

VLR 2/18/75 NRHP 6/18/75

STATE: Virginia
COUNTY: Rockbridge
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Thorn Hill # 091-0094

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Southwest: of Lexington, west side of Route 251, .7 mile  
Northeast of intersection of Routes 251 and 764.

CITY OR TOWN: (Lexington vicinity) CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Sixth (M. Caldwell Butler)

STATE: Virginia CODE: 51 COUNTY: Rockbridge CODE: 163

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Acquisition: In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pork <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Mrs. Susan C. Tucker

STREET AND NUMBER: RFD 3

CITY OR TOWN: Lexington STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Rockbridge County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Lexington STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

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: 11

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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 type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Thorn Hill commands a sweeping view of the Valley of Virginia from its position on a high ridge just south of Lexington. Approached from the east, the north-facing house sits at the summit of the hill with a forecourt of early outbuildings to the south.

The dwelling house is a five-bay, two-story, Flemish-bond brick building built circa 1792 with a two-story, one-bay wing added to the west end at an early date. All of the interior end chimneys have corbelled caps. The windows, with their simple architrave surrounds and molded sills, have original nine-over-nine sash. Both the front and the rear doorways are hung with narrow, three-panel, raised-panel double doors and have simple four-light transoms. A modillion and dentil cornice surrounds the house and its wing. This is repeated on the fine one-story pedimented rear porch which also has scalloped fascia boards and highly attenuated colonnettes. The latter are supported by short concrete piers, suggesting that some sort of balustrade may have been removed. A colossal tetrastyle portico accents the north front of Thorn Hill. The pediment has the same modillion cornice found on the rear porch, but the massive ill-fitting Doric columns are obviously ante-bellum replacements, probably for a two-level porch with posts similar to those on the rear porch.

Thorn Hill is an "I" plan house. A parlor opens off the central stair hall to the east and a dining room to the west. The second-floor plan is similar, except that the large size of the house permits the insertion of a small room in the front of the stair hall and another one between the stairs and the west bedroom.

All of the interior woodwork at Thorn Hill is Georgian in character, but the builder's naive sense of proportion and detailing give it a fantastic quality. The chimney wall scheme in the parlor consists of a chimney breast flanked by two niches. The niches have segmental arches with molded archivolts springing from impost blocks, each of which has a little finial. A tall, featherlike fluted keystone surmounts each arch. The same sort of arch and finials, mounted on a plain field, serve to suggest the pediment of an overmantel panel. Squat Doric pilasters with entablature enriched by latticework and Wall-of-Troy fretwork form the mantel. Slimmer pilasters with outside bases frame the "overmantel", and others in the corners flank the entire wall composition. The heavy modillion cornice which encircles the room is broken out not only over the pilasters but over each of the keystones as well. Raised-panel wainscoting decorates the other three walls of the room. An architrave doorway with full, stylized Doric entablature leads from the room. Finally, there are two small sections of molding, similar to that over the doorway, which serve as shelves to support the lower ends of portraits hung on the north and south walls. These portrait shelves are apparently original.

The central passage has raised-panel wainscoting and a modillion cornice like those in the parlor. The doors into the parlor and the dining room are similar to that in the parlor, except that the one leading into the parlor has a tall broken triangular pediment added to it. The handsome stairs have a molded banister scrolled at the newel, two turned balusters to each

(see continuation sheet #1)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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tread, sawn brackets with pierced latticework bands, and a raised-panel dado. The banister is ramped and eased at the landings. Throughout the house, but most notably in the stair hall, there are extensive areas of early nineteenth-century graining.

A modillion and punch-and-dentil cornice encircles the dining room and is used for portrait shelves as well. Fluted pilasters are used once more to compose the chimney piece. Here, again, a molding carried across a flat field from pilaster to pilaster suggests, rather than forms, an overmantel. Some stop-flute work enhances the pilasters flanking the fireplace.

In the upstairs bedrooms are chimney pieces which are simplified versions of those downstairs. That in the west bedroom has exaggerated crossettes on the heavy architrave fireplace surround.

The outbuildings are worthy of note. The west range, from north to south, includes a square, pyramidal-roofed, V-notched log smokehouse, a recent frame chicken house, and a frame kitchen with an enormous interior brick chimney and a chimney-end lean-to garage. The east range, from north to south, consists of a frame servants house and loom house which resembles very closely the kitchen, except for having an exterior chimney and being nogged, and another frame building. Some late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century barns and other farm buildings close the court on the south. Finally, there is a well-preserved, ancient gasoline pump near the servants house.

DTU

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATES (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                      |  |   |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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/Phi-           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | losophy  | <u>local history</u>                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                 | _____   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture               | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | Architecture                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Human | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | <del>History</del>                               | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                 | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation          | _____   |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Thorn Hill was built as the home of Col. John Bowyer, a central figure in Rockbridge County's formative years. Conspicuously sited and commanding panoramic views of the Lexington area, the dignified house symbolizes the prominence of its first owner. Its elaborate, but eccentrically proportioned, late-Georgian woodwork has few parallels in its area of the state and gives the house exceptional architectural interest. In addition, the fine collection of early outbuildings increases our understanding of rural life in early Rockbridge County.

John Bowyer came to Rockbridge, then Augusta, County in 1753 as a school teacher, and two years later bought 300 acres of land from James McDowell for the nominal sum of five shillings. In 1761, he made another large purchase, this time acquiring 533 acres of land from Alexander Craighead of North Carolina for five more shillings. The boundary descriptions of this latter tract identify it as the "530 acres more or less" of the Thorn Hill plantation which Bowyer left to his nephew and namesake, John Bowyer of Staunton, in 1806. Bowyer's prominence increased with his fortunes, and he became a captain in the Augusta militia in 1763.

In the mid-1760s, however, he apparently moved to Botetourt County but retained his Augusta County holdings. He appears in the records as a Burgess from Botetourt from 1769-1775 and was a representative to all Revolutionary conventions and state legislatures held during those years. In 1770, Bowyer was appointed one of the first justices of Botetourt County.

By 1778, Bowyer was again residing in the newly-formed Rockbridge County. He became a county lieutenant in that year, a colonel in the Rockbridge County Militia in 1782, and a justice of the peace seven years later. In those years as well he augmented his estate with a further purchase of 375 acres.

Bowyer has important connections with Liberty Hall Academy, the forerunner of Washington and Lee University. He took in John Robinson, later a principal benefactor of the college, soon after the latter's arrival from Ireland in 1770. Robinson lived on Bowyer's Thorn Hill land until 1779. In addition, Col. Bowyer himself was appointed one of the first trustees of Liberty Hall Academy in 1782.

Bowyer built his mansion house around 1792, according to a contract for the brickwork. The strange proportions of the interior woodwork, together with the naive, yet effective, employment of certain forms in place of others,

(see continuation sheet #2)

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

for instance, the use of arches to suggest overmantel pediments, mark Thorn Hill as the work of an uneducated but highly skilled joiner with an enter-taining sense of design. Thorn Hill's group of outbuildings, at least three of which--the kitchen, overseer's house, and log smokehouse--appear to be near contemporaries of the main dwelling, is a valuable survival. They graph-ically illustrate the relative lack of importance of such auxiliary buildings which might be built of the plainest materials even where the house itself was relatively pretentious, and they mark the replacement of the concept of a formal group of outbuildings by the idea of a single important building meet-ing the public eye, with service buildings hidden behind it.

Col. John Bowyer died in 1806. His nephew continued in Bowyer's grand tradi-tion and was described in 1830 as living with his wife "in elegant style at Thornhill . . . ." At his death in 1851, he left a large estate with personal property and slaves alone valued at over \$18,000.

Thorn Hill has led a relatively uneventful existence since the high times of the Bowyer tenure. It has recently been inherited by Mrs. Susan Tucker and is well maintained.

DTU & MTP

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Boley, Henry. Lexington in Old Virginia. 1936.  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA See continuation sheet #3**

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		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	37°	46'	15"	79°	28'	56"
NE	37°	46'	15"	79°	27'	27"
SE	37°	45'	24"	79°	27'	27"
SW	37°	45'	24"	79°	28'	56"

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 500 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission      DATE: December 1974

STREET AND NUMBER:  
221 Governor Street

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond      STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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: Junius R. Fishburne, Jr.  
Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Exec. Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: FEB 18 1975

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

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

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

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

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

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(Continuation Sheet) #3

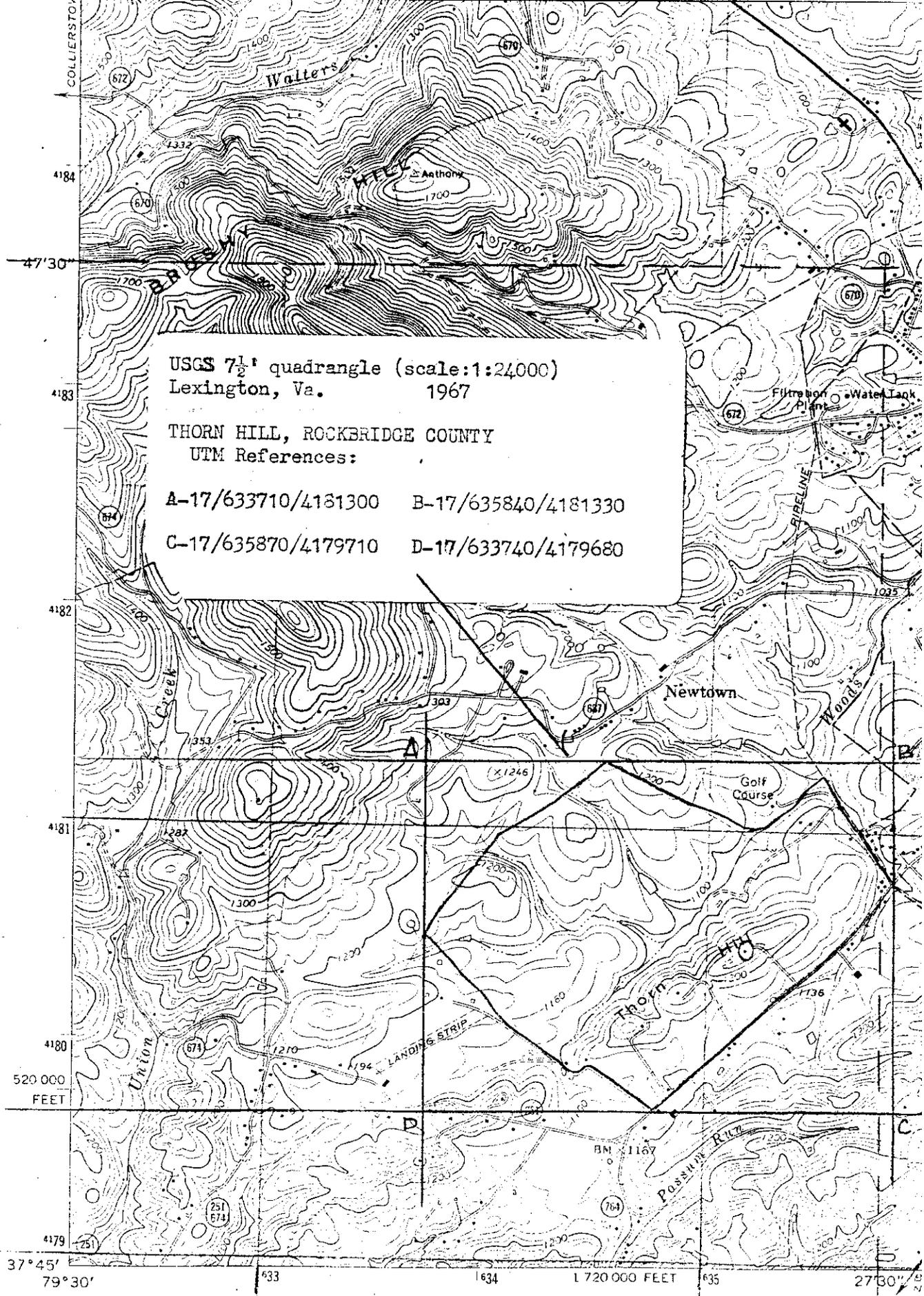
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**10** GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	6,3,3	7,1,0	4,1	8,1	3,0,0	B	1,7	6,3,5	8,4,0	4,1	8,1	3,3,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
C	1,7	6,3,5	8,7,0	4,1	7,9	7,1,0	D	1,7	6,3,3	7,4,0	4,1	7,9	6,8,0



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
 photographs taken 1964. Field checked 1967

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grid based on Virginia coordinate system, south zone  
 1,000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks.

(NATURAL BRIDGE)  
 5059 II NE

4 1/2" = 1 MILE  
 1 1/2" = 1/4 MILE