

VLR- 8/21/90 NR-HP-2/4/91

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a) Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name AURORA
other names/site number Pink House, Boxwood, Penn Homestead

2. Location

street & number East side Route 629 not for publication
city, town Spencer vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Patrick code 141 zip code 24165

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets, does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet

Henry C. Miller Signature of certifying official 20 Dec 1990 Date
Department of Historic Resources 221 Governor St., Richmond, Va. State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service ad

I, hereby, certify that this property is.

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic-Single dwelling
 Commerce/Trade-Business

Domestic-Single dwelling
 Domestic-Secondary structure

7. DescriptionArchitectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Mid-19th Century: Italian Villa

foundation Brick
 walls Wood-weatherboard
 roof Wood-Shake
 other Porch- Iron and wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Aurora is located on the east side of Route 629 in the Penn's Store vicinity of south-eastern Patrick County. There are two contributing resources on the five-and-one-half acre land: the two-story main house which is oriented west towards the road and a small one-story frame building once used as an office. Aurora is a two-story, three-bay, hipped-roof frame house, one-story porches on the east and west facades. The house is built in the Italian Villa style and has several features typical of that style, including round-arched windows, clustered chimneys and low pitched roofs. The west porch is the most elaborate feature of the exterior and features decorative iron panels ornamented with an ornate grapevine design. Above the porch roof is a wooden railing, also with a grapevine pattern. The interior features a symmetrical cruciform plan with two parlors, kitchen, dining room and bedroom on the first floor, and five bedrooms and wide spacious halls on the second floor. Interior trim is generally simple, with the exception of the two parlors, which feature marble mantles and some Greek Revival decorative elements. There is a fireplace in virtually every room, all with original mantles. Both the exterior and interior are in good and virtually unaltered condition.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Aurora (also known as the Pink House) is located on the east side of Route 629 in the Penn's Store vicinity of south-east Patrick County, Virginia. The surrounding landscape is made up of small farms with many mid and late nineteenth century residences and is overwhelmingly rural. The eastern portion of the approximately five-and-one-half acre property slopes steeply to the east down to a stream fed by two small springs. There are two contributing resources on the property: the two-story main house, which is oriented west towards the road, and the small one-story frame building facing north once used as an office for the Penn family tobacco operations.

Aurora is a two-story, three-bay, hipped roof frame house with one-story porches and cross gables on the east and west facades. The roof is composed of four squared low-pitched hipped segments divided by a median east-west longitudinal section. The house is presently painted pink except for the porches, trim and the vertical boards which mark each bay and the corners.

 See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance
ca. 1853-ca.1880

Significant Dates
NA

Cultural Affiliation
NA

Significant Person
NA

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Aurora is a rare and architecturally significant example of the Italian Villa style in Virginia as popularized by the architectural pattern books of Andrew Jackson Downing. Aurora features many of the characteristics of this mid-nineteenth century style, including a wide verandah, clustered chimneys, and round-arched windows. In general appearance, in fact, Aurora possesses many similarities with Designs VIII and XXVII as shown in Downing's The Architecture of Country Houses (1850). Its floor plan, however, is more complex and inventive and is influenced strongly by eighteenth century Palladian principles. Also atypical is the use of high style Greek Revival decorative features and the ornate iron and wood front porch. Decorative cast iron porches such as this are more typical of urban areas, but is extremely rare in a remote rural area such as Patrick County.

Aurora is also significant as the home of Thomas Jefferson Penn, a prominent farmer, merchant and tobacconist in nineteenth century Patrick County. The architectural sophistication of Aurora undoubtedly reflects the prosperity enjoyed by Penn and his tobacco manufacturing company. His son, Frank Reid Penn founded the company F.R & G. Penn Co. that was eventually acquired by tobacco magnate James Duke to form the American Tobacco Company, still one of the "Big Three" tobacco firms in the United States.

HISTORY:

Aurora was built by Thomas Jefferson Penn (1810-1888) one of the wealthiest and most successful tobacco farmers and merchants in nineteenth century Patrick County. Members of the Penn family first arrived in Virginia in 1621 and thereafter settled in Caroline and Spotsylvania counties before taking up tobacco farming in Patrick County in the early eighteenth century. 1 Among the members of the family were Colonels Abram and George Penn of local

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1

Revolutionary War fame. 2 In Patrick County, the Penns concentrated their landholdings in the southeast corner, in an area known as Penn's Store or Pennville. Among the prominent houses built by the family were Greenview (circa 1800), Sunnyside (1852) and the early nineteenth century estate of Greenville Penn. 3

Greenville Penn's daughter Catherine Lucinda (1824-1901) married his cousin Thomas Jefferson Penn in 1839 and at her father's death in 1846 inherited most of his wealth in land and slaves. (The 1840 United States Census listed the names of more than forty slaves and servants owned by the elder Penn). 5

Thomas Penn built this inheritance into a considerable fortune of his own by growing and processing tobacco. The Census of 1860 records that Penn (referred to as a merchant) owned real estate valued at \$14,000 and a personal estate over \$100,000, values well above the average in Patrick County at that time. 6 The agricultural censuses of 1850 through 1870 give a clear indication of his wealth. In 1850 Penn owned nearly 1800 acres (with a cash value of of \$5,000) on which more than \$10,000 worth of tobacco and corn was grown. By 1870 the cash value of his farm and crops had tripled. 7 According to the Population Census of 1870 there were more than fifty "hirelings" living on his farm, both black and white. Interestingly, most of the black workers bore the Penn surname. 8

It was not only as a tobacco farmer that Penn prospered, but as the proprietor of a tobacco manufacturing company and dry goods store. The 1860 Census of Manufacturers gives a detailed financial description of his company (then known as Penn&Critz, but soon to become simply T.J. Penn & Co.). \$20,000 worth of capital was invested in the company, which had more than thirty employees. 250,000 pounds of tobacco were processed annually into 112,000 pounds of plug, chewing, and snuff tobacco. By contrast, its nearest competitor in Patrick County had only \$3,500 worth of invested capital and produced 32,000 pounds of tobacco products. 9

Penn's prosperity in the tobacco business mirrored the enormous burst in the fortunes of the tobacco industry in the forty years after the Civil War in Virginia. The development of new blending and manufacturing methods, increased advertising and marketing and the expansion of railroad service brought great prosperity to the centers of the "Bright Belt" such as Danville and South Boston.

The success of Penn's company undoubtedly spawned the proliferation of other tobacco manufacturers in Patrick County, most of them concentrated in the Penn's Store community. T.H. Penn & Co., and T. G. Penn Co. were the most successful according to the 1870 Census of Manufacturers, but a business directory of 1871 also lists Penn & Sons, Penn Bros., and the Penn Company. A close competitor of the Penn tobacco companies

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

was the Reynolds tobacco company, centred in nearby Critz. The most prominent member of this family, R.J. Reynolds, eventually moved the company to North Carolina where it still exists. Also in the business directory were listings for the F. R. & G Penn Store (owned by Thomas' two sons, Frank Reid and Greenville), Penn and Mills Blacksmiths, Martin and Penn Shoemakers, the Penn cooping company and even Penn Jewelers. 12

The architectural sophistication of Aurora undoubtedly reflects the prosperity enjoyed by Penn and his tobacco manufacturing company. Property tax and census records indicate that Penn built his house between 1853 and 1856, near the midpoint of his career. The architect, if any, is unknown, but its design is derived in large part from the architectural pattern book The Architecture of Country Houses (1850) by Andrew Jackson Downing. Its exterior appearance bears a close resemblance to two of the designs contained in the book: Design VIII, a "Suburban Cottage" with a wide decorated verandah, wide eaves and projecting bays and Design XXVII, a "Small Southern Country House" with a cross gable and French doors. 13 Other exterior elements, such as the tri-partite, round-arched windows, clustered chimneys and eave trim were also influenced by Downing's suggested designs.

The two publications by Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses and the earlier (1842) Cottage Residences, were among the most influential in American architectural history. While architectural pattern books had existed since the eighteenth century, they were used primarily by carpenters and builders. Downing's books were written for popular markets and contained his theoretical observations on the Gothic and Italian Villa styles, the picturesque movement and architectural verities, as well as practical advice on building materials and landscaping. The design of Aurora clearly reflects many of Downing's precepts. It is straightforward and unpretentious in its massing, with clean lines, symmetry and attention to proportion. 14 Such architectural features as the polygonal bays, clustered chimneys and grouped windows add variety and relieved the exterior of the "sterility and starkness" Downing disliked in Greek Revival architecture. Direct historic and stylistic references are few, although the wide eaves and round-arched windows are in the Italian Villa (or "rustic Venetian") style popularized by Downing.

Aurora is also notable for the many ways in which it deviates from Downing's principles. The porch would have most certainly been considered too ornate for a simple country farm house 15 and the use of both iron and wood for the porch was unusual. The porch design was probably chosen

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

by Penn from the many specialty catalogues of ornamental ironwork popular at that time. Although more common in urban areas, ornamental iron porches were quite rare in rural areas and its appearance at Aurora may be the result of Penn's business travels. The use of classical Greek decorative elements, such as the anthenia and the capitals in one of the parlors indicate an owner with eclectic and educated tastes. Finally, the interior plan is larger than was typical of Downing's country houses, as well as more original. The modified cruciform plan, with its wide axial hallways and centrally placed stair is almost Palladian in inspiration.

Insight into contemporary opinion of Penn's newly constructed home is provided by a letter written by a visiting cousin, Henrietta Marie Penn to her daughter in Alabama in 1860:

"... Cousin Jefferson has a very fine house and fine furniture he has two parlors both finely furnished in each there is a silver picher and in one there is a silver water and two goblets lined with gold the mantle pieces in all the rooms is marble and all around the fireplaces covered with marble..." 16

When built, Aurora undoubtedly appeared more architecturally avant-garde than the other Penn family residences. Sunnyside, built only a few years earlier, is much more conservative in its use of a Georgian center hall plan, and the late Federal-Greek Revival decorative elements used. Aurora is today the only known example of the Italian villa style in Patrick County

Thomas Penn and his family continued to reside at Aurora until the 1880s. The routing of the railroad line to bypass Penn's Store in the late 1870s necessitated a move by the Penn company to Danville, Virginia and the family soon followed. The most successful of his sons, Frank Reid Penn, later relocated to Reidsville, North Carolina where formed his own company. There, he produced the popular "Penn's Natural Leaf", "Red J", and "Penn's Arrow" brands of chewing tobacco until his company was bought by the tobacco magnate James Duke. 16 Duke's company the American Tobacco Company (now a subsidiary of American Brands) still exists and remains one of the "Big Three" tobacco firms in the United States, with Reidsville as one of its headquarters.

The house passed from the immediate family at the death of Catherine Penn in 1901. 17 The property changed hands a number of times until it was purchased and occupied in 1935 by a collateral relative of the Penn family, Mrs. Annie Theodore. She lived in the house until her death in 1973. The house was bought by the present owner in 1990.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4

REFERENCES --

- 1- V.G. and L.G. Pedigo, History of Patrick and Henry Counties, (Baltimore), pages 220-223.
- 2- V.G. and L.G. Pedigo, page 222.
- 3- Emma Ferguson Farrar, Old Virginia Houses: The Mountain Empire, (New York: Hastings House), page 187.
- 4- Patrick County Will Book 4, Page 241.
- 5- United States Bureau of the Census, Census Schedules for Patrick County Virginia, 1840.
- 6- United States Bureau of the Census, Census Schedules for Patrick County, Virginia, 1860.
- 7- United States Bureau of the Census, Agricultural Census Schedules for Patrick County Virginia, 1870.
- 8- United States Bureau of the Census, Census Schedules for Patrick County Virginia, 1870.
- 9- United States Bureau of the Census, Manufacturing Census Schedules for Patrick County, Virginia, 1870.
- 10- Andrew Boyd, Business Directory of Virginia, (Richmond: B. Bates), page 83.
- 11- V.G. and L.G. Pedigo, History of Patrick and Henry Counties, (Baltimore), pages 248-249.
- 12- Andrew Boyd, Business Directory of Virginia, (Richmond: B. Bates) page 83.
- 13- Andrew Jackson Downing, Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture and Landscape Gardening. (Watkins Glen: Library of Victorian Culture) pages 231 and 245-246.
- 14- Ibid., page 42.
- 15- Ibid., page 43.
- 16- V. Rainey Veligo, The American Tobacco Company, page 57.
- 17- Patrick County Will Book 17, page 256.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Va. Dept. of Historic Resources
221 Governor St. Richmond Va

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 5.576 acres

UTM References

A 17 5184690 4050820
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Aurora property are shown as the solid black line on the accompanying plat recorded in Deed Book 275, Page 495, Patrick County Land Records. State Route 629 serves as the western boundary. The boundaries include the two contributing resources: the main house and the former Penn company office.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated property include the land inherited by Thomas Jefferson Penn and upon which he built his residence. The boundaries include the main house and the former Penn tobacco company office.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Geoffrey B. Henry

organization _____ date July 1990

street & number 1515 Rutledge Avenue telephone 804-293-8006

city or town Charlottesville, Virginia state _____ zip code 22903

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

The house is built in the Italian Villa style (with indications that its design was taken from Andrew Jackson Downing's The Design of Country Houses) and has several features typical of that style including round-arched windows, clustered chimneys and wide eaves. The house has been virtually unaltered since its construction; only the back porch has been changed and the elaborate iron porch may be a somewhat later addition.

The west (front) facade has a center double-door (hinged) flanked by French doors with louvered shutters. The windows on the second story are narrow tri-partite, round-arched, casement windows. The middle window of the center grouping on this facade is taller and slightly wider, creating a modified Palladian window arrangement. The center window on the west facade opens out to the second floor of the porch.

The west porch is the most elaborate feature of the exterior and is built on an exposed brick foundation. The pitched roof is supported by decorative cast-iron panels with an ornate grapevine design. There are clustered iron grapes with decorative tendrils at the roof corners and below the eaves. Above the roof is a wooden railing, also with a grapevine design, with each bay and corner marked by a Greek anthemion. This railing is in deteriorated condition and several of the wooden panels and anthemiae are missing.

The north and south facades are quite similar to each other and have a one-story polygonal bay with scalloped eave trim, and four-over-four window sash on their respective western corners. The center door on the two facades has sidelights and a three-light transom. The east corner has a tri-partite window: a center four-over-four sash window flanked by narrow two-over-two sash. The windows on the east and west corners of the second floor are tri-partite, round-arched casements. The center window of the two facades is a wide round-arched casement.

The one-story porch on the east facade has a steeply pitched shed roof supported on simple chamfered posts. The floor has been reconstructed over a new concrete foundation. There are three entrances on this facade: a large central door with side-lights and transom flanked by two doors with simple raised panels.

The interior consists of a cruciform plan with wide halls running the length of the house and intersecting at the center stair. Two parlors, a kitchen, dining room, bedroom and sitting room are located on the first floor, with five bedrooms opening on transverse halls on the second floor. The stair rises from a wide stair hall in the center of the house; there is also a small service stair which rises from the north-east bedroom. The interior has been little altered and is in generally good condition. With the exception of the two formal parlors, the wooden trim is quite simple: flat, mitred

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

boards trim the door and window openings and are used as baseboards ; there is little use of mouldings. The floors are mostly pine and are original and are unpainted on the first floor, painted on the second floor.

The northwest parlor is the most ornate room in the house as well as the most deteriorated in condition. In the center of the ceiling is an elaborate plaster medallion decorated with acanthus leaves and rows of florets. The fireplace mantle on the east wall is flanked by two segmental-arched alcoves. The marble mantle has a semi-circular opening with a center keystone decorated with a superimposed tulip and daffodil design, a carved wild rose design in the spandrels and a molded shelf. Much of the original chimney breast is missing, although on the left is a flat plaster pilaster with an acanthus leaf capital-one of several Greek Revival features is this otherwise Downing-inspired house. Parts of the elaborate and deeply molded ceiling cornice are also missing.

The southwest parlor is similar in size and configuration but lacks the cornice, medallion, alcoves and ornate mantle. The marble mantle has a semi-circular opening, molded shelf and plain spandrels. There is a center keystone/cartouche with a shell design and scrollwork. As in the other parlor there is a polygonal bay with panelled window seats. The room is in good condition.

The kitchen is situated in the north-east corner. There is a closet, fitted with shelves to the right of the fireplace, which has been hooked up to a wood stove. To the south of the kitchen is the dining room, which also has an entrance to the east porch. The existing chairrail and crown moulding are not original. The mantle, with its simple Greek trim is flanked by a full built-in closet with double doors on the left and a door to the first floor bedroom on the right. The bedroom has an outside entrance as well as a door leading to the enclosed back stairway. Also on the first floor is a small sitting room, once called the "tack room" as well as a small half-bath installed by the previous owner.

Like the downstairs, the second floor has a cruciform plan with the hallways converging on the center stairhall. The wallpaper in the hall appears to be quite old, perhaps nineteenth century in date. Each of the five bedrooms has a fireplace with stone hearth and simple mantle trim. The fireplaces are flanked by a built-in closet and a door. Narrow width panelling is found in one of the bedrooms. Each of the hallways, which are wider than mere corridors and may have been used as sitting or ante-rooms, is lit by a round-headed casement window. Baseboards, floor, hardware and door and window trim are all original.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

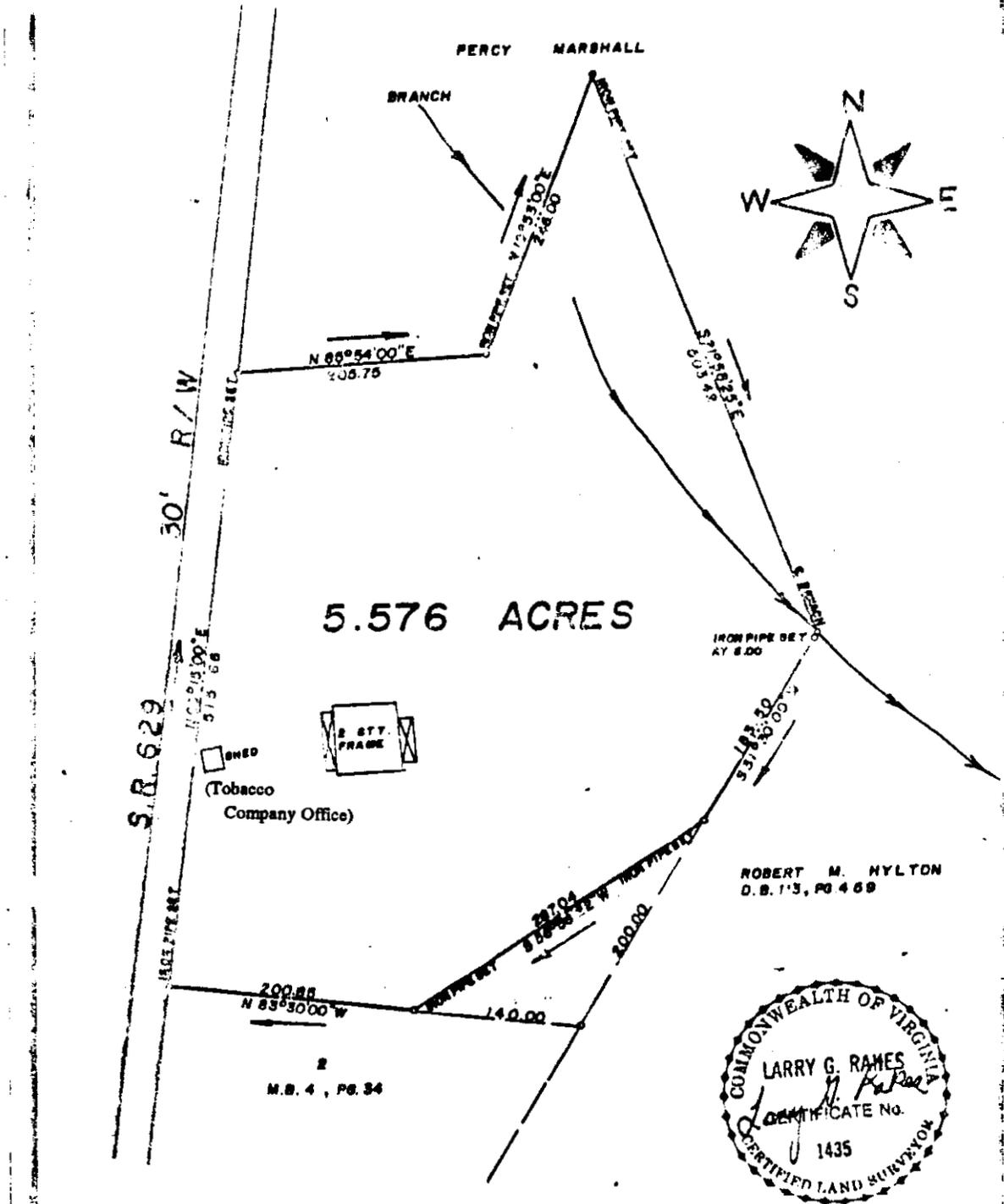
Situated due west of the house is the one-story, three-bay, gable-roofed frame building which once housed the payroll operations of the Penn family tobacco company. Like the main house, it is painted pink and features scalloped eave trim. There is an entrance on the north gable end and there are sash windows on the east and west facades. There is a small chimney on the south end. The office is in good condition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Scale: 1" = 100'
Deed Book 275, page 495
Patrick County Land Books
FIG. 1

Section number 10 Page 1



PLAT OF SURVEY

RAINIE P. REA

MAYO RIVER MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT PATRICK COUNTY VIRGINIA
ALL OF THE PROPERTY THAT RAINIE P. REA ACQUIRED FROM