



North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

State Historic Preservation Office

David L. S. Brook, Administrator

James B. Hunt Jr., Governor
Betty Ray McCain, Secretary

Division of Archives and History
Jeffrey J. Crow, Director

May 24, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: William D. Gilmore, P.E., Manager
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch
Division of Highways
Department of Transportation

FROM: David Brook (handwritten signature)
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

SUBJECT: Replace Bridge No. 42 on SR 1734 over North Branch of the Hungry River.
TIP No. B-3346, BR 00-9943 (handwritten: Henderson Co.)

Thank you for your letter of May 15, 2000, transmitting the survey report by Mary Pope Furr concerning the above project.

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, we concur that the following property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under the criterion cited:

Stepp's Mill is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance in industry and community planning and development as an increasingly rare example of a water-powered saw and gristmill and one of the few remaining original buildings of the town of Saconon, a town that is typical of a small mountain settlement in western North Carolina. It is also eligible under Criterion C for architecture as an intact example of a water-powered saw and gristmill. We concur with the boundaries as stated on page 19 of the report.

The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, please contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919/733-4763.

cc: B. Church

Table with columns: ADMINISTRATION, ARCHAEOLOGY, RESTORATION, SURVEY & PLANNING, Location, Mailing Address, bc: Brown/Montgomery County RF, Fax. Includes contact information for various departments and the county.

B-3346 · Replace Bridge 42 on SR 1734 over the North Branch of Hungry
River · Henderson County · Historic Architectural Resources Survey Report

HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT

**Replace Bridge No. 42 on SR 1734 over the
North Branch of the Hungry River
Henderson County, North Carolina
TIP No. B-3346
State Project No. 8.2951301
Federal Aid No. MABRZ-1734(3)**

North Carolina Department of Transportation
Report Prepared by Mary Pope Furr

May 2000

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North Carolina Department of Transportation
Report Prepared by Mary Pope Furr

May 2000

Mary Pope Furr
Mary Pope Furr, Principal Investigator
Historic Architecture Section
North Carolina Department of Transportation

5.11.2000
Date

Barbara Church
Barbara Church, Supervisor
Historic Architecture Section
North Carolina Department of Transportation

5/11/00
Date

**REPLACE BRIDGE NO. 42 ON SR 1734 OVER THE
NORTH FORK OF THE HUNGRY RIVER
HENDERSON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
TIP NO. B-3346**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to replace Bridge No. 42 on SR 1743 over the North Fork of the Hungry River in Henderson County with a new structure (Figure 1). Bridge No. 42 is a one-lane timber and steel bridge built in 1958 and has a sufficiency rating of 41 out of 100.

Two alternatives are being evaluated for replacing Bridge No. 42 (Figure 2). They are:

Alternative One – The existing bridge will be replaced with a 140-foot long, two-lane bridge on a new alignment approximately 70 feet northeast of the existing bridge. Traffic will be detoured on other roads during construction. Bridge No. 42 will be removed upon completion of the new bridge.

Alternative Two – The existing bridge will be replaced with a 150-foot long, two-lane box culvert on new alignment approximately 150 south of the existing bridge. Traffic will be maintained on existing alignment during construction. Bridge No. 42 will be removed upon completion of the new bridge.

PURPOSE OF SURVEY AND REPORT

NCDOT conducted a survey and compiled this report in order to identify historic architectural resources located within the APE as part of the environmental studies performed by NCDOT and documented by a Categorical Exclusion (CE). This report is prepared as a technical addendum to the CE and as part of the documentation of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended. Section 106 of the NHPA requires that if a federally funded, licensed, or permitted project has an effect on a property listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation be given an opportunity to comment. This report is on file at NCDOT and available for review by the public.

METHODOLOGY

NCDOT conducted the survey and prepared this report in accordance with the provisions of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Technical Advisory T 6640.8A (Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents); the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological and Historic Preservation (48 FR 44716); 36 CFR Part 800; 36 CFR Part 60; and Survey Procedures and Report Guidelines for Historic Architectural Resources by NCDOT. This survey and report meet the guidelines of NCDOT and the National Park Service. In addition, this report conforms to the expanded

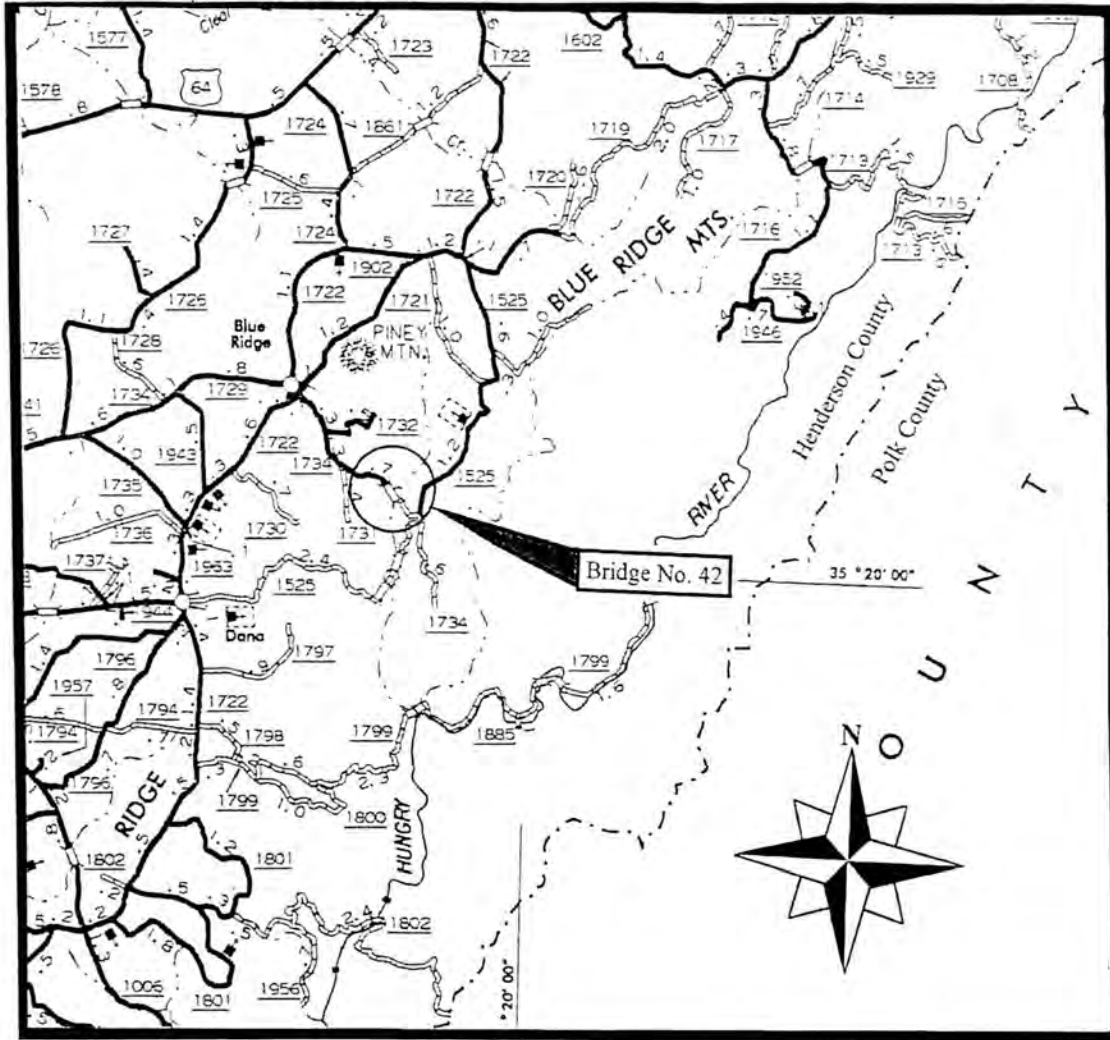
requirements for architectural survey reports developed by NCDOT and the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) dated February 2, 1996.

NCDOT conducted an intensive survey with the following goals: (1) to determine the Area of Potential Effects (APE), defined as the geographic area or areas within which a project may cause changes in the character or use of historic properties, if any such properties exist; (2) to identify all significant resources within the APE; and (3) to evaluate these resources according to the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

The APE for historic architectural resources was delineated by a NCDOT staff architectural historian and reviewed in the field. The APE boundary is shown on the attached map (Figure 3).

The survey methodology consisted of a field survey and background research on the project area. A NCDOT staff architectural historian, accompanied by an architectural historian from SHPO, conducted a field survey on April 24, 2000, by car and on foot. All structures over fifty years of age in the APE were photographed and keyed to an area map.

Background research was conducted at the Western Office of the SHPO in Asheville and the North Carolina State Library in Raleigh.




	<p>North Carolina Department of Transportation Division of Highways Planning & Environmental Branch</p>
	<p>Henderson County Replace Bridge No. 42 on SR 1734 Over North Branch Hungry River B-3346</p>
<p>Figure One</p>	

Figure 1 -- Project Vicinity Map

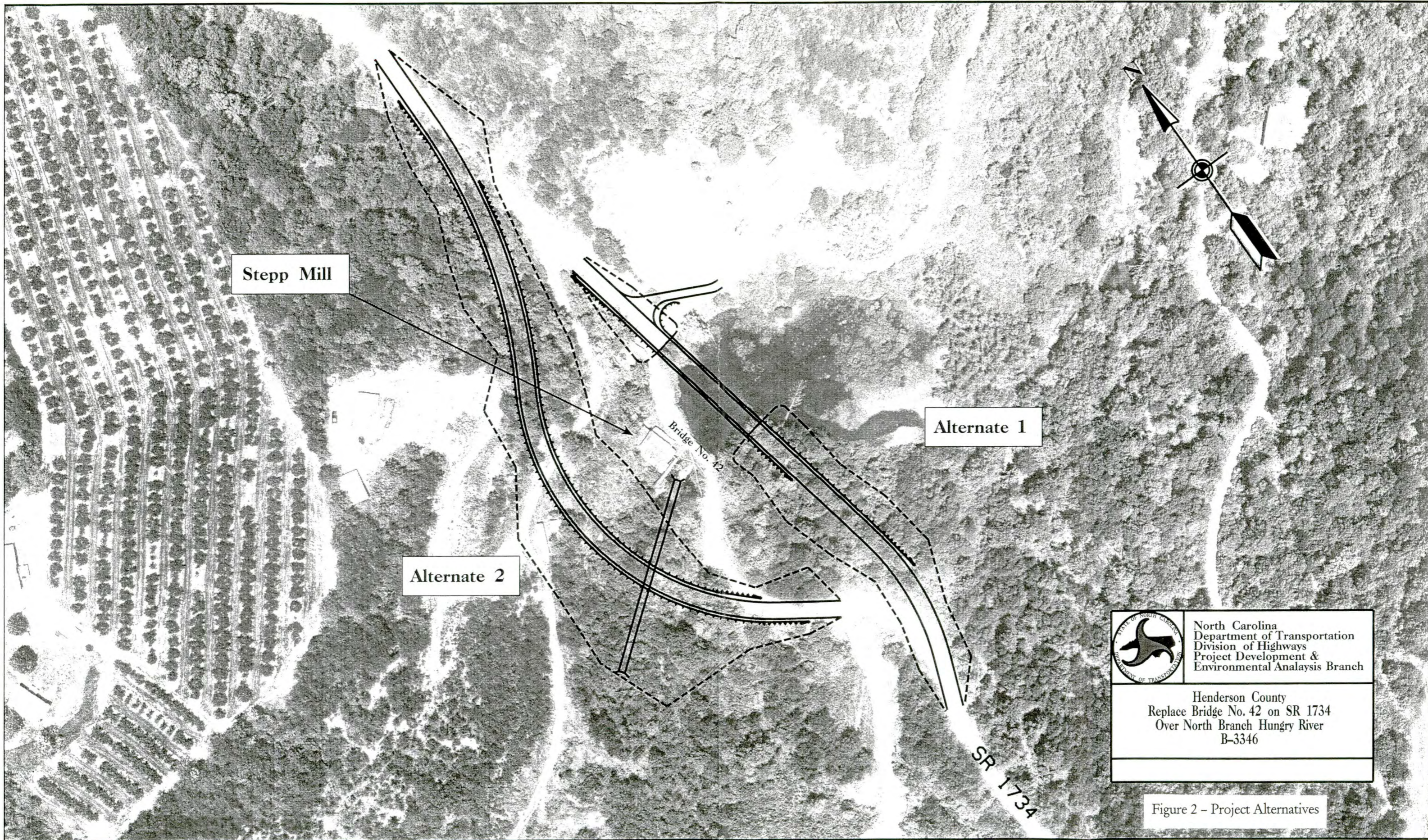


Figure 2 - Project Alternatives

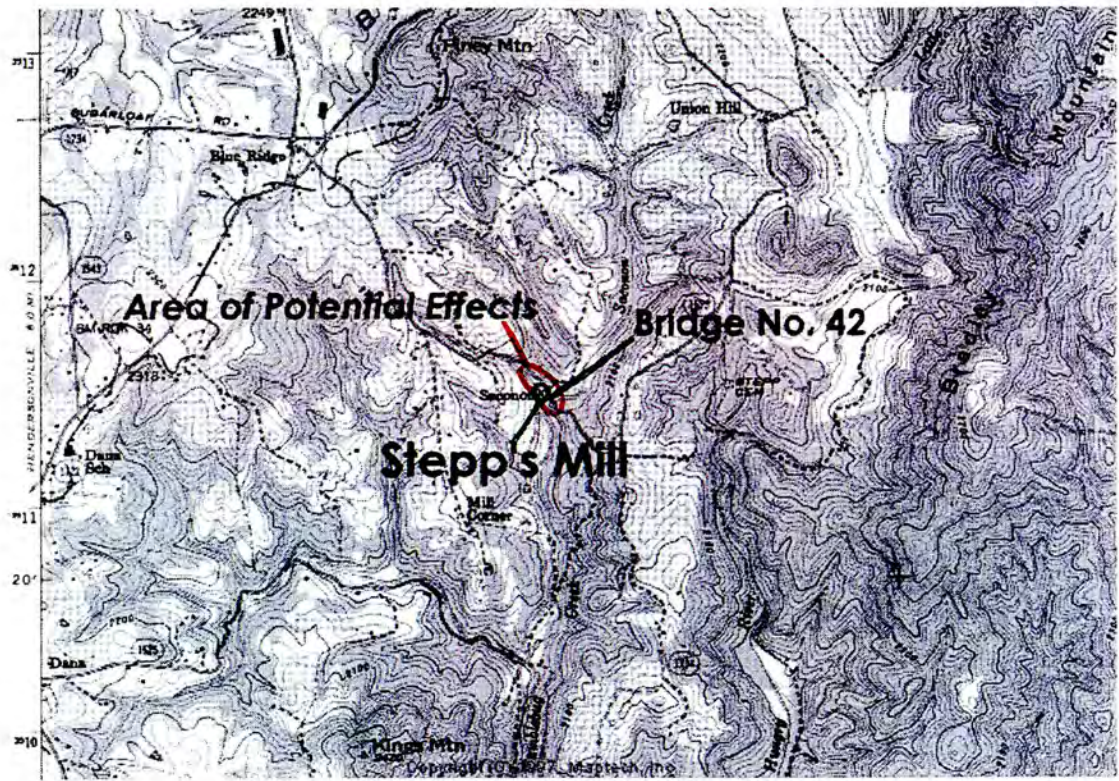


Figure 3 -- Project Area Map (Cliffield Mountain Quad)

SUMMARY FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

There are no properties less than fifty years of age within the APE that qualify for the National Register under Criterion Consideration G.¹ There are no properties listed on the National Register located within the APE for the subject project; however, there is one property, Stepp's Mill, that is listed on the North Carolina State Study List.

Properties Evaluated and Considered Eligible for the National Register:
Stepp's Mill (North Carolina State Study List, 1981)

PROPERTY INVENTORY AND EVALUATIONS

Properties Evaluated and Considered Eligible for the National Register:

Stepp's Mill (North Carolina State Study List, 1981)

Location.

Located at the center of the former community of Saconon, Stepp's Mill and two related buildings stand on the southwest side of SR 1734, approximately 0.3 miles northwest of the road's junction with SR 1525. The millpond is located on the northeast side of SR 1743 and fed by a branch of the Little Hungry River. Bridge No. 42 was built in 1958 and spans the pond and the dam associated with Stepp's Mill. The terrain in the immediate area varies greatly in elevation and in fact most buildings along SR 1734 are built into the base of hills or hanging over a precipice.

Description.

Stepp's Mill is a timber-framed saw and gristmill set into the hillside and powered by an enormous exterior metal wheel. While the site appears to have been used for milling purposes since the 1880s, the current mill building dates from c.1900. Historical and architectural evidence reveals that the mill was initially constructed as a single story, frame structure sheathed in German siding and capped with a gable roof. The rear elevation of the mill was two stories in height, due to the steep terrain, and anchored with a fieldstone foundation. Five of the original six-over-six double hung windows remain, but the primary doors appear to be later replacements. Portions of the interior structural frame date from c.1900, but the addition of a second story between 1932 and 1950 resulted in the rearrangement of interior space and greatly affected the exterior form of the mill. From the road, the second story appears as a sloping shed roof rectangle that rises out of the west half of the c.1900 structure. Additions were also made to the rear elevation of the mill, and as a result the mill nearly tripled in size. A majority of the building is sheathed in lapped wood siding that

¹ Criterion Consideration G states that properties less than fifty years of age may be listed on the National Register only if they are of exceptional importance or if they are integral parts of districts eligible for the National Register.

was once painted red. Other changes made between 1932 and 1950 include the replacement of the wood water wheel with a metal turbine, replacement of the wood race by a metal structure, and improvements to the concrete dam. The mill remained in operations until the 1950s and few changes have been made to the building since. In the 1970s a stone covering was applied to the first story facade of the mill, but for the most part the building has steadily deteriorated.

Adjacent to the mill is a small, c.1900 frame structure thought to be the office for the mill and possibly the post office for Saconon. The building is sheathed in plain weatherboards and covered by a gable roof on the upper story, and set into the slope by a lower story constructed of mortar and fieldstones. Four-over-four double hung windows remain, along with an attached porch, a six panel door, and a brick chimney stack on the western elevation. Inside, the building appears to contain shelves and a few chairs. Overall it remains in good condition despite neglect.

Also included within the mill site is a two-story frame house, probably used as a dwelling house for the proprietors of the mill. The construction date of this house is uncertain and historical research suggests that it was once on the opposite side of the road, but this has not been confirmed. The building is unusual for two reasons; it has a gambrel (instead of the more common gable) roof and it was once sheathed in weatherboards cut to look like bricks. Currently the structure is covered in asbestos shingles and is in a state of disrepair with various doors and windows missing.

The landscape surrounding Stepp's Mill includes steep slopes covered in timber and a millpond on the north side of SR 1734. In addition, the remains of a nineteenth-century log house have been recorded on the south side of the mill. However, recent development in the area is destroying the woods and flattening hilltops so that the former rural community of Saconon is beginning to resemble other residential roads near the City of Hendersonville.

Background Information.

Stepp's Mill is located within the larger property holdings of Larry and Carolyn Justus who reside in a late twentieth-century house north of the millpond. Larry Justus is the grandson of Thomas Dulus Stepp, after whom the mill was named. A chain of title search of the property revealed that Thomas Dulus Stepp and his wife, Anna, acquired the mill, its accompanying buildings, and twenty-five acres in 1932.² Stepp had previously operated the Rhett Mill at Flat Rock and a cannery in nearby Dana.³ Stepp's sister and brother-in-law, Alice Elizabeth Stepp Merrill and Benjamin A. Merrill, owned and operated the mill prior to 1932. The Merrill's had purchased "part of the George Case Mill Tract" in 1910 from James L. Ward and his wife, Mary L. Ward.⁴ Prior to that time Benjamin A. Merrill ran a saw and gristmill and Alice Merrill was the postmistress in the community of Oleeta. After purchasing these 50 acres,

² Henderson County, North Carolina. Records, Deed Book 206 (Hendersonville: Henderson County Courthouse.) 298.

³ Lenoir Ray, *Postmarks: A History of Henderson County, North Carolina, 1787-1968*, (Chicago: Adams Press, 1970), 334.

⁴ Henderson County, North Carolina. Records, Deed Book 68, 25.

Benjamin A. Merrill completely disassembled his mill in Oleeta and Alice Merrill closed the post office. By 1913 the Merrills had moved to Saconon and established a new mill and post office using machinery and supplies from Oleeta.⁵ While the property had been known as the “George Case Mill Tract” before the Merrill’s purchase, it is unknown what buildings existed when they arrived. Deed research reveals that George W. Case transferred seventy-seven acres to James L. Ward in 1906, but there is no mention of buildings. However, when George W. Case acquired the land from J. P. Hyder in 1902 the boundary refers to a mill. Unfortunately there is no other mention of a mill or buildings in previous deeds.



Figure 4 – Stepp’s Mill, south elevation

⁵ Ray, 333.



Figure 5 – Stepp's Mill, east elevation



Figure 6 – Stepp's Mill, west elevation



Figure 7 – Stepp's Mill, north elevation

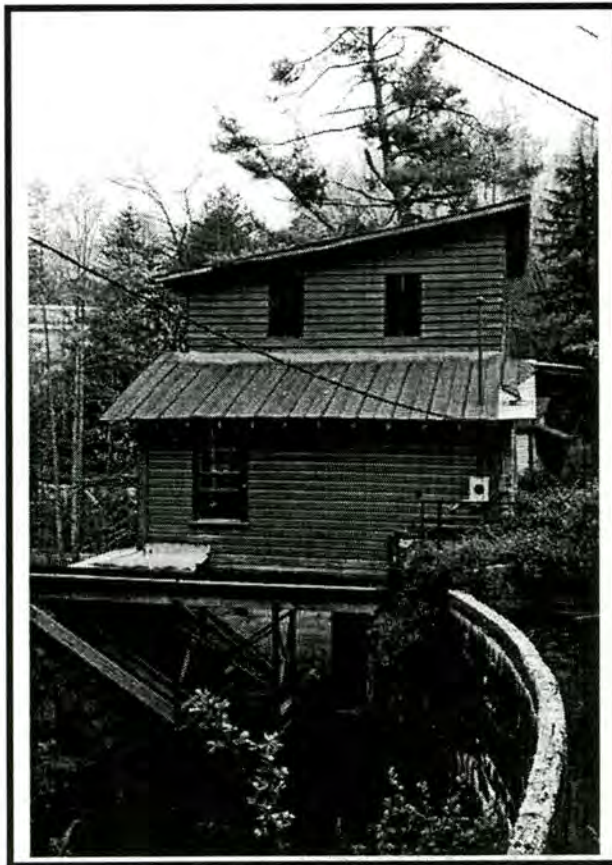


Figure 8 – Stepp's Mill, south elevation, showing dam and race



Figure 9 – Stepp's Mill, waterwheel



Figure 10 – Office at Stepp's Mill, east elevation



Figure 11 – Office at Stepp's Mill, south elevation

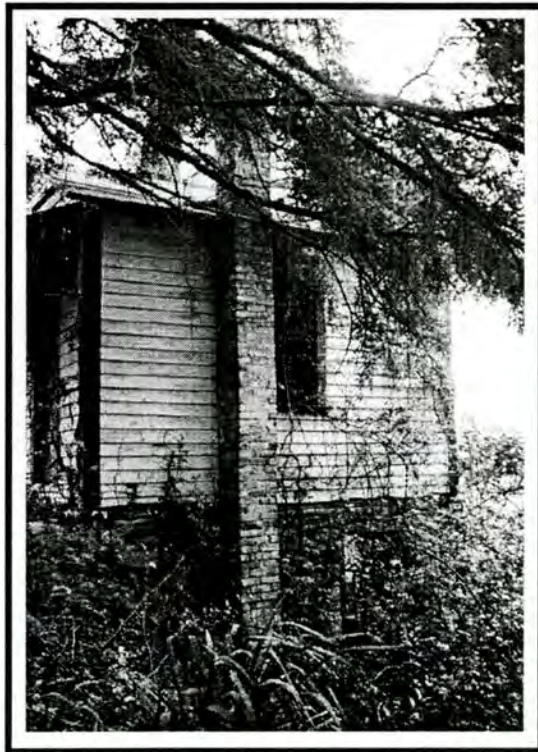


Figure 12 – Office at Stepp's Mill, north elevation



Figure 13 – Dwelling at Stepp's Mill, east elevation



Figure 14 – Dwelling at Stepp's Mill, west elevation

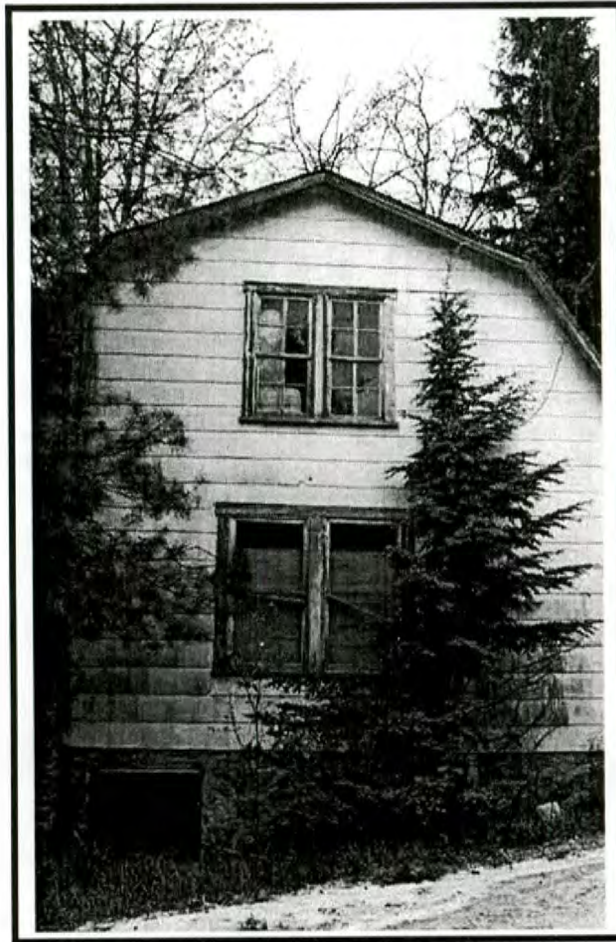


Figure 15 – Dwelling at Stepp’s Mill, south elevation

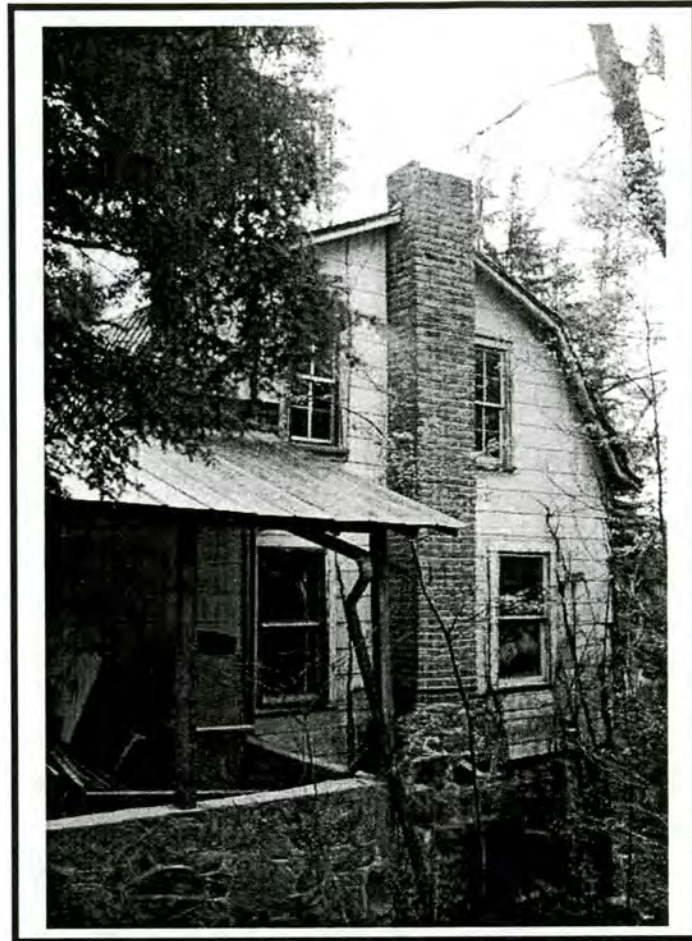


Figure 16 – Dwelling at Stepp's Mill, north elevation



Figure 17 – Dwelling at Stepp's Mill, detail of wood siding



Figure 18 – Site of Stepp's Mill, mill in foreground & dwelling in background



Figure 19 – Site of Stepp's Mill, Bridge No. 42 & millpond

Evaluation.

Stepp's Mill is **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion A (event) for its significance in industry and community development. *To be eligible for significance under Criterion A the property must retain integrity and must be associated with a specific event marking an important moment in American history or a pattern of events or historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community. Furthermore, the property must have existed at the time and be documented to be associated with the events. Finally, the property's specific association must be important as well.*⁶

Stepp's Mill is an increasingly rare example of a waterpowered saw and gristmill as well as one of the few original buildings left in the community of Saconon.⁷ The mill, office, and dwelling form the core of a typical small mountain settlement in western North Carolina. Communities in the mountains remained small, isolated, and self-sufficient until road and highway construction after World War II made travel by car easy and economical. Stepp's Mill was once the center of the small settlement of Saconon as well as the primary means for obtaining sawn lumber and ground meal. The post office associated with the mill was also important because it provided a link between Saconon and more populated areas such as Flat Rock and Hendersonville.

Stepp's Mill is **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion B (person). *For a property to be eligible for significance under Criterion B, it must retain integrity and 1) be associated the lives of persons significant in our past, i.e., individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, state, or national historic context; 2) be normally associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when she achieved significance; and 3) should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions. Furthermore, a property is not eligible if its only justification for significance is that it was owned or used by a person who is or was a member of an identifiable profession, class or social or ethnic group.*⁸

There are no persons of national, state, or local significance associated with the Stepp's Mill.

Stepp's Mill is **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion C (Design/Construction) for its significance in architecture. *For a property to be eligible under this criterion, it must retain integrity and either 1) embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; 2) represent the work of a master; 3) possess high artistic value; or 4) represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*⁹

Despite changes to the building, Stepp's Mill is a rare example of a waterpowered saw and gristmill from the early twentieth century. In addition, the cluster of

⁶ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1991), 12.

⁷ Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 42.

⁸ National Park Service, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

buildings associated with the mill represent the central features of a small mountain settlement where locals would come to get building materials, food, and information. In addition, the unusual wood siding found on the dwelling embodies the distinct characteristics of decorative exterior siding, not commonly seen in rural areas.

Stepp's Mill is **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion D (Information Potential). *For a property to be eligible under Criterion D, it must meet two requirements: 1) the property must have, or have had, information to contribute to our understanding of human history or prehistory, and 2) the information must be considered important.*¹⁰

The architectural and engineering components of Stepp's Mill are not likely to yield information important in the history of building technology.

Historic Boundary.

The Historic Boundary for Stepp's Mill has been drawn according to the guidelines of National Register Bulletin 21, "Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties." The Historic Boundary for Stepp's Mill begins at the southeast edge of the millpond, thence north along the back edge of the millpond to a gravel drive, thence west along the centerline of the gravel drive and across the road to the western edge of pavement, thence north along the pavement's edge to another gravel drive, thence south and west approximately 350 feet following the centerline of the gravel drive, thence south to the north branch of the Hungry River, thence east following the centerline of the stream to the beginning.

The Historic Boundary for Stepp's Mill is delineated on the preliminary design sheet for the project area (Figure 21).

Historic Boundary Justification.

The Historic Boundary for Stepp's Mill includes all of the significant resources that retain integrity and contribute the property's significance. These include the mill, dam, stream, office, dwelling, and millpond. However, while Bridge No. 42 is located within the historic boundary of the mill, it is not a contributing resource and is not individually eligible for the National Register. Also, only a portion of the current legal property boundaries have been outlined because the larger parcel contains resources which do not directly contribute to the property's significance and landscapes which have lost integrity due to construction.

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

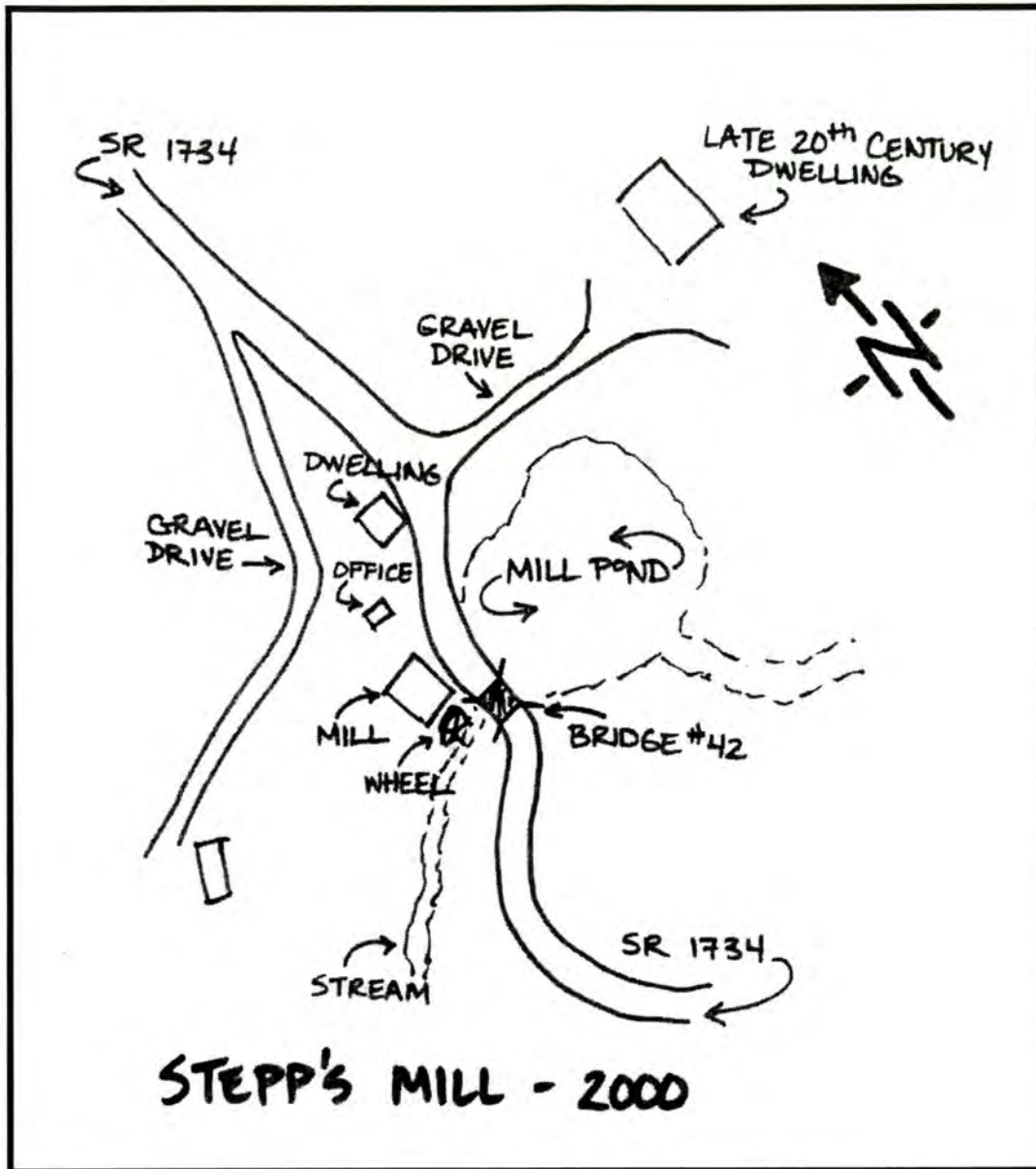


Figure 20 – Site Map for Stepp’s Mill

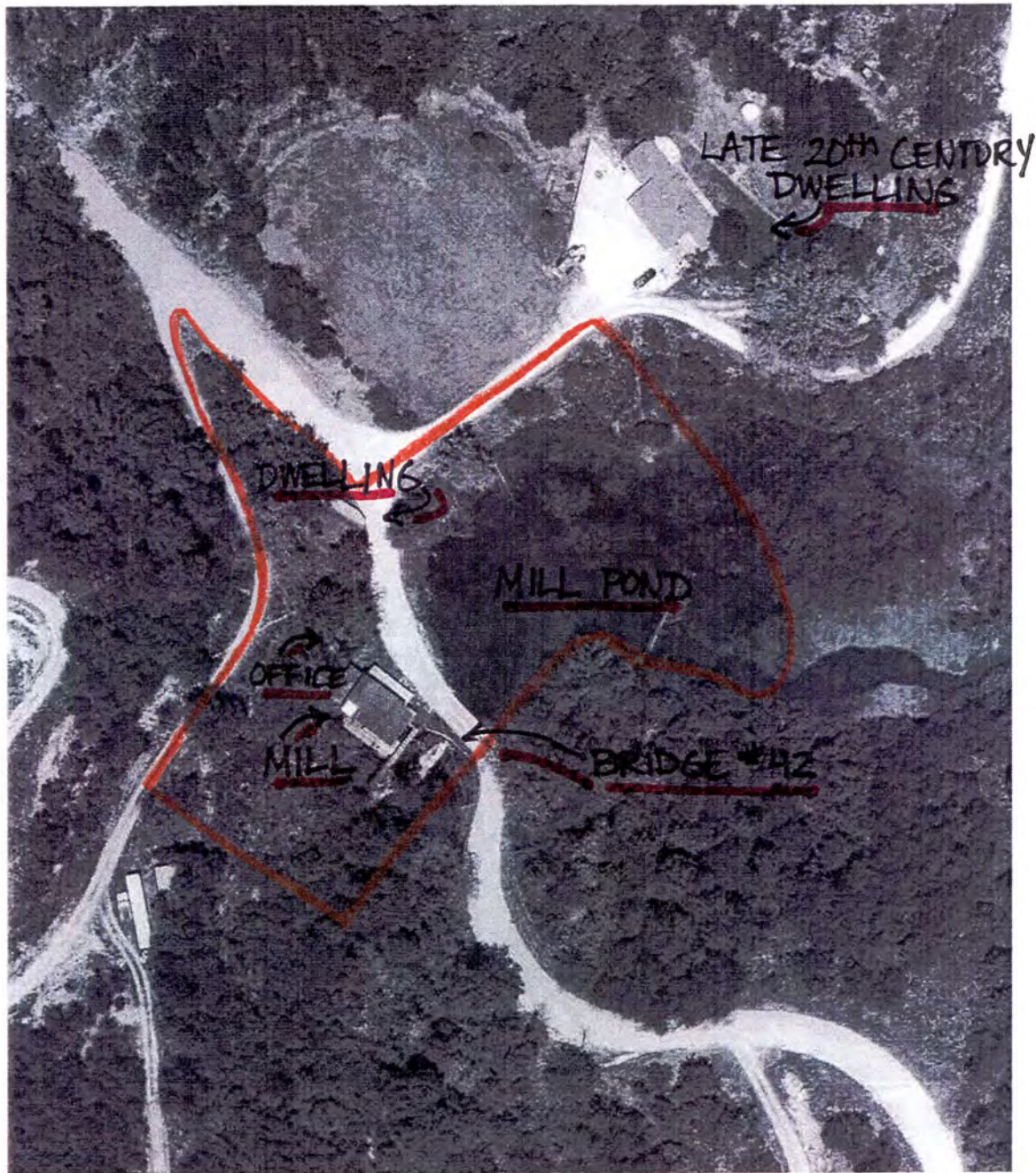


Figure 21 - Historic Boundary Map for Stepp's Mill

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