

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Mill Farm Inn

Tryon, Polk County, PL0057, Listed 1/22/2009
Nomination by Clay Griffith
Photographs by Clay Griffith, April 2008



Facade view



Rear view

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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. 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 Mill Farm Inn
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 701 Harmon Field Road not for publication N/A
city or town Tryon vicinity X
state North Carolina code NC county Polk code 149 zip code 28782

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination/____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ____ nationally ____ statewide X locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
____ entered in the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ determined eligible for the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
____ removed from the National Register	_____	_____
____ other (explain): _____ _____		

Mill Farm Inn
Name of Property

Polk County, North Carolina
County and State

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	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	0	objects
1	2	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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/hotel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/hotel
DOMESTIC/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/granite

roof Asphalt
walls Stone/granite
Wood/rough-cut siding
other _____

Narrative Description

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

Mill Farm Inn
Name of Property

Polk County, North Carolina
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)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

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

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1939 – 1958

Significant Dates

1939

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Walcott, Russell S. - architect

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository:

Polk County Public Library, Columbus, NC

Polk County Historical Museum, Tryon, NC

Mill Farm Inn
Name of Property

Polk County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acree of Property 3.75 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 17 387070 3898450
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 Clay Griffith

organization Acme Preservation Services LLC date September 2, 2008

street & number 825-C Merrimon Ave., #345 telephone (828) 281-3852

city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28804

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Gary W. Corn and James R. Blanton

street & number 701 Harmon Field Road telephone 864-590-7410 / 828-817-0215

city or town Tryon state NC zip code 28782

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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Mill Farm Inn, Polk County, NC

Section 7. Narrative Description

(*N.B.* The Mill Farm Inn is oriented to the southeast, but for the ease of reading herein the façade is identified as the south elevation. Similarly, the two ends are referred to as the east and west elevations, and the rear is designated as the north elevation.)

Designed by architect Russell S. Walcott and completed in 1939, the Mill Farm Inn is located at the intersection of three important roads in southern Polk County. The Mill Farm property lies a short distance north of the Tryon town limits on North Carolina Highway 108 (Lynn Road), which connects Tryon to the small village of Lynn and the county seat of Columbus, approximately three miles to the northeast. Mill Farm Inn occupies a 3.75-acre site that is bound by Harmon Field Road (SR 1121) to the south, Howard Gap Road (SR 1122) to the east, Pacolet River to the north and northwest, and adjacent property lines to the west. The inn sits in the southwest section of the property, facing southeast and overlooking the intersection of Highway 108, Howard Gap Road, and Harmon Field Road. The property is bordered by mature vegetation between the inn and the roads, and along the west and far north property lines. A semi-circular, gravel driveway enters the property from Harmon Field Road, with parking areas at the southwest end of the main building. Two square, stone pillars mark the entrance walkway from the driveway to the front of the inn, and a manicured lawn and garden area lies directly in front of the building, framed by hedges and tall trees. A small creek runs through the property on the east side of the inn, flowing roughly north to the Pacolet River. The property is also accessed from the east, off Howard Gap Road, by a gravel driveway that serves an eight-bay frame garage built around 1988. A wood gazebo, erected around 1990, is located to the northwest of the inn. An open, grass lawn extends north and northeast from the inn to the banks of the Pacolet River.

Mill Farm Inn, 1937-1939; ca. 1985. Contributing building

Exterior

The Mill Farm Inn, designed by Chicago architect Russell Walcott and completed in 1939, is a two-story, Colonial Revival-style, stone building topped by an asphalt-shingle side-gable roof with exposed rafter ends. The building is constructed of irregularly coursed granite quarried near the Green River in northern Polk County. The symmetrical façade is six bays wide with a central entrance bay on the first story and an interior stone chimney rising from the center of the roof's ridge line. Windows across the façade are single eight-over-eight double-hung wood sash except for a square, four-light wood casement to the side of the front entry. Articulated granite keystones and voussoirs form flat-arch lintels above the window openings, which are also framed with granite block sills. The single-leaf entry contains a glazed-and-paneled wood door topped by a flat-arch lintel and framed by decorative wood shutters. The entrance bay and granite stoop are sheltered by a gable-roof porch supported by square wood posts, with weatherboard siding and exposed rafter ends in the gable end. The current owners replaced the porch posts in 2007 with oak timbers sawn to match the original posts.

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The four-bay west elevation of the building is relatively plain with single eight-over-eight double-hung windows on both stories and a rectangular, louvered vent in the gable end. The east elevation, which was originally obscured by a one-story shed-roof sleeping porch, displays only two eight-over-eight windows (instead of four) on the second story and a rectangular vent in the gable end. The first- and lower-story exterior walls are now covered by an apartment addition, built to replace the sleeping porch in the late 1980s following a local ordinance requiring that the innkeeper live on-site. The lower story of the building is exposed at the east end due to the slope of the site, allowing the two-story addition to appear subordinate to the main building. The addition features rough-cut wood siding, paired one-over-one windows, and entry porches on the south and east sides. Both porches, which shelter single-leaf glazed-and-paneled wood doors, consist of a gable roof supported on slender wood posts and feature exposed rafter ends and weatherboards in the gable end. A wood walkway wraps around the corner of the building and connects to a modern wood deck projecting to the southeast. At the north (rear) end of the addition, the upper-story wall projects beyond the rear wall of the inn and the overhang is supported by thick, carved brackets.¹

The north elevation of the building offers a similar appearance to the façade but lacks its strong symmetry. Eight bays wide on the first story and six bays on the second story, an extra first-story window located on the east side of the elevation provides additional light to the dining room at the northeast corner of the building. A flat-roof porch supported by decorative iron posts and brackets shelters the single-leaf glazed rear entry door. Ghostmarks at the second story on the east side of the elevation indicate the location of a suspended walkway, now removed, that connected an exterior stair from the original end porch to a balcony located atop the rear porch roof. The exterior stair, which provided access for to Ms. Williams' apartment on the second floor at the northeast corner, was likely removed by the Hedrick family in the 1960s or 1970s.

Interior

The Mill Farm Inn is entered through a transverse foyer with a half bath located to the east and the main stair rising against the north wall. A narrow hall to the east provides access to the basement stairs, the wood closet beneath the main stair, and to the kitchen. A passageway at the west end of the foyer continues through to the large living room on the north side of the building, as well as a hallway to the bedrooms located at the west end of the building. The interior is generally finished with chestnut floors in the main living rooms, oak floors in the hallways, six-panel doors with brass hardware, tall baseboard moldings, and picture moldings. The flat window and door surrounds of the main public rooms (foyer, living, and dining) are differentiated by a narrow outer band. The walls and ceilings are composed of wall board covered with a thin coat of plaster for texture.

¹ James Blanton and Gary Corn, owners of Mill Farm Inn since 2006, have gathered information about the inn from conversations with Frank Albrecht, grandson of Frances Williams; Rena Hubl, granddaughter of Russell Walcott; and the previous owners, Chip and Penny Kessler. Some of these details, which have subsequently been incorporated into the written description, were communicated to the author by the owners on April 16, 2008.

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The living room measures fourteen feet by twenty-eight feet and is punctuated by a fireplace on the south wall and a beamed ceiling. The restrained mantel features fluted pilasters framing the fireplace and supporting a tall architrave and mantel shelf. Glazed tiles originally framed the fireplace opening, but the tiles were removed by a previous owner, who painted the exposed brick. A solid wood door accented with iron strap hinges to the east of the fireplace accesses the wood closet that was added sometime after 1960. The decorative wood beams were also added to the room sometime after 1960. A partition wall added in the 1980s to the west end of the living room shortened its original length but created an additional guest bathroom and office for the inn (now a closet). An open doorway at the east end of the living room leads into the dining room, where the current owners added built-in bookshelves against the east wall in 2007. At the south end of the dining room, a small butler's pantry connects back to the kitchen and features a swinging wood door and built-in shelves and cabinets. The kitchen displays a linoleum tile floor in angled checkerboard pattern, pine paneled cabinets from the 1950s, and breakfast nook. The current owners installed tile counter tops and backsplashes in 2007. At the west end of the first floor, a narrow hallway leads from the foyer to two bedrooms, each with a private bathroom. Access to the bathroom on the south side of the hall was altered by removing the doorway from the hall and opening a new doorway from inside the bedroom.

The stairs from the foyer open onto a small sitting area on the second story, with two suites of rooms located to the east and west. Each suite consists of two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a kitchen. The two kitchens were created in the 1980s from a large common room originally located above the first-story living room. The second-story interior is generally finished in the same manner as the first story with chestnut floors, six-panel doors with brass hardware, flat window and door surrounds, tall baseboard moldings, and picture moldings. However, the two bedrooms at the east end are carpeted. Original walls and ceilings are composed of wall board covered with a thin coat of plaster for texture, while the kitchen partition walls are painted wood paneling. In the east kitchen, a doorway originally opened onto the rear porch roof deck, but the previous owners replaced the door in the 1980s with a one-over-one window.

Garage, ca. 1988. Non-contributing building

In the late 1980s, the Kesslers built a freestanding, eight-bay, frame garage to the east of the inn to house their family's numerous automobiles. The Kesslers attempted to visually mitigate the size the building by designing it to look like a barn with rough-cut wood siding, asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, and false barn doors on the south side. The garage is a long, rectangular structure with four bays on either side of a blind center bay, and each open bay contains a metal roll-up door. Carved brackets support the eaves at the four corners, and louvered vents are located in the gable ends. Two eight-over-eight double-hung windows are located on the west elevation of the building facing the inn, and two pairs of decorative wood shutters are located on the east elevation. A square cupola is positioned at the center of the roofline and features a pyramidal roof and latticed openings. On the south (rear) elevation, the false "barn" doors consist of plywood panels painted red with applied decorative rails and stiles painted white. Two sets of paired shutters

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flank the false doors on the south elevation. The Kesslers also planted a row of hemlock trees to screen the building from Highway 108 and Harmon Field Road. A second gravel driveway was laid from Howard Gap Road to access the garage. The current owners rent out the garage bays as individual storage units.

Gazebo, ca. 1990. Non-contributing structure

Built around 1990, the gazebo is a large, octagonal, wood structure with wood posts, wood deck flooring, screened sides, and diagonally braced rails. The asphalt shingle roof is topped by a short, solid cupola with a ball finial. The structure stands to the northwest of the inn, accessed by a short walkway from the rear porch and entered through a single-leaf screen door.

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Section 8. Statement of Significance

Summary

Completed in 1939, Mill Farm Inn is a two-story Colonial Revival-style inn constructed of local blue granite and located at 701 Harmon Field Road near the town of Tryon, North Carolina. Proprietress Frances Williams, a divorcee, had run a boarding house in Cambridge, Massachusetts and lived in France prior to coming to Tryon, where she operated the inn for the literary and artistically minded visitors that frequented the area. Ms. Williams commissioned architect Russell S. Walcott to design the country inn, a rare surviving example of expressly designed tourist accommodations in Tryon. Mill Farm Inn meets National Register Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation as a domestic guest accommodation common to Tryon and Polk County. Mill Farm Inn also meets National Register Criterion C as an intact Colonial Revival-style inn designed by Chicago architect Russell Walcott, who retired to Tryon in 1936. Upon relocating to Tryon, Walcott's work evolved from the popular revival styles that he frequently employed during his career toward a more modern aesthetic. The inn represents a vernacular expression of the popular Colonial Revival style. The period of significance for the Mill Farm Inn, which remains in operation, extends from the construction of the main building in 1939 to 1958; the years after 1958 do not meet Criteria Consideration G for exceptional significance.

Historical Background

The small mountain town of Tryon, North Carolina, lies in the far southern section of Polk County, just north of the North Carolina/South Carolina state line. Polk County is relatively small in area, covering only 237 square miles, and ranges in elevation from 750 feet above sea level in the south to 3,238 feet above sea level at its highest point in the northwest. The crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains forms the northern boundary of the county, which is drained by the Pacolet and Green rivers. Lying on the southern slopes of the Blue Ridge, Polk County enjoys characteristics of both the mountain and piedmont regions. Thermal belts occurring in the county provide frost-free areas that allow farmers to grow a wide range of crops. The variety and influence of geography in Polk County is manifested in the two towns of Tryon, a popular winter resort, and Saluda, a summer resort only eight miles to the north.²

² D. William Bennett, ed., *Polk County, North Carolina, History* (Tryon, NC: Polk County Historical Association, Inc., 1983), 5. Bill Sharpe, *A New Geography of North Carolina*, Volume III (Raleigh, NC: Sharpe Publishing Company, 1961), 1536-1538. Elizabeth Doubleday Frost, *Tryon Memories* (Tryon, NC: Polk County Historical Association and Tryon Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 7-10, 27-28.

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Located approximately three miles southwest of Columbus, the county seat, which was formed in 1855, the town of Tryon remained a modest settlement through much of the nineteenth century. The community began to take its present shape following the arrival of the Asheville-Spartanburg Railroad, which reached Tryon in 1877. Built with the intention of connecting South Carolina ports and markets with people and resources in North Carolina, Tennessee, and the Ohio Valley, the railroad had a dramatic impact on the economic and social development of Tryon in the late nineteenth century as the trains between South Carolina and Asheville began to expose a wide range of visitors to the community. Located at the base of the Saluda Grade, the steepest mainline railroad grade in the country, Tryon became a frequent stopping place as northbound trains prepared for the grueling climb and southbound trains cooled their wheel bearings and brakes. As a result, a hotel was erected and boarding houses were opened to accommodate the accidental tourists and Tryon's reputation as a pleasant resort quickly grew.³

Following its incorporation in 1885, Tryon was laid out in a circle around the railroad depot, which was located on the east side of the tracks near their intersection with South Trade Street (roughly opposite the current Tryon Theatre). Trade Street, the town's original commercial street, ran parallel to the railroad tracks on the east and northeast side and was the location of T. T. Ballenger's dry goods store and his blacksmith shop. Ballenger, who was one of the town's most prominent citizens and its first mayor, built Oak Hall (originally known as the Tryon City Hotel), the first building constructed specifically as a hotel for visitors to Tryon, with John Garrison in 1882. The hotel, a local landmark until its demolition in 1979, was a large frame structure with Italianate and Queen Anne ornamentation that was restrained yet stylish for its day.⁴

Early visitors to Tryon were also served by the McAboy House, a popular inn located north of town near the community of Lynn. Dr. L. R. McAboy, a Presbyterian minister from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, purchased the Dr. Columbus Mills House in the 1870s, added a third story, and converted it into an inn that became popular among visitors from the north. McAboy House attracted many guests seeking a cure for respiratory ailments, especially tuberculosis, in the late nineteenth century. Asheville had become renowned for its sanitoriums, but Tryon began to attract patients who were disillusioned with Asheville's unpredictable weather and looking for a more relaxed environment in which to convalesce. The poet Sidney Lanier (1842-1881) transferred from Asheville to McAboy House in 1881, as he was dying of tuberculosis. Lanier's widow and two sons moved to Tryon after his death, and contributed to the town's reputation in literary and cultural circles. In 1889, several new Tryon residents saw the need for a public library and formed a club of community members to promote a library and provide a focus for intellectual and cultural activities. Club

³ Diane E. Lea and Claudia Roberts, *An Architectural and Historical Survey of Tryon, North Carolina* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979), 1-3. 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), 186-188.

⁴ Lea and Roberts, 9. Frost, 20-21.

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members decided to name the group in honor of Sidney Lanier, and Mrs. Lanier responded by donating two volumes of her husband's poems for the library, known today as the Lanier Library. In addition to founding the library, the Lanier Club worked to establish the town cemetery, educate people about tuberculosis, and beautify the depot. The club also hosted popular fundraising events, which often featured dramatic or musical performances.⁵

David Stearns later purchased the McAboy House, which he extensively remodeled, modernized, and renamed Mimosa Inn. To the old structure Stearns added an elevator, running water, steam heat, gaslights, and a casino at the rear. The Mimosa Inn burned in 1914, but a new building, which continues to operate today, was erected on the same site and utilized portions of the casino structure. Stearns, along with partner Aaron French, also operated the Skyuka Hotel, a popular lodge built near Tryon on White Oak Mountain in the 1890s (no longer standing).⁶

Whether visitors to Tryon arrived by accident or came specifically for the salubrious climate, a substantial number became enchanted with the community and decided to buy property for seasonal or year-round use. Many of these new residents came from the North or upper Midwest regions of the country and infused the small town with their own diverse interests. In addition to Sidney Lanier's association with Tryon, William Gillette, the renowned New York stage actor, General Ulysses Doubleday, and industrialist Charles E. Erskine of Wisconsin, all helped to solidify and spread Tryon's reputation as a first class resort town in the early twentieth century. Many of the individuals who adopted Tryon as their home contributed generously to its institutions and organizations.⁷

One of the most important individuals to make their home in Tryon was Carter Brown, who owned and managed the Castle Park Hotel in Michigan and came to Tryon in search of a new resort property to develop. He settled on a lodge and several cottages that had been built for a tuberculosis sanatorium in 1906. Brown acquired the property in 1917, erected some additional buildings, and operated it as the Pine Crest Inn (NR, 1982) from October to May. The inn quickly gained notice for its hospitality, good food, and rustic charm. The Pine Crest Inn exemplified the unpretentious comfort that made Tryon so popular among its well-to-do clientele. Brown became an important promoter of Tryon, especially with the formation of the Tryon Riding and Hunt Club in the 1920s. He worked to rehabilitate the Block House, an eighteenth-century trading post near Tryon, establish riding trails, and organize the annual horse and hound shows and steeplechase. Brown's efforts to popularize equestrian activities in the area have contributed to Tryon's strong association with these pursuits that continues to this day.⁸

While Carter Brown was often the most visible of Tryon's proponents in the second quarter of the twentieth century, the town also gained recognition from other sources, including the Lanier Library, a

⁵ Lea and Roberts, 2 and 4-5.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 4-6.

⁸ Claudia P. Roberts, Pine Crest Inn National Register of Historic Places Nomination (1980). Lea and Roberts, 6-7.

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subscription library organized in 1890. The library, which established its permanent home in 1905, served for many years as the principal cultural center in town. At 5½ inches by 8½ inches and only four pages in length, the *Tryon Daily Bulletin*, a local newspaper organized in 1928 by Seth Vining Sr., was touted as the world's smallest daily newspaper. Eleanor Vance and Charlotte Yale, who had formed Biltmore Industries in Asheville, relocated to Tryon and organized the Tryon Toy Makers and Wood Carvers in 1915. The Tryon Toy Makers helped initiate a crafts revival in Polk County that led to the formation of other groups such as the Blue Ridge Weavers, a crafts guild organized in 1922 for the production and promotion of local handicrafts including textiles, basket weaving, and ceramics.

Before coming to Tryon in the mid-1930s, Frances Nevins Williams, a Kentucky native, grew up in Nashville, Tennessee and married Mason Williams of North Carolina. Mr. Williams eventually became the District Attorney of San Antonio, Texas. Around 1900, however, the Williams' divorced and Frances Williams moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she ran a boarding house for Harvard professors. After her children were grown, she moved to Grasse, France, a village in the hills of Provence, where she intended to spend the rest of her life. She eventually returned to the United States, as her financial situation worsened following the stock market crash in October 1929, and purchased the Mill Farm property from J. J. and Flossie Cantrell in September 1936. At the time, Mill Farm contained a farmhouse and grist mill, which was located near the alignment of present-day Harmon Field Road and alongside the small creek that runs through the property. Williams commissioned Chicago architect Russell Walcott, who retired to Tryon in 1936, to design a two-story stone country inn on the site of the existing farmhouse, which was torn down to make room for the new building. Williams reportedly envisioned the inn as French farmhouse similar to examples she remembered from her time in France. She received a loan from the Bank of Tryon and began construction of the inn. The blue granite for the building came from a quarry on the Green River in northern Polk County, near property owned by the Walcotts. Frances Williams welcomed the first guests to Mill Farm Inn in July 1939. Ms. Williams lived in a second-floor apartment at the northeast corner of the inn.⁹

At the time of its construction, Mill Farm Inn surely seemed to be a moderately risky investment. Nationwide economic conditions, coupled with improving highway systems, forced many local establishments to close their doors. With the notable exception of Oak Hall, the majority of tourist accommodations in Tryon were simply large private residences that had been opened to guests. Mill Farm Inn differed significantly in that it was architect-designed and built specifically as an inn, although clearly domestic in scale. Many of Tryon's inns and guest houses catered to visitors making extended stays during the summer or winter seasons, but automobile tourism increasingly challenged this type of business by allowing easier access to destinations farther afield and shorter stays. Williams persisted, however, and catered to the well-to-do literary and artistically-minded visitors that helped to make Tryon's reputation as a

⁹ Frank Albrecht, letter to Gary Corn, September 14, 2006. Polk County Register of Deeds Book, 60, page 583. James Blanton and Gary Corn, personal communication.

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resort area. Considered a stern businesswoman, Williams reportedly advertised the inn exclusively in the *New York Times Book Review* and expected her guests to discuss their current book choices in the evenings. Requiring that guests of the inn stay for at least a month, Williams preferred that guests reserve their room for the entire season. Meals were served for guests of the inn and included in the room fare. The inn had no public restaurant, but Tryon residents were occasionally invited to join guests for Sunday lunch in the dining room. Though invited, diners were expected to pay for their meal.

Frances Williams operated Mill Farm Inn with the assistance of three employees: housekeeper, groundskeeper, and cook. Williams maintained the inn from 1939 to 1948, when she suffered a stroke and was no longer able to run the business. She built a house, known as the Pink House, immediately west of the inn overlooking the Pacolet River, where she lived until her death. Williams sold the inn to Paul and Natalie Lower on March 1, 1948 (89/114), who ran it for just two years before selling the property to Ethel Sturgis in 1951 (94/247). Ms. Sturgis operated the inn for several years and produced a promotional brochure describing its amenities at the time. Elliott and Lula Ranney purchased the inn from Sturgis in 1954 (100/200), and after the death of his wife, Elliott Ranney sold the property to Gordon and Jeanette Hedrick in 1961 (120/65). The Hedricks converted the building into a single-family dwelling where they raised their two children.¹⁰

In October 1981, Chip and Penny Kessler purchased the old inn from the Hedricks and set about returning the building to use as an inn. The Kesslers, Chicago transplants, came to Tryon in 1977 and the following year purchased Auberge, an upscale European-influenced inn from the 1940s that they remodeled and converted into guest accommodations after several years of use as apartments. With the demise of the Thousand Pines Inn, Mimosa Inn, and Oak Hall, the Kesslers recognized a market for guest rooms in Tryon and refurnished the building's seven apartments for daily, weekly, or monthly accommodations. After completing work on Auberge, the Kesslers purchased the old Mill Farm Inn to offer additional rooms. The Kesslers made several changes to the building before it reopened as an inn in 1982, including enclosing the end porch for innkeepers' quarters and adding the garage and gazebo to the grounds. The Kesslers continued to operate the inn until 2006, when it was sold to the current owners, James Blanton and Gary Corn.¹¹

Architecture Context

Prominent Chicago architect Russell Smith Walcott (1889-1959), who retired to Tryon in 1936, designed the Mill Farm Inn for Frances Williams. Born in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, Walcott studied architecture at Princeton University, where he graduated with high honors, and following graduation, he travelled to Europe. Upon his return, Walcott started his career in the office of Howard Van Doren Shaw, a renowned architect to Chicago's leading families. In 1917, Walcott married Eugenia Buffington, and

¹⁰ Polk County Register of Deeds Office.

¹¹ Bennett, 95 and 235. Polk County Register of Deeds Office.

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together they raised two adopted children. After a stint in the armed forces during World War I, Walcott joined his older brother, Chester Walcott, in a partnership with Edwin H. Clark from 1919 to 1922. Walter T. Stockton, a former employee of the Clark and Walcott office, recalled that Russell Walcott was not heavily involved in the firm's work and started his own practice in 1922. Based in Chicago, Walcott specialized in residential architecture influenced by English and French architectural models.¹²

Walcott enjoyed a successful private practice in the 1920s, designing large houses and estates along Chicago's North Shore. His designs were typically executed in the Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, or Normanesque styles, with pleasant proportions and fine craftsmanship but lacking excessive ornament. The renowned designer Buckminster Fuller credited Walcott with introducing him to the influential writings of French architect Le Corbusier. Fuller considered Walcott among "the best of residential designers in Chicago...." Walcott appears to have been influenced by the Country House movement popular among the nation's leading industrial and business families during the first part of the twentieth century, although he worked on that scale less frequently than some of his contemporaries. Situated on generous, private grounds, country houses were usually designed as a family's principal residence that was close to urban centers or transportation lines and spacious enough to allow for leisurely recreation and elaborate entertaining. New York architect Harrie T. Lindeberg (1880-1959), a leading proponent of the Country House movement in the United States, designed several North Shore estates at the same time Walcott was establishing his practice. Lindeberg frequently drew on a vocabulary of forms and details influenced by Medieval-, Tudor-, and English Arts and Crafts-style houses, and he felt that the key compositional element of a building was its roof, which served to unite the whole structure.¹³

In 1928 Walcott teamed with Robert J. Work, and the new firm continued to design imposing suburban houses and country estates for Chicago's elite families. Examples of Walcott's work portray his clear understanding of the popular revival styles that were dominating residential architecture at the time. Walcott and Work also completed projects outside of Chicago, including the Normanesque Ben Alexander House in Wausau, Wisconsin, built in 1932, and Canterbury in Fauquier County, Virginia. Completed in 1933 for Col. and Mrs. Albert E. Pierce of Chicago, Canterbury is a grand Georgian Revival-style house with an imposing three-story central block flanked by symmetrical two-story wings and projecting pavilions.¹⁴

¹² "Interview with Walter T. Stockton" (rev. ed.), interviewed by Betty J. Blum, Chicago Architects Oral History Project (The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2005), 1-5, 7. Vital records, Polk County Register of Deeds.

¹³ Fuller quoted in *Your Private Sky: R. Buckminster Fuller: Discourse*, Joachim Krausse and Claude Lichtenstein, eds. (Springer, 1999), 80. Mark Alan Hewitt, *The Architect and the American Country House, 1880-1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 53-55, 278. Lindeberg is known to have designed two buildings in western North Carolina: the rambling, Norman-style Grove Park Country Club clubhouse (1924) in Asheville and Ellsleigh (1927), a large Colonial Revival-style stone dwelling in Biltmore Forest. See Clay Griffith, "Grove Park Country Club Clubhouse Local Landmark Designation Report," Asheville, NC, June 14, 2002.

¹⁴ Trowbridge & Beals Collection, Drawings and Document Archive, Ball State University Architecture Library, Muncie, IN. Joan Evanich, "House of the Season: 'The 1928 Vernon Welsh Home,'" Winnetka Historical Society website

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In addition to his architectural practice Walcott was active in finance, and together with seven other men founded the First Federal Savings and Loan of Barrington, Illinois. Walcott served on the board of directors of the bank, which opened in March 1934 with approximately \$1,800 beginning capital. Twenty years after its organization the bank's assets had grown to \$2.5 million. The success of his architectural practice and other investment ventures allowed Walcott to leave Chicago in 1936, intent on retiring at the relatively young age of forty-seven, to Tryon, North Carolina.¹⁵

Russell and Eugenia Walcott purchased a large tract of land from Dr. and Mrs. Marion C. Palmer in March 1936. Dr. Palmer acquired the property off Howard Gap Road at the foot of Warrior Mountain and began work on a log house. During the Depression Dr. Palmer's patients who were unemployed and unable to pay would work on the property in exchange for medical services. Walcott later expanded the property, now known as Walcott Farm, and enlarged the cabin. His decision to come to Tryon was based, in part, on being diagnosed with diabetes, and at the time a doctor in Spartanburg, South Carolina was having success with new insulin treatments for the disease. From his home near Tryon, Walcott could take the train to Spartanburg, receive his treatment, and return home all in the same day.¹⁶

Walcott was unable to stay away from architectural practice completely after arriving in Tryon, and he undertook a select number of commissions. He designed Mill Farm Inn for Frances Williams, a neighbor of sorts, who lived a few miles south on Howard Gap Road. In 1938, he designed the main house at the large hunt country estate known as "Cotton Patch," located on South River Road (SR 1516) east of Tryon. Walcott served as the local architect on the Art Deco-style Tryon Theatre, which was built according to designs by Hendersonville architect Erle Stillwell in 1938. In 1940, Walcott also designed Auberge, an upscale European-influenced inn located on Melrose Avenue in Tryon known for its four-star restaurant. The distinctive two-story, U-shaped stucco building sits slightly below grade with engaged portico, second-story balconies, curving exterior stairs, and plain square posts framing the entrance. The austere exterior finish and blocky massing suggests the introduction of modern architectural influences in Walcott's work, possibly dating from his collaboration with Stillwell on the Tryon Theatre design.¹⁷

Among the several residences that Walcott designed in Tryon, he appears to move away from the strict use of revival styles into a more modern aesthetic, combining rambling one-story plans with rough-cut wood siding and informal stone work. Designs for the Washburn House, Holt-Webster House, and Turck House in Tryon mark a departure from Walcott's more traditional application of revival styles. The Holt-

(http://www.winnetkahistory.org/gazette/homes/1180_westmoor.html - accessed April 3, 2008). Springs Valley Rural Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Warrenton, VA, 2006.

¹⁵ From Arnett C. Lines, *A History of Barrington, Illinois* (1977), which is reprinted on the Barrington Area Library website (<http://www.barringtonarealibrary.org/LocalHistory/LinesHistory/part4.htm>).

¹⁶ Polk County Register of Deeds Book 68, page 74. Bennett, 276. James Blanton and Gary Corn, personal communication.

¹⁷ Holland Brady, "Architects in the Life of Tryon," manuscript, Holland Brady, AIA, Architect, Tryon, NC (February 17, 2004; updated October 2007).

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Webster House on Overlook Circle, which was chosen as the House Beautiful House of the Year in 1941, still stands and features a ten-foot high dry-stacked stone wall supporting a terrace “that extends about eighty feet along the south side of Little Piney Mountain.”¹⁸

Beyond the small number of buildings that he designed in Tryon, Walcott quietly influenced the life of the community in a number of other ways. He served on the Board of Trustees of St. Luke’s Hospital in Tryon and drew the first plans for the hospital’s expansion program. He also served as an advisor to the Tryon School Board during its building campaign of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Around 1938, Walcott formed a partnership with architect Shannon Meriwether that lasted until 1942. Walcott may have also influenced architect Ernst Benkert to come to Tryon. Benkert, architect of the Tryon Fine Arts Center (1967-1969), had worked for various architects in Chicago during the 1920s and was a good friend of Walcott. Walcott died at his farm off Howard Gap Road in 1959. His wife, Eugenia, continued to live at Walcott Farm until her death in 1994, at the age of 104.¹⁹

Frances Williams reportedly approached Walcott about designing the Mill Farm Inn to evoke a sense of a provincial French farmhouse. Williams lived in south France for a while before returning to the United States and settling in Polk County. Walcott, who had also travelled in France and designed a number of residences in the Normanesque style, was good choice as architect for the project. Although the building lacks any specific references to the French architecture that Ms. Williams envisioned, the vernacular Colonial Revival style effectively captures some of the spirit that she desired. Beginning in the 1930s, the popularity of the Colonial Revival style started to wane as changing fashions and economic conditions led to a simplification of the style, and the Mill Farm Inn’s stone construction, simple forms, and restrained details fit within the characteristics of the style while also standing apart from the more common frame dwellings in the area.²⁰

As an architectural style, Colonial Revival represented a broad rebirth of interest in the early English and Dutch houses of the Atlantic coast states. The 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia is commonly cited as the first awakening of interest in the nation’s colonial architectural heritage. The nationally prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White popularized colonial architectural precedents through a widely publicized tour of New England to study original Georgian- and Federal-style buildings. However, the firm’s work in the late nineteenth century contributed to the often eclectic nature of early Colonial Revival-style buildings, which were rarely historically correct copies of colonial precedents. Across

¹⁸ Jeffrey A. Byrd, ed., *A Sense of Heritage: A Pictorial History of the Thermal Belt Area* (Tryon, NC: Tryon Chamber of Commerce, 1991), 311-312. *Tryon Daily Bulletin* (July 17, 1939). See also Brady.

¹⁹ *Tryon Daily Bulletin* (May 7, 1959 and October 17, 1994) and Brady. Holland Brady, a Tryon native, worked for a while for Paul Schweikher in Chicago before eventually returning to Tryon in 1951. Schweikher had worked in Russell Walcott’s office in the 1920s. Upon returning to Tryon, Brady joined Shannon Meriwether’s office, and eventually the two became partners in 1953. Mr. Brady continues to practice architecture in Tryon.

²⁰ James Blanton and Gary Corn, personal communication.

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the country, Colonial Revival was the dominant style for domestic architecture in first half of the twentieth century. A renewed emphasis on symmetry and a central portico, along with classicized embellishments around entrances, cornices, and windows, are hallmarks of the style. Beginning in the mid-1910s the style shifted toward more carefully studied designs with correct proportions and details influenced, in part, by new published sources of information including the *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* (1915-1928). These widely available publications contributed to a greater understanding of the original buildings, and from 1915 to 1935 Colonial Revival-style houses more closely reflected the early prototypes. From the mid-1930s through World War II changing fashions and economic conditions led to a simplification of the style before it lost favor.²¹

In North Carolina the Colonial Revival style entered residential architecture at the turn of the twentieth century with classicized adornments grafted onto Queen Anne forms. As the Colonial Revival style became accepted in the state, it grew to represent the architecture of Anglo-Saxon heritage and encompassed not only seventeenth- and eighteenth-century precedents but also examples from the early nineteenth century. A “Southern Colonial” variant of the Colonial Revival style emerged with a central portico of colossal order and one-story porches extending out to the sides as its principal feature. The symmetrical form returned to a double-pile, central-passage plan familiar in antebellum architecture of the southern states. Although the Southern Colonial model frequently appeared in towns and rural areas across the Piedmont and coastal regions of North Carolina, it found less favor in the western mountain region where the associations with idealized antebellum society and values were not as strong.²²

In western North Carolina—especially outside of Asheville—the Colonial Revival style commonly appears as classicized embellishments applied to transitional Queen Anne or vernacular house forms. In the sparsely populated rural areas of Polk County examples of Colonial Revival-style buildings are less common than in the resort towns of Saluda and Tryon, which contain an eclectic mix of architectural styles. Early examples of the Colonial Revival style often continued the commodious, rambling forms of the Queen Anne with classicized elaborations at the entrances, cornices, and windows. Variations of the style, exemplified by the symmetrical, red brick and white trim Georgian model, did not appear in these resort communities. Originally built as a tuberculosis sanatorium in 1906, the Pine Crest Inn in Tryon, a two-story frame building and three detached cottages with simple Colonial Revival detail—pedimented gables, wide cornice boards, and Tuscan porch columns—captures the informality typical of the area.²³

²¹ Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 321-326.

²² Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 416-423.

²³ Lea and Roberts, 10-11.

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At Mill Farm Inn the symmetrical arrangement of the exterior elevations exhibits the typical formality of the Colonial Revival style, although it is not so rigid as to disallow subtle variations between the front and rear and the two end elevations. The stone construction, simple forms, and restrained details fit within the general tenets of the style, while at the same time convey a relaxed, vernacular character appropriate for a country inn. On the interior, the spacious main living room, narrow halls, chestnut floors, plaster walls, and tasteful moldings help to express the casual elegance of Ms. Williams' establishment. Although the building has been altered as it has changed functions over the years, the overall form and character of the building remain intact, with most of the changes occurring on the second story of the interior and the addition at the northeast end for innkeeper's quarters. The two additional structures—an eight-bay garage and a gazebo—added to the property in the late 1980s and early 1990s also do not diminish the historic integrity of the Mill Farm Inn.

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Section 10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property for the Mill Farm Inn contains the full extent of Polk County tax parcel P48-127. The boundary is shown by a heavy line on the accompanying tax map.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the residual parcel historically associated with the Mill Farm Inn. Frances N. Williams acquired the property from J.J. and Lottie Cantrell in 1936. The 3.75-acre tract contains all of the buildings, structures, driveways, parking areas, and landscape features associated with the inn. The property is described in Polk County Deed Book 343, page 99.

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Photograph Index

All photographs of Mill Farm Inn at 701 Harmon Field Road in Polk County, North Carolina by Clay Griffith of Acme Preservation Services, on April 16, 2008. Digital images kept at the Survey and Planning Branch of the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh, North Carolina.

1. Oblique view from Harmon Field Road, looking north
2. Facade, looking northwest
3. Oblique view of northeast side elevation, looking southwest
4. Rear elevation, looking southeast
5. Interior – foyer, looking west
6. Interior – living room fireplace, looking east
7. Interior – 1st story bedroom (northwest corner), looking east
8. Interior – 2nd story bedroom (northwest corner), looking west
9. Garage, main elevation, looking southeast (non-contributing)
10. Gazebo, looking west (non-contributing)