



*Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Nomination Report*

**Winchester Cold Storage Building**

471 Cold Storage Road, Charles Town, WV 25414

**Presented by Patrick J. Fuller**



## Description of Resource; Architectural Information

The Winchester Cold Storage Building is located at the end of Cold Storage Road, about two miles west of Charles Town, West Virginia. Tracks located near the southeast side of the building are owned and operated by Norfolk Southern. The oldest section of the warehouse (circa 1950) is made of white-painted structural terra cotta block walls, “tar and gravel” roof, and steel frame industrial windows. The land on which the Winchester Cold Storage Building is situated is overall flat. The current footprint of the building (including later additions) measures approximately 40,000 square feet.

## Historical Background

Apples predate Jefferson County. Early absentee landowners required prospective tenants to plant apple trees. In 1786, for example, George Washington required John Ariss to plant “300 Winter apple trees” spaced 40 feet apart, and to keep them “well pruned, fenced in, and Secure from Horses, Cattle, and other creatures that may hurt them (Fig. 13).”<sup>1</sup> In the same agreement Washington also required Ariss to plant 400 peach trees and to replace any trees that died.

The roots of the commercial orchard industry in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia can be traced to 1851, when W.S. Miller, who is often regarded as the “Father of the Apple Industry,” planted his first orchard in Gerrardstown, Berkeley County, West Virginia.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the Civil War, Miller had thousands of peach trees and a few hundred apple trees. In the decades that followed, the apple industry in the Eastern Panhandle blossomed, spreading to nearby Jefferson, Morgan, Hampshire, and Mineral counties. Apple production in West Virginia peaked in 1931, with over 12 million bushels produced. As of 2016, apple production in West Virginia amounted to only approximately 2 million bushels.

In 1914 R. R. Jeffries published an apple orchard survey of Jefferson County.<sup>3</sup> He credits the founding of commercial apple orchards in the county to 1876 when D. W. Border in Kearneysville planted 40 acres. Border planted winter varieties York Imperial, Ben Davis, Yellow Newton (Albemarle Pippin), Grimes, Rambo, Ralls, Rome, Gravenstein, Smokehouse, Pecks Pleasant, Buckingham (Winter Queen), Fallawater, Redstreak, Winesap, Winter Sweet Paradise, and Vandevere, He also planted summer varieties. His range of varieties allowed him to see which grew best, were least susceptible to blight and pests, and produced the largest harvest.

### *Early Cold Storage*

In the late-1800s, many Americans moved from rural areas to industrial centers for steady work. Urban growth and increased distance between city centers and farmland ultimately led to a need for better food preservation methods to feed ever-growing city populations. Those who had

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<sup>1</sup> George Washington to John Ariss, Indenture, Deed of Lease, John Ariss, 1786 April 20. Mount Vernon, VA: Fred W. Smith Collections for the Study of George Washington. Box: 34, Folder: 1786.04.20, Identifier: A-516.9.

<sup>2</sup> Derek Richard, “Roots of the WV Apple Industry,” *The Market Bulletin* Vol. 100, No. 12 (December 2016): p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> R. R. Jeffries, “An Orchard Survey of Jefferson County” (1914). *West Virginia Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station Bulletins*. 147.

[https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/wv\\_agricultural\\_and\\_forestry\\_experiment\\_station\\_bulletins/147](https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/wv_agricultural_and_forestry_experiment_station_bulletins/147).

formerly grown their own fruits and vegetables, and raised their own livestock now found themselves buying food from city markets and grocery stores.

Modern refrigeration required electricity and freezers. Before modern refrigeration, apples needed to be stored in root cellars to ensure freshness. Alternatively, the apples could be turned into cider or canned for long-term storage. Other early efforts to prevent freshly-picked apples from spoiling include covering the fruit in soil for winter storage. By the 1920s, however, cold-storage facilities had become common, and provided apple growers with more flexibility in marketing their product.<sup>4</sup>

An early reference to cold-storage facilities in West Virginia can be found in an 1892 article published in the Wheeling, West Virginia, *Sunday Register*, in which the author expresses skepticism about the effectiveness of cold-storing apples:

From information just at hand, the Register is inclined to doubt the efficacy of cold storage as a means of preserving perishable articles from decay, particularly fruits and vegetables in barrels. An instance under notice is a shipment of several hundred barrels of apples to a cold storage warehouse early in the season. The (sic) have been just opened and the owner's statement is that the loss from shrinkage and deterioration is fully as great as if they had been packed away in a good cellar.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1910s, cold-storage of apples in the Eastern Panhandle was both common and effective. After World War I, the practice became more critical, as a new market for American apples emerged in Europe. In mid-December 1918, "Price Increased By Close of War," published in the Martinsburg, West Virginia, *Evening Journal* read:

As a result of the opening of the British markets to American apples which are being shipped in large quantities, the price of cold storage apples has advanced from 50 to 75 cents, and a further advance is anticipated. The demand for barreled stock fresh from the cold storage plants increase. A message from New York states that a big shipment was made Tuesday, exporters having cleaned up all the better grades of apples they could lay hands on in that city.<sup>6</sup>

### *Harry Flood Byrd and the Winchester Cold Storage Co. Inc.*

In 1887 Harry Flood Byrd was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, to Richard Byrd and Eleanor Flood. Shortly thereafter, the Byrds left Martinsburg for Winchester, Virginia. At age fifteen, Harry Byrd took over the failing *Winchester Evening Star* and made it a profitable business. Byrd founded other businesses. He bought a second newspaper, established a third newspaper, leased apple orchards, and served as president of the Valley Turnpike Company. The latter

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<sup>4</sup> National Apple Museum, "Storage," National Apple Museum (Biglerville Historical and Preservation Society). <http://www.nationalapplemuseum.com>. Accessed March 10, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> "Cold Storage," *The Wheeling Sunday Register*, March 20, 1892, Vol. 27, No. 251, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> "Price Increased By Close of War," *Martinsburg W. Va. Evening Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 194, Dec. 13, 1918, p. 5.

operated a toll road between Winchester and Staunton, Virginia.<sup>7</sup> Byrd was able to buy orchards and apple cold-storage facilities with earnings from these businesses.

At the same time, Byrd began his political career. He served one term on Winchester's city council (1909) and ten years in the Senate of Virginia from 1916 to 1926.<sup>8</sup> Byrd was Governor of Virginia from 1926 to 1930 and a United States Senator from 1933 to 1965. As Virginia governor and United States Senator, Byrd expanded his network of personal and professional contacts.

A group of investors led by Harry Byrd decided to market fruit directly to commercial buyers instead of using fruit brokers as middlemen, the more common practice in the early 1900s. In 1917 his most prominent business was the Winchester Cold Storage Company WCS. By 1920 the WCS building in Winchester measured fourteen stories, 370,000 square feet, and declared itself "the largest apple storage in the world."<sup>9</sup>

Under Byrd's ownership, the Winchester Cold Storage Company stored apples from as far away as the Pacific Northwest. Thus, his vision and business acumen extended far beyond the Shenandoah Valley. With rail trunk lines to his facilities Byrd could easily transport apples from anywhere in the United States to ports in Baltimore and Norfolk for shipment to Europe and South America.

Cold storage for apples developed in Jefferson County as well. County Historian Doug Perks recalls the most prominent county facility in Ranson. In 1914 C. L. Robinson Ice and Cold Storage Corporation built a fruit cold storage facility there. The new facility could store 50,000 barrels of apples and produce 35 tons of ice a day. Local orchardists quickly filled the facility to capacity. Frank Robinson, C. L.'s son, managed the facility for nearly 50 years. To local families he offered storage freezer lockers where families could store frozen foods, fruit, and meat.<sup>10</sup> This was a local innovation not available through Winchester Cold Storage. Other county apple cold storage facilities were located in Kearneysville and Shepherdstown.

In 1937, Harry Byrd bought the Colston-Burnlea farm located about two miles southwest of Charles Town. In the early 1950s he built an apple cold-storage building there and operated it as H. F. Byrd, Incorporated, a separate company from Winchester Cold Storage, of which Byrd was also president. After Byrd's death in 1965, H. F. Byrd, Inc., expanded the building in 1967, and again in 1970. The Winchester Cold Storage Company acquired the property from H. F. Byrd, Inc., in 1979.<sup>11</sup>

By the mid 1980s Winchester Cold Storage consolidated its apple cold-storage operations to Winchester, Front Royal, and Charles Town. The facility at Charles Town has provided cold

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<sup>7</sup>Ronald L. Heinemann, "Harry Flood Byrd (1887-1966)," Dictionary of Virginia Biography (Library of Virginia, 2001), [http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Byrd\\_Harry\\_Flood\\_1887-1966](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Byrd_Harry_Flood_1887-1966).

<sup>8</sup> Heinemann, "Harry F. Byrd."

<sup>9</sup> WCS Logistics, "Timeline," <https://wcslogistics.com/timeline/>. Accessed April 20, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Doug Perks, "How Ranson Became a Town and Manufacturing Center," *Spirit of Jefferson*, Sept. 28, 2022, 10.

<sup>11</sup> WCS Logistics, "Charles Town Facility," WCS Logistics, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://wcslogistics.com/locations/>. Jefferson County Deed Book 452:151.

storage for apples from 1950 to 2023. In 2019 the Winchester Storage Company, renamed Winchester Cold Storage Logistics in 2016, leased a portion of its building to the Shenandoah Plaining Mill (SPL). SPL provides kiln-dried lumber to specification and molds lumber to shape using modern, up-to-date milling equipment. But a portion of the facility retains its historical function of cold storage of apples as it has for more than 70 years.

**Nomination Criteria**

The JCHLC nominates this property under Criterion A as a county landmark. The Winchester Cold Storage Building meets Criterion A for its association with the orchard industry in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia.

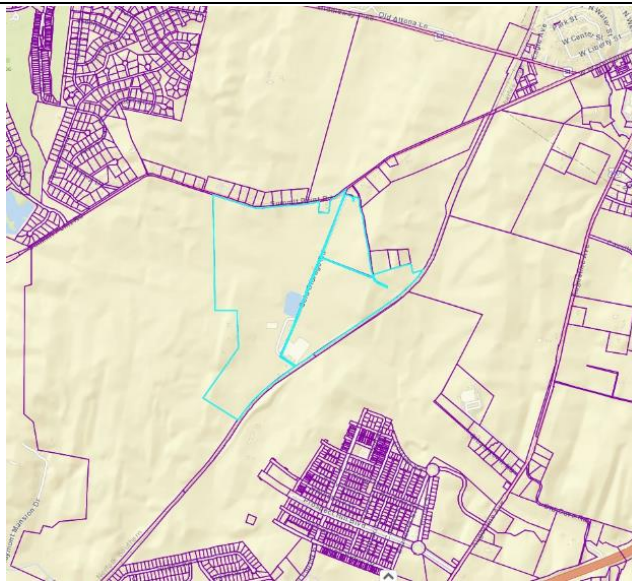
**Nomination Action:**

Landmarks Commissioner, John Demer presented the nomination to the JCHLC at their general meeting. The commission voted unanimously to add the Winchester Cold Storage Building under Criteria A, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on June 7, 2023.

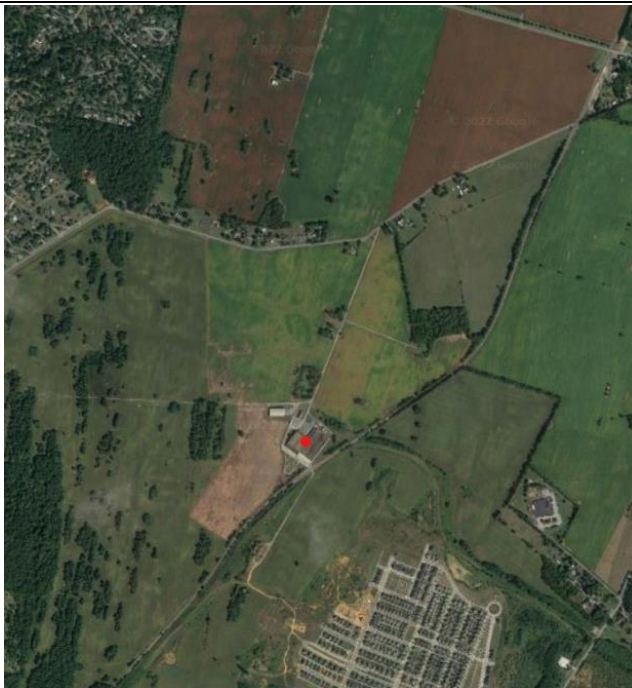
Images:

<i>Image</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Property owned by the Winchester Cold Storage County, Inc. in Charles Town, West Virginia outlined in blue. Map courtesy of the Jefferson County Assessor’s Office.
2	Aerial view of Winchester Cold Storage Co. property and surrounding properties. Subject building marked by red dot. Image courtesy of Google Maps.
3	Looking south, at the north corner of the building.
4	Looking toward the north corner of the building, with later addition visible on the right side of the photo.
5	Northwest side of the building.
6	West corner and southwest side of the building.
7	Southwest side of the building, looking toward the south corner.
8	Southwest side of the building, from the south corner.
9	Southeast side of the building (that faces the railroad tracks) from south corner.
10	Southeast side of the building from the east corner.
11	Northeast side of the building from the east corner.
12	Subject building in relation to other structures on the property. North corner of the Cold Storage building visible on the left side of the photo.
13	George Washington to John Ariss, Indenture, Deed of Lease, John Ariss, 1786 April 20.

*A note on photographs: Due to the size of the building, some photographs had to be taken panoramically, which resulted in slight distortion.*



**Image 1.** Property owned by the Winchester Cold Storage County, Inc. in Charles Town, West Virginia outlined in blue. Map courtesy of the Jefferson County Assessor's Office.



**Image 2.** Aerial view of Winchester Cold Storage Co. property and surrounding properties. Subject building marked by red dot. Image courtesy of Google Maps.



**Image 3.** Looking south, from the north corner of the building.



**Image 4.** Looking south toward the north corner of the building, with later addition visible on the right side of the photo.



**Image 5.** Northwest side of the building.



**Image 6.** West corner and southwest side of the building.





**Image 7.** Southwest side of the building, view toward the south corner.



**Image 8.** Southwest side of the building, from the south corner.



**Image 9.** Southeast side of the building (which faces the railroad tracks) from south corner.



**Image 10.** Southeast side of the building from the east corner.



**Image 11.** Northeast side of the building from the east corner.



**Image 12.** Subject building in relation to other structures on the property. North corner of the Cold Storage building visible on the left side of the photo.

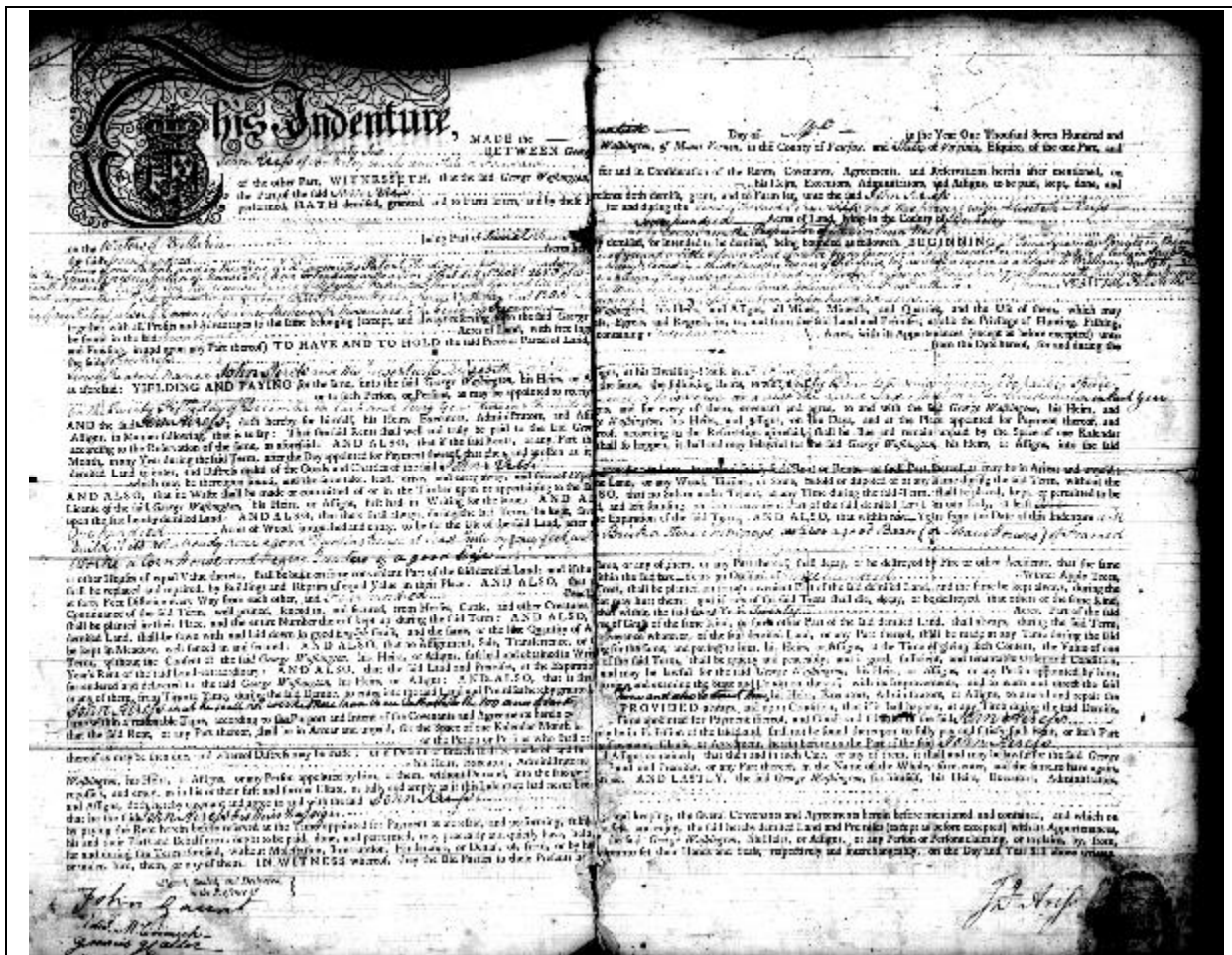


Image 13. George Washington to John Ariss, Indenture, Deed of Lease, John Ariss, 1786 April 20. Source: Mount Vernon, VA: Fred W. Smith Collections for the Study of George Washington. Box: 34, Folder: 1786.04.20, Identifier: A-516.9. In 1786, George Washington required John Ariss to plant “300 Winter apple trees” spaced 40 feet apart, and to keep them “well pruned, fenced in, and Secure from Horses, Cattle, and other creatures that may hurt them.” He also required Ariss to plant 400 peach trees and to replace any trees that died.

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- WCS Logistics. “Charles Town Facility.” WCS Logistics. Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://wcslogistics.com/locations/>.