

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

OWENS-THOMAS HOUSE

AND/OR COMMON

Richardson-Owens-Thomas House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

124 Abercorn Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Georgia

___ VICINITY OF
CODE

First
COUNTY

CODE

Chatham

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input 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"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<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
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

121 Barnard Street

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

STATE

Georgia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Chatham County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

Bull Street at Wright Square

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

STATE

Georgia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE (a) Historic American Buildings Survey
(b) Historic Savannah Architectural Survey

DATE

(a) 1934, 1936 (b) 1968

a- FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY b- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

(a) Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
(b) Historic Savannah Foundation, Savannah, Georgia

CITY, TOWN

119 Habersham Street

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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 Richardson-Owens-Thomas House is a two-story brick and stucco structure built over a high basement. It was built on one of the isolated properties, 60 feet by 180, known as "Trust lots" because they were first set aside for the Trustees of the Colony. The property had been originally granted to William Gerar DeBrahm and Henry Yonge, surveyors of the Colony of Georgia. There followed a succession of owners, ending with the trustees of the Chatham Academy, from whom Richardson acquired the property in 1816. One of the early owners, perhaps Yonge, had built a house on the western half of the site in 1760, and it appears that parts of the foundation of the older structure were incorporated in the house by Retan. The present house fronts on Oglethorpe Square, and unlike earlier Savannah houses, is set back from the street and enclosed by a balustraded wall. In the rear there is an arrangement conventional with these lots: a garden enclosed on both sides by a high tabby and stucco brick wall, with a carriage house and servants' quarters at the back.

Double semicircular stone steps ascend to the elevated floor of the serpentine Ionic portico. The portico is surmounted by an arched door and a pediment which breaks the straight roof line. The building has heavy quoins, and a dentiled cornice continues the line of the portico. The exterior is surfaced entirely with salmon-color stucco which has weathered to a rich tone akin to that of the villas of Palladio.

Jay seems to have run the gamut of the classic orders in his Savannah houses; for the principal order of the Richardson House he selected the Ionic, and classic elements are handled with great inventiveness and distinction. Unique features are the serpentine Ionic portico on the front, and on the south facade the cast-iron Corinthian veranda.

Jay's treatment of the interior is remarkably similar in many respects to designs of the architect W. F. Pocock illustrated in his book, Modern Finishings for Rooms, published in London in 1811. Certain elements suggest that he was also an admirer of Sir John Soane.

The Richardson House conforms, as did Jay's other houses, to the balanced-plan concept--a central hall flanked by rooms of equal width. The entrance hall is an unusual combination of classic elements. On the right as one enters is the salon, perhaps the most beautiful room of its style in America. Here, as in all of his homes, Jay used an exceptionally heavy architrave surrounding doors and windows which gives his interiors a distinction not found in the works of his contemporaries.

At the left of the entrance is the mansion's largest room; now furnished as the dining room. In spite of its size, this room has only two windows. Jay believed in restrained fenestration; he wrote in 1819, "another circumstance of considerable importance is, to avoid so many openings, they are neither useful or ornamental--in the finest specimens of architecture, you cannot find them, they distract the eye, and destroy that repose which is so essential in architecture." He recognized the desirability of light, however, and found an

(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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	BUILDER/ARCHITECT
1816-1819, 1825	William Jay

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architectural historians have called the Owens-Thomas house one of the most beautiful English Regency homes in America. Designed by the young English architect, William Jay for the prosperous Savannah merchant, Richard Richardson, Jay, who was original and gifted with refined taste, added immeasurably to Savannah's beauty and deserves his reputation as one of America's finest architects, although he returned to England in 1824.

There are a number of unique architectural features about the house--indirect lighting in the drawing room, curved walls and doors, the superb plaster work throughout the house and the bridge in the upstairs hall. The main central stair is one of the most elegant in the South.

The residence was completed in 1819 for Richard Richardson, president of the Savannah Branch of the Bank of the United States. After Mrs. Richardson's untimely death in 1822, the house was sold, then acquired by the bank and leased for a brief time as a boardinghouse. It was during this period that accommodations were obtained here for the Marquis de Lafayette and his son when they were guests of the city in 1825.

George Welchman Owens purchased it in 1830, and it was bequeathed to the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1951 by his grand-daughter, Miss Margaret Gray Thomas. The family had occupied the home continuously for 121 years. It is now maintained by Telfair as a house museum, containing furnishings unexcelled in quality.

William Jay was born in Bath in 1792 and arrived in Savannah after studying with a British architect, with his designs for Richardson's house, his earliest commission in America. In this architectural masterpiece he demonstrated originality, a thorough knowledge of the classic Greek style, a sense of proportion, and dignified restraint in the use of ornament. In the designs for this and his other dwelling houses he introduced to Savannah the architectural vocabulary of the English Regency style; and though he returned to England in 1824, his academic and closely reasoned architectural style strongly influenced a whole generation of housebuilders in antebellum Savannah.

Richard Richardson was a prominent citizen and president of the Savannah branch of the Bank of the United States. In 1811, he married Frances Lewis Bolton, whose older brother, Robert Bolton, had married Anne Jay, the architect's sister, in Bath in 1810. Through the influence of the Boltons, no doubt, Jay had received

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	4915,5,0	3514,818,1,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All that certain lot, tract, or parcel of land lying and being in the State of Georgia, County of Chatham and City of Savannah, known as Trust Lot X--Anson Ward. Said lot having a frontage of 60 feet on Abercorn Street with a rectangular depth of 180 feet. Being bounded on the North by State Street, on the East by Lincoln Street, on the South by President Street and on the West by Abercorn Street.

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

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

1/29/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, N.W.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D.C. 20240

STATE

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

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET Owens-Thomas House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

ingenious way of introducing it in this room: above a shallow niche that holds a massive built-in Regency serving table, a reverse curve of the wall is fitted with pale amber glass in a classic fret pattern through which the daylight is filtered--an early indirect-lighting device.

Columns within antae topped with finely carved and gilded Corinthian capitals support an entablature which separates the entrance area of the hall from the stairs. The hall is ample but not spacious, and the area is restricted by two consoles, probably built in by George Owens after 1830, which support bronze busts of Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott. In plan the stairway is most unusual, though faintly reminiscent of several of Soane's designs. The rear of the second-floor hall is inaccessible except by an ingenious gently curved walkway bridging the stair well from front to back. The second-floor hall is spacious and handsome with wide transomed glazed doors at front and rear. Four bedrooms--two on each side of the hall--composed the original plan.

The basement has been restored to its original uses as a kitchen, laundry and wine cellar. It houses as well a small archaeological collection-exhibit assembled by architect J. Everett Fauber.

This material is excerpted from an article by Edward V. Jones, Antiques Magazine.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Owens-Thomas House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

the commission to design a house for the Richardsons, and it was to complete the drawings and supervise its construction that he came to Savannah. John Retan was selected by the Richardsons as the builder of their house and construction had been in progress for well over a year at the time of Jay's arrival. This fact was conclusively established by the discovery some time ago of an inscription crudely incised on the masonry foundation under the portico: Began house A.D. 1816--Finished June A.D. 1819--J. Retan. These dates, coupled with the date of Jay's arrival (announced in the Savannah Gazette for December 30, 1817) are acceptable evidence that Jay did at least part of the designs for the house before he left London.

Many of Jay's buildings in Savannah have been destroyed or disfigured through the years, but the Richardson house, a superlative memorial to his unquestioned genius, has been preserved as a house museum.

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