VLR-7/7/70 NRHP-9/15/70

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:	
Amherst	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Sweet Briar House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Sweet Briar; Locust Ridge

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: .8 mi. NW of Rt. 29, .1 mi. SW of intersection with Rt. 624.

CITY OR TOWN: Sweet Briar

STATE: Virginia — CODE: 45 — COUNTY: Amherst — CODE: 009

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object	☐ Public ☒ Private ☐ Both	Public Acquisition: ☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered	☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress	Yes: ☒ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☒ Private Residence	☐ Other (Specify)	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Sweet Briar College

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Sweet Briar — STATE: Virginia — CODE: 45

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Amherst — STATE: Virginia — CODE: 45

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1957 ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington — STATE: D. C. — CODE: 08

STATE: Virginia

COUNTY: Amherst

FOR NPS USE ONLY — ENTRY NUMBER — DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One) ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated ☐ Ruins ☐ Unexposed	
	(Check One) ☒ Altered ☐ Unaltered	(Check One) ☐ Moved ☒ Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

As originally built Sweet Briar was a typical Piedmont Federal-style brick farmhouse, featuring a hipped roof, a two-level pedimented portico, and exterior end chimneys. Although the oldest section of the house has a single pile plan, it has a centered two-story rear ell which may be original. In 1851, the house underwent an extensive remodelling in an attempt to transform it into an Italianate Villa-style country house. The original portico was removed and substituted by a two-level arcaded portico with a one-story verandah across the facade. The plain molded cornice was replaced by a simple modillion cornice. At the ends of the house were placed two three-story Italianate towers of slightly unequ[illegible] height and form. Both towers, however, feature three-part windows on the upper levels and ornamental iron balconies. Both towers also are topped by shallow hipped roofs. The entire house was painted a uniform cream color with white trim. Following these alterations and additions, the house received further additions on the rear at different times, part of which may date from the early-twentieth century.

Most of the interior trim of the original section survives, although some of the mantels have been replaced by Victorian ones. The original woodwork is of the simplest type, with no outstanding details. Much of the trim in the entrance hall was replaced as a result of a fire in 1927. The simple trim in the tower rooms complements the fine Victorian furniture, much of which was purchased by the Fletcher family in Philadelphia and New York especially for the house. The first floor tower rooms are further enhanced by elaborate bronze chandeliers and marble mantels. Many Fletcher pieces remain in the rest of the house, making the place an important document of mid-nineteenth century interior decoration.

The house is set in a spacious informal park featuring ornamental trees and numerous large boxwood. Boxwood in front of the house that originally lined a circular drive have grown to great height and make a handsome frame for the facade. In the rear of the house is an early but largely rebuilt outbuilding that belonged to the original farm complex.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Aboriginal
- ☐ Prehistoric
- ☐ Historic
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☒ Architecture
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Commerce
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Conservation
- ☒ Education
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Industry
- ☐ Invention
- ☒ Landscape Architecture
- ☐ Literature
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Religion/Philosophy
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Sculpture
- ☐ Social/Humanitarian
- ☐ Theater
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Urban Planning
- ☐ Other (Specify) _____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Sweet Briar House was probably built in the first quarter of the nineteenth century by the Crews (or Crouse) family as a six-room, T-shaped farmhouse. The land on which the house was built was part of a grant by the Crown to George Carrington in 1770. At a public auction in 1830, the property, known as Locust Ridge, was bought by Elijah Fletcher, a New England school teacher who had come to Virginia in 1810.

Elijah Fletcher was the owner and publisher of The Virginian, a Whig newspaper in Lynchburg; he also served as the mayor of that city. Mrs. Fletcher, the former Maria Antoinette Crawford of nearby Tusculum, changed the name of the property to Sweet Briar, for the abundance of wild roses that grew there. At first a weekend retreat, the Fletchers made Sweet Briar their permanent home in 1846. In the spring of 1851, Fletcher began the enlargement of the house by the addition of the tower wings and the connecting arcaded portico in the Italian Villa style. The project was completed in about eighteen months.

After Fletcher's death in 1858, his daughter Indiana inherited the house. In 1865 she married James Henry Williams, an Episcopal clergyman, and two years later their only child, Daisy, was born. Daisy died when only seventeen years old, and it was in her memory that her sorrowing parents made plans to found a school for girls and young women. The college was established in accordance with provisions of Mrs. Williams' will; its charter was granted by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1901; and the first students matriculated in 1906. The house now serves as the residence for the president of Sweet Briar College, one of the nation's most prestigious women's colleges.

As a result of the 1851 remodelling, Sweet Briar House stands today as a major example of the Italian Villa style in Virginia. In a sense Sweet Briar achieved its picturesque effect in much the same manner as its prototype, the vernacular Italian farmhouse - through alterations and additions. Unfortunately the architect of the remodelling is unknown, although an unsigned contemporary rendering of the facade showing its additions survives in the College Library. Not only is the quality of the picturesque evident in the architecture of the house, but the informal gardens originally laid out by Elijah Fletcher display a romantic inspiration as well. The many large boxwoods have long been a favorite attraction.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

O'Neal, William B., Architecture in Virginia. New York: 1968.
Stohlman, Martha Lou, The Story of Sweet Briar College. Alumnae Association of Sweet Briar College, 1956.
Sweet Briar Institute. 1904 (pamphlet).
Information provided by Martha von Briesen, Director, Public Relations Office, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, Virginia.

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			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	37 °	33 '	26 "	79 °	04 '	59 "
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 3 acres

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
DATE: April 21, 1970

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 _____

Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Chairman
Title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Date _____

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

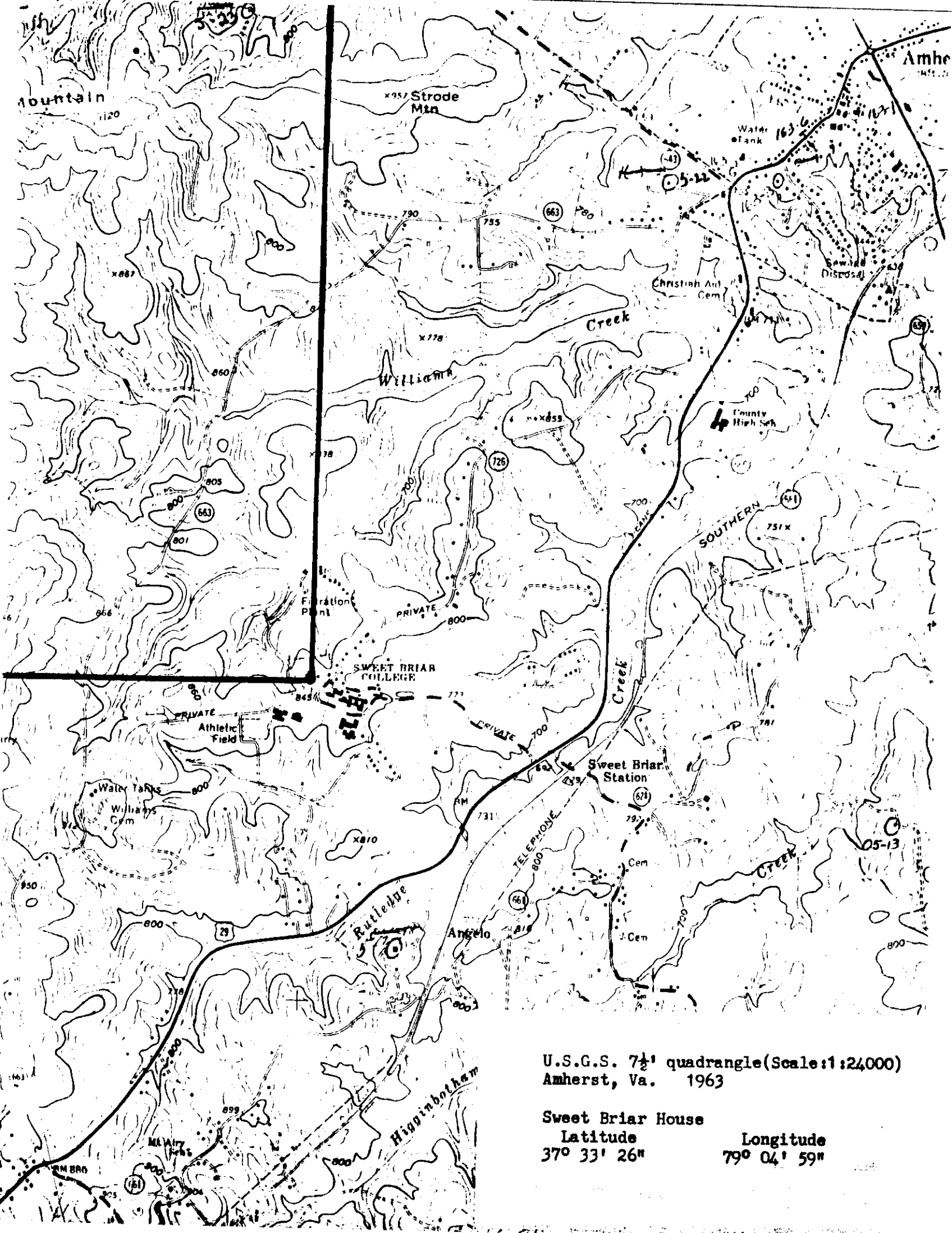
_____
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

_____
Keeper of The National Register

Date _____



U.S.G.S. 7½' quadrangle(Scale:1:24000)
Amherst, Va. 1963

Sweet Briar House

Latitude	Longitude
37° 33' 26"	79° 04' 59"