

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic Alexander Inn

and/or common

2. Location

street & number N side SR 2435, 0.2 mi. W jct w/SR 2458 ☒ not for publication

city, town Swannanoa ☒ vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. Elizabeth Deal

street & number Box 629, Old US 70

city, town Swannanoa N/A vicinity of state North Carolina 28778

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds

street & number Buncombe County Courthouse

city, town Asheville state North Carolina 28807

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Buncombe County Historic Properties
title Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1978-79 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records N. C. Division of Archives and History, Western Office

city, town Asheville state North Carolina

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" 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
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Alexander Inn is a rambling two-story log and frame structure sited just north of the old east-west roadway in the Swannanoa Valley, about twelve miles east of Asheville, N.C. The inn is sited at a strategic point where the valley floor narrows to several hundred yards, and hence faces not only the old roadway but also the railroad, highway US 70, and Interstate 40--all of the major transportation links into Asheville from the east. The Black Mountains rise gradually to the north behind the inn, eventually cresting at Mt. Mitchell, eastern America's highest peak, less than fifteen miles away.

The inn was initially a small log structure built about 1820 by George C. Alexander. It was enlarged in several stages throughout the nineteenth century until it took its present form--a two-story main block, seven bays long with an engaged two-story porch under a simple gable roof, and with a one-story ell to the rear at its eastern end. A covering of asbestos shingles, added ca. 1950, provides a deceptively unified facade, as revealed on the building's rear elevation where the recent removal of a shed addition has exposed its various framing systems. The building has suffered extensively from termitedamage and poor maintenance, but still contains intact and salvageable fabric from all of its construction phases. Relatives of the present owner, a descendant of the builder, have expressed considerable interest in rehabilitating the structure and are presently searching for the means of achieving such a goal.

Framing material exposed on the inn's rear elevation suggests that the building was at first a two-story log house with an exterior rock chimney on its eastern gable end and with opposed doors approximately centered front and back. Half-dovetail cornering and mud daubing reflect the standard log building technology of the area. Although perhaps not weatherboarded immediately the log house received a heavy frame addition within a decade or so and presumably the ensemble was weatherboarded at that time. The addition was made to the west, chimney-free end of the house and included a dug-out cellar.

The two-story, double-pen structure that resulted from this initial expansion displays consistent Federal style detailing in its surviving original materials. Six-panel doors on strap hinges remain in each of the three exterior doorways. A molded cornice and chair rail survive in the west ground-floor room. This room also displays some original hand-planed board sheathing; the other rooms received match board sheathing in the late nineteenth century.

Board and batten doors survive in place on the second floor of this Federal period section of the inn. The original arched stone fire opening with simple board mantel shelf also survives on the second floor; the ground floor fireplace received a rustic stone remodeling early this century. Scars in the second-story floor suggest a boxed-in stairway rose in the southwest corner of the original log rooms.

Sometime during the third quarter of the nineteenth century--perhaps upon the transfer of the inn from father, George C. Alexander, to son, George N., in 1869, the building was doubled in size by the addition of a two-story saddlebag-plan section to the east of the original stone chimney. This was also apparently the time at which double-tier porches were added across the building's facade. The rafters in the Federal section were extended to engage the porches under a simple gable roof, and the boxed-in stairway was replaced by an exterior stairway tucked into the interstice occupied by the original chimney and opening onto the porches which became open-air hallways. Either at this point or later in the century, porch rooms were enclosed at the ends of both porches. The ground-level east end porch room was later removed, but the other three remain.

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DESCRIPTION

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The one surviving ground-floor mantel in the saddlebag addition is a heavy, Italianate composition with a curvilinear shelf, and the surviving original door--between the ground-floor rooms--is a similarly heavy, four-panel affair. Curiously, the second-floor mantels are lightly molded designs of a distinct Federal character, as if moved from the earlier wing of this building, or salvaged from another early nineteenth century structure. Second-floor doors are board and batten.

One guesses that a third major remodeling occurred during the latter years of the nineteenth century at which time the one-story kitchen ell was added to the rear at the east end of the inn, and a number of wall and ceiling surfaces were re-sheathed with match boards. Originally the ell featured an open porch to the east, which was eventually enclosed.

Twentieth-century alterations include the removal of a wall between the west ground-floor room of the saddlebag section and the ell, producing an enlarged room lighted from the west by triple french doors in the west wall of the ell. This enlarged room now serves as a residential "living room" and has recently been paneled and the fireplace enclosed. As mentioned above, the inn was covered in asbestos shingles about mid-century, and a late-nineteenth century shed addition behind the Federal section was recently removed allowing a reading of the wall framing in that area.

Windows in the inn are mostly two-over-two sash from the late nineteenth century, with some smaller four-over-four sash and a few four-pane sash installed singly as fixed or casement lights.

Of six small, kitchenless guest cottages that once served the inn, only three survive within the boundaries of the nominated property (two others survive outside the boundaries; the other was demolished). All three appear to have been constructed early in this century. One, to the west and rear, is a small, clipped gabled bungalow sheathed in novelty siding (a trailer is now parked beside it). Another, to the east, appears to have been a hip roofed double-pen plan building whose porch has been enclosed. It was weatherboarded. The last, to the east and in front of the inn, is a one-story L-plan cottage, originally weatherboarded and now partially covered with asbestos shingles.

A small building, said to have been Swannanoa's first post office and later a general store, was sited in front of the inn at roadside for many years. No trace of it remains today.

Tradition holds that a large rectangular stone in the yard of the inn was once the stepping stone for guests traveling by carriage. Though altered through the many years of its service as a farmhouse and roadside inn, and though presently in poor repair, Alexander Inn survives as the Swannanoa Valley's chief architectural link with its early nineteenth century history and especially with the history of transportation into Asheville and the mountains from the east. It displays a rich patchwork fabric reflecting the changing building technology as well as something of the vernacular interpretations of the architectural styles of the nineteenth century.

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 type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) tourism

Specific dates ca. 1820 and later **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Alexander Inn was built around 1820 by George C. Alexander. The inn is located in the Buncombe County community of Swannanoa, east of the county seat of Asheville. It is believed to be the oldest standing building in Swannanoa and one of the oldest such inns in the North Carolina mountains. Originally a modestly scaled two-story log structure, the inn was extended on either end by frame additions during the nineteenth century. The addition of an engaged double-tier porch across the building's facade during one of these remodelings produced a building form typical of mountain inns of the period. Architectural fabric from each of the inn's construction periods coexists in the building in its present form.

Alexander Inn was located on the main road into Asheville from the North Carolina piedmont and was a regular stage stop. It was also the residence of the Alexanders, who were relatively prosperous farmers. The inn has served as a tavern and a boarding house. The railroad, which arrived in the area in 1880, went nearby the inn and created a rush in tourists. Alexander Inn welcomed this new influx, as it did a similar influx created by the automobile in the 1920s. It suffered during the economic hard times of the 1930s, however, and gradually phased out commercial operations during that decade. The inn has not reopened but it is presently the residence of Mrs. Elizabeth Alexander Deal and her daughter, Mrs. Mary Garner.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- A. The history of Alexander Inn is inseparable from developments in transportation into the western North Carolina mountains and the effects of these developments on commerce and tourism. It is also representative of a definite building type: the roadside farm home which also served as an inn and traveler's rest.
- C. The Alexander Inn is the Swannanoa Valley's richest example of an early log structure overbuilt to accommodate changing tastes and an expanded functional program. Its final form, featuring an engaged double-tiered porch across its facade, is typical of nineteenth century mountain inns.
- D. The structure, of course, is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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Alexander's Inn is located in the Buncombe County community of Swannanoa, east of Asheville. The inn was built by George C. Alexander around 1820 and is still owned by his descendants. The inn, which was in operation as a commercial establishment into the 1930s, is believed to be the oldest building standing in Swannanoa and is one of the oldest inns in the North Carolina mountains.¹

George C. Alexander (1790-1880) was the son of James Alexander and Rhoda Cunningham Alexander. James Alexander was a Revolutionary War veteran who fought at Kings Mountain and was one of the justices of the peace who organized Buncombe County in 1792. George's brother James Mitchel Alexander built a prominent inn, called "Alexander's" or Alexander's Hotel" north of Asheville on the Buncombe Turnpike around 1828.² This inn should not be confused with the Swannanoa inn built by George C. Alexander. The latter was handbuilt by Alexander, who "made it of huge logs notched and fitted with the pegs, with floors and ceilings of boards."³

Although not located on the famous Buncombe Turnpike Alexander's Inn was located on the main road into Asheville from the east and was a regular stagecoach stop. Writing in 1859 Henry E. Colton observed that the Swannanoa route "simply as a road, and as a line of stages, . . . is the best by which Asheville can be reached from Eastern North Carolina."⁴ Referring to Alexander's Inn Colton remarked: "On the Swannanoa, Mr. George Alexander's is a pleasant stopping place. It is twelve miles from Asheville, situated very prettily, and with a very good view on all sides."⁵ Local tradition maintains that the inn was visited by a number of prominent travelers including Henry Clay. However, it is clear from contemporary accounts that it was not as highly regarded as Alexander's Hotel to the north of Asheville.⁶

The inn was the place of residence for Alexander and his family. He and his wife Elizabeth had at least six children: James, Orra, Thomas, George N., Rhoda, and William. The 1850 census lists Alexander's real estate as \$5,000 while in 1860 his real estate was valued at \$10,000 and his personal estate at \$19,500. The census consistently lists him as a farmer, rather than an innkeeper. In 1860 he owned 950 acres, 150 of which were under cultivation. He owned \$1,800 worth of livestock in that year, including 3 horses, 5 mules, 10 milk cows, 20 other cattle, 6 sheep, and 60 swine. He grew 1,200 bushels of corn and owned 10 slaves.⁷ It is not known if his slaves worked on the farm, in the inn, or both. Swannanoa's first post office was located nearby and was operated by his unmarried daughter Orra Alexander. When the post office was moved the building was operated as a general store for a period.⁸

In 1869 George C. Alexander sold the inn to his son George N. Alexander for five dollars.⁹ During the 1860s and 1870s Branson's North Carolina Business Directories list the establishment as a tavern. George C. Alexander continued to be listed as the proprietor. A visitor during this period describes Alexander as "a hale sprightly young man of eighty who, like all other farmers in the mountains 'took in' travelers, gave them an excellent supper and comfortable beds, and sent them on the next day."¹⁰ This passage indicates that the inn was not the sole source of income for the Alexanders and the 1870 and 1880 censuses confirm this. Both George C. Alexander and his son continued to farm and reside at the inn. In 1870 George C. had 200 acres under cultivation and had real estate valued at \$10,000 and personal estate at \$2,000.¹¹

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In 1880, after years of delay, Asheville was linked by rail with the Carolina piedmont to the east. The tracks went right by Alexander's Inn. Almost overnight stage traffic ceased. The advent of rail traffic into the mountains created a tourist boom of sizable proportions. Alexander's Inn welcomed the rail traffic and capitalized on the tourist boom by renovating and becoming a boarding house. In 1905 George N. Alexander sold the inn to Rufus D. and Carrie Davidson Alexander. Mrs. Alexander was related to the founders of Sherill's Inn, another prominent mountain inn.¹²

The automobile brought another surge of tourists into the area in the 1920s, many from Florida. These Florida visitors "built summer homes around its /the inn/ neighborhood without kitchens . . . but plenty of food at its famous groaning table of mountain raised food."¹³ The Great Depression of the 1930s forced the Alexanders to sell much of the surrounding property in order to pay taxes and eventually forced the closing of the inn. After the deaths of Rufus and Carrie Alexander the property was divided among their three surviving children. Mrs. Elizabeth Martin Alexander Deal inherited the inn and approximately six acres. Mrs. Deal resided in the inn with her husband Charles Edward Deal, an Asheville architect, and their two children Carolyn Elizabeth (Yates) and Mary (Garner). Mrs. Deal was the head dietician at Owen High School in Swannanoa. Mrs. Deal and Mrs. Garner continue to occupy the Inn.¹⁷

Alexander's Inn is believed to be the oldest surviving structure in the Swannanoa Valley and as such has local historical significance. It has other areas of importance, however. The inn survived three distinct periods of mountain trade and commerce. When it was constructed it was a small log building, located one day's journey of Asheville, serviced mainly by stagecoach traffic. It was also largely an adjunct to the Alexander's farming operation. The coming of the railroad in the 1880s created a new influx of tourists and the inn expanded to meet this demand. As the railroad made Swannanoa minutes from Asheville rather than hours the inn lost its function as a stop over and evolved into a boarding house to serve the new "summer visitors" to the area. It was in this capacity that the inn welcomed the automobile traffic of the 1920s and another new wave of visitors, many of these from Florida. During the 1920s and 1930s the inn largely catered to Florida tourists, many of whom returned on a yearly basis. The inn is thus illustrative of changes brought on the mountain area by advances in transportation.

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NOTES

¹Buncombe County Deed Book 15, p. 12.

²Foster A. Sondley, A History of Buncombe County (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company Publishers, 1977, reprint from 1930 edition), 743-746; Doug Swaim, Cabins and Castles (Asheville: City of Asheville; County of Buncombe; Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1981), 64, 148, hereinafter cited as Swaim, Cabins and Castles.

³Asheville Citizen-Times, July 17, 1960.

⁴Henry E. Colton, Mountain Scenery (Raleigh: W. L. Pomeroy, 1859), 21, hereinafter cited as Colton, Mountain Scenery.

⁵Colton, Mountain Scenery, 85.

⁶Colton, Mountain Scenery, 82-85; Asheville Citizen-Times, February 21, 1932; July 17, 1960.

⁷Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Population Schedule, Slave Schedule.

⁸Asheville Citizen-Times, February 21, 1932.

⁹Buncombe County Deed Book 34, p. 29.

¹⁰Levi Branson (ed.), North Carolina Business Directory (Raleigh: various publishers, published at irregular intervals from 1866 until 1897), 1868, p. 17; 1869, p. 22; 1878, p. 41, hereinafter cited as Branson, North Carolina Business Directory with appropriate year; Ina Woestemeyer and John J. Van Noppen, Western North Carolina Since the Civil War (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1973), 39-40. The Van Noppens do not identify the visitor.

¹¹Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, Agricultural Schedule; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule.

¹²Asheville Citizen-Times, February 21, 1932; July 17, 1960; Swaim, Cabins and Castles, 77-79, 148; Branson, North Carolina Business Directory, 1896, p. 120; 1897, p. 120; Buncombe County Deed Book 139, p. 346. Rufus Alexander purchased the inn and land from George C. Alexander for \$4,200. George C. Alexander and wife Sarah apparently had no children. Present family members believe that Rufus Alexander was a nephew of George C. Alexander's although he may have been a cousin. Telephone interview with Dr. Mary C. Yates, January 11, 1983, notes in file. Dr. Yates is a granddaughter of the current owner.

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¹³ Asheville Citizen-Times, July 17, 1960.

¹⁴ Information supplied by Dr. Mary C. Yates.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \pm 4.0 acres

Quadrangle name Oteen, N. C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

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3	7	4	6	0	0
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3	9	4	0	7	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached plat. Boundary of nominated property drawn in red.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Description by Doug Swaim, Preservation Specialist, N. C. Division of Archives and History; Significance by Jim Sumner, Research Specialist, N. C. Division of Archives and History

organization N. C. Division of Archives and History date July 14, 1983

street & number 109 E. Jones Street

telephone 919-733-6545

city or town Raleigh

state North Carolina 27611

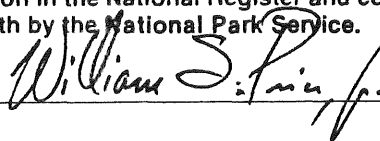
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ 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



title State Historic Preservation Officer

date March 19, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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North Carolina, Population Schedule; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860,
Buncombe County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Population Schedule, Slave
Schedule; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Buncombe County, North Carolina,
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and History.

Van Noppen, Ina Woestemeyer and John J. Western North Carolina Since the Civil War.
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Yates, Dr. Mary. Telephone interview with. January 11, 1983. Notes in file. Dr. Yates
also supplied genealogical information for the family. She is a granddaughter of
the present owner.

