United States Department of the Interior
National Park 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 The George Matthias Bernhardt House

and/or common

2. Location

Down a 0.65 mile lane, entrance North side SR 2361 (County Line Road), 0.3
mile east of junction with SR 1006 (Mt. Pleasant Road)—not for publication

street & number Rockwell X vicinity of congressional district

city, town state North Carolina code 037 county Rowan code 159

3. Classification

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4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. Leake Augustus Bernhardt

street & number 328 West Bank Street

city, town state Salisbury, N. C. 28144
county

date 1977

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Rowan County Office Building

street & number 402 North Main Street

city, town state Salisbury, N. C. 28144

date 1977

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

An Inventory of Architectural and Historical Resources in Rowan County
title has this property been determined eligible? yes X no

date 1977 federal X state county local

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History

city, town state 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh N. C.
7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The George M. Bernhardt House, located in a grove of towering oak trees near the center of its 323 acres, is an unusually well-preserved Greek Revival plantation house erected in the 1850s. The rich program of architectural detail which embellishes its weatherboarded and sheathed exterior and interior is one of the most complete and well-crafted of its period in the county.

While lesser houses of the early to mid-nineteenth century were built in a story-and-a-half or diminutive two-story height, it is unusual to see a diminutive two-story height dwelling boasting such architectural detail. But the height of the house is no more unusual than the T-shaped plan on which it was built in the 1850s. It is the earliest known use of that plan in the county and the only antebellum example, predating its later popularity by nearly thirty years.

Today the house sits in a grove near the center of its acreage and in the northeast corner of the intersection of two farm roads. The principal farm land leads off SR 2361 (County Line Road) and extends in a north-northwest direction for nearly 0.7 of a mile where it intersects with the second road and then continues a short distance to the north to the large barn. The second farm road winds in a west to east direction to its intersection with SR (Lower Stone Church Road). The 323 acre tract is generally rectangular in form and has as its east boundary SR (Lower Stone Church Road) and SR 2361 (County Line Road) as its boundary. Slightly over half of the acreage is wooded. Also on the property are six outbuildings three of which are contemporary with the house. Of these the plantation office is surely the most important being the only known surviving freestanding antebellum plantation office in the county. It is a small weatherboarded frame structure with Greek Revival trim; the smokehouse and barn are log construction.

The house rests on a full brick foundation which appears to date to the rebuilding of the brick chimneys. The elevations are all weatherboarded except under the porches where they are sheathed with flush horizontal boards. The gable ends of the house are flush and molded whereas along the sides of the house the roof continues over projecting molded eaves which have a shallow return on the gable ends across the top of the corner boards. All the door and window openings on the house have symmetrically molded surrounds with cornerblocks. The window openings are all fitted with louvered blinds.

In plan the stem of the "T" is wider and deeper than its top which is made up of a two-story block to the right (west) and a longer one-story block to the left (east). The stem of the "T" is on a north-south axis while the top of the "T" is on a east-west axis. To simplify the description of the house the right (west) top of the "T" will be referred to as the front ell while the left (east) top of the ell will be identified as the rear ell. The stem will be considered the main block. The front entrance of the house into the center hall main block is sheltered under a L-shaped porch which carries along the west elevation of the main block and the north elevation of the front ell.
That porch is supported by pairs and trios of tapering wood columns, square-in-plan which are connected by a handrail and footrail carrying a wood lattice railing. The railing is continuous around the porch except for its west end where a flight of wood steps leads down to the lawn. As noted above the main entrance to the house, a pair of two-panel doors flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a three-pane transom occurs in the west wall of the main block near the junction with the north wall of the front ell.

The wall behind the porch is flush sheathed with a full molded baseboard. The symmetrically molded door and window surrounds rest on square blocks set in the baseboard. A door and window are set in the north wall of the front ell under the porch while a pair of windows are set in the north wall of the main entrance.

A chimney flanked by fenestration on both levels is centered on the west gable end of the front ell. The tall narrow window openings on the first floor level contain tall four-over-six sash while those on the second story contain a more regular-sized six-over-six sash.

The south elevation of the front ell has a symmetrically spaced two bay division on both stories with openings containing six-over-nine sash on the first story and shorter openings on the second story containing six-over-three sash. The south gable end of the main block has rather regularly-sized openings on each story, flanking the central chimney, containing six-over-nine sash on the first story and six-over-six sash on the second story. As noted earlier the rear ell is only one story in height. Its south elevation has a symmetrical three-bay division with the three window openings containing six-over-nine sash.

The east gable end of the rear ell, also boasting a centrally placed chimney, is blind and engages the east end of the L-shaped porch which carries in the southeast crotch of the plan. Unlike the front porch its supports are large tapering wood columns, square in plan, connected by a shaped handrail and footrail carrying simple member balusters. The east end of the porch is open with a flight of wood steps down to the lawn. Here on the rear ell's north wall are first a four-panel door and a window symmetrically positioned to reflect their pendants on the south wall of the rear ell. These two openings occur in the larger of the two rooms in the east end of the rear ell. Further along the north wall of the rear ell and near its junction with the east wall of the main block is a four-panel door in to the smaller room of the rear ell. A few feet away and in the east wall of the main block are a pair of two-panel doors opening in the center hall—opposite the above mentioned front door. The porch turns the corner here and carries but a short distance to the north where it terminates at the shed room which in plan occupies the northern end of the porch. The shed has a two-bay division with window openings containing six-over-nine sash windows. Its north wall is flush with the north gable end of the main block. Here the brick chimney is flanked by window openings containing six-over-nine sash on the first story and six-over-three sash on the second story. Thus while all four gable ends of the house have centrally positioned chimneys the size of the window openings and their sash treatment varies from gable to gable.
The interior of the house is built on a single-pile center stair hall plan with a single large room in the front ell and two rooms of unequal size in the rear ell. The interior finish is just as handsome and well-crafted as that on the exterior and excepting the replacement of one mantel remains as built in the 1850s. The walls are sheathed with flush horizontal boards with handsome molded baseboards of varying profiles. The elevations are terminated with wood cornices of varying profiles as well. The handsomest finish in the house occurs on the first story of the main block, with the rooms of the ells having a less rich though no less well-crafted finish. The second story of the main block and front ell have the simplest finish of all. The floors are all heart pine. The doors throughout the first story have either a four or five panel arrangement.

The stair rises along the north wall of the hall to the east to an intermediate landing in the northeast corner; it then continues in a shorter flight across the back to a second hall landing in the southeast corner. It then continues along the south wall in a short flight to the second floor hall. The main newel at the foot of the stair and others occurring at each landing are chamfered. The rounded handrail ramps as it approaches and continues from the newels. It carries chamfered balusters, square in plan. At the foot of the stairs is a door into the parlor on the north side of the hall, while another door centered in the hall's south wall, opens into the south parlor. The finish of the north parlor is the finest in the house and includes a tall rather richly molded baseboard. The window surrounds continue below the window enframing a molded flat panel to rest on square blocks set in the baseboard. The cornices are made up of a series of moldings with Greek profiles. The mantel in the north parlor features fluted pilasters rising to a cornetblock with a square center panel. A fluted panel acts as a frieze and carries across the top of the fire opening and connects the above cornerblocks. The shallow shelf projects above the frieze. A door in its east wall opens into the shed. In the opposite south parlor the finish is simpler. The window and door surrounds are fluted and again continue below the window to rest on a square block in the baseboard. The baseboard is made up of a flat plain board with a shallow narrow molding applied to its top. The mantel in the south parlor has channeled pilasters rising to cornerblocks with bull's eye medalions. The cornerblocks are in turn connected by a channeled frieze board. The mantel shelf is shallow.

Entrance in the large room (bedroom?) in the front ell is through a door in the center of the south parlor's west wall. The walls here are covered with wallpaper and rise from a rather robust cyme recta molding forming the top of the baseboard. The surrounds here are fluted with cornerblocks and again the window surrounds continue below the window enframing a molded flat panel to rest on square blocks in the baseboard. The mantel consists of flat pilasters rising from bases to shallow capital bands. The wide fireze board arches above the corners of the fire openings and then curves down in the center to a flat bottom pendant. Again, the mantel shelf is shallow.
Returning to the south parlor a door in its east wall opens into the smaller room in the west end of the ell. One passes through the small room and through a four-panel door in its east wall into the kitchen occupying the east end of the rear ell—about two-thirds its total area. The finish of these rooms is similar; however, there is again variety in the design of the door and window surrounds and the baseboard. Nevertheless the Greek profile of the various moldings maintains a visual consistency in the finish.

In the late nineteenth century the large fireplace—which appears to have occupied most of the east wall—was replaced by a smaller fire opening and mantel. The mantel is ornamented with carved bosses and turned members. A curved shadow board carries across the back of the shelf. The pine floor has been covered with sheet vinyl.

The stair rises to a landing on the second floor over the first floor hall. It and the bedroom to the north (over the north parlor) have a vaulted ceiling of flush sheathing. The door surrounds in the hall are symmetrically molded while those in the bedrooms to the north and south and in the (third) bedroom over the front ell have plain board surrounds with cornerblocks. The door between the hall and north bedroom is board and batten while the door between the hall and south bedroom has five flat molded panels. The meeting of the walls and ceiling in the south and ell bedrooms are clipped because of the low roofs of the house. The walls of the second story bedrooms are flush sheathed and the floors are of heart pine.

In addition to the house, there are six log and frame outbuildings on the property being nominated. They are: the smokehouse, the well shed, the plantation office, two granaries, and the barn. The office, the smokehouse, and the double pen log barn are contemporary with the house's construction. The two granaries and the well shed date from this century.

The office is a small rectangular weatherboarded frame building with a gabled roof covered with sheet tin. A replacement brick chimney stands in the center of its west gable end. A shed porch, added in the 1940s and recently rebuilt, carries across the full south front elevation and shelters the entrance containing a five panel Greek Revival door. A pair of window openings containing six-over-six sash are symmetrically placed on the rear north elevation. The gable ends of the office are molded and flush: the moldings connect with the molded box cornice on the front and rear elevations. The office is the only known surviving antebellum plantation office in the county. It is located on the east side of the main farm lane just southwest of the house.

The smokehouse and well shed are located behind and to the east of the house. The smokehouse is a log construction building which has been covered with weatherboards. It is covered with a gabled roof. The well shed is a simple pole structure covered by a hipped roof. On the west side of the farm land and nearly due west of the house is a one-story rectangular weatherboarded frame granary. It rests on a cement block foundation.
and is covered with a gabled roof. The door in the center of its east gable end is sheltered by a gable pent and opens onto a small platform for loading and is sheltered by a gable pent supported by wall brackets. Steps descend on the north and south sides of the porch. The granary was built in the 1940s by Leake and Paul Bernhardt.

A second and older granary stands near the barn to the northwest of the house at the end of the farm lane. The older turn-of-the-century granary is also weatherboarded frame construction with a gabled roof covered with sheet tin. A shed roof corn crib carries across its east gable end. The barn, the largest of the outbuildings, is a double pen log structure with a central passage on a north-south axis. A two-story shed carries across its south elevation. The gabled roof of the barn and the shed are covered with sheet tin. In the 1940s the Bernhardt brothers added a shed addition to the barn's west gable end. It is of frame construction covered with weatherboards.
The George Matthias Bernhardt House, situated in a grove of trees on the north central part of its tract of 323 acres and enframed by its fields, is an unusually well preserved Greek Revival plantation house which was erected for Bernhardt in the mid 1850s. George M. Bernhardt (1820-1885) was the son of John Christian Bernhardt and the nephew of Colonel George Bernhardt, an investor in the gold mining operations at nearby Gold Hill. He was therefore a member of the Bernhardt family which achieved prominence in the nineteenth century agricultural and industrial community of Cabarrus and Rowan counties; his descendants would achieve prominence in mercantile (hardware) community and other fields in Salisbury. Bernhardt's plantation was a large and prosperous one both before the war and afterward although in the later years of his life cultivation declined. Bernhardt served as a Justice of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions after the Civil War and served one term in the General Assembly. The position of the family and the exceptional quality of the two-story frame house reflects the emerging affluence of the planter class in antebellum Rowan County. Although the family occupied the house only intermittently after Bernhardt's death in 1885 their affection for it has resulted in an exceptional degree of maintenance and preservation. The architectural detail of its exterior and interior elevations is completely intact. The most significant of its outbuildings is the small office to the south of the house from which Bernhardt oversaw the operations and cultivation of his plantation.

Criteria Assessment:

A. The house, built in the mid-1850s is associated with the emerging affluence of the planter class in antebellum Rowan County and is a specific product of that wealth.

B. The Bernhardt House is associated with the lives of members of the Bernhardt family who achieved prominence in Rowan County in the nineteenth century and in Salisbury in particular in the twentieth century. It was built for George Matthias Bernhardt (1820-1885) a prominent and prosperous planter in the Organ Church (NR) community. The house is also associated with the life of the builder's grandson, Leake Augustus Bernhardt (1895-1981) a prominent Salisbury merchant for seventy years, who has owned and maintained it since 1941.

C. Remarkably intact and handsomely maintained the George Matthias Bernhardt House embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Greek Revival style. While the T-plan and diminutive two-story height is unusual for that period the program of symmetrical architectural detail places the house in the upper rank of antebellum plantation seats in Rowan County.
The George Matthias Bernhardt House was built in the middle 1850s in the southeastern part of Rowan County, near the line with Cabarrus County. The house was built by Bernhardt on a 323 acre tract purchased from Joseph Fisher in 1854 for $3,000.1

The Bernhardt (Barnhardt) family is of German extraction. John Christian Barnhardt landed in Philadelphia in 1749 at the age of 24. His son Matthias Barnhardt (1752-1818) was born in Philadelphia but moved to the North Carolina piedmont after the Revolution and married Mary Boshart in Mecklenburg County in 1785. In 1806 he was one of the founders of the Bethel (Bear Creek) Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cabarrus County. His sons included Col. George Barnhardt (1791-1871) and John Christian Barnhardt (1786-1854). Col. Barnhardt was the first mayor of Gold Hill and was associated with the profitable Gold Hill mining venture for many years. John Christian married Elizabeth Lentz in 1818. Two years after that George Matthias was born.2

The George Matthias Bernhardt House became the seat of a prosperous plantation. By 1860 Bernhardt had increased his holdings to 946 acres, 300 of which were under cultivation. His real estate was valued at $6,140 while his livestock, including 50 swine and 16 sheep, was valued at $850. He grew 4,000 bushels of wheat, 700 bushels of corn, and 27 tons of hay. He owned 15 slaves.3 In 1870 his farm was valued at $4,500 with 314 acres under cultivation. Wheat, corn, oats, and hay were the largest crops.4 In 1880 Bernhardt, by this time 60 years of age, had only 100 improved acres and the value of his farm was $3,000.5

In 1841 Bernhardt married Mary Ann Heilig. They had at least four children, Caleb, Paul, Harry, and Minnie. Bernhardt was a prosperous, respected farmer and member of the community. In 1860 his personal estate was valued at $41,000 and his affluence can be seen by the fact that his household included, in addition to his family, an assistant housekeeper and two "house carpenters." After the Civil War he served as a justice of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. In 1874 he was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives where he served one term.6

Mary Bernhardt died in 1878 and George in 1885. The house and land became the property of their daughter Minnie. Minnie married Bob Thompson and they lived in Tyro. The house and land were rented. Mrs. Thompson died in 1938. She had two sons, both of whom died prior to 1938. In 1941 brothers Leake and Paul Bernhardt purchased the house and 323 acres for $5,995. The Bernhardt brothers were sons of Paul Matthias Bernhardt, the second son of George M. Bernhardt. Paul M. Bernhardt moved to Salisbury in the 1860s and started a hardware business, which dealt in farm implements, caskets, harnesses, and wagons, and eventually became one of Salisbury's first automobile dealers. Leake Bernhardt (1895-1981) joined his father's business around 1910 and stayed in the hardware business in Salisbury until his death. His brother Paul ran a comparable store in Lexington until his death in 1961. Upon the death of Paul Bernhardt his share of the property was purchased by his brother. During this period the Bernhardt brothers operated the farm with hired help. Presently the house and farm are owned by Leake Bernhardt's widow, Eva Nicholas Bernhardt. The land is rented for agricultural purposes, while the house is unoccupied. However, it is well maintained. It remains a sturdy monument to the German settlers who have contributed much to Rowan County's history.
NOTES

1 Salisbury Post, March 23, 1954; Rowan County Deed Book 41, p. 407.

2 Thomas L. Moose and Reedy J. Moose, Bethel (Bear Creek) Church, 1806-1974 (Mount Pleasant, North Carolina: Bethel United Church of Christ, 1974), 1-4; James S. Brawley, The Rowan Story, 1753-1953 (Salisbury: Rowan Printing Company, 1953), 161-162, hereinafter cited as Brawley, The Rowan Story; Paul Bernhardt to Davyd F. Hood, March 9, 1978, hereinafter cited as Bernhardt letter, copy in file. The family name was spelled either Barnhardt or Bernhardt interchangeably in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The George M. Bernhardt descendants have used the latter spelling although other members of the family use Barnhardt.

3 Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Rowan County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Slave Schedule.

4 Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Rowan County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule.

5 Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Rowan County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule.

6 Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Rowan County, North Carolina, Population Schedule; Brawley, The Rowan Story, 201, 365.

7 Bernhardt letter; Rowan County Will Book 2, p. 11; Rowan County Deed Book 264, p. 171; Salisbury Post, March 22, 1981.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: 323 acres more or less

Quadrangle name: Rockwell

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Rowan County Tax Map, Gold Hill Twp, Map #387. Property is outlined in red. Also see continuation sheet.

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

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11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Architectural description, statement of significance, and criteria assessment by Davyd Foard Hood; historical research by Jim Sumner.

Organization: Division of Archives and History

Date: July 8, 1982

Street & Number: 109 E. Jones Street

Telephone: (919) 733-6545

City or Town: Raleigh

State: N. C. 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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature: [Signature]

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: August 30, 1982

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration


The property being nominated is identified as Parcel 1, Rowan County Tax Map 387, Gold Hill Township, a copy is attached. Original available at the Tax Supervisor's Office Rowan County Office Building, 402 North Main Street, Salisbury, North Carolina 28144. This tract of 323 acres is the house tract and comprises the core of the 1,000 acre plantation operated by George Matthias Bernhardt (1820-1885), most of which has passed out of association with the house.
George Matthias Bernhardt House
Rockwell, N. C. Quadrangle
Zone 17
Scale 1:24 000

A 17 551320/3929880
B 17 552080/3929910
C 17 552410/3929
D 17 552360/3928660
E 17 551300/3928660

AP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS:
BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D.C.
USING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

ROCKWELL, N. C.
N3530—W8022.5/7.5
1962

AMS 4955 III SW—SERIES Y842