PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No.	(to	be completed	by DHR	staff)	108-6187	

Purpose of Evaluation

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

The Almagro Resource Center is seeking a National Register eligibility evaluation to underwrite the historic significance and integrity of this formerly independent, Reconstruction and Growth Era African American neighborhood. The City of Danville is presently engaged in implementing a master plan that proposes additional residential and commercial construction throughout the historic village. New development can be undertaken with sensitivity to the historical trajectory of Almagro's evolving character.

1. General Information
District name(s): Almagro Historic District
Main Streets and/or Routes: South Main Street, Industrial Avenue, Broadnax Street, Betts Street
Walters Mill Road
City or Town: Danville
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Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: <u>Danville</u>
2. Physical Aspects
Acreage:~280
Setting (choose only one of the following):
Urban Suburban <u>X</u> Town Village <u>X</u> Hamlet Rural
Briefly describe the district's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

Almagro is a suburb on the south side of Danville established as a distinct locality by African Americans during Reconstruction and annexed by the city in 1932 (Figure 1). The Richmond and Danville Railroad, the construction of which began in 1848, historically marked the city's southern limits, and it continues to define Almagro's northern boundary. South Main Street defines the district's western boundary. Lincoln Street defines the eastern boundary. The irregular southern boundary is defined by property lines beginning in the southeast with Oak Hill Cemetery and proceeding west through the woods following parcels on the south side of Lamar Street, the ends of Smith Street, Vassar Street, and Slade Street, and along the south side of Broadnax Street to the intersection with South Main Street (Figure 2).

The terrain within Almagro is largely defined by a northeast trending ridge that rises between Jackson Branch, that flows east through the northern part of the district, and Pumpkin Creek about one mile to the south. Both empty into the Dan River approximately one mile east of Almagro (Figure 3).

The main route through Almagro follows the ridgeline from the southwest corner of the district. It begins at South Main Street and runs northeast as Broadnax Street for about one third of a mile. The route crosses Slade Street and continues as Betts Street for about a quarter mile through the district's highest elevations and Almagro's institutional core past a hospital, two churches, several houses, former commercial properties, and a historic school on Smith Street. Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of VA F & A Masons No. 217 stands at the end of this stretch on the east side of Mabin Street and the north side of Betts Street opposite the formerly location of the eponymous Betts family home and caddy-corner from the lot that formerly housed the family's grocery store. From here the route continues as Betts Street and begins a quarter-mile descent northeast to a narrow northerly gully which defines the western edge of Oak Hill Cemetery. The route turns southeast here, at the cemetery's historic entrance, where Bee Street becomes Cemetery Road, and rises as Walters Mill Road along the eastern edge of the cemetery for one half mile before ending at Lincoln Street, the border between Almagro and the Liberty Hill neighborhood.

Almagro is bordered on the southwest by Grove Park, a residential neighborhood of a different character developed during the 1950s for sale to White residents. This latter neighborhood presents a comparative contrast to Almagro in the content and character of its buildings and circulation. A wooded area encompassing about 100 acres extends east from Grove Park with terraced slopes and road traces extending south from Almagro lined with rectangular lots. Evidence for historical archaeological sites has been observed on some of these lots. An aerial photograph captured in 1955 shows occupation in this area (Figure 4)

Dee Street provides access to Almagro from Lincoln Street north of Walters Mill Road and south of Industrial Avenue. Industrial Avenue is a major thoroughfare that traverses the northern part of the district between and paralleling the railroad and Jackson Branch. Few individual historic properties are preserved along this corridor although it retains its industrial character and function.

On the west side of the district, Flint Street, Dudley Street, and Hughes Street provide access from South Main Street below Industrial Avenue and north of Broadnax Street.

Direct access to Almagro from north of the railroad between South Main Street and Lincoln Street is provided by Holbrook Avenue and Jefferson Street. By way of Holbrook Avenue, Holbrook-Ross Historic District (DHR ID No. 108-0180) is just over a half mile north of Almagro.

Jefferson Street defines the western boundary of Green Hill Cemetery (DHR ID No. 108-0058-0619) north of the railroad from Lee Street to the tracks (Figure 5). Crossing the railroad, Jefferson Street enters the northeastern part of the district to intersect with Aye Street at Almagro's lowest elevations in an area subject to flooding of Jackson Branch.

Oak Hill Cemetery (DHR ID No. 108-6188) occupies a distinctive rolling upland encompassing the southeastern ~30 acres of the district (about 10 percent by area) directly south of Almagro's lowest elevations. By contrast, the western third of the district features a broad lowland of about the same size (~30 acres). This basin is traversed by Foster Street and occupied by E.A. Gibson Elementary School on the west and a currently undeveloped greenspace, formerly part of Peter's Park/Almagro Baseball Stadium on the east. The Boys and Girls Club building at the corner of Foster Street and Branch Street is a recent addition to the east side of the basin. Foster Street was historically named Spring Street and the 1877 *Topographic Map of Danville*, *Pittsylvania*, *Co.* by F.W. Beers, C.E. shows the northerly spring fed tributary that created the basin from its head to its confluence with "Jackson's Branch" (Figure 6).

The terracing created to accommodate buildings on the ridge slopes is a notable feature of Almagro's historic cultural landscape. These modifications are vividly apparent in bare-earth digital elevation models derived from LiDAR data and correspond to parcel boundaries platted by at least 1877 (Figure 7).

3.	Architectural/	'Physical	Description
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Architectural Style(s): Mostly vernacular with little or no traditional styling; Folk Victorian;
Craftsman; Italianate
If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect engineer, or other professional, please list here:
If any builders or developers are known, please list here:
Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): <u>c.1880 - 1964</u>
Are there any known threats to this district? Neglect: redevelopment

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district.

Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district.

Almagro is primarily a residential district built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are about 746 tax parcels within the district. Approximately 300 parcels contain extant buildings. Of these, approximately 270 parcels are estimated to contain architectural resources contributing to the district (Figure 8). Most properties are one- or one and a half-story, single-family houses on rectangular lots; few lots are larger than 0.1 acre. There are some two-story houses, some duplexes, and at least one possible multifamily building. Houses face streets from setbacks generally less than 40 feet. Vernacular folk forms predominate including hall and parlor, gable and wing, I-house, pyramidal and massed-plan, side-gabled, and gable-front shapes (see neighborhood views photograph collection; McAlester 2020). Ornamental detailing and styled elements are rare and modestly and presented but express Folk Victorian, Craftsman, and Italiante traditions. There are some brick ranch houses in the district that are generally found clustered together.

Neighborhood streets descend either side of the ridgeline quickly, and even steeply in the eastern half of the district, between terraced lots that impart a grounded stability to the landscape. Retaining walls are common. The physical elevations of buildings on either side of these streets sometimes vary considerably. House foundations vary along the same block and range from full to partly exposed basements, brick piers, cement block, and, in one instance, wood stilts. Cement blocks have been added to support most older houses on brick piers. These modified foundations are commonly painted or parged. Approaches to residences from the road likewise vary with terrain and preference and include paved walkways, stairs of wood, stone, brick, concrete, or cement steps rising or descending to one or more landings. Some post-annexation residences were built with garages or carports, and some lots with earlier properties have had driveways added.

Frame houses in traditional folk forms with replaced siding are most common. Brick veneers have even been added to some formerly weatherboarded properties. Some original standing seam metal roofs appear to be preserved, some have been replaced with newer standing seam metal roofs, and others with asphalt shingles. Most retain their chimneys. Rear shed-roof additions are very common. Additions to lateral elevations are somewhat common.

Covered front porches, on brick piers, wood posts, cement masonry blocks or poured cement, are nearly ubiquitous as original elements and additions. Decorative iron porch roof supports are very common. Square and turned wooden posts and rails, or square or tapered wood or brick column porch roof supports are present on some residences.

Betts Street travels through the civic center of Almagro among historic buildings housing or formerly housing important institutions. Shiloh Baptist Church sits at the highest elevation in the district facing southeast. Zion Holiness Church sits at the western end of the core and the cement block Masons Lodge sits at the eastern end. Both churches are brick and Zion Holiness Church is entirely stuccoed.

The core of Almagro Training School was built before 1915 just around the corner from Shiloh Baptist Church, operating as a school for Black students until shortly after E.A. Gibson Elementary School was built in 1951.

Winslow Hospital was dedicated in 1943 as the medical center treating Black patients, replacing Providence Hospital on the north side of the railroad.

A barber shop was located across from Zion Holiness Church in a vacant lot with associated archaeological deposits. A dentist's office was formerly located in the large two-story multifamily residential building on the south side of Betts Street southwest of Shiloh Baptist Church, was a mixed-use property. This may be the only building with a first-story storefront facade.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

Almagro is an organized Reconstruction and Growth Era suburb and continues to be a primarily residential district of properties owned and occupied in the majority by African Americans including descendant families. Lots are laid out along regular streets in a slightly warped grid that had largely been established by 1877 (see Figure 6).

An article published in the Richmond Planet on 1922 May 27, 1922, related,

We went over to Mrs. M. [Mary] E. Bethel's residence and the ladies remained there in Almagro. This village is occupied exclusively by colored people. The roads will attract the attention of nay automobilists. Cars can be tested here with the absolute knowledge that if they can travel the Almagro streets in safety and without broken springs they rank with the best...Mud is guaranteed in wet weather to be axle deep, and while getting in is easy, getting out is difficult. It is far better to leave your car near the highway and walk than it is to ride in with the changes of staying in until help comes to get you out.

Almagro streets are paved today. Sidewalks are rare except for the east side of South Main Street and the district's western boundary. The 160 feet stretch of Old South Main Street in the northwesternmost corner of the district also have a sidewalk. Short spans extend in front of Winslow Hospital and Shiloh Baptist Church

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 4 5/14/2024 Rev. July 2020

on Betts Street, and several sections of Industrial Avenue have sidewalks including the stretch along E.A. Gibson Elementary School in the west and in front of warehouses in the east.

Grass lawns, hedges, ornamental shrubs, and mature trees are common on residential lots. Lots from which buildings and structures have been removed are generally densely wooded or denuded grassy areas. Most of these likely contain historical archaeological deposits. House ruins, machinery, and other evidence of archaeological sites are preserved on undeveloped properties in all parts of Almagro including numerous parcels in the wooded south-central portion of the district.

The two extant churches in Almagro along the main road at the center of the district, Shiloh Baptist Church and Zion Holiness Church, continue to serve active congregations. Earlier churches appear elsewhere on historical maps but have been demolished, including an A.M.E. Church built on Epps Street (formerly named Church Street) before 1915 and another that appears on the 1951 Sanborn insurance map behind where E.A. Gibson Elementary School now stands. Both locations may contain preserved archaeological deposits.

The Almagro Training School building was most recently used as the Almagro Community Center. It is currently vacant and poised for adaptive reuse. As is Winslow Hospital which closed in closed in 1968 and was reopened as an assisted living facility named Winslow Loving Care that closed in 2014. The building is currently vacant amid plans for reuse and/or redevelopment.

E.A. Gibson Elementary School continues to serve as a public school. The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of VA F & A Masons No. 217 remains in use by the organization.

4. District's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the district, such as when it was established, how it developed over time, and significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.) Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

If the district is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Almagro began as a Reconstruction Era Black village. Black property owners named on the 1877 *Topographic Map of Danville, Pittsylvania, Co.* by F.W. Beers, C.E. are also enumerated in the 1870 and 1880 federal censuses and listed in the 1867 *Colored Poll Book for District No. 5, Pittsylvania County.* Some of these names are shared among families living in Almagro today. The 1877 plat is also largely preserved in the present grid. Street names in Almagro that were already used for Danville streets were changed after the 1932 annexation to recognize the contributions of early and influential Black residents. For example, High Street was rechristened as Betts Street, and Church Street as Epps Street.

A currently vacant parcel at the southeast corner of Betts Street and Epps Street is attributed to Bartlett on the 1877 map and owned by a Bartlett descendant today, by name. Structures from this early period may be preserved within some extant properties. For example, the building on the property at 1218 Branch Street is labelled "Toney's Est." on the 1877 map may be preserved within the evolved house that stands there today (Figure 9).

At least some of Almagro's first property owners had been enslaved. Research by Danville historian, Gary Grant (2001) found that,

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 5 5/14/2024 Rev. July 2020 In June, 1873, William T. and Jane E. Sutherlin conveyed to "Henry Sergeant (freedman) lot #30" (H. Sergeants on the Beers Map). Situated "south east from Danville and a little beyond Jacksons Branch...on a street laid off and to be known as Church Street," the one-fifth-acrelot cost \$50.

Major Sutherlin is a well-known historical figure in Danville who enslaved people before the Civil War. He is recognized especially for hosting Confederate President Jefferson Davis after the evacuation from Richmond. Likewise, Captain Azariah J. Walters was also a prominent historical figure and pre-Civil War enslaver with large property holdings. His household appears in the 1870 census living within Almagro. Ina Jackson's (2022) research found,

In June of 1885, Mr. [Capt. Azariah J.] Walters sold a tract of land on the corner of High (now Betts) and Tilden Street, "in the village of Jacksonville," to the trustees of Shiloh Baptist Church (Robert Chambers, Henry Davis, and Andrew Jackson) for \$330.32."

Nineteenth-century Almagro was recognized as a distinct village with social, educational, and religious institutions, funeral homes and a cemetery, sports and entertainment facilities, diverse employment and commerce, groceries and other necessary stores, medical specialists and facilities, a judiciary, and a post office. The vibrance of the community was expressed by *Richmond Planet* editor John Mitchell, Jr. in an 1890 editorial, "What the Editor Saw – Enterprising Colored Men – A Growing City – Milestones of Progress."

Black-owned business in Almagro can be traced to at least 1883 (Gottleib 2016). Early resident Alexander Epps was a businessman and served as an elected justice of the peace for the Tunstall Magisterial District from 1897 to 1905. Epps is enumerated as a merchant and homeowner in the 1900 Federal census. "Alex. Epps, Wood Yard." and the immediate surroundings are among the few properties south of the railroad shown on the July 1899 Insurance Maps Danville Pittsylvania County Virginia by Sanborn-Perris Map Co. (Figure 10). The operation sat on the east side of Holbrook Avenue on the south side of the railroad and held stables, a sawmill, scales, a general store, a blacksmith, a saloon, and a grocery store. All the buildings were single-story. A frame awning ran along facades and covered the entrances to the general store, saloon, and grocery toward the south end of the block.

All residents are listed as either Black or Mulatto by the 1880 census. The number of families enumerated in Almagro increased progressively between 1870 and 1930. A dip in the number of households enumerated in Almagro between 1900 and 1910, is recouped by a spike between 1920 and 1930.

As related by Gary Grant (2001),

Almagro was the largest of several African American neighborhoods in Danville and vicinity early in the 20th century. Liberty Hill was immediately adjacent, Colemantown was just across South Main Street, and Brucetown was nearby on lower West Main. Along Union Street, not far from downtown and the river, was Mechanicsville. Other communities included a prosperous enclave of black tradesmen, merchants, and professionals on Holbrook and Ross streets. North of the river, Camp Grove, Crooktown, and Lucktown developed as old Neapolis.

The number of households in Almagro increased from around 50 in 1870 to around 750 by 1930 drawn from an overview of Federal censuses. Most houses in Almagro were built during this period as well as the buildings within the commercial and institutional core of the district seated at the highest elevations along Betts Street with Shiloh Baptist Church standing at the highest point. Notably, historic aerial imagery shows

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 6 5/14/2024 Rev. July 2020 the large single-story gable-front residences on Branch Street in the north and south of Lamar Street on Epps Street were constructed in the 1950s though their form, materials, and style may suggest and earlier date.

Tobacco factories were the primary employers for working Almagro residents through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Residents were also employed as waggoners, day laborers, farm laborers, shoemakers, basket makers, carpenters, coopers, cashiers, clerks, cooks, and servants. Certainly, some of these jobs were associated with local Almagro businesses.

Almagro Training School was built on Smith Street around the corner from Shiloh Baptist Church before 1915. It is not yet clear whether the "Jackson Branch Public Schools" [sic] refered in an 1899 editorial by Richmond Planet editor John Mitchell Jr. is this institution. According to L. Beatrice W. Hairston's A Brief History of Danville, Virginia, 1728-1954,

Just outside of the city, Almagro Training School served some of the students living in rural Pittsylvania County. Mrs. Avicia Hooper-Thorpe, former English teacher in the Danville public schools, attended Almagro Training School and graduated in 1924. She recalled that the school had only eleven grades. After completing these grades, she enrolled in and completed the twelfth grade at the Industrial High School, a parochial school supported by the Presbyterian Board of Education. This was founded in 1884 and served the children of Danville and the surrounding counties. Industrial High School was destroyed by fire in 1929. Almagro was eventually annexed to Danville and the Almagro Training School became one of Danville's public schools (Hairston 1955).

Winslow Hospital at 709 Betts Street is an important post-annexation property. The institution was dedicated in on November 27, 1940, as the medical center for African Americans for the remaining decades of *je dure* segregation. It replaced Providence Hospital founded on September 8, 1919, north of the railroad at 223 South Main Street.

Peter's Park, also known as Almagro Baseball Stadium, opened in 1948 (Figure 11). A state historical highway marker on Foster Street next to the site reads:

James Peters Sr. (ca. 1883-1970) opened Peters Park, also called the Almagro Baseball Stadium, at this site in 1948. The park was home to the Danville All-Stars, an African American baseball team that Peters sponsored. The stadium was state of the art when it opened, being one of the first in the country to boast lights to permit nighttime usage. Peters Park became an important part of the African American community, hosting Sunday afternoon baseball games as well as community events. In 1952 the park closed because of the racial integration of baseball and the ability to watch the sport on television.

The first buildings at E.A. Gibson Elementary School were constructed in 1951.

Historic events in the struggle for African American Civil Rights unfolded in Danville during the spring and summer of 1963. Brutality suffered by demonstrators at the hands of police officers and firefighters outside of the city jail on June 10, 1963, is remembered as Bloody Monday. The event drew national attention and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) made Danville one of its primary theaters of operation.

Dorothy Miller and Danny Lyon produced the August 1963 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee newsletter, *Danville, Virginia*. The report opens with the "Official Record of Hospitalized Demonstrators, June 10th, 1963 – Danville, Virginia," followed by a list of these persons' names and their injuries and the note,

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 7 5/14/2024 Rev. July 2020

"An unknown number of persons were treated as outpatients by the staff at Winslow Hospital and discharged without a record being made of the injuries or injury."

The SNCC pamphlet provides the following account:

That evening, the following events took place: A group of 65 Negroes (and one white woman, a SNCC office worker) walked five abreast from Rev. Campbell's Church [Bible Way Church] to the city jail. SNCCer Zellner was along, photographing the march. Mrs. Campbell was at the head of the line. The group, led by Rev. H.G. McGhee, sang hymns and circled the jail once, passing several policemen who stood there watching. As they began the second trip around, police halted them...firemen turned hoses on the people...Nightstick-wielding police and deputized garbage collectors smashed into the group...Police and garbage collectors chased those demonstrators who were able to walk for two blocks...At Bible Way Church, pastored by Rev. Campbell, bloody me and women came in by twos and threes and were shuttled to the [Winslow] hospital. Of 65 demonstrators, 40 were hurt.

Archived television news footage covering parts of these demonstrations is available through the Virginia Center for Digital History, although scenes from Almagro do not appear to have been captured (http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/filmIndex1963.html).

Record No. 6258 Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia at Richmond Doyle J. Thomas, et al. v. City of Danville documents a successful appeal by seven men and one woman indicted following the events of Bloody Monday. A perpetual injunction had been ordered upon them, along with "all persons similarly situated and their agents, servants, employees and attorneys and all persons in active concert and participation with them, from committing certain unlawful acts..." (Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia). These acts are subsequently outlined in a list that amounts to any direct or indirect involvement in organized, or otherwise, acts of protest or public demonstration, and culminating with "8. Participating in or inciting mob violence, rioting, and inciting persons to riot" (Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia).

Transcripts of the appeals trial proceedings contain direct references to the place of Almagro and Winslow Hospital in the events of Bloody Monday. Municipal support for the hospital also figured directly in the sources of the conflict. Revered Doyle Thomas responded to the question, "What was the matter you brought to them [the City of Danville] in regard to Winslow Hospital,"

We wanted a trained administrator and the salaries of the nurses and the working people there raised so that we would be able to keep our people at home and get more registered nurses in the hospital so it would be a better place for sick people. There have been times when there were only two or three registered nurses in the whole hospital, the rest were practical. And people have serious operations and we simply wanted the hospital to have a staff that would be able to take care of our sick people.

City of Danville police officer W.L. Osborne testified to having seen 200 to 300 people, "all colored," on both sides of Betts Street at Winslow Hospital. In response to, "Did you patrol in the area of Winslow Hospital and Almagro at any time that night [June 10, 1963]," Osborne testified,

[We] were going Betts Street and as we were going by Winslow Hospital toward Smith Street someone hollered...leaving there going toward Lincoln Street over in the Project [Liberty Hill], we went down King Walter's Mill Road and back Industrial and up Grant Street and

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hollered...

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	city or town:	Danville	state: Virginia	_ zip code:	24541
		ircecenter@gmail.com	telephone:757-3	09-7225	
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Rev. July 2020

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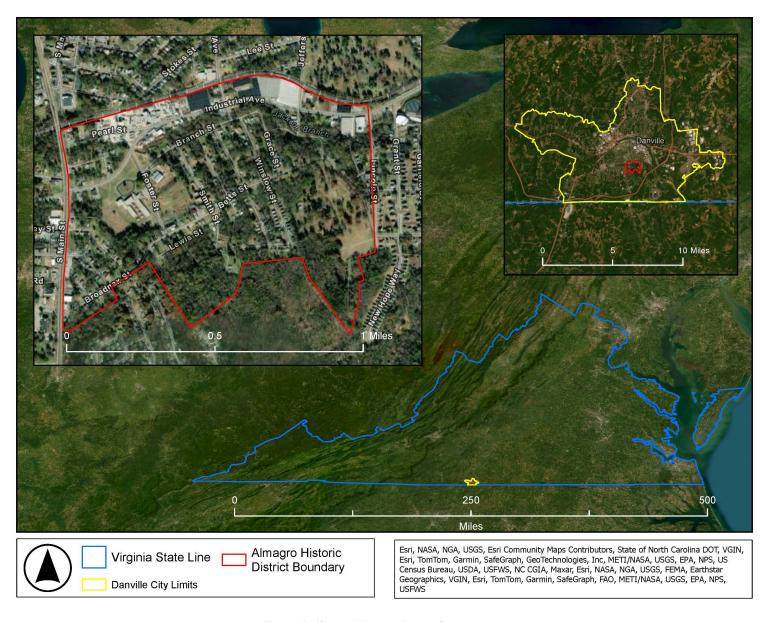


Figure 1. Almagro Historic District location map.



Figure 2. Almagro Historic District boundary map.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 2 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020

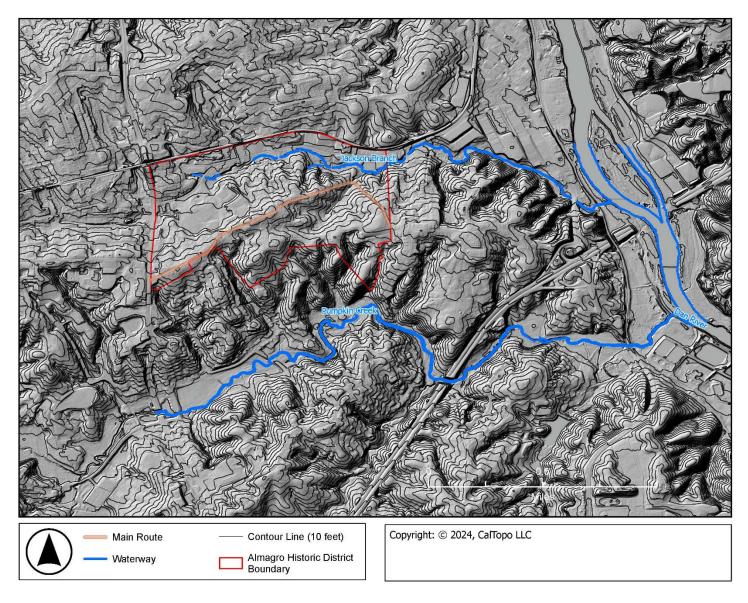


Figure 3. Almagro Historic District topographic map.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 3 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020



Figure 4. A 1955 aerial photograph of Almagro Historic District.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 4 5/14/2024

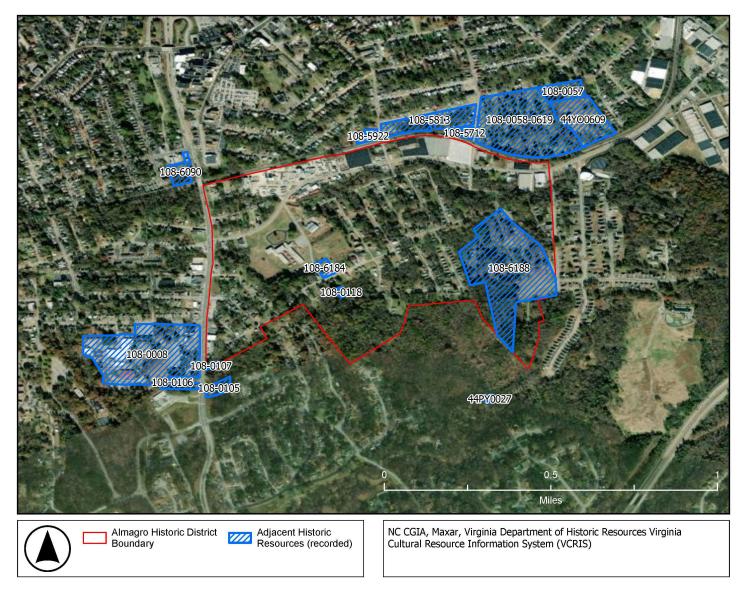


Figure 5. Previously recorded historic resources (VCRIS) within and adjacent Almagro Historic District.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 5 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020

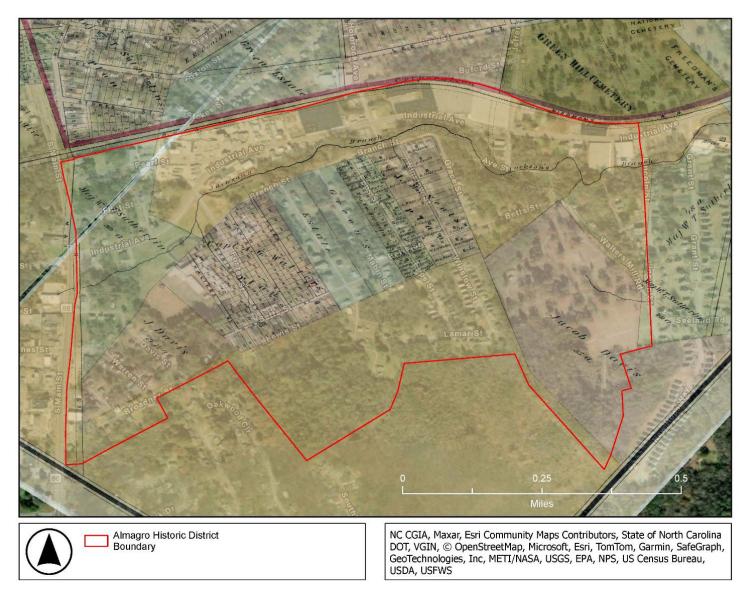


Figure 6. Part of F.W. Beers' 1877 Topographic Map of Danville, Pittsylvania, Co. with Almagro Historic District boundary.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 6 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020

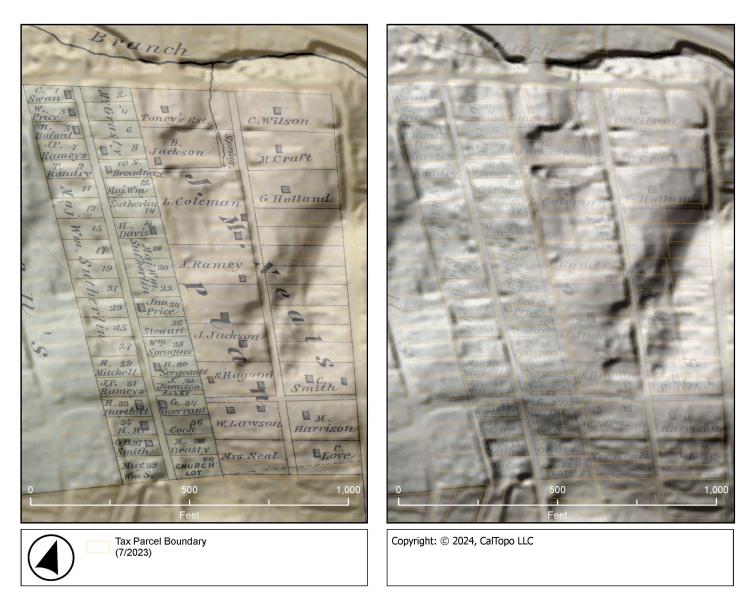


Figure 7. Detail of part of Almagro Historic District comparing parcels on the 1877 plat and a LiDAR-derived digital elevation model.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 7 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020



Figure 8. Estimated parcel with contributing resources in Almagro Historic District.

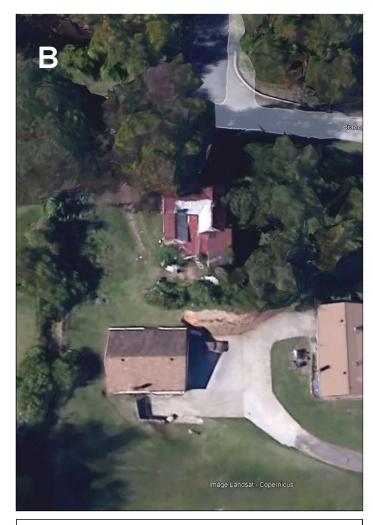
Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 8 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020





- A. Toney's Est. on F.W. Beers at 1208 Branch Street.
- B. Google Earth 3D aerial image of 1208 Branch Street.



Commonwealth of Virginia, NC CGIA, Maxar, Microsoft, Google Earth Landsat/Copernicus

Figure 9. Detail of part of Almagro Historic District comparing the property at 1208 Brnach Street on the 1877 plat and a recent 3D Google Earth aerial image.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 9 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020

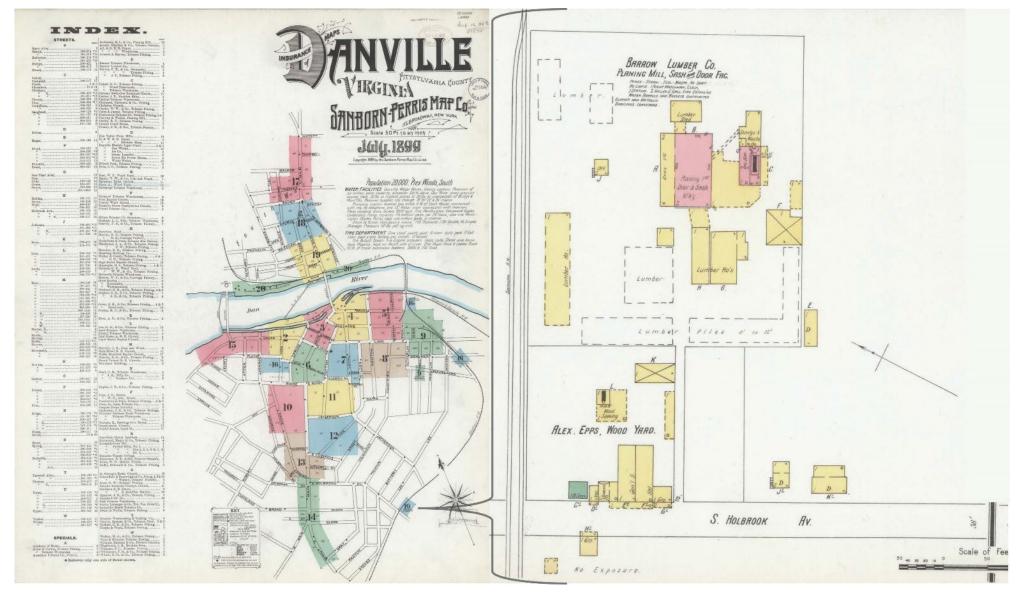


Figure 10. "Alex. Epps, Wood Yard." on the July 1899 Insurance Maps Danville Pittsylvania County Virginia by Sanborn-Perris Map Co.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 10 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020



Figure 11. A 1955 aerial photograph of Peters Park / Almagro Baseball Stadium.

Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information Form 11 5/14/2024

Rev. July 2020





























