**United States Department of the Interior**

**National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**

**Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3

**Summary Description**

The Covington Historic District is located in the city of Covington, in Alleghany County, Virginia. The district occupies approximately forty acres and includes most of the original forty-acre town plat. The district I essentially commercial in character and encompasses the principal historic commercial areas of the city located along Main Street and Maple Avenue. Also included within the boundaries are two small residential neighborhoods along Locust and Riverside streets. The historic architectural resources in the district include late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century commercial buildings, dwellings ranging in date from around 1820 until 1940, and governmental, educational, religious, industrial, and transportation-related buildings. Roughly three-quarters of the 140 buildings, sites and structures in the district are contributing.

**Town Plat**

Covington, Virginia, was laid out on a level terrace at the bend of the Jackson River in 1818. As originally platted, the town occupied a rectangular area of 900’ by 1,900’ (forty acres) oriented with the long dimension parallel to the river. One hundred and twenty quarter-acre lots were laid out along the town’s two principal streets: Water Street (now Riverside Street) and Bath Street (now Main Street). Lexington Avenue, which bounds the original town at its southwest end, corresponds to the preexisting east-west road on which Covington was strategically situated. When Alleghany County was formed in 1822, lots 61, 62, and 63 near the center of the town grid were set aside for the new county’s public buildings.

**Early Architecture**

Despite the rapid urbanization of Covington during the 1890s and early twentieth century, several buildings dating to the early years of the city’s development survive in the heart of the downtown. These early buildings, mostly dwellings and a few commercial establishments, are small in scale and domestic in form and employ traditional materials and construction techniques. Of the four surviving buildings built between the late 1810s and the early 1830s and located in the district, two are of log construction and two are brick. The log buildings include Merry Stand (441 W. Riverside street), said to have been built around 1817, and the 1825 William Scott House (239 W. Main Street). The brick buildings include the 1824 James Burk House (232 W. Riverside Street) and the Joseph B. Clark House (212 W. Riverside Street of about 1839. Located just outside the district is the Lynch-Damron House (130 W. Riverside Street; formerly known as the Henry Hoke House; VDHR Sties No. 107-6), a brick central-passage-plan I house that dates to the second quarter of the nineteenth century with a rear wing that is an earlier frame house which probably dates to the late 1820s. A sixth early building, the recently demolished Jacob Cunningham House of Riverside (107-11), was frame.

The surviving early buildings in the district are for the most part conventional in form and plan. All of them are a full two stories in height. The Scott and Clark houses have central passage plans. Somewhat unusual is the brick house built by tavern-keep James Burk in 1824. The Burk House has a side-hall plan and a narrow three-bay street façade that gives it the appearance of a town house, such as would have been built in the populous section of the more established towns of the period. Riverside Street failed to achieve the density that Burk apparently anticipated, and probably not long after he built his house Burk added a one-story brick wing on the north gable end, creating a less compact massing.

The exterior finishes and detailing of Covington’s surviving early building are relative refined. The Burk House in particular has sophisticated features, with Flemish bond brickwork, a dentil cornice, and stuccoed door and window lintels scored in imitation of masonry. The Scott House has beaded weatherboard siding, as did the now demolished Cunningham House.

Merry Stand, the William Scott House, and the James Burk House have sophisticated Federal-style interior detailing that is remarkable similar from house to house. All three houses have mantels with nearly identical rectangular frieze tablets containing modified sunburst motifs. The mantel pilasters and shelf moldings are subtly varied but are in each case richly embellished. In the Burk and Scott houses the staircases have delicate scrolls under the tread returns; again, this detailing is virtually identical from house to house, although in the Scott House the scrolls continue along the stairwell fascia. The staircases of the Burk and Scott houses also have slender turned newel posts and drops under the second-floor posts. The Burk House and Merry Stand have similar molded door surrounds with

turned corner blocks. The stylistic similarities that characterize Covington’s earliest interiors suggest that they were the work of a single craftsman who may have operated during a brief period in the late 1810s and early 1820s and whose work appears to have been locally restricted to Covington.

**Late-Antebellum Architecture**

The Covington taxable town lot lists of 1850 provide information on the extent and character of development in the town at that time. The lots between Riverside Street and the river were nearly all developed. Another concentration of buildings occurred along Main Street around the courthouse, roughly corresponding to Covington’s present central commercial district. The area around James Merry’s early store at the corner of Riverside and Lexington constituted the least developed section of town in 1850. This was probably due to the abandonment of the Lower Ford at the end of Lexington Avenue in favor of the Monroe crossing (provided with a bridge by the 1850s), and to a shift in the commercial focus of the town to the area around the county buildings on Main Street following the early 1820s.

A series of maps dating to the late-antebellum period shed more light on the architectural fabric of the town. Covington’s population in 1850 numbered roughly 250 free inhabitants, yet a map drawn by Charles B. Shaw of the Virginia Board of Public Works around 1850 shows that the town was still contained entirely with the original 120 lots. As with the tax records, the Shaw map indicates a concentration of buildings on Main Street, specifically on the 200 and 300 blocks centered on the courthouse. Several houses stood on the northwest side of Riverside Street, which by mid-century had clearly become secondary to Main Street. At the back of the lots on the northwest side of Riverside Street, the Shaw map shows a range of buildings fronting on an alley and the river bank and restricted to the area although small, are nevertheless represented as larger than the domestic out buildings on the map. Their sitting by the river suggests they may have been associated with river traffic.

Only two buildings built during the late-antebellum period survive in the district. These are the 1840s Callaghan House (301 W. Main Street) and the 1850s William W Lawrence House (W. Riverside Street). The Callaghan House is a two-story Flemish-bond brick dwelling with an I house form. Located across from the courthouse, the Callaghan House probably originally contained shops on the first floor; formerly it had a two-tier front porch. The Lawrence House is a two-story stuccoed frame dwelling with the I house form.

**Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Commercial and Institutional Architecture**

The major event in Covington’s post-bellum history was the arrival of the Virginia central Railroad in 1867. The railroad passed to the east and north of the town, crossing the Jackson River at a point upstream. By 1860, Maple Avenue, one of the town’s original cross streets, had been extended southeastward from the town to a point on the line where the depot was afterwards located. During the 1870s a secondary commercial district developed in the vicinity of the depot, and prominent among the buildings built there at that time was the McCurdy Hotel, a large two-story frame building under a hipped roof with multiple gabled dormers. The only building to survive from this early development in the depot vicinity is the 1873 Payne House (127 N. Maple Avenue) a hip-roofed two-story frame house and store with Italianate bracketed cornice.

During the 1890s, as a consequence of Covington’s integration the national rail network through consolidation by the Chesapeake and Ohio, a number of large industries located in and near the town. Industrialization generated growth - Covington’s population more than quadrupled during the 1890s – and several new residential neighborhoods were laid out adjacent to the original town. The original town itself was transformed as new commercial, institutional, and residential development took place.

The urbanization of Covington was most apparent on Main Street. Beginning in the 1890s, the small-scale log, frame, and brick buildings of earlier decade were largely supplanted by the contiguous brick and brick-faced buildings that characterize the street today. The earliest surviving commercial buildings are richly ornamented. The Rinehart Building (348-356 W. Main Street) is one of the handsomest of these early commercial establishments. Actually a bloc of three stylistically unified two-story brick buildings built around 1895, the Rinehart Building has quarry-faced stone quoining, pressed-metal cornices, and coupled windows with pediment pressed-metal surrounds. Also dating to the 1890s are two nearly contiguous two-story, hip-roofed brick commercial buildings at 379-383 W. Main Street and 239 N. Maple Avenue. Like the Rinehart Building, 379-383 W. Main Street employs quarry-faced stone as ornament and also has Queen Anne-style features such as a Palladian window with stained-glass panes in a roof former. Other notable brick commercial buildings dating to before 1902 include 368-370 W. Main Street, which has an elaborate corbelled parapet; 204 W. Main Street, which has a rusticated second story and an added third story with round-arched windows; and 215-227 N. Maple Avenue, a relatively utilitarian two-story block extended on the northwest side during the early twentieth century.

Several architecturally sophisticated neoclassical bank buildings built in Covington during the 1910s. The best preserved of these are the Covington Savings Bank (also known as the Peoples Bank; 386 W. Main Street) and the Covington National Bank (304 were W. Main Street), The Covington Savings Bank is the most imposing building in the district: a four-story high-rise faced with white architectural terra-cotta. Doric pilasters Frame the principal entry, which opens into a vestibule with stairs and an elevator to upper-floor apartments. Beyond the vestibule is the bank lobby containing white marble teller’s cage and two vaults (one, with a painted door, apparently moved from the original bank quarters across Main Street). The Covington National Bank is a three-story limestone-faced building with large arched lobby windows and cared or cast ornamental panels between upper-story windows.

A less academic neoclassicism expressed in brick characterizes the general run of commercial buildings built on Main Street during the 1910s. Three examples are the I.O.O.F. Building (376-382 W. Main Street, 361 W. Main Street and 369-375 W. Main Street, all of which share plastered second-story facades with coupled windows spanned by elliptical arches and fanlights. Not a commercial building per se but designed in a neoclassical idiom is the 1914 Covington Post Office at 211 W. Main Street. The building has an austere plastered Flemish bond street and was the work of Washington architect Oscar Wenderoth.

The third and last district phase of construction in Covington’s downtown took place during the 1920s. This phase was precipitated by a 1917 fire that gutted the majority of the building on the southeast-side of the 300 block of West Main Street. Two replacement buildings were built by 1920, but the rest (six in number) were built during the 1920s. The Brook Building (353-355 W. Main Street) and its neighbor on the north-east (343 W. Main Street) are the most elaborate of the group, with ornamental parapet profiles and cast-stone detailing. Other 1920s commercial buildings on the 300 block and elsewhere in Covington use in their construction dark colored, rough textured brick, often forming decorative bonds and patterns. The 1920s also saw the construction of a number of automobile dealerships in the district. Notable among these is the dealership at 229 W. Main Street, where Studebaker and Packard automobiles were sold during the 1920s.

The kinds of changes taking place on Main Street were also occurring in Covington’s secondary commercial district on Maple Avenue. During the early twentieth century, the frame commercial buildings of the last third of the nineteenth century were replaced by more permanent and generally large brick buildings. The largest of these is the 1910 Hotel Collins (116-126 S. Maple Avenue), a three story building with over fifty rooms. Next to the Hotel Collins is the 1920s Hippodrome Theater (128 S. Maple Avenue), a three story building with decorative parapet and brickwork and original ticket booth and storefronts. The C&O Railroad also renewed its own local building stock during this period. About 1914 the C&O built a Mission-style passenger station between Maple Avenue and the railroad tracks (107-16). This brick building has a ceramic tile hipped roof, large arched lobby door and window openings, and quatrefoil windows under the eaves, Near the 1914 station is a smaller, late-nineteenth century brick depot with a clipped gable roof and large freight doors surmounted by quarry-faced stone arches. This building may have served as a combination passenger and freight depot until the construction of the 1915 station, and as a freight station only afterwards. Also associated with the railroad is the Hawthorne Street Bridge that carries Hawthorne Street over the railroad tracks a block to the northwest of the depot area (`107-7). The Hawthorne Street Bridge is a metal single-truss Pratt bridge that was fabricated by the Phoenix Iron Company of Philadelphia, Pa. at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Increased growth in Covington and in Alleghany County generally led to increased institutional development and the need for improved governmental, educational, and religious facilities. Since the early 1820s Alleghany County’s public buildings occupied three lots on the corner of Main Street and Court Avenue in Covington. In 1910 the nineteenth-century brick courthouse on the public square was replaced by the present limestone building (266 W. Main Street), which has a massive Doric portico supported by stone columns and was designed by Richmond architect Charles M. Robinson (107-1), Next to the courthouse is the Alleghany County Jail (331 N. Court Avenue), a much altered and expanded brick building that may incorporate the 1890 sheriff’s house. Across Main Street from the county building is a range of one story early-twentieth-century law offices with a front porch and decorative/parapet brickwork (275 W. Main Street).

Several churches and one school building dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are located in the district. The school is the (former) Covington High School (158 N. Court Avenue), a two-story Neoclassical brick building with Corinthian porticos dating to about 1910. The churches include Sacred Heart Catholic Church 225 W. Main Street), which incorporates a late-nineteenth-century Methodist church building; Emmanuel Episcopal Church (100 block of N. Maple Avenue), which incorporates a late nineteenth-century church building into a larger complex of Gothic and Tutor inspiration; First Presbyterian Church (168 N. Maple Avenue), a 1924 brick Neoclassical building with Corinthian portico; an 1896 First Presbyterian Church building remodeled as the 1942 R.M. Loving Funeral Home (350 W. Riverside Street), a virtually unaltered brick building dating to 1902 that shows influences from the Gothic and Romanesque styles (107-7).

**Late-Nineteenth & Early-Twentieth Century Domestic Architecture**

Covington’s domestic architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is essentially conventional in form and detailing yet manifests some purely local characteristics, the trademarks of individual builders. Styles represented in the district include the Italianate, Queen Anne, Craftsman, Foursquare, Tudor, and Colonial Revival. In addition there are many turn-of-the-century houses that are Victorian in character but are not readily ascribable to any stylistic subcategory.

The Payne House (127 N. Maple Avenue) is one of two domestic examples of the Italianate style located in the district; the other is the house located at 157 N. Maple Avenue, which has bracketed and paneled main house and porch cornices. The majority of the houses in the district display later Victorian detailing and massing. The finest of these are the 1895 Virginia Payne House (308 W. Riverside Street; 107-10), a novelty-sided two-story frame dwelling with two-story bay window, wraparound porch, and Eastlake inspired cornice brackets; and the 1906 William E. Allen House (332 W. Riverside Street; 107-12), which has a brick first story and a wood-shingled second story.

Most of the generic Victorian houses in the district are located on the 100 and 200 blocks of North Court Avenue and the 200 block of West Locust Street. These two-story frame houses typically have hipped roofs with a prominent asymmetrical front gable embellished with decorative wood shingles or millwork or both. Many have large front parlor windows with fixed upper sashes bordered by small stained glass panes. Parlor windows like these occur on many houses outside the district, and appear to be the trademark of a building or construction firm active in Covington during the 1890s and possibly the first few years of the twentieth century. Another common feature of Covington’s turn-of-the-century houses is an exterior feature of textured stucco, left its original buff color or painted white. All of the houses discussed above are of frame or brick construction, but two houses in the district are constructed of rock-faced concrete block (147 N. Court Avenue and 219 W. Locust Street).

Beginning in the 1910s, houses in the various early-twentieth-century styles appeared in the district. The earlier of these are several Foursquare houses on West Riverside Street. During the 1920s Tudor-style houses and Craftsman-style bungalows appeared. The finest Tudor-style houses in the district were built at 314 and 318 W, Riverside Street and are brick with rough stone accents. Two good examples of the Craftsman style are located at 205 and 209 W. Locust Street. During the 1930s, several brick Colonial Revival-style houses were built on West Riverside Street and North Lexington Avenue.

**Summary**

The Covington Historic District includes buildings from all periods of the city’s development. These buildings are primarily commercial and residential in character, although there are also governmental, educational, religious, and transportation-related buildings. The majority of the buildings in the district, nearly 80 percent, date to the years between 1865 and 1940, the years of greatest growth in Covington. Roughly a third of the buildings built between 1865 and 1940 date to the period 1865 to 1900, a third to the period 1900 to 1920, and a third date to the 1920sqne 1930s. Over the entire seventy-five-year period two decades stand out as being especially prolific. Between 15 and 20 percent of all the buildings in the district (consisting mostly of houses) date to the boom decase of the 1890s. Another 15 to 20 percent (mostly commercial buildings) date to the 1920s. About 3 percent of the resources in the Covington Historic District date to the antebellum period; only about 15 percent of the buildings in the district date wholly to the period after 1940.

The high percentage of contributing buildings in the district reflects the fact that much of downtown Covington’s historic fabric is still intact. Most commercial buildings retain their original upper-story street fronts, although most street level storefronts have been altered, and few historic commercial interiors survive. At the larger scale of the street and block Covington’s commercial districts preserve considerable integrity, with virtually no gaps left by demolition and few modern intrusions. The character of Covington’s streetscapes has changed over the years – North maple Avenue was once lined by trees that are now gone – but some historic landscaping survive. Until the early twentieth century the area adjacent to the depot received heavy use and was left open and unpaved. With the construction of the new C&O Passenger Depot and the Hotel Collins in the 1910s, this area was planted with trees and ever since has had a park-like character.

Two small residential neighborhoods in the district, located along Riverside and Locust Street, have changed little since the end of the historic period, in part because they have continued in their traditional residential roles, and in part because more recent residential development has occurred on the outskirts of the city. The Locust Street neighborhood has only lost a few houses over the past fifty years. The older Riverside Street neighborhood has fared less well, with some parking lots appearing along its length, but fortunately these are small and discontinuous, and with the several small scale modern commercial and professional buildings on the street they have ot destroyed the historic character of the neighborhood.

**Footnotes**

1. This discussion of historic architectural resources in Covington is derived principally from two sources; the 1979 architectural survey of Alleghany County, Covington, and Clifton Forge undertakes by David Edwards of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission; and an architectural survey of downtown Covington undertaken in 1896 and 1987 by volunteers with the Alleghany Historical Society.
2. Another early log building in Covington, no longer extant stood on the 100 block of West Main Street. As illustrated in Gay Arritt’s Historical Sketches of the Alleghany highlands, this was a large two-story, v-notched building that is said to have served as Covington’s first courthouse in 1822 and later as a church and Masonic hall.
3. Historical photographs show a no longer extant brick building that may have been a contemporary of the Burk and Clark houses that stood at the north corner of Main and Maple. The two story, gable-roofed