

VLR-9/18/73  
NHL-4/15/70

137-58 Already NHL under Theme  
"Colonial Architecture"

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Virginia
COUNTY:	James City
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON: George Wythe House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Wythe House

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: On the west side of the Palace Green between the Duke of Gloucester Street and Prince George Street.

CITY OR TOWN: Williamsburg

STATE: Virginia      CODE:      COUNTY: James City      CODE:     

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., Division of Interpretation

STREET AND NUMBER: Goodwin Building

CITY OR TOWN: Williamsburg      23185      STATE: Virginia      CODE:     

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE: Virginia      CODE:     

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE:      CODE:     

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:      COUNTY:      ENTRY NUMBER      DATE

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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 Wythe House is based on William Salmon's Palladio Londinensis, or The London Art of Building, first published in 1734. Carefully designed in the early Georgian style, the house is brick, laid in Flemish bond, and is two stories high, below a low hipped roof. The structure is 54 feet long and 39 feet deep and its two chimneys occur in the end slopes of the roof. The windows have nine over nine light sash throughout, but the glass size in the sash of the upper windows is greatly reduced, and the second floor openings are also smaller. This diminution was an effort to increase the scale of the building and is very successful in this case, where a structure of only moderate size appears to have the importance of a much larger one. The windows, with their broad muntins and wide frames, also give interest to a very conservative facade. The center doorway of the five-bay facade is unenriched except by its fine paneled double door and rectangular transom. The chief beauty of the building, however, lies in its good lines and fine brickwork. This latter is quiet and rather uniform, with a simple beveled water table and unmolded belt course, both in gauged brick, as are the flat arches of the windows. The windows, doors, and corners of the house have rubbed dressings, and at the eaves line is a modillioned cornice.

In plan the house has the standard Georgian central-hall-and-four room arrangement, which is repeated again on the second floor.<sup>1</sup> The wide central hall has a fine stair ascending in one long run, on the south side of the hall, the house facing east. Like the exterior of the house, the open string stair is well designed, and the architectural features are deliberately simple. The hall has no paneling except the stair spandrel. For finish it has only a molded chair rail on a plaster-board and a single crown mold at the ceiling line. However, the stair has a beauty that comes from fine materials and well-studied detail. The newel post is square, there are no ramps in the well-molded handrail, and it is received against the face of the gallery post, which has a fine turned pendant. There are suavely scrolled brackets at the stair ends, above a molded string piece, and the walnut balusters are richly turned. Except for the stair there is no other important wood work in the house. Plaster dados, however, occur throughout, with chair rails on plaster-boards and single molded cornices.

Restored in 1926-31 and 1939-40, the Wythe House is maintained in excellent condition and is open to visitors as a historic house museum.

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1. The fireplaces in each of the two interior chimneys, however, are curiously placed side by side on each floor.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**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) 1755-1791

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input checked="" 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 Wythe House was declared eligible for the Registry of National Historic Landmarks in May 1970, under Theme XX, subtheme Architecture, Part I--Colonial/.

The Wythe House was the home from 1755 to 1791 of George Wythe, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence for Virginia, lawyer, politician, first professor of law in the United States, and chancellor of Virginia. Designed and built by the amateur architect Richard Taliaferro about 1755, the Wythe House is architecturally one of Virginia's finest examples of a Georgian brick town house.

Brief Sketch of the Life of George Wythe, 1726-1806.

George Wythe was born in 1726 on his father's plantation on Back River, about 8½ miles north of Hampton, Elizabeth City County, Virginia. After a brief attendance at the College of William and Mary, probably in the grammar school, he studied law after a fashion in Prince George County and in 1746 was admitted to the bar. He became associated in practice with John Lewis, a prominent Spotsylvania County attorney. In 1747 Wythe married John's sister, Ann Lewis, who died in 1748. Wythe remained at Spotsylvania for about eight years. In 1755 his eldest brother died and George inherited the large family estate. Having represented Williamsburg in the House of Burgesses in 1754-55, Wythe now made his home in that town. About 1755 he married Elizabeth Taliaferro, daughter of Col. Richard Taliaferro of "Powhatan," James City County, Virginia, planter and architect. Wythe now practiced law diligently, also began to study the law in earnest, and delved into the classics and the liberal sciences; he was admitted to the bar of the General Court. His brilliant career really began in 1758 with the advent of Francis Fauquier as the Royal Governor. Wythe became his intimate friend. Wythe was a representative in the House of Burgesses from 1758 to 1768, mayor of Williamsburg in 1768, and clerk of the House of Burgesses, 1769-1775.

In 1775 he was sent as a delegate to the Continental Congress, where he served until the close of 1776. He ably supported Richard Henry Lee's resolution of independence and signed the Declaration of Independence. Wythe was speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates in 1777 and in 1778 became one of the three judges of the new Virginia high court of chancery. With Thomas Jefferson and Edmund Pendleton, Wythe was assigned the

(continued)

SEE INST.CTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
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(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance: (1) Wythe House

tremendous task of revising the laws of Virginia, his portion covering the period from the revolution in England to American independence. The committee's report, embracing 126 bills, was made to the Virginia general assembly in 1779, most of the bills being adopted in 1785 under Madison's leadership. The revision was thorough, intelligent, and consistent with revolutionary political principles.

On December 4, 1779 Wythe was appointed "Professor of Law and Police" at the College of William and Mary, the first chair of law in the United States. Among his students were Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, and James Monroe. In 1788 Wythe represented Williamsburg at the Virginia convention which ratified the Federal Constitution. In 1788 the state judicial system was reorganized and Wythe became sole chancellor, holding this office until 1801, when three chancery districts were created; he continued, however, to preside over the Richmond district. He resigned his professorship in 1790 and in 1791 removed to Richmond, where he formed a small law school of his own. Among his students was Henry Clay, who was also clerk of the court.

With other eminent Virginians of the period Wythe was opposed to slavery and by his will emancipated his Negroes. This will led to Wythe's death. His grand nephew, George Wythe Sweeney, was named principal beneficiary, while a legacy to a slave was to come to Sweeney if the servant died. To secure this legacy, or perhaps the inheritance, Sweeney poisoned some coffee with arsenic. The Negro drank some; Wythe also drank some. The slave died first, but Wythe lingered long enough to disinherit Sweeney, who, tried for murder, was acquitted for lack of evidence, since the testimony of the Negro cook, the principal witness, was not admissible in Virginia courts at that time. Wythe died at Richmond on June 8, 1806 and was buried in the churchyard of St. John's Episcopal Church, Richmond.

History of the House

The house was built for Wythe by his father-in-law, the noted Virginia amateur architect Richard Taliaferro, about 1755 and Wythe inherited it upon Taliaferro's death in 1775. Wythe resided in the house until 1791. The house was occupied briefly by Thomas Jefferson, and served as headquarters for George Washington prior to the siege of Yorktown (1780) and for Comte de Rochambeau after the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

The Wythe House, in very poor condition, was purchased by Bruton Parish in 1926, and between that date and 1931, the structure was repaired and restored, under supervision of the Reverend Dr. William Goodwin. The building was then used as a parish house until 1937, when it was acquired by Colonial Williamsburg, Inc.. The major task in the 1939-40 restoration was the installation of appropriate mantels, as the originals had long since disappeared. The little-altered house is maintained in excellent condition and is open to visitors.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Elizabeth Fields and Dr. J.E. Fields, "The Signers Lived Here," Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine, May 1971, 8.  
Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XX, 586-589. Article by Theodore S. Cox  
Virginia, A Guide to the Old Dominion (American Guide Series) (New York, 1947), 324-325.  
 Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952), 333-334, 347-48.  
 Thomas T. Waterman, Mansions of Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1946), 217-220, 424.  
 Robert A. Lancaster, Historic Virginia Homes and Churches (Philadelphia, 1915)  
 Edith T. Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times (Richmond, 1927), 37-45.  
 (Continued)

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 TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		37 16 19	76 42 11	
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acre

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:  
 Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service. DATE: 3/12/71

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 801 - 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: 20006

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Virginia	
COUNTY James City	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

9. Major Bibliographical References: (1)

- Dorothy and Richard Pratt, A Guide to Early American Houses - South  
(New York, 1956), 15.  
Richard Pratt, A Treasury of Early American Homes (New York, 1949), 38-39.  
William B. O'Neal, Architecture in Virginia (New York, 1968), 93.  
William Draper Lewis, editor, Great American Lawyers. (Philadelphia,  
1907-09, 8 vols.), Vol. I, "George Wythe," by Lyon Tyler.

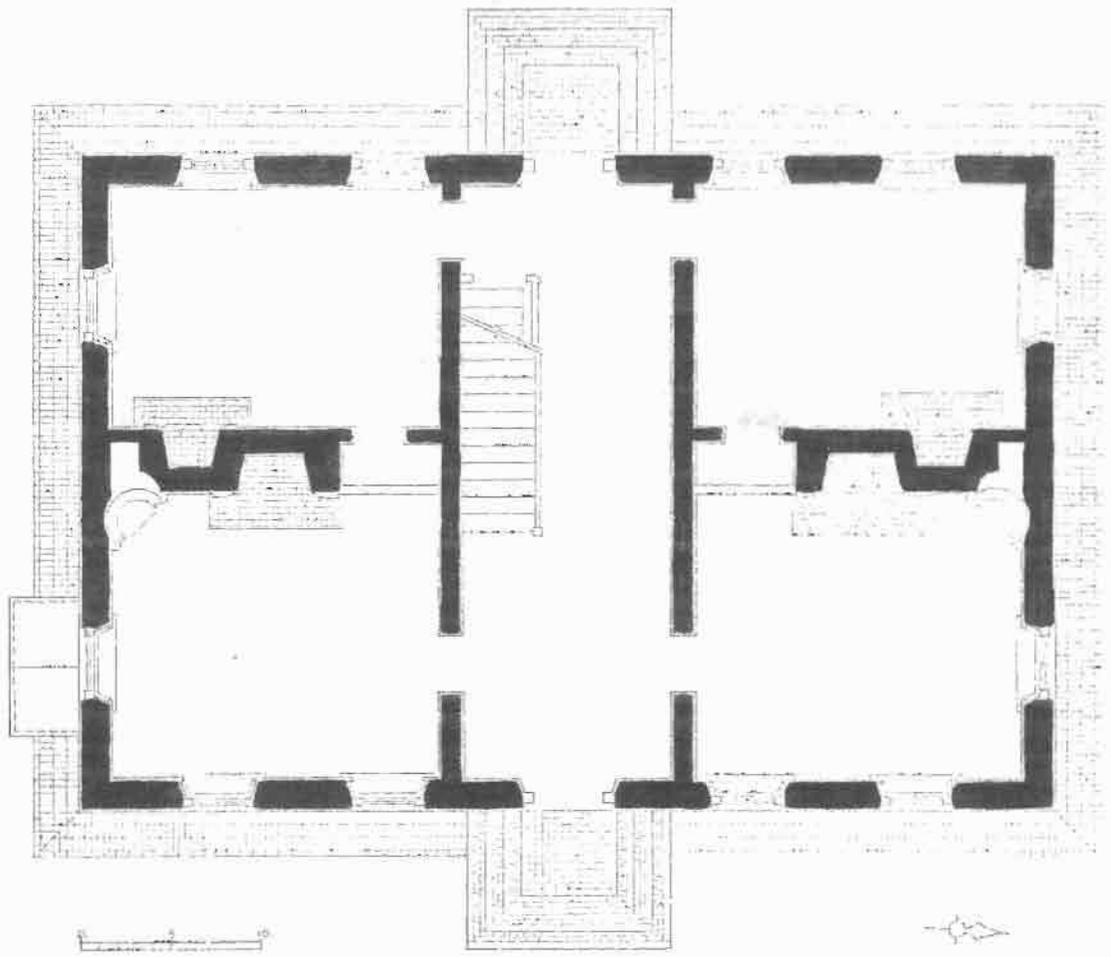
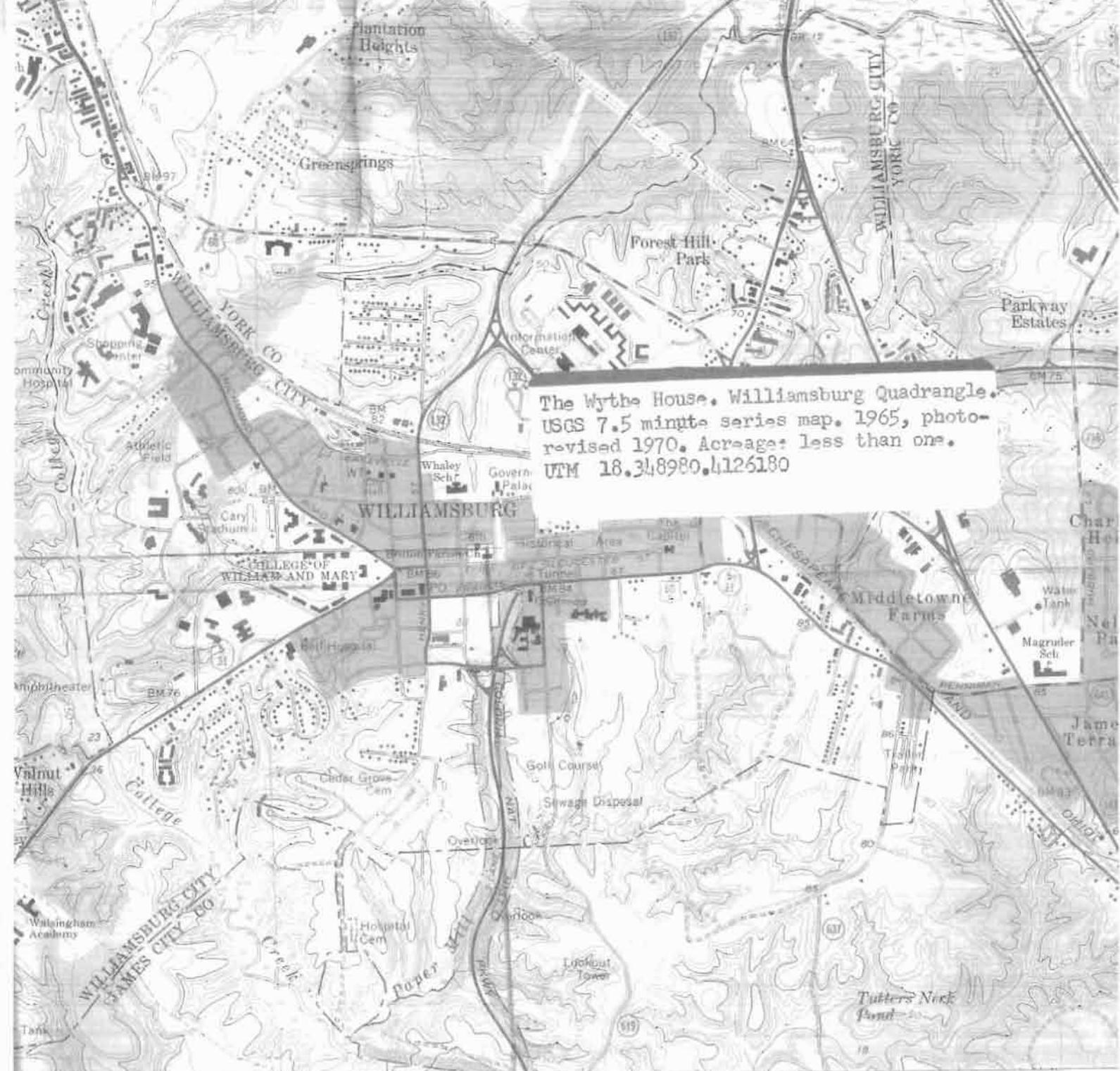


Figure 12. THE WYTHE HOUSE. PLAN.



The Wythe House, Williamsburg Quadrangle.  
 USGS 7.5 minute series map, 1965, photo-revised 1970. Acreage: less than one.  
 UTM 18.348980, 4126180

347 348 42°30' 349 JAMESTOWN 2 MI 350 (HOG ISLAND) 5658 11 NW 351

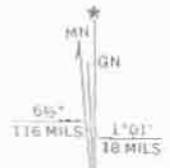
SCALE 1:24,000



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
 SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
 THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 2.8 FEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
 AND VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



UTM GRID AND 1970 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

137-0058

(1961)

ere  
 (checked)  
 shown