

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: Bedford	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Three Otters

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Three Otters

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
N side of Rt. 838, .7 mi. W of intersection with Rt. 43.

CITY OR TOWN:
(Bedford vic.)

STATE Virginia	CODE 45	COUNTY: Bedford	CODE 019
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<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	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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 type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <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. H.C.F. Sitwell and Miss Beatrice Shook

STREET AND NUMBER:
Three Otters Estate, R.F.D. 2

CITY OR TOWN: Bedford	STATE: Virginia	CODE 45
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5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Bedford	STATE: Virginia	CODE 45
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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1958 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: D. C.	CODE 08
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia
COUNTY: Bedford
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" 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

Three Otters is a massive two-story house approximately fifty feet square, with five bays across the facade and four bays on the sides. The walls are laid in exceptionally fine Flemish bond of very even color. The house is covered by a hipped roof of such low pitch that it gives the roof the appearance of being flat. Surrounding the base of the roof is a full Doric entablature in which nearly all the metopes are single pane windows. These windows serve to both light the attic story and to ventilate the house by drawing air through the open windows of the lower floors. The lintels of the windows of the lower floors are ornamented with Greek frets at their ends. Between the first-and second-floor windows are flat stuccoed panels which, together with the exceptionally large double-hung sash, give the house a low ratio of solid to void. The main entrance to the house is a three-part composition and is sheltered by a small Greek Doric portico topped by a balustraded deck that is reached by a door treated similarly to the one below it. The asymmetrical rear elevation features a Doric portico similar to that on the front.

The interior is virtually unaltered and is laid out in a simple central-hall plan, with a minor service hall between the two eastern rooms. Nearly all of the moldings, architraves, and other woodwork details are directly derived from plates in Asher Benjamin's architectural handbook, The Practical House Carpenter. Outstanding among the interior features is the three-story staircase with its original marbleizing.

The original two-story kitchen and pantry outbuilding is connected to the main house by a covered walkway, although part of this walkway has been incorporated into a two-story brick and frame addition to the house. Other early outbuildings include a brick well house with a Greek Revival cupola, located in the southeast corner of the yard. Directly behind the house are the ruins of an extensive brick chicken house, which retains some of its brick nests. A brick necessary house is located in the northwest corner of the yard. The whole complex is dramatically situated on the crest of a hill, with magnificent views of the Bedford countryside and the famous Peaks of Otter in the distance.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (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/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

Three Otters was built by Abel Beach Nichols, a merchant from Bridgeport, Connecticut, who settled in Bedford County in 1820. Nichols built a brick store in Bedford Court House in 1824, where goods imported from New York were sold. It is believed that Nichols began construction of his country house, Three Otters, in 1827. The house probably was finished after 1830, since nearly all of the architectural detail is directly based on plates in Asher Benjamin's builder's handbook, The Practical House Carpenter, first published in 1830.

Three Otters served as an important social center for the Bedford area throughout the nineteenth century, horse racing being one of the most popular activities there. Robert E. Lee was entertained at Three Otters, and it is said that Abel Nichols' son George presented Lee with a saddle horse that fell in battle under its rider.

Architecturally, Three Otters is a rare and important example of a non-temple-form Greek Revival country house of mansion quality. It stands as a tribute both to Asher Benjamin, the great popularizer of Greek architectural forms, and to the unknown master carpenter, who successfully adapted Benjamin's carefully delineated details to a bold and unified design. Three Otters is thus evidence of Benjamin's ambition to make his handbook a "completely practical one," and "to facilitate and assist the efforts of master carpenters . . . who have not had an opportunity of learning to draw architectural subjects."

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Benjamin, Asher, The Practical House Carpenter. Boston: R. P. and C. Williams, and Annin and Smith, 1830.
 W.P.A. report on Three Otters, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

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
NW	37°	21'	35"	79°	33'	04"			
NE	37°	21'	35"	79°	32'	28"			
SE	37°	21'	10"	79°	32'	28"			
SW	37°	21'	10"	79°	33'	04"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **90 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

May 7, 1970

STREET AND NUMBER:

Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN:

Richmond

STATE

Virginia

CODE

45

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 _____

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

Date _____

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

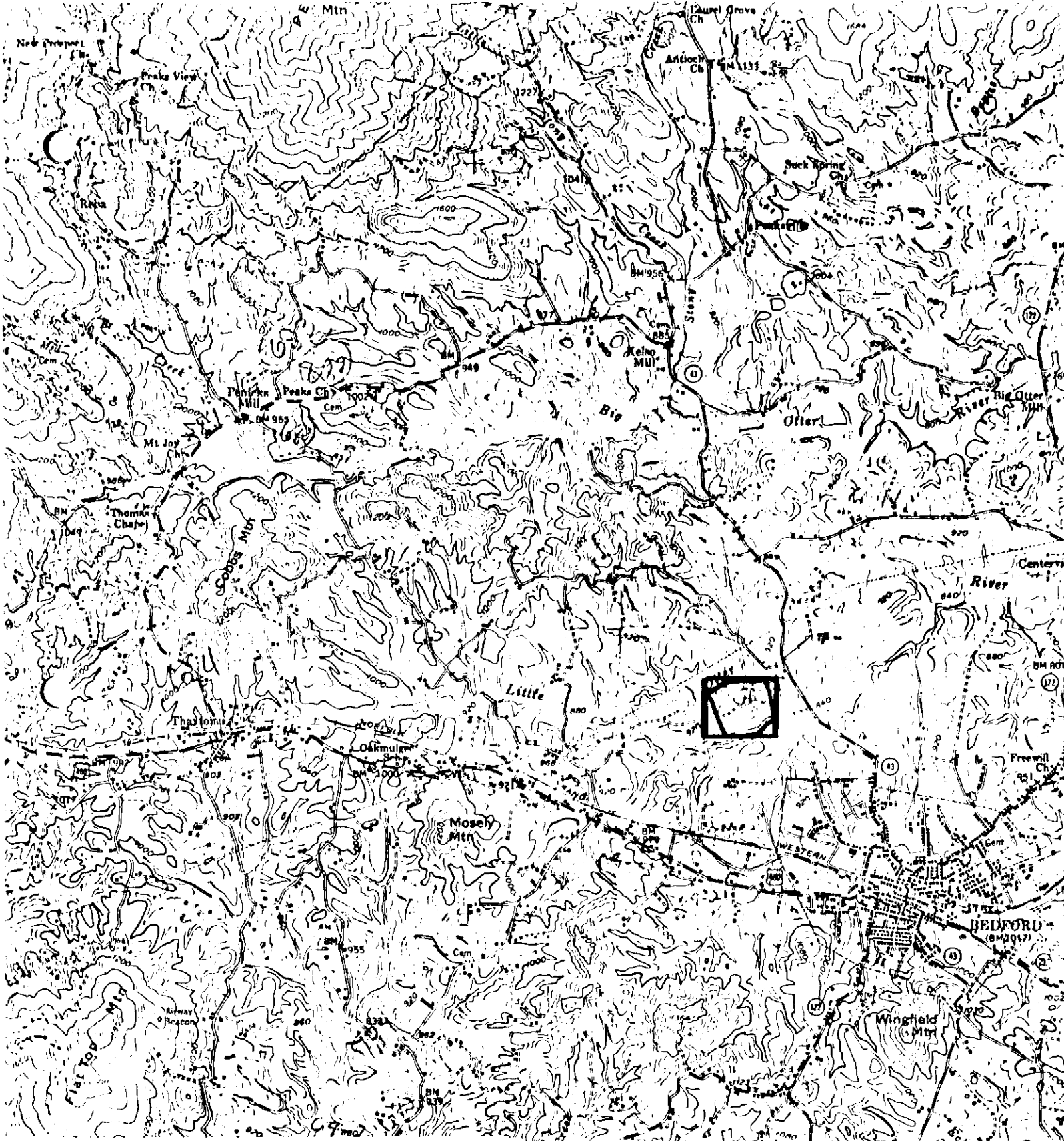
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

 Keeper of The National Register

Date _____



U.S.G.S. 15' quadrangle (Scale:1:62500)
 Peaks of Otter, Va. 1950

Peaks of Otter

Latitude	Longitude
NW 37° 21' 35"	79° 33' 04"
NE 37° 21' 35"	79° 32' 28"
SE 37° 21' 10"	79° 32' 28"
SW 37° 21' 10"	79° 33' 04"

