United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Vernon Place

and/or common Cowper-Taylor House

2. Location

street & number NW side US 258, 0.2 mi. NE of jct. w/SR 1316 ___ not for publication

city, town Como ___ vicinity of congressional district ___ First

state North Carolina code 037 county Hertford code 091

3. Classification

Category district ___ building(s) building(s) ___ structure ___ site ___ object ___ Public Acquisition ___ Accessible ___ Status X occupied ___ unoccupied ___ work in progress ___ Present Use ___ agriculture ___ commercial ___ educational ___ entertainment ___ government ___ industrial ___ military ___ museum ___ park ___ private residence ___ religious ___ scientific ___ transportation ___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. Howard Kelly Taylor Mr. and Mrs. Howard K. Taylor, Jr.

street & number Post Office Box 38 805 Craigie Drive

Suffolk, Va.

city, town Como ___ vicinity of state North Carolina 27818

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Hertford County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Winton state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title ___ has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town state
Vernon Place (Cowper-Taylor House), recently renovated, is a transitional Federal to Greek Revival dwelling, located immediately to the east of the crossroads-community of Como. The house is situated approximately five hundred feet north of the highway near the center of its cleared farm land. It is surrounded by a white fence and is approached by a wide, spacious lawn with double rows of pecan trees flanking the avenue leading to the house. Two large grandiflora magnolia trees stand symmetrically in front of the house while numerous elm, pecan, and other trees are located in a more informal manner in the yard surrounding the house.

The two-story frame building has a "T"-shaped plan beneath a low-pitched, gable roof, which is covered with standing-seam tin that probably dates from soon after 1900. The house was built as a whole with the exception of additions at the end of the stem of the "T". The top of the "T", which faces the highway, is five bays wide, with the entrance doorway located in the central bay, and has single-shouldered brick exterior chimneys at its east and west ends. Five-to-one-course American bond predominates in the chimneys, but seven-to-one-course American bond is sometimes found. The chimneys, which are painted white to match the siding, have stepped shoulders and free standing stacks. The brick piers which originally supported the house are still in place with the spaces between them having been bricked-in, sometimes in a pierced design. Most of the plain weatherboards are original. There are beaded cornerboards on the house as well as beaded rakeboards and a molded cornice.

The present Colonial Revival one-story hip-roof porch, which wraps around the front (south), side (west), and rear (north) of the front portion of the house, was built soon after 1900 by the father of one of the present owners and occupants. The Colonial Revival porch replaced an earlier one-story one-bay-wide low-pitched-gable-roof porch for which evidence still survives on the facade in the siding just below the second-floor central window and in the siding to the sides of the front door. Tuscan columns support the entablature of the Colonial Revival porch, which is also covered by a standing-seam tin roof.

The house retains almost all of its original fenestration. A symmetrical architrave with cornerblocks surrounds the double entrance doors and transom. Heavy molded and mitered architraves surround the windows. Nine-over-nine sash occur at the first floor level, six-over-nine sash in the front portion of the house and the six-over-six sash in the rear wing at second floor level. On the east and west (end) elevations of the front portion of the house, a pair of windows flank the chimneys at both first and second floor levels. On the rear (north) elevation of the front portion of the house there are windows on the east and west ends of the second story, and an original window and doorway in the first and second bays, respectively, from the west at first floor level. A one-story shed-roof porch that was located at the east end of the rear (north) elevation of the front portion of the house was enclosed for a bathroom shortly after 1900 by the father of one of the present owners.

The rear wing of the house, the stem of the "T", is three bays long and retains its original fenestration with the exception of the doorway which now leads into the first-floor bathroom rather than outside as it originally did. An exterior doorway located in the south bay of the west elevation at first floor level, opposite the bathroom door, leads to the porch on the west elevation of the rear wing. This porch is original to the house and retains its original tapered square-in-section posts which contain round mortises to receive the handrail and rectangular mortises for the footrail. This porch intersects with the Colonial Revival porch where the stem and top of the "T" intersect. The louvered blinds and their hardware date from the nineteenth century. A brick chimney, which is coeval with the chimneys on the front portion of the house, is located on the north (rear) end of this wing. This chimney is laid in
The interior of the house follows, predictably, a central-hall plan one room deep with a cross hall and room to the rear. The rooms at first floor level contain the original simple chair rail and wainscoting, which in the central hall and east room is divided by stiles into panels. The window and door surrounds in the front portion of the house at first floor level are symmetrical, receding in steps toward the center, with square cornerblocks which have an identical profile. The window openings in the east room are splayed and paneled, with panels also below the windows. The window surrounds in the north (rear) room are plain, Greek molded and mitered. The woodwork in the central hall retains its original painting and graining. The baseboards located in the front portion of the house at first floor level are simple, molded ones. The crown molding was added by the present owners in 1975. The door soffits leading from the central hall into the east and west rooms are paneled. The doors themselves were removed and stored by the present owners. The double doors which connected the central hall to the cross hall were removed by a previous owner. The front double doors remain in place and retain their original painting and graining and a working English Carpenter lock. A nineteenth century door bell is also located on one of these doors. The other original exterior doors, which remain in place (from the west room and the cross hall to the wrap-around porch) also retain their original Carpenter locks, as do all of the original interior doors. There are butt hinges throughout. All of the original doors have typical Greek Revival moldings and panel arrangements.

The original stair, located in the cross hall, was replaced with the present stair in 1975 by the current owners. According to the owners, the original stair was enclosed and rose from east to west along the rear wall of the cross hall. It was apparently a quarter-turn-with-winders stair and had chair rail, wainscoting, and baseboard. The present stair rises from west to east along the rear wall of the cross hall. It is an open-string, half-turn-with-landings stair and has a balustrade with a ramped handrail and turned balusters.

On the first floor there are mantels in the east, west and north (located directly behind the cross hall) rooms. All of these are Colonial Revival, having Tuscan columns supporting the entablatures, and were probably installed soon after 1900. At second-floor level the mantels, which were located in the two front rooms, were removed during the 1975 renovation and stored, and the fireplace openings were plastered over. The rear second-floor room has a Colonial Revival mantel. The door and window surrounds at second floor level have a wide, flat, typical Greek Revival molding. The baseboards are beaded. The small room in the center of the front of the house at second floor level has been made into a bathroom. The rear (north) second-floor room has a high ceiling in the center of the room, but the upper part of the side walls slope following the rake of the roof. This rear room and the cross hall, which contains the stair, are at a lower level than the front part of the house.

The attic is unfinished. The rafters are sawn and mortise-and-tenoned and have collar-beams but no ridge pole.

There are several early-twentieth century outbuildings to the rear of the house including a wellhouse and a Delco plant. Further away from the house are several barns and barn stiles. Still further behind the house is one tenant house and the site of another.
To the rear and east of Vernon Place is a small, one-room, story-and-a-half frame Federal style house which appears to be older than Vernon Place. This small house, which faces east rather south as Vernon Place does, is supported by brick piers. It is sheathed with beaded weatherboards and has a box cornice with crown and shingle moldings. Its chimney is missing but the owner says that it was laid in five-to-one-course American bond. The roof is covered with standing-seam tin. The front (east) elevation has a central doorway, which now contains a door with two longer panels above two shorter panels, and a small window opening to the left (south) of the doorway. The south elevation is obscured by bushes but it can be seen through the chimney opening that there is a larger window near the center of this elevation at first floor level. The rear (west) elevation has a doorway near the center of the elevation and a larger window to the right (south) of the doorway. An early-twentieth century one-story frame wing was added to the rear of the house but is now in unsafe condition. The chimney opening is located in the center of the north elevation with one small window opening located just to the left (east) of the chimney at first floor level and an even smaller window opening to the right (west) of the chimney at second floor level. No early sash survives. On the interior the first floor room is plastered and has a chair rail and picture molding. There is a quarter-turn-with-winders stair located in the southwest corner rising first along the west wall and then the south wall. A square-in-section newel supports a rectangular-in-section handrail parallel to the west wall. After the stair makes its turn, its rise along the south wall is fully enclosed and there is a small closet beneath the stair. Near the center of the ceiling of the first floor room there is an iron hook from which a lighting device was hung.

The Cowper family cemetery is located in the open field further to the rear and east of Vernon Place than the small house just described. Tradition has it that Richard Green Cowper is buried there. There is only one headstone there and that is for Henrietta Cowper who died in 1869.
Located near the community of Como in Hertford County, Vernon Place has always been the center of a large and successful farming enterprise which encompasses both field crops and livestock. The house is an imposing two-story frame antebellum house representative of the transition from Federal to Greek Revival style and of the cotton plantation prosperity of the county. It was built and named in the late 1820s by Richard Green Cowper (1806-1873), one of Hertford's largest cotton planters and an active state politician. The house with its complex of outbuildings was later owned by Paul Douglas Camp (1849-1924) the founder of Union-Camp Mills. The Colonial Revival porch and mantels were added in 1900 when the Taylor family acquired the property.

Criteria Assessment:

B. Associated with Richard Green Cowper, one of Hertford County's largest cotton planters and an active state politician and briefly in the nineteenth century with lumber magnate Paul Douglas Camp.

C. Vernon Place is a representative example of an antebellum plantation house which reflected the prosperity of a cotton-rich county and the transition in architectural styles from Federal to Greek Revival.

D. The house with its surviving complex of outbuildings is likely to yield information about nineteenth century lifestyles on a prosperous cotton plantation.
The sacking and burning of Hertford's county seat, Winton, by Union troops on 20 February, 1862, destroyed virtually all of the county land records prior to that day; thus it cannot be documented exactly how or when Richard Green Cowper acquired the land upon which Vernon Place stands. Born apparently in Hertford County in 1806, Richard Green Cowper was the youngest son of William and Rebecca Meredith Cowper, who removed from Virginia to Hertford in the early 1800s. Young Richard may possibly have inherited the property upon his father's demise in 1818; or, the land might have been an adjoining tract to the sizable plantation established by the elder Cowper which Richard acquired at a later date. In any event, R. G. Cowper became as a young man one of the leading planters in northeastern North Carolina; and he embarked in the 1820s on a political career which, according to his Hertford contemporary and historian John Wheeler Moore, "has never been surpassed by any man in Hertford's history in the length of his hold upon the public affections."

An avowed Whig and later a member of the American or "Know-Nothing" Party, Cowper served as sheriff of Hertford County for seventeen years (1825-1836; 1838-1844) and represented his native county in the state senate in 1844, 1846, 1852, 1856, 1858, and 1865. The exact date Cowper built Vernon Place could not be determined, although it might have been about the time of his marriage in 1826 to Margaret Long, a daughter of prominent Hertford lawyer Harry W. Long and a granddaughter and heiress of Henry Hill. Through this marriage Cowper acquired the sizable "Hill's Ferry" plantation on the Chowan. By 1860 Cowper was the master of seventy slaves, and his two Hertford plantations were annually producing some 40,000 pounds of ginned cotton. Moreover, Cowper had invested his profits from "king cotton" in Florida lands and owned a one-third interest in some 10,000 acres along the Apalachee River. Assessing Cowper's investments and other assets, the final census before the outbreak of hostilities between North and South valued the Cowper estate at $129,069.

Vernon Place remained R. G. Cowper's home plantation for the duration of his life. Although he naturally suffered severe economic losses as a result of the Civil War, Cowper managed to emerge from the war financially sound; the 1870 census valued his estate at $14,500. His marriage to Margaret Long (1809-1850) produced seven children and youngest son George Vernon (1847-1916) inherited the Hertford plantations upon the death of his father in 1873. A prominent Hertford attorney, George Vernon Cowper later decided to reside at the Hill's Ferry plantation and sold Vernon Place in the 1880s to lumber magnate Paul Douglas Camp, founder of Camp Manufacturing Company which later became the largest supplier of hardwood lumber on the east coast. Camp resided at Vernon Place for a short time before returning to his native town Franklin, Virginia, selling the old Cowper plantation to the Vaughan family in the 1890s. In 1900 William Thomas Taylor purchased the property, which has remained since in the possession of his descendants. The Taylors have kept the old dwelling in a state of good repair, remodeling much of the interior in the Colonial Revival style and adding the large wrap-around porch which graces the structure today. Several early twentieth-century outbuildings stand behind the house, where remnants of earlier farm dependencies can also be seen. An avenue lined with pecan trees leads to the entrance of the house, which is flanked by two huge magnolia trees. Most of the original farm acreage (5,600 acres at its 1860 peak) has been sold off over the years, but Vernon Place remains to this day a working farm of some 108 acres and marks an important site in the history of Hertford County.
The structures of course are closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structures. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archeological record. Therefore, archeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.
FOOTNOTES


2 Cowper, The Cowper Family, n.p. A bonafide "FFV," the Cowpers were a Virginia family of some prominence in the Suffolk and Portsmouth region. Immigrant ancestor William Cowper apparently came to the Old Dominion state in the early 1650s. The William Cowper (1766-1818) who removed in the early 1800s to Hertford and settled near Murfreesboro was a son of Revolutionary War Major William Cowper (1735-1784). Many of his brothers and kinsmen also settled in North Carolina, particularly in Gates County. After the death of his first wife Rebecca Meredith, William Cowper married Martha Ballard, who survived her husband's death and lived until the 1840s. Prominent Murfreesboro lawyer Lewis Meredith Cowper was a brother to R. G. Cowper.

3 The 1830 census listing of separate households for R. G. Cowper and his mother-in-law Martha Ballard Cowper seems to suggest the latter in this case (see Fifth Census of the United States, 1830: Hertford County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 412, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Fifth Census, 1830, with appropriate schedule, county and page number).


5 Cheney, North Carolina Government, 313-314, 319, 323, 325, 332, 832; Winborne, History of Hertford County, 123, 139, 142, 167, 191, 193, 200-201, 227, 236. Cowper was the head of the Whig Party in Hertford and often ran against the leading Democrat in Hertford, Dr. Godwin Cotton Moore of "Mulberry Grove."


7 Eighth Census, 1860: Hertford County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Maneys Neck Township, 9-10; Slave schedule, 23-24. In 1860 Vernon Place consisted of 1,000 improved acres, 4,600 unimproved, and was assessed at a cash value of $60,000. Livestock included: 11 horses; 10 mules; 6 milk cows; 80 oxen; 50 cattle; 2 sheep, and 250 swine, all valued at $3,842. Agricultural production for the year 1859-1860 included: 5,000 bushels of Indian corn; 250 bushels of oats; 40,000 pounds of ginned cotton; 100 bushels of peas and beans; 25 bushels of Irish potatoes; 1,750 bushels of sweet potatoes, and 42 tons of hay. Twenty-one slave cabins were recorded as standing on the plantation, housing seventy slaves.

8 Cowper, The Cowper Family, n.d.; Hertford County Record of Wills, Book C, 97-100, microfilm copy, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Hertford County Wills, Eighth Census, 1860: Hertford County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 44.

10. Hertford County Wills, Book C, 97-100; for biographical sketches of the Cowper children, see Cowper, The Cowper Family.

11. Survey and Planning Branch files, Vernon Place folder.

12. Survey and Planning Branch files, Vernon Place folder.

13. Survey and Planning Branch files, Vernon Place folder.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscript Sources

State Archives
Federal Census Records, 1800-1880
Hertford County Records
Research Branch files

Lewis Smith House, Raleigh
Survey and Planning Branch Files

Contemporary Newspapers

Murfreesboro Enquirer

Secondary Sources


Acreage of nominated property: approximately 100 acres

Quadrangle name: Sunbeam, Va. - NC

UMT References: Riverdale

Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

Verbal boundary description and justification: The nominated property is described in Hertford County Deed Book 7, Page 66 and contains approximately 100 acres. This includes the house, outbuildings and agricultural lands still associated with the more than 5,600 acre plantation developed by R. G. Cowper.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

11. Form Prepared By

Architectural Description: Margaret L. Stephenson, Consultant

Survey and Planning Branch: Archaeology and Historic Preservation

N.C. Division of Archives and History

Historical Statement: Bruce S. Cheeseman, Research

street & number: 109 E. Jones Street

Telephone: (919) 733-6545

city or town: Raleigh, state: North Carolina 27611

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

For HCRA use only: I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Keeper of the National Register

Chief of Registration

date: October 16, 1980