

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Solitude
other names/site number 150-100-3

2. Location

street & number Greenhouse Road adjacent to the Duck Pond on the V.P.I. N/A not for publication
city, town Blacksburg Campus vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Montgomery code 121 zip code 24060

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing resources.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: A. Bryan Mitchell
Date: March 24, 1989
Director, VA Division of Historic Landmarks
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
entered in the National Register.
determined eligible for the National Register,
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Hall parlor

OTHER: Single-pile center passage

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestone

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof METAL: iron

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The house at Solitude is a two-story structure built in several campaigns during the nineteenth century. The house is situated in a landscaped park adjacent to the central campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. The park, created in the twentieth century, contains two bodies of water: the large "Duck Pond" and a smaller nineteenth century mill pond.

What appears to be the earliest portion of the house is a two-story weatherboarded log section which faces south towards Stroubles Creek. It is sheathed with beaded weatherboard and features a 2-story brick chimney and tapered beaded rake boards. The six over six double hung sash are equipped with early louvered blinds on the north (rear) 2nd floor. The transomed entry door is in the west bay of the two bay principal facade, and is sheltered below an early gabled porch with wide ceiling boards. A one-story leanto of frame opens off the two first floor rooms.

The interior of this section has two rooms of unequal size on each floor, separated by a log partition. In spite of alterations through years of use as an academic building, the section contains flush wood wainscoting with molded chair and beaded base. The mantel has been removed and lost. Door and window trim features a $\frac{1}{4}$ round architrave molding and beaded edge. An early enclosed winder stair rises near the entry door from the smaller room along the central partition. The second floor incorporates the same wainscot, base chair and window trim. The original mantel survives in the large second floor room. The mantel is of the Federal type, with central tablet and stepped moldings. A stud partition has been added along the west side of the stair, which was open on the second floor. A bathroom has been added in the early part of this century in the smaller 2nd floor room.

A log section seems to have been added to the previously mentioned portion. While it shared a common eave height with the other section it appears to have faced the west and to have incorporated a chimney in its north end. In the 1850's, the section was altered radically to conform to a further addition made at that time, so that beaded weatherboard remains on the eastern half of the south wall, continuous with the previously mentioned log section. The interior contains one room on each of the two floors, and the only early features retained on the interior are a pair of closets on the north wall which apparently flanked the original chimney. The closet doors are equipped with three light transoms, six panel doors, and molded architrave trim. A Federal mantel with reeded pilasters, central tablet, and panelled pilaster caps survives in the second floor of the log section, apparently relocated.

In 1859 Robert Preston added a hip-roofed frame wing to the north, incorporating the log section discussed above into a new center passage dwelling presenting its principal facade toward the west.

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1808-1859

Significant Dates
1808, 1859

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The property is significant under criterion C, as an excellent example of the early and mid-19th century architectural forms popular in the area, and their change through time as spacial and decorative ideas underwent alteration. The building incorporates elements of earlier log houses in a full-blown center-passage Greek Revival house of unusal scale and decorative merit. It also features a very unusual pair of outbuildings. It is one of 19 frame 2-story single-pile center-passage dwellings dating from the period (eight were of brick and one of log), and it is the grandest of the number with its unusual exterior plaster and wainscot on the front, and articulated five-bay fenestration.

The land on which Solitude is built was part of a 200 acre tract at the headwaters of Stroubles Creek from his father Casper, part of a 507 acre grant purchased from the original tract of 7,500 acre known as Draper's Meadow. James Patton Preston, son of William Preston (who built nearby Smithfield), purchased the 200 acres in 1803, and sold it in 1807 to Granville Smith, his maternal uncle. The name Solitude first appears in a letter from Smith to his nephew on December 13, 1808. Smith seems to have lived there and in Goochlan County until about 1810 (he died in 1816). Preston's sister Letitia and her husband Dr. John Floyd lived at the house in c. 1814-1815, from several letters headed Solitude written during that period. In 1815 and 1816 James P. Preston applied to the court to erect a grist mill at Smithfield, and a dam and ditch on his land. A jury were to evaluate the damages to Preston and the heirs of Granville Smith. Their report attested that the heirs of Smith would be benefitted by the ditch, which was fed by the pond still adjacent to the house at Solitude (Kegley, vol. 1, pp. 190 & 253).

James P. Preston purchased back the land in 1822 from Granville Smith's heirs (D.B. O, p. 605). In 1820 John Hammet, overseer at the Horseshoe farm employed by then Virginia Governor James P. Preston, wrote that Governor Preston planned to build a distillery near the mill in partnership with Mr. Gull, tenant at Solitude. Mrs. Preston was opposed to the scheme, saying it would "ruin his negroes". (Preston papers, reel 12).

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Elmore, Frank, interview, February, 1988.
Historic Photograph Collection Special Collections, Newman Library, V. P. I.
Johnston, Mary Tabb, interview, January, 1988.
Kegley, M. B. Early Adventurers on the Western Waters. Orange, Va: Green Publishers, 1980.
MacEver, Mac, interview, February, 1988.
Montgomery County Deed Books.
Preston Papers, Library of Congress.
Robertson, Jenkins M. V. P. I. Historic Data Book, vol. IVII, no. 3.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks
221 Governor Street
Richmond, VA 23219

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately 3 acres

UTM References

A | |

Zone Easting Northing

C | |

B | |

Zone Easting Northing

D | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point on the southwest side of Greenhouse Road where a drive from Solitude intersects it, preceeding three hundred feet southeast along Greenhouse Road to the north side of Stroubles Creek where it emerges from a culvert under Greenhouse Road at point B, thence generally west and north with the north side

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries were chosen to enclose an undeveloped portion of the original farm which retains much of the ambience of the early domestic space and is visible from the house.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gibson Worsham
organization Gibson Worsham, Architect date January 1988
street & number Yellow Sulphur Springs, Route 2 telephone (703) 552-4730
city or town Christiansburg state Virginia zip code 24073

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Solitude
150-100-3

7. Description (Continued):

The roof of the log section was removed and the walls raised to match the new section, and all fenestration and interior trim replaced. The chimney was relocated to the south end and replaced by a door to match a similar chimney on the north end. New Greek Revival mantels were installed in the south (log) room and the north (frame) room. The Federal mantel mentioned above was apparently relocated with the chimney on the 2nd floor log room. The central passage contains a straight flight of open-riser stairs with a turned newel and balusters, and a ramped and eased railing ending in a carved volute. The new large six over six double hung sash are given Greek ears and paneled aprons. The windows and doors in the north room have fluted molding, and the high baseboard is molded. The trim in the south room has a plain section and shallow pointed pediments.

The exterior of the principal five bay facade completely conceals the varying dates and materials of its parts. The central passage is reached by a sidelit door with a similar tripartite window above, and the entire first floor front is sheltered by a wide hipped roof porch carried on six square Greek Revival columns. The exterior front wall was treated with a panelled wainscot as if it was an interior space, and the walls above and the ceiling were plastered. The door was flanked by paired Greek engaged pilasters with an entablature featuring a raised central tablet and end blocks. The windows, equipped with original louvered blinds, are also flanked by similar pilasters. A partially enclosed one-story porch extends across the east (rear) with similar pilasters. At the turn of the twentieth century alterations were made, including the addition of a window and closet beside the door in the log first section, and a window to the east side of the north chimney. Second floor room partitions and dropped ceilings in the first floor south room were added in recent decades and can be easily reversed.

Two early outbuildings, both of V-notched log construction, remain near the house. A stone springhouse with log superstructure stands immediately to the southwest, while a log kitchen or office is located just to the northeast. The building had a brick topped chimney at its northern end, visible in historic photographs, but it is gone and a frame addition now in poor condition extends to the north. The interior is plastered on diagonal laths, features a partially dismantled enclosed winder stair in the southwest corner, and a plastered garret with intact beaded baseboard. The top log projects on the front and rear to form a cornice. The building is sheathed with added plain weatherboard, visible in 1890's photographs.

Interviews with mid-twentieth-century inhabitants of the house have indicated that there were windows in the rear (east) wall of the west log section flanking the first floor door (concealed behind modern plaster). The walls of the frame section are also said to be infilled with brick, a regionally popular way of insulating a house (MacEver, Elmore).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8/10 Page 1

Solitude
150-100-3

8. Significance (continued):

Robert Preston inherited Solitude from his father James Patton Preston in the 1850's. The house is said to have been built in 1859 (apparently referring to the large-scale expansion of the house done at that time). Forty acres, embracing the house and several farm buildings, were purchased from Robert Preston in 1872 for \$21,250. The land became the central campus of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, and the house, after the death of Preston in the following decade, was used for faculty housing until the 1970's, when it became a classroom and office facility. The university is now preparing to restore the house for use as an appalachian studies center. (Data Book).

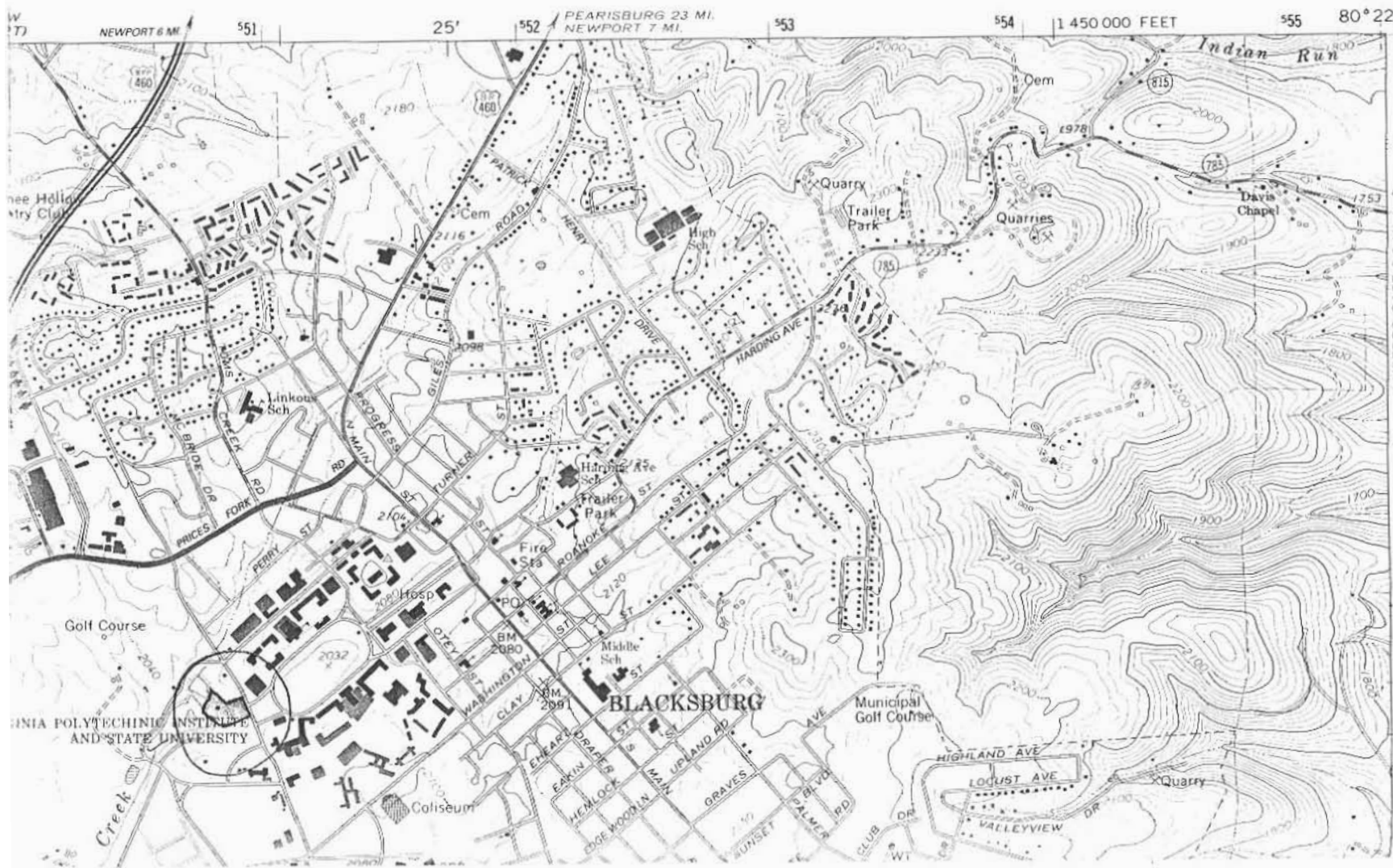
10. Geographical Data (continued):

of Stroubles Creek and the east edge of the Duck Pond and the adjacent mill pond to Point C on the eastern edge of the mill pond in a direct line northwest of the northeast end of the addition to the log outbuilding, thence following said line past the addition 200 feet to point D on the northwest side of the drive to Solitude, thence northeast along the drive 350 feet to the point of origin.

OF VIRGINIA
AL RESOURCES

BLACKSBURG QUADRANGLE
VIRGINIA—MONTGOMERY CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

1958 IV SE
(MC DONALDS MILL)



4122
LUSTERS GATE 0.5 MI
4121
4120
330 000
FEET

Solitude
Montgomery Co., VA
UTM References:
17/550820/4119910
Blacksburg, VA quad