

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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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

James K. Polk Home

AND/OR COMMON

James K. Polk Home

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

301 West 7th Street (corner of South High)

CITY, TOWN

Columbia

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

__ VICINITY OF

6th

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

047

COUNTY

Maury

CODE

119

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

State of Tennessee (administered by James K. Polk Memorial
Association of Nashville and James K. Polk Memorial Auxiliary
of Columbia)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Tennessee

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Maury County Court House

CITY, TOWN

Columbia

STATE

Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of Historic Assets

DATE

in progress

__ FEDERAL STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Tennessee Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input 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 James K. Polk Home stands at the southwestern corner of West 7th Street (numbered at 301) and South High Street, near the center of Columbia, Tennessee. A reconstruction of the original detached kitchen is located at the rear (south) of the home, separated from it by a small brick courtyard. The Polk Sisters' House (305 West 7th) stands immediately west of the Polk Home on the same lot. The southwestern portion of the Polk property is now a formal garden with period character.

The Polk Home was erected by Samuel Polk, father of James, in 1816. An example of the Federal style as constructed in Tennessee, the L-shaped brick building is two stories high and carries a gabled roof broken at the ridge by interior chimneys. The main entrance, located at the western side of the north elevation, consists of a paneled doorway with sidelights and elliptical fan, all recessed in an arched surround. Windows are flanked by louvered blinds and topped by flat arches with keystones. Those on the second floor retain their original 9/9 sash while those on the first floor front have been converted to 12/12 sash with iron railings.

The building contains a stairhall (west) and double parlors separated by a paneled archway (east) on the first floor, with a crosshall and three bedrooms on the second; the rear parlor is now furnished as a dining room. A one-story porch, constructed in the angle of the "L" c. 1870, has been enclosed and now serves as a museum room. With the exception of the enlargement of the parlor windows, the addition of a standing seam metal roof, and the installation of a bath at the eastern end of the second floor hall, alterations in the house have been relatively minor; it has been restored over a period of years and now appears to be in excellent condition. Furnishings are a combination of Polk family items and appropriate period pieces.

None of the original Polk Home outbuildings survive. The detached kitchen, reconstructed on the original foundation in 1937, is a one-story brick building with gabled roof broken at the ridge by a center chimney. Doorways are located on the northern and western elevations. Windows are flanked by louvered blinds and topped by blind arches. The building contains two rooms, the kitchen itself and a family dining room. The implements and furnishings are again a combination of family items and period pieces.

The building known as the Polk Sisters' House was constructed in 1818 and lived in by James and Jane Polk Walker from that time until 1843. From 1849 to 1853 it was the residence of John and Ophelia Polk Hays. Though the two-story brick building with gabled roof still reflects something of its original scale and proportions, it has been altered both inside and out. A two-story rear ell was added c. 1827 and the main block was extended one bay to the east at an undetermined date. The two-story structure now connected with the rear of the house by a wooden porch is believed to have been a kitchen and storage area.

(Continued)

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 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 1816

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Samuel Polk

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This two-story gable-roofed brick house at Columbia, Tennessee, was constructed by Samuel Polk in 1816 and was the home of his son James K. Polk, eleventh President of the United States, for several years during his young manhood. (None of the other houses in which Polk lived is still in existence.) The house remained in the Polk family for many years, then changed owners several times before it was purchased in 1929 by the State of Tennessee. The James K. Polk Memorial Association of Nashville and the James K. Polk Memorial Auxiliary of Columbia maintain the property on behalf of the State. Now in excellent condition and furnished with a combination of family items and period pieces, the Polk Home is open to the public weekdays from 9 to 5, Sundays from 1 to 5.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

James Knox Polk was born in Mecklenberg County, North Carolina, on November 2, 1795. In 1806, at the age of eleven, he moved with his family to Tennessee, settling in what is now Maury County. Ten years later, his father, Samuel Polk, purchased a lot in the town of Columbia, on which he constructed a two-story brick house (the present Polk Home). There the younger Polk remained until 1819, when he went to Nashville to read law in the office of the noted Felix Grundy. Admitted to the bar in 1820, Polk returned to his parents' home, opened his own practice, and had immediate success.

Since he was a confirmed Democrat, an unfailing supporter of Andrew Jackson, and a popular orator (often characterized as the "Napoleon of the stump"), Polk's political success was assured. Elected to the Tennessee legislature in 1832, he went on to the United States House of Representatives two years later, becoming Speaker in 1835 and remaining in the House until he was elected Governor of Tennessee in 1839. Polk's rapid rise to political power was shared by his wife, the former Sarah Childress of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, whom he married in 1824; the couple had no children.

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than two acres

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|
| A | 1 6 | 4 9 6 6 2 0 | 3 9 4 1 0 4 0 |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |

| | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

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 Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Frank B. Sarles, Jr., Historian, 11/1/60

ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE 1/23/76

STREET & NUMBER 1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE 202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN Washington

STATE D.C. 20240

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE 1/3/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: B.J.O. [Signature]
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 1/3/78

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Victorian elements added to the Sisters' House include 1/1 windows, extended gables with cornice returns, large cornice boards, the standing seam metal roof, and the stained glass transom above the main entrance. On the interior, the stairway has been altered to a three-quarter turn with double newel and much of the original woodwork has been replaced. The Sisters' House is currently used for storage but future plans call for its restoration and eventual use as a museum and administrative offices for the Polk Home.

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Polk is regarded as the first "dark horse" nominee in the history of the American Presidency. There were three prominent candidates for the nomination at the Democratic convention of 1844 (Martin Van Buren, Lewis Cass, and James Buchanan), but they could not resolve their differences and a compromise nominee had to be found. Since the campaign was to be run on issues rather than personalities, it was decided that Polk would do. Among his strong points were his acknowledged integrity, his legislative experience, and the fact that he was a party man from the west. During the campaign, Polk surprised the country by taking strong stands on two major issues, demanding the annexation of Texas and advocating a drastic change in policy on the Oregon boundary dispute with Great Britain. His election was close but decisive--170 electoral votes against 105 for Henry Clay.

Polk's single term as President was marked by rapid expansion of America's territorial boundaries. The annexation of Texas as a state resulted in a two-year war with Mexico which, in turn, added the southwest and far west (California and New Mexico) to the United States. During the same period, the Oregon boundary was fixed by a treaty and the continental United States became a recognized reality. Other achievements of the Polk administration included a treaty with New Granada (Columbia) guaranteeing a right of way for United States citizens across the Isthmus of Panama, passage of the Tariff Act of 1846, establishment of a warehouse system for temporary retention of undistributed imports, reenactment of an independent treasury system, creation of the Department of the Interior, establishment of the United States Military Academy, and authorization of the Smithsonian Institution.

Not yet 50 years old when elected, Polk had been the youngest successful presidential candidate up to that time and had entered his term determined to serve the country to the best of his ability. However, the diary he kept in the White House stressed the burden of his office and he left it exhausted by the efforts he had made. At the close of his term, March 4, 1849, Polk retired to "Polk Place," his home at Nashville, where he died on June 15, 1849.

The Polk Home at Columbia remained in the family for many years, then changed owners several times before it was purchased in 1929 by the State of Tennessee and opened to the public (1930). The purchase of an additional portion of the Samuel Polk lot in 1937 permitted the reconstruction of the detached kitchen on its original foundation. In 1941, the adjoining house, constructed by James Polk's brother-in-law in 1818, was also acquired. The entire complex is administered for the State by the James K. Polk Memorial Association of Nashville and the James K. Polk Memorial Auxiliary of Columbia.

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(revised edition, 1958).

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the James K. Polk Home at Columbia, Tennessee, are those of Lot 35 on which that building stands (shown on the accompanying photocopy of a Columbia assessors' map), as owned by the State of Tennessee and administered by the James K. Polk Memorial Association of Nashville and the James K. Polk Memorial Auxiliary of Columbia. Also located on Lot 35 are a reconstruction of the detached kitchen of the Polk Home and the Polk Sisters' House. Although neither of those buildings contributes directly to the national significance of the Polk Home, both are included in the boundaries for the landmark designation for convenience in definition and because of their value in maintaining the historic setting of the Polk Home.