

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Farthing, Ben, Farm

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number W side SR 1121 (Rominger Road), just N of Jct n/a not for publication  
with Watauga River

city or town Sugar Grove  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Watauga code 189 zip code 28679

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

William S. King 11-4-92  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Ben Farthing Farm  
Name of Property

Watauga County, NC  
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	
6	2	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
6	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**

-0-

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:  
agricultural outbuilding  
agricultural fields  
LANDSCAPE: street furniture/object  
natural feature  
forest

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:  
agricultural outbuilding  
agricultural fields  
LANDSCAPE: street furniture/object  
natural feature  
forest

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Frame gambrel banked barn  
Bungalow/Craftsman

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone  
walls weatherboard  
roof metal  
other wood  
asphalt shingle

**Narrative Description**

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

Ben Farthing Farm

Watauga Co., NC

Name of Property

County and State

3. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- XA 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 grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture

Period of Significance

1935-1942

Significant Dates

1935

1938

1939

1941

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Farthing, Ben

Hartley, Charles

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Ben Farthing Farm

Watauga Co., NC

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 16 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	4 2 5 6 3 0	4 0 1 0 6 0 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	1 7	4 2 6 2 7 0	4 0 1 0 7 4 0

3	1 7	4 2 6 1 9 0	4 0 1 0 5 1 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	1 7	4 2 5 6 7 0	4 0 1 0 4 5 0

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 Langdon E. Oppermann, Consultant

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date August, 1992

street & number 1500 Overbrook Avenue telephone 919/721-1949

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27104

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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Watauga County, NC

The Ben Farthing Farm is a picturesque rural property located in the steep mountains and fertile bottomlands of the Sugar Grove community in northwest Watauga County, North Carolina. Situated on the north bank of the Watauga River at the junction of Cove Creek, the farmstead consists of a modest one-and-one-half story frame bungalow of the early 1920s, a large 1930s frame barn of traditional gambrel-roof form, a 1930s root cellar built into a mountainside, a 1930s frame outhouse, and an early 1940s frame scale house for weighing lambs, ewes and cattle at selling time. It also retains a significant vernacular landscape of rock walls, walkways and steps. This complex is surrounded by woodland, pastureland, and tillable bottomland which served the farm during its period of significance (1935 to 1942). This agrarian and forested terrain is an integral part of the landscape which still today conveys the isolated visual character typical of this mountain region. The building complex is clustered on the southern edge of Beaverdam Ridge with the house on a small plateau overlooking the Watauga River towards mountains in the distance. A curving drive climbs the mountain past the scale house and pond to reach the tightly-nestled collection of barns, house, and outbuildings. To the north and particularly west of the house is the farm complex, built into and around the steep hillsides and making beneficial use of this topography to ease the work of the farm. Just as the bank barns accommodate the steep terrain into which they are built, the Farthings' rockwork harmonizes with it, creating steps down hills from the house to the road, to other buildings and to the garden; retaining walls along the garden's edge, near the barn, and around the graded lawn of the house; and level rock pathways. Near the buildings were the family gardens for food and flowers and farther north and uphill were the cattle and sheep pastures. To the east in the bottomlands along Cove Creek were planted three acres of corn; on the steepest lands grew hardwoods, mainly oak, locust, and maple.

The Farthing Farm with its setting in an historic landscape possesses integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The house has been divided and is now rented as duplex apartments, and some of the pastureland not included in the nominated area has been planted for the last twenty years in white pine. Still the land and buildings are in good repair and convey the sense of family farm life and livestock farming in this mountain region in the early part of the twentieth century. The essential integrity of the farmhouse, of the pre-1943 farm outbuildings, of the remarkably intact vernacular rock landscaping, and of the undisturbed mountain setting has not been compromised.

According to members of the Farthing family, there were at least three other outbuildings on the property which no longer exist. These included a chicken house and a pig pen, both built before the Farthings purchased the land in 1932 and demolished in 1978 because they were in deteriorated condition. A third building demolished in 1978 was a sheep barn, located just below the farm pond and harmed significantly when the pond dam broke, damaging the barn's foundation. The loss of these buildings and the presence of two post-1942 outbuildings do not detract from the integrity of the complex.

The elements of the nominated area include:

A. Designed Landscape Features, designed and built 1939, (C).

On the farm is significant vernacular landscaping of native rock, designed by Ben Farthing and built mainly by his children under his direction while he was in poor health, with the majority of the

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collecting and carrying of the rocks done by his children. The impressive work remains in remarkably intact condition today. Flat stone walkways lead from the driveway to the house and from the kitchen to the edge of the barnyard. Stone steps climb to the front porch of the house, from the side lawn to the garden, and up a steep hill to the second floor of the cellar behind the house. A long stone staircase from the front of the house climbs down a steep incline to the road. Stone walls were also built to create a terrace between the garden and root cellar and the back of the house, and a stone retaining wall supports the driveway as it approaches the barn from the north.

B. Ward-Farthing House, built in 1923, (C).

The house is the oldest building on the Farthing Farm. Built by Charlie Hartley, a local builder, for the owner Walter L. Ward and his family, it illustrates the transition in Watauga County as elsewhere from more indigenous house types to the popular national bungalow style. The house is a typical one and one-half story frame bungalow of its period. Covered in weatherboards, its roof is side-gabled and of standing-seam metal, with false knee braces at the gable ends. The roof was originally covered with chestnut shingles; the metal was applied during the 1978 repairs. An attached shed porch extends across the entire front, supported by four square posts, and wraps to the left, or west, side. The front porch remains open while the side porch has been screened, retaining its posts. The first-story facade is divided into five bays with a central entrance; a side door enters the house from the side porch. Windows are one-over-one throughout. On the front elevation is a broad shed dormer with three bays of paired windows, exposed rafter ends on the front, and false knee braces at each side corner. There is no dormer on the rear. The house measures 30 by 48 feet overall including the porch. Reflecting its mountain setting, the house rests on a stone foundation and a broad rock step leads from the stone walkway to the central entrance of the front porch. From the porch is a stunning view to the south, across the river valley below to the mountains in the distance.

The interior of the house is simple, even less adorned than the exterior. Most of the interior walls and ceilings are sheathed with beaded tongue-and-groove siding. An enclosed stair is just to the side of the front entrance door in an entrance room with fireplace on the west wall with unadorned brick chimney breast. The house was heated with a central chimney with fireplace opening on either side, both now closed, and a flue in the rear serving the kitchen. Door and window surrounds are plain. Downstairs rooms include a living room, dining room, kitchen, bath area (added in 1939 when interior plumbing was installed), and two bedrooms.

The second story of the Ward-Farthing House was unfinished when the Farthings purchased it in 1938, and was completed in that year and the next creating three bedrooms with closets, a storeroom, and a large hall. A typical and simple square newel and rail are found around the stair opening on the second floor. The beaded sheathing of the second floor is slightly wider than that of the first floor. Most of the first floor sheathing has been painted, while that of the second floor remains unpainted. Doors on the second floor, also unpainted, are two-panel and five-panel. Surprisingly, the second floor was not heated. Instead, a rectangular panel opens in the ceiling of the first floor just in front of the fireplace, allowing heat to pass up into the sleeping area above.

In 1978 the house was converted into a duplex with six rooms on both levels of the right, or east side, in one residence using the front door as its entrance. The other side has three rooms, a storeroom and a bath, and uses the side porch door as its entrance. Doors were closed to create the division between

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living spaces; no new partitions were created. Although a second small kitchen was added, the exterior of the house was not affected and the adaptation to a duplex was made without compromising the integrity of the house. The building is in good condition.

Outbuildings remaining with the Farthing Farm are positioned close to one another north and west of the house and arranged as dictated by the mountainous terrain:

C. Agricultural Landscape, from 1935, (C).

Another integral part of the landscape is the agrarian and forested terrain which still today conveys the isolated visual character typical of this mountain region. To the north and particularly west of the house is the farm complex, built into and around the steep hillsides and making beneficial use of this topography to ease the work of the farm. Above the house were two springs, their waters routed into a single receiving tank in 1938 and water pipes built to carry the water down to the farm and house complex.<sup>1</sup> Below and north of the 1935 barn is the farm pond, built in 1938 or 1939 for watering the pastured livestock and fed by the overflow from the springs' reservoir up the mountain. The pond is still used today for fishing.<sup>2</sup> The cattle and sheep pastures hugged the mountain north of the buildings. These are not included in the nominated area because they have been planted in white pines since the early 1970s and no longer reflect the pasture patterns present during the Farthings' use of the land as a working livestock farm. In the 1940s Mr. Farthing had planted pines to the southwest and southeast of the building complex on lands thought to be too steep for pasture. These are included in the nominated area.

D. Barn, built 1935, (C).

The large frame barn, with stone foundation and gambrel roof, was built in 1935 by Ben Farthing and helpers for animals, hay and grain.<sup>3</sup> The gambrel roof, with steep flowing sides, was originally covered with chestnut shingles but is now standing-seam metal. The barn was built into a hillside to provide direct access at both levels. Consequently, the east gambrel end appears to be one story but accesses the second level of the barn. This elevation is covered with diagonal siding except for the lower south portion which is sided with spaced horizontal slats to provide air to the corn crib. Small slats at the peak of the gambrel above repeat the diagonal pattern of the barn siding. The original door and window openings remain in this elevation, although the door itself is a replacement.

The south elevation is also patterned with diagonal siding, meeting at a batten door with a small four-light sash to the west. Farther east on this elevation is a large batten wood door hung on a sliding metal track; this provides vehicular and animal access to the lower level of the barn.

The west gambrel end shows the full height of the barn, as it is on the downhill side. Again, the barn is diagonally sided with the "V" meeting in the middle. Three batten doors are spaced symmetrically;

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<sup>1</sup> The receiving tank is north of the nominated area.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Dr. Frances M. Farthing.

<sup>3</sup> Study List application, also personal interview with Dr. Frances M. Farthing, daughter of Ben Farthing and part owner.

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each opens to a cow stall and has rectangular openings for air and light on each side. The "Z" pattern of the battens is reversed in the central door, probably for symmetry.

The north elevation is similar to the others in its diagonal siding meeting in a "V," but has no human access door as found in the south elevation. It does, however, have the large doorway for vehicular access. The batten door has been removed and is stored inside. At the northeast corner of the barn, cinder-block buttresses have been built to support the rock retaining wall at the driveway.

Inside on the lower level are three cow stalls on the west end, each with an opening to the exterior, and horse stables across an aisle. Feeding troughs remain in the stalls. A feed storage area is also on the first floor next to a wooden staircase leading to the hayloft above. Extending across the south end of this level, beneath the corn crib, is an enclosed area used for shearing of sheep, butchering of animals, storing of farm machinery and harnessing of the horses.<sup>4</sup> On the upper level, a large hayloft extends over the entire first floor with the exception of the corn crib in the southeast corner. Between the levels are shoots for dropping hay and grain from the storage loft above to the animals below. The upper level was accessible from the east by trucks, wagons and sleds for loading and unloading of hay into the loft and corn into the crib. The building is in good repair; the northeast corner of the second level has been curtained off and a simple half-bath and plumbing added with virtually no affect on the integrity of the structure. The rest is remarkably unchanged and used for incidental storage.

E. Root Cellar, built 1938, (C).

The cellar is located just behind the farmhouse and built into a steep mountainside. Built by Mr. Farthing when his family moved to the farm, again with help, this building is a tall, narrow gable-roofed structure of cement construction on the first floor and weatherboarded frame construction on the second. Decorative chestnut shingles in the upper gable ends are the only ornamentation. A thick wooden door opens to the cement lower level with cement floor. This level was used to store canned meat, vegetables, fruits, pickles and other summer products. Built-in wooden bins held potatoes, apples, and onions, but the cellar was too damp for storing gladioli and dahlia bulbs. Access to the second floor is up a steep rock staircase along the west side of the building to a four-panel door, apparently reused from an earlier building, with plain surrounds. This level of the cellar has a wooden floor and rough-board walls and was used for curing meat for home use. Hooks remain in the rafters. The building is in good repair and is used for incidental storage today.

F. Outhouse, built 1938, (C).

This small building is of frame construction with a shingled shed roof, measuring six by six-and-one-half feet. The outhouse is sided with unpainted vertical boards and has a batten door. An earlier outhouse in the same location was demolished and replaced by this one under a government program. The building was repaired and moved ca. 1978 from its original location nearer the house to its current location in the garden field and is now used for storage of garden tools.

G. Scale House, built 1941, (C).

This plain frame structure was built by Ben Farthing and his father, William Farthing, to hold cattle

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<sup>4</sup> Frances Farthing write-up for Study List application, and personal interview.

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scales and provide for the annual weighing of lambs, ewes, and cattle at selling time. This was the only scale house in the area and served livestock farmers from the surrounding community.<sup>5</sup> Roofed with a standing-seam metal gable roof, the building has large openings at each gable end to allow for livestock to be brought in at the north end, weighed, and taken out at the south end. A smaller doorway for people is at the east elevation. The building is located with its long axis parallel to the hillside to allow for level entrance and exit. The building is at a lower elevation than the rest of the farm complex and located just west of the entrance drive to the farm, providing easy access for farmers and buyers who came to use the scales. (The entrance drive was relocated slightly east in the 1980s to help alleviate erosion problems. The scale house is west of both the original and current driveway locations.) The scales have been removed and are stored by the family; the building is vacant but in stable condition, and surrounding growth is kept under control.

H. Dairy Barn, built 1949, (NC).

Built by Ben Farthing and helpers to serve a dairy operation which was begun on the farm in 1949 when one of Farthing's sons returned. Dairy functions dictated modifications to traditional frame construction: the first level is of cement and the second level of wood. The building is covered with an asphalt-shingled gambrel roof. Its north/south axis leaves access to both ends of the building at a similar level, while it is the sides of the building which meet the hillside at different levels. (The reverse is true for the 1935 barn.) The first floor was used for milking, feeding, washing of milk cans, and feed storage. The wooden second floor was used for grading of tobacco and storage. This building was converted into a residence in 1984. Wooden entrance steps and a small deck have been added to the upper level on the east elevation and a roof has been added to the cement porch on the west elevation's first level.

I. Woodshed, built 1949, (NC).

This is a simple cinder block building, one story with attic beneath a standing-seam metal gable roof. It was constructed to replace an earlier frame woodshed which was removed the same year for construction of the dairy barn. It is in good condition.

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Farthing write-up for Study List application, and personal interview.

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Watauga County, NCSummary

The Ben Farthing Farm is a significant representative of the predominance of agriculture in Watauga County in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The farm's setting on the north bank of the Watauga River and at the mouth of Cove Creek includes both mountainous terrain and bottomland. Historically the farm property has consisted of a mix of woodland, pasture, garden, the building complex, and cultivated bottomland. The Farthing Farm contains buildings associated with twentieth-century mountain farm living and livestock farming, including a large frame banked barn, a banked root cellar with space for dry storage above, and an unusual scale house, used for weighing cattle and sheep and thought to be the only example of its type in Watauga County. The farm also retains a significant designed vernacular landscape of rock work, including impressive stone walkways and steps on both flat areas and steep inclines. These are important as a part of the setting utilizing indigenous materials. The complex was created by Ben Farthing and his family, who bought the property in 1932, built a large barn in 1935, moved into the existing farmhouse in 1938 and immediately built several outbuildings and the rock work. The farm, with its buildings and rock landscaping, together with the steep terrain and wooded ridges, presents an agricultural landscape that is rapidly becoming a rarity in Watauga County as in much of the mountainous regions of North Carolina. This farm is the most intact twentieth-century farm in the area, where such farms are disappearing due to development and the difficulty of making a living on mountain farmland. The property began to take on its present appearance in the mid-1930s when the Farthings developed it as their farm, beginning with the construction in 1935 of the large banked barn. Thus the period of significance extends from 1935 to 1942, which complies with the fifty-year guideline for nominations. The boundaries include approximately sixteen acres which represent the area retaining the farm's historic integrity. The west, south, and east boundary lines follow the property lines, while the irregular northern boundary follows the tree line separating historic pastureland from white pines planted in 1971 on lands previously used as pasture.

Agricultural Context

Throughout the nineteenth and continuing after the first half of the twentieth century, farming was by far the chief land use and source of income in Watauga County. Although the percentages of land devoted to farming decreased in the twentieth century, they remained high. Almost 100 percent of the county's land area was in farms in 1910; thirty years later it was still relatively high at 79 percent, compared to 72 percent for the entire state in 1910 and 60 percent in 1940.<sup>6</sup> During the same period the number of farms increased, indicating a reduction in the size of farms.<sup>7</sup> Most farms in the county, including the Farthing Farm, were between 20 and 100 acres. This remained true throughout the period of significance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Agricultural Schedules, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940 census records.

<sup>7</sup> From 2,332 farms in 1900, up to 2,696 in 1940. Figures Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Agricultural Schedules, 1910-1940 census records.

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While the number of cattle on the farms of Watauga County declined each decade from 1910 to 1930, their value increased from under \$275,000 in 1910 to \$498,000 in 1930. Similarly, the number of sheep declined from 13,500 in 1910 to 9,300 in 1930, but the value of those sheep increased from \$61,000 to almost \$135,000 during the same twenty years.<sup>9</sup> The number of sheep shorn for wool reflects the numbers above, with 7,213 sheep shorn on 540 farms in 1930, producing over 39,400 pounds of wool at a value of over \$15,700.<sup>10</sup>

Few early twentieth-century Watauga County farms were specialized. Commercial farming did not begin in the county until after 1900, and not to any great extent until after 1920.<sup>11</sup> Most farms were classified as "self-sufficing" farms in the 1930 census records. Just under a fourth were "general farms," and a mere 4.5 percent were "animal-specialty" farms. The more specialized classifications, such as poultry farm, cash-grain farm, fruit farm, cotton farm, or dairy farm, either did not exist in the county at that time (e.g. there were no cotton farms) or were represented by only a very few farms there (e.g. fruit farms). Thus the Farthing Farm, which was self-sufficing and concentrating on livestock for income, is representative of the county during that period. The Farthings, like others in the area, were self-sufficient in vegetables, meat, and fruit, as well as feed for their livestock. According to family tradition, only coffee, sugar, and salt were bought at the store.<sup>12</sup>

As Ben Farthing's daughter states, "On most mountain farms the owners were involved in a number of activities, all contributing to the success of the venture... A few cattle and sheep--pasture, hay and grain for the animals--perhaps some 'truck' crops, especially cabbage and potatoes, some chickens, a pig and a big garden, were all part of the self-sufficiency and independence of the family."<sup>13</sup>

The lifestyle of the Farthings on their mountain farm is further reflected by their daughter:

Mrs. Farthing, as in most families of the time, made the many shirts needed by five growing sons, the dresses needed by three daughters, bed linens, curtains and other items. The elder daughter soon learned to be of great help with this chore. Mrs. Farthing also saw that the cellar was filled with vegetables, meat, fruit and berries--all canned, dried, pickled, preserved or simply stored as were onions, potatoes and apples. Flower bulbs could not be stored there as the cellar was too damp; they were buried in the garden as were cabbage and celery.

The meat used by the family was born, fattened and slaughtered on the place--except

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<sup>9</sup> Agricultural Schedules, 1910, 1920, and 1930 census figures.

<sup>10</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1930.

<sup>11</sup> Whitener, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with Dr. Frances M. Farthing.

<sup>13</sup> Letter, Dr. Frances M. Farthing to Dr. William S. Price, October 3, 1992.

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that the pig was purchased from a nearby neighbor when very young. A lamb and beef came from the farm. Each was appropriately canned or cured and used the following months. A chicken was always in the barnyard for use on Sunday or otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

The major commercial use of the Farthings' Watauga River farm was for raising beef cattle and sheep. These were pastured together in the fields above and north of the house and barn, where a watering trough was filled with water piped from the springs above. Between fifteen and twenty-five yearling calves were sold each year.<sup>15</sup> The sheep and cattle were pastured on this property as well as on their Avery County property, which was fifteen miles "the back way" behind Beech Mountain. Ben Farthing's sons and neighbor boys would drive the animals, spending the night at the tenants' house on the Avery County property. Farmers kept only as many cattle through the winter as they could feed from hay and grains grown on their lands. Cattle were kept at pasture all winter; ewes were brought into the sheep barn for lambing.

When the Farthings moved to their river property in 1938 there were about thirty-five to forty ewes and a buck. Because sheep often had twins, about forty to sixty lambs were sold each year.<sup>16</sup> Ewes were shorn in the frame barn each spring, and were not sold unless they were not producing lambs. Sheep shearing in Watauga County was said to be among the best in the United States, and shearing competitions were held each spring for high school boys.<sup>17</sup> Ben Farthing allocated income from the wool to the expenses of the sheep and considered income from the sale of the lambs as profit.

The scale house on the Farthing Farm was the only one in Watauga County and was used by farmers and buyers from a wide area. Selling time was in the fall, after the cattle had been in pasture all summer.<sup>18</sup> About two to four dozen neighbors brought cattle and sheep to be weighed and sold for butchering during selling time, and the buyers came to the Farthing scales to negotiate.<sup>19</sup>

### Historical Background

Benjamin Walter Farthing (12/17/1889-11/20/1967) grew up in a farming family. His father, William Farthing, was a farmer and teacher in the public schools, and several times named the county's Farmer of the Year. William's grandfather Reuben P. Farthing had been a Baptist minister, surveyor, and

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<sup>14</sup> Letter, Dr. Frances M. Farthing to Dr. William S. Price, October 3, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Information from Baxter Farthing, fourth son of Ben Farthing, supplied to Oppermann by Frances M. Farthing.

<sup>16</sup> Baxter Farthing, via Dr. Frances M. Farthing.

<sup>17</sup> According to Frances Farthing, each year Watauga sheep-growing sons participated in the national sheep-shearing contest held in the western United States; one year the national champion was from Watauga County, and a Watauga contestant was runner-up more than once.

<sup>18</sup> Letter, Dr. Farthing to Dr. Price, October 3, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Letter, Dr. Frances M. Farthing to Langdon E. Oppermann, May 25, 1992.

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farmer. He was called "one of the foremost educators of his day."<sup>20</sup> The Farthings descended from a prominent local family who were among the first settlers of the county in the 1820s. Dudley Farthing had been a public speaker of note. He moved here in 1826 with his son Rev. William W. Farthing, a preacher "of force and fame." His son Reuben was Ben Farthing's great grandfather.<sup>21</sup> The family had among its members many teachers and a high regard for education continued in later generations. Ben Farthing also became a teacher.

After their marriage in 1911, Ben Farthing and his wife Dixie Glenn Farthing (3/20/1892-1/28/1951) moved in 1912 to the Dark Ridge area in northern Avery County (southwest of Watauga County). The couple started a farm on land they bought from Ben Farthing's grandfather, Richard Greer, gradually building a house, acquiring additional land, cattle and sheep, and growing crops such as cabbage and potatoes. In 1920 they moved to Valle Crucis in Watauga County so their children could attend the local schools, but held on to the Avery County farm. Both Farthings had earlier taught and Ben Farthing had been principal of the Beech Mountain School in Avery County. On moving to Valle Crucis, Dixie worked at the Valle Crucis Bank and later taught third grade at the Valle Crucis Mission school. Ben also taught for a few terms before becoming cashier of the Valle Crucis Bank (later sold to the Watauga County Bank).

Ben Farthing later bought a one-quarter interest in the Valle Crucis Company Store where his brother Aubyn Farthing was manager and part owner.<sup>22</sup> Ben and Aubyn became partners in Ben's Avery County farm, as well, when Aubyn bought a part interest. In addition, the brothers bought a farm in 1932 on the Watauga River in Watauga County, which is known today as the Ben Farthing Farm. As a result of the depression, the previous owner, Walter L. Ward defaulted on his loan causing his farm to be sold at auction. It was then that the two Farthing brothers purchased the farm from Ward's mortgagers.<sup>23</sup> The store's truck was used a great deal for farm needs.

After Ben and Dixie Farthing moved to Valle Crucis, the Avery County farm was operated by a tenant farmer. For six years the Farthings also operated the Watauga County farm on the river but did not live there. The family who lived in the bungalow on the property most of the time was that of Elisha Presnell. He was not the typical tenant farmer, however, as he did nothing to help with the farm operation; thus it is assumed by the family today that he paid a nominal rent.<sup>24</sup> A relative named Don Farthing later lived there for a short time until 1938.

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur, p. 310.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Their store was called "The Republican Store." The Mast General Store (listed in National Register 1973) was called "The Democrat Store." The Valle Crucis Store bought chickens and eggs but not herbs--the Mast Store bought herbs collected by local residents. Info from personal interview with Frances Farthing.

<sup>23</sup> Watauga County Deed Book 40, page 569, June 15, 1932. Deed from J. J. Mast & Ed Yates, mortgagees, to R.A. and B. W. Farthing.

<sup>24</sup> Letter, Farthing to Oppermann, May 25, 1992.

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In 1938, Ben Farthing's health was declining due to asthma. He left the store and he and his brother Aubyn dissolved their partnership. Aubyn's half of the Watauga River farm was conveyed to Dixie G. Farthing, Ben Farthing's wife, so that the couple now had full ownership of the 47-acre farm.<sup>25</sup> It was upon moving in in 1938 that many improvements were made to the old "Ward Place." The large barn had been built three years earlier by Ben and local helpers to improve their farming activities on the property. After moving into the bungalow he immediately went about building other necessary outbuildings. The two-story root cellar was constructed, a new outhouse was built, the springs above the house were joined and the water piped to the pasture and building complex, and in 1939 the extensive rock landscaping was undertaken. Also in 1939 the Farthings put plumbing into their 1923 bungalow. A few years later, in 1941, Ben Farthing, with the help of his father, built a scale house on his farm and installed a set of cattle scales. He and his brother had maintained scales at their Avery County property.

There was not much tillable land on the river property. Corn was grown on the three acres in the bottom land near the entrance and a vegetable and flower garden behind the house were kept for home use. Any produce and grains grown on this farm were for feeding the animals and the family, not for sale. Vegetables were canned and stored in the root cellar behind the house. Cabbage, potatoes, and later tobacco were grown on the Avery County farm for sale. Hay and additional corn were also grown there for feed for their Watauga livestock.

The beef cattle and sheep were for profit, with one of each butchered each year for family use. On the other hand, the pigs were kept and butchered for home use, regularly providing sausage, hams, shoulders and bacon for the family. These were cured in the upper level of the root cellar.

In the meantime, Ben Farthing's health had improved so he was able to maintain an active farm operation. The construction of the scale house made the Farthing Farm the area's center for weighing livestock as well as for selling cattle and lambs each year, not just for the Farthing operation, but for farmers in the surrounding area. These were the only scales in the area, just as the Farthings' scales on their Avery County property had been the only ones there.<sup>26</sup>

The Farthing family's concern for education showed itself again in Ben Farthing's efforts to follow advances in farming. At both of his farms, he searched for methods of improving farming practices and animal husbandry. He kept a pedigreed bull, rotated crops, avoided plowing steep land, and was one of the first in the area to believe in and practice planting cover crops.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Watauga County Deed Book 57, page 239, March 5, 1938. Deed from R. Aubyn Farthing & wife Hazel D. Farthing to Dixie G. Farthing. (Richard Aubyn Farthing 6/24/1893-10/16/1968, married 1915 to Hazel Dell Glenn Farthing 6/13/1894-9/28/1978. Info from Heritage of Watauga County, Vol. 1, p. 185.)

<sup>26</sup> Heritage of Watauga County, Vol. 1, p. 255. Also, interviews with Frances Farthing.

<sup>27</sup> Heritage of Watauga County, Vol. 1, p. 255.

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In 1949 Ben Farthing introduced dairy farming to his Watauga farm. He built the new barn with its materials and form following the needs of a dairy operation. Baxter Farthing, Ben Farthing's fourth son, returned home the same year to help run the farm operations and the new dairy business. He remained until 1957 when he went back to Virginia. Ben Farthing began to curtail his farming operations in the 1950s, selling the dairy cattle and the sheep, which enabled him to increase his income from Social Security.

Dixie Farthing, Ben Farthing's wife, died in early 1951. In 1957 Mr. Farthing married his wife's sister, Eunice Glenn Tester Farthing, who had been widowed in 1952. This marked the cessation of the farm's use as a working farm and as a permanent residence. The Farthings spent the winters in Florida and the summers at Mrs. Farthing's place on Bowers Mountain in Watauga County, about ten miles away near Banner Elk. Ben Farthing died in 1967, and is buried with his first wife Dixie at the old Mast Cemetery at Valle Crucis.

The farm was used as a weekend place by family members from 1961 to 1978. In 1971 white pines were set on most of the northern pastureland and continue to be grown for timber. In 1978 renovations and remodelings were made. The cellar and scale house were repaired and the outhouse was repaired and moved for its new use as garden tool storage. The large wooden barn, built in 1935, was in excellent condition needing no repair; its aluminum roof was painted, and the building is used for storage. A portion of the hayloft was curtained off for family use and electricity and a simple half-bath added. The farmhouse was adapted into a duplex. A sheep barn which sat below the 1935 barn was demolished; the pond's dam had given way and harmed the foundation considerably.<sup>28</sup> Also demolished were a chicken house and pig pen built by the Ward family before 1932. Both were in poor condition. The water pipes from the spring, installed in 1938, were replaced in 1979, and in 1984 the 1949 dairy barn was converted to a residence. Both the bungalow and the dairy barn continue to be rented as residences. The three acres of bottom land are rented, continuing their use for corn production.<sup>29</sup> The scale house is the only one known to exist on a farm in Watauga County today, and reflects the Farthing Farm as a center for annual livestock sales in the area. The Farthing Farm with its house, outbuildings, vernacular rock landscape and pristine mountain terrain still conveys a strong image of a middle-class Watauga County farmstead from the years of the farm's primary significance, 1935 to 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, Farthing to Oppermann, May 25, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> Frances Farthing write-up for Study List application, and personal interviews.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property being nominated consists of approximately 16 acres of the tract identified in Watauga County tax records as property 1961-78-3118-000. It is shown on Map 1961, quadrant number 78, parcel number 3118, Watauga County, N.C.. The boundary of the nominated property is illustrated by the heavy black line on the accompanying tax map (scale of 1" = 200'). The boundary follows the property lines on the south and on the southern parts of the west and east boundaries. The westernmost part of the northern boundary follows the property line, then continues eastward becoming an irregular line following the line of the white pines planted in 1971. At SR 1121 the northern boundary turns north along the west side of SR 1121, thence east to cross the road, continuing east to join the northern property line between SR 1121 and Cove Creek. At Cove Creek it meets the eastern property line mentioned at the start.

**Boundary Justification**

The property described is owned by members of the Farthing family and includes that portion of the tract historically associated with the Ben Farthing Farm and which retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Not included in the nominated area are stands of white pines planted in 1971 on earlier pastureland.

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Ben Farthing Farm  
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The following information is true for nine of the ten photographs accompanying this nomination. The exception is Photograph #1. The original is a color photograph taken in 1985 by a friend of the Farthing family. In 1992 a black-and-white negative and prints were made of the color photograph. That negative is in the possession of Dr. Frances W. Farthing, 116 Orchard Avenue, Boone, NC 28607, 704/264-0227. Dr. Farthing is part owner of the property.

Name of property:	Ben Farthing Farm Historic District
Location:	SR 1121 at jct with Watauga River Sugar Grove vicinity Watauga County, NC
Photographer:	Langdon Edmunds Oppermann
Date of Photo:	May 1992
Location of original negative:	SHPO Office NC Division of Archives & History Raleigh, NC 27601

Photo #

- 1 Farm complex  
Overall view looking north with the Watauga River in the foreground, the building complex in the center, and the mountainside continuing beyond.  
1985 photograph is an accurate representation of the farm at the time of this nomination.  
Photographer facing N
- 2 1935 Barn  
East elevation  
Photographer facing NW
- 3 1935 Barn  
Interior showing roof construction  
Photographer facing W
- 4 1923 Bungalow  
E side elevation looking across Watauga River valley  
Photographer facing N
- 5 1923 Bungalow  
E side elevation and S front elevation  
Photographer facing W
- 6 1938 Root Cellar  
South and west elevations  
Photographer facing NE

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Watauga County, NC

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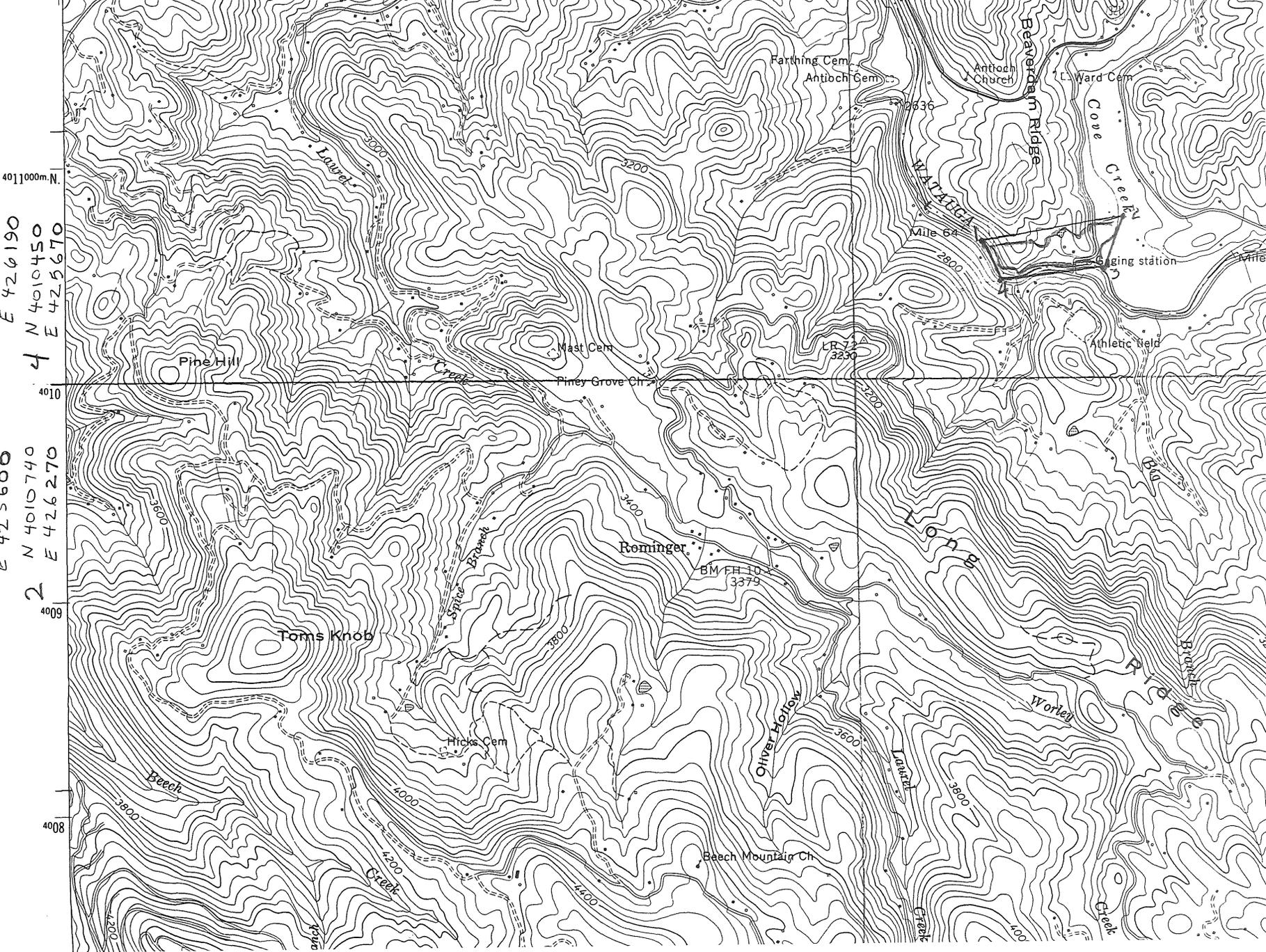
- 7      1941 Scale House  
        East and north elevation  
        Photographer facing SW
  
- 8      1938 Vernacular Rock Landscaping  
        Steps to garden just NE of woodshed  
        Photographer facing N
  
- 9      1938 Vernacular Rock Landscaping  
        Stone steps from house front to river and road  
        Photographer facing S
  
- 10     1949 Dairy Barn  
        East (side) and north (end) elevations  
        Photographer facing SW

4650 IV SW 21A-SW  
ELK MILLS 21A-SW

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

UNITED STATES  
TENNESSEE VI  
MAPPING SE 461  
(SHERV)

81°52'30" 422000m.E. 423 424 50' ELIZABETHTON 33 MI. 6.3 MI. TO STATE LINE 1.9 MI. TO U.S. 421



Ben Farthing Farm Historic District  
Sugar Grove vic., Watauga Co., NC  
Valle Crucis Quad Zone 17

- 1 N 4010630 E 425600
- 2 N 4010740 E 426270
- 3 N 4010510 E 426190
- 4 N 4010450 E 425670

4011000m.N.

4010

4009

4008

