

## Virginia Department of Historic Resources PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the proposed district for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the district could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

<b>General Property Information</b>	For Staff Use Only DHR ID #: 083-5153
District Name(s): <u>Dante Downtown Historic District</u>	
District or Selected Building Date(s): <u>1930</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post              Open to the Public? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Main District Streets and/or Routes: <u>Bunchtown Road, Staright Hollow Road, &amp; Lower Bear Wallow Road</u> City: <u>Dante</u> Zip: <u>24237</u>	
County or Ind. City: <u>Russell</u> USGS Quad(s): <u>St. Paul</u>	

<b>Physical Character of General Surroundings</b>	
Acreage: <u>4.15</u> Setting (choose one): <input type="checkbox"/> City <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Corridor	
Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features/Streetscapes: The district is a 4.15-acre area at the core of the historic coal town and the junction of several small county roads including Bunchtown Rd., Lower bear Wallow Rd., Straight Hollow Rd and the residence-lined Back St. It occupies a the small flat area, limited by surrounding steep, wooded slopes, along Lick Creek and the former Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway (C.C.&O.) line, now operated by CSX Corp.	
Ownership Categories: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public-Local <input type="checkbox"/> Public-State <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal	

<b>General District Information</b>	
What were the historical uses of the resources within the proposed district? Examples include: Dwelling, Store, Barn, etc...	
It was the main point of commerce for the residents of Dante and included many things such as a hotel, train depot, company store, theatre, bank, post office, steam heat building and many more things.	
What are the current uses? (if other than the historical use)	<u>Downtown park and museum with post office and apartment building.</u>
Architectural styles or elements of buildings within the proposed district:	<u>The styles of the buildings are typical of their period of construction in and around the 1930s. The steam building has noticeable Italian carved stone work.</u>
Architects, builders, or original owners of buildings within the proposed district:	<u>Clinchfield Coal Company was the original builder of all the properties</u>
Are there any known threats to this district?	<u>Vacancy and neglect of some resources has been a big problem up to the present, but there is hope for the future.</u>

**General Description of District:** (Please describe building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district and a general setting and/or streetscape description.)

The Dante Downtown Historical District is currently made up of six structures, five of which are buildings that were built by the Clinchfield Coal Company in its prime. From available records it appears all of the remaining structures were built in the late 1920s to early 1930s. The district sets with steep mountains in all visible directions and was the central hub for the Dante community when Clinchfield Coal Company built the town. The train depot, company store, post office, movie theater, steam building, car dealership, dry cleaners, bank and motel are among the structures that once stood upon this area. From that time till now all that remains are the train depot, bank, post office, dry cleaner and steam building.

The steam building still stands in relatively good condition. It is a brick and stone structure that has hand carved Italian stone work accenting the brick work of the building. It may be the oldest structure remaining with photos showing it in use in the 1920s. It was once home of the steam heater that heated most of the structures listed above and several of the nearby homes thru pipes buried below the surface. It served many years after that as a garage and was a part of the car dealership that was located in town. The bank building sits adjacent to the steam building. History shows that the brick structure was built in the 1920s and is currently home of the Dante Coal and Railroad Museum. The bank closed in 1931 due to The Great Depression and was home to a beer garden and then served as a teen center for many years before becoming museum as it currently is.

Directly beside the museum is the building that served as the dry cleaners and press building. The small two story brick structure also appears to have been built in the same time frame and is currently used as a storage space. The outside of the building as a mural of a train loaded with coal winding through the mountains.

Across a small bridge and into the heart of downtown Dante is the Train Depot was built in 1930 and is a single story brick structure. It is the second depot built in the town as it replaced the original wooden depot that was built in 1910. This was built to be a better constructed, more modern depot to serve passengers taking the train from as far as Erwin, TN to Elkhorn City, KY. The depot is currently in the process of an ownership change so restoration of the building can begin.

Across the road from the train Depot is the post office and apartments. The right hand side of the structure is where the post office currently is with a vacant commercial space next to it that was once home of the general store. This part of the building was built after World War II to accommodate a dress shop, pharmacy and offices. In later years well after the motel was gone and Clinchfield Coal Company sold to Pittston Coal Company a large extension was built onto the building which served as the headquarters for Pittston for many years. In recent years People, Inc. gained ownership of the building and it now has several apartments in it.

**Significance Statement:** Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the proposed district. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Please list all sources of information. Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

The Town of Dante came to be through the Clinchfield Coal Company. The coal company built most every home and structure in Dante in its infancy. During its prime in the 1930s, Dante boasted a population of over 4,000 residents. It had the largest population of any community in Russell County for many years. Dante was also home to the first electrical power plant in Russell County.

The Clinchfield Coal Company was formed by George L. Carter. Mr. Carter was an ambitious man who is credited with forming the Clinchfield Coal Company, as well as as being a major part of the formation of East Tennessee State University through assisting with its organization and selling his Johnson City, TN farm to the school for it to be built. Carter is also credited with the formation of the Clinchfield Railroad. He purchased the Ohio River Railroad and Charleston Railroad and renamed them the Clinchfield Railroad. Carter developed a plan to connect the railroads and built the 35 mile extension from Dante to Elkhorn City, KY that opened up the Midwest to the Eastern Seaboard.

One of the first Vice-Presidents of Operations for Clinchfield Coal Company was Lee Long. Mr. Long helped grow Dante to its largest point of a population of over four thousand residents in the 1930s. Along with his work for Clinchfield Coal Company, Mr. Long served as a member of the Breaks Reserve and Reforestation Association which helped add the 130,000 acres of Breaks Interstate Park to the Jefferson National Forest. He also served as President of the Appalachia League of coalfield baseball teams.

2008 Cost Share survey (WMCAR): Prior to its growth as a major coal company town, Dante was a tiny rural settlement called Turkey Foot (so named for the three branches of Lick Creek that form distinct “toes”) that was established by the Philips family. After the Civil War, local farmers began selling mineral rights, typically around 50 cents per acre, to coal companies. Eventually Turkey Foot was sold to the Tazewell Coal and Iron Company. With no railroad in or out of the area, the company failed to succeed. Thus, the land was sold again in 1901, at \$18 per acre, to entrepreneur Stilson Hutchins. Hutchins quickly recognized the need for adequate transportation linkages. He organized the Lick Creek and Lake Erie Railroad and built a line down to St. Paul. In 1903, he began to build up the town and renamed it in honor of his business associate William Joseph Dante. The early company town was outfitted with a hotel, a company store, a steam-heat plant, and some basic worker housing. When the Clinchfield Coal Company organized in 1906, it established its headquarters in Dante and took over production of the town. Immigrants, largely Hungarian, Italian, and Polish, were already heavily employed to build the railroad and construct the mining camps. Dante quickly became one of the largest coal communities in southwestern Virginia, employing around 4,000 people at its peak during World War I, and even out-ranked St. Paul in size. Dante rose in status to become the economic engine, and largest town, of Russell County. The company town was replete with black and white schools and churches, a company store, a pharmacy, a hospital, a theatre, a bank (later a beer garden), a baseball field, a depot, and rows upon rows of worker cottages, which were constructed along the creek branches and the railroad tracks that pass through the narrow hollows. “These hollers around here are very narrow. All the houses are built similar because it was a mining camp. On the backside of the houses was a creek, and then the row of houses and the road, the track, and another row of houses. So you just fit in right between two mountains.” Neighborhoods and quality of housing was divided into race or ethnicity (i.e. African-American, Hungarian etc.) and company status. The workers resided in smaller single or double houses near the mines, while managers lived in larger dwellings upon the hillside overlooking the town. The churches in town were particularly prominent, featuring Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Catholic congregations. Due to the fact that Dante was never officially incorporated, the town collapsed when the company closed the mines after World War II. A large exodus of workers left many cottages abandoned, and a number of buildings, including the company store, the theatre, and the hospital, were torn down. Although waning in integrity and varying in levels of deterioration, much of the housing stock still stands as do several of the original churches. The original bank building turned beer garden now houses a historical museum, and several other buildings, including a circa 1950 store, an abandoned school, the depot, and the steam heat plant, remain at the center of the town.

**Sponsor** (Individual and/or organization, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please use a separate sheet.)

Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Dante Community Association		
	(Name)		
P.O. Box 671	Dante	VA	24237
(Address)	(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)
jarred@danteva.org	(276) 415-0150		
(Email Address)	(Daytime telephone including area code)		

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Jarred Glass, Tourism and Economic Development Committee Chair

Daytime Telephone: (276) 393-8431

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form)

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>	Jarred Glass		
Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Miss <input type="checkbox"/>	(Name)	(Firm)	
428 Clairmont Circle	Castlewood	VA	24237
(Address)	(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)
jarred@danteva.org	(276) 393-8431		
(Email Address)	(Daytime telephone including area code)		

Applicant's Signature:

Date: 01/17/2017

**Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. <input type="checkbox"/>	Lonzo Lester			County Administrator
Miss <input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Hon. <input type="checkbox"/>	(Name)	(Position)		
Russell County	P.O. Box 1208			
(Locality)	(Address)			
Lebanon	VA	24266	(276) 889-8000	
(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)	(Daytime telephone including area code)	

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this district.

In 2016 the Dante Community Association was organized as a non-profit to work on the revitalization of the Dante community. While revitalizing the area to find a purpose since the downturn of coal it is still important that we preserve what is left of our heritage and history of the coal town that Dante was and the impact it had on the region.

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes  No

Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes  No



Back St

Straight Hollow Rd

Bunch Town Rd

Lower Bear Wallow Rd

Roanoke Hill Rd

083-5120

083-5132

083-5153

083-5131

083-5119

083-5118