

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Sophia Historic District
other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: Main Street between Polk Street and Riffe Street not for publication: NA
city/town: Sophia vicinity: N/A
state: West Virginia code: WV county: Raleigh code: 081 zip code: 25921

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 ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally.

Susan M. Pierce
Susan M. Pierce, Deputy SHPO

2/7/06
Date

West Virginia Division of Culture and History
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 Certifying Official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of Keeper: Edson H. Beall Date of Action: 3-22-06

- entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

other (explain): _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property:
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
22	4	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
22	4	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

COMMERCE/business
RECREATION and CULTURE/theater

Current Functions

COMMERCE/business
RELIGION/religious facility
GOVERNMENT/fire station

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19th and EARLY 20th CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS=Commercial
Style

Materials

Foundation: stone, concrete
Walls: brick, stone
Roof: asphalt
Other: terra cotta

Narrative Description

(See continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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.

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County and State

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Commerce
Architecture

Period of Significance

c.1925-1956

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Milano

Narrative Statement of Significance

(See continuation sheets)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(See continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 5

UTM References

Quad Map Name: Lester

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>17</u>	<u>477606</u>	<u>4173414</u>	D	<u>17</u>	<u>477624</u>	<u>4173378</u>
B	<u>17</u>	<u>477984</u>	<u>4173434</u>	E	<u>17</u>	<u>477622</u>	<u>4173346</u>
C	<u>17</u>	<u>477984</u>	<u>4173402</u>	F	<u>17</u>	<u>477590</u>	<u>4173351</u>

Verbal Boundary Description

(See continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(See continuation sheet.)

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Ms. Joellen A. Kerr with assistance from SHPO staff

Organization: University of Charleston Date: December 7, 2005

Street & Number: 2300 MacCorkle Avenue, SE Telephone: (304) 357-4750

City or Town: Charleston State: WV ZIP: 25304

Property Owner

Multiple

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 1

Location and Setting

The Sophia Historic District consists of the central business district of Sophia, a small town in Raleigh County, West Virginia, approximately six miles from Beckley. The town was named after the third wife of Pyrrhus McGinnis, a pioneer who received a land grant of 2500 acres from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The town was incorporated in 1912 and consists of stone and brick commercial buildings built after 1925 after three destructive fires. After the 1925 fire, the Town Council drafted an ordinance to forbid wood frame business buildings.

The small town setting is in the heart of the Winding Gulf Coal Fields which were opened to development in 1905. Sophia is located in the National Coal Heritage Area. The Coal Heritage Trail, a national scenic byway, passes through Sophia and into nearby coal camps. The small commercial district is lined up on one side of Main Street across from a new visitor center. The town's biggest growth period happened during the 1930-40s after Mayor Criss Ruble brought water to the town from the Beckley Water Company and with the development of the road and transportation systems.

Before the development of road and transportation systems, the Virginian Railroad was the only means of travel to Sophia, other than by foot. The railroad tracks are located across Main Street, opposite the small commercial district. The road system helped develop Sophia's Main Street from quagmire conditions with Soak Creek running through it and in front of the buildings in the commercial district of today. The three block Sophia Historic District is bordered at the west end by Polk Avenue and the east end by Riffe Street with WV Route 16 or Robert C. Byrd Drive being the east/west divider.

The core buildings are primarily one and two story masonry buildings with storefronts on the first floor and housing in the upper stories. There is on street parking and decorative street lighting in front of the majority of the buildings with concrete sidewalks replacing the wooden board walks of earlier days. The majority of buildings are attached to each other, with four buildings standing alone. The majority of the buildings are brick and/or cut stone and are built on stone foundations. The stone was locally quarried and dressed.

The commercial style in the district relates to the period of construction of the buildings. The buildings are rather simple in appearance with great detail and attention given to the use and placement of brick and stone and the varied parapet roof lines. The majority of the core commercial buildings in the district are two-stories interspersed with nine one-story buildings. Some first-floor store fronts have been altered with new glass store fronts, awnings,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 2

signage, etc. and some of the second story windows have been replaced with new modern windows. Several of the buildings, brick as well as stone, have been painted.

The highly crafted stone work is seen on both main building facades and side elevations as illustrated in buildings #2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, and 20. Cut stone is used in plain lintels, lug sills, and slip sills as illustrated in buildings #6, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, and 25. Crafted cut stone from the area is used for a decorative cornice treatment as illustrated by building #13. Four buildings have a stone cartouche designation marker as illustrated in #7 (N. Atilli 1939), 15 (M.L. Tosh 1926), 16 (W.J. Lovell 1922), and 26 (Daniel 1938).

A good example of a simple commercial style stone façade building in the district is LB & J Antiques, #10, built c.1937. It is a simple, two-story stone parapet, flat roof building with the dimensions of the sandstone blocks becoming progressively smaller from bottom to top. The glass windows are not original to the building.

Brick is used for seventeen building facades within the district. Decorative brick cornice treatments, brick panels, corbelled bricks, and varied and decorative brick courses are commonly seen as illustrated in buildings #7-9, 11-13, 15-21, and 26. A brick building with the use of brick to delineate line, design, and form is illustrated in the Real Wood Unfinished Furniture building, #11. Alternating red and tan bricks are used to create a panel effect, a quoin pattern, a cornice treatment, and an outline of the parapet roof line.

Italian immigrants were responsible for much of the cut stone work on the buildings. The Milano family is responsible for several of the structures in the district as seen in buildings #2, 7, 9, 10, and 18.

The following is a complete list of resources in the district. The nominated area contains 26 resources including 22 contributing buildings.

Summary

Although Sophia was not a mining town, the inhabitants of the surrounding coal camps helped develop the thriving commerce and economy of historic Sophia. The row of commercial buildings along Main Street dates from the decade between 1920 and 1930 and reinforces the architectural diversity of the region. The business buildings were first open for business by J.H. Hunt, W. J. Lovell, P. G. Thomas, Max Fisher, and the Tosh Brothers.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 3

Descriptions

1

W. Main Street

contributing

Filling Station

Date: c.1925

Description: One-story, stucco-covered, hipped-roof filling station with two canopies, glass display windows, and covered transoms. A rear, historic addition is constructed of concrete block, has a hipped roof, and two garage bays with modern roll-up doors.

2

302 W. Main Street

contributing

Reck's Place (historic)

The Chestnut Tree Café and Art Gallery (current)

Date: c.1936

Description: One-story, five-bay, flat-roof, commercial-style building on stone foundation with stepped parapet and tile coping with a wood framed recessed entrance. Building appears joined with a center seam. Aluminum cased large modern fixed windows with translucent non-original transoms are surrounded on one side with dark "quoin style" brick. White painted, running bond, cut faced block covers the building and white painted brick covers area above the windows and entrance. Rowlocks of red brick are used for window sills. White brick inserts are used as fill between openings.

3

304 W. Main Street

contributing

O.A. Phillips Filling Station (historic)

Interstate Truck and Wrecker (current)

Date: c.1936-38

Description: One-story, four-bay, concrete block commercial building with three garage bays with roll up doors. The building is rectangular in shape and has a corner entrance and display windows and a modern shed-roof.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 4

4

304 W. Main Street

contributing

O.A. Phillips Auto Body Shop and Showroom (historic)

Town Hall (current)

Date: c.1936-38

Description: One-story, L-shaped, concrete-block building with shed roof and shed-roof vestibule in corner of ell. Fixed windows, display windows, and transoms have been covered in plywood. This building is in the process of renovation.

5

306 W. Main Street

noncontributing

Sophia Volunteer Fire Department

Date: 1973

Description: Rectangular one-story, three-bay brick commercial building with a block foundation and three flush bays consisting of two aluminum symmetrically placed garage doors and a single centered aluminum framed glass entrance door. The identity of the function of the building is spelled across the top with the notation "Since 1948." The common running bond variegated rust brick is capless.

6

308 W. Main Street

contributing

Commercial building

Date: c.1935

Description: Two-story, three-bay, commercial-style building with a stone foundation, vertical red wood stained board and batten pieced across the front façade at door height on the first floor with an aluminum glass door to one side and garage door to the other. Two rows of vertical Permastone are found on the façade, one separating first floor from second, the other serving as a decorative cornice. The second floor façade is faced with random ashlar Permastone. Three series of double hung windows have keystone motifs as lintels and stone slip sills. Two sets of windows are over the garage door side of the building and a trio of double hung windows is over the entrance door. Clay tile coping caps the roof line with a stepped parapet on sides of building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 5

7

140 W. Main Street

contributing

Attili Building (historic)

Date: 1939

Description: Two-story, three-bay commercial-style building with stone foundation and symmetrical façade of running bond red brick has a differentiated brick course dividing first floor from second floor. First floor façade has two large cased store front windows flanking a center recessed single door with a cased opaque transom spanning both windows and door. Upper story has two sets of one over one double hung sash windows with soldier brick pattern serving as lintels and a centered marker cartouche that reads "N. Attili 1939." Roof line is stepped parapet on front with stone coping. Side elevations are cut stone.

8

142 W. Main Street

contributing

Visionz Lounge (current)

Date: c.1955

Description: One-story, two-bay, running bond red brick. Commercial-style building supported by stone foundation. Once had a symmetrical façade at one time with a window and door on each half. The bay on the east side has been altered with a smaller horizontal sliding window and filled door. The bay on the west side holds a large glass fixed storefront window and wooden door. Close to the top of the building façade is a horizontal decorative brick course, topped with a flat roof and clay tile coping.

9

143 W. Main Street

contributing

State ABC Liquor (historic)

Sophia Laundromat (current)

Date: c.1949

Description: Two-story, two-bay, commercial-style building with stone foundation and running bond red brick construction. First story left side of building has two doors topped with transoms, one door leads to upper story apartments and other to the shop. On right side of building is large four section window above a brick kick panel, flanked by a vinyl horizontal louvered fill section. First story is covered by a metal awing which exposes a row of brick headers. Second story has two sets of one over one double hung windows, covered by awnings. Flat roof has raised parapet roof line and capped with clay tile coping.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 6

10

145 W. Main Street

contributing

LB & J Antiques (current)

Date: 1937

Description: Two-story, three-bay commercial-style building of rock faced, plain ashlar and varied-dimensioned sandstone façade on stone foundation. First story glass storefront has center glass entrance door. Kick panels below glass are of vertical aluminum siding and glass transom is located over centered glass entry door which is capped with an awning. Sandstone blocks get progressively smaller from the bottom of the building to the top of the façade. The second story has two separate double hung windows with wood fill on sides, stone slip sills, and awnings overhead. The roof line is a stepped parapet design.

11

147 W. Main Street

contributing

Bez' Five and Dime, Ben Franklin, Federated Department Store (historic)

Real Wood Unfinished Furniture (current)

Date: c.1937

Description: Two-story, five-bay commercial building of running bond red brick pattern façade interspersed with a decorative tan brick on a stone foundation. Glass front first story has recessed glass double door entry on right side of façade topped with a glass transom and flanked on both sides by large vertical store front glass windows above tile kick panels. Fixed glass windows, surrounded by wood board, are repeated across the front with a single doorway entry on far left leading to upper story. The first story with the exception of the far left entry door is covered by an aluminum awning. In between doors and series of windows, bricks are laid in a modern "quoin" pattern of alternating tan and red bricks. Above the first story and below the five sets of one over one double hung windows outlined with alternating rowlock and header tan and red brick are three decorative raised brick rectangular panels. Six sets of three courses of tan bricks are spaced equidistantly across the top of the building. At the cornice line is a continuous course of tan bricks outlining the stepped parapet roof line.

12

c.415 W. Main Street

contributing

Sophia Theater (historic)

Date: c.1925

Description: Three-story, brick, commercial-style building with flat roof and stepped parapet on side elevations. First story has large display windows with two entrances, one to the upper floors, and a large metal awning spanning also across the adjacent building. Windows are one-over-one, double-hung sash. Some windows have been covered with plywood.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 7

13

417 W. Main Street

contributing

Cut Rate Grocery (historic)

Jordan Christian Fellowship (current)

Date: c.1925

Description: Two-story, four-bay, running bond brick commercial building. First story of buildings has similar materials of large glass store fronts and green and black carrara glass panels for headers, verticals, and kick panel bases. There is an extended aluminum canopy across the facade. Building on left has four full length vertical glass panels with two single glass entrance doors, covered with transoms. The connector wing is a repeated window style. The building on the right repeats the design with five full length windows and three single glass entrance doors, covered with transoms. The building on the left had six double hung sash windows, three and three, with four filled with tan brick and stucco. Two square shapes are also filled with brick and stucco. Three continuous rows of tan brick courses serve as a faux cornice for the flat parapet roofed building which is topped with clay coping tile and stepped on the sides. The other building has four pair of one over one double hung sash windows above two stringcourses of brick that separate the first story from the second. This building has two additional stringcourses of brick delineating the cornice above the second story and topped with a recessed center panel of brick with a pediment and symmetrically shaped parapet roof line.

14

418 W. Main Street

noncontributing

Sophia Drug and Barber Shop (historic)

China One (current)

Date: c.1920

Description: One-story modernized commercial building with single-pane, glass, off-centered door, flanked by a square-shaped large store front glass window on left and a long horizontal glass window on right side of building. Below the glass is a masonite stucco-like board. An extended aluminum canopy covers the entire first story. The upper half of the one story building is covered with an aluminum modern grill of punctuated verticals, which also serves as a modern parapet roof line.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 8

15

126 W. Main Street

contributing

Tosh's Furniture Store (historic)

Quilt Fabrics & Craft Corner (current)

Date: 1926

Description: Two-story, five-bay, commercial-style building with white painted horizontal tri part brick façade with three bays on first story with centered single glass door and overhead transom, leading to the second story. Center door is flanked on each side by a series of three large glass store front windows and a single glass door with transom, all angled into the center of the building. A light green tile is located below the windows with a minimal "bargeboard" canopy above. Three wooden vertical recessed panels are located above the three bays. Two stringcourses of brick separate the first story from the second. There is a series of five double hung one over one sash windows across the second story with stone sills and lintels. Two additional stringcourses of brick delineate the second story from the top of the building which holds six recessed brick panels, alternating vertical and horizontal bricks. The middle panel reads, "M.L. Tosh 1926." The flat parapet roof is capped with painted clay coping tiles.

16

125 W. Main Street

contributing

W.J. Lovell General Merchandise (historic)

Stage Coach Salon (current)

Date: c.1940

Description: Two-story, five-bay, running bond brick façade building has expanse of full length modern glass store front on first story. Two single glass separate entrance doors are divided by two fixed glass center panels. Painted concrete block surfaces the minimal area between the glass panels on the first floor which is covered by an asphalt shingle awning style roof. A faux painted single door is located between the glass areas. Two string courses of brick are located above the rowlock brick course to divide the first story from the second. Four pairs of one over one double hung sash windows with soldier headers and stone plain lug sills are located across the second story. Two additional string courses of brick are located above the second story windows and below the three centralized recessed brick panels with alternating squared pattern of soldier and stretcher bricks. The center recessed panel cartouche marker reads, "W. J. Lovell 1922." The roof line is in the form of a battlement parapet.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 9

17

221 W. Main Street

contributing

Advantage Sport and Pawn (current)

Date: c.1935

Description: Two-story off-white painted running bond brick building has a flush single centered entrance flanked with large glass store front windows with metal transoms and kick panels. Corbelled brick register divides the two stories with the second story having a horizontal sliding window flanked by sidelights and faux shutters. The second story parapet cornice is defined with three rows of corbelled brick, topped with clay coping.

18

118 W. Main Street

contributing

Miss Judy's Restaurant (historic)

Fox's Pizza Den (current)

Date: c.1935

Description: Two-story running bond red brick façade has a flush single centered glass entrance flanked with large glass store front windows, glass transoms, and metal kick panels. Corbelled brick register divides the two stories with the second story having a pair of one over one double hung sash windows with a brick lug sill. Cornice is defined with corbelled diagonal brick, topped with wood and brick alternating as a faux battlement with a rubber membrane covered parapet. Different texture-faced brick is used on three-fourths of the building.

19

116 W. Main Street

contributing

Lozier's Shoe Shop (historic)

Vacant (current)

Date: c.1935

Description: Two-story, flat roof, commercial building with variegated tan running bond brick. First story has center recessed wood framed single glass entrance door flanked by large stationary glass storefront windows with a plywood transom and kick panels. A corbelled brick register divides the two stories. Second story has a single fixed window with sidelights and a stone plain lug sill and lintel. Above the window is a recessed brick panel. The parapet is defined by corbelled brick and topped with clay tile coping.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 10

20

110 W. Main Street

contributing

Sophia Hardware Store (historic)

Awesome Karate Academy (current)

Date: c.1926

Description: Two-story, flat roof building with running bond red brick façade has recessed single glass door entrance with transom and side lights positioned between large, fixed glass store front windows above brick kick panels. First story brick corners and glass prisms, located above the glass store front, are painted. Alternating stretcher and soldier bricks define the first story from the second. Two pairs of double hung one over one sash windows have stone lintels and plain lug sills. The cornice area is defined by corbelled brick courses and a cartouche of soldier patterned bricks. Parapet is capped with clay tile coping.

21

108 W. Main Street

contributing

O.G. Richardson's Furniture Store (historic)

Unique Antique (current)

Date: c.1930

Description: Three-story, flat roof building with running bond red brick façade. Recessed single glass door entrance with side lights is off center on the right adjacent to three large, fixed glass store front windows above brick kick panels. Single light double hung windows are housed in projected roof awning. Alternating stretcher and soldier bricks define the first story from the second. Two pairs of double hung one over one sash windows have stone lintels and plain lug sills. The cornice is defined by corbelled brick courses with a raised cartouche of bricks in the cornice area. Broken parapet of modified embattlement form is capped with clay tile coping.

22

434 W. Main Street

noncontributing

Modern Furniture Store (historic)

Atlas Fitness Center (current)

Date: c.1940

Description: Two-story modern, flat roof commercial building with three tri-part fixed ribbon windows located adjacent to non-original single door in recessed entryway with transom and sidelights. Single flush door with glass transom, located on left of façade, leads to second story. Painted brick separates doorways, and unpainted brick wraps building, vertical vinyl siding covers second story and has an aluminum cap.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section 7

Page 11

23

101 Robert C. Byrd Drive
Black Diamond Power Co. (current)

noncontributing

Date: c.1990

Description: One-story double wide has side gabled roof with end gabled roof over center porch with wooden ramp. Horizontal vinyl siding has six over six and four over four double hung sash windows.

24

E. Main Street
City Finance Co. (historic)

contributing

Date: c.1948

Description: Small one-story commercial building has common running bond red brick pattern, a missing transom, and non-original six panel single door and fixed aluminum framed window. Building has a flat roof, tile coping, and side-stepped parapet.

25

E. Main Street,
Stone's Dry Cleaning and Pool Hall (historic)

contributing

Date: c.1946

Description: One-story commercial building with light-gray painted common running bond brick pattern has flush centered non-original single door and wood fill for transom. Two wood filled windows with stone plain slip sill flank center door. A soldier course of brick serves as lintel and header for windows and door across facade. Building has a flat roof and stepped parapet on side.

26

111 E. Main Street
Hanson's Grocery; Lovell's Auto (historic)
Sophia Auto Parts (current)

contributing

Date: c.1938

Description: Two-story light gray painted commercial building has common running bond brick pattern. Original storefront has two display picture windows flanking recessed, original entrance, capped by a non-original transom and alternating black and white tiles for a kick panel. Corbelled belt course of brick delineate first and second stories. Second story has two pair double hung one over one sash windows with brick sills, topped by a rectangular, recessed brick panel in cornice area holding cartouche stone with inscription, "Daniel 1938." A decorative course of soldier bricks follow the stepped parapet roof line.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 12

Statement of Significance

The Sophia Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register under *Criterion A: Commerce* for its local significance as a business area serving the residents of Sophia and the coal camp families of the Winding Gulf coal fields. The district is also eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* for its collection of commercial style buildings which represent the distinguishable work of stone and brick masons, significant architectural construction techniques, and artistic architectural materials and details. The rich history of the district reinforces the coal heritage of southern West Virginia, which helped diversify the economy of the region. The coal camps had a significant ethnic diversity of Hungarians, Poles, African-Americans, Italians, and Syrians who patronized the businesses of Sophia and eventually became the leaders in commerce.

The period of significance extends from c.1925 with the construction of the first contributing buildings to 1956, the National Register's fifty-year cut-off date. Sophia was incorporated in 1912, one of the smallest towns in West Virginia to be incorporated, and one of five incorporated towns in Raleigh County today.

History of Sophia

Sophia, originally called Soak Creek, was established on wilderness farm land owned by Pyrrhus McGinnis and Conrad Riffe, which stretched along Soak Creek valley. Pyrrhus McGinnis, a merchant, was listed in the 1850 landbook as landowner of Soakass and Crab Orchard Creek for 11,628 acres. Soak Creek received its name from a somewhat humorous incident. A hunter in a group of hunters on McGinnis and Riffe's farm slipped into a stream and became soaked with water, thus the area name, Soakass Creek. Those that lived in the area kept the name for many years, but as new settlers moved in they changed the name for obvious reasons to Soak Creek.

The town was first inhabited by Pyrrhus McGinnis, a pioneer who received a land grant of 2500 acres from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Pyrrhus moved his family to what was then Fayette County in the spring of 1843 into a log cabin he had built with the help of his son, Achilles McGinnis in the previous fall of 1842. McGinnis eventually sired a long line of Raleigh County lawyers. And the town was eventually named for his third wife, Sophia.

Another settler on Soak Creek was Conrad Riffe, who also received a grant of land at the head of the creek and moved there in 1843. The Raleigh Register June 16, 1910 article titled, "Bit Auction Lot Sale Has Been Announced for Sophia on the Winding Gulf," noted that Sophia is a new point on the Winding Gulf Branch of the Virginian and is a strategic point which will

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 13

undoubtedly within a short time develop into a thrifty town. There were few opportunities for towns to develop in the area because most of the land was owned by the coal companies except for the land in the Soak Creek area, which was owned by individuals. There was never a town plan for Sophia, thus it was built where there was water. The Sophia Historic District is stretched out along Main Street, bordered by Polk Street on the West and Riffe Street on the East, land originally owned by Henry Riffe and Daniel Polk.

Criterion A: Commerce

The Sophia Downtown Historic District is significant under *Criterion A: Commerce* for its significance as a local business center. Farming dominated the area until 1900 when accessible coal was discovered, and the coal mining industry began and moved at a rapid pace by establishing coal camps throughout the region. Along with the development of the coal mines came the need for transportation of the coal.

The contractors Mason & Hanger built the Virginian Railroad in 1908 from Mullens, West Virginia to Soak Creek, and they located their office and commissary in Soak Creek. James I. Wilson was in charge of the railroad's commissary and established the need for a post office. He was not fond of the Soak Creek name, for he realized people laughed at its origination. In 1909, Wilson asked E.S. Brown for a suggestion on a more proper name, and he suggested "Sophia" to commemorate the hospitable and kind wife of Pyrrhus McGinnis. The post office and town were named Sophia. James I. Wilson served as the first postmaster until the railroad crew moved out of the area. The first post office had been established in 1877-78 with Mrs. Phleager as the postmistress, followed by W. Riffe as postmaster. The job was passed around to all original inhabitants of Soak Creek. No one would take the job. When Wilson left town, the post office continued to move to different spots with different postmasters.

In 1909, the only building in Soak Creek was a shed at the end of the railroad track. Before 1912 and until the development of the coal industry, Sophia had only one business, a general store operated by J.H. Hunt. By 1912, W. J. Lovell, P. G. Thomas, Samuel Max Fisher, and the Tosh Brothers opened stores. Samuel Max Fisher, a Jewish business owner, closed his business on Saturday to observe his Sabbath, and he opened at 6 p.m. Saturday evening and remained open on Sunday to capture all of the good trade from the coal miners. The other merchants of Sophia were not happy with this practice and had the town incorporated in 1912 and adopted an ordinance prohibiting business establishments to remain open on Sunday.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 14

J.T. Stephen, J.H. Hunt, and A. Hodge were granted incorporation papers for the town on August 30, 1912 for 302 acres. When the town was incorporated in 1912, "black diamonds" were pouring from the Tams, McAlpin, Hotcoal, Stotesbury, Baileywood, and Helen mines. E.H. Ballard, a carpenter and contractor, was the first mayor of Sophia, which had a population of 45 in 1912 and was the smallest town in West Virginia to be incorporated.

Coal camps in the surrounding area were very self-sufficient. Each camp, owned by the coal company, had a church, a general store, a doctor, a theater, a pool room, a ball team, and a "beer joint" to take care of the miners and their families. Many first generation European immigrants came to the area for work in the mines. After days of long, hard work and low pay in the mines, miners needed to get out of the coal camps. They needed freedom and opportunity and Sophia was that opportunity. Not only did miners and families come to Sophia to shop, they came to socialize. Coal companies issued scrip to miners. Stores in Sophia accepted seventy-five cents on the dollar, which caused businesses to flourish. Merchandise in the coal camps was much more expensive than in town.

At one point, Sophia was the trading center to as many as twenty-four coal mines that surrounded the area. Rhodell and Sophia were the only two freedom areas from the coal camps. Sophia was a "wild and wooly" town, the center of coalfield activity. Saturday was a big night in the town for "beer joints" and pool halls. When drinking was legalized, "beer joints" opened on Main Street and everybody came to Sophia from miles around. The last train on Saturday evening at 9 p.m. going out of town was packed. People who worked in the mines eventually moved to Sophia to start their own business. Most businesses started from people who came to work in the mines.

Before 1925 the only way to Sophia was by train, horse, or foot, a seven mile walk across the mountains. One could catch the train in Mullens to get to Sophia. There were forty scheduled trains a day in the 1920's. The railroad track ran through center of town with wooden buildings on either side of it. On June 16, 1925, the highway opened to Beckley and also that year, Sophia got a Main Street. Up until that time Main Street, located on Soak Creek, was a quagmire. In 1920 Sophia had a population of 240. By 1925 Sophia had a drug store, two grocery stores, one general merchandise store, a dry cleaning plant, a filling station, and a post office. In 1925, Raleigh County's rich four foot coal seams produced 17,598,224 tons of coal.

The town's most rapid growth period was 1930-1940, with the biggest business boom in the late 1930s when more than a half dozen large brick business buildings were built as well as over one hundred homes. Over the next five years, three hundred more homes and more businesses were built in Sophia. In 1930, Sophia had a population of 611. The Chamber of Commerce

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 15

originated in 1939. Charter members of the Chamber of Commerce were Pietro Milano, D. K. Daniels, C.M. Goodwin, Sid Bez, H. L. Vaughn, Dr. C. M. Peck, W. J. McElrath, E. H. Roberts, O. G. Richardson, G. Hammed, Frank Milano, Mrs. J. L. Rowless, Jess Attili, O. A. Phillips, W. J. Lovell, J. H. Smith, A. O'Vriend, and H. J. Stone.

In the 1940s, Mayor Ruble, considered the "father of Sophia", was credited with getting a brand new Main Street and sidewalks as well as the Sophia Municipal Water Works project for the town. This created a choice community for many families. In the 40s there were four grocery stores owned by the Attili, Milano, Byrd and McElrath families. People bought groceries on credit with no interest and free delivery. There were several furniture stores because there were none between Beckley and Sophia. In the 40s and 50s, five different roads led people to Sophia and made it the trading center of the area. Cars came to Sophia, loaded with people. Eleven freight and passenger trains ran round trip each day. The train cost a dime at first and then increased to twenty cents. Two railroads, the Virginian, ran through town, and the C&O, one half mile west of town, made Sophia a strategic point. In the 1940s Sophia was one of the fastest growing towns in West Virginia with a population of 1,161 and in 1946, had 1,000 new homes.

In the 1950s, Sophia was located at the entrance to the billion dollar coal fields, the gateway to the Winding Gulf, yet Sophia was never a mining town. At this time, Sophia was the third largest town in Raleigh County with a modern sewage disposal system, a modern water works, and a fire station. In 1954, Sophia had eight filling stations, two automobile agencies, two body repair shops, one auto accessory store, two drug stores, four furniture stores, nine eating places, a theater, two dry cleaning plants, seven grocery stores, two general merchandise stores, one lumber and building supply store, three doctors, three pool parlors, two barber shops, two beauty parlors, a dentist, a jewelry store, three clothing stores, a state liquor store, and an undertaker. In 1954, twenty-four operational coal mines surrounded Sophia. Some of the town's population worked in most of the mines. Sophia was a leading business center for those who worked in the mines. In 1950, Sophia had a population of 1,427. In 1960 the town population was 1,284. In 1967, construction was completed on the extension of State Route 16, a four-lane divided highway, from Mabscott to Sophia that connected the town to the West Virginia Turnpike (I-77).

Criterion C: Architecture

The Sophia Historic District is significant under *Criterion C: Architecture* for its well-preserved collection of commercial buildings in the business district. The most common style within the district is the commercial style as illustrated by most buildings in the district. The Attili Building, site #7, is a good example of the commercial style. It is a two-story, flat roofed, symmetrical façade building of running bond red brick with a brick course dividing the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 16

first floor from the second. The sides of the building are of cut stone. The roof line is a stepped parapet with stone coping. The building was built in 1939 and is in excellent condition.

The buildings in the district are in good condition. The building with the most decorative and intricate brick work is Bez's Five & Dime, #11. The largest dimensioned building that served so many different and varied commercial needs over the years is Cut Rate Grocery, #13. The smallest building in the district is City Finance Company, #24, which served many of the banking and economic needs of the citizens and businesses.

The 1910 lot sale by H. Riffe in Sophia established many business and residential sites. The railroad ran through the center of town, and cheaply constructed wooden buildings were erected on both sides of the railroad tracks, which set the stage for three costly fires in 1913, 1922, and again in 1925. In 1922 a good part of the entire town of Sophia was wiped out by fire. Business buildings and homes valued at \$25,000 were lost. The Sophia Drugstore, Tosh Building, a Tailoring Shop, and W. J. Lovell's General Store were a few of the buildings that were lost. After the 1922 fire, businesses were built of brick. The first brick and stone business buildings were constructed ca. 1920-1922 by W. J. Lovell and Dr. S. R. Roberts, druggists. On January 15, 1925 the town council passed an ordinance barring construction of frame business buildings, which resulted in the brick and stone structures on Sophia's main street today.

The majority of builders of the buildings at that time were often the owners of the establishments. The buildings along Main Street have exterior side walls of cut stone, stone that was brought in from a near-by hollow or quarry. The front façades of 17 buildings are of brick. The buildings were built by hand and built on a solid foundation of bedrock on Soak Creek. Consequently, the buildings today have very few cracks in them due to the solid bedrock foundation. It is also known that abandoned mine works are present below much of Sophia.

The historic district represents early 20th century commercial architecture and is significant for its local representation of that style. The buildings were designed and constructed to serve the needs of the surrounding coal towns during the early 20th century. The buildings represent the work of master stone masons who possessed artistic skills in the craft of stone cutting. Ten of the 16 contributing buildings have stone exposed fronts and/or exterior sides. The majority of the buildings are built on stone foundations. The only unpainted stone façade building is LB & J Sophia Antiques, #10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 8

Page 17

The buildings are primarily two-story, masonry buildings with updated store fronts on the first floor and housing on the second floor. The district has two buildings with minimal alterations or additions to the store front; they are Atilli Building, #7, and Awesome Karate Hardware, #20. The buildings are all located on one side of Main Street, intersected with an alley, a street and a state highway. The buildings have a street running behind them and the majority of them are directly adjacent to each other.

Other than buildings for commercial needs, there were also buildings for education and entertainment. There was a one-room "shack" school building in 1912 when the town was incorporated. In 1921, Mark Twain High School opened in a two-story frame house, which was moved into a new brick building a year later. Senator Robert C. Byrd graduated from Mark Twain High School where he met his future wife, Erma, and developed his love and interest in music. He graduated as valedictorian of his twenty-eight member class in 1934 and worked as a butcher and grocer in Sophia in the present day Jordan Christian Fellowship (Cute Rate Grocery) building, field survey #13 until he began his political career in 1946, when elected to the WV House of Delegates.

The first theater was constructed in 1934-35, site #12, and people would walk seven miles to reach the theater to see a movie. In 1940, there were five new church buildings built in the area. In 1942, there was a new high school with funds appropriated in 1950 for additions of a gymnasium and auditorium, along with a new sixteen room elementary brick school building. Sophia also boasted as having the largest 4-H club in the state in the 1950s.

With the town being built in the creek bottom, drainage problems often resulted in swampy conditions. The first sidewalk was a boardwalk, located in front of the post office. Later, there was a boardwalk in front of the stores. Young boys would crawl under the board walk to search for money. In the 1930s, the boardwalk gave way to a twelve foot sidewalk. Each owner built his share of the sidewalk.

Summary

The Sophia Downtown Historic District is locally significant for its association with the growth and development of the commercial business district of Raleigh County and for the commercial style of downtown architecture. The period of significance is c.1925 to 1956.

(NPS Form 10-900)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 9

Page 18

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(NPS Form 10-900)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 9

Page 19

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(NPS Form 10-900)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number 10

Page 20

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary begins at the northwest property line corner of site #2 and continues east along the rear property lines of site #s 2-26, crossing Valley Road and Robert C. Byrd Drive. The boundary turns south along the east property line of site # 26 before turning west along the south property lines of site #s 3-26. From this point, the boundary turns south along McAlpin Road and then west along the rear property line of site #1 before turning north along the western property line to the beginning point.

Boundary Justification

The historic boundary encompasses Sophia's commercial buildings situated in the core business district.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Sophia Historic District
Name of Property

Raleigh County, West Virginia
County/State

Section number Photos **Page** 21

Photographer Erin M. Riebe, WV SHPO
Date 18 October 2005
Negatives WV SHPO, Charleston, W.Va.

Photo 1 of 7 Streetscape view of Sophia Historic District
View facing northwest

Photo 2 of 7 Site #s 17, 18, and 19.
View facing north

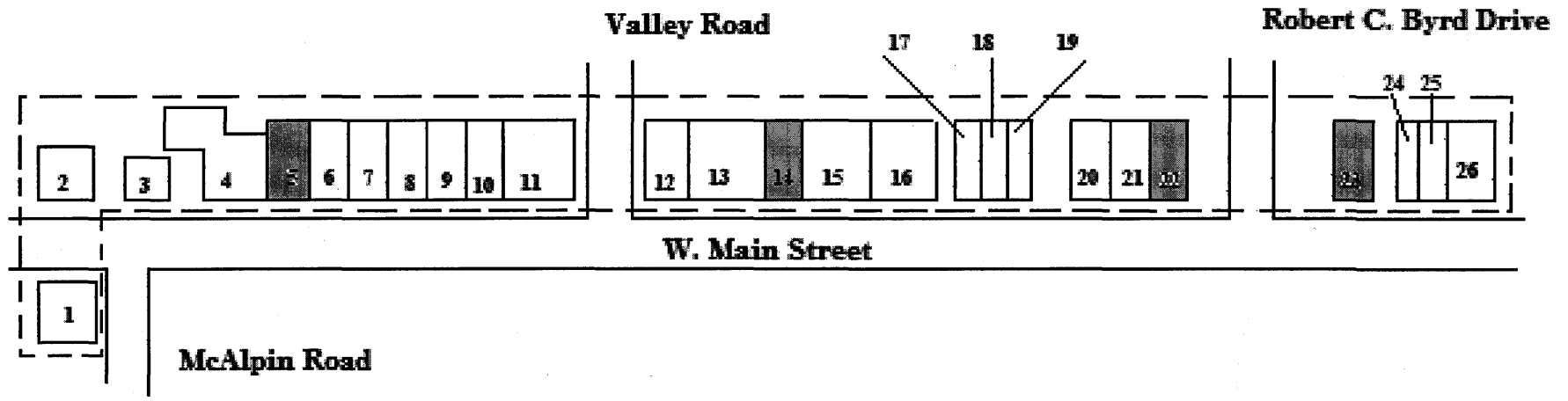
Photo 3 of 7 Streetscape of Sophia Historic District showing site #s 2-11
View facing northwest

Photo 4 of 7 Streetscape of Sophia Historic District showing site #s 12-26
View facing northeast

Photo 5 of 7 Streetscape view of Sophia Historic District
View facing northeast

Photo 6 of 7 Site # 1
View facing southwest

Photo 7 of 7 Streetscape of Sophia Historic District
View facing northeast



**Sophia Historic District
Raleigh County, West Virginia**

- Contributing
- Noncontributing
- ↑ North

--- Boundary