

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Banner Elk Hotel

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 309 Banner Street Not for publication

city or town Banner Elk vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Avery code 011 zip code 28604

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO 8/29/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____ _____ _____	_____	

Name of Property

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
4		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: hotel

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls weatherboard

roof asphalt

other

Narrative Description

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

Name of Property

County and State

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.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
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.
Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
removed from its original location.
a birthplace or grave.
a cemetery.
a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
a commemorative property.
less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
Social History
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

ca. 1856--1950

Significant Dates

ca. 1856

1898

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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:

Western Office, Archives & History

Banner Elk Hotel
Name of Property

Avery County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 2.70 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	4 2 1 5 6 0	4 0 0 1 9 0 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sybil Argintar Bowers
organization Bowers Southeastern Preservation date April 26, 2000
street & number 166 Pearson Drive telephone (828) 253-1392
city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28801

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name see continuation sheet for multiple owners
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1 Banner Elk Hotel Avery County, NC

Set on a knoll overlooking the town of Banner Elk, the Banner Elk Hotel is an excellent example of a vernacular building which evolved from a small two-story house to a rambling frame inn capable of accommodating numerous guests. The building served originally as a farmhouse, later evolving into a hotel for out-of-town guests and locals who enjoyed meals and community events. On the north side of the lot is a gravel drive and parking area with the ca. 1920s garage at the end. To the south of the main hotel building, the lot is wooded, with a cleared area to the east at the crest of the hill which is currently under cultivation. The property consists of the hotel building and several support structures dating from the mid-to-late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. The original section of the hotel appears to date from ca. 1856, with expansions made between 1877 to 1891, as families grew and the building came to be used as a hotel. Located in the town of Banner Elk, North Carolina, the property is bordered by Banner Road and the campus of Lees-McRae College on the west, Central Way and the center of town to the north, Highway 184 to the east, and woods and additional residences to the south. The property is a portion of the original twenty-five acre tract purchased by Lorenzo Dow Lowe from Edwin Joseph Banner, and then deeded to L. D. Lowe's brother, Robert Lee Lowe in 1891. The remainder of the original property has been sold or willed to various family members through the years. The nominated tract is approximately two and three-fourths acres, and consists of four contributing resources (the hotel, the garage, the former servant's quarters and the concrete block storage building).

1. Banner Elk Hotel. Contributing. ca. 1856; ca. 1877; ca. 1891-1898.

Facing north, this rambling, frame, two-story building covered with weatherboard siding exemplifies the evolution of a small frame building into an I-house and later into a larger structure which became necessary as the needs of the family and the uses of the building changed through the years. Making additions to buildings as needed by the family, especially in more remote areas of western North Carolina such as Avery County, was a popular trend throughout the nineteenth century. The current modified u-shaped frame structure sits on a knoll facing north toward Beech Mountain, with mostly wooded land to the south and cleared and cultivated land to the east. When the building was in use as a hotel, beginning in 1898, there were extensive flower gardens between the two rear wings, and most of the remaining acreage was cultivated for crops, planted in apple trees, and used as livestock pasture.¹

¹Beasley, Elsie Lowe. Granddaughter of Robert Lee Lowe. Interviews by Sybil A. Bowers, 6 August 1999 and 18 October 1999.

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Originally horse barns were located on the property. The Lowe family used the horses to transport guests by carriage from the railroad to the hotel.²

The basic evolution of the house appears to begin with a small two-story section located at the northwest corner of the building (ca. 1856) followed by an expansion of these rooms into a full two-story I-house configuration (ca. 1877-1891). The building was expanded subsequently by the addition of the two-story wings to the rear and the smaller additions on the east elevation (ca. 1891-1898). These smaller east elevation additions included the kitchen and a greenhouse, which was later converted to a bath (see Exhibit A).³

The roofline of the front section of the building is side gabled, with front gable roofs over the two rear wings, and front gable and shed roofs on the east elevation additions. Windows are a combination of six-over-six and two-over-two. Exterior doors are a combination of four-light-over-two-panel with transom on the north (front), four-panel with transom on the west wing, and a mid-nineteenth century two-panel door into the oldest section of the building at the northwest corner. Exterior siding at the northwest corner on the original section of the house is wide flush boards. A wraparound porch with an engaged roofline and simple square posts extends across the north and west elevations, being one-story on the north (front elevation), and two-story on the west. The ceiling of the porch is wide boards combined with narrower beaded boards. The original granite slab steps to the front door are still in place on the north elevation. The current balustrade consists of simple square posts, a replacement of an earlier latticed balustrade.⁴ A stepped brick exterior end chimney predominates the east elevation, with several other brick chimneys located where the oldest section of the house joins the wing additions. The foundation of the building is primarily stone piers.

The interior of the building continues the vernacular simplicity of the exterior. Wide planks sheath all walls and ceilings in the original sections and the west wing. It appears a wall was removed from the current living room, which would have made the original section three rooms down, and four rooms above (see Exhibit A). A boxed beam in the living room shows the location of this former wall. It also appears that a door was later added between the living room and the adjacent parlor. Some walls have also been removed in the first floor of the east wing, at the southeast corner (see Exhibit A). Floors in the original section on both stories are wide boards, except in the parlor at the northwestern corner which appear to have been replaced with narrower tongue-and-groove floors in the 1890s, perhaps when this room was used as the post office. The east wing has a combination of wide board walls and ceilings and

²Ibid.

³The original kitchen was separate from the main building.

⁴See ca. 1912 photo in working file.

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narrow beaded boards. Floors in portions of the late-nineteenth-century additions are tongue-and-groove, but those in the west wing are wide boards. Interior doors are either two-panel, two-light-over-two-panel, or four-panel, many with original porcelain knobs. The staircase in the main hall is cherry, with turned newel post and balustrade, made by Bill Banner, a local woodworker and owner of a sawmill.⁵ This appears to be a replacement of an original enclosed exterior staircase once located outside the original section of the house. A door has been enclosed to the west at the top of these stairs which apparently was the entry to the original second floor (see Exhibit A). Floors in the stair hall as well as in the adjacent parlor at the northeast corner appear to have replacement narrower tongue-and-groove boards, probably inserted at the same time the staircase was replaced. Mantels throughout the house are simple post and lintel style.

2. Former Servant's Quarters. Contributing. ca. 1900.

One-story, two-room building with a side gable roof, board and batten walls, four-panel doors, and six-over-six windows. There is a full cellar below the building which was used for fruit storage.

3. Storage Building. Contributing. ca. 1940s.

One-and-one-half-story storage building of concrete block, with a side gable roof, built over the original spring house, which was used for meat storage. This may have also been the original location of the kitchen building. Good condition.

4. Garage. Contributing. ca. 1920s.

One-story building with a front gable roof and shingle siding. Rooms in the upper portion were rented to guests or were used to house servants. Good condition.

⁵Interviews with Elsie Lowe Beasley by Sybil A. Bowers.

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Banner Elk Hotel Avery County NC

Summary

The Banner Elk Hotel in Avery County is the only remaining historic inn in the town of Banner Elk which was associated with the booming tourism industry that began in the late nineteenth century in the mountains of western North Carolina. The original section of the Banner Elk Hotel, a small, two-story, single-family house, was built ca. 1856. Later additions appear to have included the expansion of the original house into an I-house form between 1877 to 1891, and the addition of two wings to the rear between 1891 to 1898. The original owner of the property appears to have been Lewis B. Banner, one of the earliest settlers in Banner Elk, who gave the house and a portion of his land to his son Edwin Joseph Banner in 1877. To accommodate the burgeoning tourist industry Edwin Banner likely operated the house as an inn beginning in the 1880s. The property later sold to Robert Lee and Blanche VonCanon Lowe who opened the Banner Elk Hotel 1898. For fifty years, the hotel served not only as a tourist destination from spring to fall every year, but was also a focal point of the local community. Many civic, church, school, and social groups met at the inn, and local people often came for the bountiful meals. Fannie Lowe, daughter of Robert and Blanche Lowe, continued to operate the hotel until the late 1960s, offering the same degree of hospitality and warmth as her parents. The Banner Elk Hotel is eligible for listing under National Register Criterion A in the areas of social history and entertainment/recreation for its contributions to the development of the town of Banner Elk and for its role in the history of tourism in Avery County. It is also eligible under Criterion C for architecture as a highly intact example of an unpretentious, but substantial frame building started in the mid-nineteenth century and expanded during the latter part of the century in order to accommodate growing numbers of tourists.

Historical Background and Social History Context

In the mid-nineteenth century, when Banner's Elk⁶ was settled, present-day Avery County was part of Watauga County. Watauga County had been formed from Wilkes and portions of Ashe, Caldwell, and Yancey counties in 1849.⁷ Mitchell County was formed out of part of Yancey, Caldwell, Burke, McDowell, and Watauga counties in 1861, and Avery County was formed out of the southwest portion of Watauga County in 1911.⁸ The land which made up first Watauga and later Avery County was an area rugged in terrain, often with harsh winters, and remote from most of the rest of the state. Being close to the Tennessee border, much of the early trade traffic came from out of state rather than other parts of North Carolina. It was a long and difficult trip to travel east to other regions of North Carolina, with a trip to Charlotte

⁶The present-day town of Banner Elk was originally called "Banner's Elk" for the many Banner families that settled there in the mid-nineteenth century. The "Elk" part of the name came from the location of these early settlements on the Elk River. It wasn't until the twentieth century that the name was changed to Banner Elk.

⁷Whitener, Daniel J. History of Watauga County. Boone: Watauga Centennial Commission, 1949.

⁸Ibid, p. 33.

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to travel east to other regions of North Carolina, with a trip to Charlotte often taking up to three weeks, and a trip to nearby Lenoir taking four or five days.⁹ When these trips were made, farmers loaded up on a year's supply of goods such as flour, coffee, sugar, salt, and rice which could not be produced locally. By necessity, early settlers had to become self-sufficient, with farming and production of most household needs on site being the way of life.¹⁰

The population of Watauga County in 1850 was 3,348 with 129 slaves and twenty-nine free Blacks.¹¹ There were 520 children in twelve "common schools".¹² A trade route, built by the Caldwell and Watauga Turnpike Company, was completed in 1851.¹³ By 1860, the population had grown to 4,957 with 104 slaves and eighty-one free blacks.¹⁴ There were 902 schoolchildren, with thirty-three schools available to them.¹⁵ As the Civil War began, most residents of Watauga County were loyal to the South, but there were many who also fought for the Union forces. The public school system was set up in Watauga County in 1874, with a total of thirty-nine schools.¹⁶ The post office at Banner's Elk was established on June 16, 1875.¹⁷ The population in Watauga County after the War had reached 5,287; and 8,160 in 1880.¹⁸ In the 1880s, Hugh McRae, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a mining engineer in Yancey County, bought 16,000 acres of forest land near Linville. Soon after, developer S. T. Kelsey built a turnpike to Blowing Rock.¹⁹ In 1882, the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad ("Tweetsie") made its appearance as the first narrow gauge train from Johnson City, Tennessee to Cranberry, North Carolina, in Avery County, with a track length of thirty-four miles.²⁰ This train was initially set up to haul iron and ore that was being mined in the mountains, but this service soon grew to include passenger cars. As the train began to make Watauga County more accessible in the latter part of the nineteenth century, certain industries also grew, including mining, forest production and lumber, ornamental

⁹Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 42.

¹¹Ibid, p. 47.

¹²Ibid, p. 51.

¹³Ibid, p. 48.

¹⁴Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 63.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 64-65. By 1880, there were forty-eight schools, including many private schools which were founded in the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included Valle Crucis Mission School (1845); Lees-McRae College (1900); Cove Creek Academy (1885); Skyland Institute (1891); Walnut Grove (1904); and Valle Crucis (1909).

¹⁷Cooper, Horton. History of Avery County, North Carolina. Asheville: Biltmore Press, 1964, p. 96.

¹⁸History of Watauga County, p. 48.

¹⁹History of Avery County, p. 12.

²⁰Ibid, p. 44.

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shrubbery, commercial farming, and tourism. The Eseeola Inn was built in Linville, now part of Avery County, in 1891, with tourist stage coaches from Blowing Rock, Edgemont, and Cranberry bringing the summer visitors. The summer resort community of Linville was planned around the inn in the late nineteenth century.²¹ In 1894, the Linville River Railway was established which extended the narrow gauge line of the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad from Cranberry to Linville.²² Watauga County's population grew to 10,611 in 1890; 13,417 in 1900; and 13,423 in 1910.²³

Avery County was founded on February 23, 1911.²⁴ Much of the area had been settled in the mid-nineteenth century by English, German, and Scotch-Irish descendants. The county was named for Colonel Waightstill Avery, and the county seat of Newland was named for Lieutenant Governor W. C. Newland.²⁵ Even though there had been some rail access and road improvements in the area by the time Avery County was formed in 1911, much of the county, including Banner Elk, remained isolated in many ways from the rest of the state. There were no paved roads, and dirt turnpike roads such as the one between Banner Elk and Elk Park or the Parallel Road between Banner Elk and Cranberry formed some of the only transportation routes.²⁶ In 1915, Avery County issued a \$100,000 bond for road improvements.²⁷ By 1917, the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad had acquired the old Linville River Railway, and completed its route from Johnson City all the way to Boone, with stops at Elizabethton, Hampton, Blevins, White Rock, Crab Tree, Roan Mountain, and Shell Creek, in Tennessee and Elk Park, Cranberry, Minneapolis, Vale, Newland, Montezuma, Pineola, Linville, Linville Gap, Jestes Siding, Townsend, Foscoe, Shulls Mills, Laurel, and Hodge's Gap, in North Carolina, a total of sixty-six miles.²⁸ The Tweetsie line, known for its ornate passenger cars and mountain excursions, continued to run until 1946, when automobiles and better roads made train travel less economical. As roads and rail continued to improve in the region, commercial farming became more prevalent, and tourism continued to grow as an industry. The population of Avery County was 10,335 in 1920; 11,803 in 1930; 13,561 in 1940; and 13,352 in 1950.²⁹ Banner Elk's population in 1940 was 3,990.³⁰

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid, p. 45.

²³History of Watauga County, p. 48.

²⁴History of Avery County, p. 5.

²⁵Ibid, p. 9.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid, p. 11.

²⁸History of Watauga County, p. 48. Banner Elk tried to get the line to stop there, but it bypassed them and went on to Boone.

²⁹History of Avery County, p. 58.

³⁰Ibid, p. 65.

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Martin Luther Banner (1808–1895), from Surry County, North Carolina, was the first permanent white settler in the area of present-day Avery County that came to be known as Banner Elk. In 1849, when Martin Luther Banner settled there with his family, the area of land along the Elk River was part of Watauga County. Banner married Mary Ogburn, and they had ten children. In the 1850s, four of Martin Luther's brothers, Lewis B., Anthony E., Edwin H., and John William moved to Banner Elk. Since the Banner family made up most of the early population of the settlement, it was known for many years as Banner's Elk. Other early settlers in Banner's Elk included the Moody, Dugger, Abrams, VonCanon, Keller, Smith, Lineback, and Foster families.³¹

Of the five Banner brothers, only two, John William and Lewis Bitting, remained in Banner Elk. John William Banner married Elizabeth Shipwash and they had five sons, Americus, Henry, Michael, Abraham, John, Jr., and three daughters, Martha, Nancy, and Elizabeth.³² Lewis Bitting Banner came to Banner Elk around 1856, and died there in 1883.³³ He bought 200 acres on the Elk River and married Nancy Meadow Flipping. They had eight children, William Derritt; Samuel Henry; Joshua Albert; Mary Mildred; Nancy A.; Lewis Martin; Edwin Joseph; and Martha H.³⁴

It appears from deed records that Lewis B. Banner may have built the original section of the Banner Elk Hotel ca. 1856. This section consisted of three rooms downstairs, four rooms upstairs, and an enclosed exterior staircase (see Exhibit A). In the deed to his son Edwin Joseph dated April 5, 1877, there is mention of granting the "lands and premises" to him.³⁵ This parcel contained 53 and one-fourth acres on the Elk River, appearing to be a portion of the 200 acres which Lewis B. Banner purchased when he moved to Banner Elk in 1856.³⁶ It is likely, though not fully documented, that Edwin Joseph Banner enlarged the house to more of an I-house configuration after 1877 (see Exhibit A), adding two rooms upstairs and a parlor downstairs to the east of the original section. The upstairs rooms may have been used for guest rooms, or for additional family bedrooms. Edwin Joseph married Alunda Fox on April 8, 1877, and they had eleven children, Helen; Minnie; Robert; Ada; Bess; Bynum; Sallie; Grace; Ruth; Joe; and

³¹Ibid, p. 32.

³²Banner, William P. The Banner Family of North Carolina. Asheville: William P. Banner, 1979, p. 102.

³³North Carolina 1860 census, Lewis B. Banner's name appears.

³⁴The Banner Family of North Carolina, p. 48.

³⁵Watauga County marriage register 1873–1911.

³⁶This deed was apparently a wedding gift since Edwin Joseph Banner married Alunda E. Fox on April 8, 1877. Watauga County Deed Book D, 380.

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Lawrence.³⁷ A portion of the original fifty-three and one-fourth acres was apparently sold to Lorenzo Dow (L. D.) Lowe after 1877, since an agreement dated April 15, 1891, between L. D. Lowe and brother Robert Lee (R. L.) Lowe includes only twenty-five acres.³⁸ In this agreement, L. D. Lowe, a teacher, lawyer, and surveyor, and wife, Hattie Hoye Calloway Stinson, are documented as having purchased twenty-five acres from Edwin Joseph Banner (E. J. Banner in the deed) on the "Elk and Shawneehaw creeks" for \$1000, of which \$425 had been paid by L. D. Lowe. In this agreement, Robert L. Lowe agreed to pick up the remainder of the purchase price of \$575 and pay it to E. J. Banner in order to take over the deed to these twenty-five acres, minus a portion which had already been sold by L. D. Lowe to J. W. Banner (John W. Banner, Jr., most likely), and a one-half acre section which L. D. Lowe would select for his use.³⁹

Robert Lee Lowe (1861-1948) married Nancy Blanche VonCanon (1869-1948) on January 28, 1891.⁴⁰ Between 1891 and 1898, they apparently made additions to the Banner Elk Hotel, adding the east and west wings to the rear (see Exhibit A) which added many new guest rooms. Blanche Lowe was the daughter of Mary M. Banner and William VonCanon (Mary M. Banner was the sister of Edwin Joseph Banner from whom L. D. Lowe purchased the twenty-five acres). Robert Lee Lowe was the son of Gilbert Alexander Lowe, Jr. and Rebecca Lowe.⁴¹ Robert Lee and Blanche Lowe had eight children, Fannie Wade (1892-1973); Lucy Mae (born 1893); Robert Chester (1895-1960); Annie Logan (1897-1970); Patrick Henry (born 1899); William Gilbert (1902-1957); Mildred Rebecca (born 1904); and Charles Lee (1909-1997).⁴² The Lowe family lived in a separate house from the hotel, so that rooms in the hotel could be for guest use only.

The Banner Elk Hotel officially opened on June 1, 1898. An advertisement for the hotel noted that it was only eight miles from the railroad (at Elk Park or Cranberry), with "...good accommodations and polite service". Rates were \$1.00 per day, \$5.00 per week, and \$15.00 per

³⁷The Banner Family of North Carolina, p. 53.

³⁸Avery County Historical Society. Avery County Heritage, Volume III. Banner Elk: Puddingstone Press, 1981, p. 137-138. Lorenzo Dow Lowe (1856-1923) and Robert Lee Lowe (1861-1948) were two of the children of Gilbert Alexander Lowe, Jr. (1822-1881) and Rebecca Lowe (died 1885). Other children included John Cicero (1846-1906); Cassius Hannibal (1848-1929); Gilbert Lucian (1850-1932); Lucinda Catherine (Kate, 1853-1933); Mary E. (born 1855); and Thomas Luther (1857-1926). The Lowes settled in Banner Elk later than the Banners, ca. 1876. They moved from Surry County, North Carolina. There were many marriages between the two families, however.

³⁹Agreement between L. D. Lowe and R. L. Lowe, April 15, 1891. Lowe family papers.

⁴⁰Marriage register of Watauga County 1873-1911.

⁴¹Avery County Heritage, Vol. III, p. 137-138.

⁴²The Banner Family of North Carolina, p. 63-64.

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month. The ad also stated that "...you cannot find a place where the scenery and other attractions are better, and the very low rates offered for board make this the ideal place for the tourist from the low country. The Hotel and furnishings are both new, and guests will receive the very best attention".⁴³ Guests were transported by horse and buggy from the train to the hotel. While the Banner Elk Hotel was more modest in its accommodations than the nearby Eseeola Inn at Linville or the Green Park Inn at Blowing Rock, it had over twenty rooms available for rent, and quickly became known for its hospitality; gay, social atmosphere; and excellent food grown on the surrounding farmlands, orchards and gardens. Livestock was also raised on site for use at the hotel. Three meals were served per day, with a typical breakfast consisting of oatmeal, eggs, bacon, ham, biscuits, butter, and jam. Blanche Lowe supervised a staff of cooks, with students from Lees-McRae College often waiting on tables in the summers. Other staff came from nearby Lenoir. Fresh flowers from the hotel gardens were always on the tables, and cold lemonade was served on the wide porches on summer evenings. Excursions trips on horseback were offered to the guests, often including an overnight camping trip in the nearby mountains. Day trips were offered to guests to the nearby Blue Ridge Parkway beginning in the 1930s. Spring water was piped into the hotel from a spring which was one-fourth of a mile away. Water was piped through hollowed out chestnut logs crafted by Bill Banner, a neighbor and cousin of Blanche Lowe, who also crafted the newel posts and balustrades and some of the furniture in the house.⁴⁴

The hotel was open to guests primarily from April to October each year, but there were often small numbers of guests at the hotel in the winter months as well, including local teachers who boarded during the school term. Guest registers, which date from May 29, 1934 to August 1967, include visitors from Boone, Asheville, Lenoir, Johnson City, Erwin, Elizabethton, Crossnore, Hickory, Salisbury, and Newland, but also list repeat visits from guests from as far away as California, England, and France.⁴⁵ Over thirty states were represented at one time or another by guests at the Banner Elk Hotel.⁴⁶ Well-known guests included Shepherd Monroe Dugger, the first superintendent of Watauga County schools and an author known as the "bard of Banner Elk"; Marjorie Rawlins, author of The Yearling, who wrote some of the book at the inn; Maximilian J. St. George, author of Traveling Light or Cycling Europe on Fifty Cents A Day;

⁴³Cottingham, Leslie Banner and Carol Lowe Timblin. The Bard of Ottaray: The Life, Letters and Documents of Shepherd Monroe Dugger. Banner Elk: Puddingstone Press, 1979, p. 130-131.

⁴⁴Interviews with Elsie Lowe Beasley by Sybil A. Bowers.

⁴⁵Hotel guest registers 1934-1967. Family papers.

⁴⁶Some of these states included Florida, Tennessee, Ohio, Iowa, Georgia, Virginia, Mississippi, West Virginia, New Jersey, Kentucky, Texas, Maryland, North Carolina, New York, South Carolina, Alabama, Washington, D. C., Missouri, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Illinois, Maine, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Indiana, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Kansas, Michigan, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

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Congressman Jamie Clarke and family; Reverend Edgar Tufts, founder of Lees-McRae College; and Lieutenant Governor W. C. Newland, for whom the town of Newland was named.⁴⁷

The hotel, while established primarily as a tourist guest house, served the local community of Banner Elk in many other ways as well. It was often the social center of the local community, with weekly dances, quilting parties for the local women, meals open to the local residents, and weddings and anniversaries often celebrated there. On New Year's Eve, the hotel would host a gathering for the men in the community, which included a possum supper, and children's events such as candy pulls and Halloween parties were always part of the hotel's activities.⁴⁸ It was the meeting place for many community, school, and church groups, including the Red Cross during World War I, the Presbyterian Woman's Circle, the Banner Elk Woman's Club, and the Literary Society.⁴⁹ The post office, which had been established for Banner Elk in 1875, was located there in the 1890s. The hotel also served as the location for voter registration for the county. In the 1920s, the telephone exchange was located in the hotel, and there was a small lending library there before the local public library was established.⁵⁰

In addition to their work as host and hostess of the hotel, Robert and Blanche Lowe were involved in many other community activities. Blanche Lowe was head of the Republican Party for Avery County, and served on the executive committee of the local Red Cross chapter. She also served as postmaster, running the post office out of the hotel from 1891 to 1897. Robert Lowe was mayor of Banner Elk at one time, served as head of the Democratic Party for the county, and was the first Justice of the Peace in Avery County. As Justice of the Peace, he performed the first wedding in the newly established Avery County at the Banner Elk Hotel. Robert Lowe also owned and managed a store across the street from the hotel (on the present-day Lees-McRae College campus), and ordered supplies for the hotel from there. In 1909, he also built a store in Valle Crucis, the Watauga Supply Company, which was two blocks from the Mast Store. He sold it in 1910 to Charles D. Taylor and Dr. H. B. Perry. This building is now the Mast Store Annex.⁵¹

On August 24, 1948, soon after the death of Robert Lee Lowe, his will was found. In it, he willed the hotel and associated acreage of approximately 2.84 acres to daughters Fannie and Annie, with the remainder of the hotel lot to be sold with proceeds to his other children, Gilbert,

⁴⁷Interviews with Elsie Lowe Beasley by Sybil A. Bowers.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Interviews with Elsie Lowe Beasley by Sybil A. Bowers.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹The Heritage of Watauga County, North Carolina. Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1984, p. 80.

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Charles, Lucy, and Mildred.⁵² Fannie Lowe, the eldest of the Lowe children, helped to run the hotel as a young woman, and then took over managing and running it after her parents died in 1948 and willed the property to her and sister Annie.⁵³ She continued the long-established traditions of her parents in extending warm hospitality to both local and out-of-town visitors to the hotel. In addition to her duties as hostess of the Banner Elk Hotel, Fannie Lowe was president of the Banner Elk Woman's' Club, and served in the 1930s on the Avery County Public Welfare Board.⁵⁴ Fannie continued to run the hotel until the end of 1967, and died September 15, 1973.⁵⁵ In her will dated August 28, 1961, Fannie Lowe willed one-half interest in the hotel property including the "...furnishings, glass, linens, and china..." to her brother Charles L. Lowe.⁵⁶ Annie Lowe Morgan willed the other half-interest in the hotel to her two sons. Upon the death of Charles L. Lowe, the hotel property was passed on to descendants of the Robert Lowe family who still own it today.

Architectural and Entertainment/Recreation Contexts

When the Caldwell-Watauga Turnpike was completed in 1851, this began to open up many of the more remote counties of western North Carolina adjacent to the Tennessee border to tourism. As more roads developed, and then later the railroad, the Banner Elk Hotel and many of the more elaborate resort communities in the counties of Watauga, Ashe, and Avery began to develop. The Banner Elk Hotel, with its basic form, additions, and simple interior details, was much more modest in character than most of the grander inns which developed at the end of the nineteenth century in nearby communities. The Banner Elk Hotel drew its own share of repeat visitors every year, but they were not often the typical resort tourist. Visitors to the Banner Elk Hotel would have been drawn into the local community, treated to bountiful meals with all ingredients grown on the surrounding farmland, and entertained by dances and children's activities. These tourists experienced a much simpler style of accommodation, something which many obviously wanted as evidenced by the wide variety of places from which visitors to the Banner Elk Hotel came. The Banner Elk Hotel was not originally built as a resort, as many of the other nearby resort hotels were. It served first as a home for local settlers and, as the train and trade routes became more prevalent in Avery County, evolved into a boarding house. The additions to the Banner

⁵²Avery County will records, Book 2, 169. In addition to the hotel property, Robert L. Lowe willed some of his other holdings to his children, totaling approximately sixty-nine acres total. The acreage of the hotel at this time was 2.84 acres. This included the Puckett farm to Robert Chester Lowe, and the store and lot opposite to the hotel to Fannie.

⁵³Robert Lowe died July 30, 1948 and Blanche Lowe died February 16, 1948 (Avery County wills).

⁵⁴History of Avery County, p. 95.

⁵⁵Avery County will records, 73-E-50.

⁵⁶ibid.

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Elk Hotel are in keeping with the domestic character of the original sections of the building which were built for use as a house.

The closest to the Banner Elk Hotel in style is the Appalachian Inn which still exists in nearby Minneapolis (Avery County), and the Klonteska Inn (now an area of modern infill development), which was located near the Banner Elk Hotel in Banner Elk on the north side of Highway 194. The Appalachian Inn, like the Banner Elk Hotel, also began as a simple two-story I-house which later was expanded for use as an inn as tourists began to visit Avery County. Built in 1898, the Appalachian Inn was bought in the early 1900s by Dr. L. E. Clark and his wife Josie Burleson Clark. They added a two-story ell onto the house for the doctor's office, which was used in later years by members of the Burleson family for use as an inn.⁵⁷ The Klonteska Inn was also simple in its design, with weatherboard siding, simple porch details, and more vernacular architectural features.⁵⁸ In contrast to the Banner Elk Hotel, the Eseeola Inn (Avery County), which was built in Linville in 1891, was more typically in the style of the day with a multi-gabled roofline, shingle siding, and numerous porches.⁵⁹ In addition to the hotel buildings, the resort community of Linville was also developed in the 1890s to the 1920s, with many individual cottages built in the Rustic revival style. The Pineola Inn, also in Avery County, was also more elaborate in style than the Banner Elk Hotel, with a much more refined exterior and interior.⁶⁰ The Green Park Inn in Blowing Rock (Watauga County), built in 1882, also differed in style from the Banner Elk Hotel. Like the Eseeola Inn, the Green Park Inn was an expression of the Queen Anne/Colonial Revival style with weatherboard and shingle siding, and more elaborate interiors. It was typical of the late nineteenth century resort, with the whole town of Green Park (incorporated as the town of Blowing Rock in 1927) being built to cater to the wealthy tourist. Typical tourists were considered to be "...well-to-do, of high social standing, and usually occupied the hotel for an entire summer...".⁶¹ Nearby Ashe County, like most of Avery County, existed primarily as an agrarian culture until the advent of late nineteenth century tourism. Then, hotels such as the West Jefferson Hotel (built in 1917 in the town of West Jefferson, Ashe County) were constructed specifically as a place to house visitors who came to

⁵⁷From determination of eligibility report, Western Office, Archives & History files, "Appalachian Inn".

⁵⁸Dugger, Shepherd M. The Balsam Groves of the Grandfather Mountain. Banner Elk: Shepherd M. Dugger, 1934, p. 225.

⁵⁹The Bard of Ottaray, p. 132. This building burned in 1936, and the Eseeola Lodge, originally built as an annex building to the Eseeola Inn in the 1920s, was then added to and used as the main inn (from A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina, p. 225).

⁶⁰The Bard of Ottaray, p. 134.

⁶¹From National Register nomination for the Green Park Inn, prepared by Jim Sumner and Douglas Swaim, 1981.

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the area by railroad.⁶² This simple, square building with its two-story porch wrapping around a brick facade, represented the new growth and accessibility in this part of the state which led to the boom in the tourism industry. In contrast, the Glendale Springs Inn (Ashe County), was more in keeping with the grander resort communities of Watauga and Avery Counties mentioned above. Built in 1895 and expanded in 1902 and 1905, this structure began as an I-house and evolved into a more Neoclassical style building. It was in use through the first part of the twentieth century as a resort spa with mineral water bathing pools being a major attraction.⁶³ Many of these late nineteenth and early twentieth century resorts and hotels catered to the very wealthy who came to the mountains expecting to be pampered and removed from the local community to a degree, and as a place to gather socially with others. Others, like the Banner Elk Hotel, began as simple farmhouses which grew into boarding houses and later inns which continued to serve the local community as well as the seasonal visitors.

⁶²Bisher, Catherine, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin. A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 203.

⁶³Ibid, p. 209-210.

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Boundary Description

The boundary for this nomination as indicated on the accompanying survey/sketch map, is all of tract one on the plat recorded in Avery County Deed Book 121, page 1465. The nominated tract is approximately two and three-fourths acres, and includes the hotel and associated support buildings.

Boundary Justification

Boundary encompasses part of the original twenty-five acre tract historically associated with the property.

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The following information applies to all of the photographs, except where noted.

Name of Property: Banner Elk Hotel
309 Banner Street
Banner Elk
Avery County
North Carolina

Photographer: Sybil Argintar Bowers
Date of photos: October 1999
Location of original negatives: Division of Archives and History
One Village Lane
Asheville, North Carolina 28803

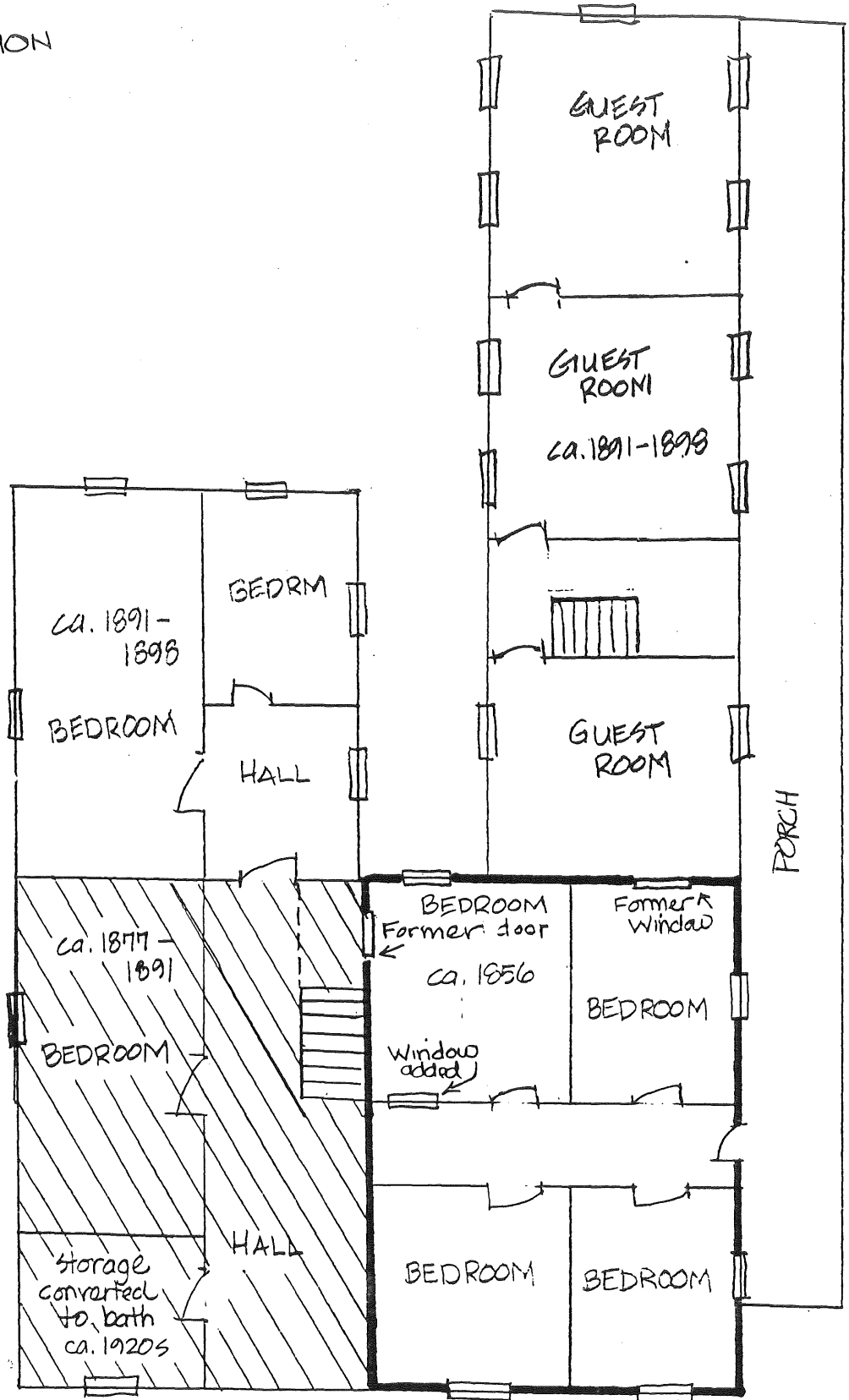
1. Front and west elevations, view southeast.
Date: April 2000
2. Porch at west wing, view south.
3. Chimney, view northwest.
4. East and west wing additions, view north.
5. Garage, view northeast.
6. Newel post, front entry hall, ca. 1877-1891 section, view south.
Date: December 1999
7. View into original ca. 1856 section, view southwest.
8. Former dining room, ca. 1891-1898 section, view southwest.
9. Second floor stair hall, view into original ca. 1856 section, view southwest.
10. Typical second floor bedroom, original ca. 1856 section, view northeast.
11. Typical second floor bedroom in west wing, ca. 1891-1898, view south.

KEY

 ORIGINAL SECTION
 ca. 1856-1877

 EXPANSION
 ca. 1877-1891

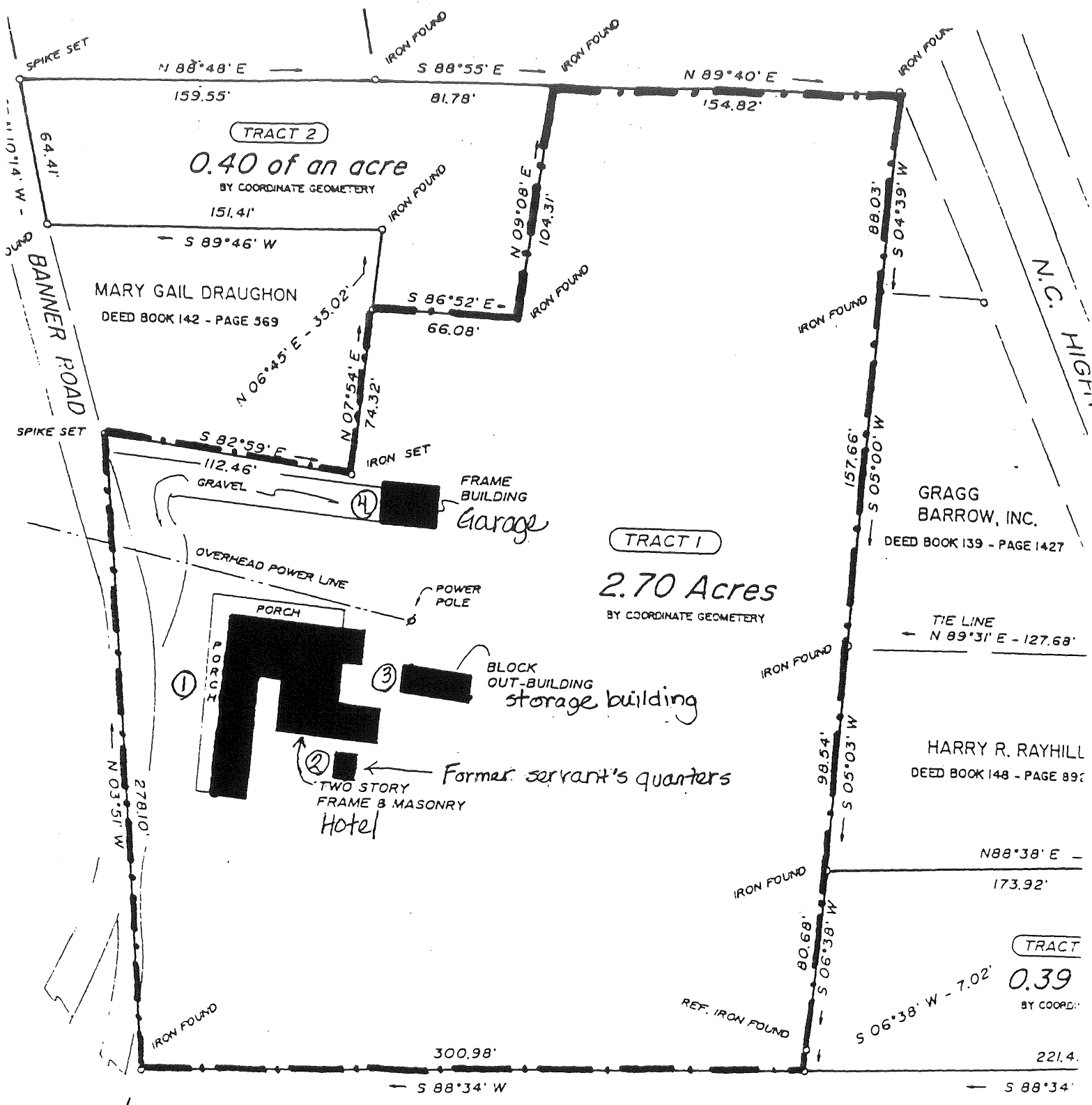
 EXPANSION
 ca. 1891-1898



Avery County
 Banner Elk Hotel
 Banner Elk, NC

Exhibit A Second Floor Plan Not To Scale

North

Survey and Sketch Map

JACK C. ROBINSON
DEED BOOK 121 - PAGE 1465

—•— boundary
■ contributing



ROBERT E. GRINDSTAFF, R.L.S., NO. L-1294,
118-1,

MENTS IS NOT LESS THAN 1:10,000.

SE 66 Banner Elk Hotel, Avery County, NC

Banner Elk



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