

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0363995

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	FEB 22 1977
DATE ENTERED	NOV 2 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

**HISTORIC** Thomas M. Gilmer house  
 AND/OR COMMON same

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

E of Vesta off GA 17  
Goosepond Militia District (G. M. D. 238)

CITY, TOWN

Vesta, Ga.

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

10th - Robert G. Stephens, Jr.

STATE

Georgia

CODE

13

COUNTY

Oglethorpe

CODE

221

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

J. C. Saxon

STREET & NUMBER

Rt. 1

CITY, TOWN

Elberton

VICINITY OF

STATE

Georgia 30635

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Oglethorpe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

STATE

Georgia 30648

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Oglethorpe County Survey

DATE

1975

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Preservation Section, Dept. of Natural Resources

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Gilmer house is a one-and-a-half story frame house with pitched roof and two exterior end chimneys. On the first floor are an entry passage and four rooms of unequal size; on the second, two unheated rooms with sloping ceilings. Now virtually a ruin, it is here described as it was before deterioration and vandalization.

The house faces south. It is compact, a deep rectangle approximately 32' x 27½' (inside measurements.) It has no windows upstairs other than the small ones beside the chimneys. The chimneys are the dominant and most decorative exterior feature and, as usual with 1½ story houses, the roof is the other important visual element. The east chimney serves one fireplace and is over six feet wide, with a long stack. The west chimney, almost 11 feet wide, carries three flues; from a cellar fireplace and two corner fireplaces on the first floor. (Measurements from Rodgers, Housing of Oglethorpe County.) Each chimney has a stepped base, bricks laid in Flemish bond with lime mortar, and decorative cap. Each has two sets of weatherings, which present smooth surfaces of edge-laid bricks; the lower weatherings are quite long, but the upper are short. Earlier photographs document these features.

The front porch has a hipped shed roof. The whole present roof is tin. According to Rodgers, the present weatherboarding is not original, a fact also shown by circular saw marks. However, it is interesting in itself, as the upper edge of each weatherboard is tapered with a plane or draw knife, to provide a snug overlap. Apparently the usual smooth shiplapped boards on the front porch wall have never existed, as the weatherboarding there is also overlapped.

The house rests on a continuous brick foundation. The land slopes slightly to the west, so that on that side there is a cellar with about six feet of head room, reached by both an outside entrance and a stair underneath the main stair. Here is the massive foundation of the side-by-side corner fireplaces above, jutting into the cellar, a fireplace built into one face. How the Gilmer family used the cellar is unknown, but descendants of the builder of a house with similar cellar fireplace (the Beard-Faust house, in the same county) say the cellar room was used as a bathing room by the men in the family (Rodgers, p. 26).

On the interior, all rooms originally had a dado made of two horizontal pine boards, each about 14" wide, with baseboard and chair rail. In several rooms the wide dado boards have been replaced with narrow grooved boards. Window and door casings are wide and flat. All rooms are plastered above the chair rail, an early use of plaster for this region. The dados were painted a dull red, chair rails and window facings a dark blue, according to Rodgers. The white plaster walls were never painted or papered. Ceilings downstairs are almost 13 feet high, perhaps 8 feet high upstairs where not sloping. In the two upstairs bedrooms, doors in the dados gave access to storage space under the eaves. Throughout the house are wrought nails of different sizes.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gilmer house ITEM NUMBER 7. PAGE 2.

By the time the writer first saw the house, about five years ago, the doors and most mantels were gone, some said to have been removed by the owner. Rodgers (1971) says:

Six-panel doors hung on hinges. Mantelpieces remaining in the two smaller rooms are simple post and lintel framing on which pilasters are superimposed on either side; a bold projecting molding supports the mantelboard. The mantelpiece of the main room has been removed, but it was illustrated in a newspaper article... in 1964. It was more decorative, the handcarved pilasters having exaggerated molded capitals which did not quite reach the cornice-like molding supporting the shelf.

A footnote cites the article, "Last House at Goose Pond" by Andrew Sparks, Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine, August 2, 1964, p. 7.

According to Osborne Bounds, Jr., of Washington, Georgia, who first saw the house years ago, the door from the passage to the great room was of an extraordinary design. While the top and bottom panels were of the usual shape, in the center was a diamond-shaped motif with quarter-circle panels in the corners.

The plan of the house, like the profile resulting from it, is most unusual for Georgia, where the norm for this period is the plain style house: a house of one and a half or two stories, one room deep. It may have one-story shed rooms in the rear, bringing to three or four the number of rooms on the first floor, but still the house is essentially one room deep, the definitive characteristic of the plain style, for the shed rooms are outside the main framing of the house and often represent, in fact, space enclosed from a back porch. The Gilmer house is, as noted, two rooms deep. Two doors open onto the front porch. The right-hand door leads into a short, narrow passage. Just inside the door, on the left, enclosed stairs wind to the loft. Down the passage on the right is the door to a small, unheated room about  $9\frac{1}{2}$  feet square, and straight ahead is the door to the great room. This room,  $17\frac{1}{2}$  feet square, has a fireplace on the east wall, a window to the left of it, another in the rear wall, a door to the outside in the same wall and, in the inner corner, one to the left front room. (Room measurements are from Rodgers.) The two west rooms are smaller. These are the rooms with the side-by-side corner fireplaces. The west front room also opens onto the front porch.

The Saxon family, last occupants of the house, used the left rear room for dining and added a kitchen to it, also adding a back porch.

While two barns remain, none is as old as the house. The location of the original detached kitchen and other outbuildings is unknown. It may be

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gilmer house      ITEM NUMBER 7.      PAGE 3.

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noted that the cellar fireplace is small and shallow—definitely not a kitchen fireplace. A large black walnut used to shade the front yard, whether planted by the Gilmers is unknown.

The Gilmer graveyard lies about 200 feet east of the house and a little to the rear. Here are the graves of Thomas M. Gilmer and others.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD :	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) History
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES **1800**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The house has both historic and architectural significance. It was the boyhood home of George R. Gilmer, governor of Georgia 1829-31 and 1837-39. His lively, subjective account of his family, relatives and neighbors in his book, First Settlers of Upper Georgia (1855) is an invaluable source for life in the piedmont around the turn of the 19th century, and contains as well a detailed account of his political career. Thomas M. Gilmer, father of Governor Gilmer, was one of two dozen or so men who brought their families to Georgia, under the leadership of George Mathews. These settlers came from western Virginia to the Goosepond area of Wilkes county in the period 1783-90. (Oglethorpe county was cut from Wilkes in 1793.) The area took its peculiar name from a pond where migratory geese were wont to set down. Mathews had seen the Broad river while an officer in the Revolution under General Greene, bought a large tract, and persuaded neighbors and friends to remove to Georgia with him. As Governor Gilmer said, "The war of the Revolution left the people of Virginia penniless in purse and restless in spirit." Clearing this fertile Broad river land, they raised tobacco for several decades until, after c. 1810, cotton supplanted it as a cash crop. Of British stock--English, Scotch, Welsh, some Irish--the settlers came, as mentioned, from western Virginia, their families having lived in earlier generations in tidewater and piedmont Virginia before settling in the great valley of Virginia. Many of the children of these settlers, restless in their turn and seeking new land, moved on to newer counties in Georgia or to Alabama and Mississippi. The Broad River settlement produced wealthy planters, political leaders, some professional men, and ne'er to do wells. Mathews himself was governor of Georgia 1787-88 and 1793-96. His house, one of the last survivors, burned in the 1950's. The settlement is immortalized in First Settlers of Upper Georgia, but of material remains, only the Thomas Gilmer house still stands, though not for much longer.

The house has belonged to the Saxon family for the last 60 or more years. The family kept a 16-acre parcel, including the house, when it sold the rest of the farm, some years ago, to a paper company. Recently the heirs of Joe Saxon divided this tract into two eight-acre parcels. The parcel including the house now belongs to J. C. Saxon of Elbert County (Oglethorpe County deed books 4 T 539 and 4 U 101 and plat book 8, p. 2.)

Tobacco culture's heavy demands on soil fertility, followed by terrible cotton farming practices, ruined the land here as elsewhere, and by the latter 19th century the Goosepond was an area of sorry farms and scrubby woods. Now the region is wholly abandoned and owned by lumber and paper companies. Now, though, the soil has renewed itself and fine stands of pine grow here.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gilmer, George R., First Settlers of Upper Georgia, Baltimore, 1970, Geneological Publishing Co. (First ed. pub. 1855.), p. 8 ff., p. 180 ff.  
 Rodgers, Ava D., The Housing of Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1790-1860, Tallahassee, 1971, Florida State University Press, pp. 19-20.  
 Waterman, Thomas Tileston, The Dwellings of Colonial America, Chapel Hill, 1950, University of North Carolina Press, pp. 43, 125.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 8

E. 17 330 410 37 60 930  
 F. 17 330 370 37 61 140

UTM REFERENCES - *only single point for house - 17/330-460<sup>E</sup>/3760-970<sup>N</sup>*

A | 1,7 | 3|3,0|5,0,0 | 3,7|6,1|2,2,0 |  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
 C | 1,7 | 3|3,0|6,1,0 | 3,7|6,1|0,2,0 |

B | 1,7 | 3|3,0|6,4,0 | 3,7|6,1|1,1,0 |  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
 D | 1,7 | 3|3,0|5,4,0 | 3,7|6,0|9,5,0 |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

*Sydney Smith*

NAME/TITLE Dr. Elizabeth A. Lyon, Manager, Survey & Planning Unit

Mrs. Patricia Irvin Cooper, Researcher

ORGANIZATION Historic Preservation Section, Dept. of Natural Resources DATE September, 1976

STREET & NUMBER 270 Washington St. S. W. TELEPHONE (404) 656-2840

CITY OR TOWN Atlanta STATE Georgia 30334

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE *[Signature]* DATE 2-9-77

TITLE Chief, Historic Preservation Section DAVID M. SHERMAN

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR OF STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION <i>[Signature]</i>	DATE <u>1/2/77</u>
ATTEST: <i>[Signature]</i> KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE <u>7-22-77</u>

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gilmer house ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Thanks to Governor Gilmer, we know exactly when the house was built. He was born in 1790 and lived until the age of ten in a cold, unchinked log cabin. Thus the house was built in 1800.

Thomas Gilmer's cabin was atypical in being cold and open, but Thomas Gilmer was atypical too. He was a very fat man who weighed over 300 pounds, and was, as his son said, ". . . insensible to cold, but could not bear heat". This peculiarity may have some bearing on his frame house, as will be noted later.

Beyond its historical interest, the house is fascinating for the architectural questions it raises. Of course, we do not know what picture might emerge had more of the Broad river houses survived. But among the dozen or so houses in the sand hills and piedmont which are older than the Gilmer house, as well as among houses of somewhat later vintage, it remains unique in plan. To what influences can be attributed its plan two rooms deep when other early (surviving) houses are always one room deep? Why the strange room arrangement, with a great room and partial central passage? Why the side-by-side corner fireplaces?

Gilmer gives no details about the building of the house. It seems unlikely that his father's small number of slaves—he had eight—included a trained carpenter. It is quite certain that the brick work was done by a trained artisan, and also the framing and some of the finish work inside. Some of the latter is so simple, however, that it was perhaps done by Gilmer sons. It is likely that the artisan masons and joiners working in the piedmont came from the same regions that furnished the general body of settlers: the Carolinas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, eastern Georgia.

The valley of Virginia, including the Shenandoah valley at its northern end, from which Thomas Gilmer came, was settled by several overlapping migrations. It was settled by Virginians pushing westward from the tidewater and piedmont; by Quakers fanning out from eastern Pennsylvania; by Scotch-Irish who had entered at the port of Philadelphia, or whose fathers had; and by German-speaking people from various parts of Europe. Peachy Gilmer, father of Thomas and grandfather of the governor, who grew up in Williamsburg, married Mary Meriwether and settled in Rockingham county "in the midst of the Dutch, at a place still called Lethe..." (Gilmer uses the terms "Dutch", from Deutsch, and "German" interchangeably.)

As noted, Quakers from Pennsylvania were among the settlers in the valley of Virginia. They brought with them the so-called Quaker house plan, which Penn recommended to his colonists in 1684: ". . . build then, a House of thirty foot long and eighteen broad, with a partition near the middle, and an other to divide one end of the House into two small Rooms." (quoted in Waterman, Dwellings of Colonial America.) Waterman established that the plan was actually

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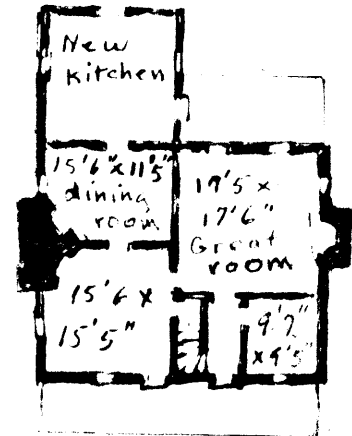
CONTINUATION SHEET Gilmer house      ITEM NUMBER 8      PAGE 3

Swedish in origin; Penn would have seen it among the Swedes who were living near and in Pennsylvania before his colony was established. The Quaker-Swedish house plan is found wherever groups of Pennsylvania Quakers settled, as in north-central North Carolina, the eastern shore of Maryland, and the valley of Virginia. The plan very often used side-by-side corner fireplaces for the two smaller rooms. Waterman also found that corner fireplaces are Swedish in origin; they are unknown in the vernacular architecture of England, France and Germany. Morrison in Early American Architecture supports the Waterman conclusions.

This writer suggests that we have in the Thomas Gilmer house a modification of the Swedish-Quaker plan, Virginia examples of which would have been known to Gilmer and to artisans from that region. In the Gilmer modification, space has been taken from the great room for a passageway and the little unheated room. A comparison of the plans below will show the similarities.



The Quaker Plan in the Valley of Virginia  
Fairfax Grant Farm. The Quaker plan of the central block with an added wing room.



Thomas M. Gilmer house plan,  
Oglethorpe County, Georgia.  
Revised from Rodgers, The Housing  
of Oglethorpe County, Georgia  
1790-1860, p. 19.

Fairfax Grant Farm, Jefferson County,  
West Virginia. From Waterman, The  
Dwellings of Colonial America,  
p. 43.



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While usually the left front room would have been the parents' bedroom, it is not possible that the warmth-hating Thomas Gilmer could have slept in a room heated by a cozy fire. Possibly the little unheated room was for Mr. Gilmer during the winter when his wife desired a fire. The second story is unheated too, but this is normal for one-and-a-half story houses; the children made do with hot bricks in their beds.

This type of plan was probably represented by a number of examples in Georgia at one time, since the state received settlers from many parts of North Carolina, from western Virginia, and from Pennsylvania. Interestingly enough, the one house left in Georgia known to have been built by a Quaker, the Mendenhall wing of Colonsay, in Taliaferro county, does not have this plan. Earlier and cruder than the Gilmer house, it is a single low-ceilinged room with stair curling up beside the chimney to the loft above, and was probably built by Marmaduke Mendenhall himself. Thus the Gilmer house alone represents the Swedish-Quaker plan complete with corner fireplaces.

The rare diamond-motif design of the now-vanished door to the great room is also found at Tuckahoe, a. 1712-c.1740, in Goochland county, Virginia. The door is illustrated in Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia, and the author notes that the design is found in Salmon's Palladio Londinensis. That book was published in 1734. However, it is far more likely that the joiners of the Gilmer house knew the design from Virginia examples than from the book.

In sum, it would be hard to find one house embodying so much of historic and architectural interest as the Thomas M. Gilmer house.

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Thomas Gilmer House

A group of citizens is extremely interested in the preservation and restoration of the Gilmer House. They have been negotiating with the Champion Paper Company, in hopes that the Company will purchase the building and use it as a lodge.

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Thomas M. Gilmer House, Oglethorpe County

Photographs by: David J. Kaminsky

Date: September, 1976

Negatives filed at: Department of Natural Resources

1. Front facade, looking northwest.
2. Rear view, looking southwest.
3. Side view showing extremely wide chimney, looking east.
4. Hall to main room, looking toward the rear.
5. Added kitchen.
6. Fireplace in rear left room.
7. Upper left room.
8. Grave of the wife of Thomas Gilmer, Eliza Lowis Gilmer.