

STATE: Virginia	
COUNTY: Bedford	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 69-11-45-0093	DATE 11/12/69

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Poplar Forest

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Poplar Forest

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: .2 mi. N of Timber Lake, .9 mi. S of Rt. 661, .5 mi. S of intersection of Rt. 661 and Rt. 460.

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE: Virginia CODE: 45 COUNTY: Bedford CODE: 019

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

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

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNERS NAME:  
Mr. and Mrs. James O. Watts, Jr.

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Poplar Forest

CITY OR TOWN:  
Forest

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
45

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
Bedford County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Bedford

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
45

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 950

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1941 Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
D. C.

CODE:  
08

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## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins <input type="checkbox"/>	Unexposed <input type="checkbox"/>
INTEGRITY	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	Altered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unaltered <input type="checkbox"/>		Moved <input type="checkbox"/>	Original Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Poplar Forest is a brick one-story building, octagonal in shape, set on a high basement with tetrastyle pedimented Tuscan porticoes, on low arcades, on the entrance and rear facades. As a result of a fire in 1845, only the walls, chimneys, and possibly the columns are original. From a drawing, circa 1820 (now in the Alderman Library, University of Virginia), by Thomas Jefferson's granddaughter, Cornelia Randolph, the original design of the exterior can be reasonably determined. The drawing shows the house crowned by a deck on an octagonal hipped roof surrounded at its base by a balustrade. Below the balustrade is a Tuscan cornice which encircles the entire house.

The original interior plan of the house is intact, and consists of four elongated octagonal rooms around a square central hall which was originally lighted from above. Two of the rooms were divided in the middle by bed alcoves, similar to that in Jefferson's bedroom at Monticello. Unfortunately, there is almost no evidence indicating the appearance of the original woodwork.

Jefferson refers to an office wing, 110 feet long "...in the manner of those at Monticello, with a flat roof in the level of the house." While no trace above ground remains of this wing, a kitchen and smokehouse still stand. On either side of the house, the two original octagonal privies are discreetly hidden by artificial mounds.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century   
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Historic <input type="checkbox"/>	Industry <input type="checkbox"/>	Science <input type="checkbox"/>	<del>Architecture</del>
Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/>	Invention <input type="checkbox"/>	Sculpture <input type="checkbox"/>	<u>History</u>
Art <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Landscape <input type="checkbox"/>	Social/Humanitarian <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Commerce <input type="checkbox"/>	Architecture <input type="checkbox"/>	Theater <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Communications <input type="checkbox"/>	Literature <input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Conservation <input type="checkbox"/>	Military <input type="checkbox"/>		_____
	Music <input type="checkbox"/>		_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)

Poplar Forest was designed and built by Thomas Jefferson on his Bedford County plantation as a "pleasant retreat" from the social pressures of Monticello. Construction on the house began in 1806 and continued as late as 1819. Jefferson visited Poplar Forest as much as four times a year, often remaining there as long as a month. Originally the house had been designed for Jefferson's daughter, Maria, to be built in Albemarle County, but she died in 1804.

Although burned and substantially rebuilt, Poplar Forest ranks among the most important of Jefferson's architectural designs. In it he was able to indulge his fancy for compact forms and geometric shapes, and stated that it was "inferior only to Monticello".

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

O'Neal, William B., Architecture in Virginia, New York: Walker and Company, Inc., 1968.

Watson, Lucille McWane, "Thomas Jefferson's Other Home", Antiques, April, 1957, pp. 342-346.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN ONE ACRE		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	37° 21' 30"	79° 17' 00"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	37° 21' 30"	79° 15' 30"				
SE	37° 20' 10"	79° 15' 30"				
SW	37° 20' 10"	79° 17' 00"				

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Staff, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, James W. Moody, Jr., Director

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE: June 2, 1969

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond

STATE: Virginia

CODE: 45

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

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:

National  State  Local

Name: Edw. P. Alexander by John

Title: Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Chairman Virginia Historic Landmarks Comm.

Date: 10-7-69

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

Ernest Allen Connolly  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

William J. Smart  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: OCT 23 1969

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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STATE	
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6. Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory  
1958 Federal

Library of Congress  
Washington, D. C. Code: 08

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Report #09-27  
1968 State

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219 Code: 760

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Poplar Forest

Statement of Significance

Thomas Jefferson displayed throughout his life a fascination with unusual architectural shapes and volumes. In this he shared an interest with the professionally trained architects of his age. Both the oval rooms in the rotunda of the University of Virginia and octagons and semi-octagon incorporated into the final version of Monticello are fine examples of this.

Between 1806 and 1819 a fully mature Jefferson decided to build a retreat in the rural seclusion of Bedford County Virginia. He named his hermitage Poplar Forest. In its design he gave full reign to his fancy and planned a one story octagonal house over a raised basement. In plan the house has four perfectly symmetrical principal spaces in the shape of elongated octagons arranged around a large square central room lit by a central skylight. In planning the grounds Jefferson was also his most fanciful and created miniature hills in the garden to screen the view of the octagonal out-houses from the main house.

Poplar Forest was completely gutted by fire in 1845 and immediately repaired. However no attempt was made to recapture the original decoration. Only the basic shapes of the rooms remain. The roof was reconstructed without the skylight or the original balustrade.

In spite of the fact that Poplar Forest is an intensely personal example of Thomas Jefferson's architectural taste and, in that regard, is second only to Monticello, the 1845 fire and subsequent rebuilding have significantly reduced the buildings importance.

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Poplar Forest property description:

Beginning on New London Road approximately 1950 feet from the intersection of New London Road and Waterlick Road, and following the road for approximately 1490 feet; thence S 49° 12' E, 190 feet; thence N 64° 18' E, 370 feet; thence N 23° 12' W, 480 feet; thence N 18° 18' E, 23 feet; thence N 42° 27' W, 52 feet; thence N 31° 3' E, 555 feet; thence N 58° 42' W, 200 feet; thence N 24° 42' W, 255 feet; thence S 31° 3' W, 515 feet; thence N 12° 20' W, 750 feet; thence N 37° 20' W, 515 feet; thence N 31° 3' E, 750 feet; thence following the Norfolk and Western Railway Low Grade Belt Line approximately 5100 feet; thence about N 28° W, approximately 1200 feet; thence S 67° 19' W approximately 1050 feet; thence S 14° 39' E, 218 feet to North Fork of Tomahawk Creek; thence S 8° 24' E, 2957 feet to Up Branch Creek; thence following Up Branch and the South Fork of the Tomahawk Creek approximately 1315 feet; thence S 23° 36' W, 725 feet; thence S 75° 54' E, approximately 1115 feet; thence S 28° 6' W, approximately 1200 feet; thence approximately N 78° W about 1800 feet; thence N 22° 40' W, 530 feet; thence S 47° 20' W, 146 feet; thence N 16° 10' W, 1089 feet; thence N 17° 28' W, 963 feet; thence N 62° 12' W, 641 feet; thence N 67° 49' W, 761 feet to beginning.