirty-one were aged thirty and over (the two oldest--a man and a woman--were aged seventy), twenty-one were aged fifteen to twenty-nine, and eighteen were younger than fifteen years old. Forty-one of the Eldridge slaves were male and twenty-nine were female. In 1860, after the Eldridge slaves had been divided among Bowling Eldridge's heirs, twenty-eight slaves resided on Mildred Eldridge's plantation.

Bowling Eldridge expanded his landholdings over the decades of the 1830s and 1840s; by the mid-1840s he owned 950 acres on Birch Creek. One acquisition is particularly noteworthy. In 1834, Caleb Dodson, Jr. deeded a thirty-five-acre parcel on Birch Creek to Eldridge in order to secure a debt. On the parcel were a grist and sawmill that had been built by Dodson in the early 1830s.<sup>8</sup> The mill was referenced in Eldridge's 1850 will, although it may not have been operational that year or its value of product may have been under \$500, too low to register in the 1850 census of industry. The 1850 and 1860 census population schedules do not list a miller living in the vicinity of the Eldridge plantation.

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

The 1850 and 1860 censuses provide detailed information on the agricultural production of the Eldridge plantation. As might be expected, tobacco figured prominently; 20,000 pounds were raised in 1860.<sup>9</sup> Wheat and corn were also raised in quantity, and some oats were grown. In terms of types and number of crops and livestock raised, the Eldridge plantation was typical of the larger farms in antebellum Halifax County.

As Bowling and Mildred Eldridge's sons gained adulthood, they too purchased farms or pursued business careers. The eldest son, John Caleb Eldridge (1811-1899), appears to have entered with his father into several business ventures. In 1831, 1832, and 1833, father and son applied for ordinary licenses. Considering John C. Eldridge was only twenty in 1831, it seems likely that the ordinary was kept on the Eldridge farm, perhaps in the Bowling Eldridge House (see architectural analysis section of this report). In the early 1840s, after he had acquired 438 acres on Birch Creek from his brother-in-law, William M. Cabaniss, John C. Eldridge applied for ordinary licenses on his own.<sup>10</sup> John C. Eldridge's 438-acre tract surrounded or included the village of Brooklyn, which boasted twelve dwellings in 1836.<sup>11</sup> From 1838 to 1848, John C. Eldridge is believed to have operated a mercantile business out of a two-story store building that still stands at Brooklyn. He styled his business "John C. Eldridge & Company."<sup>12</sup> Bowling and Mildred Eldridge's youngest sons, Caleb Baker Eldridge (b. 1833) and Daniel B. Eldridge (b. 1835), were apparently enrolled in the high school at Randolph-Macon College at the time of their father's death.<sup>13</sup>

In the year before his death, Bowling Eldridge contemplated moving to Texas, where two of his sons had already relocated. The Eldridges were not alone; many Halifax County families moved to the Southwest between 1830 and 1860, contributing to a decline in the county's population.<sup>14</sup> Henry B. Eldridge may have been the first son to move; in 1848 he was married in Washington County, Texas.<sup>15</sup> John C. Eldridge moved to Washington County in 1849, and Alfred Bucker Eldridge made a trip to Texas during the same period and returned to Virginia, apparently not pleased with what he had seen.<sup>16</sup>

The Eldridge family's movements to and from Texas are the subject of a letter written in March 1850 by the youngest daughter, Ellen M. Eldridge (b. 1830), to her niece Virginia, daughter of John C. Eldridge.<sup>17</sup> On her father's plans, Ellen wrote, "Much to my gratification, I heard Papa had almost abandoned the idea of going to Texas. How true this news is. I know not . . . knowing how anxious he is to live in Texas, the last place almost in creation." Ellen also enquired as to her brother John's opinion of his new home. "John is so silent on the subject we have all concluded he is prodigiously disappointed and dreadfully displeased with the sunny climes and rich bottoms of Texas."



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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

Bowling Eldridge died in 1850, leaving a life right to his 930-acre plantation and twenty-eight slaves to Mildred Eldridge. His children and selected grand-children received slaves, personal items, or cash.<sup>18</sup> Bowling Eldridge is believed to be buried in the walled family cemetery located a short distance to the north of his house, just outside the nominated parcel, although his memorial as well as all other formal gravestones are missing from the plot.

After her husband's death, Mildred Eldridge managed the plantation, probably with the assistance of one of the overseers that the 1860 census lists as living in the vicinity. In 1860, Mildred's daughter Sarah A. Cabaniss lived with her mother, as did Sarah's son William and her daughter Mary. A fifth member of the household was an eleven-year-old mulatto girl named Patty.<sup>19</sup>

During the Civil War, Mildred Eldridge furnished slaves to the Southern war effort. In 1862, 1863, and 1864, one to two Eldridge slaves each year were sent to work on the defenses at Richmond.<sup>20</sup> In the Spring of 1865, C.S.A. Lieutenant Bowling Eldridge of Texas stopped at his grandmother Mildred Eldridge's farm on his way home from Appomattox, and it was apparently he who announced to the Eldridge slaves that they were free.<sup>21</sup> Afterwards, several of the former slaves remained in the Birch Creek area, whereas the others appear to have dispersed to other counties or states, or to have taken last names other than Eldridge. At least four slaves listed in Bowling Eldridge's will appear to have remained at Birch Creek: Aaron Eldridge (b. ca. 1810), Freeman Eldridge (b. ca. 1800), Milton Eldridge (b. ca. 1820), and Sallie Eldridge (b. ca. 1795). Whether these four--all fifty years or older in 1870--lived on the Eldridge farm or not is unknown.<sup>22</sup>

The Civil War brought an end of the slave-based plantation economy of which the Bowling Eldridge House was a product and symbol. As one historian of Halifax County has noted, "Lands which before the Civil War were worth four or five times their present rating, after the war were thrown out of cultivation, because neither capital nor labor was to be had for the proper working of them."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps in part because of these profound changes, but more likely because of a desire to be near her family, Mildred Eldridge moved to Texas in 1868 and died shortly thereafter.<sup>24</sup> In November 1869, John C. Eldridge, acting as the executor of his father, sold 1,026 acres less a half acre reserved for the Eldridge Cemetery to James S. Easley and John R. Edmunds. Easley and Edmunds paid \$7,229.78 for the plantation, less than the \$18,600 county tax valuation for 1869 and far less than the \$40,000 value given in the 1860 census.<sup>25</sup>

With Easley and Edmunds began a century-long period during which the Eldridge farm was owned by absentee landowners and gradually reduced in size. Many tenant families probably lived in the house, of whom there is no record except the carved and scribbled initials of their children on the front porch and upstairs walls. After 1875 the property was owned wholly by

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

James S. Easley, and in 1881 it was sold to H. A. Edmundson, a prominent Halifax County land speculator.<sup>26</sup>

In 1912, Edmundson's heirs had the farm subdivided. A map entitled "The Eldredge [sic] Farm, Paces, Va." was produced that depicts the Eldridge House and its outbuildings as a row of four square-shaped symbols running east and west.<sup>27</sup> The Edmundson heirs sold a 107.66-acre parcel including the Eldridge House to L. A. and Susan M. Chaney in 1913.<sup>28</sup> The Chaney family were probably the first owner/occupants of the house after the Eldridges. The Chaney children Emma and Willie left some of the graffiti appearing in the upstairs east room of the house. After the Chaney family, the house passed from owner to owner until its purchase in the 1960s by the Rev. Barney L. Davidson of Fayetteville, N.C., an Eldridge descendent. Davidson worked to salvage the neglected house, stabilizing the chimneys and foundation and temporarily replacing deteriorated window sashes with new sashes (the old sashes are stored in the house). In January 1992 the house was acquired by Lester and Janet Welch, also Eldridge descendants, who have undertaken further stabilization of the house.<sup>29</sup>

## Endnotes

1. A number of individuals assisted in the preparation of this report. Lester and Janet Welch, the present owners of the Bowling Eldridge House, initiated the project and provided genealogical and historical information on the house and the Eldridge family throughout the course of the project. Carol Tuckwiler of the Roanoke Public Library and the staffs of the Halifax County Courthouse and the Virginia State Library provided assistance. Kendal Chisholm helped the author measure the house.

The name assigned to the property for the purposes of this report--the Bowling Eldridge House--is chosen because it recognizes the role Eldridge had in realizing the construction of the house. The property is first referenced by name in county records of the late nineteenth century as "the Eldridge farm" or "Eldridge's." In the mid-twentieth century the house acquired the name "Ridgecrest." Whether this name is historic or of recent invention has not been determined.

2. Welch research.

3. Halifax County Deed Book 25, pp. 295 and 430. Hereafter, Halifax County deed records will be abbreviated as in the following example: DB 25.295.

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4. DB 27.16 & 18. The two deeds appear to describe separate but adjoining parcels of 410 acres each, although the 1818 tax records describe parcels of 310 and 377 acres for a total of 687 acres.
5. Halifax County Will Book 23, p. 99. Hereafter, county will book citations will be abbreviated similarly to deed references.
6. DB 44.65; WB 23.99. A slave woman listed as "old Clarissa" in Eldridge's 1850 will may have been owned by Eldridge as early as 1809 (Brunswick County Deed Book 20, pp. 404-406.
7. Halifax County Minute Book 11, p. 205.
8. DB 41.379; DB 45.240; Halifax County tax records.
9. The 1850 census lists a tobacco crop of only 3,000 pounds. This figure does not correlate to the size of the Eldridge land- and slaveholdings for the period and may be mistaken. The largest tobacco product in the county for 1850 was the 71,925 pounds raised on the immense Berry Hill plantation near South Boston.
10. Halifax County General Index to Court Orders.
11. DB 45.73 & 251. Martin, *Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia*: 185.
12. DB 53.76; "Store one of area's earliest:" the anonymous author of this article also asserts that Bowling Eldridge operated a store at Brooklyn
13. Welch research.
14. Morrison, *1907 Halifax County*, p. 85.
15. Welch research.
16. Ibid.; Plummer, 34. John C. Eldridge was a resident of Halifax County as late as February, 1849, as indicated by DB 53.76.
17. Welch research. The letter is in private possession in Texas.
18. WB 23.99. Ellen M. Eldridge received ten slaves and the family's piano.
19. Patty's last name is given in the census but is illegible.

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va

20. Halifax County General Index to Court Orders.
21. "Brenham Man."
22. 1870 United States Census, population schedules for Halifax County.
23. Morrison, p. 10.
24. Welch research.
25. DB 61.520; Halifax County tax records.
26. DB 64.457; DB 64.503; DB 84.257.
27. Halifax County Plat Book 1, p. 32.
28. DB 113.313.
29. DB 572.844.

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**Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.**

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property is indicated by the solid line on the accompanying Plat of Survey at 1" = 200' from Will Book 66, page 513 in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Halifax County, Virginia.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the nominated property corresponds to current property lines and includes the Bowling Eldridge House and two noncontributing outbuildings.

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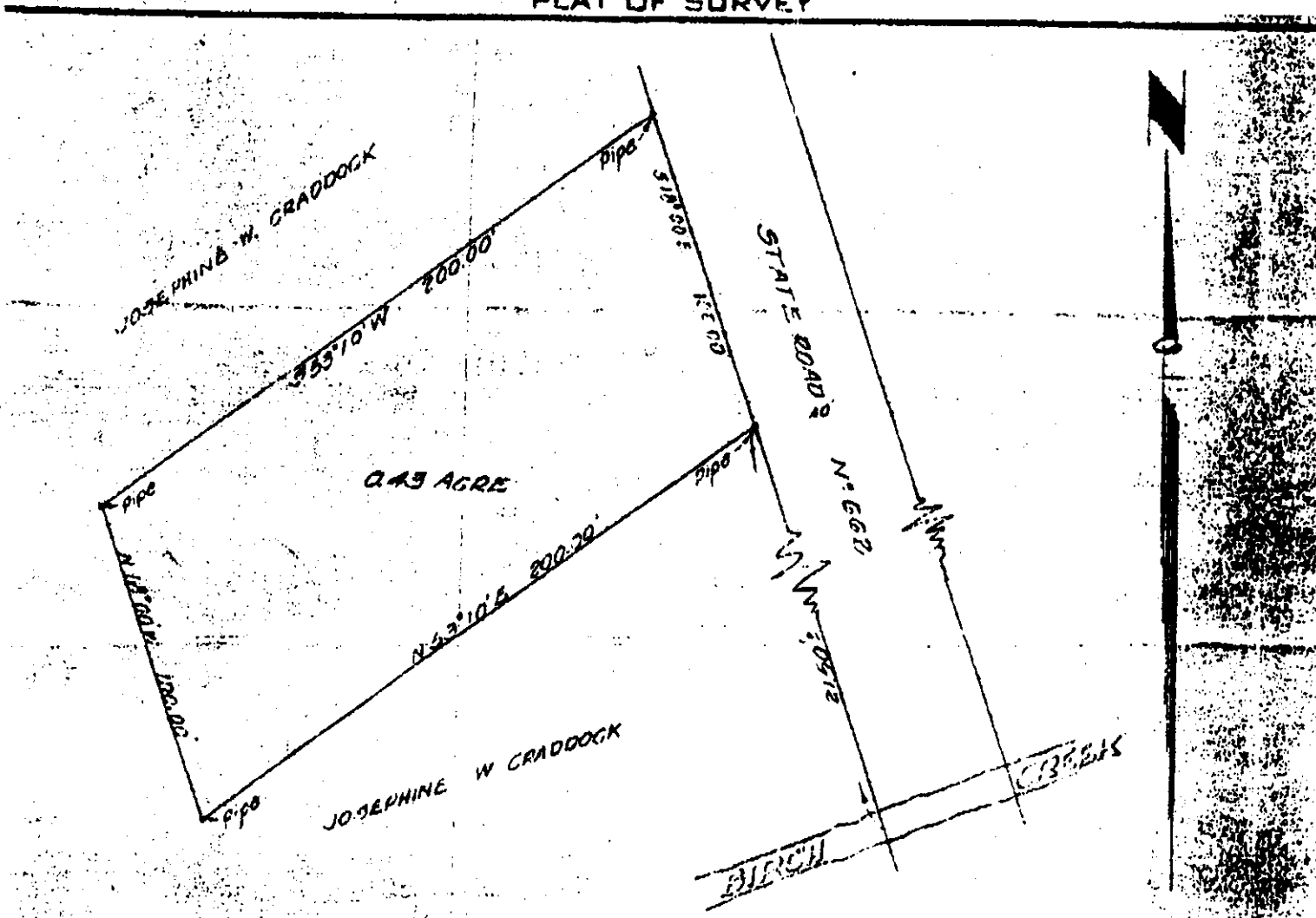
Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

Map of the Bowling Eldridge House nominated parcel.

Scale: 1" = 200'

The nominated area is the 0.43-acre parcel depicted on this 1963 survey of the property.

## PLAT OF SURVEY



Being that certain tract or parcel of land containing 0.43 acre on the Westerly side of State Road #62 in Birch Creek District of Halifax County, Virginia, and being a portion of the land that was devised to Josephine W. Craddock in the Will of R. E. Craddock recorded in Will Book 66, page 513 in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Halifax County, Virginia.

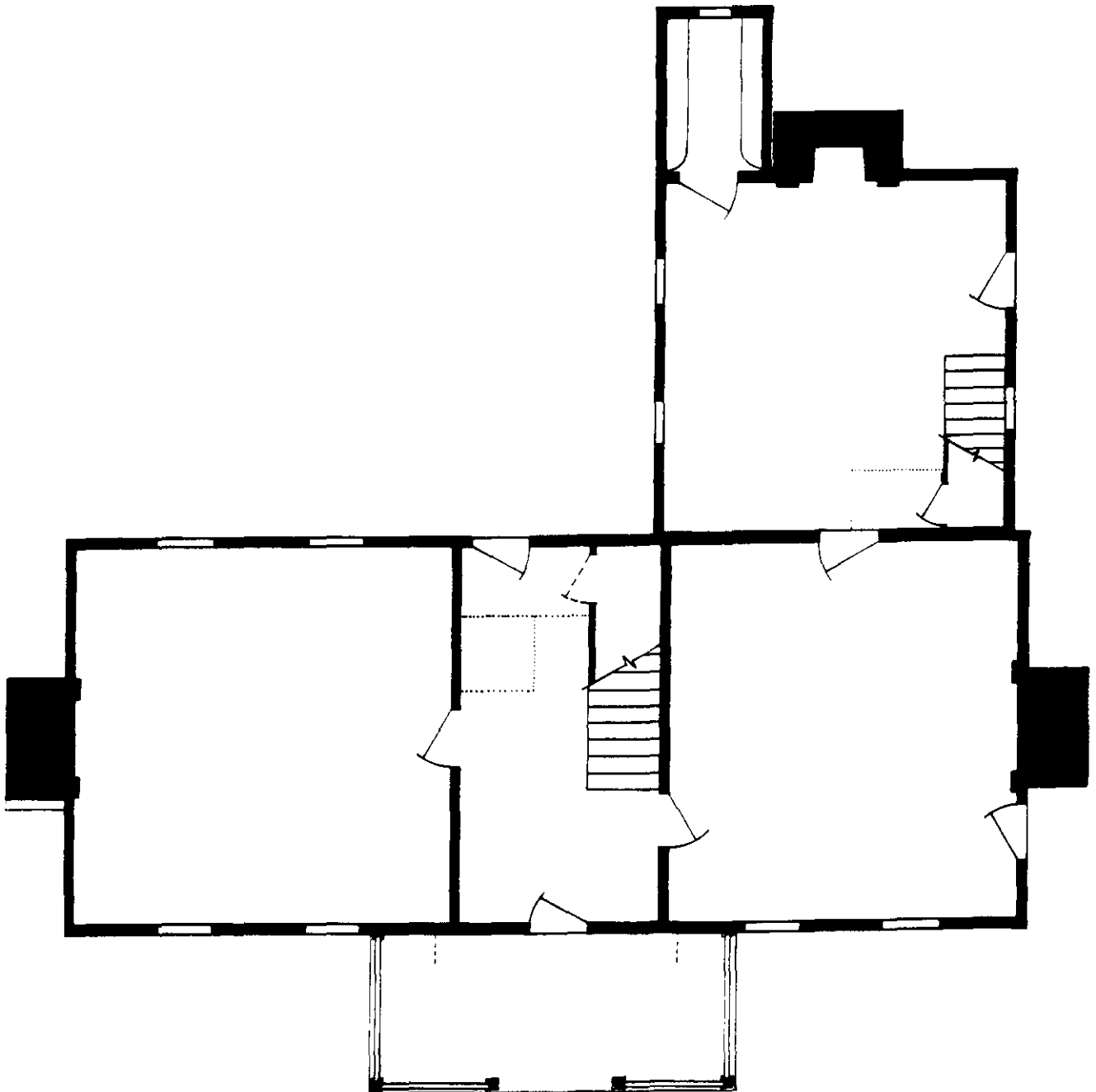
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

Plan of the Bowling Eldridge House (first story).

Scale: 1/8" = 1'.





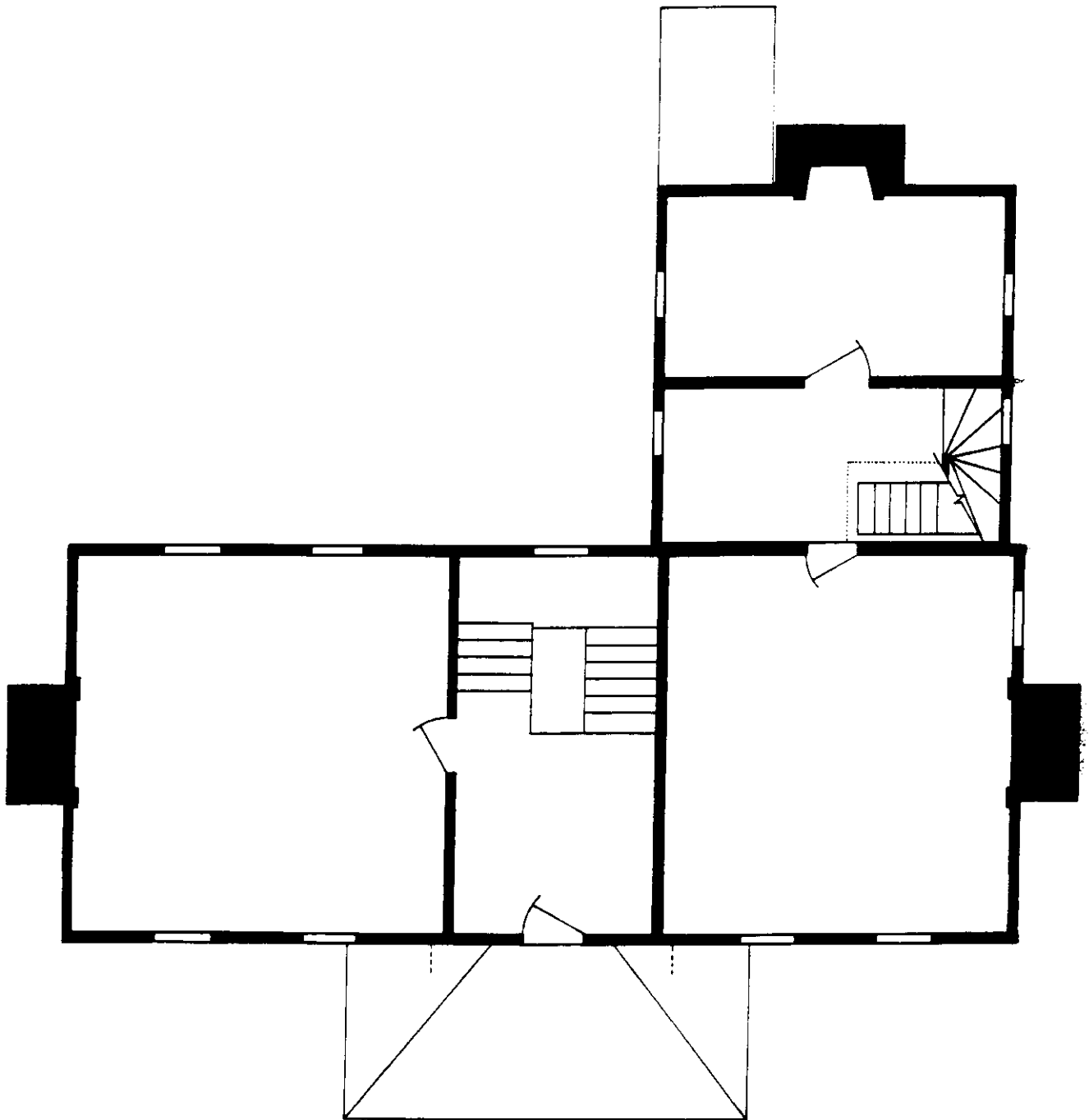
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

Plan of the Bowling Eldridge House (second story).

Scale: 1/8" = 1'.



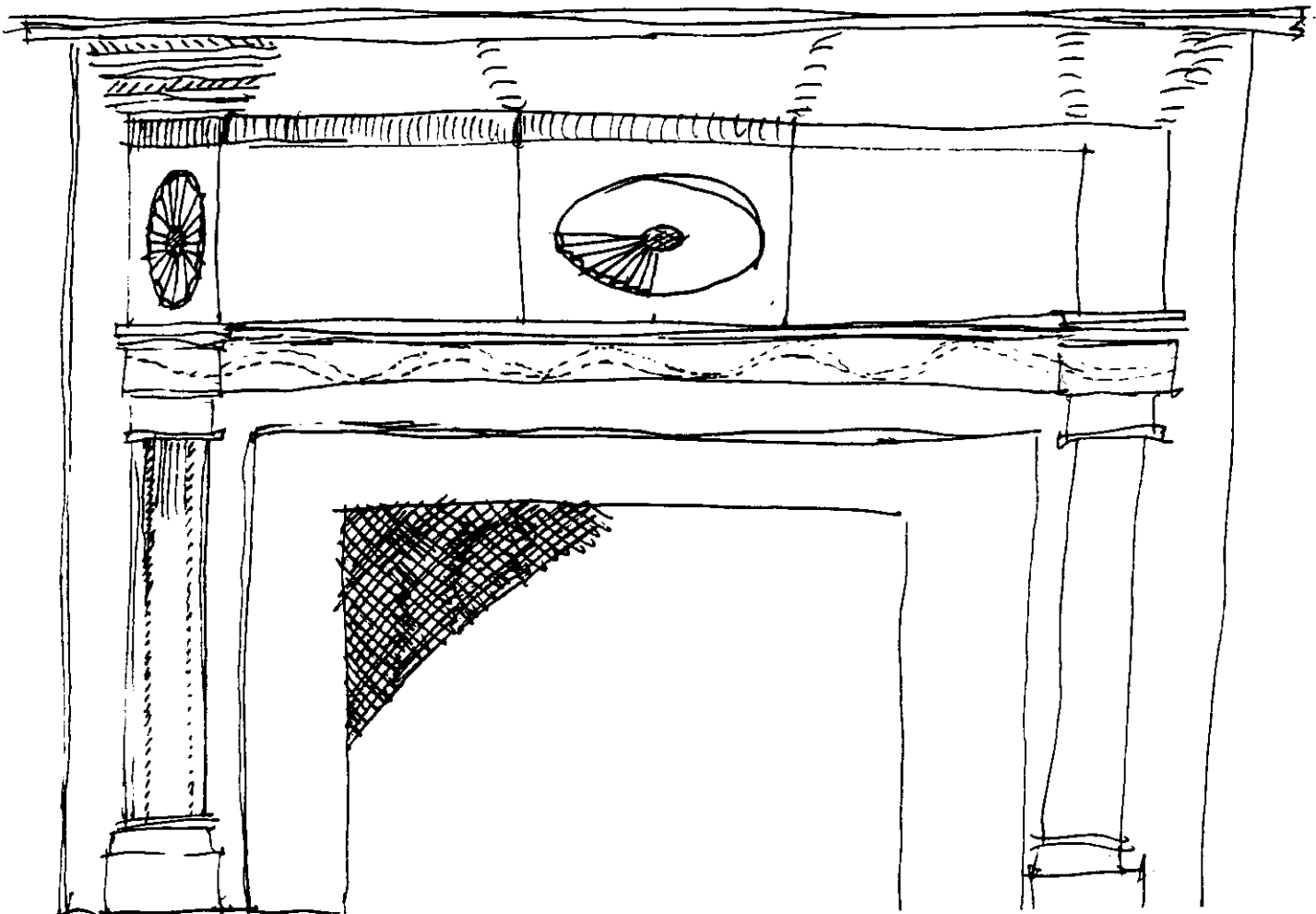
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

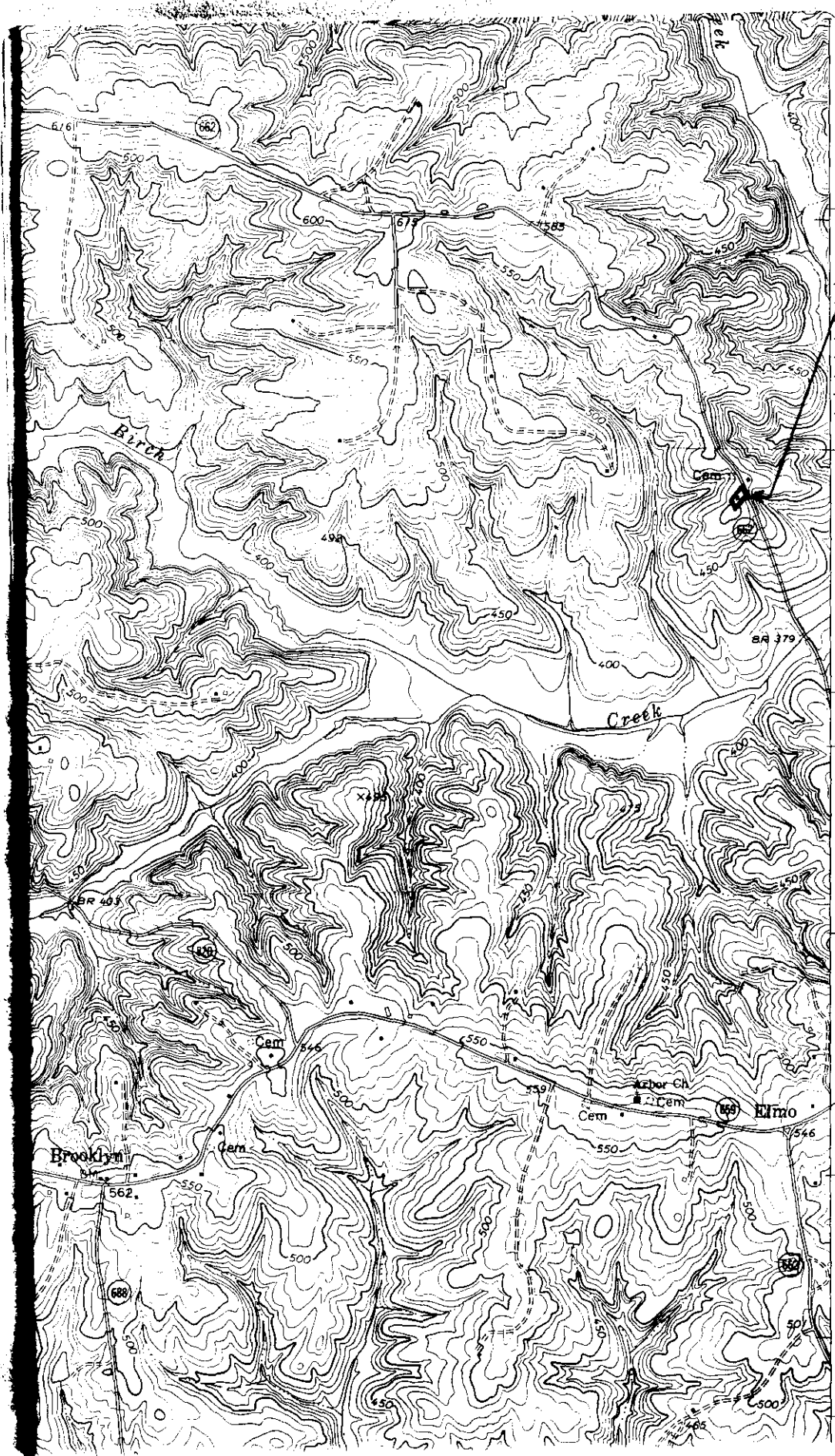
Section number Exhibit Page 21

Bowling Eldridge House, Halifax Co., Va.

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Sketch of the mantel originally located in the first-story west room of the Bowling Eldridge House (no scale).





4064  
42'30"

Bowling Eldridge Hs.  
Halifax Co., VA

UTM:  
Z 17  
E 667150  
N 4062800

4063

4062

(OAK LEVEL)  
5157 II NE

4061

1/4 MI. TO U.S. 501

4060

40'

4059