

PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST INN (Old Pisgah Inn)  
Blue Ridge Parkway Milepost 408.6  
Ashville Vicinity  
Buncombe County  
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-356

HABS  
NC-356

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Southeast Region  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST INN (Old Pisgah Inn) HABS No. NC-356

Location: Twenty-five miles south of Asheville, NC, at Blue Ridge Parkway Milepost 408.6, on the left side looking south, about 3 miles southwest of the Parkway, NC 151 intersection.

U.S.G.S. Cruso 7.5' Quadrangle Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
17.340600.3918890

Present Owner: Parkway Inn, Inc. (Concessioner)

Present Occupants: Parkway Inn, Inc., seasonal employees

Present Use: Seasonal staff quarters

Significance: The Old Pisgah Inn and Cottage is an important complex within the framework of the recreational history of western North Carolina. Among many guests, the Inn was a favorite retreat for the area's wealthy elite and certain noted professionals from other areas.

The property is an excellent example of rustic architecture and retains integrity of location and setting, particularly important here, as well as materials, workmanship, design, feeling, and association. Derived from William West Durant's Adirondack architecture known as "Pine Knot Style," the irregular mass of Inn buildings and additions are informally planned, with rustic gray board and batten siding, uncoursed stonework chimneys, and bark covered structural members composing a structure sitting on a shelf overlooking broad forest expanse.

PART I. PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST INN

The Pisgah National Forest Inn (Pisgah Forest Inn, Old Pisgah Lodge), built in 1919, is a hostelry significant to one's enjoyment of the Great South View of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Inn site, elevation 5,120 feet above sea level, is a shelf of Mount Pisgah, a peak named for the Biblical mountain ridge. The Inn consists of what was formerly a main lodge with restaurant facilities, a gift shop, eleven bedrooms with baths, and four overnight cabins adjacent to the lodge: Kalmia Cottage, Chinquapin Cottage, Chewink Cottage, and Tree-Top Cabin. A rambling porch wraps around the back or south side of the Inn. From it one can enjoy an exceptional panorama of the Pink Beds Valley of the Pisgah National Forest. The design of the Inn is rustic and perhaps naive but is in keeping with several other "pine knot" lodges in existence in western North Carolina. It cannot be denied that the Pisgah Forest Inn was a search for a regional style or, at least, an architecture appropriate to its setting.

The Pisgah National Forest Inn is an informally organized two-and-half story board and batten on frame structure featuring natural log details. It was built in 1919 on the highly picturesque south slope of Mount Pisgah, 600 feet below the highest peak in the Pisgah and Tennessee ridges. The Inn is easily accessible from Asheville, North Carolina, twenty-five miles south of the city on the Blue Ridge Parkway at milepost 408.6. The old Inn cannot be seen from the motorway; it is necessary to park at the modern facility (also called the Pisgah Inn) and follow the designated path through the kalmia (mountain laurel) and the rhododendron to the "Old Pisgah Inn."

George F. Weston, the designer and original owner of the Inn had a preoccupation with Pisgah's beauty and its bountiful forests. The Inn and its four adjacent cabins and two outbuildings are built of pine, and the interior of the Inn is of wormy chestnut. Weston's structures reflect little stylistic influences except in the unpeeled log beams and supports as seen on the porches of all of the buildings and in the decorative unpeeled log motif on the facade, on the portico, and in the lobby/dining room of the Inn. The unpeeled log motif was a popular decorative technique used, and perhaps originated, by William West Durant in the 1890s for his summer camp resorts in the Adirondack Mountains. Durant's school of Adirondack architecture became known as the Pine Knot style.

The Pisgah National Forest Inn was built on 2.91 acres of leased land within the Pisgah National Forest, on the Haywood and Transylvania County lines. Each room had eighteen volt lighting, generated from a "Delco Plant" located half a mile north of the Inn. Water was pumped from a spring near the plant through above-ground pipes into a water tower located on the Inn property. Even though some interior "improvements" have been made, the Inn and its adjacent buildings are used as summer housing only; two fireplaces still serve as the only source of heat.

The Inn's floorplan consists of the main lobby/dining room with a registration area west of the entrance; the original kitchen wing projects northwest behind the registration area. The rambling outdoor terrace borders the south wall of the lobby/dining room and can be reached either through the Terrace Room in the southwest corner of the Inn or through the hall leading to the East Room. A wall of paired casement windows separates the lobby/dining room from the terrace and allows one to sit in the lobby and enjoy the view to the south. A large stone fireplace is located to the east of the entrance; beside the fireplace is a splendid rustic staircase with split-log treads which leads to the second floor. Originally, all the rooms for lodging were located on the second floor; in 1966, the kitchen wing was converted into dorm rooms for the employees of the new facility. A large room in the northeast corner, beside the staircase, is also used as a dorm room; its original function is unknown. There are eleven rooms originally used for lodging in the Inn, including two rooms on the second floor of the kitchen wing accessible from a southwest balcony. The small rooms measure about ten feet by twelve feet but vary somewhat in size; several have connecting baths. One bath is located in the main second-floor hall, one is above the kitchen, and another is located on the staircase landing. Six storage closets line the north side of the second-floor hall at the end of which is an exit to the balcony. Each room has two or more paired casement windows which swing out towards the south view.

The Inn rests on a stone foundation; log piers elevate the porch and part of the east wing on the downhill side. The East Room is an early and compatible addition to the main structure; a small passageway connects the two buildings. The East Room has a stone fireplace with an exterior chimney. The bath is enclosed in a projecting shed roof structure on the northwest corner. A 1974 fire damaged a large portion of this room; it is greatly in need of repair as nothing has been done since the fire.

Board-and-batten sheathing provides a richly textured surface for the Inn's exterior. The gray, rough-sawn boards compliment the unpeeled logs used in the entrance composition, the porch, and some window architraves. A massive fieldstone chimney--almost cone-like in shape--abuts the entrance to its east and anchors the structure to the steep mountainside.

The entrance composition itself is the center piece of the building's roadside facade. An exposed log truss, or tympanum, with diagonal bracing rests atop two stout posts, one to either side and slightly in front of the double door entrance. This truss and two log beams projecting from the building carry the roof of this rustic portico. Smaller halved-logs frame the entrance wall in a Tudor-like design. Two large paired casement windows and two small shed dormers provide facade fenestration; second-story gables balance the central composition.

A wooden latch invites entree into the spacious lobby/dining room with its beamed ceiling. The ceiling is supported by a chestnut log post-and-lintel system with chestnut log braces. The logs shine with a light glaze. Chestnut boards create a tall wainscotting which is interrupted west of the entrance by a built-in registration desk and elsewhere by chestnut bookshelves. The focal point of the room is the mammoth fireplace with a half-log shelf. Logs for the fireplace can be kept just outside the double-door entrance in an enclosed closet within the portico. Of special interest is the lobby staircase made of half-log treads (the unpeeled bark evident on the underside) which fit into the notched string logs; a pole handrail curves into the clutch of a forked-log newel--apparently a "found" artifact of nature. The staircase is of the quarter-turn type with landing.

The Inn's south terrace makes possible the fullest enjoyment of the panoramic scene of mountains. As the terrace cantilevers somewhat off the mountainside, there is also a dramatic sense of plunging down among the rhododendron, the kalmia, and the tree-tops that cover Pisgah's steep slope.

A similar view may be experienced from the porches of the southfacing cabins adjacent to the Inn, the closest of which is Kalmia, named after Kalmia latifolia or mountain laurel. Kalmia Cottage is a one-story rectangular structure with a shed porch and a gabled roof. The cottage is sheathed in board-and-batten siding and has an exterior chimney for the fireplace in the northwest corner. The cabin consists of two bedrooms, each with a separate entrance from the porch; a bath connects the two rooms.

Chinquapin Cottage, named after a variety of the dwarf chestnut, is an L-shaped, one-story, board-and-batten cabin with a double gabled roof: one first enters into the porch and living space after which a doorway leads into the bedroom and bath. The fireplace, with an exterior stone chimney, warms the northwest corner of the cabin.

Chewink Cottage is the last cottage on the south side of the road. It takes its name from an American bird species, the towhee, commonly called the finch. Chewink Cottage is a central-block-with-one-wing structure covered by a double gabled roof. It has two bedrooms, each with separate entrances from the porch, and the bath and closet space are shared. A small fireplace with an exterior native stone chimney is located in the northeast wall.

Tree-Top Cabin sits at the top of the property line; it is a two-story board-and-batten rectangular structure with a southeast wing addition. The gabled-roof structure is aligned east-west, parallel to the nearby Parkway. There are two entrances to the main building; the west entrance is covered by a hood-on-brackets canopy. Above the canopy and flush with the building is a second-floor porch which faces west. Unpeeled log decoration gives special flavor to the porch, especially the fan design on the wall. The second entrance to the main structure is on the southeast end; the stairway to the second floor begins to the right of the entrance. The large first floor room is divided by light board partitions into a two-room plan with a hall. The bath for the building is located on the first floor. The second floor consists of two bedrooms with windows facing south. Access to the porch is through the second bedroom. Tree-Top's southeast addition has a separate entrance; it is a one-room, gabled roof structure with a modern bath, added in 1979.

The two outbuildings are rectangular in shape; the workshop/garage is the larger building with a gabled roof. It is divided into east and west spaces, the first of which functions as a garage (double car) and the other side of the building is the workshop for the employees of the Inn. The Laundry building is a small rectangular room with a gabled roof and an entrance on the north side.

PART II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

George Farrington Weston, the designer, original owner and operator of the Pisgah Forest Inn, was an architect and an engineer. He worked as the superintendent of farms (dairy farm, pig farm, and poultry farm) for millionaire George W. Vanderbilt from 1895-1903. At the turn of the century, George Vanderbilt owned Mount Pisgah as part of his Biltmore Estate. After George Vanderbilt's death in March, 1917, Mrs. Vanderbilt sold 36,000 acres of the Pisgah Forest to the U. S. Government. Under the direction of the U. S. Forest Service, Pisgah Mountain became the backbone of the Pisgah National Forest.

George and Mary Cynthia Weston lived in New York City for six years before moving to Asheville, North Carolina, in 1918. Weston knew the area from his previous employment under George Vanderbilt. The Westons were outdoor enthusiasts; they appreciated the beauty of the Pisgah area and camped frequently on Pisgah's mountainside. Weston told his wife he would like to spend the rest of his life on the spot that became the site of the Inn. In the spring of 1919, the Westons arranged for a concession permit and a thirty-year lease with the U. S. Forest Service in which he and his wife would construct and own an Inn and lease the land from the U. S. Government. The Westons went to the site on July 12, 1919. There they drew the plans for the Inn and camped for eight weeks in order to personally supervise its construction. Once the exterior was complete, the Westons moved into the Inn. The Pisgah National Forest Inn opened for business in 1920.

The Westons took pride in making the Inn an exceptional hostelry. Mary Cynthia Weston was greatly interested in the native flora and fauna. She fed the deer and squirrels from the woods and spent considerable time studying the wildflowers of western North Carolina. In 1921, Mrs. Weston started a garden of native wildflowers. The garden covered more than an acre and contained 290 varieties of wildflowers and shrubs, among which were some of the rarest species, all of which Mrs. Weston collected and transplanted from the forest. The garden was open at all times during the operating season, April to November, to interested visitors. Students from surrounding colleges made yearly visits to Pisgah to study the plants. Indeed, trips to the Pisgah National Forest Inn were an annual affair for some of the summer guests. One professor from Charleston came every season and brought his piano with him. Another faithful visitor arrived annually with an entourage of cats. She disliked her cats being spoiled by too much attention, so it is said the Westons built a separate cottage for this guest and her cats.

In the very early days (1920s), guests arrived at the Pisgah National Forest Inn attended by servants and traveling by horse and buggy. Transportation had always been something of a problem at this mountain retreat. The Inn was reached by the old wagon road, formerly built by Carl A. Schenck and his forestry apprentices, to haul chestnut logs for construction of Mr. Vanderbilt's Buckspring Lodge. The Inn's registers contain citizens--E. W. Grove, Fred L. Seely, L. B. Jackson, J. M. Westall, Tench C. Coxe, C. P. Ambler, and Frank Wolfe-- but also names of architects and foresters drawn to Asheville by the construction and development of Vanderbilt's Biltmore House and Estate-- Charles N. Parker and Verne Rhoades-- not to mention persons of leisure and wealth attracted to the mountain area because of western North Carolina's fame as a tourist/health center. This annual influx of relatively wealthy tourists interjected into the mountain isolation an element of urbane culture.

George and Mary Cynthia spent the winter months at their home in Arden until 1931. They erected a handsome new house in Fletcher, called "Shenstone" and lived there until George Weston's death, November 20, 1946. Weston was an active member in church work at Calvary Episcopal Church in Fletcher, North Carolina. Among those attending the funeral were Overton Price, David A. Harris, and Dr. E. L. Shuford. Weston befriended many of the notable Vanderbilt entourage during his employment on the Biltmore Estate. Weston is mentioned several times by Carl A. Schenck in his book The Biltmore Story.

H. H. Nash and Harold V. Moon became the new owners of the Pisgah National Forest Inn in 1937. Weston had a thirty-year lease with the U. S. Forest Service which ended October 1, 1949, and the last twelve years of the lease were taken over by Nash and Moon. H. H. Nash of New Jersey had previous experience in the hotel business; he managed the Roger Smith Hotel 1932-1937; he was the assistant manager of the Carolina Hotel at Pinehurst from 1928-1932; and he had been connected with the Saranac Inn in New York, the Grafton Hotel, and the Ebbitt Hotel in Washington. Moon, from New York, managed the Hotel Wentworth in New York City, the Hotel Davenport at Stanford, Connecticut, and the Roger Smith Hotel. With the help of an Asheville realtor, John Rowland, Jr., Nash and Moon purchased the Pisgah National Forest Inn for \$27,000 which included the buildings, the lease, and the furnishings. Due to proposed plans by the federal government to construct the Blue Ridge Parkway in the vicinity of the Pisgah National Forest Inn, an agreement was made stipulating that the North Carolina Highway and Public Works Commission would settle for any resulting damages to the Pisgah Forest Inn property from state or federal agencies.

Despite the existence of newspaper clippings reporting that World War II forced Moon and Nash to shut down for a period of ten years, the Inn registers list a number of visitors from 1937-1948. Business, however, must have been too slow for the owners and, in 1948, Marine Hess and Bess Caravan opened the inn under new management. In 1951, the deed for the Pisgah Inn passed into new hands once again, when Mr. and Mrs. Leslie G. Kirschner bought the lodgings. The Kirschners, former Long Islanders, found the Pisgah Inn through an advertisement in a hotel review. They opened the Inn in 1952 and began a program of restoration from 1952-1955.

Leslie G. Kirschner and Leda D. Kirschner jointly operated the Pisgah National Forest Inn under a U. S. Forest Service permit from October 18, 1951, to December 21, 1962. The land on which the Pisgah National Forest Inn is located was transferred from the Forest Service to the National Park Service on May 13, 1963. For several months prior to 1962 the National Park Service had been in touch with the Kirschners in connection with the future development and operation of the visitor accommodation facilities at Mt. Pisgah; the National Park Service was concerned about the future when the Mt. Pisgah portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway would be finished and modern facilities to serve the public would be needed there. Although the Kirschners had renovated the Inn and land managed it with considerable personal involvement, the building had begun to show its age and would have been inadequate to serve the many visitors anticipated upon the completion of the Blue Ridge Parkway in 1965.

The Kirschners were informed in 1962 that, conditioned upon proper financing to undertake an improvement and building program of not less than \$250,000 (consisting of fifteen lodging units, dining room, lobby, public use space, gift shop space and an automobile service station to be completed by June 1, 1967), the National Park Service was prepared to negotiate a twenty-year contract from January 1963 to December 31, 1982, to provide concession facilities at the Pisgah National Forest Inn. The existing facilities (the Pisgah National Forest Inn and four adjacent cabins, a garage, a workshop, and a wash room) were to be used under the contract of 1963 and 1964 pending completion of the new construction.

In order to provide the necessary financing, the Kirschners associated themselves with Messrs. J. A. Prevost and J. H. Moody of Hazelwood, North Carolina, and Messrs. John N. Johnson and George M. Kimball of Waynesville, North Carolina, and formed the North Carolina Corporation of Pisgah Inn, Inc., on July 20, 1962. The total authorized capital stock of the corporation was \$250,000 divided into 2500 shares of \$100

each. Under an oral understanding with the corporation, the Kirschners operated the facilities at the Pisgah National Forest Inn as they had been doing in the past. This arrangement was to last for two years or until the new facilities had been constructed. It was further agreed "that the foresaid building program was intended to replace the buildings of the concessioner that existed at the initiation of the contract, and that such buildings will be removed at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior but with minimum interruption of the business operation. This provision in the current contract with the owners, the Pisgah Inn, Inc.

The Asheville link of the Parkway motor road (between U. S. 70 and N. C. 191) and the new addition to the modern Inn facility were scheduled to be ready in 1971. The first fifteen units were completed in 1965. Memo after memo can be found in the Blue Ridge Parkway files in reference to the Old Pisgah Lodge and what was to be done with this building once the new addition was built. In 1964, it was stipulated that the Old Pisgah Lodge, currently in use for lodgings and dining, would remain in place for one operating season after the Parkway section at Asheville opened but that the building would be used for employee lodging and possibly overflow of visitors; however, no meals were to be prepared or served in the Old Pisgah Lodge once the new restaurant opened. In a letter dated 1966 from the Kirschners, it was reported the Old Lodge and adjacent cabins had been utilized to a great advantage that season: in addition to housing twenty-two employees, they also housed from seven to twenty per cent of the guests, some request, others when all accommodations were taken. In 1968, it was requested that the practice of housing guests in the Old Pisgah Lodge and adjacent cottages be discontinued. These buildings could be used to house employees only.

The Old Pisgah Lodge and the adjacent cabins are still used by the summer employees, as long as repairs and refurbishing of the buildings are carried on by the concessioner, the Pisgah Inn, Inc. This policy has held to the present with the expiration date of the contract ending December 31, 1982. The current stockholders, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas O'Connell and the Prevost family, own the building and use it for employee housing, a meeting room for lectures, and occasionally a wedding will be held on its rambling porch with its view of the slopes of the Blue Ridge. Despite some serious structural problems, the building appears much as it did in the 1920s. Also, it coexists successfully with the 1960s structures on the site, in part because it is well buffered on all but its view side by mature rhododendron.

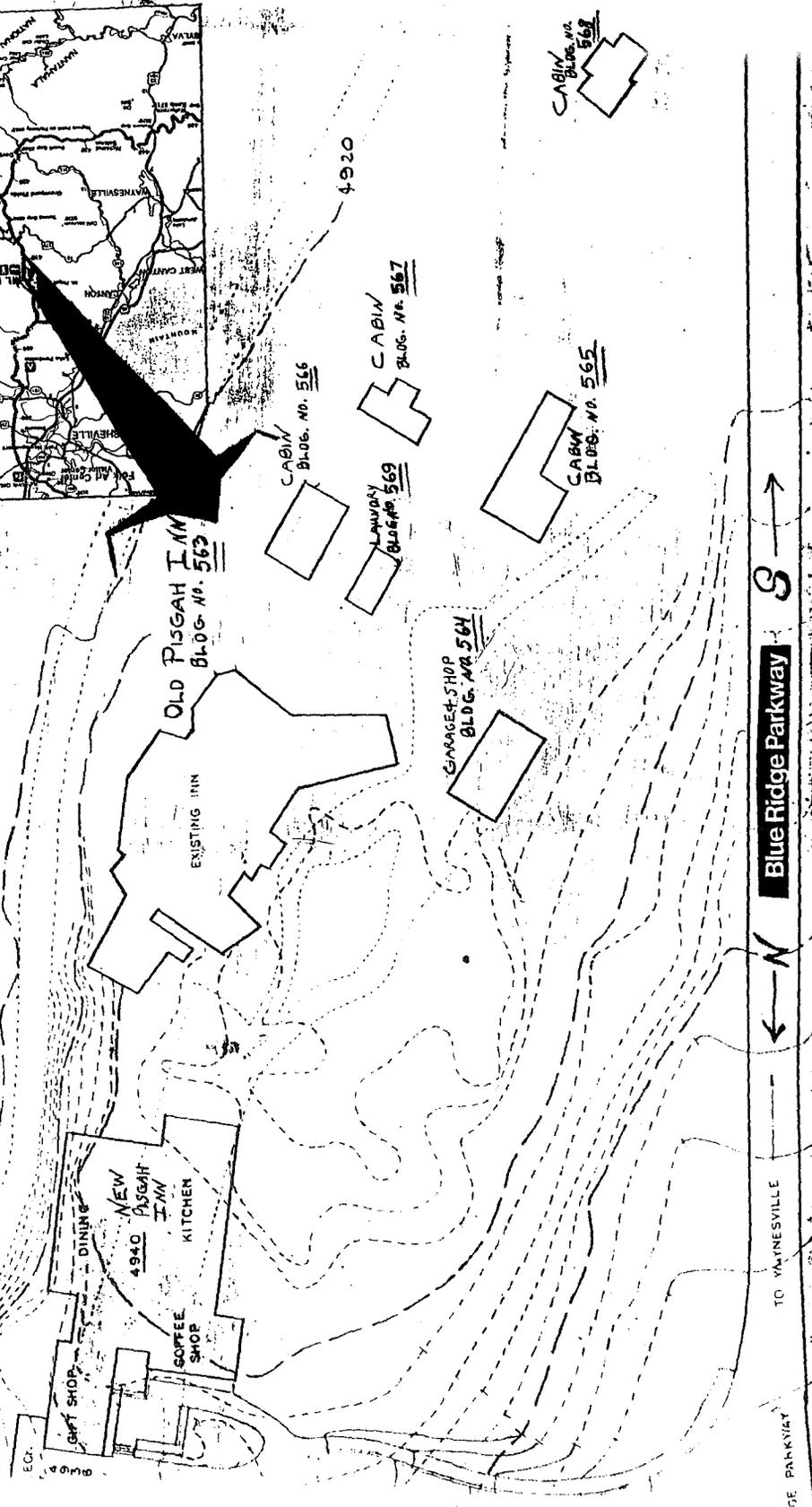
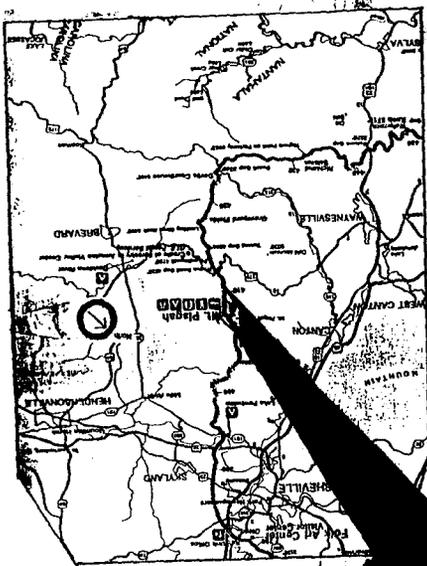
# SITE PLAN

INCLUDING PARKWAY LOCATION

HABS SKETCH DRAWING

NOVEMBER 25, 1987

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



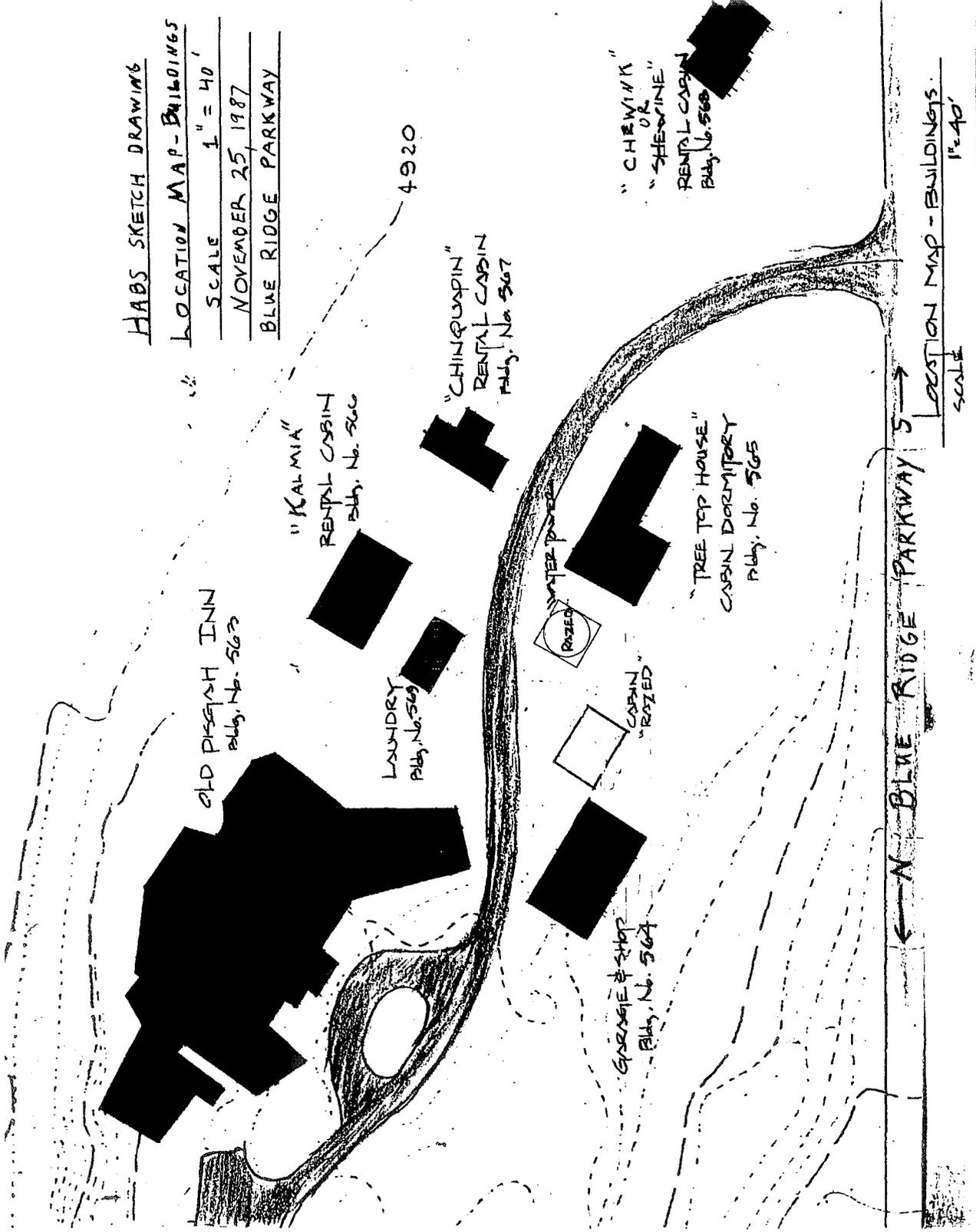
Blue Ridge Parkway



TO YANNEVILLE

GE PARKWAY

HABS SKETCH DRAWINGS  
LOCATION MAP - BUILDINGS  
SCALE 1" = 40'  
NOVEMBER 25, 1987  
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



LOCATION MSP - BUILDINGS  
SCALE 1" = 40'