

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**DATA SHEET**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAY 5 1975  
DATE ENTERED MAY 21 1975

**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 Polk Sisters' House  
AND/OR COMMON

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 305 West 7th Street  
CITY, TOWN Columbia VICINITY OF Sixth  
STATE Tennessee CODE 47 COUNTY Maury CODE 119  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: part of an operating historic site

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of Tennessee  
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Nashville VICINITY OF Tennessee

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Register's Office  
STREET & NUMBER Maury County Courthouse  
CITY, TOWN Columbia STATE Tennessee

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN STATE  
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

EXCELLENT                       DETERIORATED  
 GOOD                                 RUINS  
 FAIR                                  UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Sisters' House as it appears today is anything but the simple two-story brick structure that Columbia carpenter James Purcell constructed for James Walker in 1818. An austere facade disguises a complicated series of additions to the rear of the house. Each addition evidences the evolving needs of many former residents of the house. As originally constructed, the house was a basic four room structure of three bays in width. An excellent example of the influence of Federal style architecture in Tennessee, this structure was distinguished on the exterior by single shoulder exterior chimneys, flat jack arched lintels, and marked symmetry of fenestration on the facade.

The diary of Nathan Vaught, an apprentice to carpenter Purcell, records that an addition was made to the house in 1827. Superficial architectural investigation indicates that this addition was the two-story ell on the right side of the rear of the structure. An extension, one bay in width with an interior chimney, of the main wing was made at an as yet undetermined date. This extension involved the total demolition of an original bearing wall, and its presence contaminates the original symmetry of the facade.

To the immediate rear of the main wing, and now attached by the extension of two-story porch, stands a two-story structure which is believed to have been a kitchen. Sophisticated architectural investigation is needed to accurately determine its original and subsequent uses.

Along the left hand side of the main wing is located a single level clapboard addition which houses toilet facilities.

Influences of the Victorian Era are readily seen in the altered windows (ca. 1900), the extended gables with cornice returns, the large flat cornice boards, the standing seam metal roof and the altered door configuration crowned with a stained glass transom. The veranda attached to the right side of the house also exhibits the flavor of the "Age of Excess."

As a result of the many additions, the interior has been altered significantly. The front door opens into what is now a spacious center entrance hall. A non-original three-quarter turn with landings stairway with dual newel posts rises from the left side of the entrance hall to a large central hall on the upper story. Single rooms open off of each side of the two center halls. Thin partition walls divide the halls and the rooms to the left while a load bearing wall twelve inches thick separates the halls from the rooms on the right. Much of the interior woodwork has been replaced. Double sliding doors have been installed between the hall and the lower right hand side room, and also between the lower level of the ell and the original lower right side room.

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The Sisters' House is currently closed to public visitation and is mostly used for storage space. Eventual adaptive restoration is planned for the house for use in conjunction with the neighboring James K. Polk Home. To the rear of this structure is an outstanding formal garden which is open to the public. The garden was begun in 1949 and is maintained by the James K. Polk Memorial Association.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1818

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James Purcell

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Standing side by side with the James K. Polk Home, a National Historic Landmark, in Columbia, Tennessee, is the former residence of two of President Polk's sisters which is now known, appropriately enough, as the Sisters' House. The house was built by James Purcell in 1818 for James Walker and his wife, Jane Maria Polk Walker, on land which was originally deeded to the former President's father, Samuel Polk. Samuel Polk and James Walker were partners in one of Columbia's earliest general stores and in addition they jointly established the town's first bank. James W Walker, a staunch Jacksonian Democrat, corresponded prolifically with his brother-in-law, James K. Polk, while Polk was serving in the Congress. Walker kept the future president up to date on the sentiments of his constituents, and also attended to Polk's business interests in Columbia. Jane Maria Polk Walker lived in the house which was built for them until 1843. In April of 1849 a second sister, Ophelia, and her husband, Dr. Samuel Hays, purchased the house, and they resided there until Ophelia's death in 1853. Ownership of the structure changed only twice more before it was purchased by the State of Tennessee in 1941.

In addition to its significance for being associated with a former president's family, the Sisters' House is also an outstanding example of Federal style architecture as it was executed in Tennessee. In concert both historically and architecturally with the more significant structure to its right, the Sisters' House aids in the interpretation of the lifestyle of one of Tennessee's most noted families.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Diary of Nathan Vaught. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.  
 Watson, Elbert L. "James Walker of Columbia, Polk's Critic and Compatriot." Tennessee Historical Quarterly. Volume XXIII, No. 1 (March, 1964), 24-37.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	4,9,6,5,8,0	3,9,4,1,0,4,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

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

NAME / TITLE

R. Paul Cross, Historical Projects Officer

ORGANIZATION

Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

4/25/75

STREET & NUMBER

170 Second Avenue North

TELEPHONE

615-741-2371

CITY OR TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE X

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

*Lauren C. Henry*

4/30/75

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Ernest M. Caspally*

DATE

MAY 21 1975

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

*W. Murky*

DATE

5/20/75

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER