

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received APR 10 1984
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Thornhill (The James Innes Thornton Plantation Home)

and/or common

2. Location

n.w. of Forkland

street & number N. side of Co. 19, approx. 4.2 mi. N.W. of intersection with Co. 4 at Forkland
not for publication

city, town Forkland *vic.* NA vicinity of 7th congressional district

state AL code 01 county Greene code 063

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
			<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. & Mrs. F. Watson Jones

street & number P. O. Box K

city, town Camden NA vicinity of state Alabama 36726

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Office

street & number Greene County Courthouse

city, town Eutaw state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title HABS has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1933-35 federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state D.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" 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

"Thornhill" is a Greek Revival, two-story, frame plantation house with a full length, full width, hexastyle Ionic portico. The exterior wall material is clapboard with the original five-bay front measuring 54'-5" x 58'-10" including portico. The house is two stories with a complete basement and attic. The hipped roof, slightly broken at front, extends over a full length, full height, hexastyle Ionic portico and a balcony with a wheatsheaf balustrade above the main doorway. The house has two pairs of interior end chimneys plus one chimney in the servants' dining room. Both main entrance and entrance to the balcony have elaborate side lights and single panel doors. The windows are rectangle with nine over nine sashes on the first floor and nine over six on the second floor. The house was built on a center hall plan and has a curving stairway located in the entrance hall. All interior walls are plaster and the flooring in the original part of the house is made of seven inch thick pine. Hardware throughout the house is original silver plated brass. Additions to the house include a two-story shed addition and a one-story ell added to the rear around 1900 and a "Sunroom" added in 1946 to the back of the house and has dimensions 13' wide x 22' deep with nine windows. Dependencies on the site include a plantation school building constructed CA 1840 and located 175' S.W. of the main house. Frame with clapboarding, its dimensions are 21'-9" x 28'-8". The building is one room, one-story with a steeply pitched gable roof, one exterior end chimney at the rear, and balustraded porch at gable end with cusped bargeboard. (Also located on the site are the carriage house, barn and plantation cemetery.)

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1833

Builder/Architect James Innes Thornton

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion C - Agriculture

"Thornhill" is representative of a "main house" that was the center of a large ante-bellum self-sustaining plantation complex that was based on cotton as its staple crop and slave labor as an economical means of working the crop through all phases of its production. "Thornhill" was one of the three most valuable cotton plantations located in the "Forks," a section of the Black Belt region of Alabama, which by 1850 had become the leading cotton producing state in the south. With a total land value of \$37,000 dollars, in 1850, the plantation produced 232 bales of ginned cotton each weighing over 400 pounds, plus sustained a slave population of ninety-seven by producing the necessities needed by the complex. James Innes Thornton, the master of "Thornhill," was an early advocate and practitioner of soil conservation, and he also performed agricultural experiments in an attempt to produce higher crop yield per acre.

Criterion B - Politics

"Thornhill" is significant for its association with its builder, James Innes Thornton. Thornton held the office of Secretary of State of Alabama from 1824-1834 and served as General Lafayette's escort during an extensive tour of Alabama in 1825 during Lafayette's second visit to the United States. Thornton retired from public life in 1834 and devoted the rest of his life as a planter at "Thornhill."

Criterion C - Architecture

"Thornhill" is significant architecturally as an excellent example of a fine Greek Revival plantation house. The full height, full width, hexastyle Ionic portico of "Thornhill" along with the portico of the same style found at nearby Rosemount, is unique among the plantation houses of western Alabama.

The design for "Thornhill" may have been influenced by the designs of William Nichols who served as State Architect and Engineer at Tuscaloosa during James I. Thornton's tenure as Secretary of State of Alabama. "Thornhill" is similar in design to the James Hunter Dearing House built between 1828 and 1834 at Tuscaloosa. The Dearing House, which also features a hexastyle Ionic portico and low-pitched roof, was built for one of the commissioners of the Alabama Capitol; and the design for this house may also have been influenced by Nichols.

* * * * *

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 219.5

Quadrangle name Forkland

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6
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4	1	2	4	7	0
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3	6	1	7	6	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

1	6
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4	1	3	3	4	0
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3	6	1	7	6	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	6
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4	1	3	3	5	0
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3	6	1	6	8	2	0
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D

1	6
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4	1	2	9	2	0
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3	6	1	6	8	4	0
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E

1	6
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4	1	2	9	2	0
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3	6	1	6	4	2	0
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F

1	6
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4	1	2	6	4	0
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3	6	1	6	4	3	0
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G

1	6
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4	1	2	5	0	0
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3	6	1	6	7	6	0
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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

SW 1/4 of Section 19
NW 1/4 of NW 1/4 of Section 30 east of Forkland-Boligee Public Road

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	NA	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael Bailey, Historic Resource Coordinator

organization Alabama Historical Commission date February 8, 1984

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 205 261-3184

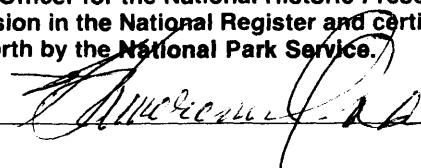
city or town Montgomery state AL

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

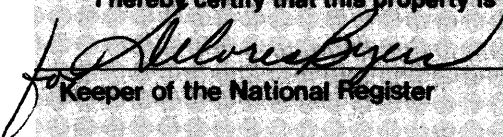
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 4-3-84

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 5/10/84

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

Historical Summary Thornhill

Built in the mid 1830s by James Innes Thornton, "Thornhill" is an excellent example of the "Golden Age" of plantation life in the Black Belt region of Alabama. Thornton, a member of an influential Virginia family, emigrated to Huntsville in 1820. He entered into law partnership first with Henry W. Collier, later Governor of Alabama, and then with his brother Harry Innes Thornton who also emigrated from Virginia.

In 1824 James Innes Thornton was elected Secretary of the State of Alabama and held that post for the next ten years. In 1825 he was appointed, by Gov. Isreal Pickens, to be the escort for General Lafayette who was traveling through Alabama during the General's second visit to the United States. Thornton escorted the General on an extensive tour throughout the state with stops at Montgomery and Cahaba, then the capitol of Alabama, and was in turn appointed an honorary member of Lafayette's staff.

In 1825 Thornton purchased the property on which "Thornhill" now stands from David Bragg for \$100.00. Also in 1824 he married Mary Ann Glover, daughter of Williamson Allen Glover who was the master of "Rosemount," the most grandly conceived mansion in Alabama, and owner of the largest plantation in Greene County.

After the death of his first wife, Thornton married Anne Amelia Smith of Virginia and shortly after, began construction of Thornhill, utilizing the labor of his slaves and of carpenters brought in from Virginia. Completed around 1825, "Thornhill" was furnished with fine furniture and decorative pieces, much of which came from "Fall Hill," Thornton's family home in Virginia.

The 1840s and 1850s have been called the "Golden Age" of plantation society within an area of the Black Belt region called "The Fork," ten to twenty miles from Eutaw and an equal distance from the Warrior and Tombigbee Rivers.

By 1850 Thornton owned 1,900 acres of land valued at \$37,000 dollars, which was the third highest cash value of any plantation in Greene County, and 97 slaves, the fourth largest number of slaves owned by an individual in the county. Only Williamson Glover of "Rosemount," and William McAlpine owned more valuable plantations.

Large crop yields were achieved at Thornhill (in 1850 232 bales of ginned cotton each weighing over 400 pounds) because of Thornton's careful management of soil, a sharp contrast to many plantation owners. He was a strong believer in the doctrine prescribed by Edmund Ruffin in his Essay on Calcareous Manures of the use of marl to rejuvenate soils. Thornton once belittled his overseer for allowing his slaves to burn cornstalks in the fields, stating that he had emigrated from Virginia because of depleted soil and he wanted to prevent soil depletion in Alabama if possible. He also conducted experiments involving crop production, always attempting to achieve a higher yield per acre. In 1853 he succeeded in producing an unbelievable high yield of 120 bushels of corn from an unfertilized one-acre strip of bottom land.

Although the major efforts of the plantation went to produce cotton, "Thornhill" also produced most of the necessary provisions needed for its operation. During 1850, 7,000 bushels of corn, 60 bushels of oats, 10 bushels of Irish potatoes, 60 bushels of sweet potatoes, 730 pounds of butter plus wool and homemade manufactured goods were produced at "Thornhill."

While "Thornhill" was able to produce the necessary goods for its operations, many choice items such as fine wines, seafoods and fruits were shipped up river from Mobile or ordered from sources in Virginia. The majority of the clothing worn by the ladies of "Thornhill" was ordered from Mobile; however, very fine articles were ordered from shops in New Orleans.

It was during this period that the classical portico was added to the main house. This portico was possibly designed and built by David R. Anthony who also designed and built the nearby home of William High, "Rose Hill," which bore a strong resemblance to "Thornhill."

Also constructed at "Thornhill" during this period was a small single-room school building that closely followed the classical lines of the main house. Concerned with the early education of his children, Thornton also hired a private tutor to conduct classes in the school.

"Thornhill" was a center of the social life of the Forks. Elaborate dances and parties, some lasting several days, with music provided by slave musicians, were held at "Thornhill." These events were attended by the families from such neighboring plantations as "Rosemount," "Morven," "Ben Lomond," "Hill of Howth," "Strawberry Hill" or "Barton's Hill."

After James Innes Thornton's death in 1877, Col. Thornton's son, Harry Innes, inherited "Thornhill." Upon his death "Thornhill" passed to James Innes Thornton II, who in turn died in 1951 with the property being held by his widow until her death in 1964. "Thornhill" and 808 acres of land were then purchased by Mr. & Mrs. F. Watson Jones. Mrs. Jones is the great, great, great-granddaughter of Col. James Innes and Ann Amelia Thornton.

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

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

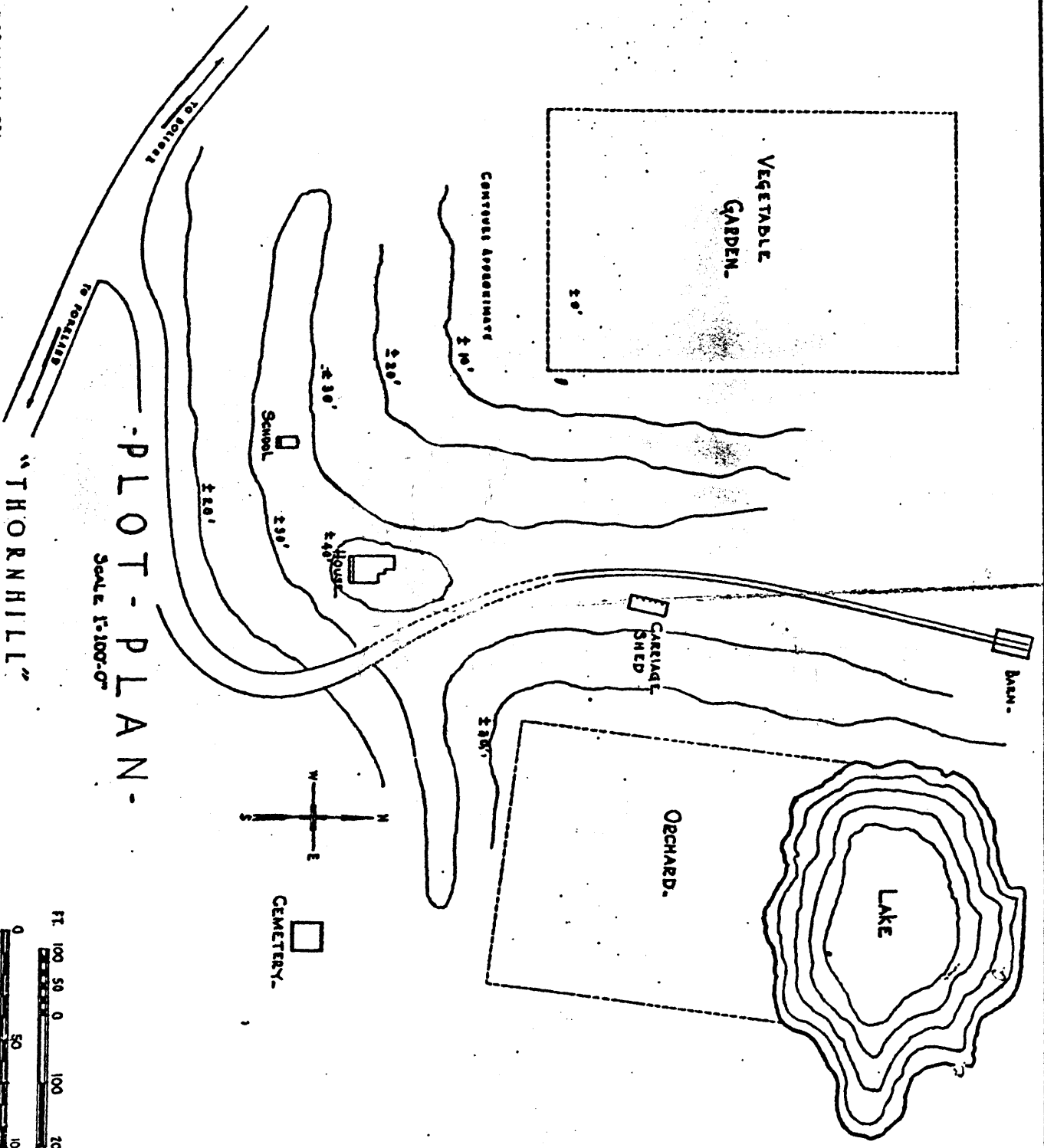
ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

- 1) Eutaw; The Builders and Architecture of an Ante-Bellum Southern Town
Clay Lancaster, 1979 Greene Co. Historical Society
- 2) Ante Bellum Mansions of Alabama
Ralph Hammond, 1951 Architectural Book Publishing Co.
- 3) Greek Revival Architecture in Alabama
Clay Lancaster, 1977 Alabama Historical Commission
- 4) A Goodly Heritage: Memories of Green Co.
Mary Morgan Glass, 1977 Greene Co. Historical Society
- 5) U.S. Census Reports - 1850 Slave Census, Greene Co.
- 6) Snedecor - A Directory of Greene Co. 1856
Mobile: Strickland & Co.
- 7) U.S. Census Reports - 1850 - Agricultural Census - Greene Co.
- 8) The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama
Charles S. Davis, Montgomery 1939, Alabama State Department of Archives & History
- 9) William Nichols, Architect Peatross, Ford C. and Mellown, Robert O.
University of Alabama 1979

W.A. HOTCHKISS - DEL -

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF NATIONAL PARKS, BUILDINGS, AND RESERVATIONS
BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

THE JAMES INNES THOLNTON PLANTATION HOME
GREENE COUNTY - WATSONIA - ALABAMA



THORNHILL

PLOT - PLAN

SCALE 1"=100'-0"



AL-230

HISTORIC AMERICAN
BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 1 OF 16 SHEETS

