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7. Narrative Description*Location & Setting*

The Haxton-Griffin Farm is located on the west side of the Hudson River, about one-half mile from the river and less than two miles southwest of the village of Athens, in Greene County, New York. This 55-acre property represents the remaining acreage of a late eighteenth century farm that at one time included more than 300 acres of associated land. The nomination boundary takes in acreage on both sides of Howard Hall Road, a narrow road on a north-to-south alignment that is accessible from New York Route 385, the latter a major north-south artery along the river in the Athens area. The primary built feature included within the nomination boundary is a large stone dwelling, located on an elevated shoulder of land on the east side of the road. There are additionally a mid-nineteenth century dairy barn and an early twentieth century frame residence on the west side of the road, and an early twentieth century barn on the east side, near the house. The stone house's elevated site capitalizes on views eastward towards the Taconic Mountains, with partial views of the Hudson River in the near distance, while its west elevation commands a view shed which includes the Blackhead range of the Catskill Mountains. This somewhat commanding position allows the property to be visible from the east side of the Hudson River. The stone dwelling is situated in close proximity to the road, though well above it, and is accessed via a long driveway which connects with Howard Hall Road at two points. East and north of the house are large areas of pasture; that to the north contains a number of locust trees. The majority of the acreage included within the boundary is west of the road, beyond the frame house, which occupies a site below the bluff on which the stone house was built.

Haxton-Griffin Farm: Overview

Built c. 1812 for Benjamin Haxton, the Haxton-Griffin house forms the architectural centerpiece of the nominated farm and remains an important example of early nineteenth century domestic design with subsequent modifications. The original two-story masonry dwelling was built of mortared rubble-stone on a rectangular plan with hipped roof and displayed design features associated with the Federal style. Subsequent modifications were rendered in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, among them the introduction of Greek Revival-style and Italianate-style design elements; the former included the introduction of black marble mantelpieces to the first-floor parlor and library, the latter the construction of a new circular staircase in the main hall. It was yet later, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that the original plan was modified and the roof raised, changes associated with declining agricultural fortunes in the region and the modification of the original single-family dwelling for operation as a seasonal boarding-house use. The interior plan originally included a basement kitchen and, on the first floor, formal areas disposed on a center hall layout, with bed chambers on the second floor. Today the Haxton-Griffin house is a composite of the original and subsequent historic periods. In addition to the stone house, the nomination includes the twentieth century house, a c. 1900 barn, in addition to a timber-frame banked barn.

Haxton-Griffin House: Exterior

The Haxton-Griffin house is a two-story masonry building constructed with load-bearing walls of mortared rubble stone, the primary window openings formed with brick keying. The dwelling was built into the sloping grade of the site so as to allow access to the basement on the east elevation, where service areas were originally disposed. The north and south side elevations featured limited fenestration while the east and west facing elevations were five ranked in symmetrical and formal fashion. The east and west elevations were similarly

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conceived, though the east elevation has a two-tiered verandah or piazza which extends across the first story and provides shelter for the exposed-at-grade basement. The piazza is supported by brick piers and above, at first-story level, by square piers with runs of balustrade between (currently removed); the roof is of a half-hipped type. At the northeast corner of the building is a 1930s wood-frame addition, erected above a brick foundation. It forms an extension of the piazza and aligns a part of the main block's north elevation, its interior accessible only from the exterior and not from the interior of the main block. A moulded wood frieze terminates the stone walls of the main block and gives way to a projecting cornice, moulded, which contains built-in gutters. An undated nineteenth century exterior image, taken before the raising of the roof, indicates the presence of a parapet or balustrade screen above cornice level of the verandah and main roof. Also visible is a second corresponding section of balustrade, which was used to terminate the hipped roof. These were removed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The raising of the roof c. 1880 was achieved with light framing sheathed with clapboard, creating a large, cupola-like feature built on a rectangular plan. The hipped roof which covers the main block and raised section of roof is clad with standing-seam metal.

Fenestration is symmetrical on both the east and west elevations. Both have center entrances at the first-story level, above which are semi-circular fanlights, and are flanked by a pair of double-hung wood windows with six-over-six glazing. All the original windows in the house have wood sills. The louvered wood shutters have been removed and are currently undergoing restoration. The entrance on the west or roadside elevation is currently obscured by a small frame vestibule added subsequently in the building's history and recently restored; it has flushboard siding, a wood frieze, and cornice treatments matching that of the main block. The sides have double-hung round-arched windows with four-over-four glazing. The door into the vestibule is set within a round-arched recess with paneled jambs, and has two round-arched glazed panels above a single wood panel. A semi-circular fanlight surmounts the door. Later in its history the vestibule had a second-floor addition, which contained a bathroom, a feature which has since been removed.

The basement level on the east elevation has two windows and three doors, the windows fitted with double-hung sash; the openings here are spanned by brick relieving arches with blind heads. The basement level has at times been partially concealed by latticework, spanned with railing, or otherwise fully enclosed. The original entrances are those corresponding with the center and south bays. The door in the north bay is not original. Window openings are fitted with eight-over-eight wood sash.

The north elevation was originally blind and contains a single small window, added more recently. Located high on the wall near the cornice, it is a narrow round-arched opening fitted with one-over-one glazing. The 1930s addition has a small shed-roofed addition appended to its north side.

The south elevation of the main block has two double-hung wood windows with six-over-six glazing, their placement corresponding with the chimney and related fireboxes. There is also an original double-hung window with eight-over-eight glazing in the basement, below the corner window. The remaining windows have been added over time, among them a small, fixed-sash window near the western elevation at the first-story level, which replaced a twentieth century entrance that was cut through the stone wall to accommodate communication with a frame wing since removed. There are two additional basement windows on this elevation, both toward its west elevation, one of which is spanned by a segmental brick lintel.

The upper floor, created c. 1880 with the raising of the roof, was recently rehabilitated to match its original

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proportions. It has double-hung, six-over-six sash windows: seven windows on the east facet, four on the west facet, three on the south facet, and one on the north facet. The latter elevation also has a wood door accessing the roof.

Haxton-Griffin House: Interior

The house is entered through the vestibule on the west-facing façade, which contains a hall flanked by two small rooms. A canvas mural, not original to the house, covers the upper portions of the walls, below which is paneled wainscot. Double-leaf doors that fold into jambs demarcate the transition between the vestibule and main block, the front entrance prior to the addition of the vestibule. A semi-circular fanlight and associated moulded wood architrave remain in place, these dating to the original c. 1812 building campaign.

The front and rear rooms on the first floor of the main block are divided by a wide center hall. It is flanked by four rooms of unequal size, though nevertheless indicative of the original pile-and-half plan. The two principal rooms, the parlor and the library—occupying the southeast and northeast portions of the plan, respectively—were located in relation to the river, with smaller rooms behind. The parlor is the largest room, extending approximately three-quarters of the way to the west elevation. Behind it, to the west, is the smallest first-floor room, now used as a kitchen. The library is on the north side of the hall, opposite the parlor. Both rooms were serviced by end-wall fireboxes. There are entrances from the hall into all four rooms and entrances between the front and back rooms. The primary feature of the hall is a circular staircase, oriented to face east, towards the river side of the house. It is of an open-stringer type and has paneled sides, and a large railing sustained by stoutly turned balusters and a prominent newel post. A stair to the basement is located below the main stair and has narrow treads. The location of the original main staircase remains a point of speculation; there is evidence of a stair in the small room west of the parlor, though this may have functioned as a service stair and not the primary staircase. Plaster work in the hall includes a struck cornice and a circular ceiling medallion. While the baseboards are of an Italianate-style, with rounded mouldings, the door architraves are of a backbanded type, and represent original c. 1812 fabric.

Undated historic photographs document the appearance of the hall, parlor and library in the nineteenth century. These show the black marble mantelpieces in the main parlor and library, of a characteristic early Greek Revival-style type. In the library, the chimney breast was at one time flanked by built-in bookcases, which are no longer extant. The struck plaster cornices here and in the parlor appear to be original or otherwise early. While the front two rooms were serviced by fireplaces, the two rear rooms appear to have been heated with stoves, though their associated chimneys have been removed.

During its years as a boarding house, and throughout the rest of the twentieth century, the house received many alterations. These included the addition of dropped ceilings, the addition of new partitions, and the covering of random-width hardwood flooring with carpeting and areas of laminate flooring. The southwest room on the first floor was converted into a kitchen and subsequently expanded into a frame addition outside the stone envelope, which has since been removed. The four first-floor rooms continue to undergo restoration activity after many years of alteration and neglect.

The second floor plan was, like the first floor, divided by a wide center hall with chambers in each corner, representing the majority of the floor plan. The largest room, in the southeast corner, was heated by stove, while

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the room opposite, in the northeast corner, had a fireplace. A small room occupies the east side of the hall, between the corner chambers. In addition to the four corner chambers and the small room on the east side of the hall, the second floor also contains two bathrooms, a small storage room, and a transverse hall that leads to the upper floor stair. The original wide, random-width floor boards remain in place. The second floor was repeatedly subdivided into a series of small rooms, after c. 1880. Although these changes have been reversed, a limited amount of early physical fabric survives.

The upper floor was created by cutting the roof framing and decking of the hipped roof and raising it, creating what might be termed a cupola. During the 1980s this upper floor was converted into an apartment, the features of which have since been removed, along with an associated metal exterior fire escape on the north elevation.

The basement's center hall separates finished and unfinished spaces. The southeast side of the basement, the kitchen, has a large cooking fireplace with cast-iron crane, uncovered during the restoration. In the southwest side of the plan is a modern kitchen. A full bath is located underneath the staircase. The northern side of the basement is unfinished.

Wagner Farmhouse, c. 1930

This is a two-story, light wood-frame house located on the west side of Howard Hall Road. It is sited close to the road and oriented to face eastwards towards it. The grade slopes steeply to the west, behind the house and away from the road. The building was erected above a concrete block foundation built into the hillside, allowing the basement to be exposed on the rear elevation. It is two bays wide by three bays deep, with clapboard siding and a gable roof sheathed with asphalt. There is a full-width, shed-roofed front porch on the façade. Fenestration consists largely of double-hung, one-over-one wood sash with narrow wood frames. The rear elevation features a full width wood deck at the first floor level. The first floor contains a small living room and dining room, which opens on a modernized kitchen. The upstairs contains bedrooms and a bathroom, and there is additionally a full basement.

Barn, c. 1850

This barn is north of the farmhouse on Howard Hall Road; the earliest portion was built c. 1850. Now functioning as a dairy barn, it is clad with novelty siding and has a gable roof the ridge of which is parallel with the long sides, clad with a raised-seam metal roof. Originally used by the owners of the Haxton-Griffen house before the properties were divided, the barn is now associated with the Wagner family's dairy farm. On the center of the east elevation is a one-story addition, for tractors, to the right of which is a large bay with sliding doors. Shed-roofed additions, with sliding doors, are on present on both the north and south ends. The south section has a side entrance to the animal pens, while the section to the north contains storage space. There is additionally a novelty-sided, metal-roofed structure on the north side of the barn, used for storage of farm equipment.

Barn, c. 1900

This barn, located northwest of the Haxton-Griffen house, is a rectangular bank barn that appears to have been built on the approximate location of an earlier stone barn. This frame building has novelty siding, a gable roof, and one central dormer on the east pitch of the roof. Access from road-level is through two sliding doors. The road-side or west elevation has four windows, equally spaced, at the second-floor level. There are doors to access the lower level on both the north and south elevations.

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Location *Athens vic., Greene County, New York*

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Other Features

Other features contained within the nomination boundary are a well, located in the pasture east of the Haxton-Griffen house, and a shuffleboard court, built by the Wagner family. The shuffleboard, which is in very poor condition, is in the side pasture to the north of the house, and due to its condition has been determined to be non-contributing. Among early outbuildings was a stone barn, referenced in the 1835 deed between Prentiss and Griffin; it is no longer extant. Images also depict what may have been a stone smokehouse, also since removed.