

34872

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District

Other names/site number: VDHR# 101-5002

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: Wood Avenue E (200-500 blocks), Shawnee Avenue, East Third Street, East Fourth Street, East Fifth Street

City or town: Big Stone Gap State: VA County: Wise

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

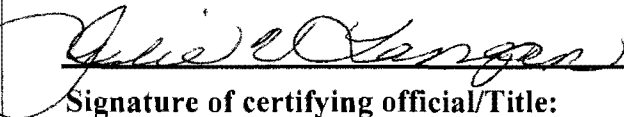
I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

	<u>1-28-19</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

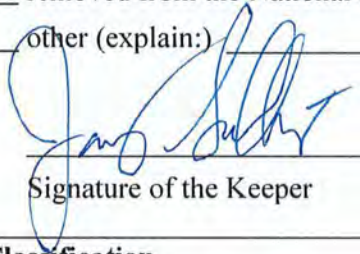
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper

3.13.2019

Date of Action

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>29</u>	<u>14</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>29</u>	<u>14</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

GOVERNMENT: courthouse

GOVERNMENT: post office

FUNERARY: mortuary

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

GOVERNMENT: post office

FUNERARY: mortuary

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Renaissance Revival, Colonial Revival

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne, Art Deco

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; CONCRETE; STONE; STUCCO; METAL (Tin), ASBESTOS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District includes a collection of commercial buildings dating from c. 1900 to present that represent the continuous development of the town as the main commercial center for the surrounding region. The 10-acre district consists of 39 commercial properties within an approximately four-block area. Wood Avenue (US Route 58 Alternate) is the main artery through the district, running northeast to southwest. Cross streets include East Fifth Street (US Route 23), East Fourth Street, and East Third Street. Shawnee Avenue bounds the district to the north and Clinton Avenue bounds the district to the south. Historic residential areas bound the district to the southwest and northeast. Architecturally, the buildings in the district reflect the growth of the town over time as the various styles, construction techniques, and materials represent the periods in which they were built. Although the functions and styles of the commercial buildings vary, general commonalities such as relatively small scale, masonry construction, primarily flat roofs, and siting along the sidewalk give the district a cohesive visual character. As the social, civic, and commercial center of Wise County, the built environment reflects provision of a variety of necessary functions for local residents, ranging from a postal office and other government services to retail stores, restaurants, and service stations. The surrounding area remains rural in character and Big Stone Gap today retains its historic role as a nexus for the county's community life. The district encompasses 43 buildings, of which 39 are primary resources and four are secondary resources. Of the total resources, 29 are contributing and 14 are non-contributing.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The Town of Big Stone Gap is located at the western end of Wise County, Virginia. It is the largest incorporated town in Wise County in both population and land area. Nestled in the Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia, the name “Big Stone Gap” refers to the broadening of the Powell River Valley between Stone Mountain, Little Stone Mountain, and Wallens Ridge. Wood Avenue, the town’s main thoroughfare, aligns with this gap. The main branch of the Powell River meanders northeast to southwest along the north edge of town. The South Fork of the Powell River flows east to west along the south edge of town before converging with the main branch of the river at the southeastern edge of town.

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District comprises approximately four blocks of commercial properties laid out in a grid pattern. Wood Avenue (US Route 58 Alternate) is the main artery through the district, running northeast to southwest. Cross streets include East Fifth Street (US Route 23), East Fourth Street, and East Third Street. Shawnee Avenue bounds the district to the north and Clinton Avenue bounds the district to the south. Although steep landforms surround the town, the terrain within the district is generally level. Historic residential areas are located southwest and northeast of the downtown historic district. The district’s orderly spatial relationships and development patterns reflect that it was laid out by the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company during the 1880s, which distinguishes it from other communities in Wise County that developed in a more haphazard, organic manner.

The historic district developed over the course of the twentieth century, with most of the growth occurring between 1900 and 1970. The district includes an assortment of commercial functions and architectural styles. Building designs range from vernacular to high style. The commercial buildings in the district are generally of brick or concrete-block construction and are one, two, or three stories tall. The buildings are also sited at grade, with no setbacks, along concrete sidewalks. These general commonalities give the district a cohesive visual character.

Architectural Analysis

An early example of vernacular commercial construction is the c. 1900 **Nickels Building** (513 Wood Avenue), which is thought to be the earliest extant building in the district. W. W. Nickels and Co. originally operated the building as a dry goods store in the east part of the building and a hardware store in the west part. The two-story building stands on a stone foundation and includes two first-floor storefronts and a central door, which provides access to the second floor. The east storefront remains minimally altered, retaining paneled wood bulkheads and wood-frame display windows and transoms. Thin columns on piers flank the recessed central entrance with double-leaf door. The upper façade features corbelled brickwork and an arched window in the central bay at the attic level. Although the window openings are reduced in size, original cut-stone lintels and sills continue to define the original openings.

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A 1908 fire destroyed a large portion of Big Stone Gap's early downtown along the 400 block of Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street. Many businesses associated with Big Stone Gap's boom period in the late 1880s and early 1890s, were destroyed by the fire. The only building that remains on the block from before the fire is the c. 1900 **Ayers Building** at 402 Wood Avenue. The two-story building functioned as the town's federal building before the construction of the Slemple Federal Building. General Rufus Ayers, the town's leading businessman, originally owned the building and his offices were located on the first floor. The second floor was used as the federal court until 1912. The exterior walls of the building are ashlar concrete block, and the main entrance is situated within the clipped front corner of the building. Concrete sills and scored concrete lintels articulate the historic window openings. A historic photograph of the building shows that it historically featured a decorative cornice and pediment that have since been removed.

After the 1908 fire, several commercial buildings were constructed along Wood Avenue in the Main Street Commercial style. Represented on major commercial thoroughfares across the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, buildings of this style are characterized by their rectangular plans, parapeted flat roofs, large storefront windows, and ornamentation reflective of architectural fashions of the period. Big Stone Gap examples include **408 Wood Avenue** and **507 Wood Avenue**, which are both two-story brick buildings with rectangular plans and parapeted flat roofs. Architectural ornamentation on 507 Wood Avenue includes a pressed-metal modillion cornice and patterned brickwork. Corbelled brick pilasters, dentiled cornices, and cut stone accents add interest to the upper façade of 408 Wood Avenue.

The **Minor Building** and **Slemple Federal Building** are two of the more architecturally sophisticated buildings in the district, referencing eclectic styles popular during the period. The 1908 Minor Building (301 Wood Avenue) is a 2 ½ story, Colonial Revival-style office building that was built as the headquarters for the Stonega Coke & Coal Company, which later became the Westmoreland Coal Company. The building is named for J.A.L. Minor, an employee of the Virginia Coal & Iron Company, who came to Big Stone Gap in 1895 to develop coke ovens. The cream-colored, common-bond brick building features a jerkinhead roof with eave returns and a modillioned cornice. Gable dormers project above the roof. The sizeable building is five bays wide and fourteen bays deep. Tuscan columns on cut-stone piers support the cut-stone lintel of the pedimented entrance portico. Inscribed in the concrete tympanum is "1908 Minor Block." A Palladian wood window is located on the uppermost story.

The **Slemple Federal Building** (322 Wood Avenue), built in 1912-1913 as a United States Post Office and Courthouse, is an imposing example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style situated on the town's main thoroughfare. The impressive stone building is seven bays long and three stories tall. The ground floor features rusticated stone with horizontal bands and voussoirs over its arched windows. The upper floors feature smooth stone facing with quoins. A Tuscan portico covers three central entrance bays. James Knox Taylor was the Supervising Architect of the United States Department of the Treasury at the time the project began. The project was completed in 1913. The building was individually listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and

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the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 (101-0004). It continues to operate as the town's post office.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, commercial buildings in the district became simpler in both form and articulation. Buildings dating to the 1920s and 1930s tend to incorporate some patterned brickwork on their facades, while later buildings were relatively non-distinct, often with unadorned brick walls. Examples of this minimalist style include the **Earle Theater** (1949) at 509 Wood Avenue and the **Mutual Pharmacy** (1951) at 314 Wood Avenue. One exception is the 1940s Art Deco design of the **ABC store** at 18 E. Fourth Street. This one-story building is faced with cast-concrete panels and fluted end pilasters in the standard design for ABC stores dating to this period in Virginia.

As the automobile became the preferred mode of transportation for many in the 1920s, the district came to include a number of buildings related to automobile sales and service. **Lonesome Pine Motors** (504 Shawnee Avenue) was built in the 1920s and **Stonega Garage** (320 Shawnee Avenue) was built in the 1930s. Both buildings are brick with terracotta coping along their parapets. **Stonega Garage** was built for the Stonega Coal and Coke Company and is architecturally distinctive with a stepped parapet, recessed brick panels, and corbelled brick cornice. The porte-cochere on the front elevation features square brick piers with concrete caps, crenellated parapet walls, and a cast-concrete, dentil-block cornice.

In 1940, the **Tri-State Coach Bus Terminal** was built on East Fifth Street. The Moderne-style building features smooth, rounded surfaces and glass block windows. The two-story building is significant for its size and Modern Movement design. Its front elevation is comprised of three distinct shapes: the rectangular main terminal; a slightly protruding central clock tower pavilion that extends above the main roof; and a semicircular side wing. This side wing features curvilinear glass block windows on both stories. A terrazzo "TS" emblem for the Tri-State Coach Company accents the floor of the recessed front entrance. Robert Edens operated the bus station for the Tri-State Coach Company. The Liberty Café historically occupied the curved section at the south end of the bus station.

The building at 306 Wood Avenue, currently occupied by Big Stone Gap Visitor's Center, was built c. 1950 as a **Gulf Service Station**. This service station shows the influence of the Modern Movement on gas station forms, with its large glass display windows, exposed steel frame, flat roofs, and canopies. The flat oblong box features two projecting canopies, resting on metal poles, which extend over the display and sales room to two detached islands with gas pumps. The large glass display windows of the sales room are canted at an angle. Adjacent to the sales room are two service bays. A tall pylon sign extends above the otherwise flat roof. Milton Paul Robelot, an architect based in Kingsport, Tennessee, most likely designed the building. According to *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955*, Robelot designed a Super Service Station in Big Stone Gap in 1950.¹

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Integrity Analysis

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District, with its collection of early to mid-twentieth century commercial buildings, continues to convey its historic and architectural significance as the commercial center of the emerging coal and iron-ore industries in Wise County. The district encompasses 43 buildings, of which 39 are primary resources and four are secondary resources. Of the total resources, 29 are contributing and 14 are non-contributing. The district retains the visual qualities necessary to meet the National Register eligibility requirements regarding historic integrity. As with most evolved commercial areas over one hundred years old, there are some instances of storefront remodeling, replacement doors and windows, and use of contemporary cladding materials. Even with these changes, the resources continue to convey their historic functions, as well as the design values, workmanship, and materials that reflect the time and place in which they were built. There are several examples of high-style architecture throughout the district, including the Slemper Federal Building, which was designed by the Architect of the Treasury in 1911. The non-contributing resources include buildings that date after the district's period of significance, as well as several buildings covered by false fronts that no longer retain the visual quality necessary to convey historic or architectural association with the district's areas of significance. The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District as a whole retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

INVENTORY

The following inventory lists the resources within the Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District. It is organized alphabetically by street name and then numerically by street number. Each entry provides the address, date of construction, architectural style, current building use, VDHR File number, and the contributing status within the district. Whether a building is considered contributing or non-contributing was determined based on its integrity as it supports the historic district's significance under Criterion A (Commerce and Industry) and/or Criterion C (Architecture) during the district's Period of Significance (ca. 1900 - 1968). Resources are keyed to the attached Sketch Map/Photo Key by the last four digits of their inventory number (0001, 0002, etc.).

EAST FIFTH STREET

North 11 East Fifth Street **101-5002-0004** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, 2017
Non-contributing Total: 1

North 14 East Fifth Street **101-5002-0005** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1975
Non-contributing Total: 1

North 17 East Fifth Street **101-5002-0006** *Other DHR Id#:*

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Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930

Contributing Total: 1

North 21 East Fifth Street 101-5002-0007 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930

Contributing Total: 1

North 6 East Fifth Street 101-5002-0003 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1940

Non-contributing Total: 1

South 20 East Fifth Street 101-0006 Other DHR Id#: 101-5002-0009

Primary Resource: Bus Station (Building), Stories 2, Style: Moderne, Ca 1930

Contributing Total: 1

South 3-11 East Fifth Street 101-5002-0008 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950

Contributing Total: 1

EAST FOURTH STREET

South 18 East Fourth Street 101-5002-0002 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940

Contributing Total: 1

EAST THIRD STREET

North 17 East Third Street 101-5002-0001 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Single Dwelling (Building), Stories 2, Style: Queen Anne, Ca 1918

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Quonset Hut (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

SHAWNEE AVENUE

East 504 Shawnee Ave 101-5002-0039 Other DHR Id#:

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Primary Resource: Automobile Showroom (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1920

Contributing Total: 1

East 320 Shawnee Avenue 101-0020 *Other DHR Id#: 101-5002-0038*
Primary Resource: Service Station (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930

Contributing Total: 1

WOOD AVENUE

East 215 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0010 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1915

Contributing Total: 1

East 219 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0011 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, 1965

Contributing Total: 1

East 224 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0012 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1950

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Other (Building)

Contributing Total: 1

East 301 Wood Avenue 101-0021 *Other DHR Id#: 101-5002-0013*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2.5, Style: Colonial Revival, Ca 1908

Contributing Total: 1

East 306 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0014 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Service Station (Building), Stories 1, Style: Modernist, Ca 1950

Contributing Total: 1

East 309 Wood Ave 101-5002-0015 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1970

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 311 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0016 *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 3, Style: No discernible style,

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Ca 1980

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 313 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0017** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950

Contributing Total: 1

East 314 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0018** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1952

Contributing Total: 1

East 315 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0019** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1950

Contributing Total: 1

East 317 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0020** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 321 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0021** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1950

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 322 Wood Avenue **101-0004** *Other DHR Id#: 101-5002-0022*
Primary Resource: Post Office (Building), Stories 3, Style: Italian Renaissance Revival, Ca 1911

Contributing Total: 1

East 323 Wood Ave **101-5002-0023** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1950

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 325 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0024** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: No discernible style, Ca 1950

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 401 Wood Avenue **101-5002-0025** *Other DHR Id#:*
Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1940

Contributing Total: 1

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Secondary Resource: Commercial Building (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 402 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0026 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1900

Contributing Total: 1

East 404 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0027 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 3, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1918

Contributing Total: 1

East 405 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0028 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1933

Contributing Total: 1

Secondary Resource: Shed (Building)

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 406 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0029 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1918

Contributing Total: 1

East 408 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0030 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1910

Contributing Total: 1

East 415 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0031 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1930

Contributing Total: 1

East 417 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0032 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 1, Style: Commercial Style, 2016

Non-contributing Total: 1

East 419 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0033 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca 1910

Contributing Total: 1

East 507 Wood Avenue 101-5002-0034 Other DHR Id#:

Primary Resource: Commercial Building (Building), Stories 2, Style: Commercial Style, Ca

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1900 - 1968

Significant Dates

1908

1912

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Robelot, Milton Paul

Taylor, James Knox

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District in Wise County, Virginia, is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Community Planning and Development. The district comprises the historic business center of the Town of Big Stone Gap, a boomtown that flourished from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century as the center of the emerging coal and iron-ore industries in Wise County. The Big Stone Gap Improvement Company laid out the town according to a plan in the 1880s, setting it apart from other mountain towns in the region that developed in a more haphazard manner. The Stonega Coke and Coal Company, a pioneer in coal production in Southwest Virginia and the largest producer in its territory, built its headquarters in Big Stone Gap in 1908, further elevating the prominence of the town. Coal continued to be the major local industry throughout the mid-twentieth century, stimulating additional commercial development in town to support the growing industry and its employees. The historic district is also locally significant under Criterion C for its architecture, which ranges from architecturally significant individual buildings, such as the 1912 Slemper Federal Building (NRHP 1975), to vernacular commercial buildings constructed from 1900 to the mid-twentieth century, which are collectively significant as a distinguishable entity. The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District's period of significance extends from 1900, the date of the earliest extant building, to 1968, encompassing the traditional fifty-year end date for districts where significant activities continued into the more recent past, as Big Stone Gap continues to serve as the principal commercial and governmental center for the region.

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

Justification of Criteria

Criterion A: Commerce

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Commerce, as it has served as the commercial center to the town and surrounding region from its establishment in 1882 (initially known as Mineral City) to the present. With the promotion of the rich natural resources of the region in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, developers and coal companies located their headquarters and offices in the town. Big Stone Gap grew and became the commercial center for its residents as well as the surrounding region with its numerous workers associated with the coal and timber industries. A business district developed with hotels, banks, lawyers' offices, the local newspaper, retail stores, and service providers locating primarily along Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street. The construction of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in 1912 further established Big Stone Gap as an important center of business, government, and social activity in the region. Although the economy of Big Stone Gap has fluctuated over the years with the rise and fall of associated industries, the construction of new commercial and office buildings – such as the 1949 Earle Theater (509 Wood Avenue), the 1952 Botts Drug and Variety Store (314 Wood Avenue), and the large addition to the Minor Building that was completed in 1970 and is known as the Luke

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Building (301 Wood Avenue) – demonstrate Big Stone Gap’s continued role as a commercial center through the mid-twentieth century.

Criterion A: Community Planning & Development

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District is also significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development because the town was laid out and built according to a gridiron plan by the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company under the leadership of General Rufus Ayers. This planned approach to developing the town, which intentionally aligned the main thoroughfare of Wood Avenue with a view of the gap in the Stone Mountains for which the town is named, differed from the informal way most other mountain towns in the region developed. Ayers, a successful lawyer and land speculator, served as the Virginia Coal and Iron Company’s director in Big Stone Gap from 1893 to 1910 and played a pivotal role in the promotion and development of the town. Ayers and other early developers were optimistic about the burgeoning town, envisioning streetlights, parkland, a water works, an interstate railroad tunnel, wild game preserve, and a 300-room hotel.² To attract industries and investors, the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company sponsored the publication of a promotional pamphlet in 1890 by John Procter, Director of the Geological Survey of Kentucky. As a result, land speculators rushed to Big Stone Gap to purchase lots at skyrocketing prices at auctions organized by the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company. While not all of the improvements envisioned by Ayers and other early developers were realized, the town retains its original grid pattern of streets that aligns Wood Avenue with the mountain gap in the distance.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its collection of commercial and governmental buildings dating from ca. 1900 to present that represent the continuous development of the town from the turn-of-the-twentieth-century through today. The functions of these buildings—which include offices for the local industries, doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, as well as retail stores, a federal post office and courthouse, a movie theater, hotel, bus terminal, automobile dealerships, and gas stations—depict the full complement of activities that made Big Stone Gap the commercial center for the surrounding region. Architecturally, the buildings reflect the growth of the town over time as the varying styles, construction techniques, and materials, reflect the time in which they were built. Early twentieth-century office buildings range from small, two-story, vernacular office buildings with decorative cornices of metal or corbelled brick to the larger corporate Minor Building built in 1908 in the Colonial Revival style for the Stonega Coal and Coke Company. The 1912 Slep Federal Building (NRHP 1975), designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style by Architect of the Treasury James P. Knox Taylor to house the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, is the largest and most architecturally significant building in the district. Later buildings designed in the Art Deco and Moderne styles—such as the ABC Store and the Tri-State Coach Bus Terminal, both dating to the 1940s, and the ca. 1950 Gulf Service Station—reflect the continued vitality of Big Stone Gap into the mid-twentieth century. Although the functions and styles of the commercial buildings vary, general commonalities such as relatively small scale, masonry construction, primarily flat roofs, and uniform setbacks give the district a cohesive visual character.

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Historical Background

Early History and the Discovery of Coal

The vast natural resources of Southwest Virginia led to the development of Big Stone Gap in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The first European colonists discovered the wealth of coal, iron, and timber in the region during an exploratory expedition from 1748 to 1759. The explorers called the area “Big Stone Gap” as it was located in the gap between the Stone Mountains. Initially, the difficulty of the swampy and rocky terrain, as well as the prevalence of conflict with Native American tribes in the area, deterred colonists from permanently inhabiting the Gap, at least for a time. Over the next century, settlers slowly started to build houses, farm the land, and form a small community. By the late eighteenth century, the community came to be known as Three Forks, named for the three tributaries of the Powell River that converged nearby.³ Many of the European immigrants who settled the area were of Scottish or Scots-Irish descent; known for their independence, they brought with them the necessary skills to thrive on limited resources and rugged environments in western Virginia.

On February 16, 1856, the Virginia Legislature passed a bill to create Wise County, which at the time comprised approximately 800 square miles.⁴ By the late 1870s, three farming families owned most of the land in the county: the Gilleys, Hortons, and Flanarys. Neither county landowners nor outsiders had much interest in mining the area’s vast reserves of iron and coal until General J.D. Imboden presented the untapped potential of the area to coal industry men in Pittsburgh during the winter of 1879-1880, touting the area as the potential “Pittsburgh of the South.” From Augusta County, Imboden was a successful lawyer and state politician before serving as a general in the Confederate Army. During his time as a Confederate officer, Imboden observed the untouched natural wealth of southwestern Virginia and became a chief promoter of “extracting the vast timber and mineral deposits of the southern Appalachian Mountains.”⁵ He conceived the region as becoming one of the leading iron-producing areas in the country due to its abundance of both coal and iron. The announcement of the coming of the South Atlantic & Ohio Railroad, combined with Imboden’s promotional efforts, inspired northern businessmen to form the Tinsalia Coal and Iron Company and invest in the region. In 1880, as an agent for the Tinsalia Coal and Iron Company, Imboden purchased an immense amount of acreage in Wise County for less than one dollar per acre.⁶ Over the course of the following months, the Tinsalia Company acquired mineral rights to over 40,000 acres and a controlling share in the railroad being built from Bristol, Tennessee into Wise County.

In 1882, the town was chartered as Mineral City and Elkanah Gilley became the first mayor and postmaster.⁷ That same year, one of the owners of the Tinsalia Coal and Iron Company, Edward K. Hyndman, bought out the others and merged his holdings with several other capitalists from the Pennsylvania coal region. Along with Judge John Leisenring, John S. Wentz, George S. Wentz, and John D. Bullitt, Hyndman formed the Virginia Coal and Iron Company.⁸ The Virginia Coal and Iron Company (VCI) acquired the land of the Tinsalia Company and some additional land, totaling approximately 70,000 acres in addition to control of the unfinished

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railroad between Bristol and Mineral City.⁹ Mineral City's population began to grow as miners and investors were drawn to the economic potential of the budding town.

Economic Boom: 1888-1899

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, both the quantity and quality of the mineral resources in the area attracted investors from nearby Kentucky as well as from the northern United States and Great Britain.¹⁰ By 1890, the name of the town had changed to Big Stone Gap. In June 1890, John K. Taggart moved to Big Stone Gap on behalf of the Virginia Coal and Iron Company to build and manage the Virginia operation. Taggart possessed a range of interests and skills combining engineering and title work experience with strong interpersonal skills. In Wise County, Taggart oversaw VCI's properties, performed surveys, and chose locations for mines and ovens.¹¹ According to Dan Rottenberg, "On August 25, the first batch of local coal was cooked into coke. Taggart was astonished by the result: The coke burned in his first oven, he reported, was the best he had ever seen—remarkably strong, with a bright metallic luster and unusual cell space, and clearly superior to the Connellsville coke, which had previously set the standard for the industry."¹² Local subsistence farmers supplied the labor in the coal mines as the coal companies lured them to the coal camps through the provision of steady work, improved housing, and proximity to neighbors and other amenities not found in the rural landscape.¹³ Many European immigrants and displaced African American workers migrated to the coal camps of the purported "Pittsburgh of the South" by train to work in the mining, timber, and railroad trades, as well. According to the 1900 census and marriage records, these laborers formed the foundation of Big Stone Gap's economy.

By 1891, several lumber mills in town were successfully producing materials for shipment out of the region as well as for local construction.¹⁴ The South Atlantic & Ohio Railroad and Louisville & Nashville Railroad both arrived in Wise County in 1891 as well.¹⁵ The development of the local railroad and lumber industries during this time propelled the county into even greater wealth as the railroad, lumber and mining operations encompassed a cyclical business structure, as the coal camps relied on lumber for construction purposes and the railroad was needed to transport the mineral resources to the national markets.¹⁶ For the most part, the same men who owned the coal companies and had significant shares in the railroads also owned much of the forest acreage in the region. Therefore a small group of men, mainly outsiders from the American northeast and from Great Britain, owned most of the area's wealth.¹⁷

As the local economy boomed due to the arrival of the railroads and the production of high-quality coke, the out-of-town investors soon recognized the need for developers to live near their investments to further the town's progress. General Rufus Ayers, one of these "in residence" developers, played a formative role in the growth and development of Big Stone Gap. A successful lawyer and land speculator, Ayers served as the Virginia Coal and Iron Company's director from 1893 to 1910. Ayers played an instrumental role in chartering the South Atlantic & Ohio Railroad Company to lay tracks to the Gap. Ayers organized and presided over the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company, which helped build the town according to a gridiron plan. This planned approach differed from the informal way most other mountain towns in the region

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developed. Land speculators rushed to Big Stone Gap to purchase lots at skyrocketing prices at auctions organized by the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company.

Ayers and the other early developers were optimistic about the burgeoning town, envisioning streetlights, parkland, a water works, an interstate railroad tunnel, wild game preserve, and a 300-room hotel.¹⁸ The Big Stone Gap Improvement Company sponsored the publication of a promotional pamphlet by John Procter, Director of the Geological Survey of Kentucky, to capture the optimistic spirit of the early developers. As Procter writes in the 1890 promotional pamphlet, "Big Stone Gap combines in a preeminent degree the advantages of a commercial and industrial centre with those of a health and pleasure resort."¹⁹ In addition to his own observations, Procter included selections from other news publications about the attractiveness of the town of Big Stone Gap and its surrounding area. An excerpt from a visit to Big Stone Gap by Charles Dudley Warner in the January 1889 edition of "Harper's Monthly" states, "It is indeed a delightful region; but however one may be charmed by its natural beauty, he cannot spend a day at Big Stone Gap without being infected with the great enterprises brooding there."²⁰ Extractions from the May 15, 1890, edition of the "Big Stone Gap Herald" announce the grand plans for two furnaces, the erection of an electric plant by the Thompson-Houston Lighting Company of Boston and the production of a waterworks system by the Glamorgan Iron Company, of Lynchburg.²¹ The hotel was a highly-anticipated improvement as it was reported that an unnamed architectural firm from Boston had already been contracted to construct "one of the most elaborate and beautiful buildings in America."²² It was to be constructed of concrete and feature modern amenities. However, it was the interstate tunnel through Big Black Mountain that was heralded to be the most important improvement in the town's development. It was to connect Kentucky and Virginia and expected to cost \$2,500,000.²³ The wild game preserve was to be comprised of 3,000 acres with "a large, rambling clubhouse, of the Swiss style of architecture, rustic without and elegant within, which will be an attractive resort for tourists from all over America."²⁴ A railroad dummy line would provide transportation from the preserve to town.

By 1890, the town had returned to its original name, Big Stone Gap. From 1888-1891 the town prospered as the coal business boomed. According to the 1890 U.S. Census, Wise County had a population of about 9,345 residents. The 1900 U.S. Census recorded a population of 19,653. The county's population more than doubled during the 1890s. The 1900 census also recorded 50 manufacturing organizations and 12 mining operations.²⁵ Business was growing in downtown Big Stone Gap as well, with two hotels (the Central and the Intermont), a mercantile, blacksmith, and a jeweler, springing up along Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street to support the growing population and wealth in the area. In 1890, the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company brought the successful newspaper editor, Col. C.E. Sears, from Louisville, Kentucky, to establish the *Big Stone Gap Post*. This newspaper would become the longest running business in town. Sears, viewed by locals as a "big city editor", was recruited by the town's leaders to record the town's economic boom and promote its attractions to prospective residents and businesses. As Sears wrote in his first editorial:

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The paper is established primarily to advertise the material resources of the Appalachian District; to show to the country that BSG possesses paramount advantages over all other locations as a manufacturing and distributing point, and that it must become the center of the great industrial movement of the South, which is now attracting so much attention abroad as well as at home.²⁶

The hotels in town were packed with men flocking to Big Stone Gap to participate in the land auctions and capitalize on the area's wealth. Since most railroad tracks were laid to transport coal out of the region and did not provide passenger service to Big Stone Gap, Rufus Ayers developed the Big Stone Gap and Powell Valley Railroad. Known locally as "the Dummy Line", this railroad ran along a one-mile track that transported people and freight between the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and South Atlantic & Ohio Railroad depots. The car resembled a trolley and children rode it to and from school. The track ran along Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street, the heart of Big Stone Gap's downtown where many businesses had located during the economic boom.²⁷ By May of 1893, Big Stone Gap had developed into the business core for a number of southwestern Virginia industries, including Virginia Coal and Iron Company, Powells River Coal and Iron, Big Stone Gap and Powells Valley Railroad Company, Daisy Iron and Mining Company, Interstate Investment Company, and the General Ram Company along with many others.²⁸

A nationwide economic depression ended the first coal boom in 1892. Many of the lots the local developers platted were never developed and over-speculation was a pervasive problem. Another blow to the economy occurred as many English capitalists ceased investing in the region's railroads, iron furnaces, and other enterprises. This caused many northern speculators to withdraw their financial support as the railroads established Norton—a community about 10 miles east— instead of Big Stone Gap, as their terminus.²⁹ The early developers' grand plans for the interstate railroad tunnel, wild game preserve, and 300-room hotel were never realized. However, the economy recovered and "by 1896, VCI was producing over 7,000 tons of coal per month and operating five hundred coking ovens."³⁰ In 1898, the Virginia Tanning and Extract Co. was constructed for Rufus Ayers. Only a year later, Ayers expanded this facility and in 1900, the tannery was purchased by the United States Leather Co.³¹ By the end of the century, Wise County had surpassed Tazewell County in total annual coal production. For the next 25 years, Wise County produced 50-60 percent of coal mined in Virginia.

Steady Growth: 1900-1939

By the turn of the twentieth century, the town's economy had rebounded and a smaller economic boom was taking place. The coal, timber, and iron industries continued to capitalize on the abundance of natural resources in the area. Big Stone Gap's population steadily grew from 1900 to 1950. Between 1900 and 1910, the population grew by 60 percent with a population increase from 1,617 to 2,590 residents. The next decade the population increased to 3,000. By 1940, the town's population had grown to 4,331 residents, and in 1950, the population peaked at 5,175.³² Many businesses were constructed in the downtown commercial district between 1900 and 1939. The town's major investor, Rufus Ayers, located his offices downtown in the building at 402 Wood Avenue East around 1900. New developers in town, such as the general manager of VCI,

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Ted Wentz, also moved to the area to usher in this new period of prosperity. Wentz established the headquarters for VCI, which had been renamed Stonega Coke and Coal Company in 1902, downtown at 301 Wood Avenue East in 1908. As these local leaders moved downtown, merchants, lawyers, bankers, land speculators, and other professionals followed.³³ The downtown business district expanded, particularly around Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street, where both the Hotel Eugene and Goodloe Brothers Store were constructed.³⁴

In 1902, a major shift occurred in the coal industry with the incorporation of the Stonega Coke and Coal Company. The company acquired the mine and coke oven operations created by the Virginia Coal and Iron Company. Stonega also absorbed both the Keokeex Consolidated Coke Company and the Imboden Coal and Coke Company. The Stonega Coke and Coal Company became the most significant founder of company towns in Southwest Virginia. New coal camps sprang up in Osaka in 1902, Roda in 1903, and Arno in 1908.³⁵ In 1908, the Minor Building (301 Wood Avenue) was constructed in Big Stone Gap as the headquarters of the Stonega Coke and Coal Company. The building's third floor housed the Stonega Coke and Coal chemical and engineering departments while the first and second floors were used as office space.³⁶ Executives, secretaries, engineers, and bookkeepers all worked in the building. Stonega spent vast sums of money to develop its properties. In 1910, Stonega implemented an improvement program, which included the construction of new mines and towns, the mechanization of mines and coke production as well as the restoration of tipples, dwellings and other structures.³⁷ This program was well timed as when World War I began, coal prices rose rapidly and Stonega was well-positioned to capitalize on the boom. According to Ed Wolfe, "Coal production soared from slightly more than a half million tons in 1902 to over three million tons in 1918."³⁸ By 1920, almost half of all the coal miners employed in the state lived and worked in Wise County.³⁹

In 1907, a fire destroyed almost an entire block of buildings along Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street. The Hotel Eugene, the J.W. Kelly Building, and the Goodloe Brothers Buildings were all lost in the flames. The Ayers Building (402 Wood Avenue) was the only building on the block to survive. New businesses moved into the new brick buildings constructed in the wake of the fire. Powell Valley Light and Power Co, Kelly Irvine Co., Intermont Coal and Iron Company, and D.C. Wolfe's dry goods store all operated out of these newly constructed commercial buildings. The three-story building at 404 Wood Avenue functioned as the Mutual Pharmacy on the first floor, office space on the second floor, and a Masonic Lodge on the third floor.⁴⁰ The Monte Vista Hotel was built in 1909 to replace the Hotel Eugene.

Most of the growth during the 1910s focused around the 400 and 500 blocks of Wood Avenue. However, a few significant buildings were constructed further down the street. In 1912, the Big Stone Gap Post Office and Courthouse (322 Wood Avenue) was constructed, signaling the growing significance of the town. The building's architect was James Knox Taylor, the U.S. Architect of the Treasury, although the building was completed under the supervision of his successor, Oscar Wendcraft. The high-style Renaissance Revival architecture of the building along with its imposing form and architectural detail demonstrate the wealth of the area, specifically the town of Big Stone Gap, during this period of growth. Upon its completion, the town court and post offices were relocated from the Ayers Building. Around 1915, the federal

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court moved out of Big Stone Gap, however, the post office remained.⁴¹ In 1915, the Wise Printing Company building was constructed at 215 Wood Avenue for the *Big Stone Gap Post*. This building is significant in that it housed the town's longest running business for over a century, from 1915 to 2018.

Downtown growth continued through the 1920s, with new businesses emerging to support the local coal industry and the emerging automobile industry. As the new merchant class working downtown grew, the automobile became not only a convenient means of transportation, but a symbol of wealth as well. This merchant class could drive themselves to and from their places of business in the downtown commercial district. The need for an automobile also distinguished the business class from the labor-class coal miners who lived in the coal camps outside of town and did not need, nor could afford, an automobile. The Lonesome Pine Motor Company was built at 520 Shawnee Avenue ca. 1920 as an automobile showroom and the Stonega Garage was built at 320 Shawnee Avenue ca. 1930 to service Stonega Coal and Coke Company vehicles. As the automobile became the preferred mode of transportation in town, the need for the Dummy Line waned. In 1919, the Dummy Line ceased running, the tracks were removed, and the streets paved.⁴² In 1930, the Tri-State Coach Bus Station was constructed at East Fifth Street. By then, the Great Depression had set in and Big Stone Gap did not escape the financial disaster. The local banks failed, developers' investments vanished, many laborers lost their jobs, and the town's second coal boom abruptly ended.⁴³ Downtown growth remained stagnant throughout the 1930s, but would see considerable growth during the following decades.

Downtown Expansion: 1940 - 1968

A period of impressive downtown growth began in the 1940s and continued through the 1960s. The onset of World War II brought increased production and wealth to the coal industry. Throughout the mid-1940s through 1950s, production ebbed and flowed with corresponding boom and bust times in the regional economy.⁴⁴ Many new commercial establishments were built along Wood Avenue and its side streets during this period. The Gulf Service Station was constructed ca. 1950. Likely designed by architect Milton Paul Robelot, this building demonstrates the national trend of the Modern movement influencing gas station designs. Another service station was constructed at 6 E. Fifth Street during this period as well, demonstrating the influence of the automobile on the downtown business district of Big Stone Gap. The Earle Theater (509 Wood Avenue), constructed in 1949 and operated by Earle Mullins of Norton, provided a popular place for locals to socialize and watch the latest movies. During this period, the 300 block of Wood Avenue was developed with new commercial buildings mostly one-story in height. In 1952, the Botts Drug and Variety Store (most recently the Mutual Pharmacy) was constructed at 314 Wood Avenue. The local Botts family originally operated this business. The patriarch, Dr. Botts, had his offices on the first floor and lived with his wife in the rear apartment on the second floor. One of their sons, William Botts Jr., worked as a pharmacist in the first floor general drugstore while another son, Stanley Botts, had his law office on the second floor. A popular lunch counter was also located on the first floor. More recently, this building, and more specifically its lunch counter, was made famous in the 2014 movie, *Big Stone Gap*. The Art Deco-influenced ABC Store (18 E. Fourth Street) was built ca. 1940 and continues its historic use into the present. Other buildings constructed during this period housed businesses

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such as Riley's Coffee Shop (321 Wood Avenue), Mike's Department Store (323 Wood Avenue), the Old Dominion Electric Company (224 Wood Avenue), and a barbershop (3-11 E. Fifth Street).

The mechanization of the coal industry left many miners out of work, and the coal camps were quickly vacated.⁴⁵ In the early 1950s, a machine that fully mechanized the mining process by both cutting and loading coal was introduced to the Wise County mines. By the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of laborers in the mines had left the area, and Stonega Coke and Coal began demolishing many buildings in the camps.⁴⁶ The town's population decreased from 5,175 residents in 1950 to 4,688 in 1960. This was Big Stone Gap's first recorded population decrease of the twentieth century. Development downtown slowed after 1960, with only one building constructed between 1960 and 1969 (219 Wood Avenue). In 1964, Stonega Coke and Coal Company merged with Westmoreland Coal Company under the leadership of E.B. Leisenring Jr. Westmoreland Coal, established in Pennsylvania in 1854, is the oldest surviving coal company in the nation.⁴⁷ Since 1929, both Westmoreland and Stonega were under common management. The purpose of the merger was to generate economies of scale and further modernization of the coal operations in the region.⁴⁸ By 1968, Westmoreland had become the largest coal exporter in the United States.⁴⁹ After the merger, the coal company continued to expand in Big Stone Gap, renaming the Wise County operations the "Stonega Division."⁵⁰

1969 - Present

Westmoreland constructed a large addition to the Minor Building in 1970, called the Luke Building. The firm also remodeled the adjacent Trail Theater post-1970 for company use. The Arab oil embargo in 1973 increased demand for Westmoreland's coal, and the company thrived. However, according to Ed Wolfe, "dwindling coal reserves, increased labor costs, increased medical costs and foreign competition doomed the company's long term survival."⁵¹ In 1977, Congress passed the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act, which strengthened the rights of miners and improved health and safety, leading to a steep drop in mining fatalities within just three years. The law also created the Mine Safety and Health Administration and established the independent Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission to provide for independent review of the majority of MSHA's enforcement actions. Between 1977 and 1980, 40 percent of surface mining in Southwest Virginia shut down and Westmoreland laid off 30 percent of its employees.⁵² Over the next decade and a half, business declined in part due to competition from coal producers outside the U.S. In 1994, Westmoreland declared bankruptcy and shut down operations in the eastern region, choosing to focus on western strip mines.⁵³ In 1995, the company shut down its Virginia division, closing its Big Stone Gap office complex on Wood Avenue. An estimated \$25 million in annual payroll was lost, and many jobs at ancillary local businesses were threatened.⁵⁴ The legacy of the once-burgeoning Wise County coal industry lives on in Big Stone Gap, even as the town tries to reinvent itself in the twenty-first century. Today, the town is known for its varied cultural attractions, such as the Southwest Virginia Museum, the John Fox Jr. Museum, and the Harry W. Meador Coal Museum. One of the biggest tourist attractions in town is the outdoor play, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, which has been performed every summer since 1964. Adapted from the 1908 novel written by Big Stone Gap resident John Fox Jr., it is the longest continually running outdoor drama in Virginia.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR File No. 101-5002

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 10.68 acres (approx.)

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

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- | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. NW Corner | Latitude: 36.866653° | Longitude: -82.777096° |
| 2. NE Corner | Latitude: 36.868677° | Longitude: -82.774602° |
| 3. SE Corner | Latitude: 36.867165° | Longitude: -82.773323° |
| 4. SW Corner | Latitude: 36.865778° | Longitude: -82.775726° |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

The true and correct historic boundaries are shown on the attached Sketch Map/Photo Key. The boundaries encompass the downtown commercial district of Big Stone Gap that contains the greatest concentration of historic-age resources. Wood Avenue (US Route 58 Alternate) is the main artery through the district, running northeast to southwest. Cross streets include East Fifth Street (US Route 23), East Fourth Street, and East Third Street. Shawnee Avenue bounds the district to the north and Clinton Avenue bounds the district to the south.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District comprises approximately four blocks of commercial properties laid out in the original grid pattern designed by the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company. The boundaries include all known properties that contribute to the historic commercial core of the town. Southwest of the downtown district is a historic residential area Northeast of the district is a smaller historic neighborhood. While commercial development continues beyond the boundaries north of the district on Wood Avenue and east of the district on East 5th Street, these areas were not included in the historic boundaries due to a lack of visual continuity with the historic district and the most recent construction dates of the buildings.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Katherine Gutshall, Kate Kronau, Alison Blanton
organization: Hill Studio, PC

Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District
Name of Property

Wise County, VA
County and State

street & number: 120 Campbell Avenue SW
city or town: Roanoke state: Virginia zip code: 24011
e-mail: kgutshall@hillstudio.com
telephone: 540-342-5263
date: August 2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District
City or Vicinity: Big Stone Gap (Town)
State: Virginia
Photographer: Katie Gutshall
Date Photographed: October 2017

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

Photo 1 of 14: 224, 219 & 215 Wood Avenue East, view NW

Photo 2 of 14: 300 Block of Wood Avenue East, view NE

Photo 3 of 14: 301 Wood Avenue East, view N/NW

Photo 4 of 14: 306 Wood Avenue East, view SE

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County and State

Photo 5 of 14: 322 & 401 Wood Avenue East, view E/SE

Photo 6 of 14: 400 Block of Wood Avenue East, view SW

Photo 7 of 14: 400 Block of Wood Avenue East, view W/SW

Photo 8 of 14: 500 Block of Wood Avenue East, view NW

Photo 9 of 14: 17 & 21 E. Fifth Street North, view W/NW

Photo 10 of 14: 504 Shawnee Avenue East, view east

Photo 11 of 14: 320 Shawnee Avenue East, view E/NE

Photo 12 of 14: 3-11 & 20 E. Fifth Street South, view SE

Photo 13 of 14: 20 E. Fifth Street South, view NE

Photo 14 of 14: 18 E. Fourth Street South, view NE

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

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

ENDNOTES

¹ John E, Wells and Robert E Dalton. *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*.

² Ewing, 9

³ Wise County Historical Society, *The Heritage of Wise County and the City of Norton*, 28

⁴ Tolson, 12

⁵ Ibid, 13

⁶ Sharon Ewing, *Images of America*, 8-9

⁷ *The Heritage of Wise County and the City of Norton*, 28

⁸ Tolson, 14

⁹ Dan Rottenberg, *In the Kingdom of Coal*, 63

¹⁰ Patricia Hickin, *Seat of Empire!*, 25

¹¹ Rottenberg, 104

¹² Ibid, 105

¹³ Tolson, 16

¹⁴ James Bolling, "Timber attracts industry to the area," *A mirror to the past...A promise for the future*.

Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District
Name of Property

Wise County, VA
County and State

-
- 15 Ewing, 16-20
16 Tolson, 13
17 Ibid, 18
18 Ewing, 9
19 Procter, 28
20 Ibid, 31
21 Ibid
22 Ibid
23 Ibid
24 Ibid
25 Tolson, 13
26 Bill Hendrick, "First edition printed in 1890"
27 Tammy Mefford and Laura Brannon, Looking Back: Wise County in the Early Years, 31
28 Bill Hendrick, Big Stone Gap – The Early Years, 39-40
29 Ewing, 9
30 Tolson, 14
31 Bolling
32 Federal Census Data
33 Tolson, 106
34 Ibid, 25-26
35 Worsham, Stonega Historic District
36 Ewing, 46
37 Ed Wolfe, "Coal Camps, Tipples and Mines," 6
38 Ibid, 6
39 Tolson
40 "Fire in 1907 destroyed much of Big Stone Gap," A mirror to the past...A promise for the future.
41 Ewing, 43-45
42 Ibid, 47
43 Ibid, 9
44 Wolfe, 9
45 "Coal Camps of Early Southwest Virginia"
46 Worsham, 38-40
47 Gannaway
48 Wolfe, 9
49 Rottenberg, xvi
50 Wolfe, 9
51 Wolfe, 9
52 Rottenberg, xvi
53 Ibid
54 Jeff Lester, Book Details History of Mining in America



Legend

Digital Location Map

Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District
VDHR ID# 101-5002
Big Stone Gap, Wise County, VA

- 1. NW Corner
Latitude: 36.866653 Longitude: -82.777096
- 2. NE Corner
Latitude: 36.868677 Longitude: -82.774602
- 3. SE Corner
Latitude: 36.867165 Longitude: -82.773323
- 4. SW Corner
Latitude: 36.865778 Longitude: -82.775726

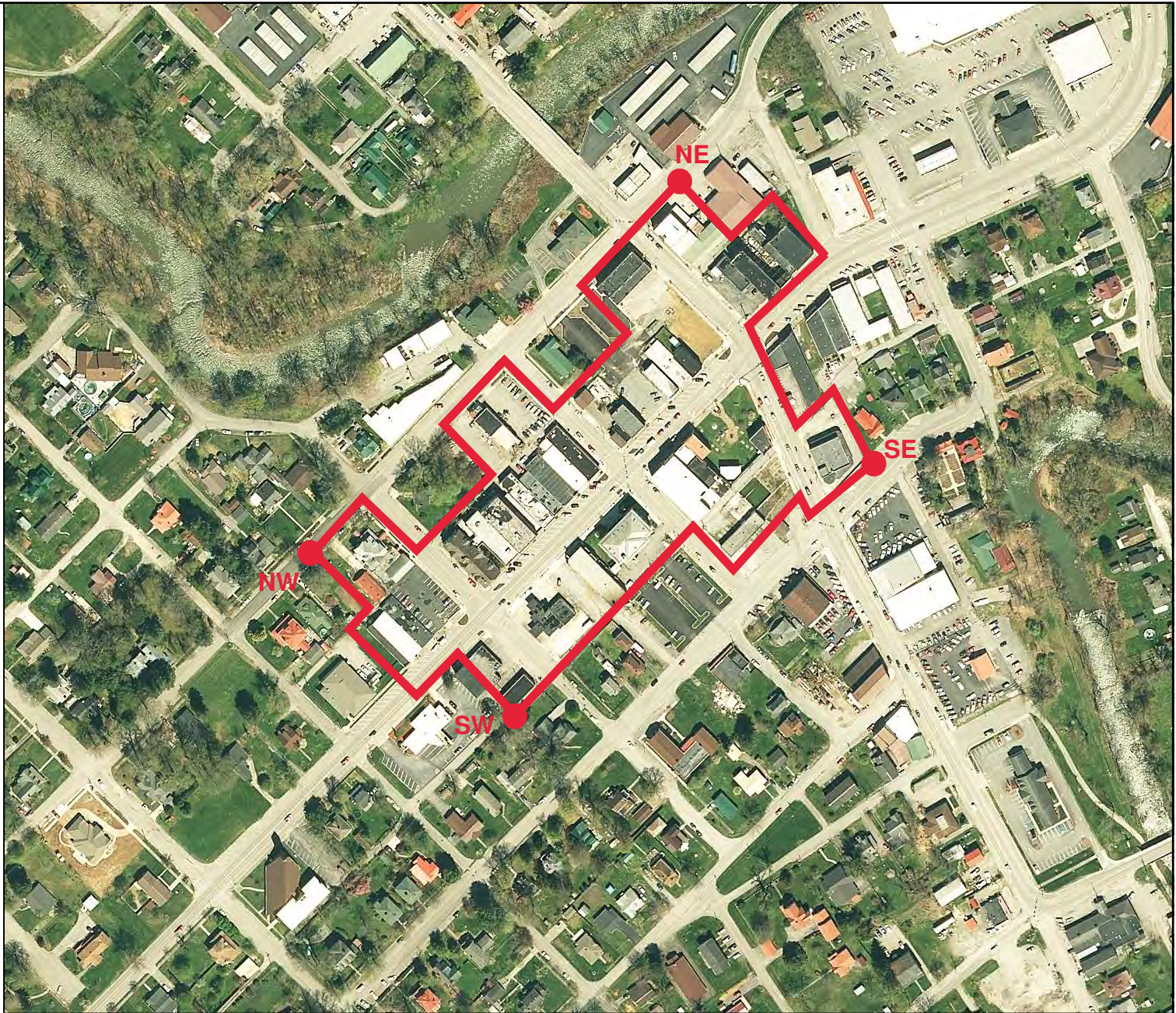
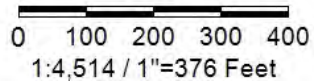
WGS84
Map Source: VCRIS



Historic Boundary



Feet



Title: Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District

Date: 5/4/2018

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

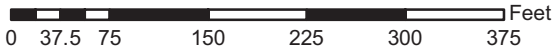
Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

**BIG STONE GAP
DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT**
Wise County, VA;
DHR #101-5002

Legend

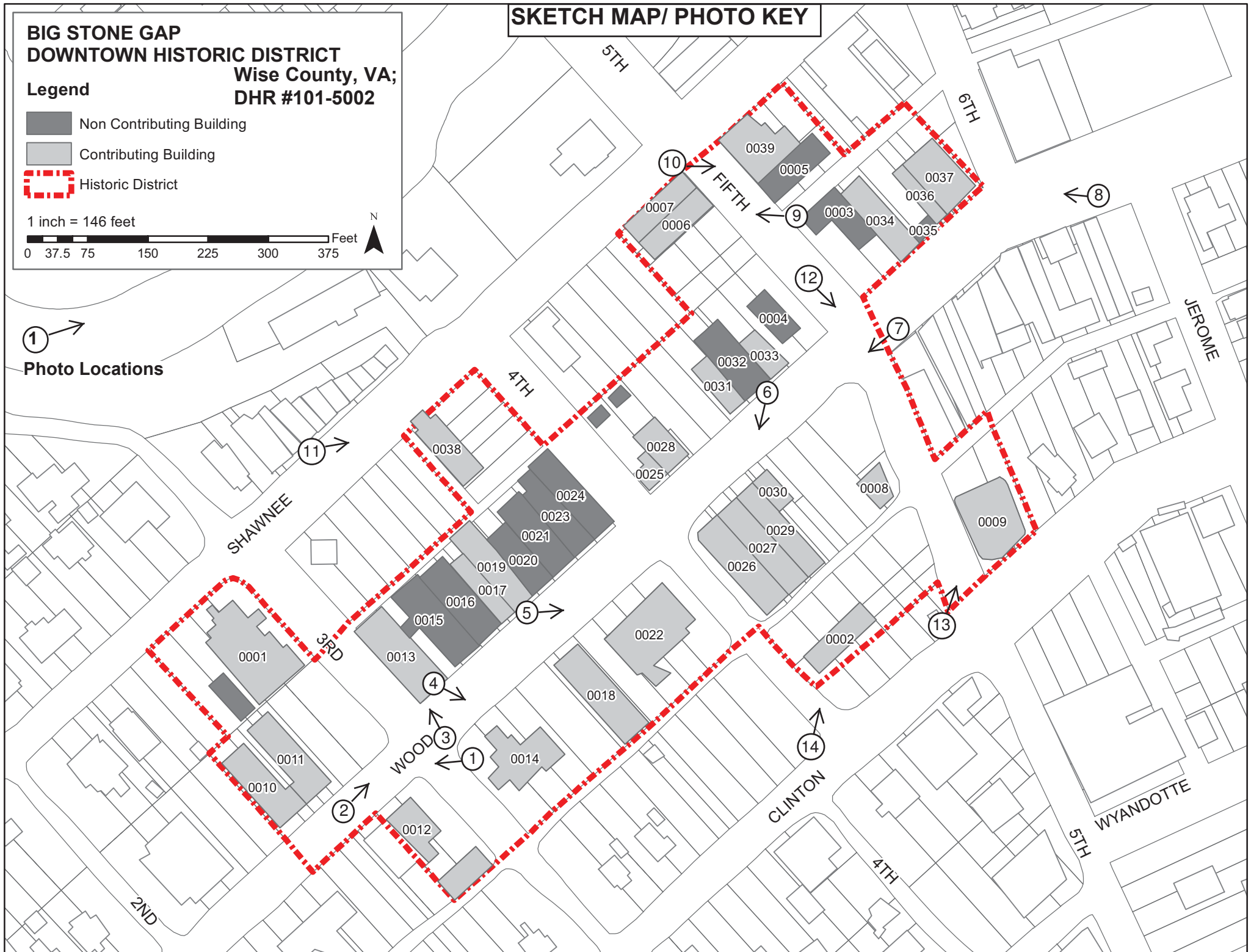
- Non Contributing Building
- Contributing Building
- Historic District

1 inch = 146 feet



SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

1 →
Photo Locations





The Gray & White
270-524-1088

THE GRAY & WHITE







BIG STONE GAP



VISITOR CENTER











th st N

LONESOME PINE MOTOR COMPANY



SHAWNEE

UMWELL

UMWELL

HALL







UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District

Multiple Name: _____

State & County: VIRGINIA, Wise

Date Received: 1/31/2019 Date of Pending List: 2/12/2019 Date of 16th Day: 2/27/2019 Date of 45th Day: 3/18/2019 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100003482

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 3/13/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Commercial core of a community developed around extraction industry. Dependent primarily on the railroad, the town's fortunes have waxed and waned with the timber and coal industries.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept / A & C

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

Big Stone Gap Redevelopment & Housing Authority

*P.O. Box 536
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219*

*Phone: 276/523-4788
FAX: 276/523-5141
Email: scradic@bigstonegap.org*

August 16, 2018

Department of Historical Resources
Attention: Mr. James Hare
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

**RE: Big Stone Gap Historical District
Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County**

Dear Mr. Hare:

The Big Stone Gap Redevelopment and Housing Authority would like to express its support for the Big Stone Gap Historical District located in the Town of Big Stone Gap.

We feel this designation will allow the Town to move forward in preserving our rich heritage and history. We encourage the Department of Historical Resources to continue with the prestigious designation for our Town.

Thank you for supporting our community.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Cradic
Executive Director



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Historic Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

Molly Joseph Ward
Secretary of Natural Resources

Julie V. Langan
Acting Director

Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391
www.dhr.virginia.gov

August 20, 2018

Daniel Delahaye
Federal Preservation Officer
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza W, SW
Room 6670
Washington, DC 20260-1862

RE: Big Stone Gap Historic District, Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, Virginia

Dear Mr. Delahaye:

We are pleased to inform you that the above referenced resource will be considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) at our March 20, 2014 Board Meeting in Richmond, Virginia.

There is a reference to the Slemp Federal Building, which currently houses a U.S. post office, at 322 Wood Avenue in the Town of Big Stone Gap in Wise County, Virginia.

Please note that the Slemp Federal Building already is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as of December 23, 1975.

We want to let you know about the nomination for your future planning purposes. We have notified all property owners by letter, and by newspaper legal notices. The processing of all nominations has followed the state regulations, which invites all owners and adjacent owners to a public information session. We provide comments from these meetings to the State Historic Preservation Officer.

The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of historic properties worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register provides recognition and assists in preserving our Nation's heritage.

Enclosed is a copy of the **notice** that was distributed to all owners in the district by first class mail. Also included is a **map** that delineates the boundary of the district.

Listing in the National Register provides the following benefits to Federally-owned historic properties:

- Consideration in the planning for federally assisted projects. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 provides that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation be given an opportunity to comment on projects affecting such properties.
- Consideration of historic values in the decision to issue a surface coal mining permit where coal is located, in accordance with the Surface Mining and Control Act of 1977.

For more information about Virginia's Register Program you can visit the web site:
<http://www.dhr.state.va.us/register/register.htm>.

Administrative Services
10 Courthouse Ave.
Petersburg, VA 23803
Tel: (804) 862-6408
Fax: (804) 862-6196

Eastern Region Office
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391

Western Region Office
962 Kime Lane
Salem, VA 24153
Tel: (540) 387-5443
Fax: (540) 387-5446

Northern Region Office
5357 Main Street
PO Box 519
Stephens City, VA 22655
Tel: (540) 868-7029
Fax: (540) 868-7033

You may review the pending nominations on the agency web site, <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/boardPage.html> starting about August 24, 2018.

If you wish to submit comments on the historic district proposal, please send them to Julie Langan, Director, State Historic Preservation Office. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions. I can be reached at 804-482-6445 (email: Jim.Hare@dhr.virginia.gov).

Sincerely yours,



Jim Hare
Director
Survey & Register Division

Enclosures

Administrative Services
10 Courthouse Ave.
Petersburg, VA 23803
Tel: (804) 862-6408
Fax: (804) 862-6196

Capital Region Office
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391

Tidewater Region Office
14415 Old Courthouse Way
2nd Floor
Newport News, VA 23608
Tel: (757) 886-2818
Fax: (757) 886-2808

Western Region Office
962 Kime Lane
Salem, VA 24153
Tel: (540) 387-5443
Fax: (540) 387-5446

Northern Region Office
5357 Main Street
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Stephens City, VA 22655
Tel: (540) 868-7029
Fax: (540) 868-7033



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Historic Resources

Matt Strickler
Secretary of Natural Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

Julie V. Langan
Director

July 17, 2018

Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391
www.dhr.virginia.gov

Re: Big Stone Gap Historic District, Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County

Dear Property Owner:

The Department of Historic Resources (DHR), Virginia's historic preservation office, is considering nomination of the above-referenced Historic District (**boundary enclosed**) to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. The national and state registers are the official lists of places in Virginia recognized as having architectural, archaeological, or historical significance at the local, state, or national level. Over 500 other districts in the Commonwealth share this honorary status which, used as an educational tool, allow us to better understand our shared history.

The Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places programs are designed to provide multiple opportunities for public participation, including the right of private property owners to state their support for, or objection to, listing in the registers. On **Thursday, August 16, 2018**, staff of DHR will host a **public information hearing** beginning at **5:30 p.m. in the Big Stone Gap Visitor Center at 306 Wood Avenue E in Big Stone Gap, VA 24219**. The purpose of the meeting is to present and explain the nomination process and results of historic district designation, to hear public comment, and to answer questions. DHR will forward the comments to the State Review Board, the Board of Historic Resources, and the agency director.

At a meeting to be held on **Thursday, September 20, 2018**, in the **Exchange Building (formerly the Siege Museum)** located at **15 W. Bank Street, Petersburg, VA 23803 (map enclosed)**, the Boards will consider the district for recommendation to the National Register of Historic Places and for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register. You are welcome to attend this meeting, which will begin at **10:00 a.m.**, but are not required to do so. Results of the joint Board meeting will appear on our website, www.dhr.virginia.gov, within ten business days following the meeting.

Enclosed is additional information explaining the register programs and the process by which owners of private property within the proposed historic district may express support for, comment on, or object to listing in the registers. Please be aware that for an objection to a nomination, you must submit to us a written letter that is attested and notarized by a notary public at least 7 business days prior to the joint Board meeting date listed above, in order for your objection to be considered with the nomination at this meeting.

If you have questions or need additional information before the joint Board meeting, please contact Mr. Michael Pulice in the **Western Region Preservation Office** at (540) 387-5443.

Sincerely,

James Hare
Director, Survey and Register Division

Enclosures

Western Region Office
962 Kime Lane
Salem, VA 24153
Tel: (540) 387-5443
Fax: (540) 387-5446

Northern Region Office
5357 Main Street
PO Box 519
Stephens City, VA 22655
Tel: (540) 868-7029
Fax: (540) 868-7033

Eastern Region Office
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391

Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District, Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, DHR #101-5002

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District in Wise County, Virginia, includes a collection of commercial buildings dating from c. 1900 to present that represent the continuous development of Big Stone Gap as the main commercial center for the surrounding region. The 10-acre district consists of 39 commercial properties within an approximately four-block area. Wood Avenue (US Route 58 Alternate) is the main artery through the district, running northeast to southwest. Cross streets include East Fifth Street (US Route 23), East Fourth Street, and East Third Street. Shawnee Avenue bounds the district to the north and Clinton Avenue bounds the district to the south. Historic residential areas bound the district to the southwest and northeast. Architecturally, the buildings in the district reflect the growth of the town over time as the various styles, construction techniques, and materials represent the periods in which they were built. Although the functions and styles of the commercial buildings vary, general commonalities such as relatively small scale, masonry construction, primarily flat roofs, and siting along the sidewalk give the district a cohesive visual character. The district encompasses 43 buildings, of which 39 are primary resources and four are secondary resources. Of the total resources, 29 are contributing and 14 are non-contributing.

The Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Community Planning. The district comprises the historic business center of the Town of Big Stone Gap, a boomtown that flourished from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century as the center of the emerging coal and iron-ore industries in Wise County. The Big Stone Gap Improvement Company laid out the town according to a plan in the 1880s, setting it apart from other mountain towns that developed in a more haphazard manner. The Stonega Coke and Coal Company, a pioneer in coal production in Southwest Virginia and the largest producer in its territory, built its headquarters in Big Stone Gap in 1908, further elevating the prominence of the town. Coal continued to be the major local industry throughout the mid-twentieth century, stimulating additional commercial development in town to support the growing industry and its employees. The historic district is also locally significant under Criterion C for its architecture, which ranges from architecturally distinguished individual buildings, such as the 1912 Slemple Federal Building, to vernacular commercial buildings constructed from 1900 to the mid-twentieth century, which imbue the district with a cohesive historic architectural character. The Gap Downtown Historic District's period of significance, is 1900-1968, beginning with construction of the earliest extant building and ending with the traditional fifty-year mark for districts where significant activities continued into the more recent past.

Big Stone Gap Downtown Historic District Wise County, 101-5002

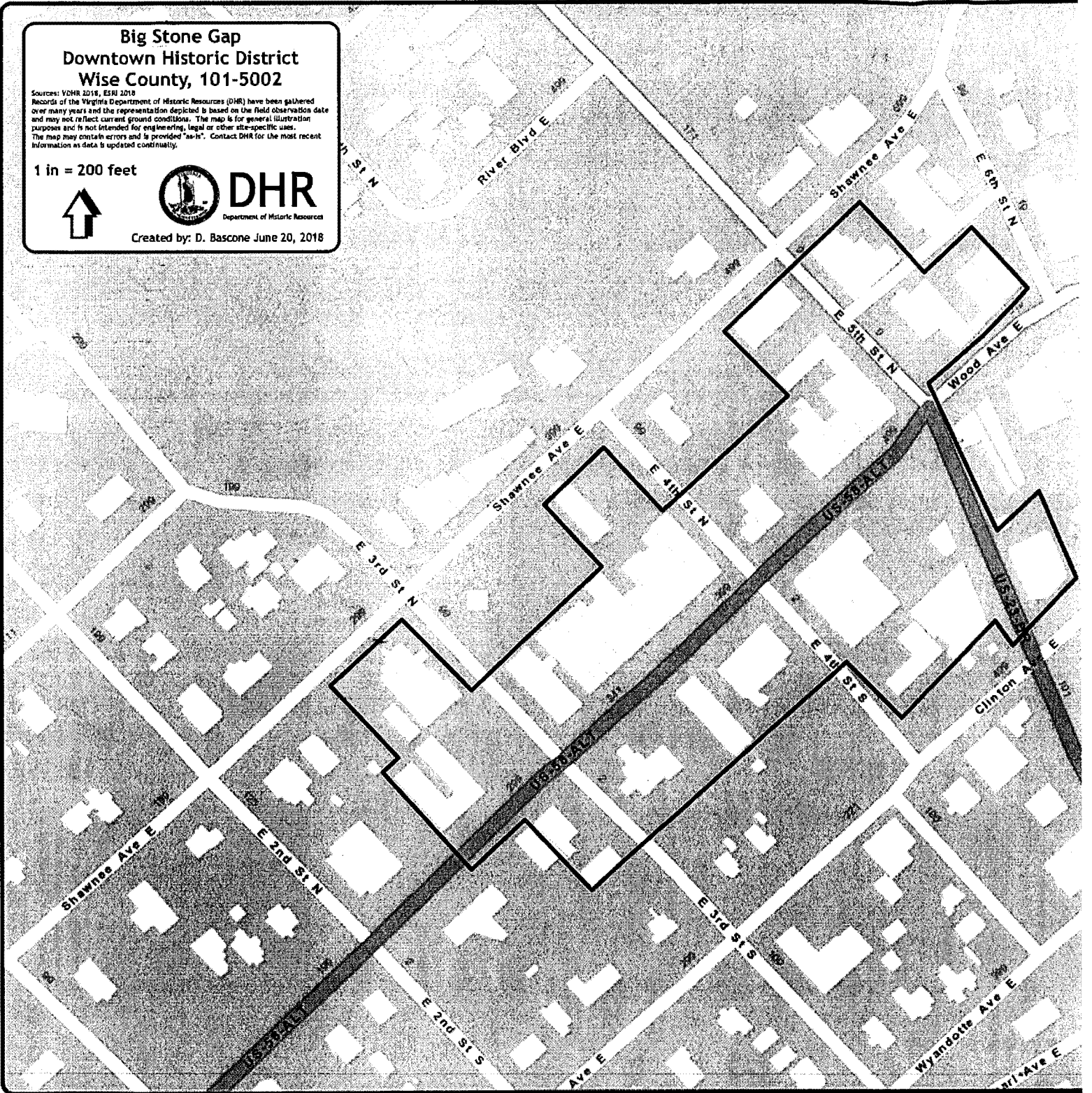
Sources: VDHR 2016, ESRI 2016
Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years and the representation depicted is based on the field observation date and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general illustration purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. The map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". Contact DHR for the most recent information as data is updated continually.

1 in = 200 feet



DHR
Department of Historic Resources

Created by: D. Bascone June 20, 2018





COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Historic Resources

Matt Strickler
Secretary of Natural Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

Julie V. Langan
Director

Tel: (804) 367-2323
Fax: (804) 367-2391
www.dhr.virginia.gov

January 29, 2019

Joy Beasley
Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Big Stone Gap Historic District, Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, Virginia

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Big Stone Gap Historic District** to the National Register of Historic Places. Submitted for your review, the nomination has been considered, and approved, by the State Review Board and the Virginia SHPO has recommended it for listing.

This property has 33 owners and the Department of Historic Resources received no letters of objection concerning the nomination. Any letters of comment or objection have been copied at the end of the nomination material, along with any FPO notification letters.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My direct phone line is 804-482-6439.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lena Sweeten McDonald".

Lena Sweeten McDonald
National/State Register Historian

Enclosures

Western Region Office
962 Kime Lane
Salem, VA 24153
Tel: (540) 387-5443
Fax: (540) 387-5446

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