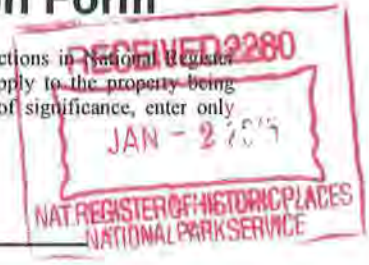


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

16

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Amblers  
Other names/site number: Coke-Watts House; VDHR #047-0043  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 2205 Jamestown Road  
City or town: Jamestown State: VA County: James City County  
Not For Publication:  n/a Vicinity:  X

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local  
Applicable National Register Criteria:  
A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of certifying official/Title:** **Date**  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of commenting official:** **Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title :** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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**4. 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:)

Joe Edward B. Beal  
Signature of the Keeper

2.07.15  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:   
Public – Local   
Public – State   
Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)   
District   
Site   
Structure   
Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC/Secondary Structure

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY/Picturesque

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/ Colonial Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; STONE/Slate

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Enveloped by a canopy of large old trees on a rise overlooking the James River at the Jamestown Ferry, Amblers (also known as the Coke-Watts House) is an H-shaped, two-story brick dwelling whose plan evolved over two major building campaigns a century apart. In 1852, John Coke built an irregular-massed, T-shaped dwelling, now the only known surviving example in Virginia's Peninsula of Picturesque design aesthetics often associated with Andrew Downing, which garnered popularity in America in the 1840s and 1850s through journals and books. In the middle of the twentieth century, Amblers changed hands a number of times as the land was subdivided and went out of agricultural production. Around 1930, Jesse Dimmick made a number of improvements to the house including the installation of new heating and plumbing systems during his ownership. In 1941, Williamsburg auto dealer Robert Brumley Watts and Estelle C. Watts purchased the Ambler tract and, by the early 1950s, more than doubled the size of the house, adding a wing to the east, a new kitchen, and garage, and repaired two antebellum outbuildings just to the east of the main house.<sup>1</sup> The Watts carefully emulated the massing, brickwork, and details of the original house in the matching wing, kitchen, and garage. They also repaired the two surviving outbuildings to the east of the house and laid out a formal garden at

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the rear of the house. This later work should be considered as a major contribution to the significance of the property as a late manifestation of Colonial Revival aesthetics, one especially, but not entirely as this property indicates, focused on the state's colonial heritage that dominated thinking about old estates in Virginia through the first half of the twentieth century. Few buildings in the region exemplify such an architectural pedigree.

Amblers historically was part of a much larger parcel that had been in agricultural use since the 1610s and still retains remnants of ancient fields first used as pastureland by Jamestown's early settlers. Though Amblers has great archaeological potential dating from prehistoric native American habitation, early European exploration and settlement, and the agricultural society that flourished here in the late colonial and early national period, this nomination focuses on the antebellum farmhouse located on the brow of the hill about 200 yards from the edge of the river. Not simply a rectangular box trimmed with Greek Revival details typical of this region and time, Amblers is one of the last surviving sizeable antebellum farmhouses in James City County and indicative of the fact that, unlike much of the Peninsula, this tract did not sink entirely into agricultural torpidity with the disruption of the tobacco economy following the American Revolution and the great outmigration of population in the early nineteenth century. In addition to the dwelling, contributing resources include two outbuildings.

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## **Narrative Description**

### **Setting**

With old fields running westward to the James River and southward to Powhatan Creek, the dwelling at Amblers was the center of a large farm that operated from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century until it was subdivided in 1917. The Ambler tract retained 169 acres when the house was renovated around 1930 by Jesse Dimmick, who had purchased the property the previous year. During the Watts' ownership period, a formal boxwood garden was established north of the house. Now overgrown, the structure of the Colonial Revival garden accentuated the attempt by the Watts to blend the modern additions with the old house and recall the earlier eras in which the property is so intimately bound. The dwelling's west porch is shaded by two massive tulip poplars and there is a large Osage orange tree in front of the house.

Today, Amblers is owned by James City County and is in the immediate vicinity of the county-owned Jamestown Beach Park, Greensprings Interpretive Trail, Powhatan Creek Trail, and Powhatan Creek Park, all of which occupy former plantation lands that dated to the earliest decades of English settlement. The dwelling's hilltop location and an expanse of meadowland between it and the James River allow it an unimpeded view southwest toward the river, which was a crucial transportation route during the colonial and early national periods. The property also is in the immediate vicinity of the Scotland-Jamestown Ferry landing.

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### **The House: 1852 Plan and Ornamentation**

When John Coke purchased the 375 acres on the mainland in 1840, the value of the property had been assessed at \$300. However, in 1840 the assessment plummeted to \$25, suggesting a catastrophic event, perhaps the burning of a house that may have stood on this property. County tax records indicate that few new improvements occurred for a dozen years following Coke's purchase. However, in 1852 the value of the tract increased substantially to \$6,666.67 "on account of a wharf and \$1,200 on account of buildings." This indicates the building of the core of the present house, whose architecture characteristics suggest a late antebellum period of construction.

Coke erected a two-story, T-shaped dwelling on the brow of the hill. Built with a shallow unheated cellar, all the brick walls are laid in 1:5 bonding with decorative V-shaped mortar joints. Had the building been constructed earlier in the second quarter of the century, then it would have been likely that the façade would have been laid in Flemish bond. However, by mid-century, this decorative bonding had finally lost its cachet throughout most of Virginia. The bricks measure 8 ¼ inches in length, 4 inches in width, and 2 3/8 inches in height. The brickwork is of a uniform red color, accentuated perhaps originally by a red color wash, traces of which are still visible on the decorative ½-inch wide v-joints. There is no water table and the openings are crowned by shallow segmental arches composed of headers. On the south wall of the west wing near the west corner of the house, a stretcher brick is inscribed crudely "Janry 16th 1840," graffiti probably left by John Coke, or a member of his family, to celebrate the date he purchased the property rather than the year the house was built.

A good example of the Picturesque fashion that was just appearing in Virginia, the house was irregularly massed, with a short blocky, two-story front section that faces southeast toward Jamestown Island, with a 17 ½- by 38-foot west double-parlor wing set at right angles to and projecting 11 feet beyond the entrance block. The 16- by 22-foot front entrance block faces Powhatan Creek to the south while the wing, which had an original (but substantially rebuilt and now enclosed) two-story porch attached to the west side, overlooks the field that ran down to the old ferry on the shoreline of the James River. Archaeologist Alain Outlaw has identified traces of a roadbed that ascends the hill from the river's edge in front of the house.

In the center of the east entrance block is the front door, which opens into a shallow, eight-foot deep stair vestibule. The open string stair rises along the front wall just east of the doorway, turns along the east wall and then doubles back at a landing to alight on the second floor. The staircase retains its original turned newel post, molded ramped handrail, and tapered turned balusters with simple stair brackets. Behind the entrance vestibule is a small unheated room. A staircase descends to the unheated cellar on the south wall of this room below the upper flight of the main staircase. Presumably, there was a rear doorway leading out of this room, either on the east wall or possibly the rear north wall.

To the west of the entrance lobby, a doorway leads into the larger of the two, ground-floor parlor rooms in the west wing. The front south room was the principal entertaining room,

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measuring nearly 19 feet in length and was heated by an inside chimney on the south gable end. The room is lit by two windows on either side of the fireplace and a pair of windows opposite one another on the east and west walls. A doorway on the west wall leads to the enclosed porch. A six-foot wide double doorway on the north end of the room opens into the smaller parlor, which is heated, not on the north gable end, but in the center of the east wall where it backs against the unheated room behind the stair vestibule in the eastern block. Perhaps there was another fireplace, since removed, that once heated this back eastern room, thus explaining the position of the chimney in this part of the house. The back parlor in the west wing has a pair of windows in the north wall and another pair on the west wall. A doorway on the east wall just south of the fireplace opens into a small lobby formed by the space taken up by the upper flight of the staircase between the entrance vestibule and back room in the east wing.

The second-floor plan nearly mirrors that of the main floor, consisting of a pair of bedchambers above the two double parlors in the west wing with smaller unheated rooms in the eastern block. One opened directly into the south bedchamber and may have been a dressing room. The other opens off the passage at the top of the stair landing. Both were converted into bathrooms around 1930 when the house was renovated. On the west wall of the two bedchambers, doors lead out to the second-floor porch.

Despite renovations completed around 1930 and the more substantial alterations made a quarter century later when the house was doubled in size, the original part of the house retains some of its original decorative woodwork. Besides the early staircase with its oval walnut handrail, turned balusters and newel post, the apertures are trimmed with symmetrical Greek architraves, molded plinths, and corner blocks. The old rooms also retain a tall molded base. All of the original window sash were replaced before or during the expansion of the house in the 1950s.

### **Renovations: c. 1929-1930**

In May 1929, Jesse Dimmick acquired 169 acres of the former Ambler estate and proceeded to make substantial repairs to the house by 1935 as is indicated in an old photograph. From the physical evidence of circular sawn framing members secured by wire nails in the cellar and roof, it appears that he gutted much of the building, replacing the original floor joists and floorboards, and rebuilt the roof framing. He covered the new roof with strips of metal shingles, which survive beneath the current slate roof on the original section of the main dwelling as well as on the smokehouse. He installed new electrical, heating, and plumbing systems, elements of which survive throughout the house. Although he did little to alter the ground-floor plan, he did convert the two second-floor unheated rooms into bathrooms with tiled floors and walls and porcelain plumbing fixtures, elements of which still survive. A sink is inscribed 9/18/29 and a toilet is stamped 7/10/28, marking them as worthy landmarks in the history of American plumbing. To give the recessed center entrance a more pronounced and formal appearance, Dimmick added a wooden pedimented frontispiece. The deeply projecting modillion pediment rests on robust brackets.

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### **Alterations and Expansion: Early 1950s**

In 1941, Robert and Estelle Watts purchased the property and within a decade after World War II made substantial alterations to the house, more than doubling its size, installing new mechanical systems, and making improvements to the older section. Based on evidence of plumbing and electrical systems, this work appears to have been done by the middle of the 1950s. The house's entire roof was covered with slate shingles. The work was done in a manner that was very sympathetic to the original structure. The Watts added a matching wing to the east side of the original eastern block to create an H-shaped massing across the south façade. The width of the south front of the new west wing was 17 ½ feet, the same as the south face of the original west wing. It also projected 11 feet beyond the face of the old entrance block like the original wing. The Watts replicated the 1:5 bonding of the original section and carefully selected bricks that matched the deep red color of the original fabric. They replicated the placement, size, and finish of the segmental arched windows of the old wing in the new one and even added a false stack at the apex of the new gable to maintain the symmetry. Although reworked in the early 1930s during Dimmick's ownership, the gables in the old west wing were rebuilt with a brick veneer to match the gables of the new wing.

The new east wing contained two rooms and two bathrooms (in a roughly 6- by 15-foot two-story projection from the east façade) on both the first and second stories with a full cellar beneath the new footprint. The cellar is deeper than the original cellar and contains a fireplace in the south wall and is decoratively paved with broken pieces of tiles. This space is one large room and was probably used as a game or entertaining room.

In the east wing on the main floor, there is a bedroom on the south side and a den on the north. The den is finished with full-length, vertical, molded knotty-pine boards, a decorative devise redolent of the era. This work matches that in the outbuilding. Upstairs, the wing has two bedrooms with private baths. The Watts also constructed a kitchen on the back side of the house just north of the original unheated room behind the stairway entrance. The kitchen is one story in height and terminates in a wide bow window on the north side. Overgrown with bushes now, this window looked out on a formal boxwood garden that was planted north of the house centered on the two outer walls of the H-shaped wings. The kitchen has a flat roof and a balustraded balcony was built on top with access to it from a doorway cut from an original window in the backside of the original eastern block on the north side. Although the kitchen cabinets and counters were replaced at a later date, the original stove survives.

A one-story garage was erected against the north end of the new east wing. It contains a separate apartment lit by dormer windows and accessed by an internal staircase from the garage. The Watts also constructed an enclosed two-story shed porch against the west façade of the original west wing. To tie the new and old work together, pediments with wooden tympanums were built against the outer slopes of the west and east cross wings. The two-story west porch of the original section was partially rebuilt and enclosed. The porch measures nearly 10 feet in



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width and 36 ½ feet in length with new foundations, paneled lower walls, and new windows. The porch has eight windows across its west face on both floors.

Watts added new woodwork to the older section of the house, installing a molded surbase and chair board and molded cornice in the two double parlors. He refaced the internal chimneys with raised panel overmantels, molded shelves, and relatively flat architraves around the fireplace openings. Throughout the house, he inserted raised panel doors with oversized colonial reproduction rim locks. The quality of this Colonial Revival trim and hardware is good but not of the museum quality that was used in the reconstructions at Colonial Williamsburg. It does not try to imitate eighteenth-century work with any degree of fidelity as the moldings are a little too flat and the locks are not properly proportioned. Yet, on the whole, the Watts additions and alterations along with those made earlier by Jesse Dimmick were executed in a sympathetic manner that respected the earlier work.

### **Outbuildings**

The 1852 house probably had a number of outbuildings located to the north and east to service it, including a kitchen that no longer stands. What does survive is a twelve-foot square brick smokehouse standing to the east of the dwelling. Laid in a similar 1:5 bond as the dwelling, the building has a doorway on the west façade and a shallow hipped roof covered with a metal roof that was probably put on the building about 1930 when the property was purchased by Jesse Dimmick. The brickwork has been badly repointed and patched with Portland cement since that time where spalling, rising damp, and other failures have occurred. The roof framing survives and is composed of circular sawn timbers deeply blackened and punky from the smoke and salt used in curing meats. The interior walls are lined with a newer layer of coarse plaster, which is deteriorating due to dampness. The floor is poured concrete.

Just to the south of the smokehouse is a one-story brick building measuring 26 feet in length by 15 feet deep with two exterior gable end chimneys. It has two doorways on the long west wall flanked by windows at each end with two dormer windows. There are two windows on the rear east wall and a small window in the gables beneath the rake of the roofline. The roof is covered by slate. The brickwork is composed of irregular bonding with traces of a 1:5 arrangement and is much patched like the smokehouse. The chimneys appear to be replacements, probably the work of the early 1950s when the entire building was substantially repaired and the interior gutted to form one large room downstairs. There is a small bathroom on the ground floor with a Standard toilet dating to September 29, 1954, indicative of the period of renovation. The upstairs is one unheated space sheathed in knotty pine paneling similar to that used downstairs and in one of the rooms in the 1950s addition to the main house. Given its size and location, it is plausible that this resource may have been a slave or servant's quarter when first built in the 1850s, but it has been so severely compromised by later alterations and repairs that little but the brickwork survives from the antebellum period, if indeed it is that old. The roof is covered with the same slates used on the main house when it was expanded in the early 1950s.

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### **Archaeological Potential**

The Amblers' tract has great archaeological potential for many periods extending from the prehistoric through the antebellum era. In the context of the antebellum farmhouse, a test unit made by Alain Outlaw revealed an intact subsurface deposit east of the house in the area where the two surviving outbuildings are located. The excavation yielded ironstone, yellow ware, wine bottle glass, and snuff bottle glass. Architectural material included handmade brick fragments, corroded iron nails, and a machine-headed cut iron nail. This deposit, and the high probability that others like it exist in the unplowed environs of the house and outbuildings, offers the likelihood that significant insights into the early to mid-nineteenth century consumer behavior and lifestyles of the owners of Amblers can be revealed. These deposits can also help date various stages of building construction and architectural renovations on the property. Moreover, archaeological investigations will probably reveal the location and character of outbuildings that no longer survive, such as a kitchen, in addition to landscape features, such as gardens, fences, and paths around the dwelling complex.<sup>2</sup>

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Garrett Fesler and Mathew Laird, "A Phase II Archaeological Significance Evaluation of Site 44JC1243 Located on Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Property in James City County, Virginia," Williamsburg: James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc., 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Outlaw, Timothy E. Morgan, Frederick W. Boelt, and Mary B. Clemons, "Phase II Investigations of Archaeological Sites 44JC0101 and 44 JC1212, James City County, Virginia." Williamsburg: Archaeological & Cultural Solutions, Inc., 2009.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1852 – early 1950s

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1852

c. 1950-1954  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Unknown

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Amblers is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture with a period of significance of 1852 through the early 1950s. The brick farmhouse erected in 1852 is the only known surviving example in the Peninsula area of the Picturesque design aesthetic that transformed American architecture in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The addition made to the house in the early 1950s mimicked the materials, layout, and details of the earlier work, but undid the irregular massing characteristic of the Picturesque in favor of the balance and symmetry of the Colonial Revival movement. Preservation of historic outbuildings also dovetailed with Colonial Revival principles to capture and revive a bygone era. As played out in Virginia during the twentieth century, Colonial Revival was a significant architectural and design trend that profoundly influenced the Commonwealth's built environment and was directly responsible for preservation of numerous Colonial-era through antebellum buildings across the state.

The acreage included with this nomination is located entirely within the Governor's Land Archaeological District, which was listed in the National Register in 1973. The historic district's period of significance includes the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The extant dwelling and outbuildings at Amblers postdate the district's period of significance, making the buildings non-contributing resources within the district. Limited investigations to date suggest that Amblers has archaeological potential, but insufficient data currently exists to establish its significance in the area of Archaeology (Historic).

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Though it has a long, complex history that would merit consideration for inclusion on the National Register for these many themes, such a nomination would encompass a much larger area of land, including most of Jamestown Island as well as land on the mainland now occupied by museums, individuals, and commercial establishments with a great variety of non-contributing structures. This nomination is more tightly focused on the last phase of this richly layered landscape, the truncated remnant of Amblers' mainland property and the surviving dwelling that was the center of farming and suburban life for a century from the last decade before the Civil War to the decade following the end of World War II.

Located just to the north of the narrow isthmus that connects Jamestown Island to the mainland, Amblers sits on land that figured prominently in the first English settlement of North America and the rise of a slavery-dependent, staple-producing plantation economy for more than two centuries. It also served as a nexus for riverine and overland transportation from the outside world to Jamestown and points on the lower peninsula including Williamsburg. Within a few years of the establishment of Jamestown, a blockhouse and stockade were built on land where

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the present house is located to protect English livestock from the native Powhatan Indians. The land remained in public domain until the College of William and Mary sold it to John Ambler following the American Revolution. The Ambler family had leased the land since the mid-eighteenth century when it was finally absorbed into their holdings, which included a large plantation that incorporated much of Jamestown Island. Until the early 1830s, the main ferry landing across the James River alighted at the waterline of this farm with a road leading toward Williamsburg running by the present house.

In 1840, the Ambler family sold 375 acres that comprised the heart of this mainland estate to John Coke, a prominent local politician from Williamsburg who served as James City County sheriff in the mid-1840s. Coke erected the core of the present house in 1852. The asymmetrical massing of the farmhouse broke with the standard architectural massing of Classical Revival and Greek Revival dwellings erected in this region in the first half of the nineteenth century and was the harbinger of a much more exuberant expression of that aesthetic that would rise to prominence in the impoverished and chaotic years following the Civil War.

Today, Amblers is the only known surviving example in Virginia's Peninsula region of the Picturesque aesthetic that began to influence American design ideas in the 1840s and 1850s, as popularized by Andrew Downing in journals and books published nationwide. Those publications presented engaging depictions of cottages and villas by A. J. Davis, Richard Upjohn, and Gervase Wheeler, and featured architectural treatments only just becoming available through mass production, such as elaborate millwork.

Cognizant of its earlier history and sympathetic to the architectural design of the antebellum farmhouse, Robert and Estelle Watts more than doubled the size of the old house in the early 1950s with an addition that respected the form and details of the original building down to matching the color and the 1:5 bonding pattern of the original brickwork and the fabrication of a false chimney stack. Their architectural decisions were influenced by Colonial Revival sensibilities that had flourished in Virginia since the early twentieth century when architects, builders, and clients looked to the state's early architecture for inspiration for modern design. Unwittingly perhaps, their addition undid the Picturesque irregular massing of the earlier house as it was transformed into a symmetrical ensemble – an essential element of the Colonial Revival aesthetic. The restoration of nearby Williamsburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s had a profound influence in shaping the region's image of its architectural heritage. The design of Amblers' addition in the early 1950s, along with a landscape of formal boxwood gardens that accompanied it, was part of a wave of influence that reverberated from the epicenter just a few miles down the road. Thus Amblers represents the rare amalgamation of two opposing design ideals—the frisson of irregularity with the composure of symmetry.

Other known significant antebellum plantation houses in James City County include the National Historic Landmark Carter's Grove (DHR No. 047-0001; NHL 1974), Powhatan (DHR No. 047-0016; NRHP 1970), and Riverview (DHR No. 047-0025; NRHP 1996). Carter's Grove predates Amblers by almost a century. Originally it featured a colonial-era Georgian mansion consisting of a two-story, hip-roofed central block flanked by detached, balanced dependencies,

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and was noted for its outstanding Flemish brickwork. In 1928, the house was substantially expanded according to tenets of the Colonial Revival movement, by raising the roof, constructing hyphens to connect the house to its dependencies, and introducing numerous dormers. The property retains extensive open space and landscaped grounds that evoke its historic use as a plantation. Powhatan also is an example of a Georgian mansion consisting of a five-bay, two-story, double-pile, central hall block. Unlike Carter's Grove and Amblers, the brick house's massing was not altered during the twentieth century. In 1948, however, a fire largely gutted the interior and necessitated rebuilding the roof. The steeply pitched roof is pierced by dormers that may or may not have been an original feature, while all interior finishes date to 1948 or later. Meanwhile, Riverview is an 1850s plantation house, making it contemporary in date to Amblers. Riverview, however, is a two-and-one-half story frame dwelling featuring Federal and Greek Revival influences. As its name suggests, it is located along the James River. Originally a mid-nineteenth century hall-parlor dwelling, it has evolved to include a five-bay, side-gable central block with flanking one-and-one-half story, side-gabled wings. Riverview remained a working farm well into the twentieth century and, unlike Amblers and Carter's Grove, was not subjected to a Colonial Revival-inspired renovation. The simplicity of its architectural design and materials is illustrative of a well-established and prosperous farmstead in rural James City County, as opposed to the grander pretensions seen at Amblers, Carter's Grove, and Powhatan. Thus, when compared to plantation dwellings of similar scale and architectural character, Amblers stands out as the only known example of mid-nineteenth century Picturesque design in the county (or, indeed, throughout the Peninsula), while also conforming to the hallmarks of Colonial Revival aesthetics as preferred during the early to mid-twentieth century.

### **Archaeological Potential**

Because the area around the dwelling and outbuildings does not appear to have been plowed since the construction of the house in the mid nineteenth century, the archaeological potential of the site is very high. Presumably, a free-standing antebellum kitchen once stood nearby along with additional service buildings, fences, gardens, and other features. A ferry landing with an old roadbed is near the present house. A test unit made by archaeologist Alain Outlaw revealed a rich stratigraphic record near the two extant outbuildings. In addition to archaeological information related to the occupation of the present house since the early 1850s, there may be information related to earlier periods of occupation, from prehistoric Native American sites to early English settlement in the first decades of the seventeenth century, and through the plantation era of the late seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth century when Amblers was a work farm.

Amblers  
Name of Property

James City County, VA  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Comprehensive Planning Team

1975 *Heritage and Historic Sites: An Inventory and Description of Historic Sites in James City County*. On file at the Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA.

Downing, A. J.

1969 *The Architecture of Country Houses*. Reprint by Dover Publications, New York. Originally published 1850.

Farrar, Emmie Ferguson

1957 *Old Virginia Houses Along the James*. Hastings House, Publishers, New York.

Fesler, Garrett and Mathew Laird

2009 A Phase II Archaeological Significance Evaluation of Site 44JC1243 Located on Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Property in James City County, Virginia. James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc., Williamsburg, Virginia.

McCartney, Martha W.

1997 *James City County: Keystone of the Commonwealth*. James City County Board of Supervisors, James City County, Virginia.

National Register Nominations

Various Carter's Grove, Powhatan, and Riverview. On file at the Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA.

Outlaw, Alain C., Timothy E. Morgan, Frederick W. Boelt, and Mary B. Clemons

2009 Phase II Investigations of Archaeological Sites 44JC0101 and 44 JC1212, James City County, Virginia. Archaeological & Cultural Solutions, Inc., Williamsburg, Virginia.

---

### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_



Amblers  
Name of Property

James City County, VA  
County and State

\_\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA;  
Photographs in Architectural Research Department, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, PO  
Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA 23187

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** VDHR # 047-0043

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 8.79

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.227510 | Longitude: -76.787662 |
| 2. Latitude: 37.226458 | Longitude: -76.786410 |
| 3. Latitude: 37.224616 | Longitude: -76.788799 |
| 4. Latitude: 37.225720 | Longitude: -76.789339 |
| 5. Latitude: 37.226809 | Longitude: -76.787918 |
| 6. Latitude: 37.227080 | Longitude: -76.788246 |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

Amblers  
Name of Property

James City County, VA  
County and State

- |          |           |          |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1. Zone: | Northing: | Easting: |
| 2. Zone: | Northing: | Easting: |
| 3. Zone: | Northing: | Easting: |
| 4. Zone: | Northing: | Easting: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

From the northernmost point on the nominated acreage (see attached map entitled "Location Map") proceed 531.6' southeast, then southwest 970.2' to the James River, then 434' northwest, along the James River, then 577' northeast, then 139.2' northwest, then 236' northeast to the point of origin, enclosing 8.79 acres.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

On the northeast, the 8.79 acres include the immediate area around the extant structures and known chronologically related archaeological deposits, all defined by a boundary of mature trees. On the southeast, the acreage defines an unimpeded view of the James River, bounded by tree lines. It includes former agricultural fields now in meadow.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Carl Lounsbury  
organization: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation  
street & number: P.O. Box 1776  
city or town: Williamsburg state: Virginia zip code: 23187  
e-mail: clounsbury@cwf.org  
telephone: 757 220-7654  
date: August 1, 2014

name/title: Alain Outlaw  
organization: Archaeological & Cultural Solutions, Inc.  
street & number: 109 Crown Point Road  
city or town: Williamsburg state: Virginia zip code: 23185  
e-mail: alainoutlaw@aol.com  
telephone: 757-561-1156  
date: August 1, 2014

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Amblers  
Name of Property

James City County, VA  
County and State

### **Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

Name of Property: Amblers

City or Vicinity: Jamestown vicinity

County: James City County State: Virginia

Photographer: Carl Lounsbury

Dates Photographed: November 8, 2007, November 15, 2007, October 11, 2012, and July 17, 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 20: Amblers, Southeast front, view looking north, July 17, 2014.
- 2 of 20: Amblers, Southeast front, view looking northwest, October 11, 2012
- 3 of 20: Amblers, Northeast elevation with garage, view looking northwest, July 17, 2014
- 4 of 20: Amblers, Amblers, Mature plantings, view looking northeast, October 11, 2012
- 5 of 20: Amblers, Southwest porch, view looking northeast, October 11, 2012
- 6 of 20: Amblers: Northwest elevation, view looking southeast, October 11, 2012
- 7 of 20: Amblers: brickwork, 1852 wing, view looking northwest, November 8, 2007

Amblers

Name of Property

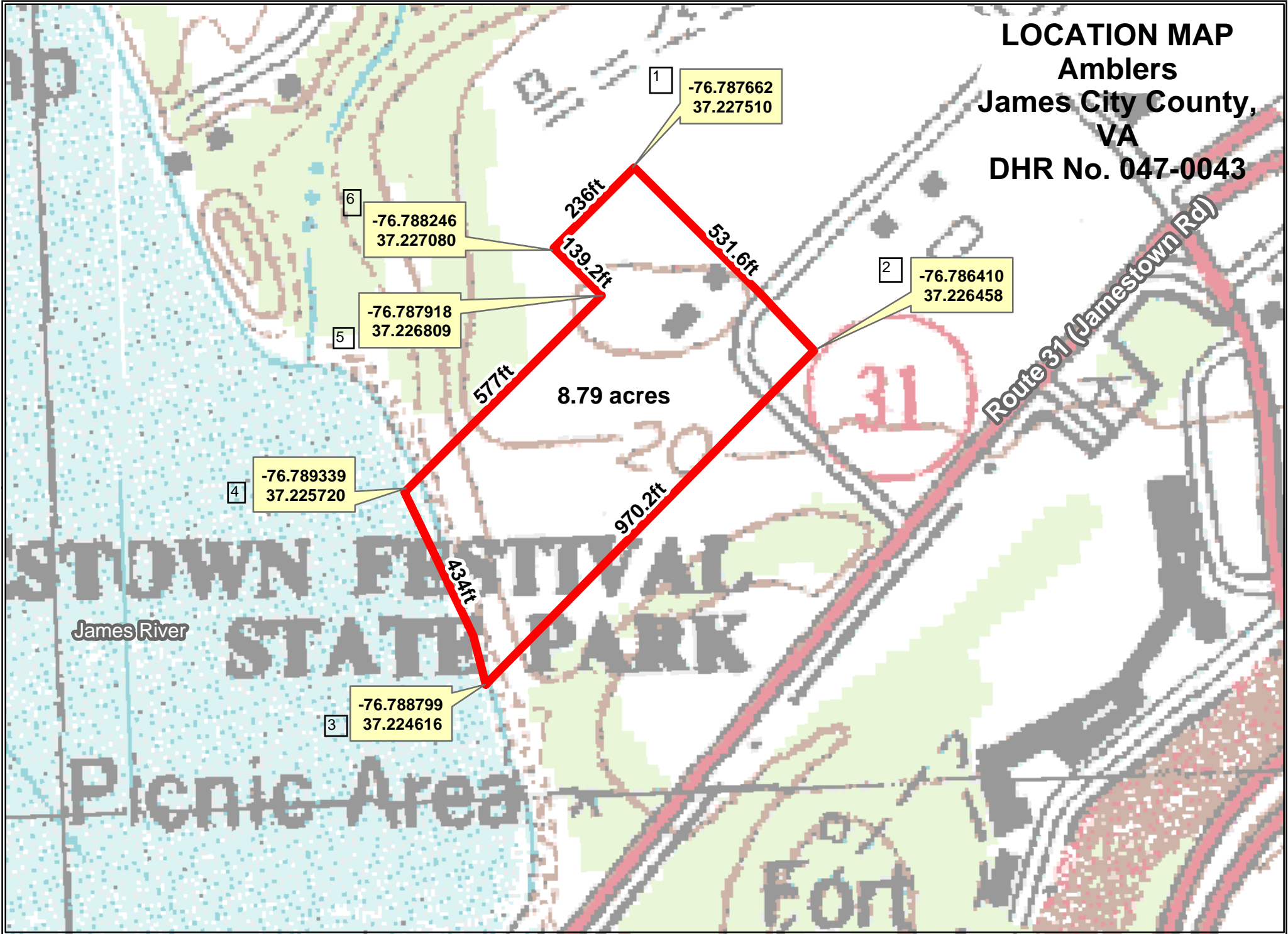
James City County, VA  
County and State

- 8 of 20: Amblers, brick inscribed January 16, 1840, south façade west wing, Oct. 11, 2012
- 9 of 20: Amblers, Frontispiece, c. 1930, southeast façade. October 11, 2012
- 10 of 20: Amblers, Staircase, 1852, July 17, 2014
- 11 of 20: Amblers, Architrave between parlor and stair, looking northeast, Oct. 11, 2012
- 12 of 20: Amblers, Detail of architrave corner block, October 11, 2012
- 13 of 20: Amblers, Second-floor bathroom fixtures, dated 1929, November 15, 2007
- 14 of 20: Amblers, Rear double parlor, view looking east, October 11, 2012
- 15 of 20: Amblers, 1950s Den, view looking south, October 11, 2012
- 16 of 20: Amblers, View of James River from second-floor porch, looking southwest, July 17, 2014
- 17 of 20: Amblers, Garden, view looking northwest, July 17, 2014
- 18 of 20: Amblers, Smokehouse and Quarter, view looking southeast, October 11, 2012
- 19 of 20: Amblers, Smokehouse, view looking north, October 11, 2012
- 20 of 20: Amblers, Quarter, view looking northeast, October 11, 2012

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**LOCATION MAP**  
**Amblers**  
**James City County,**  
**VA**  
**DHR No. 047-0043**



1 -76.787662  
37.227510

6 -76.788246  
37.227080

5 -76.787918  
37.226809

2 -76.786410  
37.226458

4 -76.789339  
37.225720

3 -76.788799  
37.224616

8.79 acres

236ft

531.6ft

970.2ft

577ft

434ft

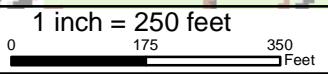
139.2ft

James River

Picnic Area

Route 31 (Jamestown Rd)

This drawing is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. The information displayed is a compilation of records, information, and data obtained from various sources, and James City County is not responsible for its accuracy or how current it may be. If discrepancies are found, please contact the Real Estate Assessment Division of James City County, Mapping/GIS Section.



**Amblers**

James City County, Virginia

DHR No. 047-0043

**SKETCH MAP**

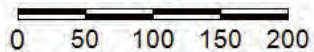
A - Dwelling (contributing)

B - Smokehouse (contributing)

C - Outbuilding (contributing)



Feet



1:2,257 / 1"=188 Feet

**Title: Amblers, James City County**

**Date: 10/20/2014**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

Amblers

James City County, Virginia

DHR No. 047-0043

PHOTO KEY

A - Dwelling (contributing)

B - Smokehouse  
(contributing)

C - Outbuilding  
(contributing)

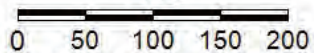
Photo Locations



1



Feet



1:2,257 / 1"=188 Feet



**Title: Amblers, James City County**

**Date: 10/20/2014**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

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1870





























UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Amblers  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: VIRGINIA, James City

DATE RECEIVED: 1/02/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/21/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/05/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/17/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000016

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 2.17.15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Department of Historic Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

Molly Joseph Ward  
*Secretary of Natural Resources*



Julie V. Langan  
*Director*

Tel: (804) 367-2323  
Fax: (804) 367-2391  
www.dhr.virginia.gov

December 19, 2014

Mr. Paul Loether  
Chief, National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Programs  
National Park Service 2280  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 "I" (Eye) Street, N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20005

**RE: Amblers, James City County, Virginia**

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for **Amblers** to the National Register of Historic Places. Submitted for your review, the nomination has been considered, and approved, by the State Review Board and the Virginia SHPO has recommended it for listing. Any letters of comment or objection have been copied at the end of the nomination material, along with any FPO notification letters.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My direct phone line is 804-482-6439.

Sincerely,

Lena Sweeten McDonald  
National/State Register Historian

Enclosures

Administrative Services  
10 Courthouse Ave.  
Petersburg, VA 23803  
Tel: (804) 862-6408  
Fax: (804) 862-6196

Capital Region Office  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23221  
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Fax: (804) 367-2391

Tidewater Region Office  
14415 Old Courthouse Way  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Newport News, VA 23608  
Tel: (757) 886-2818  
Fax: (757) 886-2808

Western Region Office  
962 Kime Lane  
Salem, VA 24153  
Tel: (540) 387-5443  
Fax: (540) 387-5446

Northern Region Office  
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P.O. Box 519  
Stephens City, VA 22655  
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Fax: (540) 868-7033