

OTTO BAHL PLACE
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Indian Camp Creek vicinity
Gatlinburg
Sevier County
Tennessee

HABS TN-258
HABS TN-258

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

OTTO BAHL PLACE

HABS No. TN-258

Location:	Indian Camp Creek vicinity, Cocke County, Great Smoky Mountain National Park, Tennessee
Present Owner:	U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
Present Occupants:	U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
Present Use:	Vacant
Historian:	James A. Jacobs, HABS

Significance: Otto Bahl Place, overlooking Indian Camp Creek in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is a homestead consisting of a high-quality former vacation house and ancillary structures constructed by Chicago artist Otto Bahl ca. 1939 as a retreat for his family. Bahl's purchase of the property in 1938 and subsequent construction of his house so late in the process of assembling acreage for the new park, formally established in 1934, remains a conundrum. Along with his wife, Alice Farrington Bahl, and sister, Rose Bahl, he sold the property to the government in 1942 while retaining a lifetime tenancy, which they subsequently sold to the park in 1955.

Just as intriguing as the timing of these property transactions is the question of how the Bahls came to desire a house in the vicinity of the park, given that they had no obvious ties to the area. If they had merely desired a vacation house or seasonal retreat, surely there were suitable locations more convenient to Chicago? Perhaps the allure of a major new national park, alone, drew the Bahls to the area. Independent of these lingering questions, Bahl constructed a unique house that merged rusticity with modernity and provided private and communal spaces tailor-made for this family of three adults. Sited on the edge of a steam valley removed from other houses, the property provided a tranquil rural escape for a family from one of the nation's largest metropolitan centers.

Description: Otto Bahl Place is located at the end of a gravel lane on a flat site overlooking the Indian Camp Creek stream valley in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM). The property includes a one-story house, a garage/workshop, and a shed that are arranged in a row running parallel to the valley about thirty feet from its edge.

Located at the end of the driveway, the garage/workshop is encountered first on the approach. The structure is composed of a 11' x 21' garage with an attached 8'-6" x 17'-0"

workshop that share a single rear wall (fig. 2).¹ The garage portion extends approximately 4'-0" beyond the front wall of the workshop and the roof extends roughly 6'-0" beyond the front of the garage, creating a covered area in front of the garage door. The bulk of the building is contained under a single asymmetrical gable roof. The roof over extruded portion of the enclosed garage bay and roof overhang is formed by a continuation at the front of the shorter roof plane and an equal sized one having a steeper pitch than the longer roof plane behind it. This interplay results in a more complex assemblage of roof planes at the front of the structure.

The walls of the garage/workshop have fieldstone underpinnings and are sheathed in vertical board-and-batten siding, painted a dark brown, with contrasting white paint used for windows and window frames, the doors and doorframes, the roof fascia and rafter ends, and the posts holding up the roof overhang at the front of the structure. The interior floors are concrete.

The storage shed is a one-story structure having a rectangular footprint measuring 8'-6" x 12'-0" (fig. 3). It has a shed roof and chamfered rafter ends and is sheathed in vertical board-and-batten siding.

The house is located to the north of the garage/workshop. Its east elevation, featuring an enclosed porch looking out onto the stream valley, can be considered the "front." Yet, the principal entrance to the house was likely the utility room door in the south wall facing the garage and drive. The form of the house is orderly, but not regular, perhaps reflecting the fact that Bahl is thought to have constructed it himself.

Two gable-roofed wings having similar depths front-to-back, but slightly different widths, are joined by a center section covered with a gable roof having a more shallow pitch and lower ridgeline than the wings. On the west (back) elevation, the wall of the center section remains in a single plane recessed approximately 4'-0" from the projecting wings. The straightforward and relatively balanced rear elevation contrasts with the more complicated one on the east side of the house. Here, the exterior wall of the kitchen, a room positioned in the center section of the house, is in the same plane as the wall of the south wing. Further complicating the relationship of roof and wall planes between the wings and center section is the enclosed porch. This space is both recessed into the mass of the house in the center section and a portion of the north wing, but also pushes approximately 2'-6" beyond the rest of the east wall for its entire length.

The exterior walls of the house are set on fieldstone and concrete foundations. The house is raised up above a crawl space that extends under most of the house. The utility room, which is situated three steps below the rest of the house, has a concrete floor laid directly on the ground. The exterior walls above the foundations are sheathed in vertical board-

¹ All room dimensions drawn from maintenance forms for "Indian Camp Creek – Bahl property," 20 Feb. 1956, building maintenance records for buildings #487, #488, and #490, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Headquarters Building, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (hereafter Bahl maintenance records).

and-batten siding with horizontal weatherboards in the gables and upper portions of the wall above a continuous beltcourse, which is situated at the level of the window lintels.

The type and size of sash varies throughout the house and, except for the two vinyl-clad, one-over-one, double-hung windows dating from the post-1987 enclosure of the porch, all of the sash is believed to be original. The sash is all wood and single-glazed and most of the windows are fitted with exterior aluminum tracks for screens and storms.² Two large six-over-six double-hung windows are located in the west wall of the living room and one in the east wall of the bedroom. The bathroom and kitchen windows each contain a single six-over-six double hung window, although smaller than the other six-over-six units. A second window in the south wall of the bedroom and the two windows flanking the large fixed “picture” window in the studio/bedroom are tall, but comparatively narrow, four-over-four double-hung units. The two windows flanking the fireplace in the studio/bedroom and the single one in the closet/dressing room are square and fitted with pairs of casement sash filled with leaded diamond-pane glass. The utility room is lighted by two tall, six-light casement windows in the south wall and two square, four-light casement windows set high in the west wall. In contrast to the multiplicity of window types, the exterior utility room door and the one at the back of the workshop portion of the garage structure are the same and have nine fixed lights positioned over a pair of raised panels.

Four stone chimneys originally served the house—all are visible in February 1956 photographs of the house.³ The one for the studio/living room fireplace is positioned on an exterior wall and remains extant, but no longer extends above the roofline. Only the stack for the fireplace in the living room, positioned against an interior wall, extends above the roof. The two others—the one once shared by the fireplace in the bedroom and the range in the kitchen, and the one for the coal-fired hot water heater in the utility room—have been cut down and roofed over. Heat was subsequently provided by electric wall heaters evident throughout the house.

The interior of the house retains its original layout (fig. 1) and most of its original, character-defining features, including: oak floors, knotty pine paneling, built-in book cases and a china closet in the living room, six-panel “cross-and-bible” doors, and bathroom fixtures. The rooms originally having “insulite” tile ceilings were later replaced by dropped ceilings with square fiber panels. The electricity in the house was upgraded at some point, probably at the time that the house was connected to the main power lines in the area, ending reliance on the limited water-generated supply that Bahl installed when the house was constructed. The historic integrity of the house is relatively high with the bulk of the changes classifiable as general maintenance or minor updates/modernization.

² Photographs taken by R.A. Wilhelm in February 1956 document the survival of what were likely the original wood-framed storm windows. See R.A. Wilhelm, photographs of the Otto Bahl House, Indian Camp Creek, Feb. 1956, file No. II-B-(2)-9647, negative nos. 9674-9679, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Library, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (hereafter GRSM Library).

³ Ibid.

The only major physical alteration to the house during its use as staff housing for GRSM was the full enclosure of the living porch, which remained only screened until 1987 and was enclosed sometime in the years following.⁴

History: In March 1938, Otto William Bahl (1886-1957) purchased 9.75 acres in Cocke County near its border with Sevier County from Jesse and Cordia Baxter for \$1,500.⁵ The transaction included the use of an access road to the property located mostly in Sevier County, which Bahl seems to have also acquired two years later.⁶ On December 15, 1942, Otto W. Bahl, Alice F. Bahl, his wife, and Rose Bahl, his sister, conveyed the entire property to the government while retaining a lifetime occupancy, an arrangement that the government formalized on February 9, 1943.⁷ In 1955, the Bahls decided to end their association with the property and agreed to a one-time payment of \$2,250 for the “unexpired period” of the tenancy.⁸ By this time, none of the Bahls were living in the Chicago area. Otto and Alice Bahl were residing in Carmel, California, and Rose Bahl was in Elgin, Illinois, some forty miles from Chicago.⁹

The government acquired over 6,000 individual properties in creating GRSM. Most of the acreage was owned by a half-dozen large timber companies, but many owners were small freeholders who had lived in the area for centuries or affluent Knoxvilleans who had

⁴ David A. Mihalic to Chief of Maintenance [Robert R. Wiley] (memorandum), 8 Jan. 1987, Bahl maintenance records. The memo included an attached list of “maintenance needs in this set of quarters” prepared by Patty Klump. The folder also included Robert R. Wiley’s detailed response to the memo and list.

⁵ “Abstract of Title of the Property of Otto W. Bahl in Cocke County,” 8 Sep. 1941, folder—Bahl, Otto, Sevier Co., Abstr. IV-4, GRSM Library. While the abstract notes only Otto W. Bahl as owner, a 1955 deed records that, in addition to Bahl, the acreage was also, or eventually, owned by Rose Bahl, his sister, and his wife, Alice F. Bahl, who he married in 1939. See: Deed, Otto W. Bahl, Alice F. Bahl, and Rose Bahl to the United States of America, [1955], partial copy in Bahl maintenance records. For Bahl’s middle name, see: “Otto William Bahl,” California Death Index, 1940-1997, accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com.

⁶ A second abstract of title for the portion of Bahl’s property in Sevier County, prepared by the National Park Service when it began the process of acquiring Bahl’s property for incorporation into the Great Smoky Mountain National Park (GRSM) noted that in 1940 Myrtle and Otho Baxter conveyed a twelve-foot-wide strip of land in Sevier County to Bahl. While of uncertain total acreage, the dimensions and the property’s location in Sevier County corresponds with the access road mentioned in the earlier deed for Bahl’s property in Cocke County. See: “Abstract of Title of Otto W. Bahl in Sevier County,” ca. Sep. 1941, folder—Bahl, Otto, Sevier Co., Abstr. IV-4, GRSM Library.

⁷ Deed, Bahls to the USA (GRSM), 1955.

⁸ *Ibid.* The 1955 deed set the total acreage in Cocke and Sevier counties owned by the Bahls at 8.02 acres. It is not known whether the total in the 1941 abstract of title (9.75 acres) or the total in the 1955 deed was correct one, whether there was a miscalculation, or the government acquired fewer acres than owned by the Bahls.

⁹ *Ibid.*

constructed second houses in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰ The Bahls were atypical among the small landowners overall as they had only purchased the property in 1938 and, perhaps more intriguing, the family does not seem to have had roots in the area or any readily apparent connection to the region.

Otto Bahl was born in Indiana on March 19, 1886 to Joseph Bahl, a German immigrant, and Katherine Reyenald Bahl, who had been born in the United States to German parents.¹¹ By 1900, the Bahls were living with their four children in Chicago's Ward 25 located south of the loop in the vicinity of the newly completed Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.¹² Twenty years later, Katherine Bahl, widowed sometime before 1910, was still living in the general vicinity with her two middle children, Rose, aged thirty-five, and Otto, aged thirty-three.¹³

The fortunes of the Bahl family seem to have increased during the 1920s. The *Chicago Central Business and Office Building Directory* of 1925 lists Otto W. Bahl as an artist with an office in the Wrigley Building (Graham, Anderson, Probst & White; 1921, south tower, and 1924, north tower).¹⁴ William Wrigley intended the building as both a headquarters for his vast chewing gum company and as speculative commercial office space. The building anchored the extension of Michigan Avenue over the Chicago River, made possible with a new bridge completed in 1920, and was soon joined by the Tribune Tower (Howells & Hood; 1922-25) as the gateway of what became known as the "Miracle Mile." Bahl is generically listed as an "artist" in the business directory, but given that his office was located in such a prominent building so soon after its completion, it can be reasonably assumed that he was successful in his line of work. The family's move

¹⁰ The Bahls' property along Indian Camp Creek was not located in or near the rarified resort community centered on the Appalachian Club and Wonderland Club at Elkmont. At the time of the Bahls' land purchase, the owners of houses in Elkmont had, for the most part, completed negotiations with the government about compensation schemes for their properties that lay within the boundaries of the new park. See: Phillip Thomason and Michael Ann Williams, National Register of Historic Places form for the "Elkmont Historic District," National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1994.

¹¹ "Otto William Bahl," California Death Index, 1940-1997, for birth date; U.S. Decennial Census, 1900, returns for Chicago (Ward 25), Cook County, Illinois, accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com, for parents names and father's birth country; "Katherine Bahl," Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947, accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com, for mother's maiden name and birth location. The California Death Index, 1940-1997 lists Bahl's mother's maiden name as "Fehringier." Bahl's wife's maiden name was "Farrington" and this may explain the discrepancy between the information his Katherine Bahl's death record in 1938 and her son's in 1957.

¹² U.S. Decennial Census, 1900, returns for Chicago (Ward 25).

¹³ The 1910 census indicates that Joseph Bahl (Sr.), was no longer living in the household and the 1930 census lists Katherine Bahl's marital status as "widowed." U.S. Decennial Census, 1910, returns for Chicago (Ward 24), Cook County, Illinois; U.S. Decennial Census, 1920, returns for Chicago (Ward 25), Cook County, Illinois; U.S. Decennial Census, 1930, returns for Maine Township, Cook County, Illinois; all accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com.

¹⁴ *Chicago Central Business and Office Building Directory* (1925), 310, accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com.

sometime before 1930 to the rapidly growing suburb of Park Ridge (Maine Township) also underscores its prosperity, which may very well have also included a salary or wages earned by his sister Rose.

It is not known how Bahl and members of his family came to desire property and a second house in Eastern Tennessee. Bahl purchased land along Indian Camp Creek in March 1938, six months before his mother Katherine's October death.¹⁵ Her death was not the only significant life change to occur around this time for Bahl. A bit more than a half year later, Otto W. Bahl and Alice Farrington applied for a marriage license in Chicago and were subsequently married.¹⁶

The house that Otto Bahl constructed sometime within a year or two of purchasing the property reflected perfectly the needs of a household consisting of his new wife and the sister with whom he had lived his entire life. The rustic one-story house had a somewhat irregular form and an unconventional plan. At its most essential, the form of the house consisted of two gable-roofed wings of slightly different widths bridged by a center section. On the east side, which faced the creek and can be considered the "front," a covered porch made the elevation more visually complex. Most of the exterior walls were sheathed in vertical board-and-batten siding with horizontal weatherboards located in the gables and upper portions of the walls above a thin beltcourse. The house included some "craftsman" details such as fieldstone chimneys and casement windows with leaded diamond panes.

A typescript summarizing "Mr. Bahl's description" of the house recorded on June 11, 1941, provides some understanding of how the house functioned and its high level of finish at the time it was constructed (fig. 1).¹⁷ While the *de facto* main entrance was likely the utility room, the "front" entrance was via a "living porch" positioned mostly within the mass of the house and screened on its east side, facing the creek. The rest of the room was formed by the exterior walls of the kitchen, living room, and closet/dressing room. The walls and ceiling of the porch were finished with knotty pine paneling as were those in the utility room, kitchen, and bathroom. The remainder of the interior rooms—living room, studio/bedroom and adjacent closet/dressing room, bedroom, and hallway—had knotty pine paneled walls and ceilings finished with "insulite," a type of insulating tile.¹⁸ All of

¹⁵ "Katherine Bahl," Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947.

¹⁶ "Marriage License," *The Daily Herald* 21 Apr. 1939: 6, accessed online, 24 Apr. 2012, www.ancestry.com.

¹⁷ "Building No. 487 – Otto Bahl House: Mr. Bahl's description of 6/11/41," Bahl maintenance records. All information about the house as originally completed is drawn from this typescript of Bahl's description.

¹⁸ Carol S. Gould, Kimberly A. Konrad, Kathleen Catalano Milley, and Rebecca Gallagher, "Fiberboard," in *Twentieth-Century Building Materials: History and Conservation*, ed. Thomas C. Jester (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995), 120-25.

the interior rooms were floored in oak, covered with “Armstrong inlaid linoleum” in the kitchen and bathroom. The living porch had a painted yellow pine floor.

The living room and studio/bedroom were the largest and best-finished interior rooms, all of which totaled 1,610 square feet exclusive of the living porch. The central living room focused on a fieldstone stone fireplace with a decorative recess above the mantel. A built-in seat and bookshelves flanked the fireplace and an open-shelved built-in china closet was situated in the wall opposite the fireplace; these built-ins indicate that this was the primary room for living and dining. Fully glazed double, or “French” doors opened onto the living porch from this room.

The studio/bedroom positioned in the north wing also had a fieldstone fireplace flanked by large built-in bookcases. The knotty pine paneling continued around the chimney and featured a shallow recess above the mantel. Window openings fitted with diamond pane casements were positioned above the bookcases. Bahl described the room in 1941 as only a “studio,” not surprising given his profession as an artist, and the large picture window and flanking double-hung sash in the north wall would have provided copious amounts of northern light. The spacious closet/dressing room included “two roll-a-way beds,” which were likely used by Otto and Alice Bahl. The second bedroom on the other side of the house was smaller, but also nicely finished with a fieldstone fireplace and a large closet, and was probably intended as a private space for Rose Bahl.

The house contained most of the modern domestic technologies widely available at the time. There was a modish three-fixture bathroom with a lavatory (sink) set on chrome legs, a toilet, and a bathtub/shower combination. Chrome towel bars and a built-in medicine cabinet with flanking “lumiline” (fluorescent) lights further enhanced the room. The kitchen was fitted with a double sink, steel cabinets, and a “canopy” over the range. The utility room, located three steps below the floor level of the rest of the house, included two deep laundry tubs, a coal-fired hot water heater linked to a 42 gallon tank and another 250 gallon insulated tank in the attic to provide water pressure for the kitchen and bathroom fixtures. The coal hot water heater and kitchen range would have provided a degree of heat in those rooms. These heat sources would have been augmented in the three rooms having fireplaces by “heatilators,” or air circulating fireplace inserts with vents that increased the amount of warm air discharged into a room.¹⁹ Remnants of a water turbine in Indian Camp Creek and extant poles once carrying distribution wires are evidence of how electricity was initially provided to the house.

The property included three other structures believed to have been constructed by Bahl around the time of the house (ca. 1939): a board-and-batten garage/workshop; a storage shed; and a springhouse. Only the springhouse has been lost, although photographs of the property from around the time GRSM took full ownership in 1955 record the survival of

¹⁹ Otto Bahl’s 1941 description of the house indicated that it was well insulated and, along with the sources of heat, may well have been used in the colder months of the year.

the springhouse at least until that time. A refrigerator was not noted in Bahl's 1941 description of the property and it probably could not have been supported by the minimal amount of electricity generated by the water turbine, making a springhouse necessary for storing perishable foods.

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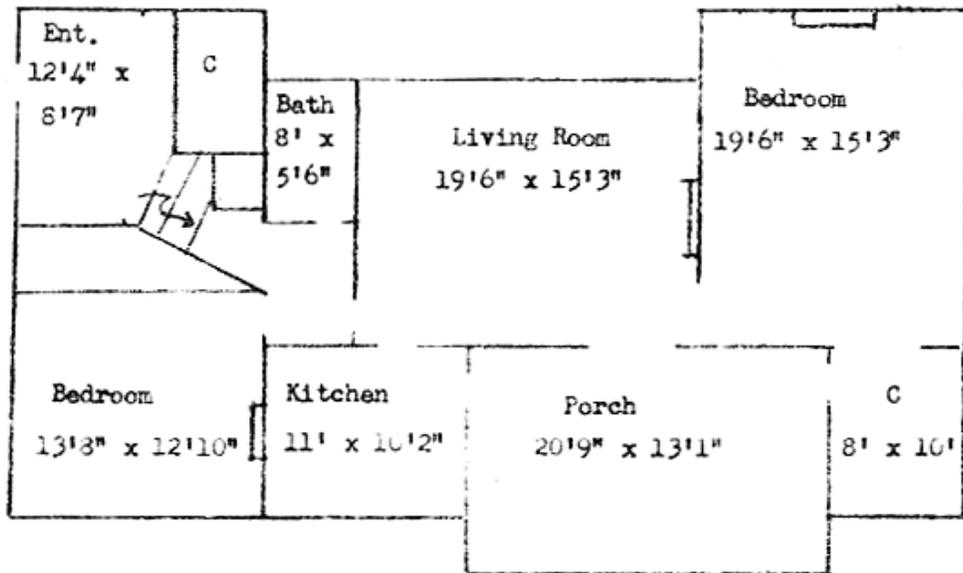
U.S. Decennial Census. 1930. Returns for Maine Township, Cook County, Illinois.

Project Information: The recording of the Otto Bahl House was co-sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, both of the National Park Service. Support provided by Erik S. Kreusch, Supervisory Archaeologist and Cultural Resources Program Manager, Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The documentation was undertaken in 2011-12 by HABS under the direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief of Heritage Documentation Programs, and Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. The project historian was James A. Jacobs and HABS photographer James Rosenthal produced the large-format photographs.

APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

QUARTERS No. 487

Sketch Plan



Scale: 1" - 10'



fig. 1. Sketch plan of Otto Bahl House developed from initial maintenance record created for the buildings on the property in February 1956 immediately after Great Smoky Mountains National Park completely acquired the property. The house was used for many decades as park housing. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Bahl maintenance records (building #487).

DATE 2/20/1956 LOCATION IN PARK Indian Camp Creek - Bahl property BUILDING NAME Garage No. 488

1. USED AS Garage
 Owned by National Park Service
 Operated by National Park Service
 Maintained by National Park Service
 Constructed by Otto Bahl

2. YEAR BUILT 1939 REMODELED

3. DRAWING NO. OCCUPANCY

ORIGINAL COST, \$
 Present value, \$ 500 (1955 appraisal \$750.00)

5. NUMBER STORIES 1 NUMBER ROOMS 2

6. CU. FT. 3,240 SQ. FT., Basement

1st floor 360 2d floor

Other

7. CONSTRUCTION TYPE Frame
 Walls, exterior Board and batten
 Walls, interior Studs
 Floors None Roof Asphalt shingle

8. INTERIOR FINISH, Walls Studs
 Floors

Utilities, Water None Electric None
 Sewer None Phone None

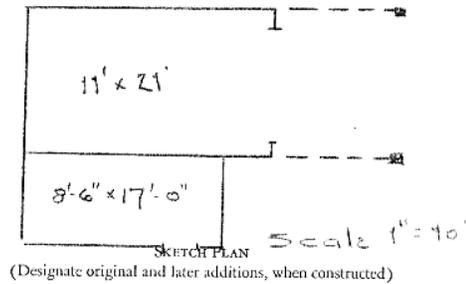
10. MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT: None
 Sanitary

Heating

Electric

11. EXISTING CONDITION OF BUILDING:
 Structural Good
 Mechanical

12. FIRE PROTECTION: None



REMARKS:

fig. 2. Sketch plan of the garage/workshop as depicted on the initial maintenance record created for the structure immediately after Great Smoky Mountains National Park completely acquired the property in 1955. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Bahl maintenance records (building #488).

DATE 2/20/1956 LOCATION IN PARK Indian Camp Creek - Bahl property BUILDING NAME Storage Shed No. 490
Springhouse

1. USED AS Storage
 Owned by National Park Service
 Operated by National Park Service
 Maintained by National Park Service
 Constructed by Otto Bahl

2. YEAR BUILT 1939 REMODELED

3. DRAWING NO. OCCUPANCY Temporary

4. ORIGINAL COST, \$.....
 Present value, \$ 75.00 (1955 appraisal, \$200.00)

5. NUMBER STORIES 1 NUMBER ROOMS 1

6. CU. FT. 432 SQ. FT., Basement

1st floor 54 1/2 2d floor

Other

7. CONSTRUCTION TYPE Frame
 Walls, exterior Plywood
 Walls, interior

Floors Wood Roof Roll roofing

8. INTERIOR FINISH, Walls None
 Floors

9. UTILITIES, Water None Electric None
 Sewer None Phone None

10. MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT: None
 Sanitary

Heating

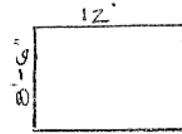
Electric

11. EXISTING CONDITION OF BUILDING:
 Structural Fair
 Mechanical

12. FIRE PROTECTION: None
 Hydrant size Distance

Sprinklers

Extinguishing apparatus



SCALE 1" = 10'

SKETCH PLAN
(Designate original and later additions, when constructed)

REMARKS:

fig. 3. Sketch plan of the storage shed as depicted on the initial maintenance record created for the structure immediately after Great Smoky Mountains National Park completely acquired the property in 1955. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Bahl maintenance records (building #490).