

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

## 1. Name

historic Villa Nova

and/or common The Captain Stephen M. Thomas House

## 2. Location

street & number South side SR 1438, 0.1 mi. east of jct. w/SR 1481 — not for publication

city, town Laurinburg — vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state N. C. code 037 county Scotland code 165

## 3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Evans Brothers Farms (919) 276-3421

street & number Post Office Box 1724

city, town Laurinburg — vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state N. C. 28352

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Scotland County Courthouse

street & number \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Laurinburg state N. C. 28352

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

An Inventory of Historical and Architectural Resources of Scotland County (An unpublished title manuscript and collections of \_\_\_\_\_ has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no files prepared 1980-1982.)

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

Survey and Planning Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
depository for survey records Section, Division of Archives and History, 109 E Jones St.

city, town Raleigh state N. C. 27611

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## 7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

Villa Nova, the Captain Stephen M. Thomas House, is the most handsome and sophisticated Italianate style house in Scotland County, and indeed, the combined qualities of its brickwork and molded woodwork provide the house a statewide architectural significance. While the particular source for the design of the building is not known it can be reasonably assumed that it was one of the numerous architectural patternbooks appearing after Civil War including Bricknell's Village Builder (1872). The two-story brick house, built in 1880 and the only surviving nineteenth-century brick house in the county, is richly embellished with quoins enframing its front elevations and projecting corbelled hoods over the window and louver openings. Pivotal in the composition of the front elevation is the trio of gables topped by terminals above the window openings and the one-story porch sheltering the first story elevation. The red and blue pattern in the grey slate roof is the only surviving one of its type in the county. The interior plaster work is unique in its richness in the county.

Villa Nova consists of a two-story main block covered with a gabled roof and a pair of one-story gabled roof ells which project from the southeast and southwest corners of the house. The free-standing one-story brick kitchen, east of the house, has since been connected to the house by an open gabled roof passage extending from the brick shed on the rear (south) elevation of the dining room ell. Sheltered in a grove of oak and pecan trees surrounded by extensive cotton fields, Villa Nova is presently occupied by the overseer of the owner's large farming operations here.

The three-bay by one-bay main block of the house, two stories in height, single pile and center hall in plan, is laid up in a one-to-five American bond. The north front elevation is enframed at the corners with quoins formed by projecting brick courses. The window openings here, and on the side and rear elevations, are arch-headed and paired with a common projecting and corbelled hood mold uniting them. The brick sills of the second story windows are connected by a string course which carries across the front elevation and along the side elevations.

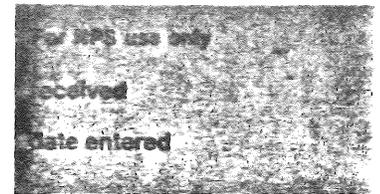
The central entrance on the first story is comprised of a door flanked by side lights and surmounted by a transom set in a rectangular opening. The glazing in the side lights and transom have shaped frames, set within the overall rectangular format. The window openings here as elsewhere contain four-over-four double-hung sash. The one-story porch has a trio of posts connected by a turned balustrade flanking the central opening. The chamfered posts rest on paneled piers and rise to support a bracketed paneled cornice. The tops of the columns are themselves bracketed and merge to create shaped arch-headed openings between the posts. While the porch anchors the front elevation its glory, crowning the elevation, is the trio of wall dormers--each containing a louvered opening--which occur above the three window openings. The faces of the dormers are panelled along the returning bracketed eaves. The tops of the gables are themselves crowned by oversized symmetrical terminals.

The east and west side elevations of the main block are sheltered on the first story by a hipped roof porch which repeats the form and decoration of the main porch. These are set on brick piers with brick lattice infill. By repeating the form of the front porch the side porches enrich the design of the house at the same time that they serve as frontispieces for that portion (half the width) of the rear ell which extend beyond the rear elevation. A pair of windows--repeating the form on the front of the house--is centered in the second story level of the side elevation; a pair of louvered openings

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are centered in the gable end. The east and west side elevations of the one-story ells also feature a pair of windows. The south rear elevation of the west ell is blind and appears to have served as the back of a shed form greenhouse whose triangular brick side walls are intact. A one-story three-bay shed porch carries between the ells. The easternmost bay nearest the east ell has since been enclosed for a bathroom. Except for a door into the dining room on the south rear elevation of the east ell the rear elevation of said ell is occupied by a shed whose roof extends to the east covering the open passage to the one-story contemporary brick kitchen. The shed was used for the storage of cured and salted pork, and other foods.

The gable ends of the ells contain single louvered openings for ventilation. The second-story of the main block has a pair of windows in its center lighting the center stair hall which are flanked to either side by single openings containing four over four sash. Brick chimneys are symmetrically placed in the rear wall of the main block and slightly off center--to the east and west of--the ventilators on the one-story ells. This quartet of interior chimneys have banded brickwork, paneled faces, and corbelled tops.

The free-standing kitchen, contemporary with the house, is rectangular in plan and like the house rests on a stuccoed brick foundation with diamond shaped openings at the top of the stucco for ventilation. The gabled roof is pierced by a bold chimney located in the center of the rear wall. A door is set in the center of the north front elevation with a louvered opening in the gable above. A door is also set in the west wall under the shed passage.

Returning to the north elevation of the main block entrance into the center hall plan interior is through a six-panel door surrounded with a transom and sidelights of red glass. The handsome staircase rises to the south from the north front of the hall along its east wall to an intermediate landing and then turns west and rises to the landing on the second story. It is carried by turned and fluted balusters and decorated with sawn scrollwork. The west parlor has the finer of the plaster medallions, being circular with scalloped edges and a floral center. This room also has plaster corbels at the niches that flank the handsome Eastlake style mantel, on the south elevation, and a plaster crown molding. The east parlor medallion is square in shape with anthemions, fretwork, and foliage providing the major detail. To the east of the rather plain pilaster-and-frieze mantel on the south wall is the door to the southeast ell, originally the dining room, but now the kitchen. Its pendant, the southwest ell room, was originally a bedroom but is now vacant. It is accessible only from the side and back porches. The second story plan follows that of the first floor, with simple pilaster-and-frieze mantels in both rooms.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Cultural History
<b>Specific dates</b> 1880	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Unknown		

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

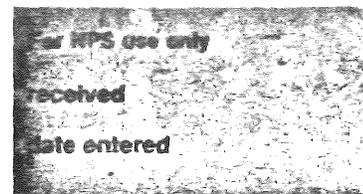
Villa Nova, built in 1880 for Captain Stephen Moorman Thomas and his wife on their cotton plantation in Richmond (now Scotland) County, possesses significance on both historical and statewide architectural grounds. Thomas, a veteran of the Civil War, began amassing his plantation in 1869 and was to become in the later years of the nineteenth century one of the most prominent planters in the area. The house reflects the elegant lifestyle of the wealthy cotton planters who overcame the drought of the post Civil War economy and prospered in late-nineteenth century North Carolina. He lived in the house from its construction until his death in 1903. The two-story Italianate style villa is the only nineteenth century brick house in Scotland County and one of a small number of brick houses in Scotland's parent Richmond County. The design of the brick house, surely based on the plates of an as yet unknown architectural patternbook, features handsome brick work enlivened with carved and turned wood ornament, and is one of the finest, most intact, examples of the Italian Villa style surviving in North Carolina

### Criteria Assessment:

- A. Villa Nova is associated with the Southern cotton plantation economy and the resurgence of that economy and society in the later years of the nineteenth century.
- B. Villa Nova, built in 1880 for Stephen Moorman Thomas and his wife, Kate Reynolds Winston (1847-1924), is associated with the life of Thomas ( -1903) who rose to the rank of captain in the Confederate Army. After the war he returned to the South and developed his cotton plantation whose profits afforded him and his family social prominence in Richmond (and Scotland) County. Mrs. Thomas was the sister of Mrs. Robert Rowe Covington whose husband built a large frame Italianate house on his plantation adjacent to the lands of Villa Nova.
- C. The Stephen's house, Villa Nova, embodies the distinctive characteristics of Italian Villa domestic architecture and through the singular success and intact survival of its impressive brickwork and carved and turned wood ornament it possesses architectural significance on a statewide level.

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In 1869 Stephen M. Thomas purchased a large tract of land in Stewartsville Township near Laurinburg in what was then Richmond (now Scotland) County. On that land in 1880 he built the home which is still known as Villa Nova, one of the area's most distinguished dwellings.<sup>1</sup>

It is not certain where Stephen M. Thomas was born or where he lived prior to purchasing the Richmond County tract in 1869. The census of 1860 does not list him as living in that county.<sup>2</sup> At the outbreak of the Civil War Thomas was in Charleston, South Carolina, where he enlisted in the Confederate army as a member of North Carolina's 46th Regiment. He served in Virginia and eventually rose to the rank of captain. While in Virginia he met his future wife Kate Winston who lived at Manheim plantation near Ashland. According to local tradition he had fallen ill or was wounded in the Virginia campaigns and was nursed by Miss Winston.<sup>3</sup>

Following the war Thomas and his new bride moved to Richmond County, and he began operating a large cotton plantation. The 1880 census reveals that he owned 260 acres of improved land and 170 acres unimproved. He devoted 105 acres to the cultivation of cotton of which he produced 83 bales in 1879. Thomas employed 500 "colored" laborers to cultivate the cotton and other crops.<sup>4</sup> The Victorian Italianate Villa style house he constructed was of a size and grandeur befitting a successful planter of wealth and position. Such men managed to secure or revive their fortunes in the aftermath of the hard times of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The house also is noteworthy because it was built of brick in an area where brick was usually used only for chimneys and foundations. (Today the house is the only surviving structure in the county that has a roof of colored slate tiles laid in decorative patterns.)<sup>5</sup>

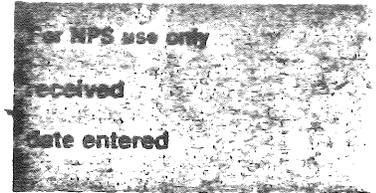
Local tradition claims that Daniel Calhoun Roper, a nationally known figure in government, once lived in the Thomas House. Roper was a native of Marlboro, South Carolina, and became assistant United States postmaster general (1913-1916) and commissioner of revenue (1917-1920) during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson as well as secretary of commerce (1933-1938) and minister to Canada (1939) under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, unlikely that Roper ever lived at Villa Nova. Tradition maintains that Roper and his father resided there soon after the death of Roper's mother. But in his autobiography Daniel C. Roper does not mention ever living at the Thomas House. In addition, his mother died around 1870, some 10 years before Villa Nova was constructed. Still, the young Roper did attend the Laurinburg Academy of William Q. Quankenbush in the 1880s, and he may have visited with the Thomas family, although he boarded with his uncle Turner Roper while attending the school.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the question of Daniel C. Roper's residency, Villa Nova remained one of the county's finest dwellings and its owner one of the area's most successful and prominent citizens. In the late nineteenth century the house was known throughout the county as a center of elegance and social activity. When, for example, daughter Ora Thomas married Willis I. Henderson in the house in 1895, "Society had looked forward to the event for some time and the occasion was fully up to expectations." At the wedding a correspondent observed:

The large lawn in front of the house was beautifully lit with Chinese lanterns, while within the walls of the lovely residence the decorations were far too beautiful for an attempt to describe.

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[In] The west parlor where the ceremony was performed, bright lights flashed only to show forth the beauty of the decorations, in which lovely white chrysanthemums reigned supreme. Just as the bridal party entered Miss Mary McKinnon with violin and Miss Ella Spencer at piano began to play Wagner's charming wedding march, the sweet notes of which added the last touch to the grandeur of the scene.

After the sacred Hymeneal vows were plighted and the happy pair had received the pastor's blessing, the many friends of the bride and groom gathered around to add their wishes of joy and happiness, while the sweet notes of "O Promise Me" was attentively listened to and was perhaps the cause of new thoughts and may be [sic] new resolves.

The ceremony over, the scene became one joyous fete of pleasure and the guest[s] were free to disperse about the beautifully decorated parlors--In the east parlor were displayed the many beautiful, elegant and costly presents. 'T was indeed a handsome collection, and noticeable among them was an envelope containing five thousand dollars, the gift of the bride's parents.

Next to be mentioned is the dining hall and supper. Here soft lights shone over beautifully decorated tables at which the guests were served a dainty collection which was such as would have pleased an epicure.<sup>8</sup>

Stephen M. Thomas continued to expand his landholdings and operate his plantation on a profitable scale.<sup>9</sup> For the remainder of his life he lived in the Villa Nova mansion. It has been said that he enjoyed frequently sitting on any one of the house's four porches and watching his field hands at work. Thomas died in 1903, and his widow went to live with their daughter Betty Thomas Shaw in Laurinburg and later in Charlotte, North Carolina. Villa Nova was subsequently sold and has since had a number of owners and tenants. Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Crosland, who purchased the home in 1934, added electricity in 1941. Mrs. Crosland recalls that workmen discovered then that the walls were fourteen inches thick and each room had its own foundation.<sup>10</sup> Villa Nova is presently owned by Evans Brothers Farms of Laurinburg, and it remains "the most architecturally significant brick residence yet built in Scotland County."<sup>11</sup>

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richmond County Deed Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, Deed Book 1, 487, hereinafter cited as Richmond County Deed Books.

<sup>2</sup>Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Richmond County, North Carolina Population Schedule, passim, hereinafter cited as Richmond County Census with appropriate year, schedule, and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup>Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations From the State of North Carolina, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Microcopy No. 270, Roll 458; Alice Q. Henderson to Tom Butchko, architectural historian, November 6, 1980, letter at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Mrs. Henderson is the wife of Willis I. Henderson, grandson of Stephen M. Thomas, hereinafter cited as Henderson letter.

<sup>4</sup>Richmond County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, 393; Agricultural Schedule, Stewartsville Township, 8.

<sup>5</sup>Laurinburg Exchange, May 27, 1981.

<sup>6</sup>National Cyclopedia of American Biography: Being the History of the United States (New York: James T. White and Company, 1944), XXXI, 5-6.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel C. Roper, Fifty Years of Public Life (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941), 3-14, 18-20.

<sup>8</sup>Newspaper clipping, 1895, from Willis I. Henderson family, copy at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>9</sup>See for example, Richmond County Deed Books, WW, 80; BBB, 329.

<sup>10</sup>Henderson letter; Anna P. Crosland to Tom Butchko, architectural historian, June 7, 1981, letter at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>11</sup>Laurinburg Exchange, May 27, 1981

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.5 acres

Quadrangle name Laurinburg

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A 

1	7	6	4	4	1	3	0	3	8	4	8	8	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The property, to be nominated is a 2.5 acre tract surrounding the house Villa Nova as shown on the attached site plan. This parcel being a part of a 514 acre tract shown as Lot 1 on Tax Map 258 in the Tax Collectors Office of the Scotland County Courthouse.

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

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state		code	county		code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Architectural description by Davyd Foard Hood and Thomas Butchko: historical significance prepared by Joe A. Mobley: Criteria Assessment by Davyd Foard Hood

organization Division of Archives and History date April 8, 1982

street & number 109 East Jones Street telephone 733-7305

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 William S. Price, Jr.

title State Historic Preservation Officer date July 21, 1982

**For NPS use only**

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

date \_\_\_\_\_

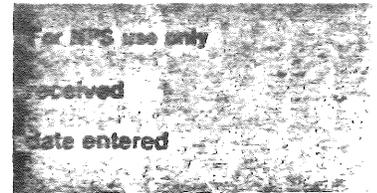
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Item number 9

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Alice Q. Henderson to Tom Butchko, architectural historian, November 6, 1980. Letter at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Anna P. Crosland to Tom Butchko, architectural historian, June 7, 1981. Letter at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

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New York: James T. White and Company, 1944, Volume XXXI.

Newspaper clipping, 1895. From Willis I. Henderson family. Copy at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

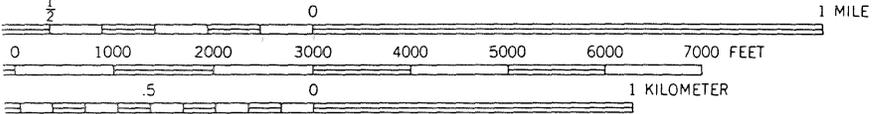
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SCALE 1:24,000



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET

INTERIOR-GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. - 1960  
MR 2007 MAXTON 2.4 MI. LUMBERTON 25 MI. 648000m.E.

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Heavy-duty
- Medium-duty
- Light-duty
- Unimproved dirt

