

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Vardell Family Cottages Historic District

other names/site number Opicherhoka; Hemlock Cottage; The Shoe

**2. Location**

street & number 222 Grandfather Avenue, 137, 187, 209 Chestnut Circle

☒ N/A not for publication

city or town Blowing Rock

☒ N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Watauga code 189 zip code 28605

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Signature of certifying official [Signature]

Date 11/17/01

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

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
Watauga County, North Carolina

---

**5. Classification**

---

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property

District

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing    Noncontributing

  3           1   buildings  1         \_\_\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_\_\_ objects

  4           1   TotalNumber of contributing resources previously listed in the National  
Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

---

**6. Function or Use**

---

Historic Functions

Cat: DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
LANDSCAPE/summer estate grounds

Current Functions

Cat: DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
LANDSCAPE/summer estate grounds

---

**7. Description**

---

Architectural Classification

Other: Arts and Crafts

Craftsman

Materials

foundation	Stone
roof	Asphalt
walls	Weatherboard
	Wood
other	Vinyl
	Stone

Narrative Description : See Continuation Form

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
Watauga County, North Carolina

## 8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ 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.)

- ☐ 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.

Areas of Significance

Architecture

Social History

Period of Significance 1899-1950

Significant Dates 1899  
1900  
1933

Significant person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Hartley, Roe--carpenter builder  
White, Joseph N.--builder

Narrative Statement of Significance: See Continuation Form

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
Watauga County, North Carolina

---

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

---

Bibliography; See Continuation Form Section 9 page 1

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of repository: North Carolina Division of Archive History

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

Acreage of Property      app. 3.73 acres

UTM References      Zone   Easting   Northing  
                                 17   438970   3998000

Verbal Boundary Description:    See Continuation Form

Boundary Justification:          See Continuation Form

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

Davyd Foard Hood

date 3 January 2000

Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road      telephone 704/4621847 (704/462-4331)  
Vale, N.C. 28168

---

**Property Owner**

---

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 1

---

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Overview and Inventory List of Resources

The Vardell Family Cottages is comprised of a group of four family-related summer residences that occupy continuous wooded lots on a knoll to the southeast of the town center in Blowing Rock, a resort on the mountainous border of Caldwell and Watauga counties. Three of the cottages are historic--Opicherhoka (#2), Hemlock Cottage (#3), and The Shoe (#4)--while the fourth, the Gage Cottage (#5), was built outside the period of significance, in 1987. The overall boundary of the nominated acreage (3.73 acres) is a rectangular, reverse "Z" in shape. The long southeast boundary (base of the "Z") carries along Grandfather Avenue, an unpaved, gravel-covered lane. The parallel, long northwest boundary (the top of the "Z") carries along Chestnut Circle (formerly Beall Street), which continues to the southwest and then curves on a ninety-degree angle to the southeast where it intersects with Grandfather Avenue at the only surviving historic corner boundary of the Vardell summer estate; the southwest border of the nominated acreage is bound here by Chestnut Circle. The other boundaries with neighboring properties are unmarked and undefined in any physical way and carry through the extensive wooded and rhododendron-covered landscape of the residential park.

1. The Grounds of the Vardell Family Cottages  
Ca. 1899 to the present  
Contributing Site

The lush, mostly evergreen grounds of the Vardell Family Cottages reflect a seamless weaving of man-made landscape features, planted trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs into a naturally wooded mountain landscape covered with volunteer deciduous and evergreen trees and a dense understory of rhododendrons. Except for where the property is edged at its historic borders by Chestnut Circle and Grandfather Avenue, the general rhododendron-covered landscape of the cottage merges with that of the neighboring tracts in an unmarked but respected fashion honored throughout the resort community. Nevertheless, the immediate house grounds of Opicherhoka and its footpath linkages with Hemlock Cottage and The Shoe reflect a process of place-making here during the last year of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The most developed landscape feature of the family estate grounds is the front lawn of Opicherhoka, an open-grass-covered teardrop-shaped ovoid, which is completely rhododendron enclosed and private except for the narrow opening near its southwest tip where Opicherhoka's simple gravel drive enters off Grandfather Avenue. The drive carries along the southeast side of the lawn,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 2

where it is flanked on the outside by a low native stone retaining wall planted with bulbs and perennials, and it continues on the southeast side of the house to an informal grass-covered rear lawn and parking area to the east and northeast of the house. Originally, the drive made a teardrop sweep in front of the house, and today, slight impressions in the lawn recall its path.

Opicherhoka sits at the wide northeast edge of the ovoid and rises in a picturesque fashion from a natural surface outcropping of dark grey stone that has been manipulated, planted, and enhanced by additional stonework to create an ideal setting for the Arts and Crafts-style house. The wide front stone steps of the house rise from this natural outcropping to the porch, which overlooks the lawn and to the southwest to Grandfather Mountain. The stone retaining wall noted above and other informal walls occurring through the property appear to incorporate stone from the grounds; a like stone is also used for the cottage's chimneys and flue stack. Flat stones (and flagstone) are also inset in the ground to provide informal footpaths between Opicherhoka and its dependant cottages, Hemlock and The Shoe, which wind their way through the dense and overgrown rhododendrons that extend over the grounds. Except for the front lawn of Opicherhoka there are only very small occasional patches of grass; otherwise, the property is covered with moss, ferns, galax, and other native and planted materials, as well as fallen leaves and needles from the rhododendrons, firs, and hemlocks. After the division of the property in 1951, simple informal, unobtrusive driveways were created off Chestnut Circle for Hemlock Cottage and The Shoe. When Charles Vardell Gage erected his year-around cottage (#5) in 1987, a clearing was cut in the rhododendron understory as a site for the house and a new gravel driveway links it with Chestnut Circle.

2. Opicherhoka  
222 Grandfather Avenue  
1899-1900  
Contributing building

Opicherhoka, built in 1899 and first occupied as a summer cottage in 1900, is a picturesque two-story weatherboarded frame Arts and Crafts-style house built by local carpenters Roe Hartley and Joseph N. White for Charles Graves and Linda Rumble Vardell; owned by the Vardells for the first half century of its existence, it has survived remarkably intact to the present and is now owned by four of their grandchildren. The name of the house was crafted by Dr. Vardell from the first letters of woods used in its construction: oak, pine, chestnut, rhododendron, and kalmia. The historic character and integrity of the house are enhanced through the continued use of an early, and probably original, paint scheme in which the weatherboards are painted a dark, rich forest green; the sill boards, cornerboards, rake board and eaves, and door and window surrounds are painted a complimenting red; and the mostly nine-over-two window sash are painted a clear

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 3

white. This period color scheme and the house's character are further enhanced by the stone outcroppings, enhancements around its foundation, and the use of like stone for the chimneys and flue stack, which appear to be dry laid (without visible mortar). The house stands on a series of timber supports and stone piers that were originally hidden by a woven limb-and-branch underpinning that accommodated the shift in grade from the east, where the house sits on low stone/timber blocks, to the west, which is downgrade. Today, as one approaches the house, various plantings screen the crawl space; however, it is visible and accessible on the private west side of the house. Unlike so many other summer cottages in Blowing Rock, the house has not been "winterized" for comfortable year-around occupancy. Its multiple gable roofs are covered with asphalt shingles.

Opicherhoka has a picturesque appearance achieved in large part through the use of multiple gable-roof blocks, projecting two-story ells, paired and individual windows, dormers and wall dormers, and an expansive L-shaped front porch which wraps the west corner of the house (and its living room). The positioning of Opicherhoka on its lot and the approach to the house from the south undercut the traditional emphasis on the front, southwest elevation; instead the asymmetrical southwest "front" and the southeast side elevations, fanning to the left and right, respectively, from the absolute south corner of the house both engage the eye of the visitor simultaneously. The house is essentially rectangular in plan with projecting ells on the front, south, and rear, north corners. The strict rectangular outline of the main block is enhanced by the projecting two-story ell on the southeast side, the one-story (dining room) ell on the opposite northwest side, and the three-sided one-story porch which carries from the south ell across the house's southwest elevation, around its west corner, and up the northwest side of Opicherhoka to stop just short of the dining room's ell.

The southwest elevation of Opicherhoka is dominated by the two-story projecting ell, with paired windows on each level, and the expansive unceiled, open-rafter porch, which carries across the face of the one-and-a-half-story main block of the house where the end-gable roof splays forward to engage the porch roof. A wide, deep stone staircase with stepped sides rises from ground level to the porch's wood floor. The porch supports are stone piers with tapering tops which support timber member columns; the supports are linked by a simple railing of two-by-four planks with diagonal braces. The unceiled construction of the porch is unpainted and has weathered to a warm brown color. A traditional five-panel turn-of-the-century door, flanked by a twenty-pane window to its west, opens into the house's center hall. Under the porch a paired window and a five-sided bay window at the cottage's west corner illuminate the living room. A second door, positioned at the north end of the porch, also opens into the living room. The porch is furnished with a swing, an extraordinary limb-and-branch rustic settee, and other rustic furniture. Inset in the roof above the porch are two dormer windows of unequal size that

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 4

---

illuminate, respectively, the "Little bedroom" above the living room, and the southwest end of the second-story stairhall.

Opicherhoka's southeast side elevation has an equally asymmetrical appearance, which can be roughly divided into three parts. The weatherboarded two-story south "third" has a single window on the first story providing light into the front (south) bedroom that for over half a century was occupied by Dr. Vardell, and a wall dormer illuminating the bedroom above it. A stone chimney rises at the center of this two-story block just south of where it is joined by the projecting two-story ell with paired windows on each level. The east "third" of the elevation comprises the one-story rear ell which contained the original kitchen with an unfinished loft room for Henry, the cook. This space continues to be called "Henry's room" by the Vardell family. A stone flue stack rises off-center here and is flanked by single windows, with nine-over-two sash that now illuminate the first-story bathroom and the utility room.

The rear, northeast elevation of Opicherhoka is occupied by two ells of differing height which flank a recessed center porch opening into the cottage's stairhall. The east one-and-a-half-story ell is preceded by a weatherboarded shed-roof wood room, positioned off-center on the gable end; it has a nine-pane window on its northeast side and a five-panel door on its northwest side. An opening in the attic gable end above holds four-over-four sash and illuminates the small loft for the former cook. The taller two-story north ell has paired windows on the first story and rectangular openings on the second level, protected by top-hinged blinds, for the sleeping porch. A shallow one-story porch, for Henry, the family's long-time cook, is inset in the north end of this ell. The recessed porch in the near center of the elevation has a wood floor and doors opening into the present kitchen, the stairhall, the old kitchen (now utility and laundry room), and the enclosed stair that rises to Henry's loft quarters above the old kitchen.

The northwest side of Opicherhoka is little seen because rhododendrons and other plants are allowed to grow close to the house here, and it is the least architecturally developed elevation on the summer cottage. The first story can be generally divided into three sections. The north end is occupied by Henry's porch; on the second story, nearly half of the elevation is comprised by a seven-bay opening on the sleeping porch that is now sheathed with boards. The middle of the elevation is occupied by the projecting three-sided bay window and flanking window openings which illuminate the dining room. The six window openings here are fitted with twelve-pane sashes, which can be raised up into the space between the exterior weatherboarding and interior sheathing. The west "third" of the elevation is sheltered by the house's main L-shaped porch.

The warm golden hues of unpainted wood, mellowed over the course of a century or so, imbue the interior of Opicherhoka with a rich character little seen to such an extent in the summer



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 5

places of Blowing Rock. Part of the cottage's overall feeling and appearance of comfort is also achieved by the survival of many of Opicherhoka's original furnishings and fittings which have remained in use generation after generation. Throughout the first story the walls and ceilings are sheathed with tongue-and-groove beaded ceiling; the walls are mostly finished with a wainscot carried between a baseboard and molded chair rail, and usually the boards are applied in a different direction in the wainscot than on the wall above. Most rooms are also furnished with a frieze band. The principal public rooms are further enriched with decorative paneled ceilings. According to family tradition much of this interior decoration is the work of Dr. Vardell, who is said to have bought up odd and short ends of ceiling in the summer. The floors have darkened either by waxing or staining. The first-story interior of Opicherhoka is laid out on a center, stair hall plan with two rooms on either side of the hall (plus the bathroom on the southeast side). The old kitchen and the present kitchen flank the rear porch at the northeast end of the hall; only the present kitchen, adjoining the dining room, communicates with the main part of the house.

The hall of Opicherhoka is visually divided by an angle-set exposed stone fireplace and chimney on the northwest wall into the front reception area and the somewhat narrower back, stair hall. The walls, appearing to be sheathed entirely with chestnut, are finished with a tall sixty-six-inch wainscot made up of four flat horizontal panels carried between a single board baseboard and the chair rail. The upper walls are finished with vertical flat panels, which rise to a paneled frieze encircling the hall. The stair, which rises back to front along the southeast wall, is fitted with a square newel and basket-weave railing under a shaped handrail. The underside of the rise and the enclosed side are paneled. The hall ceiling is beaded board. The door surrounds are made up of single plain boards and enframe typical turn-of-the-century five panel (mostly pine) doors.

In the living room of Opicherhoka, in the front west corner of the cottage, a shorter, fifty-inch wainscot encircles the room and is made up of three horizontal panels between the baseboard and chair rail. The upper walls are vertically sheathed and rise to a paneled frieze. The door and window surrounds are fitted with corner blocks which also appear on the boldly patterned, paneled ceiling where sheathing in the panels is laid in differing directions for ornamental effect. The stone chimney in the east corner of the living room is exposed from floor to ceiling; the firebox is flanked by seats enclosed by bench ends which give the appearance of an inglenook. The opposite corner, finished as a five-sided bay window, is also fitted with bench seats with similar bench ends. The living room and the dining room both appear to be finished with chestnut.

The dining room is positioned immediately behind the living room but it is accessible only from the hall and the kitchen. The wainscot here is made up of three wide horizontal boards totaling forty-one inches in width topped by a simple molded chair rail. The upper walls are sheathed

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 6

with vertical beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling and rise to a paneled frieze band. The ceiling is enriched with nine beams which carry with the length of the room on a northwest/southeast axis. A door in the dining room's northeast wall opens into the present kitchen (former serving pantry), which is simply finished with beaded tongue-and-groove walls and ceiling and sheet vinyl floor. The kitchen has been little updated since ca. 1951 and retains an old enamel-on-cast-iron wall-hung sink. The west corner of the kitchen is enclosed as a pantry and has open unpainted wood shelves. The paired twelve-pane windows in the northeast wall, like those in the dining room can be raised.

The south, front bedroom, on the southeast side of the hall was Dr. Vardell's bedroom from 1900 until his last summer in the cottage. Its woodwork appears to be mostly cherry or another reddish wood. The walls are finished in yet a different fashion from the other afore-described rooms. Instead of the usual horizontal baseboard, the bottom of the walls is vertically sheathed to a height of about eleven inches and capped with a simple molding which serves as the base of the horizontally sheathed wainscot. Vertical sheathing rises from the molded chair rail to a paneled frieze encircling the room, which has a beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling. The fireplace in the east corner of the room has a brick hearth and firebox and a simple post and lintel mantel. An enamel-on-cast-iron wall-hung sink is located on the bedroom's northeast wall and beside a closet enclosed on its north corner.

The center room on the southeast side of the hall is said to have been the cottage's original, short-lived dining room, but it became Mrs. Vardell's bedroom by ca. 1910, by which time the present dining room appears to have been added. The walls and ceiling in this room are finished in a manner similar to that of the living room. A three-tiered horizontal paneled wainscot, carried between the baseboard and molded chair rail, has a height of about fifty-eight inches. The upper walls are vertically sheathed and rise to a paneled frieze. The ceiling is paneled with triangles in the four corners of the room enframing a square field whose corners are centered on its four walls. The fireplace in the south corner of the room has exposed stonework around the brick firebox and hearth and a simple stone shelf. A five-panel door in the room's northeast wall opens, via a narrow linen closet, into the bathroom, which is also accessible from the stair hall. The bathroom has pine floors and beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling on the walls and ceiling. It is furnished with an early (original?) enamel-on-cast-iron claw foot tub and wall-hung sink; the commode is a replacement. The former kitchen, in the east end of this tier of rooms, has long been used as a laundry, utility, and storage room. The partially-collapsed floor is covered with sheet linoleum. The walls and ceiling are sheathed with tongue-and-groove ceiling.

The southeast hall wall, which rises with the stair to the second-story stair hall, is sheathed with sugarcane beaverboard and wood battens. This treatment is also used to finish the walls and

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 7

ceilings of the bedrooms and hall. According to the eldest grandchild, Margaret Ferrill Vardell Sandresky, who was born in 1921, these rooms were always "paneled" in beaverboard, or were by the 1920s when she remembers the house as a child. The stair rises to an L-shaped hall at the front of the house from which one can enter each of the four finished bedrooms and the sleeping porch (and bathroom). The walls and ceilings are finished with rectangular panels including a wainscot formed by applying wood battens over the seams and at other points to provide a generally symmetrical appearance. Most of the beaverboard remains unpainted. The simply framed doorways are fitted with five-panel turn-of-the-century pine doors with ceramic knobs. A wood paneled storage chest is built in the south end of the hall under the small front dormer window.

The front, south bedroom, above Mr. Vardell's, is called the "dormitory" by the family. Its walls are finished with a twelve-inch baseboard from which rises a five-foot vertically sheathed tongue-and-groove wainscot; the upper walls and ceiling are finished with paneled painted beaverboard. The brick chimney servicing a cast iron stove ("Richmond Stove Co., Richmond, Va.") in the east corner is exposed. A wall-hung enamel-on-cast-iron sink, directly above one in Dr. Vardell's room, is located on the northeast wall. True to its name, the room is furnished with two matching oak beds and one iron bedstead plus other furniture. The adjoining bedroom above Mrs. Vardell's room is fully sheathed in paneled beaverboard. On the opposite side of the hall the area above the living room was partitioned to form two small bedrooms, and both are sheathed with paneled beaverboard. Simple closets in these two bedrooms, as well as the one above Mrs. Vardell's are hung with cloth curtains, and, so too, is one in the hall.

The sleeping porch is a large area, directly above the dining room and kitchen, which is virtually unfinished except for board sheathing along parts of its walls. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the sleeping porch has been used for household storage. A bathroom is enclosed in its west corner to serve the second story bedrooms; it is sheathed with tongue-and-groove ceiling and flush boards.

3. Hemlock Cottage  
137 Chestnut Circle  
Ca. 1903; refitted in 1950s  
Contributing building

Hemlock Cottage was built by the Vardells for her father, Dr. Jethro Rumple, following the death of his wife in the summer of 1902, and it was used by Dr. Rumple until his death in the winter of 1906. Thereafter, it was used for overflow guests until 1951 when it was conveyed to Ruth Vardell Gage in the division of the Linda Lee Rumple Vardell property. During the first half of

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 8

the twentieth century, the cottage consisted of a finished living room, bedroom, and bathroom on the first story together with the front and rear screened porches; the second story was enclosed and partitioned, but it remained unfinished. After Mrs. Gage inherited the property, a small kitchen was installed in the former bathroom in the south end of the ell, the bathroom was relocated to an unfinished room off the first-story bedroom in the east corner of the ell, and the screened porch between the two rooms was used as a dining room. In the late-1950s, the two second story bedrooms were finished for occupancy and a bathroom installed in the high attic space over the dining room.

Hemlock Cottage is a small rectangular, plainly-finished, weatherboarded, frame cottage comprised of a two-story, two-room main block, a one-story shed roof front porch, and a gable-roof ell that occupies all of the rear (southeast) elevation. It is painted barn red. The two-story block, built on ground that slopes to the northwest to Chestnut Circle, stands on stacked stone corner piers with secondary bark-covered timber supports; the rear ell is built on low stones and stands near ground level. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The northwest front elevation has a three-bay division with a one-story shed-roof porch occupying the center two-thirds of the façade. The porch stands on stone piers, has a wood floor, bark-covered locust tree length supports, and a ceiling of beaded tongue-and-groove boards. A six-panel door in the center of the façade opens into the living room; it is flanked by openings containing paired six-over-six double-hung sash. The openings are set in plain board surrounds with a projecting perimeter band. The three bays on the second level hold two-over-two horizontal sash. The northeast and southwest side elevations of the house have window openings positioned off-center, toward the front of the house, which hold six-over-six sash; a small window, also holding two-over-two sash, is set at the east edge of the northeast wall and illuminates the bathroom. A trio of window openings and a door into the dining room are arranged along the cottage's southeast rear elevation. In the gable end a large opening holds three two-over-two sash windows.

The interior of Hemlock Cottage's main block is laid out on a two-room plan with a living room in the west end and a near equal-sized bedroom in the north end; the partition wall between the rooms encloses a stair which rises from the dining room to the second story. The floors of both rooms are pine, the walls sheathed in paneled sugarcane beaverboard, and the ceiling sheathed with beaded tongue-and-groove boards. The living room has a stone chimney rising the full height in its south corner, which provides a small fireplace with a brick firebox and a poured cement hearth. The first story doorways are fitted with either traditional five-panel turn-of-the-century doors or five-horizontal panel doors, all pine and fitted with plain board surrounds. The bathroom, dining room, and kitchen in the ell all have sheet vinyl floors, plywood walls, and celotex ceilings. The enclosed stair to the second story is sheathed with beaded tongue-and-

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 9

---

groove ceiling. The bedrooms have pine floors and five-horizontal panel doors while the bathroom has a board and rail door. The walls and ceilings are finished with painted wallboard. The bathroom is fitted with an enamel-on-cast-iron claw-foot tub, apparently reused from the first-story, and a modern sink and commode.

4. The Shoe  
209 Chestnut Circle  
1933; some refittings in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s  
Contributing building

The Shoe is a small rectangular Arts and Crafts style one-story-with-loft frame cottage, which was built in 1933 as a retreat for Dr. Vardell; from 1933 until after the division of Mrs. Vardell's property in 1951, the cottage consisted of a small hall, a sitting room, two small bedrooms, and a bathroom on the first story and an unfinished loft area. In the 1950s Mrs. Elizabeth Vardell McNett and her family added wallboard on the second story to create four very small bedrooms with curtained openings from a landing at the top of the stair. In the 1960s, the partition walls enclosing the first-story south corner bedroom were removed to create a large living room also engaging the hall in the southwest half of the cottage. In the 1970s a kitchen was introduced in the cottage for the first time and was located in a former bedroom in the north corner of the first story.

The unpainted rustic cottage stands on bark-covered timber supports and is sheathed with board-and-batten; there is a visible overlapping seam in the board-and-batten at the first-story room height that creates visual interest and breaks what would otherwise be tall walls on the rear (northwest) elevation (and gable ends) where the cottage is a diminutive two stories in height. The cottage is covered with an asphalt shingle roof. The window openings mostly contain hinged nine-pane sash with board-and-rail blinds. The cottage has a stone-paved ground level stoop centered on its three-bay front (southeast) elevation facing Opicherhoka. It is covered by a gable roof supported by hewn log piers with bark-covered angle braces; the sheathed gable front of the stoop is finished with battens applied in a chevron pattern. A wood-floored porch on timber supports is centered on the cottage's three-bay southwest gable end. It has timber supports, a limb-and-twigg railing, and a gnarled timber newel at the side where stone steps lead to the ground. There are two window openings on the cottage's northwest side and a single window on the northeast side illuminating the bathroom.

The interior of The Shoe is finished in the fashionable rustic manner of the 1930s. The appearance of the living room in the southwest half of the first-story incorporates the surviving original finishes to Dr. Vardell's sitting room, the hall, and the small south corner bedroom. The

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 7 Page 10

walls are sheathed with shellacked pine boards—some retaining bark on the vertical edges, and an unusual bark wainscot, recalling the contemporary usage of bark on the exteriors of other Blowing Rock cottages, on outside walls of the present room. The doors onto the southeast and southwest porches have slightly different treatments and cast-iron hardware.

The stone chimney providing a fireplace in the original sitting room is positioned against the room's northeast wall and is exposed on the other sides. The stair to the second story rises just inside the cottage's southeast stoop door; a skinned pine tree length newel and two bark-covered limbs forming a railing. The present kitchen in the north corner of the cottage has a horizontal sheathed wainscot and vertically sheathed upper walls. These walls are varnished while the similarly finished walls in the bathroom, in the cottage's east corner, are painted and the floor covered with sheet vinyl. The kitchen doorway is fitted with a two-panel pine door while the bathroom is fitted with a board-and-rail door; both have decorative cast-iron hinges. The second story is informally and incompletely finished to provide four small bedrooms.

5. Gage Cottage  
187 Chestnut Circle  
1987  
Noncontributing building

The Gage Cottage is a one-story frame house erected for Charles Vardell Gage (b. 1932) and his wife for year-around occupancy by the Jim Walters company; Mr. Gage finished the interior of the cottage with the help of his sons. The house stands on a cement block foundation and is covered with vinyl siding and an asphalt shingle side-gable roof.

The Gage Cottage is essentially rectangular in plan with a gable-front porch centered on its front (northwest) elevation, and an ell and open wood deck (in the south corner) on its southeast elevation. The exterior is finished in a conventional manner and so, too, is the interior, which contains a living room, dining room, kitchen, four bedrooms, and two-and-a-half bathrooms. Mr. Gage, the grandson of Charles Vardell, and Mrs. Gage, who live in Gastonia, use the cottage as a summer house and a weekend retreat throughout the year.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 11

---

Summary

The Vardell Family Cottages, a group of four summer houses standing together on property acquired in 1898-1899 by Charles Graves Vardell and his wife Linda Rumble, occupy a unique place in the history of Blowing Rock, the resort situated on the border of Caldwell and Watauga counties; they satisfy National Register Criteria A and C and hold local significance in the areas of architecture and social history. Opicherhoka, built in 1899 and first occupied by the Vardells in the summer of 1900, is an Arts and Crafts-style weatherboarded frame house that has remained a summer place for the Vardell Family to the present and stands as the oldest intact surviving house in Fairview Place, a residential park platted in 1887, which is believed to be the first planned resort development in Blowing Rock. The significance of the cottages in the area of social history derives from the long association of the Vardell family with Blowing Rock and its prominence as one of the most celebrated summer resorts in western North Carolina during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Both Linda Lee Rumble (1863-1948), the daughter of the Reverend Dr. Jethro Rumble, and Dr. Charles Graves Vardell (1860-1958), a founder and first president (1896-1930) of Flora MacDonald College, had been summering in Blowing Rock with family and friends for some years before their marriage in 1891. As Presbyterians and educators, they were part of a small, influential, fashionable summer colony at Blowing Rock that included Dr. Rumble, one of the foremost Presbyterian leaders in North Carolina in the second half of the nineteenth century and a founder of the resort's Presbyterian church, and William Joseph Martin, Jr. (1868-1943), a professor and later president (1912-1929) of Davidson College, who was both a Davidson classmate of Dr. Vardell's and later his brother-in-law. In 1898 when they decided to build their own cottage they acquired lots in Fairview Place where Mr. Martin, Sr., had built ca. 1887. While other summer residents built conventional cottages, the Vardells utilized local stone, woods, and craftsmanship to fashion a picturesque Arts and Crafts-style summer cottage that anticipated the appreciation for native materials seen on a broader scale on the later bark-covered cottages of the 1910s and 1920s. After the death of Mrs. Vardell's mother in 1902 the Vardells built Hemlock Cottage for Dr. Rumble, and in 1933 Dr. Vardell built a third cottage, The Shoe, on the summer estate as a retreat from the bustle of grandchildren in Opicherhoka. Through this period and up to their deaths, hers in 1948 and his in 1958, the Vardells and members of their family were prominent members of the Blowing Rock summer colony and its society; late in this period, in 1940, the Presbyterian church was renamed officially Rumble Memorial Presbyterian Church.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 12

---

The period of significance for the nominated property begins in 1899 when Mr. and Mrs. Vardell had Opicherhoka built, and continues through 1950, the last full year the property was in the senior Vardells' ownership. In 1951 the three cottages were conveyed to three of the couple's daughters, and their descendants continue to own the cottages. Opicherhoka survives today as the oldest known summer cottage in Blowing Rock that has remained in the continuous ownership of a single family to the present. It, Hemlock Cottage, The Shoe, and the cottage built in 1987 by Charles Vardell Gage, are also the oldest, most intact group of family-related cottages remaining in this resort town where sales and subdivision of old family places have dismembered other similar complexes of family related cottages.<sup>1</sup>



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 13

---

Historical Background and Social History Significance

Although the Vardell family's use of this property as a summer place dates to its acquisition of lots here in Fairview Place in 1898, the construction of the house known as Opicherhoka in 1899, and their first use of it in the summer of 1900, their association with Blowing Rock dates to its earliest days as a resort. During the 1870s and 1880s Linda Lee Rumble (1863-1948), the future Mrs. Charles Graves Vardell, came with her family to enjoy the company of a small but influential summer colony, which included prominent North Carolina Presbyterians and educators. Chief among this group were her father, the Reverend Dr. Jethro Rumble (1827-1906), the long-time minister of First Presbyterian Church, Salisbury, and Colonel William Joseph Martin (1830-1896), a professor of chemistry (and acting president (1886-1888) at Davidson College. Both men were influential in the organization of the Presbyterian congregation in Blowing Rock in 1887, which was later (officially, in 1940) named Rumble Memorial Presbyterian Church. After acquiring a lot on South Main Street in 1886 and building, the Rumble family summered in a Victorian-style frame cottage (enlarged and now known as the Spring Haven Inn) that stands two doors south of the church. On 1 September 1887 Colonel Martin purchased a lot (#9) in newly-platted Fairview Place on the southeast side of Grandfather Avenue, where he built a summer house that remained the property of his son and namesake until 1915 and which survives in an altered state today. Eleven years later in August 1898, Linda Lee Rumble Vardell purchased lots #12 and #13 in Fairview Place, on the northwest side of Grandfather Avenue.

Linda Lee Rumble was born in Salisbury, probably in the Presbyterian manse (listed in the National Register in 1972 as the Maxwell Chambers House), where her father had come as minister to the Presbyterian church in 1860 and where he remained in the pulpit until 1904. On 27 October 1891 she married Charles Graves Vardell. The friendship between the Vardell and Rumble families was strengthened a year later, in 1892, when Mr. Vardell's sister, Jane Dickson Vardell (1872-19\_\_), married Miss Rumble's only surviving brother, James Walker Rumble (18\_\_-1894); in 1897 she married William Joseph Martin, Jr. (1868-1943), who succeeded his father as Chambers Professor of Chemistry at Davidson College and was later president (1912-1929) of the school. By 1898 when Mrs. Vardell purchased the site of the couple's future summer house, she was the mother of four children: Charles Gildersleeve Vardell (1893-1962); Elizabeth Vardell (1894-1988); Jane Dickson Vardell (1896-1992); and Margaret Malcomson Vardell (1897-1983). The birth of a fourth daughter, Ruth Wharton Vardell (1899-1983) was followed by that of Katherine Allen Vardell (1901) and the couple's sixth surviving child, Mary Linda Vardell (1904-1998), whose daughter, son, and a grandson now own Opicherhoka.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 14

Charles Graves Vardell (1860-1958) was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on 12 February 1860, the son of the Reverend William Gildersleeve Vardell (1829-1897) and Jane Dickson Bell (1835-1919). He was educated in Charleston and at Davidson College. In 1888, he graduated from Davidson in the class with Mr. Martin, Jr., with whom he is said to have first traveled to Blowing Rock about 1886. In 1891 Charles Vardell graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, and on 27 October of that year he was married to Miss Rumble by her father in Salisbury. The couple located in New Bern where he was pastor to the Presbyterian congregation until 1896. In that year the couple relocated to Red Springs, North Carolina, where Dr. Vardell was a founder and first president of the Red Springs Seminary; the girls's school was renamed Flora Macdonald College in 1915, and Dr. Vardell remained president until 1930 (see Flora Macdonald College NR nomination, 1976). Mrs. Vardell, educated at Peace College, Raleigh, and the New England Conservatory of Music, was dean of the conservatory at the seminary and college. According to family tradition, Charles Graves Vardell was an enthusiastic amateur architect and was responsible for the design and appearance of the family summer place.

Opicherhoka was built in 1899 and first occupied by the family in 1900; however, the purchases of land making up the grounds of the summer cottage occurred in a series of transactions spanning a twenty-year period from 1898 to 1918. Dr. Vardell crafted the name of Opicherhoka from letters of five of the woods used in building the summer cottage: oak, pine, chestnut, rhododendron, and kalmia. The site of the house and an adjoining lot were bought in August 1898; on 10 August Mrs. Vardell purchased lot #12, in the northeast corner of Chestnut Street and Grandfather Avenue, from Mr. and Mrs. J. Alwyn Ball of Charleston (Watauga County Deeds, V/115-17); on 31 August she purchased adjoining lot #13--the future site of the family's summer cottage--from Mr. and Mrs. James S. Worth of Wilmington (Watauga County Deeds, U/288-90). Late in the spring of 1899, as construction was probably being undertaken on the cottage by carpenter/builders Joseph N. White (18\_\_-1952) and Roe Hartley, Mr. Vardell purchased four additional lots, #16-19, on the northwest side of the above two and bounded on the northwest by Beall Street from Herbert Wharton Bell and his wife, of Philadelphia, who had held the lots for eleven years without building (Watauga County Deeds, V/117-120). Three further transactions occurred in the 1910s. On 9 December 1911 Mrs. Vardell acquired from her sister-in-law, Katherine Malcomson Vardell Williamson (1876-1928), the northwest end of lot #20, between Chestnut Street and the turnpike road (Main Street), where Dr. Vardell created a footpath linking the cottage with the public path carrying along the turnpike road into the village center (Watauga County Deeds, 17/31). Dr. Vardell conveyed lots #16-19 to his wife on 31 October 1931 (Watauga County Deeds, 16/165). The final addition to the family summer estate was the purchase of lot #14, immediately northeast of the house lot, from the heirs of James S. Worth (Watauga County Deeds, 21/453-54).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 15

Documentary photographs of Opicherhoka, the earliest dating to ca. 1910, show it to have been an expansive, comfortable Arts and Crafts-style house, and it survives today as one of Blowing Rock's most important nineteenth-century cottages. Except for the loss of the unusual basket-weave porch railing (in the 1950s) and a twig-and-branch underpinning, the two-story frame cottage remains virtually intact to the present. (The family has also maintained the original paint colors; the body of the house is painted a forest green and the trim is painted a dullish red.) On 6 July 1902, during the third summer of the family's use of the cottage, Mrs. Vardell's mother, Jane E. Wharton Rumble (1835-1902) died at Blowing Rock; her body was returned to Salisbury for burial in Chestnut Hill Cemetery. To accommodate Dr. Rumble, who decided to give up the Main Street cottage, the Vardells erected a small cottage, since known as Hemlock (#3) to the north of Opicherhoka (and on lot #17). Dr. Rumble, an avid reader and historian, and the author of *A HISTORY OF ROWAN COUNTY* (1881), prized this retreat during summers until his death on 20 January 1906 at the Vardells' home in Red Springs.

From their removal to Red Springs in 1896 until Mrs. Vardell's death in 1948, the couple occupied a house there during the academic term and retreated to Blowing Rock and Opicherhoka for the summer. Their black cook, Henry, accompanied the family, and he occupied rather primitive quarters above the kitchen. During the interwar period electricity was installed in the cottage, and a part of the kitchen was partitioned to provide an indoor bathroom accessible both from Mrs. Vardell's bedroom and the first-story hall. According to family tradition, the present large dining room was not a part of the original 1899-1900 house but was added soon after construction, and by ca. 1910 when a documentary photograph shows its existence. Also dating to the middle of these years is the sleeping porch, positioned above the dining room and (present) kitchen, which is enclosed with weatherboards on the exterior but unfinished inside. The sleeping porch was in part a response to the increase in the family. During the 1920s five of the couple's six children were married: the only son Charles Gildersleeve was married in 1920 as was his sister Margaret Malcomson to Alexander Sprunt III (1898-1973); the eldest daughter Elizabeth married William Brown McNett (1896-1968) in 1924; in 1926 Jane Dickson Vardell married the Reverend Joseph James Murray (1890-1973); and in 1927 Ruth Wharton Vardell married Gaston Gage (1898-1983). These couples and their children visited the Vardells during summers in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, occupying the six bedrooms of Opicherhoka, the sleeping porch, and Hemlock Cottage (#3). As the number of grandchildren and their voices increased, Dr. Vardell erected a retreat, The Shoe (#4), in 1933 to the northwest of the main house. It, too, was rustic in design and better finished than Hemlock. Twice during this period Mrs. Vardell celebrated the memory of her father and his accomplishments. Dr. Rumble's *A HISTORY OF ROWAN COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA*, the first history of a North Carolina county, had been published in 1881; Mrs. Vardell prepared a biographical sketch of her father for the 1916 reprint of the book by the Elizabeth Maxwell

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 16

---

Steele Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. In 1940 the name of the Presbyterian church in Blowing Rock was renamed officially Rumble Memorial Presbyterian Church; plans for the stone church were being developed when Dr. Rumble died in 1906 and they were carried to completion by the building committee, which included Dr. Vardell and his two brothers-in-law Dr. Martin and Mr. Williamson.

The death of Linda Lee Rumble on 7 March 1948 at Red Springs resulted in a division of the family's summer property among her children. At the age of eighty-nine and sensing his own mortality, Charles Graves Vardell conveyed his life interest in the family's summer estate in undivided shares to his six surviving children on 16 January 1950 (Watauga County Deeds, 66/511-12). The six siblings hired Samuel B. Howard, a civil engineer, to survey and plat the six-lot rectangular tract forming the core of the family estate (lots #12-14, #17-19) and bounded by Grandfather Avenue, Chestnut Circle, and an undeveloped public alley on the northeast. His work was completed between 22 June and 23 August 1951. Mr. Howard platted the property into five tracts (tract A through tract E) which did not respect the original lot lines prepared in 1887 by Mr. Houck. Tract A, comprising virtually all of Fairview lot #14 and part of #13 and forming the eastern corner of the rectangle, was sold out of the family to benefit Mrs. Sprunt and Charles Graves Vardell, Jr., who did not want property here. The four remaining tracts, including Opicherhoka, Hemlock Cottage, and The Shoe on separate lots and one vacant lot, were conveyed by the siblings to the four other sisters on 1 August 1951. Opicherhoka and its immediate house grounds, comprising tract B and including most of Fairview lot #13, and parts of lots 12, 18, and 19) was deeded to Mary Linda Vardell Smyth (Watauga County Deeds, 80/120). Tract C, a vacant parcel comprising most of Fairview lot #13 and part of #19, was conveyed to Jane Dickson Vardell Murray (Watauga County Deeds, 69/301-02). (In 1966 Mrs. Murray and her husband sold tract C to her sister Mrs. Smyth (Watauga County Deeds, 99/304.) Hemlock Cottage and its grounds, being tract D and most of Fairview lot #16, was deeded to Ruth Vardell Gage (Watauga County Deeds, 69/327-28). Tract E was conveyed to Elizabeth Vardell McNett (Watauga County Deeds, 69/261-63). Except for the west corner of tract E which was sold out of the family, all of these tracts remain in the ownership of descendants of these three Vardell sisters (Watauga County Deeds, 99/304). Some adjustments to the interior boundaries have also been made by the siblings.

Mary Linda Vardell Smyth, the youngest of the Vardell siblings, had married the Reverend Joseph Ellison Adger Smyth (1903-1998), a native of Blacksburg, Virginia, and a Presbyterian minister in 1937. After a series of short posts, the Rev. Mr. Smyth went to the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church in 1948 and remained in its pulpit until retiring in 1965. The Smyths remained residents of Blacksburg until their deaths in 1998, and during this period they returned to Opicherhoka in the summers. The only real changes to the house during their ownership were

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 17

to move the kitchen into the former serving pantry, off the northeast side of the dining room; to install an asphalt shingle roof on the house; and to replace the much-deteriorated basket-weave porch railing with a simpler picket railing. The old kitchen came to be used as a utility and laundry room. On 15 November 1993 they deeded one-fourth undivided interests in Opicherhoka to their four children: the Reverend James Allan Smyth (b. 1938); Susan Vardell Smyth Lindenberger (b. 1941); Ruth Vardell Smyth Brown (b. 1943); and Ellison Adger Smyth (b. 1944).

Discussion concerning the preservation of Opicherhoka resulted in changes in ownership this year. On 8 March 2000 Ellison Adger Smyth conveyed his undivided twenty-five percent interest in the property in fee simple in equal shares to his three siblings (Watauga County Deeds, 559/734-35). Next, on 25 May 2000, Ruth Vardell Smyth Brown and her husband sold her now one-third interest in Opicherhoka for \$240,000 to her sister, Mrs. Lindenberger, and her nephew Robert Stacy Smyth, a son of James Allen Smyth; each received a 16 and 2/3 percent undivided portion of the property (Watauga County Deeds, 570/705-706).

In 1951 when Ruth Vardell Gage received title to Hemlock Cottage and its grounds, the small two-story cottage consisted of a living room, bedroom, bathroom, front and screened rear porches on the first story and an unfinished second-story; there had been no kitchen in the cottage since its construction in 1902-1903. Mrs. Gage's husband, Gaston (1898-1983), was then a professor in (and later dean of) the textile school at Clemson University, and the couple were the parents of two sons. They installed a kitchen in the cottage's former bathroom, relocated the bathroom to an unfinished room off the first-story bedroom, and converted the screened porch to a dining room. In the late 1950s (or early 1960s) they finished the second story of the cottage to provide two bedrooms and a large bathroom for the family. The property passed from Mrs. Gage, who died in 1983, to her husband, who died that same year and bequeathed Hemlock Cottage and its acreage to their younger son, Charles Vardell Gage (b. 1932). He and his family used the cottage as a summer place until 1987, when he built the Gage Cottage (#5); since 1987 it has been used for overflow and for summer rentals.

The Shoe (#4), like Hemlock Cottage, had not been built with a kitchen in 1933, and it, too, underwent some improvements after it was conveyed to Elizabeth Vardell McNett; these included the partial refitting of the second-story bedrooms and the removal of a partition on the first story to create a larger living room. Mrs. McNett, who studied at Johns Hopkins University and received bachelor and masters degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, was a medical illustrator as was her husband. After the death of Mr. McNett in 1968, a kitchen was installed in a former bedroom of the cottage by their eldest daughter Elizabeth Vardell McNett Beebe (1926-1982). At the death of Mrs. McNett in Laurinburg in 1988, The Shoe was inherited by her

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 18

second daughter, Mary Linda McNett Yarnell (b. 1934), who received a four-sixths share and the two children of Mrs. Beebe, John and Gwendolyn Beebe, who received a one-sixth share each. Mrs. Yarnell, her niece, and her nephew continue to own The Shoe.

Having been occupied by the Vardell family as a summer place for a century, from 1900 to 2000, the Vardell Family Cottages hold a unique place in the social history of Blowing Rock. Although a thorough inventory of historic buildings has not been conducted in the town, there is no other known older individual cottage, like Opicherhoka, nor known group of summer houses, like the Vardell Family Cottages, which have been built and continuously occupied season after season as a summer place by a single family. While members of the Harper and Bernhardt families have a longer, continued association with the resort, and were in fact among its founders, members of those families have occupied a series of houses over time. The family cottage in the larger resort community, encompassing once-separate Green Park (and other areas around the Blowing Rock town center), with a close claim for continued family ownership is the cottage at 6177 Pinnacle Ave. in the Green Park Historic District. Built in 1915 for James William Cannon (1852-1921), the founder of the textile dynasty bearing his name, it remains the summer house of this granddaughter Mariam Cannon Hayes. The association of families with certain North Carolina resort communities has been a hallmark of summer society in Blowing Rock, Linville, Flat Rock, and Roaring Gap throughout their history. While Vardell does not survive as a surname today in Blowing Rock, Charles Graves Vardell and his wife, Linda Rumple, held an important presence in the resort community from their arrival in the late nineteenth century until their deaths in 1958 and 1948, respectively. That association with place and community survives today at the Rumple Memorial Presbyterian Church, where they worshipped, and at the Vardell Family Cottages where they summered from 1900 into the mid-twentieth century, and to which their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren return to the present.

Architecture Significance

Although a history of the physical development of the Blowing Rock resort remains to be written, *A VILLAGE TAPESTRY: THE HISTORY OF BLOWING ROCK* (a popular history), provides useful narrative context by which some preliminary assessment can be made; Fairview Place (hereinafter Fairview) appears to be the earliest planned and platted residential development in the resort. The Vardells's Opicherhoka is the oldest intact cottage to survive here. In the mid-nineteenth century and into the later 1880s, most of those who came to Blowing Rock in the summer, lodged in private houses, boarding houses, and other small lodgings. Some few, like Dr. Rumple (and Colonel Martin), erected their own cottages to which they returned season after season. The Watauga Hotel, the resort's first substantial hotel, opened in 1888 at the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 19

---

center of the village; it consisted of the main building facing onto Main Street and two flanking parallel rows of cottages. Through the later 1880s, increasing numbers of summer tourists sought other lodgings or lots on which to build their own cottages.

Samuel McAfee Clark's Fairview development answered both needs and established a precedent that was emulated by other real estate ventures in the twentieth century. In 1883 Mr. Clark, then register of deeds in Caldwell County, purchased eight tracts of land lying astride the turnpike road linking Blowing Rock with Lenoir from the estate of James Harper (1799-1879). He well understood the desirability of this property, situated between the Blowing Rock village center and the small emerging colony at Green Park (see Green Park Historic District National Register nomination, 1994); much of the acreage, situated on the crest of the mountain, boasted spectacular views overlooking the Johns River Valley and to Grandfather Mountain. He hired J. M. Houck, a local surveyor, to survey a portion of the property, and in August 1887, Mr. Houck completed his plat of Fairview. A notation on the plat of Fairview, not recorded until August 1947, indicates thirty-three lots in the original development platted by Mr. Houck; however, on the recorded plat there are fifty-nine numbered lots (#1-22, #25-27, #29, 32, #34-40, and #43-65) and a small group of unnumbered lots. The largest of this later group, located on the northeast side of the turnpike road (now Main Street) at Spring Street is marked "Blowing Rock Hotel." From its opening on 17 June 1889, until well into the interwar period of the twentieth century, the Blowing Rock Hotel was a principal hotel in Blowing Rock and an anchor in Fairview. The two-story frame hotel with double-tiered verandas was built for Colonel Robert H. Ray and John King. The model of a hotel with its encircling residential park of private summer cottages was soon emulated at Green Park--the hotel opened in 1891--and later, most impressively, at Mayview Park in the 1910s and 1920s. Although the Blowing Rock Hotel is now lost, and the name Fairview little known or seen except in deed citations, their role in the evolution of the resort remains an important part of its history. The association of Fairview with the early history of Blowing Rock survives here among the Vardell Family Cottages, most particularly at Opicherhoka, which is the oldest, most intact cottage at Fairview.

The architectural significance of the Vardell Family Cottages derives from their construction and survival as a compound of summer residences that has remained in family ownership to the present, and for the individual importance of Opicherhoka (#2) as one of the very oldest, most intact, and most important historic summer cottages in Blowing Rock. Individually, those three adjective phrases define particular areas of architectural significance for Opicherhoka; however, their collective, interrelated quality better describes the unusual significance of the house built by Charles Graves Vardell and his wife in 1899. Although some few families and hardy individuals had sought summer refuge at Blowing Rock in the antebellum period and the post-Civil War years, the summering place did not really prosper until the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 20

and particularly after a rail line was completed between Hickory and Lenoir in 1884. Documentary photographs of the resort from the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, show one and two-story cottages of frame construction reflecting the popular architectural styles of the period. An 1898 photograph of the ca. 1886 Rumble Cottage and a contemporary view of the somewhat later Hayes Cottage--both published in *A VILLAGE TAPESTRY* illustrate houses typical of their period which could have been--and were--built throughout North Carolina in the decades around the turn of the century. Most of the cottages erected in the last decades of the nineteenth century have been pulled down, lost to fire, subsumed within expansions, or remodeled by later owners to provide twentieth-century amenities. The Hayes Cottage was moved in the 1990s from its original site on Main Street to a new location on US 221 (Linville Road). The Rumble Cottage, also on Main Street, has been moved back on its lot, substantially enlarged, remodeled, and now operated as a bed-and-breakfast. Similar fates have befallen on two other contemporary houses in the Fairview development. Chestnut Knoll, the earliest known house in Fairview, was built ca. 1887 by William Joseph Martin and stayed, probably little altered, within his family until 1915; subsequent owners enlarged and remodeled the house over the years, and flooding and water damage in winter 1999 occasioned further change. The Victorian-style Lafayette P. Henkel Cottage (1813 S. Main Street) has been more radically altered and compromised. Opicherhoka is also significant for its association with the career of Joseph N. White (18\_\_-1952), a prominent builder in Blowing Rock in the opening decades of the twentieth century. While his work over the course of some forty or more years remains to be researched he was a builder of this house and in 1905-1906 he supervised the construction of the stone church that became a memorial to Dr. Rumble.

The survival of Opicherhoka and its remarkable degree of integrity reflects the circumstances of its construction and continued family ownership. Charles Vardell was a well-educated man and one with more than a casual interest in architecture and building. When he and Mrs. Vardell built Opicherhoka they erected a house that was substantial in size and well-finished. With some additions to the rear and other refinements, it was sufficiently commodious that it accommodated the family until 1933 when the rising voices of grandchildren occasioned the building of The Shoe (#4) as a retreat for Mr. Vardell. Two other factors have contributed to Opicherhoka's integrity and significance: the cottage and property remained in the undivided ownership of Mrs. Vardell from 1898-1899 until 1948 and in her husband's undivided life interest from 1948 to 1950; and it has remained a summer cottage only for over one-hundred years to the present, not suffering the effects of winterization for year-around use.

While age and integrity comprise important parts of the house's architectural significance, another aspect of its design, namely its rustic appearance, is of critical importance in the architectural history of the resort town. As noted earlier, most of the earliest known summer



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 21

houses at Blowing Rock were conventional in their design and appearance. Over time, native materials and vernacular craftsmanship came to figure in the architecture of the resort and to define the character of many of its finest buildings. Exactly when this first occurred on a sustained basis is yet to be determined; however, the appreciation for local materials is best known through dozens of later, picturesque bark-covered cottages and buildings, many of these and others with wormy chestnut interiors and stone chimneys, from the late 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. Documentary photographs of Opicherhoka, one of which appears to date within a few years of its construction, indicate that its materials and finish reflected a much earlier, turn-of-the-century appreciation for the stone, native woods, and craftsmanship of the region that was unusual in its day. Opicherhoka also reflects the Vardells' knowledge of the then fashionable Arts and Crafts movement which embraced the Adirondack and Shingle styles for seasonal dwellings and the work of Gustave Stickley and others who designed furniture and decorative arts appropriate for both seasonal cottages and permanent residences. With its multi-gable picturesque appearance, Opicherhoka also bears certain architectural similarities to Dormicroft, the MacRaes' Shingle Style cottage in nearby Linville (in Linville Historic District, NR, 1979).

In 1899, when the Vardells built Opicherhoka, two other summer cottages were under construction. Moses Cone (1857-1908), the textile magnate, began his grand summer home, Flat Top Manor, an elegant essay in the Colonial Revival style on some 3,600 acres to the northwest of Blowing Rock. Closer to the village, William Whittingham Stringfellow built a sprawling Shingle-style house, Chetola, at the edge of his own lake. However handsome, both of these landmark houses, and the Southern Colonial mansion, Westglow, built in 1916 by artist Elliott Dangerfield, could just as easily have been built in Newport, Rhode Island, Lenox, Massachusetts, or any other East Coast summer resort. The Vardells' Opicherhoka, in contrast, appears to be woven into the landscape. Its (surviving) stone porch piers, serving as the base of tree-length columns, rise up from the boulder-strewn grounds. Today, the basket-weave porch railing linking the piers and the twig lattice skirt underpinning the porch are lost; however, an extraordinary rustic limb-and-twig sofa still stands with other furniture on the porch of the dark green weatherboarded frame house with red trim. Inside the house, the feeling and rustic character survive in a series of rooms with unpainted native wood sheathing applied in decorative patterns and exposed stone chimney breasts. According to family tradition Dr. Vardell himself installed the decorative ceilings. In 1933 when Dr. Vardell built The Shoe (#4) he repeated this native, rustic craftsmanship in the finishing of his retreat in the midst of a rhododendron thicket.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 8 Page 22

---

Endnote

1. The principal sources used in the preparation of this nomination are listed in the bibliography. Genealogical data on the extended Rumple-Vardell family was supplied by Susan Vardell Smyth Lindenberger, and supplemented in telephone conversations which do not appear in the bibliography. Charles Vardell Gage, Mary Linda McNett Yarnell, and Margaret Ferrill Vardell Sandresky--all grandchildren of the Vardells--also provided information to the author in telephone conversations.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 9 Page 23

---

Bibliography

Buxton, Barry M. A VILLAGE TAPESTRY: THE HISTORY OF BLOWING ROCK. Boone, North Carolina: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1989.

Hood, Davyd Foard. Field notes on Chestnut Knoll (the Martin-Duff-Smith Cottage), 31 May 1999, in the possession of the author.

Hood, Davyd Foard. Field notes on the Vardell Family Cottages, 31 July and 4 August 1999, in the possession of the author.

Green Park Historic District National Register Nomination, Davyd Foard Hood and Laura A. W. Phillips, authors, 1994.

Powell, William S. ed. DICTIONARY OF NORTH CAROLINA BIOGRAPHY, VOLUMES 5 AND 6, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, 1996.

Saunders, Donald B. FOR HIS CAUSE A LITTLE HOUSE: A HUNDRED YEAR HISTORY OF RUMPLE MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. Boone, North Carolina: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1988.

Watauga County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Watauga County Court House, Boone, North Carolina.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number 10 Page 24

---

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description. The property included in this nomination is comprised of five contiguous lots on Watauga County Tax Map #2807; the boundary of the nominated acreage is outlined on the enclosed photocopy of a portion of Watauga County Tax Map #2807. The five lots have the following PIN numbers: 2807-95-0592; 2807-95-0764; 2807-95-1739; 2807-95-2884; and 2807-95-3732.

Boundary Justification. The property included in this nomination comprises the site and setting of the four Vardell Family cottages which stand on contiguous lots; this property and these cottages are the residual holding remaining in the ownership of the descendants of Charles Graves and Linda Rumple Vardell who assembled the lands of their summer estate between 1898 and 1918.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number:      Page 25  
Photographs

---

Photograph Schedule

The following information applies to all photographs submitted with this nomination unless otherwise indicated.

1. Opicherhoka, 222 Grandfather Avenue, Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
Hemlock Cottage, 137 Chestnut Circle, Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
The Shoe, 209 Chestnut Circle, Vardell Family Cottages Historic District  
Gage Cottage, 187 Chestnut Circle, Vardell Family Cottages Historic District
2. Watauga County, North Carolina
3. Davyd Foard Hood
4. 4 August 1999
5. North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
- 6-7. List of photographs:
  - A. Opicherhoka, landscape view, looking north/northeast
  - B. Opicherhoka, southwest front elevation with stone steps, looking northeast
  - C. Opicherhoka, first-story hall, looking north
  - D. Opicherhoka, living room and fireplace, looking east
  - E. Opicherhoka, living room ceiling, looking west into bay window
  - F. Opicherhoka, view from dining room into stair hall, looking southeast
  - G. Opicherhoka, second-story hall, looking southeast to doors opening into bedrooms on southeast side of house
  - H. Hemlock Cottage, landscape view with northwest front elevation of cottage, looking south

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number   Photographs   Page 26

---

- I. Hemlock Cottage, landscape view, looking northwest through rhododendron thicket to dining room door and window in rear ell
- J. Hemlock Cottage, view from dining room into original enclosed stairwell, looking northwest
- K. The Shoe, landscape view, looking northwest on path from Opicherhoka to southeast front porch
- L. The Shoe, overall view, looking north to southwest gable end of cottage
- M. The Shoe, view of sitting room, showing bark wainscot, pine sheathing, limb railing on stair to second story, and ceiling beam marking original partition wall enclosing southwest corner bedroom, looking northeast
- N. Gage Cottage, overall view, looking east

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Vardell Family Cottages Historic District, Watauga County, North Carolina

Section number    Property Owner    Page 27

---

Property Owner

Mrs. Susan Vardell Smyth Lindenberger  
1885 West 20th Avenue  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
Canada V6L 1H4  
Telephone: 604/732-5870

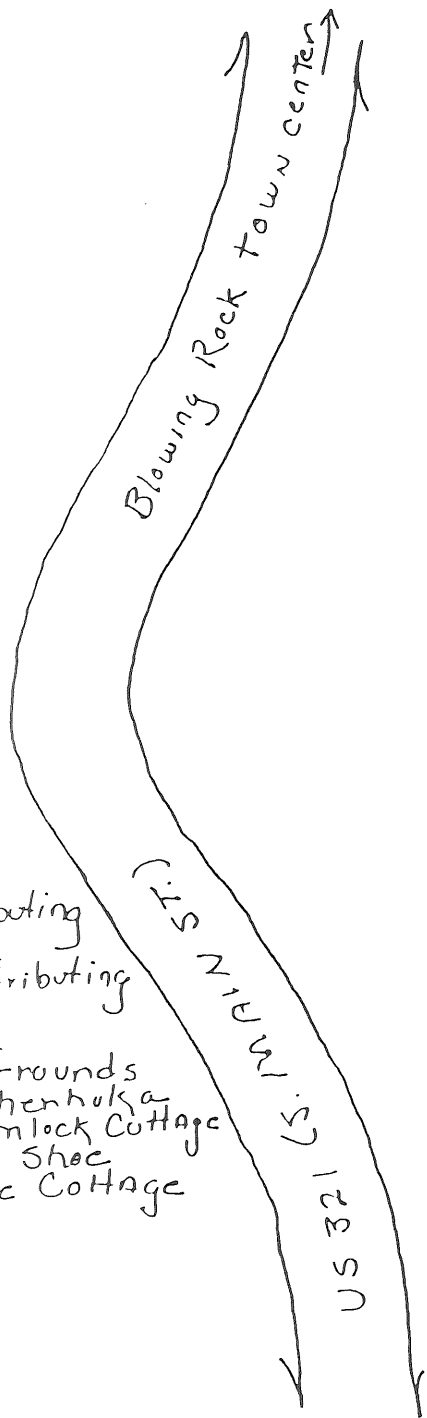
The Reverend James Allan Smyth  
10016 Janeiro Drive  
Huntersville, North Carolina 28078  
Telephone: 704/391-0459

Mr. Robert Stacy Smyth  
128 Cranberry Pond Road  
Cropseyville, New York 12052  
Telephone: 518/279-0194

*see David Hoot's attachment*

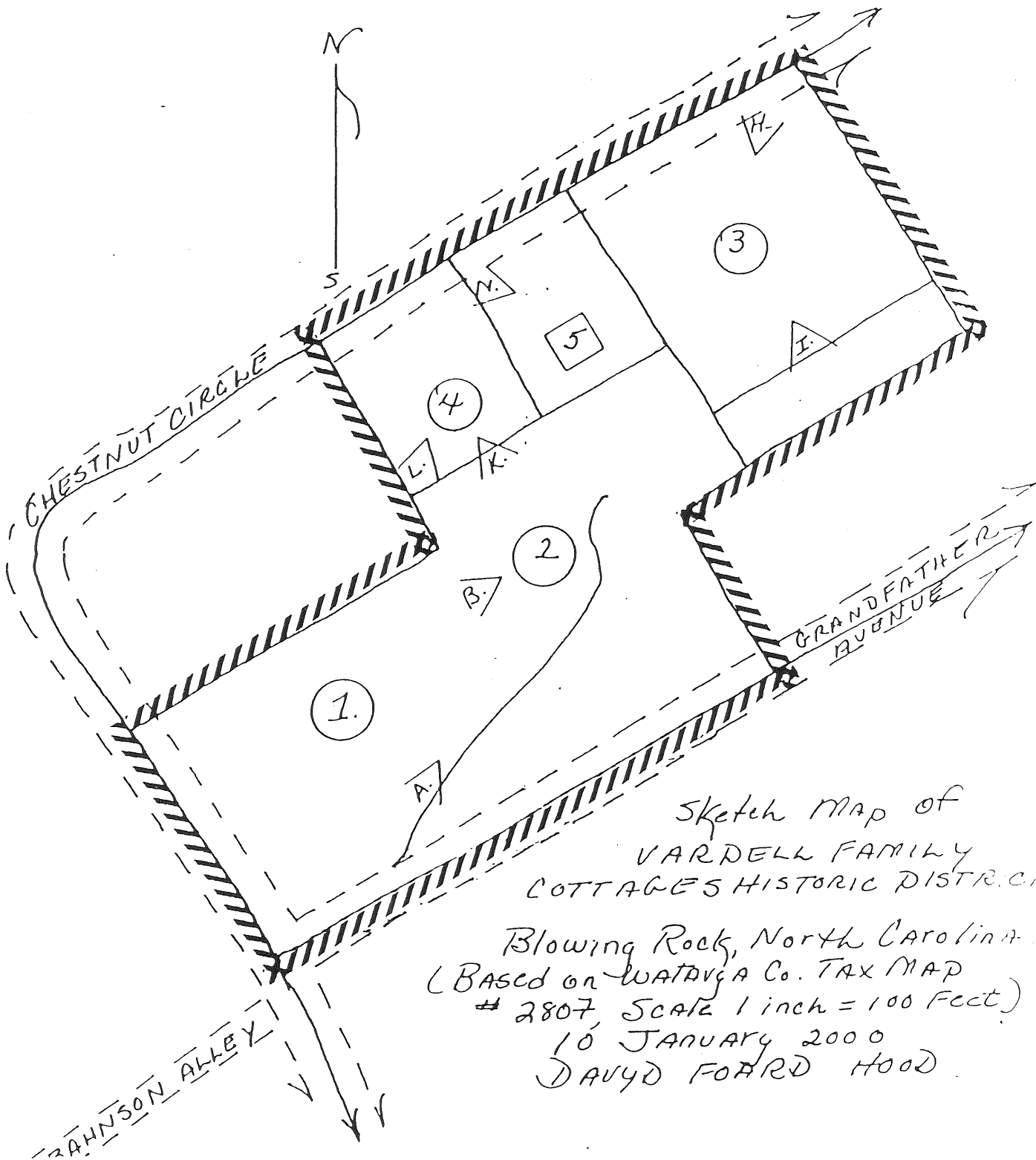
*Linda McNett Yarnell*

*Charles Vardell Gage*



Key  
 ○ Contributing  
 □ Non-Contributing

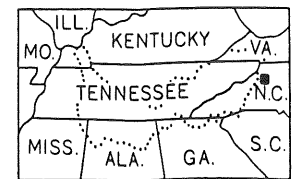
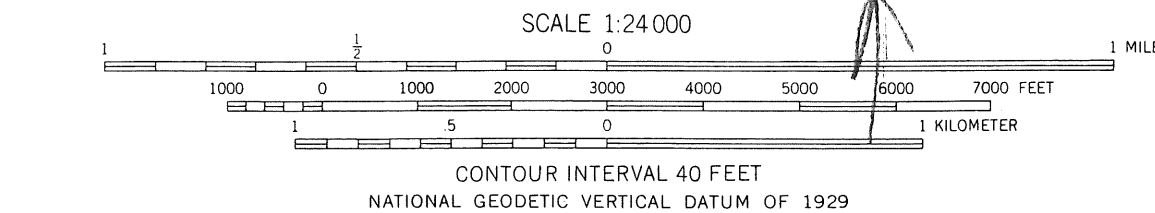
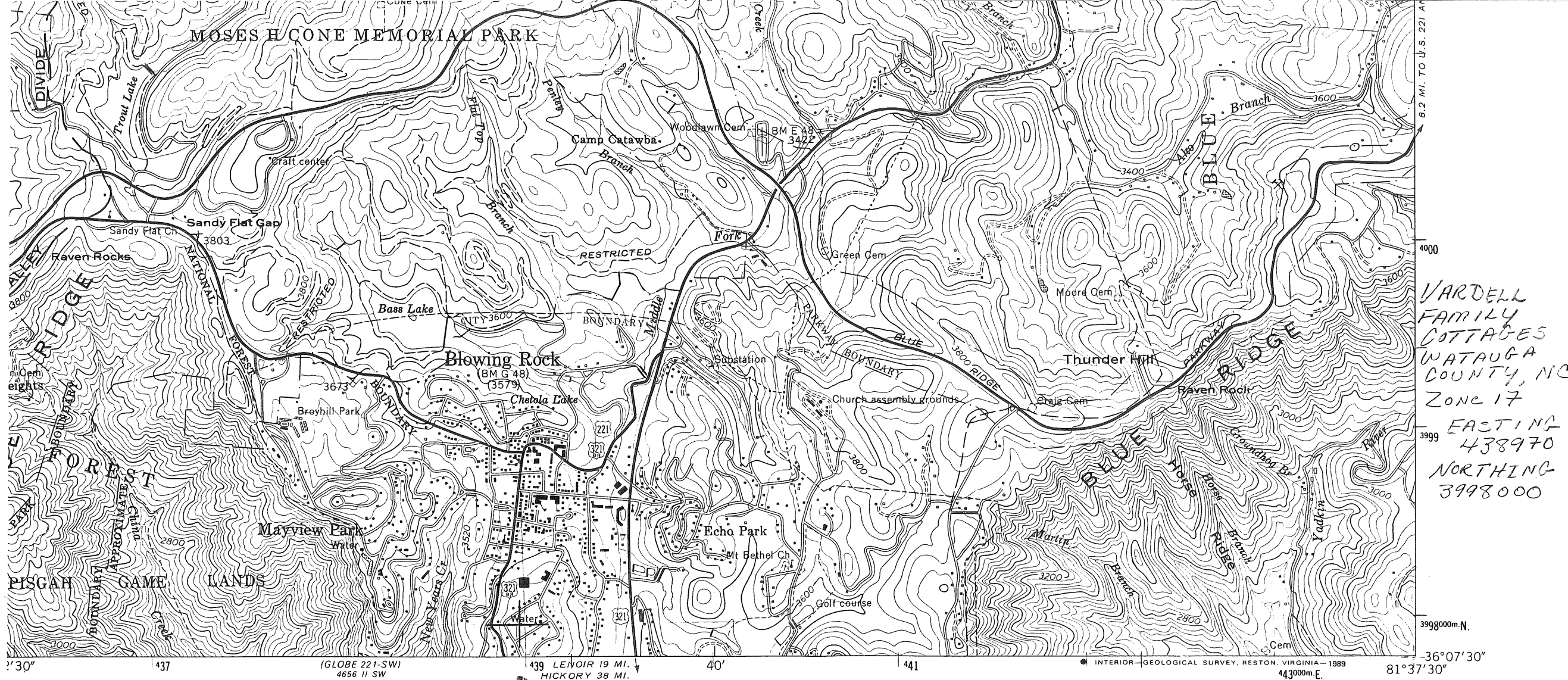
1. The Grounds
2. Opichenhulka Hemlock Cottage
3. The Shoe
4. Gage Cottage



Sketch Map of  
 VARDELE FAMILY  
 COTTAGES HISTORIC DISTRICT

Blowing Rock, North Carolina  
 (Based on WATAUGA Co. TAX MAP  
 # 2807, SCALE 1 inch = 100 FEET)  
 10 JANUARY 2000  
 DAVID FORARD HOOD





- ROAD CLASSIFICATION
- |             |       |                      |       |
|-------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| Heavy-duty  | ————— | Poor motor road      | ===== |
| Medium-duty | ————— | Wagon and jeep track | ----- |
| Light-duty  | ————— | Foot trail           | ----- |
| U. S. Route |       | State Route          |       |
- In developed areas, only through roads are classified

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND U.S. TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY, CHATTANOOGA, TENN. 37401  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

BOONE, N. C.  
36081-B6-TF-024

1959  
PHOTOREVISED 1978  
DMA 4656 II NW-SERIES V842

