

VLR-4/17/73

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

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

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Yorktown Historic District

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
See continuation sheet

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yorktown

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
First, Thomas N. Downing

STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51      COUNTY: York      CODE: 199

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) town
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Multiple ownership

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yorktown

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
York County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yorktown

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings

DATE OF SURVEY: 1933 - 1938     Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Washington

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

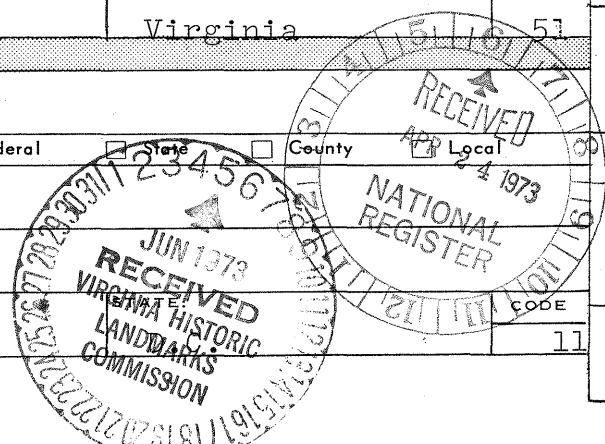
STATE: Virginia

COUNTY: York

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

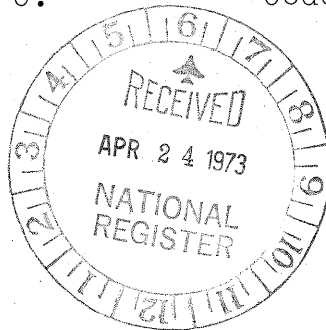
(Continuation Sheet)

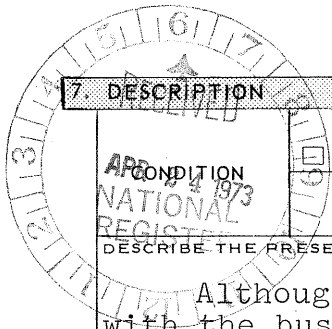
STATE Virginia	
COUNTY York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

2. The Colonial National Historical Park Yorktown portion including Yorktown, the Moore House, the Battlefield, the Surrender Ground, Commanders' Headquarters, and cemeteries.

6. Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory  
1959 Federal  
Library of Congress  
Washington, D. C. Code: 11





7. DESCRIPTION

(Check One)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
(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

Although the quiet rural aspect of Yorktown today contrasts with the busy commercial community of the eighteenth century, the village retains many of its eighteenth century buildings and features. In addition most of the original lot lines laid out on the bluffs in 1691 and at the base of the bluffs in 1788 remain. The original main street is lined with substantial brick and frame eighteenth century dwellings and some modern reconstructions.

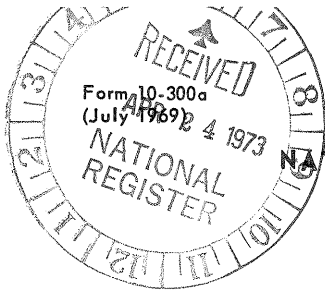
At the west end of Main Street, there are several reconstructions. The brick court house, the fifth to stand on Lot 24, was built in 1955 in colonial style. The Swan Tavern across the street from the court house, originally built in 1722, was destroyed in 1862 and reconstructed in 1930. The frame five-bay building is covered with white clapboards, has a brick foundation, clipped gables, hipped dormers and interior end chimneys. The reconstructed Medical Shop originally built in the mid-eighteenth century stands across the street from the Swan Tavern. The three-bay frame structure rests on a brick foundation and is covered with beaded white clapboards. It has a steeply pitched gable roof and an interior-end chimney.

Grace Church, on Lot 35, north east of the Court House, and already on National Register of Historic Places, is one of the few surviving colonial structures built of marl, although these marl walls were covered with stucco in the mid-nineteenth century. Built between 1696 and 1700 the rectangular building, 55 feet 9 inches by 28 feet 8 inches, received a 29 foot north wing in the eighteenth century. The church was gutted by fire in 1814, but the main portion was restored in 1848. The belfry, western doorway and circular window date from a 1926 renovation.

South of Grace Church on Lot 36 stands the Somerwell House, thought to have been built prior to 1707 by Mungo Somerwell. The house was later part of the Lightfoot family holdings. The three-bay brick building is laid in Flemish bond with irregular glazing on the south section and regular glazing on the north 'T' wing. The house has exterior-end chimneys, a modillion cornice, a steeply pitched roof and gabled dormers. The openings on the south front have been altered, but the door and window frames are old. The windows on the east and west ends have segmental arches. The west chimney, the dormers and the nine-over-nine sash are modern.

The Thomas Pate House on Lot 42 just to the east of the Somerwell House was built between 1699 and 1703 by Thomas Pate, the ferryman and ordinary keeper at York Ferry. Later in the eighteenth century the house was owned by Cole Digges and his children. The four-bay whitewashed ell-shaped brick structure is laid in Flemish bond. Three gabled dormers open on the south slope of the roof, one on the eastern and two on the western slope

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7.(1)

of the ell wing. The building originally had exterior end chimneys, but the western stack has been altered to allow a window in the gable, and the eastern chimney has become an interior one. A modillion cornice is found at the roofline. The house was extensively remodelled in 1925.

Across the Main Street from the Thomas Pate House is the Old Customs House on Lot 43, built by Richard Ambler, the customs collector, and used by him as a store house. The rectangular two-story brick building is laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers and has a belt course of three courses of corbelled brick. The building has a steeply pitched hipped roof covered with slate, a modillion cornice and an interior-end chimney with a corbelled cap on the south side. The lower story windows and the doors have segmental arches; the second story windows have flat arches. All the windows have architrave trim, blinds and nine-over-nine sash. A brick wall laid in Flemish bond encircles the large yard.

The major remaining house in Yorktown is the Nelson House. It was built on Lot 52 between 1711 and 1740 either by Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson, progenitor of this well-known family in Virginia or by his son, William. It remained in the Nelson family until it was purchased as the nucleus of York Hall estate by Captain George Preston Blow in 1914. The Nelson House has been part of Colonial Historical National Park since 1968. The Nelson House is a rectangular, two-story brick house, five bays wide (on the north facade) and three bays deep, with a generously proportioned dentil cornice, a broad gable roof with pediments on the ends and two interior chimneys with corbelled caps. The house has a fine gauged-brick water table and belt course. The corners are quoined in stone; the window sills, lintels and keystones are also in stone. The original center doorway has simple gauged and rubbed brick piers, and a triangular pediment of rubbed and molded brick, however the elaborate west doorway is modern. The south side has only four bays and the door is off-center. The large hipped dormers were added in 1920.

The floor plan has a central hall with the smaller two rooms on the east separated by a small stair and two large square rooms are on the west. This plan is repeated on the second floor. The entrance hall is paneled above and below the molded chair-rail, and there is a fully developed cornice. The stair, ascending in three easy flights, retains its original treads, risers and stringer. Although all the rooms are paneled, the northeast room is the most elaborate. The walls are not only paneled, but are marked off by a modified Corinthian order, somewhat like Plate XXV in Batty Langley's Builder's Director. The order is composed of columns engaged three-quarters of their depth with capitals

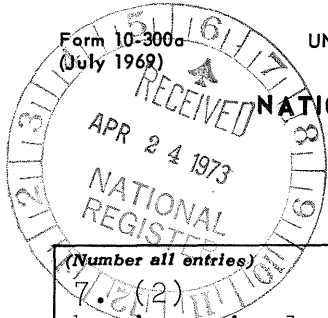
Form 10-300a  
(July 1962)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE



(Number all entries)

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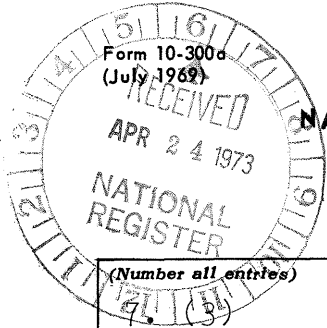
having single bands of tall acanthus leaves. Windows, doors and mantel are framed by this order. The marble mantel, as with all the others in the house, is a copy of the original. In the north-west room, fluted pilasters (apparently Doric, although the capitals have been removed) flank the windows, doors and mantel.

Across the cross street from the Nelson House on Lot 56 is the Sessions-Shield House built in the last years of the seventeenth century by Thomas Sessions. The rectangular five-bay brick dwelling is laid in Flemish bond and has a clipped gable roof. Five hipped dormers open on the north slope of the roof and three on the south slope. Two exterior-end chimneys are T-shaped. The original modillion cornice is found at the roofline and the first floor windows retain original trim and nine-over-nine sash, as do the second floor end windows. The dormer trim and sash are modern. Segmental arches mark the end windows and basement windows. The front and back porches and the eastern frame wing are nineteenth century additions. On the interior, the first floor rooms feature chair rails and cornices, but the distinctive feature in the central hallway is the arch with a fluted keystone, fluted pilasters and a paneled spandrel.

North of the Sessions-Shield House across Main Street on Lot 77 stands the Dudley Digges House built for Digges about 1755. Digges inherited the property from his father, and expanded it by purchasing the adjoining lots (76 and 79) as locations for out-buildings. The Digges House is considered an outstanding example of the mid-eighteenth century one-and-one-half story house in Virginia. One of the few frame buildings surviving in Yorktown, the five-bay house has a modillion cornice and two interior-end chimneys with corbelled caps. Five gabled dormers pierce the north and south slope of the roof, which as a slight kick at the eaves. The nine-over-nine sash in the south facade and the east and west ends is original, however the dormer four-over-four sash and the six-over-six sash in the gables are modern. Architrave trim frames the doorway with its rectangular transom consisting of four panes and the windows.

The floor plan shows a central hall plan with two rooms, each having a corner fireplace, on either side of the hall. In the hall, a vertically paneled wainscoating and a wooden molded cornice are employed. The two-run open-string stair with a molded handrail, turned balusters and ornamental brackets is set back into the northeast corner of the hall. The southwest room is fully paneled with vertical panels and features an arch with a keystone as a doorway in the north wall. Many of the original six-paneled doors remain in the house.

Two houses, the Edmund Smith House and the Ballard House,



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7. (3)  
stand on the cross street east of the Nelson House, Nelson Street. The Edmund Smith House on Lot 53 was built by Edmund Smith in 1751 for his daughter, Mildred, who married David Jameson. This five-bay brick dwelling laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers originally fronted on the street. When it was converted into a guest house for the York Hall estate early in this century, the entrance was changed to the garden front, and the former street entrance was made into a window. At the time of the renovation, two gabled dormers were added to the two already opening on the west slope of the roof, thereby matching the four original dormers on the street front. The windows are marked by segmental arches and stone sills and have architrave trim and nine-over-nine sash. The stacks of the two exterior end chimneys are slightly removed from contact with the house.

South of the Edmund Smith House on Lot 54 is the Ballard House built by Captain John Ballard by 1744. The five-bay rectangular frame structure is covered with beaded white clapboards. The exterior-end chimney of the south end has its stack set out from contact with the gable, although the north chimney is within the frame of the house. Four gabled dormers open on the east slope of the steeply pitched roof, and three on the west slope. A molded cornice is employed on the exterior. The doorway in the street facade is off center to the south; three bays extend north of the doorway. The first floor windows have nine-over-nine sash and the dormers have six-over-six.

The reconstructed Archer House stands under the hill on the water front. Built by Thomas Archer in the eighteenth century, the structure was destroyed by fire in 1814. The present frame rectangular two-bay house with two gabled dormers in each slope of the roof is built on the foundations of the earlier structure.

Extensive remains of William Rogers pottery kiln have been located on the east side of Read Street, southwest of the Nelson House. This local industry produced good quality stonewares and coarse earthenwares in the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

Governor Gooch referred to Rogers in letters of the 1730's to the English Board of Trade as the "poor potter", but historical research and archaeological excavation have determined that his pottery operation was large and successful.

A number of eighteenth century house sites have potential for archaeological examination. In addition to many small and medium sized structures, there were three major brick residences that have been destroyed. The Secretary Thomas Nelson House, stood on Main Street just east of the town limits and was reduced to a ruin by American shelling in 1781. Aged Secretary Nelson

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7. (4)

was finally convinced to abandon his home when his body servant "had his brains dashed out by a cannon ball while he stood by his side." Foundations of the Secretary Nelson house have been partly excavated. A large H-shaped house on lots 46, 47, 84, and 85 across from the Governor Nelson House was the home of William Nelson, President of the Council. The house was lost in an 1814 fire that destroyed much of the town. Its foundations remain below ground, and excavation would provide information about its interesting plan. A 1754 sketch shows the Lightfoot House, at the west end of the town. It was an imposing two story hip roof structure, with an appearance similar to Westover and Carters Grove. The building's plan would be valuable for comparative evidence, but archaeological remains of the house are believed to have been destroyed by modern construction on the site.

A few miles east of Yorktown is the Moore House, owned in 1781 by Augustine Moore. Built about 1725, the house is restored to its Revolutionary condition, when it served as the meeting place for the representatives of the three armies. Here the Articles of Capitulation, signed by the commanding officers on October 19th were drawn up. The frame five-bay rectangular house with beaded white clapboard has a hip-on-gambrel roof and a modillion cornice. The north slope of the roof is broken by five hipped dormers, the south by three. The two brick exterior chimneys are T-shaped. Nine-over-nine sash is employed in the first floor windows, and six-over-six in the dormers. The floor plan has a central hall with two rooms to the west and one large room to the east. A two-run closed-string stair ascends on the east side of the hall. A chair-rail is employed in the first floor rooms, and the mantels have plain friezes and shelves supported by simple pilasters.



8. SIGNIFICANCE

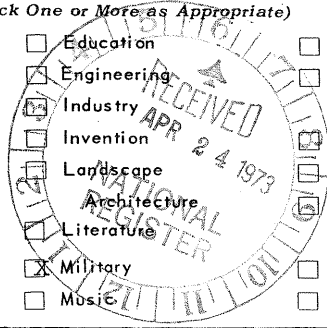
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering  | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>history</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input checked="" 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               | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature              | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military     |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                   |  |  |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

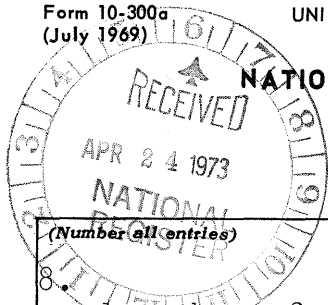
Yorktown was established by the Virginia Port Act in 1691 on the land of Benjamin Read, part of the Captain Nicholas Martiau tract which had descended through the distaff side to Read. The Port Act sought to foster urban development in Virginia and one of its measures specified the procurement of fifty acres to serve as a port for York County. Major Lawrence Smith surveyed the fifty acres and laid out eighty-five half-acre lots on the bluffs above the river. On the original plat, surviving among the York County records, a principle street (Main) running parallel to the river was intersected by seven cross streets. The original street and lot lines remain today. The lots were laid out on the bluffs above the river, but left a strip of land, "a Common Shore of no value" between the town and the river. In this area wharves, stores, lodgings and a considerable business development grew up along Water Street. Although this district was brought into the town in 1738, it remained commons land (as does the beach today) until it was surveyed for lots in 1738.

For much of the eighteenth century, Yorktown reigned as a busy commercial town and port. The excellent harbor in the York River, and the fine quality of the tobacco raised on the surrounding plantations combined to make Yorktown one of the most important tobacco ports. Yorktown reached the peak of its growth and prosperity about 1750, although it continued a busy commercial life for another twenty-five or thirty years. Rival points of trade claimed much of the town's business, the center of tobacco moved southwest as the soil of the neighboring plantations wore out, and these were the harbingers of decline even before the siege of 1781 laid waste to much of the town. Yorktown did not recover from the effects of the siege, it ceased to be a commercial center, population dropped, and a quiet rural village resulted.

At the height of its prosperity, Yorktown's population probably never exceeded three thousand. A number of prosperous families who were prominent in the affairs of the colony lived there. Among the more famous of these were the Nelson family who produced William, President of the Council and acting governor, Thomas, Deputy Secretary of the Colony for many years

SEE INSTRUCTIONS





**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

and member of the Council, and Thomas, Jr., Signer of the Declaration of Independence and Governor of Virginia; and the Digges family whose scion Dudley was in the House of Burgesses and an active supporter of the revolutionary cause.

Today Yorktown is principally remembered for its part in the culmination of the American Revolution. Although as early as 1775 Governor Dunmore had stored supplies and later lived aboard his warship in Yorktown harbor, the area saw little action until Cornwallis entered the town in August, 1781. Here he prepared to await re-enforcements from New York, and here he was surrounded by the combined American and French forces under Washington and Rochambeau. The French fleet under the Comte de Grasse defeated the British off the capes of the Chesapeake in early September and were thus masters of the bay and river entrances. Gradually Cornwallis was forced to pull his lines in closer to Yorktown. The Americans and French constructed several siege lines as they pushed Cornwallis in on the town. By October 17th the town and the British troops had been under incessant artillery fire for eight days and they were surrounded at close range. Relief had not come and the Americans and French had superior forces. Cornwallis' position was untenable, he could not fire a single gun, thus surrender was the only alternative. On the 19th of October, Cornwallis signed the Articles of Capitulation, drafted the day before at the Moore House, and the British troops marched to Surrender Field and stacked their arms.

After the Siege of 1781, Yorktown settled into the role of a rural community, although it retained its position as the York County seat. In 1814, a fire began along the waterfront in Yorktown-under-the-hill, spread into the town and destroyed many old colonial buildings. The next major event in the town's history occurred when Lafayette was feted there during his tour of America in 1824. During the War Between the States, there was a second siege of Yorktown in 1862, a minor engagement; some of the visible fortifications date from this siege. The victory at Yorktown was extensively observed during the Centennial Celebration in 1881, and at the Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1931.

In the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, Yorktown was an important port and an active commercial community. The substantial houses of the early merchants were followed by fine mansions as the merchants increased their wealth. A number of eighteenth century houses remain today, and these with the Main Street reconstructions combine to give the atmosphere of an eighteenth century village along the original streets. The smaller brick and frame houses are excellent examples of the typical early and mid-eighteenth century town dwellings. The Nelson House is a

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

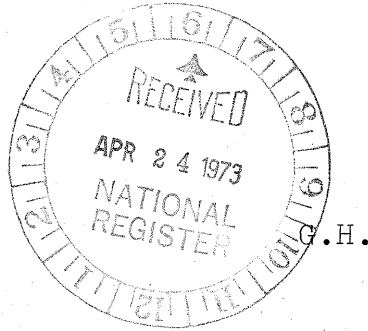
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STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

*(Number all entries)*

8.

distinguished example of an Early Georgian pedimented gable-end house, and retains most of the original interior trim. Yorktown gains its greatest glory from having been the site of the culmination of the American Revolution. The Battlefield sites, Headquarters, Surrender Field and other integral parts of the wartime Yorktown are contained within the Colonial Historical National Park.



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Charles E. Hatch, Jr. Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, National Park Service Historical Handbook Series, No. 14, Washington, 1954, revised 1957.  
 Charles E. Hatch, Jr. The Nelson House and the Nelsons, Washington, D.C.: Office of History and Historic Architecture, 1969.  
Grace Church, Washington, D.C.: Office of History and Historic Architecture, 1970.  
The Thomas Pate House, Washington, D.C.: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 1969.  
 See continuation sheet

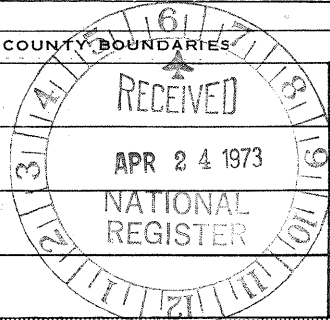
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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	37° 14' 37"	76° 32' 53"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	37° 14' 37"	76° 29' 02"				
SE	37° 11' 35"	76° 29' 02"				
SW	37° 11' 35"	76° 32' 53"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 4,500 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission DATE: January, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

**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

Name J. R. Fishburne  
J. R. Fishburne, Director  
 Title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Date APR 17 1973

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

9.

The Edmund Smith House, Washington, D.C.: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 1969.

Dudley Digges House and Dependencies, Washington, D.C.: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 1969.

Harold A. Larrabee, Decision at the Chesapeake, New York: Bramhall House, 1964.





# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H34-PHR

JUN 4 1973

Dr. Junius R. Fishburne, Jr.  
Executive Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
State Ninth Street Office Building  
Room 1106  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Junius:

After careful consideration by our staff, we are returning the nomination for the Yorktown Historic District. We recognize that the Yorktown area is an extremely significant part of our national patrimony, but the district boundaries need to be carefully defined and its internal cohesiveness shown. The boundaries should be marked on the U.S.G.S. map and a sketch map should be provided which indicates the relationships of the buildings. The district appears to include part of the Colonial National Historical Park, already listed on the National Register. We suggest that you nominate only properties outside the established boundaries of the Park. In addition, intruding elements should be mentioned, including some details on reconstruction and restoration. Finally, to illustrate a district, we need some vista photos showing relationships between buildings, open spaces, and along streets.

We are sure that you will agree that it is important to maintain the highest possible professional standards for National Register nominations, and we will be happy to review this nomination again when resubmitted.

Sincerely yours,

*William J. Murtagh*  
William J. Murtagh  
Keeper of the National Register

Enclosures

