INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

1 NAME
HISTORIC
James A. Thomas Farm

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER South side SR 1941, .9 mi southwest of junction with SR 1700
CITY, TOWN Pittsboro
STATE North Carolina

3 CLASSIFICATION
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4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME Alma Parrott

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE Chatham County Courthouse

6 FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE Ray Manieri
DATE July 1, 1983
ORGANIZATION Urban Research Associates
TELEPHONE
STREET & NUMBER 1301 Cornwallis Drive
CITY OR TOWN Pittsboro
STATE N. C.
The James Thomas Farm, consisting of a main house, built in several sections during the late nineteenth century, surrounded by several log, weatherboard, and board and batten outbuildings, presents an interesting example of the physical evolution of a small piedmont North Carolina farm.

The main house appears to consist of a one-story frame cabin, perhaps constructed during the late 1860s or early 1870s, to which a rear shed and a two-story, late nineteenth century wing have been added. The oldest section (section A on map) of the main house is characterized by such vernacular elements as a steeply pitched gable-end roof, which extends over the front porch, double-hung windows with six-over-six sash and plain surrounds, extended rafter ends, and a large exterior stone and brick chimney. The cabin's three-bay facade, now sheathed with flush-mounted boards, and its original porch, were altered during an 1890s remodeling. This remodeling moved the kitchen from its original location at the enclosed end of the front porch, to a newly constructed rear shed addition (section C on map). This alteration destroyed the original configuration of the front porch which was characterized by unusual tapered porch posts, two of which still remain. A light sawn ballustrade, some of which still survives, was also added during this 1890s alteration.

The vernacular quality of this section is continued on its interior. Although the walls have been covered in plaster, a large simple mantel with wide shelf, and rustic doors composed of vertical boards backed by horizontal bracing still survive.

Constructed, according to family tradition, during the early 1880s by members of a local Masonic Lodge, the two-story wing (section B on map) combines subtle Greek Revival influences with a more pronounced vernacular motif. Late nineteenth century vernacular elements such as double-hung windows with six-over-six sash and plain surrounds, large exterior stone and brick chimneys, and an appended shed roof porch with slender square posts and unusual sawn brackets, are accentuated by such Greek Revival characteristics as pilastered corner boards, a wide frieze, and a steeply pitched gable-end roof with extended eaves and scalloped cornice returns. Although the Greek Revival style had ceased to be the most popular building idiom for rural farm houses in Chatham County by the early 1880s, it was not unusual for craftsmen to combine subtle influences of this earlier style with later nineteenth century vernacular construction. This section's four bay facade, distinguished by a double entry which, although not rare in rural North Carolina, is an unusual surviving feature in Chatham County, is defined by a shed roof porch which repeats the interesting scalloped cornice returns of the roof gable.

The interior of this late nineteenth century section maintains much of its original finish. Greek Revival doors with long, narrow panels

...continued on additional sheet
are contrasted by simple vernacular door and window surrounds, and interesting vernacular mantels survive in each first floor room. The northern most room contains a particularly exciting mantel featuring wedge-shaped pilasters and a molded diamond-shaped motif, perhaps the work of a specific Masonic craftsman. A simple open-string stairway, rising from rear to front provides access to the upper floor bedrooms which are sheathed in the original flush mounted boards accentuated with a heavy wooden shelf.

Several interesting log, weatherboard and board-and-batten outbuildings are located just behind and on each side of the main house. Included in these buildings are a log smokehouse with gable roof and square corner notching, a log and weatherboard shed featuring V-shaped notching and iron strap hinges, a large weatherboard and log barn constructed with V-shaped notching and iron hinges, and a weatherboard shed now altered for use as a garage. The most significant of these outbuildings is a two-room board-and-batten cabin built c. 1903 to house the growing Thomas family. A shed porch, enclosed at one end, is appended to this structure, which, although it is rapidly deteriorating, still features papered walls, a simple vernacular mantel and an unusual stone and brick chimney with corbelled shoulders.
The James A. Thomas Farm composed of a main house built in several sections during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and several outbuildings of log, weatherboard, and board-and-batten construction provides a picture of the physical evolution of a small piedmont North Carolina farm during the final years of the nineteenth century. The main house consists of a one-story cabin perhaps constructed in the late 1860s or early 1870s and a two-story wing built by local masons in the early 1880s which combines subtle Greek Revival influences with a more pronounced late nineteenth century vernacular motif.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. Associated with the decline of larger farms and the increased establishment of smaller farms in North Carolina during the last several decades of the nineteenth century.

C. Embodies the form and characteristics of vernacular residential architecture that developed in central North Carolina during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.
The Thomas Farm was established on the banks of the Haw River during the decade after the Civil War by small Chatham County farmer James Andrew Thomas. Following Thomas's death in the early twentieth century, the farm was occupied by his widow and later by his children and grandchildren.

James Andrew Thomas was born on Christmas Day 1843 and reached adulthood during the last years of the Civil War. Although he would have been old enough to serve in the Civil War, no evidence of his involvement in the conflict has yet been found. Thomas established himself as a small Chatham County farmer during the years following the Civil War. His first land purchase took place in 1869 and gave Thomas title to 100 acres of land in the area which became New Hope Township when Chatham County was divided into townships in 1870. In the following year he married Sarah Elizabeth Moore, who bore him sixteen children, eleven of whom reached adulthood. During the late 1860s or early 1870s Thomas built a home near an eastern Chatham County trading center known as Trade's Hill.

Local deed and tax records reveal that Thomas was a small but successful Chatham County farmer. He purchased seventy additional acres along the Haw River in 1875 and by 1880 when the average farm in North Carolina contained 142 acres, Thomas owned 170 acres valued at $680 and possessed a total estate valued at $866.

According to family tradition, which is vague and unclear, the original Thomas house, which sheltered a family of five in 1880, burned about 1882 and was rebuilt with the help of a local Masonic lodge, of which Thomas was a member. It is most likely that only a portion of the house burned leaving the one-story cabin to which a two-story newly built wing was added.

Following the rebuilding of part of his home in 1882, Thomas continued to operate his small farmstead. Like most of his Chatham County neighbors during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Thomas grew cotton as a large cash crop and harvested corn, wheat and other grains in smaller quantities. During the decade 1880-1890,

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Chatham County Records (subgroups: Deeds, Tax Lists, Marriage Books, Wills, Estate Records), Chatham County Courthouse, Pittsboro, N. C. and North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N. C. 

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property consists of approximately forty-three acres on the eastern side of the Haw River in New Hope township bounded as shown on Chatham County Tax Map #9771-62-5067.
as the size of the average North Carolina farm was decreasing from 142 acres to 101 acres, the Thomas farm also decreased in size from 170 acres to 141 acres of land valued at $700 in 1892. Although he had sold a portion of his farm, Thomas purchased a one-quarter interest in Moore's Mill, located nearby on the Haw River. After maintaining the size of his 141 acre farm throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century, Thomas made a number of land purchases during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century.

Thomas occupied the farm complex until his death in 1917 after which his widow and oldest son Newton occupied the farm. Thomas's widow remained on the complex until her death in 1930, when Thomas's younger son Benjamin established his residence there. Ben Thomas raised his family on the farm which was transferred to his daughter in 1964, who still resides there. During the creation of the B. Everett Jordan lake in the 1970s, the federal government purchased ninety-eight acres of the Thomas farm which was eventually covered by the lake. This reduced the current size of the Thomas farm, but had no effect on the location or condition of the farm's main house and surrounding outbuildings.
NOTES

1. Mrs. Alma Parrott, interviewed March 31, 1983. She is the granddaughter of James A. Thomas. Thomas' birth year is confirmed by census records.


5. Trade's Hill, which is remembered by local residents is shown on Ramsey's 1870 Map of Chatham County. Mrs. Parrott claims the original house later burned.


8. Chatham County Tax List, 1880.


11. Ibid.


13. Chatham County Tax List, 1892.

14. Chatham County Tax List, 1898.


17. Chatham County Deeds, Book 302, p. 84.

18. Chatham County Tax Cards.


Parrott, Mrs. Alma. Interviewed March 31, 1983.

Ramsey, N. A. *1870 Map of Chatham County.*

Thomas Farm Complex
Approx. Scale 1" = 25'
CH 215

Log cabin

Log smokehouse
Square notching

Well
Concrete slab

Section C

Section B

Section A

Log weatherboarding

Barn

Weatherboarding shed

Garage

Charles 1941
James A. Thomas Farm
CH 215
Tax Map #9771