

VLR 4/16/85  
NHP 7/30/76

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

(Thematic Nomination)  
historic CARTER FAMILY THEMATIC NOMINATION (DHL File 84-20)

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Various (see individual inventory forms)  for publication  
city, town Maces Spring  vicinity of  
state Virginia code 51 county Scott code 169

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s) structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<input type="checkbox"/> both	work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> object	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> thematic group	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: storage

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership (see individual inventory forms)  
street & number N/A  
city, town N/A N/A vicinity of state N/A

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Scott County Courthouse  
street & number N/A  
city, town Gate City state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (See Continuation Sheet #1)

Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, was this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date 1975, 1985 federal  state  county  local  
depository, or survey records Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks  
city, town 221 Governor Street, Richmond state Virginia 23219

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Continuation sheet #1

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

A. P. Carter Homeplace (National Register, 7/30/1976)  
1975-6 State Survey  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

professional career as the Carter Family are all located in this small geographic region.

The nomination includes five of the buildings initially identified in the survey and research. The first, and oldest, is the A. P. Carter Homeplace, previously listed individually on the National Register. This small, one-story half-dovetailed log cabin contains a single room on the main floor with a loft above. It was later enlarged by a frame shed kitchen addition along the back. This was the birthplace of A. P. Carter in 1891, and it has remained in the Carter family through the present day. The form is very typical of the mid- to late 19th-century domestic property types in the area, and illustrates the oldest surviving house types in Scott County.

The other two houses, the A. P. and Sara Carter House and the Maybelle and Ezra Carter House, served as the residences of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter during their recording careers as the Carter Family between 1927 and 1943. Both are typical in form, scale, materials, and plan for domestic architecture of the period. In both instances the Carters purchased an older house, originally four or five rooms, and remodeled it in the 1920s or 1930s to create a domestic form popular for that period. Both were one-story frame dwellings enlarged by an additional half-story for more bedroom space. These renovations responded to the bungalow style which became increasingly popular during these years. The survey revealed that many of the older, probably 1880-1920 houses in the region were similarly remodeled during these years in the bungalow style. It is significant that these present forms also reflect the changes made by the Carters themselves when they lived at these houses, and the houses have not been significantly altered since.

The remaining two properties are both public buildings. The oldest is the Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church, attended by the Carter Family members. The church follows the traditional church plan, a one-story, rectangular frame structure with gable roof and simple wooden steeple. Like many rural churches of

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date N/A

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

This thematic nomination focuses on buildings associated with the lives of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter, important collectors, performers, and composers of mountain music and major figures in the hillbilly music revival of the 20th century. The primary unifying theme is historical in nature, based on buildings directly associated with these original Carter Family members. The selected properties are the A. P. Carter Homeplace, the A. P. and Sara Carter House, the Maybelle and Ezra Carter House, the A. P. Carter Store, and the Mt. Vernon Methodist Church. All five of the nominated properties are located in the Maces Spring community of Scott County, Virginia, and date to the late 19th or early 20th century. Besides their primary historical significance, the five nominated buildings also illustrate a second theme--that of typical rural vernacular architecture in a southwest Virginia mountain community. These buildings all serve as representative examples of Scott County's vernacular architecture from 1890 to 1945.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

This nomination evolved as an effort to identify and evaluate properties associated with the original Carter Family. The inclusion of the A. P. Carter Homeplace in the National Register of Historic Places on July 30, 1976 has already recognized the important contributions of the Carter Family. However, substantial local and family interest in registering the A. P. Carter Store led to the suggestion of a thematic nomination which would include all properties associated with the Carter Family during their active professional careers. Research and survey activity by the Division of Historic Landmarks in January and February of 1985 helped identify the potential pool of resources from which the nominated thematic resources were drawn. Carter family members assisted in the documentation and identification of these properties. The survey included one store, one school, one church, and several houses.

The survey was restricted to the Maces Spring area of Scott County where the Carter Family lived during the most productive period of their recording life, between 1927 and 1943. Maces Spring is a small community strung along state Route 614 in a narrow mountain valley, named Poor Valley, between Clinch Mountain to the north and the Pine Ridge to the south. Four of the resources are located directly on a 7/10 mile stretch along route 614 in Poor Valley. The remaining building is situated in Little Valley, across Pine Ridge from Poor Valley and approximately 5/10 miles from the cluster of the other four resources. A. P. spent his entire lifetime in this community. Sara and Maybelle both moved to Maces Spring upon their marriages, Sara in 1915 and Maybelle in 1926. Sara later relocated in California in 1943, and Maybelle moved to Nashville in the late 1940s, but the properties most specifically identified with their

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

this period, the exterior and interior were quite plain. Although the original church furniture has been removed, there have been few alterations to the interior of the building. Behind the church is the cemetery containing the graves of A. P. and Sara Carter. The A. P. Carter store, the most recent of the nominated resources, was built in 1945 by A. P. Carter and exhibits a commercial form particular to this immediate region. Instead of the familiar rectangular form with gable end entrance, the A. P. Carter's store has been turned so that the longer side and roofline run parallel to the road. Yet the building has not completely abandoned the use of a front gable; the central entrance is instead flanked by a cross gable to each side, suggesting its commercial use. In its one-story elevation and frame construction, the A. P. Carter Store meshes well in scale, materials, and form with the older cultural resources in Maces Spring.

Criteria B and C proved most useful in evaluating the significance of the nominated resources. Since the primary theme was historical, criterion B--relating to "properties associated with the lives of persons significant in our past"--became the first, and major, criterion for this nomination. To be considered, the properties first had to have a direct relation with one of the original Carter Family members, either A. P., Sara, or Maybelle Carter. Ideally, the buildings should be associated with their adult, or productive, lives. The four previously unregistered resources included in the nomination do actually reflect the lives of these individuals while they were active in their music careers. The only previously registered building, the A. P. Carter Homeplace, was the only exception, and justification had already been made for its inclusion based on other qualifications under criteria B and C.

The length of association of these properties to the Carter Family was also an essential consideration under Criterion B. All of the nominated resources had been associated with the original Carter Family and their heirs throughout much of the 20th century. The three dwellings have remained in the Carter family since their initial acquisition. The A. P. Carter Homeplace still belongs to A. P.'s brother Ermine; the A. P. and Sara Carter House served as A. P.'s home until his death in 1960, when it passed to his daughter Gladys, the present owner; and the Maybelle Carter House was used as her home between 1927 and the early 1950s, when it was sold to her husband's brother, but it has recently been repurchased by Maybelle's daughter June Carter Cash. The A. P. Carter Store, built by A. P., was willed at his death to his daughter Janette who later used the building as a music hall and most recently as the Carter Family Memorial Museum to perpetuate the memory of the original Carter Family and to preserve traditional mountain music. The Mt. Vernon Church served as a "cornerstone" in the lives of all the original Carter Family members, who were quite religious and known for their hymns and gospel music, and is still attended by A. P. and Sara's three children who live in Maces Spring.

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

A third consideration under Criterion B is whether the properties would be recognizable to the Carter family were they to see them today. Because there have been no major changes to any of the five nominated properties since their association with the original Carter Family members, there is little doubt that they could be recognized.

The secondary area of thematic significance for these resources, architecture, has been evaluated by Criteria C. As representative examples of local vernacular architecture, all the nominated resources should "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction." The five selected buildings all exemplify the vernacular forms of architecture popular in Scott County most specifically and southwest Virginia more broadly for the early 20th century, serving as good examples of local and regional building practices. The A. P. Carter Homeplace, the oldest of the nominated resources, illustrates the most common small house type and building technology for this region in the late 19th century. As such, it presents a transition from the past to the more recent, 20th-century buildings included in the nomination. The two 20th-century houses, the A. P. and Sara Carter House and the Maybelle and Ezra Carter House, exemplify the vernacular dwelling types most often found for small houses in this region in the 1920s and 1930s. The Mt. Vernon Church, built in the 1890s, reflects a very standard church plan for this region at the turn of the century. The last building, the A. P. Carter Store, is representative of a more distinct local commercial form found in Scott County in the 1940s. Besides representing regional forms, all the nominated resources display traditional forms of workmanship, moving from log construction in the late 19th century to frame construction in the 20th century. Taken as a thematic group, these buildings provide an excellent sampling of vernacular architecture in a small, fairly isolated mountain community of southwest Virginia.

Criteria B and C excluded only a few buildings from the already small pool of potential resources. The original Carter Family members each lived primarily in one home during their most active musical careers, from 1927 to 1943; consequently only one house associated with Maybelle and one house associated with Sara and A. P. could qualify. The previous short-term residences of Sara and A. P. were eliminated from consideration. The one-room schoolhouse attended by A. P. Carter was excluded on the basis of both criteria. First, it did not rank high in Criteria B because it had been substantially altered since its association with A. P. Secondly, because of these alterations, it had lost much of its integrity as an example of local vernacular architecture under Criterion C.

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

After meeting both the criteria, the five nominated resources were evaluated to determine if they possessed integrity as representatives of the primary and secondary themes. One of the most important standards of integrity for historically significant structures is location. All of the buildings were in their original location and had not been moved. Location was particularly important in this nomination for several other reasons as well. First, the relationship between the nominated buildings, which are clustered closely together in a one-half mile radius, reveals the close family ties that developed between Sara, A. P. and Maybelle. Secondly, the relationship between the resources and the place, an isolated, rural southwest Virginia community, is important since this is where they learned the traditional music for which they became so well known.

Closely related to location is integrity of setting. Again, because of the primary historical theme, the original setting is essential in evoking the meaning and significance of these resources. In all five cases, the setting has been well preserved. Due to the lack of any substantial modern development in this small mountain community, the density of buildings or structures around the properties has not changed dramatically. The setting of the individual properties also is important in illustrating the changes in settlement patterns that characterized the Appalachian regions. The oldest building, the A. P. Carter Homeplace, is located in the rolling farmlands along a stream, as were most of the first settlements in these mountain communities. After the railroad was built through the adjoining Poor Valley, the majority of the traffic moved into this Valley, where the road was greatly improved in the 20th century. The four resources which are significant for their 20th-century periods are all located along this route, instead of the major rivers or streams. The church is picturesquely sited atop a small knoll overlooking this community in Poor Valley. Its setting clearly exemplifies the local vision of the church as both a symbol of the community's strong religious character and as a focal point for community life.

The nominated buildings should and do retain integrity of design, workmanship, and materials, although these qualities are more relevant to the secondary area of significance. In terms of design, all the nominated resources reflect the vernacular architectural developments of Scott County in the early 20th century. Since none have been dramatically altered, they retain the forms, structures, and styles characteristic of the period. The only building to be enlarged was the A. P. and Sara Carter House, but the garage addition to the side has not compromised the integrity of the original structure. Similarly, in terms of workmanship, these vernacular structures reveal local and regional methods of construction which are generally quite plain due to the character of the area. The five buildings also retain most of their historical materials, although some have clearly been better preserved than others. Both the A. P. Carter Homeplace and the A. P. Carter Store have had virtually no changes to their historic fabric while the A. P. and Sara Carter House and the Mt. Vernon

(See Continuation Sheet #5)

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

Methodist Church have had aluminum siding added over the original wood frame. However, since the later two buildings meet the other standards of integrity, they have not been excluded solely on the basis of their new siding.

The last two ways in which integrity should be evaluated are feeling and association. As previously stated, with few alterations and long-term associations with the family, the nominated resources rank very high as direct reflections of the lives of the original Carter Family. The buildings thus remain sufficiently intact to convey those relationships. Meeting the six previously described standards of integrity, the nominated buildings also rate high in feeling, evoking the quality of life in the Appalachian mountain region and the historical roots from which mountain music evolved as well as the lives of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter.

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

west Virginia. After their marriage, Sara moved to Maces Spring, where she and A. P. performed locally for several years.

The third member of the group was Maybelle Addington, a cousin of Sara, and also from the Copper Creek community. Maybelle married A. P.'s brother Ezra in 1926 and moved to Maces Spring. Like A. P. and Sara, Maybelle brought a rich musical background. She played guitar, banjo, and autoharp, and also sang many of the traditional songs. After her move to Maces Spring, the group as it is commonly known today was complete.

The Carter Family's first major break occurred in the summer of 1927, when the Victor Talking Machine Company auditioned local talent in nearby Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia. The Victor talent scouts immediately recognized their potential, and the Carters were on their way to a long and fruitful recording career. The Carter Family performed a wide repertoire of songs traditional in the family, including songs composed by A. P. and to a lesser extent by Sara and Maybelle Carter, as well as songs actively collected by A. P. Carter and performed verbatim or reworked by him. At a critical period in mountain musical culture, when outside influences were beginning to overwhelm traditional local strains, the Family's corpus of about 250 songs recorded between 1927 and 1941 preserved a valuable body of southwest Virginia's folk music. The Carters' working collection of old ballads, occupational songs, hymns and gospel music, Victorian parlor songs and other sentimental pieces, and black-inspired blues probably

(See Continuation Sheet #6)

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) folklore

**Specific dates** late 19th & 20th **Builder/Architect** Various

Centuries

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Despite their fairly recent arrival on the traditional music scene in the 1920s, the original Carter Family, composed of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter, has been recognized by folklorists and historians for their tremendous influence on American folk music. Their recording career, which began in 1927, came at a formative time in the hillbilly music industry, as it was building a new regional popular music on a folk base. Under A. P.'s leadership, the Carter Family was instrumental in transforming their expression of Virginia folk music from a local phenomenon into a regional one. The Carter Family won immediate favor and maintained their popularity for over three decades, with the individual members continuing their participation in folk and country music through the 1950s and 1960s. The five buildings included in this nomination are integrally associated with the lives of the original Carter Family members and illustrate, in a material form, the folk culture portrayed in their music. In addition to their historical association with the Carter Family, all five illustrate a secondary theme of vernacular architecture in Scott County. Taken as a thematic group, the buildings exemplify traditional building practices characteristic of rural mountain communities in southwest Virginia in the first half of the 20th century.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. P. Carter was the only member of the Carter Family originally from the isolated mountain community of Maces Spring. His family, however, had been living here for over 100 years when he was born in 1891. In his early years, A. P. showed much interest and talent in musical areas. His early instruction in music came from an uncle who kept one of the shape-note "singing schools" popular in rural areas of the South during the 19th century. A. P. sang both in the church choir at Mt. Vernon Methodist Church and in a family quartet and also learned to play the fiddle.

In June of 1915 A. P. married Sara Dougherty, who lived over the mountain in Copper Creek. Sara was also musically inclined, playing banjo, guitar, and auto-harp and, like A. P., absorbing much of the musical traditions prevalent in south-

(See Continuation Sheet #5)

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

represented a truer cross section of mountain tastes and culture of the early 20th century than any academic collection before or since. The Carters also made other valuable contributions besides their song repertoire. Maybelle's guitar playing offered a new rhythm to country music which was absorbed by other guitarists and can still be heard today. Each of the original members clearly revealed their own strengths in the group--A. P. as the group leader and song collector and composer; Maybelle as the guitarist whose playing transformed future folk guitar styles; and Sara as the solo singer whose outstanding voice characterized the group's singing style.

While the Carters achieved much national acclaim, they never claimed great wealth from their recording careers and continued to live and work in the Maces Spring community. Occasional trips outside the area for work and for performing were the only times they left. The Carters continued to record actively during the depression years, unlike most country artists. In the late 1930s they brought their children into the singing group--A. P. and Sara's children Joe and Janette and Maybelle's three daughters Anita, June, and Helen. Yet throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, their performances remained very consistent, drawing upon the same types of songs and using the same, and very distinct, Carter Family style.

In 1943 the original Carter Family finally disbanded. However, they did not cease to be involved in the musical field. Maybelle remained most active, forming a group with her daughters entitled Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters. The group first appeared on WRVA's Old Dominion Barn Dance in Richmond, Virginia, but soon moved on to Nashville and appeared regularly on the WSM Grand Ole Opry, where they quickly became famous. During their Nashville tenure, Maybelle and her daughters moved more into the realm of popular country music, but retained their repertoire of traditional Carter Family songs still demanded by their audience. In the late 1960s, they began their association with country singer Johnny Cash. June Carter's marriage to Johnny Cash continued to keep Maybelle's daughters in the limelight and led to the increased popularity and notoriety of the original Carter Family's songs and contributions to the realm of country music.

A. P. and Sara Carter remained less involved in the public sphere. Sara had remarried and moved to California, but she returned to Virginia for visits to see her children and for various performances and recording contracts. A. P. built his general merchandise store in the heart of the Maces Spring community in 1945, but still had intentions of remaining active in music. He continued to collect, compose and perform music locally. In 1952, A. P. and Sara began a short recording career with their children Joe and Janette as the Carter Family or the A. P. Carter Family. Without the Nashville backings and promotion, these recordings did not achieve the popularity of either Maybelle's work or their

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

earlier work. However, their recordings reflect a continuation of their traditional fare, involving the same sorts of songs, with some of their more recent compositions, sung in basically the same style as the original Carter Family.

After A. P.'s death in 1960, the contributions and impact of the original Carter Family became more apparent with the growing urban folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s. Maybelle and Sara both became popularly requested performers, who brought the traditional styles to modern ears. Their children have continued these efforts, with Janette opening a music hall in Maces Spring to highlight traditional music. Janette and Joe Carter still are active in performing more traditional styles of music, while Maybelle's daughters, particularly June Carter Cash, continue to bring their traditional heritage to a more broadly based country music audience.

The nominated buildings clearly display, in a material manner, the Appalachian heritage which the Carter Family popularized through their music. As a thematic group, the five resources document the vernacular architecture heritage of rural Scott County, and rural southwest Virginia more broadly. The A. P. Carter Homeplace is an outstanding example of the rather unglamorous one-room house plan that proved to be one of the most common features of the domestic landscape in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The A. P. and Sara Carter House and Maybelle and Ezra Carter House continue this domestic theme into the 20th century, illustrating two of the more familiar forms of small house construction for the period. Both the A. P. Carter Store and the Mt. Vernon Methodist Church provide excellent, well-preserved examples of the public building forms most commonly found in these isolated mountain communities.

Although less than 50 years old, the A. P. Carter Store, built in 1945, has been included as an integral member of this thematic grouping. Although the building post-dates the career of the original Carter Family, A. P. continued to be involved with music during the years in which he operated the store, from 1945 to his death in 1960. Besides this direct connection to A. P. Carter, the store has been used by his daughter Janette in the 1970s to perpetuate the memory of the Carter Family and the tradition of mountain music. Janette Carter held "Old Time Music Shows" here in the mid-1970s, and later transformed the store into the Carter Family Memorial Museum. In addition to its historical association, the A. P. Carter Store ranks very high as an excellent example of a very local commercial building form popular in Scott County. It has remained in an excellent state of preservation with almost no alterations to the original fabric built by A. P. Carter.

(See Continuation Sheet #8)



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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Carter Family Thematic Resources  
State Scott County, VIRGINIA

Nomination/Type of Review

Cover 6/20/85

Date/Signature  
[Signature] 6/14/85

52

1. Carter, A.P., Store ~~Submitted for Review~~ Keeper  
Attest

2. Carter, A.P. and Sara, House **Entered in the National Register** Keeper  
Attest

3. Carter, Maybelle and Ezra, House **Entered in the National Register** Keeper  
Attest

4. Mt. Vernon Methodist Church **Entered in the National Register** Keeper  
Attest

5. Carter, A.P., Homeplace (Previously listed 7/30/76) Keeper  
Attest

6. Keeper  
Attest

7. Keeper  
Attest

8. Keeper  
Attest

9. Keeper  
Attest

10. Keeper  
Attest

