

STATE: Virginia
COUNTY: Independent City
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON:  
James Semple House

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
James Semple House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Francis Street: South side, between Blair and Waller Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
Williamsburg

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
001

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

COUNTY:  
Independent City

CODE:  
830

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input 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 type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. Carlisle H. Humelsine, President.

STREET AND NUMBER:  
\_\_\_\_\_

CITY OR TOWN:  
Williamsburg

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
23185

CODE:  
51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Clerk of the Circuit Court, James City County

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Court Street (2 blocks south of Duke of Gloucester St.)

CITY OR TOWN:  
Williamsburg

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY:  
1938  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Capitol Hill

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
D.C.

CODE:  
11

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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

The James Semple House is a frame house with clapboarding, having a two-storey rectangular center section with pedimented gable roof, gable-end to the front, and two interior end-chimneys. The entrance is a Roman Doric porch, with dentil pediment and eaves, and a remarkable guilloche on its architrave, a feature probably suggested by The Builder's Companion of William Pain, published in London in 1765.

Flanking the center are one storey wings with gable roofs to the side. They too are frame, with clapboarding, containing the dining room to the east, and a large drawing room to the west. In the center section, originally, was a large salon with a fireplace at the west side. In the nineteenth century, a partition was set up to subdivide the room, forming a narrow east-west hall between the wings.

The two small bedrooms in the upper level of the center section are reached by a narrow, steep, and winding staircase, contained in the East wing of the house, concealed behind the chimney in a manner similar to that used in the drawings for the first Monticello. Indeed, authorship of the design of the Semple House is often ascribed to Thomas Jefferson, who was a resident of Williamsburg when the house was constructed c. 1770-1780. Jefferson's first drawing for Monticello (1768), according to Waterman, "parallels the design of the Randolph-Semple House to such a degree that there can be no doubt that they are by the same author."

The Semple House lies at the far eastern end of Williamsburg, in fact, east of the Capitol which is the eastern terminus of the Duke of Gloucester Street east-west axis. The house was acquired and restored by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1932, after it had passed through the hands of several owners in the nineteenth century. It had been changed little, but had fallen by 1932 into some state of disrepair. The east chimney was rebuilt, as were the front porch steps. On the porch, square piers were removed and replaced with columns. The guilloche on the architrave was restored after traces of the original. A wing attached to the south of the center block, added 1806-1823, was also removed. The nineteenth century hall partition remains in place.

The Semple House, fortunately, is another of those in Williamsburg whose eighteenth century boundaries may still be followed on surviving deed records and maps. This then is the basis for the most reasonable boundary for this Landmark now.

Interestingly, a portion of Williamsburg was laid out according to a system of 5-pole measurements, the age-old measure deriving from medieval agricultural methods. A pole being approximately 5 1/2 yards, a 5-pole lot then would be about 82 1/2 feet. The maps show that the eighteenth century property lines of the James Semple House begin at a point on Francis Street 247.5 feet (15 poles) west of Waller Street, continuing east-west for 165 feet (10 poles). This is two lots, and they were never numbered. The lot

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century            |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1770-1780**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The James Semple House is an excellent example of Palladio's "Roman Country House" adapted for use as a frame townhouse. It is a distinguished and early example of the classicism which began to change the American architectural scene towards the end of the 18th century. Its beauty derives largely from its perfect proportions, enhanced by delicate classical detailing. Although there is disagreement among architectural experts, the authorship of the design of the James Semple House is often ascribed to Thomas Jefferson, who was a resident of Williamsburg when the house was built c. 1770-1780. Its design has a remarkable affinity to those done by Jefferson for his first Monticello in 1768.

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Marcus Whiffen, The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg (Williamsburg 1960).  
 Thomas T. Waterman, The Dwellings of Colonial America (Chapel Hill, 1950).  
 Thomas T. Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1946).  
 Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952).  
 Edith T. Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times (Richmond, 1927).  
 Richard Pratt, A Treasury of Early American Homes (New York, 1949).

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		UTM	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
				18.349860.4125980		

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: One

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: James Dillon Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Historic Landmarks, Historic Sites Survey DATE: 10/16/74

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L. Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: 11

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

<p>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:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)</p> <p>Landmark Designated: <u>Apr. 15, 1972</u></p> <p>Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation date _____</p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)</p> <p>Boundary Certified: <u>Cornelius Heine 6-19-75</u></p> <p>Date _____ Chief, Hist. &amp; Arch. Surveys date _____</p> <p>ATTEST: _____</p> <p>Boundary Affirmed: <u>[Signature]</u> <u>7/2/75</u></p> <p>Keeper of The National Register date _____</p> <p>Director, OAHF date _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>
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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Virginia	
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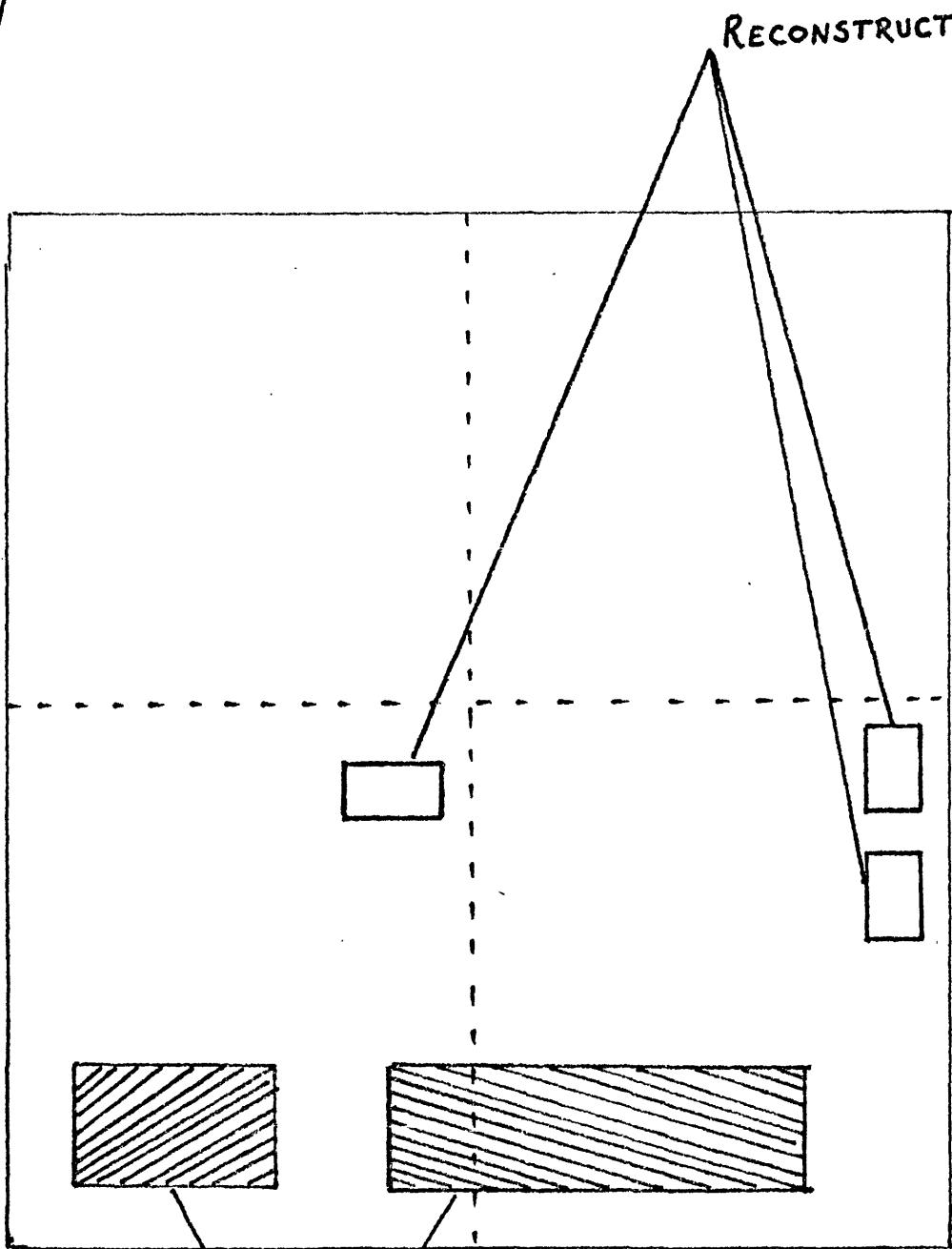
(Number all entries) 7. Description second page

line runs back from the east-west line 264 feet, exactly 16 poles.

Colonial Williamsburg has constructed a number of small buildings on these four lots. None of them are original therefore. A small kitchen building a few feet to the east of the James Semple House is the only other original building on the site.

The house is still owned by the Colonial Williamsburg corporation and is used as a residence for one of its executive employees. It is well maintained, but not open to the public. The boundary line set by Colonial Williamsburg around the property is co-extensive with the historical justification just delivered.

# JAMES SEMPLE HOUSE



FRANCIS STREET

ORIGINAL

James Semple 1914