

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Blue Ridge Assembly Historic District
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER At the end of SR 2720 on the northern slope of the Swannanoa Mountains.
CITY, TOWN _____ NOT FOR PUBLICATION _____
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT _____
VICINITY OF Black Mountain
STATE North Carolina CODE 37 COUNTY Buncombe CODE 021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Blue Ridge Assembly
c/o Mr. Frank Washburn, Executive Director
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Black Mountain VICINITY OF _____ STATE North Carolina 28711

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
Buncombe County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Asheville STATE North Carolina 28801

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
DATE
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN STATE
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Blue Ridge Assembly is sited along the north slope of the Swannanoa Mountains, a range of the Blue Ridge in western North Carolina. The Assembly is nestled in a cove between two steep, heavily forested ridges that loom up behind the complex to elevations of well over four thousand feet. Two swiftly flowing creeks, one called Wolfpit Branch and the other unnamed, run parallel to each other on an almost due north course along the east and west flanks of the Assembly area. About two miles downslope to the north in the valley of the Swannanoa River lies the town of Black Mountain. From the Assembly grounds can be seen magnificent views of the Craggy and Black Mountain ranges far to the north.

While a few modern buildings have been constructed in recent years along the southern, eastern, and northern periphery of the area, the historic core of the Assembly remains a cohesive and tightly integrated complex of about twenty-two acres containing twenty-eight white frame structures, most with red shingle roofs, that date from the teens and twenties of this century. The complex is unified with landscaping that includes serpentine access roads, footpaths and footbridges, stone retaining walls, and a rich variety of trees and flowering shrubs, most notably rhododendron. The buildings are all functional structures, executed simply with some stylistic borrowings from the Neo-classical Revival and the Colonial Revival; though none are academic in form, the result is a harmonious mountain retreat with an atmosphere of informal comfort, peace, and solidarity.

There are two general types of buildings within the complex. First are a group of seven large institutional buildings of two or three stories with porticoed facades; these serve variously as offices, meeting rooms, recreational rooms, and living quarters for staff, guests, and conferees. Five of these are arranged facing inward at the heart of the complex, forming a courtyard. Behind these buildings to the east and south, clinging to the forested slope of the mountain, are nineteen frame cottages of various forms, all with porches and foundation work of native stone. These function as residences for administration, staff, guests, and conferees.

The centerpiece of the Assembly is Robert E. Lee Hall (1), the oldest and largest of the buildings in the complex. The central section of this enormous frame structure was erected in 1911-12 to the designs of New York architect Louis Jallade; it is fronted by a north-facing octastyle portico rising the full three-story height of the building and carried by massive, smooth-surfaced columns with simplified Doric capitals. This section is seven bays wide, with divisions marked by flat, engaged pilasters. Windows are of alternating single and paired six-over-six sash on the second two floors, with the first floor windows all paired and having twelve light transoms. The wings of the building were added shortly after completion of the central portion; these are composed of three-story end pavilions with gable roofs on a north-south axis, connected to the main block by seven bay, gable roof hyphens. Engaged pilasters divide the three-bay pent-gable ends of the pavilions and terminate in a wide frieze board; a course of dentils carries under the eaves of the entire structure.

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The first floor of the central section contains a large, open, well-lighted hall with exposed ceiling beams supported by square-in-section posts with molded caps. A large stone fireplace is centered on the south wall of the hall. The wings enclose narrow hallways flanked by rooms of various sizes and functions. Though some of the original wall surface has been replaced with modern paneling, the original woodwork remains, with horizontal-panel doors in plain wood surrounds with corner blocks.

Four other institutional buildings face each other east and west, two on a side, across the large central courtyard that slopes downward to the north in front of Lee Hall. These are frame buildings of two or three stories, each fronted with a full-height tetrastyle portico with columns that are scaled-down versions of those on Lee Hall. Centered on the gable roof of each of these buildings is a shallow attic gable, each pierced with an arched attic window. On the west side are the Gymnasium (2) and Asheville Hall (3). The Gymnasium is a symmetrical, two-story structure that houses dormitory rooms on the first floor and a gym room on the second. Asheville Hall is a large, T shaped building dramatically sited on a steep incline on the west side of Wolfpit Branch, this site results in a four-story height on the front (east) elevation. The three-story portico, which shelters the central three bays of the thirteen bay facade, is supported beneath the porch level by free-standing stone piers.

On the east side of the courtyard are Abbott Hall (4) and College Hall (5). Abbott Hall is a three-story, T-plan structure with a symmetrical nine-bay front (west) elevation. College Hall is two stories, with an eleven-bay front elevation, the central five of which are protected by the portico. A two-bay, one-story extension is placed on the north gable end; on the north gable end of the extension is another one-story addition.

Martha Washington Residence (7), located behind Robert E. Lee Hall to the southwest, closely resembles those buildings of the courtyard group, being two stories with the symmetrical nine-bay facade fronted by a tetrastyle portico. From a two-story porch off the rear elevation extends a two-story, five-bay deep dormitory addition.

Directly behind Lee Hall is the Craft and Child Care Center (6). This is a large, one-story structure on a raised foundation, covered with a shallow gable roof. A broad gabled portico extends across the front (north) elevation, upon which is centered a segmental-arch attic window flanked by louvered ventilators. Under this portico a pair of stairs rises in dog-leg fashion, one on either side of a central platform with balustrade that gives access to the raised main floor level. A large screened porch is attached to the east side of the structure, and a gabled rear wing extends from the south elevation.

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The nineteen frame cottages irregularly scattered on the slope of the hill to the west and south are of four basic types. One of the most numerous--for which there are six examples--is two stories high under a gable roof, with a double-gallery shed roof porch sheltering the front elevation. All are raised on free-standing stone piers, though in a few cases the spaces between the piers have been enclosed with weatherboard. The facades are five bays in width, with the central three bays--a central door flanked by windows--set in a shallow projection. North Carolina Cottage (14), V.P.I. Cottage (21), Georgia Cottage (22), and Clemson Cottage (24) are nearly identical, with circular-in-section porch posts connected on the first floor level by a balustrade composed of intersecting diagonal members, and on the second level by a sheathed balustrade. Washington and Lee Cottage (15) has an identical second floor balustrade, though that of the first level is of standard execution with vertically set, square-in-section balusters. All cottages in this group have windows of double-hung two-over-two sash. Booker T. Washington Residence closely resembles these cottages in form, though it is a larger structure, two bays deep, with a wide five-bay facade without the central projection and with windows of six-over-six sash. Its porch posts are square-in-section, and balustrades are identical to those of Washington and Lee Cottage. A one-story shed roof porch is attached to its east gable end.

Five cottages are almost square in plan, standing one-and-one-half stories under hip roofs with gable dormers. These are also raised on stone piers, though several have modern stone or weatherboard infill. Converse Cottage (20) and Auburn Cottage (23) closely adhere to the original form. Each has a hip roof porch wrapping around the west and north sides, supported by turned posts connected by a handrail with square-in-section balusters. The gable dormers of the west and south faces of the hip roofs contain double casement windows of six lights each. Kentucky Cottage (10) closely resembles Converse, though its larger dormers contain paired double-casement windows and half of the north side of the porch has been screened. Meredith (16) and Dogwood (17) cottages are similar, though their porches have been partially enclosed, and dormers have paired double-hung sash.

Three small cottages are square-in-plan and stand one story under pyramidal roofs without dormers. Parker Cottage (8) is fronted on the west elevation with a hip roof porch with turned posts. The main block of Coker (9) is similar, though it is surrounded on every elevation by a porch supported with square-in-section posts. Overlook (25) rests on a raised foundation that has been enclosed with sheathing to create a basement; it is faced with a porch similar to that of Parker on its west side.

Three cottages have long, rectangular plans and are detailed in a manner that is a clear departure from all the others; these are arranged side-by-side on a north-south axis behind College Hall. Mississippi Cottage (13) has a three-bay center insert on the west facade fronted by a shed roof porch with square-in-section posts and balustrade; this is flanked by three-bay end "pavilions" with the entire

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composition under a gable-on-hip roof. A shed roof porch with turned posts is attached to the north end. The small windows contain four-over-four sash. Ward Belmont Cottage (12) is identical to Mississippi except for the roof, which has pent gables over each of the three-bay end sections of the facade. Agnes Scott (11) is the third member of this group; it is under a full gable roof, and the original windows have been replaced with larger, modern sash.

Two of the cottages do not conform to any of these types. Rhododendron (18) is a long, one-story cottage under a hip roof with a single gable dormer placed over the north end of the west face of the roof; the asymmetrical seven-bay facade is fronted by a porch with turned posts that is enclosed on the north end. Craggy View Cottage (19) is the only board-and-batten cottage in the complex, and is fitted with six-light casement windows. A shed porch on its north end is similar to those of the Mississippi Cottage group.

Behind the Craft and Child Care Center is the Maintenance Shop (27); this frame structure has a monitor roof and a sliding garage door on the west gable end. Adjacent to it is a small garage of tan brick (28); this is the only non-frame structure within the historic core of the Assembly. Near this is a small four-car garage (29), a three-sided frame structure under a shed roof.

A covered fountain (30) stands in the courtyard between College and Abbott halls; this is constructed of smooth river stones mortared together, with columns rising from a circular base and supporting a pentagonal cover. A bell is placed at the top.

Buildings erected since the 1920s outside the historic center of the Assembly are of various forms and colors and constructed with a variety of materials, including brick, frame, and stone veneer. None intrudes in or is nominated with the core area of the Assembly.

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Blue Ridge Assembly Historic District Inventory

1-7 Major Institutional Buildings

1. Robert E. Lee Hall. 1911-1912. Three story frame structure on a stone foundation, fronted with a full-height octastyle portico. This is the oldest and largest structure on the Assembly grounds, designed by New York architect Louis Jallade.
2. Gymnasium, ca. 1915. Two-story frame structure of rectangular plan with tetrastyle portico. Houses dormitory rooms and gymnasium.
3. Asheville Hall. 1926. Three-story, T-plan structure with tetrastyle portico, which is supported below the first floor level by free-standing stone piers. Given by the Asheville YMCA to house the YMCA Graduate School during the summer months.
4. Abbott Hall. 1927. Three-story, T-plan building with tetrastyle portico, built as guest house for visiting speakers and named for F. C. Abbott, then secretary-treasurer of the Blue Ridge Association.
5. College Hall, ca. 1918. Two story structure with tetrastyle portico, with raised one-story additions on the north gable end.
6. Craft and Child Care Center, ca. 1925. One-story frame structure on a raised foundation, covered by a low gable roof, with a gabled portico on the north elevation.
7. Martha Washington Residence, ca. 1914. Two-story frame dormitory for women; fronted with tetrastyle portico. A two-story frame extension is attached to the rear elevation.

8-26 Cottages. 1913-1927.

8. Parker. One-story frame, square-in-plan cottage under a pyramidal roof, with interior brick chimney. A hip roof porch fronts the three-bay west elevation.
9. Coker. Similar to Parker, with a porch wrapping around all four elevations on square-in-section posts.
10. Kentucky. One-and-one-half story frame cottage under hip roof with gable dormers containing pairs of casement windows. A hip roof porch flanks the west and north sides, supported by turned posts connected with a square member balustrade. The structure rests on stone piers.

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11. Agnes Scott. One-story rectangular plan under a gable roof. The central three bays of the front (west) elevation are recessed and sheltered by a shed porch supported by square-in-section posts. A second porch is attached to the north end. Original windows have been replaced with modern double-hung sash.
12. Ward Belmont. Similar to Agnes Scott, though it retains its original small windows of four-over-four sash, and the end sections of the facade are covered with pent gable roofs set perpendicular to the main hip roof of the structure.
13. Mississippi. Identical to Ward Belmont, though covered by a gable-on-hip roof.
14. North Carolina. Two-story, one room deep cottage on free-standing stone piers and covered with a gable roof. The central three bays of the five-bay front (west) elevation are set in a shallow projection; all five bays are sheltered by a double-gallery shed roof porch. The first floor balustrade is composed of intersecting diagonal members; that of the second floor is sheathed. Posts are turned, with one square-in-section replacement on the lower right. Windows are of large two-over-two sash.
15. Washington and Lee. Similar to North Carolina, with all lower porch posts square-in-section and connected by a standard balustrade with handrail supported by square-in-section balusters.
16. Meredith. Similar to Kentucky, though dormers contain paired double-hung sash, modern stone infill has been placed between the piers, and the porch has been partially enclosed. An exterior stone chimney is attached on the south elevation.
17. Dogwood. Identical to Meredith, with a brick chimney on the south elevation.
18. Rhododendron. Long, one-and-one-half story cottage on stone piers with stone infill. A gable dormer with paired windows is set on the north end of the hip roof. The west elevation is fronted by a hip roof porch with turned posts and a square-member balustrade, enclosed on the north end.
19. Craggy View. One-story, board-and-batten cottage with porches on west and north elevations, six-light casement windows.
20. Converse. Similar to Kentucky and Meredith, with paired casement windows in the dormers. The porch is partially enclosed.
21. V.P.I. Identical to North Carolina, with all posts circular-in-section.

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22. Georgia. Identical to V.P.I.
23. Auburn. Identical to Converse.
24. Clemson. Identical to V.P.I.
25. Overlook. Pyramidal roof frame cottage on raised foundation that has been enclosed with weatherboard. The shed porch on the west elevation is enclosed on the south end.
26. Booker T. Washington, ca. 1915. Similar to the North Carolina cottage group but larger, being two bays deep, with a wider five-bay front (north) elevation. The double gallery shed porch shelters the three central bays only. Porch posts are all square-in-section. A one-story shed porch is attached to the east elevation.
- 27-29 Service Buildings
27. Maintenance Shop, ca. 1925. Gable roof frame structure with monitor roof providing sunlight into the interior. A sliding garage door is set on the front (west) gable end.
28. Garage, ca. 1930. Small gable roof structure of tan brick and German siding; space for two automobiles.
29. Garage, ca. 1925. A three-sided frame structure with shed roof and parking space for four automobiles.
30. Fountain, ca. 1920. Covered drinking fountain of smooth river stones with a circular base and columns supporting a pentagonal cover, topped with a bell.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1912-1930

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Louis Jallade and others

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Blue Ridge Assembly, conference center of the Young Men's Christian Association, has served the entire southeastern United States since 1912 as a training ground in religious education for the YMCA and many other organizations. It was founded and developed largely through the efforts of Willis Duke Weatherford (1875-1970), author and humanitarian who pioneered in many areas of social and cultural development in the south. The historic core of the Assembly consists of a large and impressive group of structures with Colonial and Neo-classical Revival elements built from 1912 to about 1930. The first completed (1912) and the dominant of the group is Robert E. Lee Hall, an enormous frame building with an octastyle portico rising the full height of the three-story facade, designed by architect Louis Jallade of New York. Flanking this main Hall are four porticoed, two-story frame buildings forming a large, informal courtyard. Behind the group is a series of nineteen cottages, most with porches and stone detail, arranged irregularly on serpentine access roads which are informally landscaped with flowering trees and shrubs. The whole complex is magnificently sited with unparalleled views of the Craggy and Black Mountain ranges to the north.

Black Mountain College, an experimental institution now famed as forerunner in modern innovations in American art and education, was founded here in 1933 and operated on the site until 1941. Today Blue Ridge Assembly is an active YMCA conference center and one of the most prominent of the numerous assembly grounds centered around Asheville in western North Carolina. Its director and board are concerned with the maintenance and preservation of the Assembly's impressive early twentieth century structures.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Blue Ridge Assembly is one of the most important of the conference centers, assembly grounds, and religious retreats established around Asheville in the early twentieth century and critical to the development of the region. The site has added significance as the birthplace of Black Mountain College. It has served the entire southeast as a religious and educational center.

B. The Assembly is associated with the life and work of Willis Duke Weatherford, a distinguished author, educator, college president, and pioneer in the field of race relations.

C. The Assembly is comprised of an impressive, well landscaped, and beautifully sited architectural complex of early twentieth century structures derived from the Colonial and Neo-classical Revival styles.

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The idea of building Blue Ridge Assembly as a permanent home for the Student Conferences of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was first conceived in 1904 by Willis D. Weatherford, then International Student Secretary of the YMCA for the colleges of the South and Southwest. The annual conferences had begun in the summer of 1892 at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and had been held in various places in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

Weatherford presented his idea to Dr. John R. Mott, head of the International Committee of the YMCA. Mott also preceived the need for a permanent center, and arranged for Weatherford's suggestion to be placed before the International Committee. This committee, however, refused to take responsibility for establishing such a center and refused to give Weatherford time to pursue the idea, but suggested he might do so "during his summer vacation."¹

Weatherford thus began seeking a location, and was drawn to the Blue Ridge property by a suggestion of Judge J. D. Murphy of Asheville, N. C., who had noticed the site from a train. Weatherford visited the property in October, 1906, with Dr. A. L. Phillips, and climbing a tree near what is now the southeast corner of Lee Hall, decided that this property in the Swannanoa Valley, known as the Johnson tract, was ideally suited to their purpose. Weatherford believed that its unsurpassed view of the Blue Ridge and Black Mountains would give the peaceful and inspirational setting necessary for the successful training of student Christian leaders. Weatherford and Phillips returned to Asheville and with personal notes purchased the land, approximate 952 acres.²

An organizational meeting was held in Charlotte on January 23 and 24, 1907, and the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training was formed. Judge Murphy of Asheville secured the charter. The first officers were: J. A. Patton, Chattanooga, President; J. D. Murphy, Asheville, Vice-President; F. C. Abbott, Charlotte, Secretary and Treasurer; and W. D. Weatherford, Executive Secretary. An executive committee was formed of representatives from the Missionary Education Society, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the YMCA.³

Additional land purchases were made, totalling approximately 1574 acres. Selective timber removal was carried out under the supervision of C. H. Hobbs, President of the Central Lumber Company of Asheville. Two portable sawmills were set up and a narrow gauge track was laid down the mountain and across the valley to a spur of the Southern Railroad. From this land 1,100,00 linear feet of hardwood and 10,000 cords of wood for tannic acid were cut.⁴ The timber and chestnut bark supplied all the wood needed for construction of the buildings, and its surplus sale provided reimbursement for over half the cost of the land.⁵

Weatherford was at work on additional fundraising, trying at first, unsuccessfully, to raise \$50,000. Deciding he was not being taken seriously he determined to raise

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\$500,000 and almost immediately secured \$50,000 from John D. Rockefeller. Other sources soon brought this to \$100,000 and work was begun on the buildings.⁶

The first building on the assembly grounds was Robert E. Lee Hall, designed by architect Louis E. Jallade of New York.⁷ A native of Montreal, Jallade was educated at the Metropolitan Museum Art School and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He maintained an architectural firm under his name and in partnership with his son, Louis E. Jallade, Jr.⁸ Active with the YMCA in New York, he volunteered his service to the Blue Ridge Association, designing the original buildings and traveling to Blue Ridge to check on the progress of Lee Hall. The design over the mantel in Lee Hall is his.⁹ A Swissman named Getaz from Knoxville, Tennessee was the contractor, and his son, an architectural graduate from Nashville, was the supervising architect.¹⁰

The tall white columns on the front of Lee Hall were fashioned in the midwest and brought in by rail, but all other wood came from the Blue Ridge property. Great care was taken to make the buildings fit the site, and Weatherford himself laid out the approach road with hand level and wooden stakes, so that it could not be seen from the mountain above.¹¹

An architectural drawing for Lee Hall appears in a 1910 pamphlet issued by the Blue Ridge Association,¹² and construction must have begun soon thereafter, for the buildings were complete in the summer of 1912 for the opening conference, held by the YWCA. In addition to Lee Hall, the complex included a temporary dining hall and gymnasium.¹³

Lee Hall could then accommodate 400, and that first conference drew nearly 1000 people, with the overflow housed in tents. The Blue Ridge Committee realized at once that expansion was necessary. Two wings were added to Lee Hall and soon afterward Martha Washington Hall was built as a residence for the "Poor Working Girls," as they called themselves, college students who spent the summer working at Blue Ridge. These student workers were important to the philosophy of the center, as Weatherford believed that due to slavery the idea of labor had been degraded in the South, and he wanted to restore labor's respectability. There were non-student workers as well, and the Booker T. Washington Building, currently slated for demolition, was constructed for black employees.¹⁴

Construction began on the east of Lee Hall with the money raised by mens' and womens' colleges of the South; these cottages were named for their sponsors. The building program was ambitious. Hobbs Library, given and built by C. H. Hobbs, the lumberman who had cut timber on the Blue Ridge acreage, was completed before 1915 (this building no longer stands), as was an auditorium. In 1915 Blue Ridge constructed four cottages, a gymnasium, an athletic field, and a three-mile road to the railroad station. By 1917 ten cottages had been completed.¹⁵

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These were put to use in that year for the War Work Council of the YMCA, for which the Blue Ridge Association began the first training school for YMCA administrators for the army camps in America. Beginning in June, 1917, sixteen sessions were held in eighteen months and 2436 workers were trained.¹⁶

Attendance at the summer conferences of the various organizations also increased, from 1452 in 1912 to 5061 by 1920. To meet the needs of this increased use, Blue Ridge became more self-sufficient, with construction of a steam laundry, book store, photo finishing rooms, barber shop, garage, tennis courts, swimming pool, and an electric light plant. The Association's own gardens and orchard provided it with vegetables and apples.¹⁷

Weatherford continued as executive secretary of the Blue Ridge Association, but was active in other areas as well. He had received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and been ordained a Methodist minister before joining the YMCA as Student Secretary in 1901. He continued his work in that capacity until 1919; during that time he authored six books on religious topics, and Negro Life in the South.

His interest in race relations led him to help organize the Commission of Interracial Cooperation, an early attempt at bringing the races together on a local level throughout the South. Weatherford was a director of the Commission from its founding in 1919 until it evolved in the 1940's into the Southern Regional Council, which elected him a Life Fellow in 1965.¹⁸ His concern in this area extended to Blue Ridge, which pioneered as a Southern institution in having black lecturers such as Dr. Robert R. Moton of Tuskegee.

In 1919 Weatherford resigned as YMCA Student Secretary in order to found and serve as president of the Southern College of the YMCA, known as the YMCA Graduate School, centered in Nashville. He warned those who urged him to undertake this venture that he was of a liberal mind and would likely do things of which they would disapprove. He then created an institution whose reputation for academic excellence far exceeded the number of graduates of its brief seventeen-year existence. The Graduate School also became a part of Blue Ridge, for Weatherford spent his summers there, as did many of the students and professors, and eventually summer sessions were held at Blue Ridge.¹⁹ Asheville Hall opened June 10, 1926, given by the Asheville YMCA to house the college during the summer.²⁰

In 1925 there were forty buildings at Blue Ridge, and by 1927 fifty-six. In addition to the graduate school and regular leadership conferences of the YMCA, YWCA, and other organizations, the Assembly grounds housed the "SCY Camp" for boys. Also during the twenties the Lee School for Boys operated in the winter months in Robert E. Lee Hall.²¹

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Construction continued with a guest house for speakers which was named Abbott Hall in honor of F. C. Abbott, secretary-treasurer of the Association since its inception. A lake was built in 1927 for swimming and boating. Then the expansion of the Assembly all but ceased, as the Association realized it had incurred an indebtedness of \$180,000 above an extant bond issue of \$80,000. A new bond issue of \$180,000 was taken by a Tennessee Life Insurance Company, based on an appraisal of the Blue Ridge property at \$750,000.²²

Payments were made for two years, until the Depression hit in 1929. Banks failed throughout the region, including the bank in Black Mountain in which the Association's operating funds were kept. The Association's income plummeted from a peak of \$120,000 to \$20,000 due to a drop in conference attendance. In 1932 the Blue Ridge property was put up for public sale, and outside interests put in a bid at \$45,000. During the thirty day waiting period required by North Carolina law, Weatherford saved the Assembly by raising the money in Nashville for an upset bid.²³

It was financially necessary to reorganize and a new charter was obtained under the name of Blue Ridge College, Inc. The institution's statement of purpose did not change, being taken from the original Act of Incorporation. The new 21-member board of trustees met first in 1933.²⁴

That same year a group of teachers and students who had either been discharged or withdrawn from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida determined to start their own school, and casting about for a place to establish it, came to Blue Ridge. The site was suggested by Bob Wunsch, former Rollins drama professor and native of Asheville. John Rice, leader of the dissidents, visited the site in late spring of 1933 and was immediately enthusiastic, pronouncing it perfect. "Here was peace. Here was also central heating against the cold of winter, blankets, sheets, dishes, flatware, enough for a dozen colleges, all at a moderate rental."²⁵

Rice spent the summer raising funds for the school, and on August 24, 1933, a lease was signed with the Blue Ridge College for \$4500 a year. The college would occupy Blue Ridge during the winter months - then stow its belongings in the attic for the summer, when conferences, camps, and the graduate school continued.²⁶

Black Mountain College opened in Lee Hall in September, 1933 with ten teachers and twenty-two students. Central to the philosophy of the school was that there be no administrators, although they did hire a part-time typist. Black Mountain was to be an education for democracy, they said, and the center of the curriculum would be art.

From this improbable beginning in the worst of the depression came a college and experimental community that, though now defunct, is legendary as a forerunner and exemplar of much that is now considered innovative in art, education and life-style. It served as a nurturing ground for many of the singular, shaping talents of the twentieth century.

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Early refugees to Black Mountain included Josef and Anni Albers, who arrived from Germany in November, 1933, to teach art and weaving. Albers had been on the faculty at the Bauhaus, which had closed its doors rather than allow Nazi party members on its faculty. Anni Albers was Jewish, and thus the couple determined to come to the United States. The Albers remained on the faculty of Black Mountain until 1949, and were very influential within the community, bearing out the philosophy of art as the center of the school.²⁷

The reputation of the school grew quickly and it drew such visitors as John Dewey, who visited twice during 1934-1935 and soon became a member of Black Mountain's Advisory Board. Others who visited in the early years included Thornton Wilder, Fernand Leger, Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley and Louis Adamic.²⁸

Black Mountain College remained at Blue Ridge for eight years and perhaps enjoyed its greatest vitality during that time. In June, 1937 the college had purchased the Lake Eden property on the north side of the Swannanoa Valley as a step toward a permanent home. Although the idea of "colleges in tents"²⁹ had an appeal, the business of packing the college away each summer had become burdensome. The college's five year contract with Blue Ridge expired in June, 1941 and Weatherford had let it be known he was thinking of starting a girls' school there and might need the space. Construction was begun at the Lake Eden property, and in the spring of 1941 Black Mountain folded its tents and moved across the valley. The college would continue its existence through the fifties, when it died the death of many such schools, ultimately through lack of funds.³⁰

Another educational institution which suffered that fate was the YMCA Graduate School, which in 1936 was absorbed into Vanderbilt University. Weatherford then began ten years as a professor at Fisk University. He retired from the YMCA but continued to direct Blue Ridge.³¹ His ties to Blue Ridge were deep, and in 1940 he constructed a home on Overlook Ridge behind the assembly, on his own 185 acres, which he called "Far Horizons." It was built of native materials - river stone, poplar, white oak, maple and black walnut. He lived there until his death.³²

In 1943 Blue Ridge was again in the midst of hard times, and when the Southern Associations of the YMCA offered to purchase the property, the proposal was eagerly accepted. Thus Blue Ridge underwent its third change of name, this time to Blue Ridge Assembly, Inc. There were two conditions of sale: that the Southern Associations assume the property's indebtedness, and that they keep the purpose of the Assembly as a religious training ground for the people of the South. T. Walker Lewis of Memphis, Tennessee was the first president of the new corporation, and another Memphian, Earle Whittington, successfully spearheaded the new \$150,000 fundraising campaign.³³

During the 1950's a campaign was begun to modernize the existing structures, and in 1963 a master plan for expansion was approved. Several new buildings were added,

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including Ware Cottage, Ware Pavilion, and Younts Hall. Also constructed were new athletic fields, tennis courts, swimming pool and a new water system.³⁴ In 1966 plans were announced to raze Lee Hall and construct a new Lee Hall, but fortunately this idea died for lack of funds.³⁵ Funds were successfully solicited, however, for a new building constructed below Lee Hall, a center with kitchen and dining facilities, a registration area, and meeting rooms. This was completed in 1970, making possible the operation of the assembly on a year-round basis.³⁶

On February 21, 1970, Willis D. Weatherford, founder of Blue Ridge, died at the age of 94. His career had been long and extremely productive in several fields, including, in addition to those already mentioned, over thirty years as a trustee of Berea College, years on the Board of Directors of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company of Birmingham, Alabama, which pioneered in the employee profit-sharing concept; and the authorship of at least twelve more books. His efforts in later life were directed toward the Appalachian region, and in the fifties he embarked on an ambitious survey of the area which resulted in the 1962 publication of The Southern Appalachian Region, a work used extensively in setting up the Appalachian Regional Commission and the North Carolina Fund. His connection with Blue Ridge continued to his death, and he is buried on the grounds.³⁷

In 1964 Weatherford listed three areas of work at Blue Ridge which gave him the most satisfaction. First, "That we were really doing something about making religion intellectually respectable in the South. Secondly, we were doing something about the whole race problem. Thirdly, we had much to do about changing the attitude toward labor here. The slavery period left a dirty mark on Southern life in that both the white man and the Negro hated labor because it was a mark of slavery. We set ourselves deliberately to break that prejudice down." He continued: "Blue Ridge has been one of the forward-looking institutions of the entire south willing to take a step forward even though sometimes it might not be popular if we knew it was right. I hope Blue Ridge never loses its spirit of Adventure."³⁸

Blue Ridge Assembly, the second oldest conference center in the North Carolina Mountains, has served continuously since 1912 in its capacity of training Christian leaders of the South. Over 350,000 people have attended conferences there. It remains today a thriving institution.

FOOTNOTES

¹"History and Present Status of Blue Ridge Assembly, Inc.," n.p., 1950, p. 1.

²"The Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training," n.p., 1928?, p.1.

³Abbott, F. C., "The Story of the Blue Ridge Association," n.p., 1944?, p. 1.

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- ⁴"A Man Up A Tree, The Story of Blue Ridge," n.p., n.d., p. 3
- ⁵Memo, Dr. W. D. Weatherford to Paul M. Limbert, November 13, 1964, p. 1
- ⁶Dykeman, Wilma, Prophet of Plenty, Knoxville, Tennessee, University of Tennessee Press, 1966, p. 61.
- ⁷Abbott, F. C., op. cit., p. 5.
- ⁸"Louis E. Jallade, Architect, Dead," New York Times, February 27, 1957, p. 31.
- ⁹Abbott, F. C., op. cit., p. 5.
- ¹⁰Memo, Weatherford, to Limbert, op. cit., p. 1.
- ¹¹Dykeman, Wilma, op. cit., p. 83.
- ¹²"Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training," n.p., 1910.
- ¹³Abbott, F. C., op. cit., p. 5.
- ¹⁴Interview with Frank Washburn, Executive Director, Blue Ridge Assembly, August, 1978
- ¹⁵"The South's Fundamental Need," n.p., n.d.
- ¹⁶"The Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training," n.p., 1928? p. 6
- ¹⁷"Out of Doors in the Blue Ridge," n.p., n.d.
- ¹⁸Dykeman, Wilma, op. cit., p. 142.
- ¹⁹IBID., p. 154.
- ²⁰Blue Ridge Voice, February, 1926.
- ²¹Blue Ridge Voice, April, 1927.
- ²²Abbott, F. C., op. cit., p. 7.
- ²³"A Man Up A Tree," op. cit., p. 3.
- ²⁴Ibid., P. 3.
- ²⁵Rice, John Andrew, I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1942, p. 318.

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- ²⁶Duberman, Martin, Black Mountain, An Exploration in Community, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972, p. 31.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 56.
- ²⁸Ibid., pp. 102-104.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 40.
- ³⁰Ibid., pp. 155-156.
- ³¹"History and Present Status of Blue Ridge Assembly," op. cit., p. 5.
- ³²Dykeman, Wilma, op. cit., pp. 187-188.
- ³³"A Man Up A Tree," op. cit., p. 4.
- ³⁴Blue Ridge Bulletin, July-September, 1967.
- ³⁵"New Lee Hall to be Built at Blue Ridge," Asheville Citizen Times, December 11, 1960.
- ³⁶Blue Ridge Bulletin, October-December, 1970.
- ³⁷"Blue Ridge Assembly Founder Dies," Asheville Citizen, February 23, 1970.
- ³⁸Memo, Weatherford to Limbert, op. cit., p. 2.
- ³⁹"Blue Ridge Founded Forty Years Ago," Asheville Citizen, July 27, 1952.

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 22

UTM REFERENCES

A	[1,7]	[37,85,3,0]	[3,93,90,5,0]	B	[1,7]	[37,85,1,0]	[3,93,86,2,0]
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C	[1,7]	[37,87,6,0]	[3,93,86,1,0]	D	[1,7]	[37,88,9,0]	[3,93,90,0,0]
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the Blue Ridge Assembly Historic District forms an irregular figure of approximately 22 acres (see attached hand-drawn map) that encompasses all of the surviving pre-1929 structures in the Assembly and their associated landscaping. It excludes the later twentieth century development along the southern, northern, and western edges of the complex.

Beginning at the intersection of the Entrance Road and the Blue Ridge Center access road
LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Property description by Michael Southern, Survey Specialist
Statement of significance by Betty Lawrence, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Western Office, North Carolina Division of Archives and History

DATE
May 10, 1979

STREET & NUMBER
13 Veterans Drive

TELEPHONE
704-298-5024

CITY OR TOWN
Asheville,

STATE
North Carolina 28805

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X STATE _____ LOCAL _____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE *Ferry Tise*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE July 25, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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"The Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training," n.p., c. 1928.

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"The South's Fundamental Need," n.p., 1915.

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Asheville Citizen-Times, "New Lee Hall To Be Built at Blue Ridge," December 11, 1966.

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2 pp.

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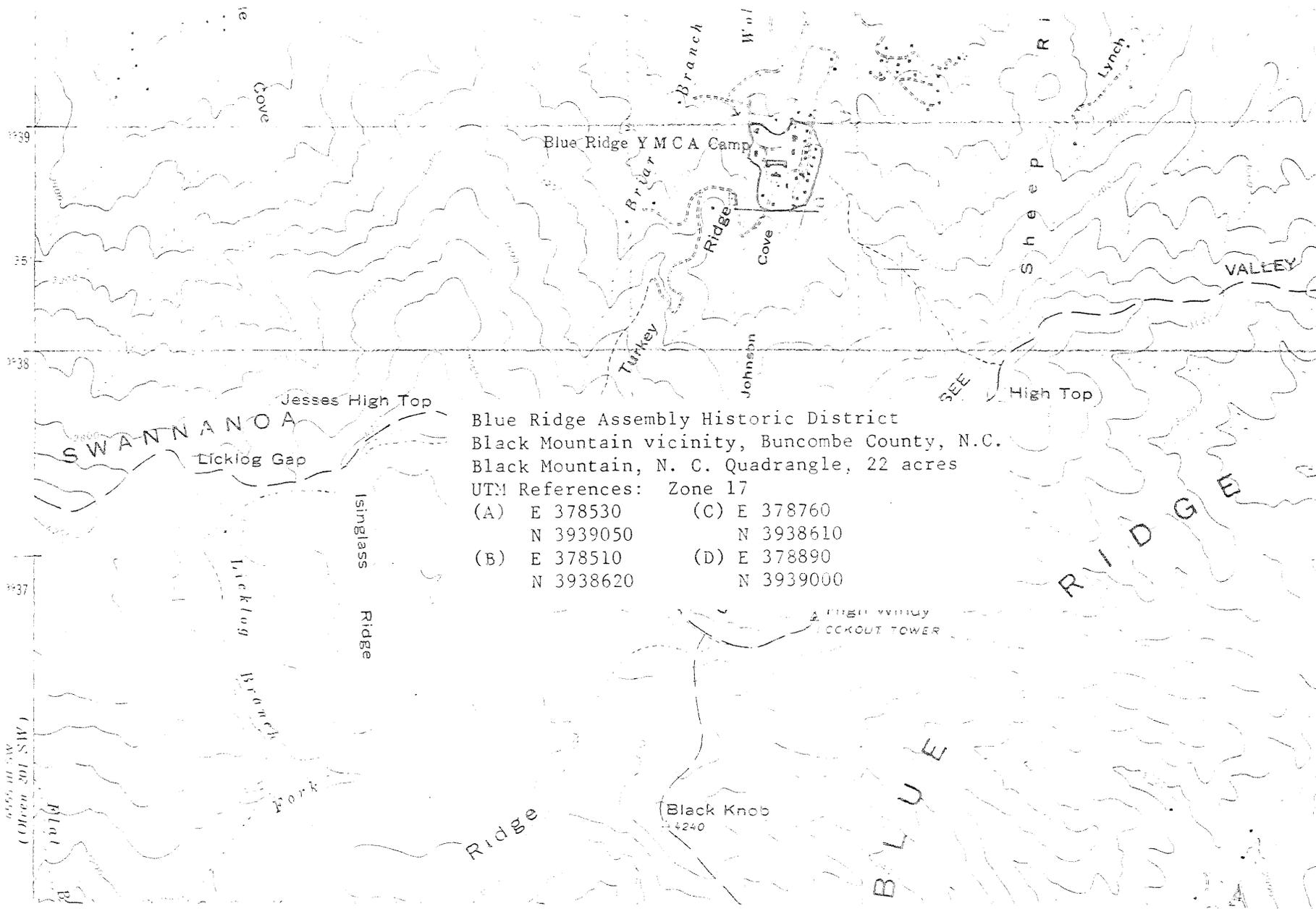
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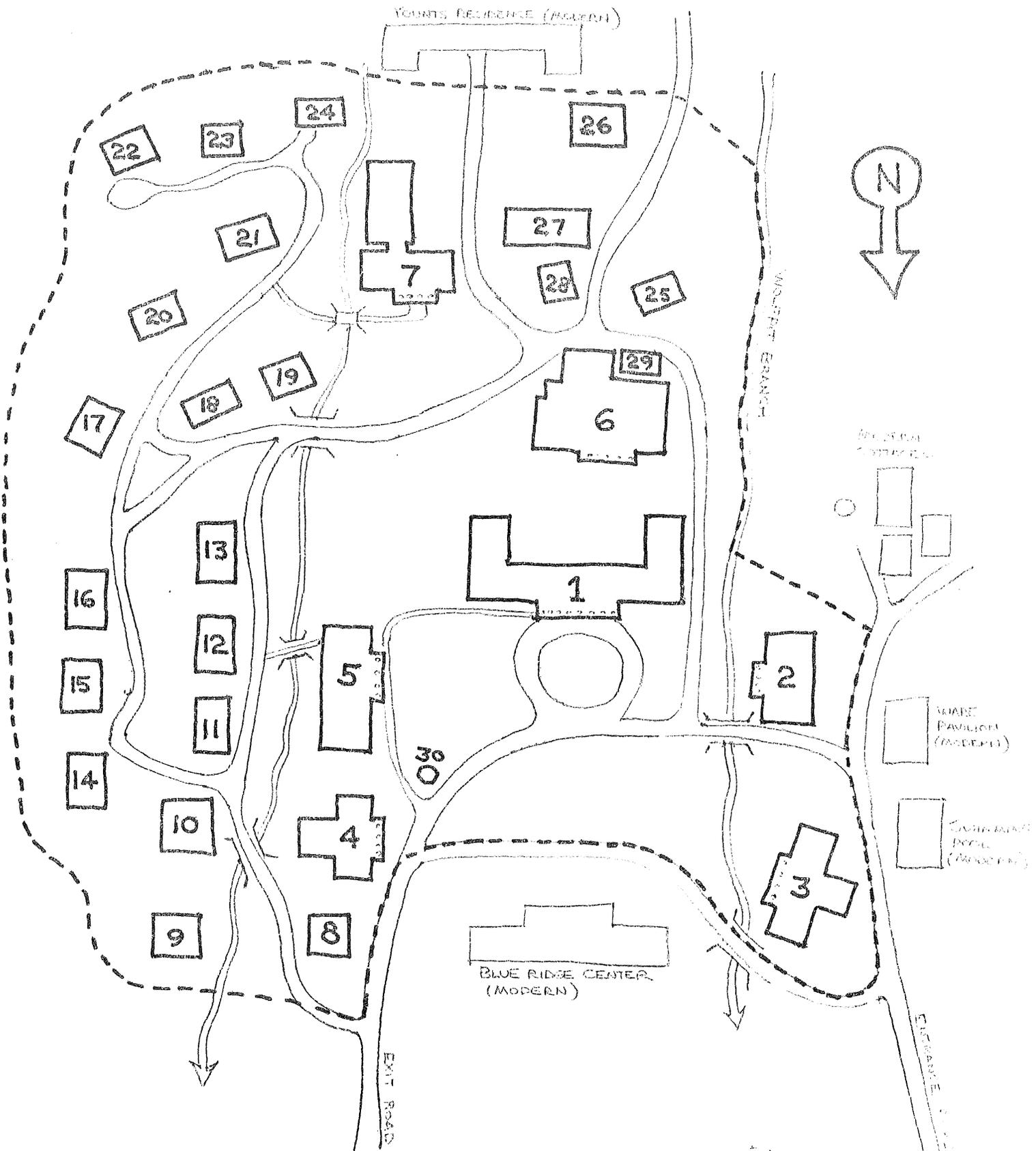
at the northwest corner of the complex, follow the access road east to the intersection with the Exit Road; then north along the Exit Road to the Cottages access road; then east, south, and west in a broad arc on a line that runs an average distance of 100 feet behind the easternmost and southernmost row of cottages, from Parker and Coker on the north to Booker T. Washington on the south, finally intersecting with Wolfpit Branch on the southwest corner of the Assembly; then north along Wolfpit Branch to a point due west of the southwest corner of Lee Hall; then on a line northwest to the Entrance Road Extension, then north along the Entrance Road back to the beginning.



Blue Ridge Assembly Historic District
 Black Mountain vicinity, Buncombe County, N.C.
 Black Mountain, N. C. Quadrangle, 22 acres

- UTM References: Zone 17
- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| (A) E 378530 | (C) E 378760 |
| N 3939050 | N 3938610 |
| (B) E 378510 | (D) E 378890 |
| N 3938620 | N 3939000 |

5555 m SW
 (Green 201)
 1959



BLUE RIDGE ASSEMBLY
 BLACK MOUNTAIN VICINITY
 BUNCOMBE COUNTY, N.C.
 MAY 1979

