

THEME: Political and Military Affairs  
 SUBTHEME: Architecture

Form 10-300  
 (Rev. 6-72)

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS  
 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

STATE: Virginia
COUNTY: Richmond
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
 INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) (Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON:  
 Mount Airy Plantation

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
 Mount Airy Plantation

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 near the junction of State Highway 646, and U.S. Highway 360

CITY OR TOWN:  
 vicinity of Warsaw

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
 001

STATE: Virginia CODE: 51 COUNTY: Richmond CODE: 159

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
 Colonel Henry Gwynne Tayloe II

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 Mount Airy Plantation

CITY OR TOWN:  
 Warsaw

STATE:  
 Virginia

CODE:  
 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
 Clerk of the Circuit Court

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 Wallace Street Mailing Address: P. O. Box 221

CITY OR TOWN:  
 Warsaw

STATE:  
 Virginia

CODE:  
 51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
 Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1934-37  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
 Library of Congress/Annex

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY OR TOWN:  
 Washington

STATE:  
 D.C.

CODE:  
 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia  
 COUNTY: Richmond  
 ENTRY NUMBER  
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins
	(Check One)		(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Constructed in 1758 by Colonel John Tayloe, Mount Airy is one of the most monumental of all eighteenth century Georgian houses. It achieves this by two means: through a very formal Palladian plan derived from the pattern book of James Gibbs, and through the use of stone rather than the more usual, but decidedly more domestic, brick. It is, furthermore, the earliest realization in the colonies of the ideal scheme of the full Palladian villa.

The composition is a five part plan (center block, flanking dependencies, and covered passages) which reaches out from the crest of a hill to dominate the surrounding landscape. In this way, it is more closely attuned to eighteenth century landscape design ideals than many houses of the period which have subsequently come to be themselves dominated by large shade trees.

The one visual theme which overrides all others at Mount Airy is order. From the sunken forecourt at the North front, one's attention is very forcefully drawn to the center block by the balanced, flanking, dependencies and passages. It is an almost unavoidable focal point. Drawn along that center axis then, one moves up the formal stair to the open trabeated loggia which itself forms a slightly projecting pedimented pavilion. The elevation of this front is almost certainly derived from William Adam's Vitruvius Scoticus (1750) and shows many common features with Haddo House, Aberdeenshire. While the appeal of the beautifully developed symmetrical plan of Mount Airy is surely an intellectual one, those who would call the design of the house cold, should note the appealing use of materials which adds a touch of non-intellectual gay informality. Constructed of poorly consolidated brown sandstone which is rather like grit, architectural details are set off in local limestone (possibly Acquia Creek stone) giving the whole a coloristic effect which is inconsistent with other formal aspects of the house. As Pierson has pointed out, this warmth of surface and detail is considerably out of tune with the smooth-cut masonry surfaces and flat monochromes of High English Palladianism. The ultimate conclusion to be drawn is that while the house has elements of Gibbs, of English Palladianism, and of Adam, it is in fact a composition in colonial-Georgian more than anything else. Interestingly, it might be added that the carefully-hewn brown sandstone walls are laid in apparently random courses, which in its own way is a very remarkable feat indeed.

The South front (as well as the plan) almost certainly comes from James Gibbs' A Book of Architecture (1726) and differs from the North front in that the projecting loggia/pavilion is here arcuated, while trabeated at the North. The rustication of the pavilion at this front is perhaps even more effective than at the North, with the boldly outlined voussoirs and keystones creating a very strong effect.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century            |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1758, 1844

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mount Airy illustrates exceptionally well through its entirely Palladian plan and its elevation after Gibbs and Adam, the bookishness of colonial design in mid-eighteenth century America. The mixture of these transplanted English strains combines to give us a style which really must be recognized as an entity in its own right, Colonial Georgian.

This is a villa-type of house, with a five-part plan; two story center block, flanking square dependencies, and connecting covered passages. The spreading symmetrical plan was perfect for the Southern plantations, and a number of them proliferated there. Mount Airy is also a rare example of stonemasonry during the eighteenth century in Virginia.

Although destroyed by fire in 1844, the magnificent interiors may have been executed by the exceptionally talented William Buckland, following his work at Gunston Hall before he moved to Annapolis.

The intellectual appeal of the plan is balanced by the coloristic effects created in the elevation by the use of contrasting brown sandstone and a lighter colored local limestone. The exterior detailing is classical throughout, and may be traced directly to plates in Adam's Vitruvius Scoticus (1750) and Gibbs' A Book of Architecture (1728).

Built in 1758 by Colonel John Tayloe, the house remains in the family today, being occupied by Colonel Henry Gwynne Tayloe II. Still maintained as a working plantation, both the buildings and lands are well-maintained in their superb location overlooking the valley of the Rappahannock. A number of outbuildings are of historical interest, including an appealing ruin of an eighteenth century orangery. To the south of the house is the family graveyard, wherein is buried Francis Lightfoot Lee, one of the signers of The Declaration of Independence.

Mount Airy is not open to the public.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

T. T. Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1946).  
 William Pierson, American Buildings and Their Architects (New York, 1970).  
 Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952).

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	UTM° 18.341560:4205140	° 18.343060:4205280		° 18.343280:4203160	° 18.341840:4203340	
NE						
SE						
SW						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 450

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:

James Dillon, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

National Landmarks Program, Landmark Review Project

DATE

11/5/74

STREET AND NUMBER:

1100 L Street

CITY OR TOWN:

Washington

STATE

D.C.

CODE

11

**12 STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

(NATIONAL LANDMARKS)

Oct. 9, 1960

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

(NATIONAL LANDMARKS)

9-22-75

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

*[Signature]*

Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Virginia	
COUNTY Richmond	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7. Description: (1)

Mount Airy Plantation

The East elevation is distinguished by a pair of Palladian windows, the lower being more formal, the upper more simple with an elliptical center window.

The plan of the rectangular two story center block is of great interest for its simplicity and balance. The broad entrance salon is placed squarely on axis, and extends clear through the house from loggia to loggia. This magnificent 20' X 30' room is braced by a pair of rooms at either side. The original location of the stair is uncertain, but it probably was in a stair hall between the two east rooms.

The interior carving at Mount Airy may have been done by William Buckland, one of the greatest of all Georgian craftsmen, between the time he finished working for George Mason at Gunston Hall and the time he moved on to Annapolis, Maryland. We may assume that they were as splendid and ambitious as the rest of the house, but Mount Airy was gutted by fire in 1844 and scarcely any original woodwork remains.

BOUNDARY INFORMATION

Today Mount Airy is still a working plantation, operated by Colonel Henry Gwynne Tayloe II and his brother. The surrounding lands then are much the same as they were in the eighteenth century, basically farm, field, pasture, river, and marsh. While the lands of the Tayloe brothers extend beyond the limits stipulated as the boundary of Mount Airy, it would seem that a perfectly adequate historical area may be created around the house by following four state highways which lie at a distance from the house of from one thousand feet to several thousand feet. Beginning at the junction of state routes 360 and 646, the boundary proceeds north and then northwest along state highway 646 to the junction with state route 621, proceeding southwesterly along that road to its junction with state route 624, then continuing southerly along 624 to the junction with state route 360, then continuing easterly along that route to the junction with 646 which was the starting point. All of this land is owned by H. Gwynne Tayloe II, the occupant of Mount Airy. The boundary limits describe an area of approximately 450 acres. While Mount Airy Plantation encompasses a number of other structures of historical interest and, of course, a number of nonhistorical vernacular farm buildings, the determination of national significance accrues only from the main house with its flanking attached dependencies.

# MOUNT AIRY

