HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT **REPLACE BRIDGE NO. 193 ON SR 1157** OVER THORPE DAM SPILLWAY JACKSON COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION **TIP NUMBER B-3196** FEDERAL PROJECT NUMBER MABRZ-1157(2) STATE PROJECT NUMBER 8.2960701

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Historic Architectural Resources

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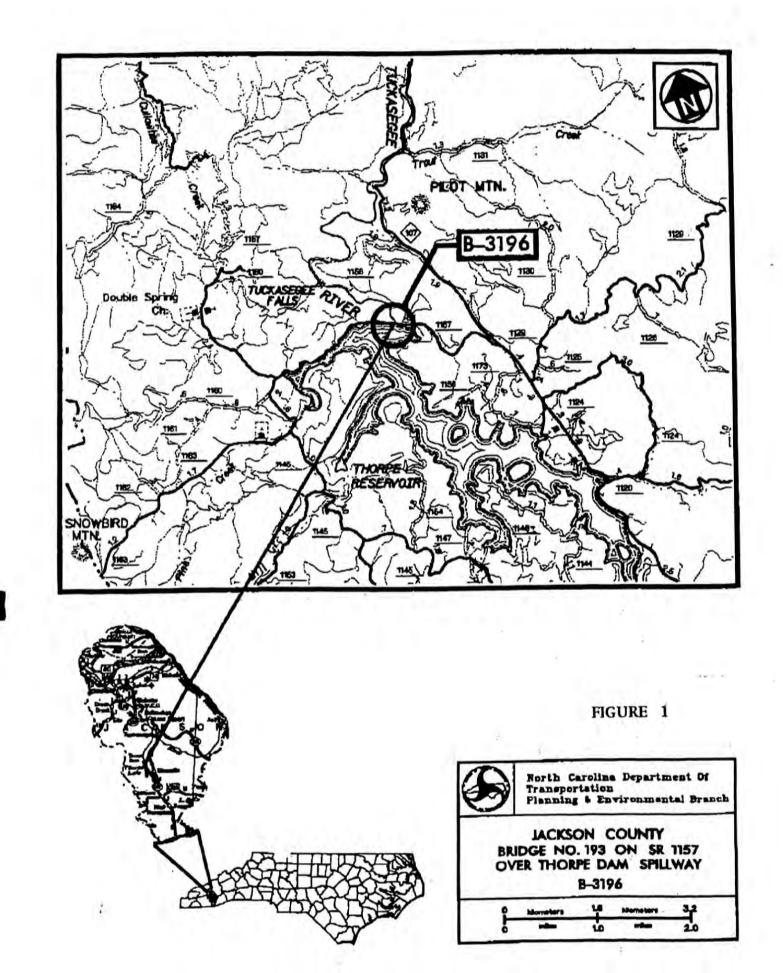
The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to replace Bridge No. 193 on SR 1157 over Thorpe Dam Spillway in Jackson County (Figure 1). Two alternatives for replacing Bridge No. 193 were studied. Each consists of a two-lane bridge 116 meters (380 feet) long and 9.2 meters (thirty feet) wide. The two alternatives, both of which require the removal of the current bridge, are shown in Figure 2 and described below.

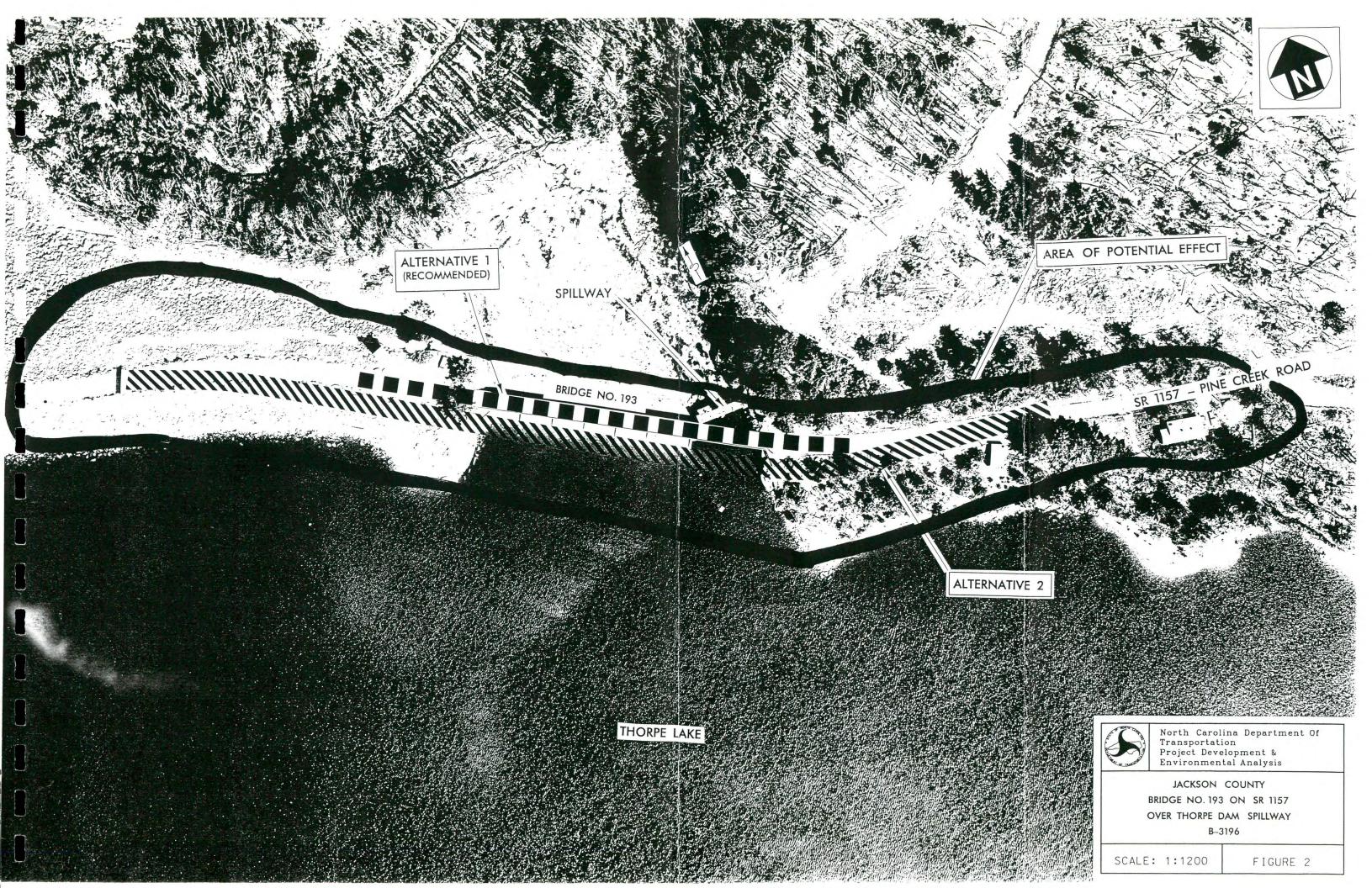
Alternative 1 (Recommended) replaces the bridge along the existing roadway alignment. Improvements to the approach roadways will be required for a distance of approximately 185 meters (607 feet) to the west and 112 meters (367 feet) to the east of the structure. An off-site detour will be used to maintain traffic during the construction period. Alternative 1 is recommended because it minimizes impacts on any sensitive natural ecosystems in the vicinity of the site. Also, this alternative will have a minimal impact on the flood plain and on adjacent properties.

Alternative 2 replaces the bridge with a two-lane span on a new alignment within the study corridor stream (south) of the existing structure. During construction, an off-site detour will be used to maintain traffic. The new alignment would have a design speed of eighty kilometers per hour (fifty miles per hour) and would be approximately 400 meters (1,300 feet) in length. This alternative is not recommended because of the impact on the ecosystem in the vicinity of the site and the effect on adjacent properties. Also, Nantahala Power and Light Company does not prefer this alternative because it will require fill material to be placed on top of the existing dam.

# Purpose of Survey and Report

This survey was conducted and the report prepared in order to identify historical architectural resources located within the area of potential effects (APE) as part of the environmental studies conducted by NCDOT and documented by a Categorical Exclusion (CE). This report is prepared as a technical appendix to the CE and as part of the documentation of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 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 potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation be given a reasonable opportunity to comment on such undertakings.





# Methodology

This survey was conducted and the report compiled in accordance with the provisions of FHWA Technical Advisory T 6640.8A (Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents); and 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.

The "Final Identification and Evaluation" was conducted with the following goals: 1) to determine the 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 historic resources within the APE; and 3) to evaluate these resources according to the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

The methodology consisted of background research into the historical and architectural development of the area and a field survey of the APE. The field survey was conducted in June 1999 to delineate the APE and to identify all properties within this area which were built prior to 1950. The boundaries of the APE are shown on an aerial map of the study area (Figure 2). The APE is defined by modern construction, topographical features, and sight lines. One hundred percent of this area was surveyed.

Background material on Thorpe Dam was provided by Clay Griffith, Head, Western Office of the State Historic Preservation Office (Asheville), and Ms. Barbara McRae and Mr. Richard Conley with Nantahala Power and Light Company in Franklin, North Carolina. The recent publication, A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina (Bishir et al. 1999), was a valuable source of information on the architectural development of Jackson County and the region.

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# Summary Findings of the Survey

The project area follows SR 1157 (Pine Creek Road) across Bridge No. 193 over the Thorpe Dam Spillway in Jackson County. The APE is tightly defined by the north bank of Thorpe Lake to the south, and the mountainous, wooded topography to the north, east, and west of the project (see Figure 2). The project is located on the north bank of Thorpe Lake, formed by the construction of Thorpe Dam on the Tuckasegee River. The mountainous Nantahala National Forest stretches across this region, and although the rugged terrain has historically restricted development, dwellings are scattered along SR 1157 in the general study area. Among these houses is a 1941, frame, gable-front bungalow situated on the east side of the APE. This dwelling is part of the 1941 Thorpe Dam Complex, which also includes the rock and earth Thorpe Dam, two adjacent concrete gatehouses, and Bridge No. 193. This complex is recommended eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for social history and Criterion C for engineering.

# Properties Listed on the National Register

None

## Properties Listed on the North Carolina State Study List None

Properties Evaluated and Considered Eligible for the National Register Thorpe Dam Complex

# Historic Context and Background Information

White settlers began moving into the broad Tuckasegee River valley of present-day Jackson County during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Typical of western North Carolina as a whole, newcomers of mainly Scotch-Irish heritage dominated the migration stream. Many followed Scott's Creek westward from neighboring Buncombe and Haywood counties, traveling through Balsam Gap into the fertile bottom lands of the Tuckasegee River basin and around the headwaters of the Chattooga, Whitewater, Thompson, Horsepasture, and Toxaway rivers in northern Jackson County. The southern end of the Jackson region, where a higher valley (Cashiers Valley) separated the area from the slow but steady flow of population to the north, was inhabited later and mostly by settlers from the South Carolina backcountry. While poor transportation kept farms isolated and fostered subsistence agriculture in the nineteenth century, by the 1830s a number of crude roads connected the region to distant markets. In 1837, the state legislature authorized the Scotts Creek Turnpike, which linked the area to the Buncombe Turnpike between Greenville, Tennessee, and Greenville, South Carolina, and to roads moving southwest into Georgia. Many farmers, especially in the Tuckasegee Valley, began to raise crops and livestock for sale, selling surplus corn to the drovers herding cattle and hogs south from Tennessee to markets in South Carolina and Georgia, or taking livestock to markets themselves (Williams 1987: 68-84, 91, 101).

The population of the region steadily climbed through the antebellum years, and in 1851 Jackson County was formed from parts of Haywood and Macon counties. A year later, the community of Webster on the Tuckasegee River became the first county seat, and during the ensuing decades it developed as the county's key trading center. However, when the long-awaited Ashevilleto-Murphy branch of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR) bypassed Webster in 1882, the rail towns of Dillsboro and Sylva rapidly grew while Webster languished. In 1913, the citizens of Jackson County elected to relocate the county seat from Webster to nearby Sylva along the rail line (Williams 1987: 68-69; Bishir et al. 1999: 357-358).

The railroad boosted small-town development along the rail line. By the 1910s, Sylva featured a grand, hilltop courthouse (1914) overlooking a thriving commercial district of masonry stores trimmed with imported pressed-metal cornices. Just west of Sylva, the railroad town of Dillsboro prospered as a commercial center and summer resort. At Balsam Gap in eastern Jackson County, the Balsam community arose around a depot stop. At 3,315 feet, the rail station there was recognized to be the highest depot east of the Rocky Mountains. By the early twentieth century, the small settlement included a school, several general stores and houses, and the imposing Mountain Springs Hotel (now Balsam Mountain Inn) overlooking the rail line (Sharpe 1961: 1370-1372; Bishir et al. 1999: 357-358).

The arrival of rail transport also spurred commercial agriculture, mining, and logging operations. More and more farmers raised cattle and sheep for sale, herding fattened stock down from mountain pastures to cattle cars in Dillsboro and Sylva. In 1893, farmers shipped forty-six carloads of cattle and sheep to

Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, and Augusta, Georgia (Williams 1987: 148).

Commercial farming encouraged the growth of rural communities. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous rural settlements, served by churches, stores, and schools, had developed near the Tuckasegee River and around numerous other waterways that coursed through the county's myriad narrow valleys. South of the WNCRR along the Tuckasegee River, the rural Cullowhee community expanded around the 1889 Cullowhee High School, which later developed into Western Carolina University. By 1896, post offices had been established in thirty-four communities countywide. The population of the county in that year exceeded 9,000 residents, compared to 5,500 on the eve of the Civil War (Branson 1869, 1872, 1896).

The advent of the railroad also generated a variety of mining ventures. The working of Kaolin deposits (used in ceramics) was an important industrial enterprise from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. Dillsboro was the home of the Harris Clay Company, a major kaolin manufacturer, while the Kaolin Manufacturing Company was headquartered in Webster. Companies also invested in the extraction of iron, gold, copper, nickel, chrome, talc, and feldspar, albeit with mixed financial success (North Carolina Labor Statistics 1902: 338; Sharpe 1961: 1370; Williams 1987: 151-159).

The great stands of virgin hardwoods drew northern logging companies into Jackson County and throughout the Southern Appalachians. The first major lumber firm to arrive in the county was the Blue Ridge Lumber Company of Portland, Maine. In 1888, the company set up operations along the Tuckasegee River near the WNCRR tracks at Dillsboro, and extended a series of temporary narrow-gauge rail lines into the mountainsides. By the early twentieth century, lumber companies had set up mills in Dillsboro, Sylva, Cullowhee, Cashiers, Gay, Kilgo, Norton, and Wilmot (Sharpe 1961: 1370; Williams 1987: 159; North Carolina Labor Statistics 1902: 338; North Carolina Labor Statistics 1915: 106-109; Bishir et al. 1999: 44-47).

Vital to economic expansion and ease of life in the region was the harnessing of the hydroelectric potential of the mountain rivers. Experiments with electrification in Jackson County began during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1906, G. W. Reagan of Gastonia, North Carolina, acquired a hydroelectric site on the Tuckasegee River near Dillsboro for a textile mill, but Reagan's plans did not materialize. About 1911, businessman, C. J. Harris, organized the county's first public power company, the Dillsboro and Sylva Electric Light Company, about 1911. Harris developed a hydroelectric site on the Tuckasegee River to furnish power to the Harris-Rees Tannery in Sylva and to illuminate the residences and main streets of Sylva and Dillsboro. A 1913 flood destroyed the company's first dam, a wooden structure, however, several new masonry dams were constructed or modernized between 1914 and 1930. By the 1950s, the electric company served approximately 2,000 houses, businesses, and industries (Williams 1987: 202; Bishir 1999: 41-44).

By 1913, the Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School was served by hydroelectric power generated at a former grist mill dam on the Tuckasegee River. The site soon produced electricity for both the school and the dwellings in the surrounding township. By the 1960s, Western Carolina University at Cullowhee abandoned its generator and purchased power from Nantahala

Power and Light Company. Other power sources served other sections of the county. In the 1930s, Smoky Mountain Power Company erected lines to Cherokee and Qualla, and a decade later the Haywood Electric Cooperative constructed a power line over the Balsams into the Canada and Caney Fork communities. The Nantahala Power and Light Company later provided service to this area and other remote parts of the county (Williams 1987: 203).

As in other parts of this region, the emergence of the Nantahala Power and Light Company developed out of the need of the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) for affordable hydroelectric power to manufacture aluminum. Alcoa began its search for power sites in the 1890s, and in the early twentieth century secured locations along the Little Tennessee River and its tributaries in Tennessee and North Carolina. In 1914, Alcoa opened its new facility at Alcoa, Tennessee, and by 1922, began construction of hydroelectric plants along the Little Tennessee, the Tuckasegee, the Cheoah, and the Nantahala rivers in Graham, Macon, and Jackson counties. In 1929, Alcoa secured a charter for Nantahala Power and Light Company to erect plants on the Little Tennessee, the Tuckasegee, and the Nantahala rivers. Confronted with mounting public criticism that these sites should be in public rather than corporate hands, Nantahala Power and Light also served public needs. Between 1929 and 1957, the company acquired local electrical systems throughout the region, including the Dillsboro and Sylva Electric Light Company in 1957 ("History to be Proud of: The Dillsboro Plant:" 1980; Williams 1987: 202-204; Jackson County Genealogical Society 1992: 34-35).

While the federal Tennessee Valley Authority acquired and developed Alcoa's site at Fontana in Graham County, Nantahala Power and Light developed a host of the hydroelectric plants in Jackson and Macon counties, including those along the Tuckasegee River in Jackson. The Glenville site was completed in 1941, Cedar Cliff in 1952, Bear Creek in 1953, and the Wolf and Tennessee Creek project in 1955. Within the APE, the 1941 construction of the rock and earth dam at the Glenville site created Thorpe Lake, a 1,470-acre reservoir. Roughly three-and-a-half miles east of the APE along NC 107, the main Thorpe Power Plant, an impressive, brick, Gothic Revival structure, was also constructed in 1941 (Williams 1987: 202-204; Jackson County Genealogical Society 1992: 34-35; Bishir et al. 1999: 361-362; SHPO survey files).

Jackson County progressed steadily through the twentieth century. Deforested mountainsides--the results of the brief but intensive period of commercial logging across the southern Appalachians--were brought under the management of the U.S. Forest Service and reclaimed as part of the Nantahala National Forest. The restored natural beauty and economic potential of the county's great forested ranges led to renewed commercial growth through tourism, managed timbering, and related economic pursuits.

In concert with federal forest conservation efforts, the widespread use of the automobile and the improvement of roads and bridges ignited the local tourist trade. Once the remote summer retreat of an elite coterie of low country planters, Jackson County by the 1920s was drawing throngs of vacationers from throughout the region and beyond. The Cashiers area expanded as a resort after World War I and then exploded with summer homes and retirement communities in the latter twentieth century. Other planned communities and vacation cottages proliferated countywide, especially around Thorpe Lake.

In the Tuckasegee Valley, the transformation of Western North Carolina College into a major state university during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to growth around Cullowhee. The university emerged as a major employer in the county, while its cultural assets attracted home seekers to the area. Surrounding the extensive campus, farmland and wooded hillsides became prime retirement real estate (Sharpe 1961: 1375).

Amidst these changes, large sections of Jackson County remain rural and sparsely settled. Although the twentieth century has witnessed the decline in the number of farms (from 1,935 in 1900 to 1,200 in 1987) and in agricultural acreage, small farms persist and their incomes have actually risen in real dollars. Farming families, whose ancestors raised small grains and livestock on Jackson County soil, have diversified into producing fruits and vegetables, firewood, ornamental shrubbery, and Christmas trees (Williams 1987: 150-151). Throughout the county, small agricultural holdings and weatherboard and rock-faced farmhouses share the spectacular, mountainous landscape with modern development.

# Property Inventory and Evaluation

Thorpe Dam Complex SR 1157 at Thorpe Dam, Glenville vicinity Jackson County

Period of Construction 1940-1941

### Description (Plates 1-12) (Figure 3)

Located in the high valley of southern Jackson County, on the north bank of Thorpe Lake, the well-preserved Thorpe Dam Complex includes the massive rock and earth Thorpe Dam, two concrete Gate Buildings sited on either side of the dam, a frame cottage and related auto garage, and Bridge No. 193. The bridge and a long causeway of heavy river rock carry SR 1157 (Pine Creek Road) over the dam and the north bank of the reservoir.

The dam is 150 feet high, 1,310 feet long, and 830 feet thick at the base. Located on a foundation of solid rock, it typifies rock-and-earth dam construction in its compacted clay core encased by outer layers of progressively heavier stone material--first fine sand, then heavier rock, and finally boulder rock. The spillway is located on the east side of the dam.

Passing over the dam, Bridge No. 193 is a continuous, steel-deck girder span measuring 342 feet long. The seven span structure has tall, reinforced concrete abutments and tall, steel I-beam piers with cross bracing. The steel piers rest on truncated concrete footings, set within the rock and earth dam. The two-lane bridge has a timber deck and wooden railing. Located at the northeast corner of the structure are the spillway gates. The gate mechanism sits on the a steel platform resting on tall concrete abutments into which the pivot tracks for the spillway gates are found.

The two poured-concrete Gate Buildings share similar utilitarian designs. Two stories high at ground level but extending deep into the embankment of the lake, these buildings hold the gates that control the flow of water from the reservoir at the site of the dam. The Gate Building No. 1 on the east side of the complex (south side SR 1157) contains hoist equipment and 70-foot-high gates for the power intake tunnel leading to the Thorpe Powerhouse, three-and-ahalf miles east along NC 107. It also holds a backup generator for the dam's spillway. The Gate Building No. 2 on the west side (north side SR 1157) holds hoist equipment and the spillgate for the diversion tunnel, which is used in emergencies to divert water rapidly away from the lake and into the ravine on the north side of the dam. Both buildings measure approximately eight feet by twelve feet, have roll-up metal garage doors and steel-sash windows on the first story, and metal doors on the second story (Conley Interview 1999).

The cottage on the east side of the complex is a simple, one-story, frame, gablefront bungalow with asbestos-shingle siding, six-over-six sash windows, square porch posts, and a poured-concrete foundation. A corrugated-metal, gable-front auto garage that dates to the construction period of the dwelling stands to the rear. The cottage originally housed a caretaker/meter-reader for

the dam. A maintenance worker currently resides here (Conley Interview 1999).

#### Historical Background

The Thorpe Dam Complex was erected in response to the country's urgent need for hydroelectricity to power the defense effort on the eve of World War II. When war broke out in Europe, the United States struggled to supply Europe with essential war materiel while gearing up for the nation's anticipated entry into the conflict. Nantahala Power and Light Company (NP&L), which was formed in 1929 by the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), responded to the national emergency by proceeding with construction plans for two large plants, Nantahala in Macon County and Glenville in Jackson County. Both facilities supplied power to Alcoa's Tennessee facility which produced aluminum for aircraft (Jackson County Genealogical Society 1992: 34-35; Nantahala Power and Light Company 1998).

The Glenville site (renamed Thorpe in 1951 for the first president of NP&L, John Edward Stirling Thorpe) was put into operation on October 15, 1941. It was the first hydroelectric plant to be completed in the South after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous fireside chat of December 29, 1940, urging the nation to become the "great arsenal of democracy." Under the direction of Thorpe, a civil engineer, approximately 1,600 laborers worked around the clock, seven days a week to develop the hydroelectric site in just sixteen months. The dam complex, the three-and-a-half miles of tunnels and pipe, the brick powerhouse along NC 107, the lake, and Pine Creek Road that passes over the dam were all built simultaneously. The Glenville project proved to be a valuable contributor to the war effort, yielding enough power to make aluminum for two "Flying Fortress" bombers per day (Nantahala Power and Light Company 1998; Bishir et al. 1999: 362).

The Glenville project transformed the rural communities of East LaPorte, Tuckasegee and Glenville along the Tuckasegee River in southern Jackson County. The Morrison-Knudson Company of Boise, Idaho, the project's contractor, opened offices in Sylva's Carolina Hotel and began hiring local labor. The depressed mountain economy experienced an unprecedented, albeit short-lived, economic upsurge as local men found employment at a steady wage, families boarded workers, and shopkeepers supplied other goods and services. At East LaPorte, where a rail line extended to Sylva, a massive storage yard held building materials and equipment used for the Glenville project. At Tuckasegee, a worker camp emerged near the site of the powerhouse (Nantahala Power and Light Company 1998).

The construction of Thorpe Dam required more than 1.25 million cubic yards of sand, clay, rock, and earth fill excavated in the bed of the 1,470-acre reservoir. The cost of the undertaking was nearly seven million dollars. It was the first hydroelectric dam in the nation to use safety fuse plugs at the spillway entrance. The earthen fuse plugs are small dams designed to fail progressively in case of a sudden flood. The dam was one in a series (exact number not currently known) of rock and earth dams constructed by NP&L in western North Carolina for Alcoa's production of aluminum. In Macon County, the Nantahala Dam arose on the Nantahala River near Beechertown in 1942. Later NP&L hydroelectric plants were constructed along the East Fork of the Tuckasegee River in Jackson County, at Cedar Cliff, Bear Creek, and Tennessee

Creek. These three sites were completed between 1952 and 1955, their construction spurred on by the Korean War and renewed national defense concerns in the early Cold War era (Jackson County Genealogical Society 1992: 35; Conley Interview 1999).

# **Evaluation of Eligibility**

The recommended Thorpe Dam Complex Historic District is considered eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for social history and Criterion C for engineering. Under Criterion A, the complex clearly reflects the rise of hydroelectric plants in Jackson County and the southern mountains of North Carolina during the early and middle twentieth century. These plants served an array of public as well as corporate and national defense needs. The 1941 Thorpe Dam was one in a series of dams constructed by the Nantahala Power and Light Company along the Tuckasegee and the Nantahala rivers. The first hydroelectric plant completed in the South in the aftermath of Roosevelt's "arsenal of democracy" speech, the Thorpe Dam project transformed the rural landscape of the area, created an economic boon, and generated electricity for the surrounding communities as well as for Alcoa's wartime aluminum production.

Under Criterion C, Thorpe Dam is a fine example of rock and earth dam design and construction. Such dams were built in the southern Appalachians and across the country during the early and middle twentieth centuries (Conley Interview 1999). Under the direction of John Edward Stirling Thorpe and Alcoa's chief dam engineer (a man named Grogan), rock and earth dams generated hydroelectric power for NP&L in western North Carolina. Other private firms and public agencies also erected such dams. During the 1940s, the Tennessee Valley Authority constructed the rock and earth Chatuge Dam on the Hiwassee River in Clay County. While concrete dams were the most common of the period and especially for the state's larger hydroelectric plants (e.g. Fontana, Hiwassee, and Cheoah), rock and earth construction proved especially safe and cost-effective for a variety of projects. The main building materials were largely excavated in the adjacent lake bed, and the moist clay core gave the structures both strength and flexibility. The Thorpe Dam is also notable for its early use of earthen safety fuse plugs at the spillway entrance (Conley Interview 1999).

Bridge No. 193, with its continuous, steel-deck girder design, clearly illustrates one of the standard vehicular bridge designs of the early to middle twentieth century. The continuous form provided the rigid framing needed for spanning great lengths, including dams, while girder constuction proved to be a more economical form of steel structure than the elaborate trusses of the earlier railroad era.

The Thorpe Dam Complex Historic District is not considered eligible under any other criterion. The district is not eligible under Criterion B because the property is not associated with individuals whose activities were demonstrably important within a local, state, or national historic context. The property is also not considered eligible under Criterion D because the architectural component is not likely to yield information important in the history of building technology.

# **Boundaries**

The proposed National Register boundaries are depicted in Figure 3. These boundaries encompass the dam, the bridge, the two concrete gate buildings, and the cottage and associated auto garage. All of these resources contribute to the historic district. There are no non-contributing resources. The boundaries are defined by Thorpe Lake on the south side, the edge of the ravine on the north side, the clearing around the cottage on the east side, and the west end of the causeway on the west side. The boundaries do not encompass the Glenville Power Plant, which is located three-and-a-half miles east of the dam site along NC 107.



Plate 1. Thorpe Dam Complex, Bridge No. 193 and Dam, Looking East.



Plate 2. Thorpe Dam Complex, Bridge No. 193 and Dam, Looking Northeast.



Plate 1. Thorpe Dam Complex, Bridge No. 193 and Dam, Looking East.



Plate 2. Thorpe Dam Complex, Bridge No. 193 and Dam, Looking Northeast.



Plate 5. Thorpe Dam Complex, Gate Building No. 1, Looking Southwest.



Plate 6. Thorpe Dam Complex, Gate Building No. 1, Looking North.



Plate 7. Thorpe Dam Complex, Cottage, Looking East.



Plate 8. Thorpe Dam Complex, Cottage, Looking East.



Plate 9. Thorpe Dam Complex, Garage, Looking South.



Plate 10. Thorpe Dam Complex, Gate Building No. 2, Looking North.

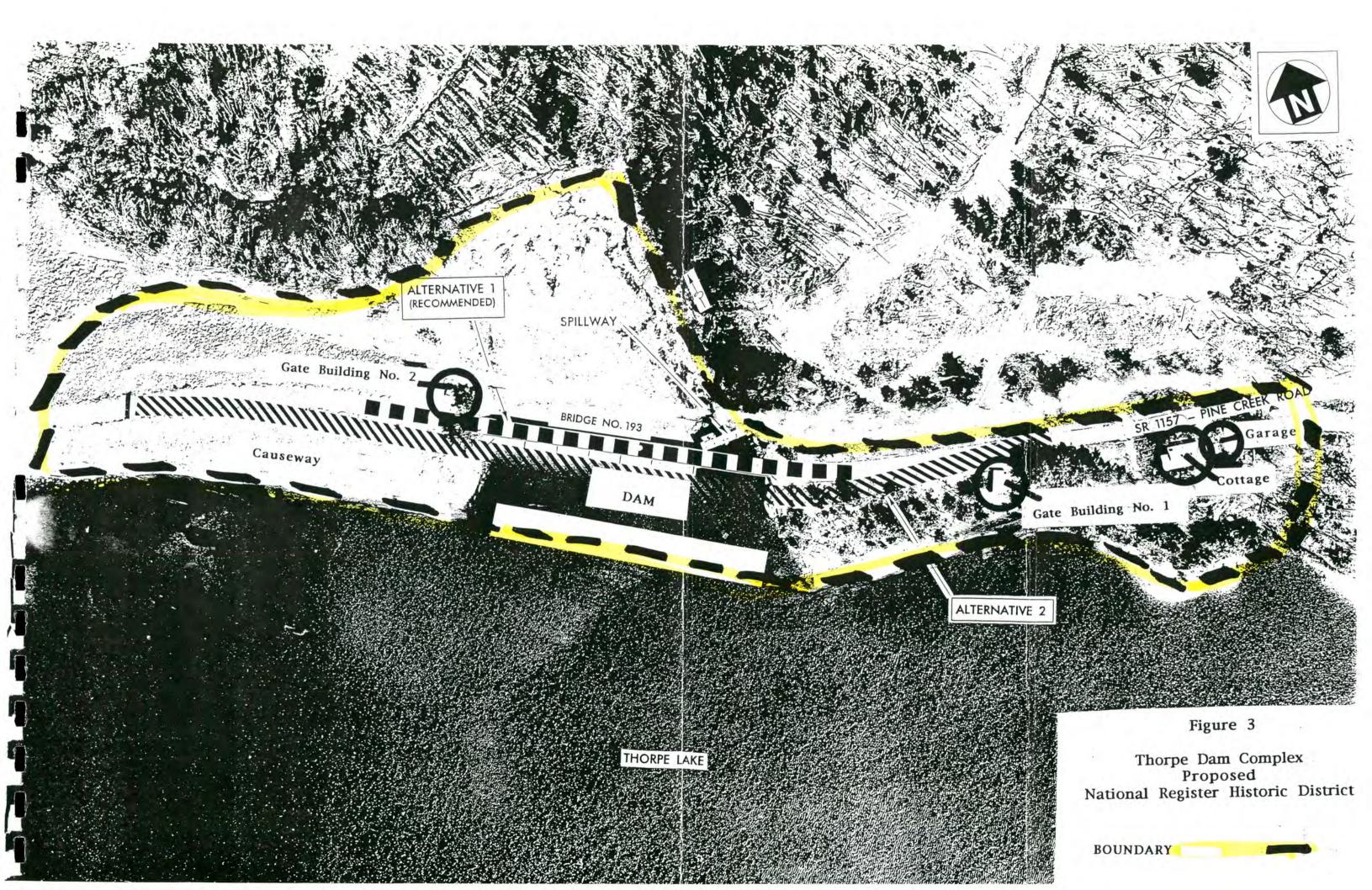


Plate 11. Thorpe Dam Complex, Gate Building No. 2, Looking Northeast.



Plate 12. Thorpe Dam Complex, Thorpe Lake, Looking South.

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