

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

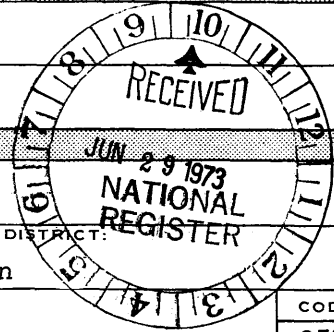
(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
Georgia

COUNTY:  
Chatham

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE  
SEP 12 1973



**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Bethesda Home for Boys

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Bethesda

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: S of Savannah at  
Bisected by Ferguson Avenue and Bethesda Road

CITY OR TOWN:  
Savannah

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
#1 Bo Ginn

STATE: Georgia CODE: 13 COUNTY: Chatham CODE: 051

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Boys orphanage</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Comments

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Union Society of Savannah

STREET AND NUMBER:  
P. O. Box 13039

CITY OR TOWN:  
Savannah

STATE:  
Georgia

CODE:  
13

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
Chatham County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Wright Square

CITY OR TOWN:  
Savannah

STATE:  
Georgia

CODE:  
13

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Comprehensive Development Plan for Bethesda Home for Boys

DATE OF SURVEY: 1972  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Bethesda Home for Boys

STREET AND NUMBER:  
P. O. Box 13039

CITY OR TOWN:  
Savannah

STATE:  
Georgia

CODE:  
13

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7. DESCRIPTION

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

On March 25, 1740, the first brick of the Bethesda Orphanage was laid by George Whitefield, modeled after the famous Professor Franke's home for children in Halle, Germany. Forty children were already under Whitefield's care at this time.

"The Great House," as it was called had a high roof and belfry and was surrounded by a colonnade. There was a cellar, a kitchen, and on the ground floor, the entrance hall was utilized as a chapel; on the left, the library, and behind it, the staircase rising between them. On the second and third floors were Whitefield's study and bedroom and the manager's room, two bedrooms for the boys, two for the girls and five others for general use. The foundation was of brick, sunk four feet within, and raised three feet above the ground. Behind was to be two small houses, one for an infirmary, the other for a work house.

The grounds surrounding "The Great House" included an extensive garden, "...with many acres of good oats and barley...and all sorts of greens and we have plenty of milk, eggs and poultry, making a good deal of butter weekly."

No architect has been discovered for Bethesda, however, Colonial Records show a "Mr. Day" was recruited from England for this construction, and received two pounds ten shillings for the work.

Whitefield's plans to charter Bethesda as a college as well as an orphanage never materialized. He claimed no intention to be known as a founder of a college, but instead to be able to offer the proper education to all children. Plans were drawn for the building additions and instructional programs, but after Whitefield's death, various administrative and financial tragedies befell the project.

In 1773, a fire totally destroyed "The Great House" and in 1805 another fire destroyed its replacement. Finally in 1870, a new and permanent structure was constructed and still stands today.

On the approximate site of the original building constructed by George Whitefield sits the present administration building constructed in 1968. The 1870 structure has been somewhat altered to accommodate the present day needs of the orphanage by the removal of the center section of the original three-story pedimented building leaving the two-story wings on either side which now function as two buildings separated by a courtyard. The interiors have been completely remodeled.

Today Bethesda consists of about 503 acres of high land, and 147 acres of marsh land of which this includes the original 500 acre grant. In the immediate vicinity of the 1870 structure and the site of the original Orphan House there are eighteen buildings, construction of which spans the 1870 to present-day period.

One of the most notable buildings in this complex is the chapel built in 1925 by the local chapter of the ~~Daughters of the American Revolution~~ as a

(continued) National Society of Colonial Dames

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7. Description

gift to the boys of Bethesda and patterned after George Whitefield's Church in England. It is a small, rectangular, neo-classical brick chapel, having as its main characteristic features, fanlights over all of the apertures and flat-gaged arches over the windows. Quoin work defines each of the four corners of the building and surrounds the doorway.

The remainder of the complex is virtually self contained. Some food crops and dairy products are raised. The Home has its own completely furnished residences; gym; cafeteria; water supply and sewage disposal system; maintenance and repair shops; administration building and extensive outdoor recreation facilities including basketball courts, baseball diamonds and a large swimming pool.

Further construction is in the planning stages to allow the Home to accommodate more than the present eighty-eight boys. However, all planning is being carefully considerate of the original intensions of George Whitefield; to have a safe, healthy and guided environment in which to allow the boys to become educated and responsible citizens.



**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) 1740

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Bethesda, known as the first charity in America as well as the oldest existing orphanage today, was founded and named as a "house of mercy" by the Reverend George Whitefield in Savannah in 1740. Bethesda is located ten miles south of Savannah.

The historical significance lies in the fact that from the time of its inception in 1740 to the present, 1973, with a brief interruption, Bethesda has functioned as a home for orphaned children. Although restricted to boys today, Bethesda at one time offered shelter and a home to both sexes.

In 1738, the Reverend Whitefield was sent to the Colony of Georgia by the Church of England to replace John Wesley as Curate of Savannah. At the suggestion of General Oglethorpe and Charles Wesley, Whitefield initiated a request for a land grant of 500 acres to establish an orphanage to accommodate the large number of homeless and destitute children. He intended to set aside part of the house as an infirmary for sick servants and poor people. He also hoped the Indians of the area would send their children for instruction.

Whitefield returned to England to solicit money for his orphans, having already taken charge of a number of children, leaving them and the accomplishment of his plans in the hands of James Habersham. While Whitefield was still in England, Habersham was notified of the agreement for the grant and he selected the site for the orphanage and acted as overseer to the building program. On March 25, 1740, "with full assurance of faith" Whitefield laid the first brick of the new home.

From this point onward, Whitefield's life is one of continual and heroic struggle to support his orphans adequately. He devoted the remainder of his life to Bethesda entirely, spending most of his time away from the orphanage seeking funds for its upkeep and survival.

When George Whitefield died in 1770, he left the orphanage under the care of Selina, Countess Dowager of Huntingdon, who administered Bethesda in absentia from England until her death in 1791. Lady Huntingdon died never having seen Bethesda.

Since the death of Lady Huntingdon, Bethesda has come under the administration of the Union Society with the exception of a brief period when it

(continued)

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Belden, Albert D., George Whitefield, The Awakener, MacMillan & Co., N.Y.1953  
 Buckley, Jean K., Personal Inspection, May 5, 1973.  
 Candler, Allen D., Colonial Records of Georgia, Vol. 11, Atlanta, 1904  
 Candler, Allen D., Colonial Records of Georgia, Vol. V, Atlanta, 1909  
 Comprehensive Development Plan, Bethesda Home for Boys, Metropolitan Inc., Savannah,  
 Ford, William H., Personal Interview by Jean K. Buckley 1972.  
 Gambel, Thomas Jr., History of Bethesda, Morning News Print, Savannah, Ga., 1902  
 Mitchell, William R., Jr., Consultant, Historic Sites Survey, 1973.  
Minutes of the Union Society, John M. Cooper & Co., Savannah, Georgia, 1860  
 Sims, Oscar J., Personal Interview by Jean K. Buckley

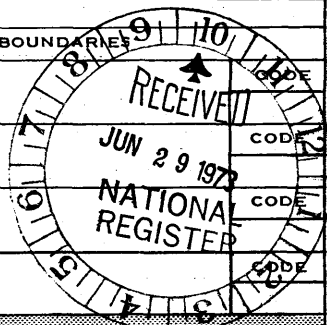
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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				
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	33°	58'	26"	81°	06'	12"			
NE	33°	58'	26"	81°	04'	54"			
SE	33°	57'	12"	81°	04'	54"			
SW	33°	57'	12"	81°	06'	12"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 650 acres

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

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



NO UTM  
CX

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Jean K. Buckley**

ORGANIZATION: **Georgia Historical Commission** DATE: **June 21, 1973**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**116 Mitchell Street, S.W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Atlanta** STATE: **Georgia** CODE: **13**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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 Mary Gregory Juett

Title State Historic Preservation Officer

Date June 25, 1973

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

Russell E. Dickenson  
 Deputy Director

Date Sept. 12, 1973

ATTEST:

Com. [Signature]  
 Keeper of the National Register

Date 9 11 73

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8. Significance

was in the hands of the State immediately after the Countess' death, and a 46 year interim when the city of Savannah disposed of the Bethesda Properties after they had fallen to ruin by fires and a hurricane. In 1854, the Union Society purchased the original Bethesda tract and "eleven boys were removed to Bethesda". The Union Society, an off-spring of a club formed for social and benevolent purposes in 1750 ten years after Bethesda's establishment, is probably the oldest existing charitable organization still functioning in America today. Originally, there were five members, dedicated to the education and care of children left destitute. Today, the Union Society still functions as the administrator to Bethesda and currently lists a membership of over one thousand. Members are solicited throughout the country, and world-wide recognition has been brought to Bethesda through former Bethesda Boys who are Union Society Members. Administration of the orphanage is entirely in the hands of the Union Society with the help of the Bethesda Alumni Association and the Women's Board of Bethesda.

Bethesda celebrated 233 years of orphan care this past April. Early records have been lost, but the total number of boys who have been helped by Bethesda run above 8,000.

Architecturally, the orphanage suffered after two totally destructive fires in 1773 and 1805. Temporary construction followed each disaster until 1870 when the Union Society completed a permanent structure. Architecturally, this structure represents the continued interest in the historic heritage of Bethesda by all of those people who have come to know the orphanage and the work of its founder, George Whitefield. New buildings have since been added to the grounds to meet the growing demands of the orphanage.

At the present there is no danger or threat to Bethesda or the Bethesda properties, but officials are anxious to insure Bethesda's continued existence and be assured its property will continue to remain as Whitefield left it 203 years ago.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Stevens, Carole, Historic Sites Survey, Archival Research, 1973.

