

VLR 4-17-91

NRHP 7-3-91

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Listed On:

VLR 04/17/1991  
NRHP 07/03/1991

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 18). 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 SEVEN ISLANDS ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC DISTRICT  
other names/site number DHR File No. 14-23

### 2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_  not for publication  
city, town Arvon  vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county \_\_\_\_\_ code 029, 065 zip code 23004

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>7</u>	<u>2</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>9</u>	<u>7</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 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.

Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 29 April 1991  
Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
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 Certification

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)

DOMESTIC: Camp  
Village site  
Single dwelling  
Secondary structure

FUNERARY: Cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling  
Secondary structure  
 AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: Agricultural field  
 FUNERARY: Cemetery

**7. Description**Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY: Greek Revival  
(Main dwelling)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
 walls WOOD: Weatherboard  
 roof STONE: Slate  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

The Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District covers an area of approximately 312 acres (126 hectares) and contains a variety of archaeological and architectural resources distributed in riverine and upland settings near the confluence of the James [REDACTED]. A total of eight archaeological sites have been identified within the district of which six are considered contributing properties. The principal archaeological resource within the district is 44FV134, a large, multicomponent Native American site reflecting the intensification of riverine adaptation during the Woodland period. The remaining five archaeological sites (44BK220, 44BK221, 44BK222, 44BK223, and 44BK226) are located in upland settings and reflect the more diffuse adaptive use of the property primarily during the Archaic period.

The focal contributing architectural resource of the Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District is a frame Greek Revival dwelling house with a high degree of integrity and in an excellent state of preservation (VDHR File No. 14-23). The house follows the I-house format popular in central Virginia, and has a two-story rear wing that was added following the Civil War when the house served as a rural academy. Situated on a high knoll in the approximate geographic center of the nominated property, the house commands panoramic views in all directions, especially across the James River bottom lands to the wooded hills [REDACTED] beyond. The house is also within sight of the famous Jeffersonian-style Upper Breemo mansion located across the river. Also included as contributing properties within the district are a mid-nineteenth-century wood stable and the Nicholas family cemetery. A total of five twentieth-century dependencies are located within the district and are considered to be non-contributing (non-archaeological) properties.

**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)

ARCHAEOLOGY: Prehistoric

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

8000 B. C. - A. D. 1600

c. 1847

1880

Significant Dates

c. 1847

1880

Cultural Affiliation

Early Archaic - Late Archaic Period

Early Woodland - Late Woodland Period

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

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

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District reflects the changing use of the piedmont landscape of south-central Virginia over the course of several thousand years by its Native American and Euro-American inhabitants. As such, the nominated property is significant for regional studies of changing settlement patterns through time. The archaeological resources within the district reflect the transition from the diffuse settlement and food gathering practices characteristic of the Archaic period to the more focused riverine adaptations characteristic of the Woodland period. The rare recovery of maize from an undisturbed archaeological context emphasizes the further intensification of riverine adaptation by horticultural groups by Late Woodland times. The location of the mid-nineteenth-century Seven Islands dwelling along a high ridge overlooking the James River offers a distinct contrast to the terminal Native American adaptation by the deliberate selection of an upland residential setting discrete from riverine areas which were reserved for agricultural purposes.

Erected circa 1847 on the site of a colonial farmhouse, the present Seven Islands dwelling is an excellently preserved representative of the residences favored by much of Virginia's planter society in the first half of the nineteenth-century. Like many such houses it follows the I-house format and employs simple, provincial Greek Revival detailing. Lending it distinction are its pedimented gables and a handsome front porch with Greek Doric columns and entablature. Recalling the late nineteenth-century use of the house as a boys' academy is a plain two-story rear wing added to accommodate a classroom, study, and dormitory. The house is the focal point of the original Seven Islands tract patented in 1723 by James Skelton of Henrico County and purchased in 1728 by George Nicholas, progenitor of the prominent Nicholas family. With its unspoiled rural setting on a knoll

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Barber, Michael B.  
1987 The Preliminary Vertebrate Faunal Analysis of the Spessard Site (44FV134), Fluvanna County, Virginia. Ms. on file, Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia.

Butler, Coleen  
1988 A Botanical Study of Feature 3-86 from the Spessard Site, Fluvanna County, Virginia. Ms. on file, Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia.

Dunham, Gary  
n.d. The Context and Integrity of James River Sites: Test Excavations at the Spessard Site. Ms. on file, Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of property 312 acres

UTM References

A	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	B	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	D	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated district is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the UTM reference points (A-L) noted above and on the continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The district boundary includes all of the archaeological and architectural resources that reflect the changing distribution of settlement across the landscape over several millennia. Also, the boundary conforms as closely as possible to existing and/or historic property lines and constitutes the

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Antony F. Opperman, Archaeologist and Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian  
 organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date March 28, 1991  
 street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804-786-3143  
 city or town Richmond state Virginia zip code 23219

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### CONTRIBUTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROPERTIES

A total of eight archaeological sites have been identified within the boundaries of the Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District. Of these six are considered to be contributing properties. These sites were identified during the Buckingham County archaeological reconnaissance survey conducted by the University of Virginia which was funded by the survey and planning subgrant program of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (Klatka et al. 1986). With only a single exception (44BK226, below), the contributing archaeological properties are presently under cultivation. Methods employed in site identification included systematic surface collection and subsurface testing within a statistically and judgementally-based sampling program. Detailed methodological statements are provided in the reconnaissance survey report cited above. Field documentation, photographic records, and artifacts are permanently curated at the Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

The archaeological character of the Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District is defined by the variable character of the landscape.

[REDACTED] In contrast, the Buckingham County portion of the district constitutes an upland setting typical of the rolling and dissected terrain of the south-central Virginia piedmont. The archaeological resources within the district can be divided into two groups based upon these landscape distinctions.

The dominant contributing archaeological property within the district is 44FV134, a large multicomponent prehistoric site situated on the James River [REDACTED] and covering an area of up to approximately 23 acres (9.3 hectares). This site is the only contributing property within the district that is located in Fluvanna County. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Archaeological testing of 44FV134 by the University of Virginia revealed evidence of Native American occupations dating from the Early Archaic through Late Woodland periods. Use of the site was most intensive during the Woodland period, particularly after approximately A.D. 500, reflecting an intensification of riverine adaptation during that time as well as increasing sedentism. High subsurface integrity is reflected by the identification of Woodland period pit features and by the presence of deep cultural deposits typically extending to depths of nearly one meter

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below modern grade. Controlled surface collection of the site also revealed excellent horizontal integrity of the cultural deposits despite flooding and historic cultivation.

Excavation of two pit features revealed through subsurface testing (Features 86-1 and 86-3) resulted in the recovery of ethnobotanical and faunal samples dating to the late Middle Woodland and Late Woodland periods (Photographs 1 and 2). Two radiocarbon dates have been obtained from each of the two features with Feature 86-1 dating to the latter half of the first millennium A.D. (late Middle Woodland period) and Feature 86-3 slightly post-dating A.D. 1000 (Late Woodland period). Of particular importance was the recovery of corn cupule fragments from the latter feature reflecting Native American horticultural activity in the piedmont during the early portion of the Late Woodland period prior to approximately A.D. 1250 (Butler 1988). Faunal remains were recovered from both of the features, with the larger assemblage from Feature 86-3 reflecting the Native American exploitation of the forest, forest-edge, and aquatic habitats during the early portion of the Late Woodland period (Barber 1987). The Late Woodland occupation at 44FV134 is also manifested by the presence of Native American ceramics typically characterized by the use of crushed-quartz temper and fabric-impressed surface treatment. The archaeological assemblage recovered from 44FV134 represents one of the largest collections obtained under controlled conditions in the region.

In contrast to 44FV134, the remaining five contributing archaeological sites within the district (44BK220, 44BK221, 44BK222, 44BK223, and 44BK226) are situated in upland settings and reflect the occupation of the property during the Archaic through Early Woodland periods. All of these sites are smaller than 44FV134 and range in size from approximately 1.5 acres (.60 hectares) to 7.5 acres (3.0 hectares). The occupation of these sites at any one period of time probably occurred on a seasonal basis and utilized only a small area. The size of each site probably reflects overlapping, repeated occupations over several millennia. Artifacts recovered from these upland sites are almost exclusively of stone and include finished tools and chipping debris to the exclusion of ceramics. These assemblages reflect focused food procurement activities in contrast to the more diverse assemblages recovered from more sedentary habitation areas such as 44FV134.

Though not specifically recorded for its archaeological character, the environs of the Seven Islands dwelling house may contain evidence of the historic occupation of the property prior to the construction of the existing residence in 1847. The dwelling house is alleged to occupy the

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site of an earlier residence constructed by Dr. George Nicholas during the second quarter of the eighteenth-century. According to Mutual Assurance Society policies for the property (1803, 1805, 1814) the core portion of the residential complex contained a frame, one-story dwelling house accompanied by a detached frame kitchen. Two other dependencies, a barn and a stable (both frame) were also located nearby. The residential area may also contain the archaeological remains of three dependency buildings, date(s) of construction unknown, demolished by the present owner due to their dilapidated condition.

**CONTRIBUTING ARCHITECTURAL PROPERTIES**

The main or dwelling house at the Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District is a single-pile, two-story frame structure erected circa 1847 in the form commonly known as the I-house (Figure 1, Photographs 3-9). It has a south-facing three-bay facade, with a circa 1880 two-story wing extending from the center of the north or rear elevation. The walls are sheathed in beaded weatherboards, most of which appear to be nineteenth-century if not original. The main part of the house is set on a brick foundation laid in Flemish bond which although painted over, preserves traces of its original penciled joints. The foundation of the wing is laid in American bond. While the structural system is not visually accessible, it almost certainly is the braced frame system typical of nineteenth-century rural building throughout Virginia. A degree of sophistication is given to the house by the use of pedimented gable ends and a pedimented gable over the center bay. As with most of the early structures of Buckingham County, the roof is covered in Buckingham slate, probably original as the slate quarries are only a few miles distant and were open by the time the house was built. The source of the slate is the nearby quarries at Arvonnia, one of which was operated by a member of the Nicholas family.

A distinctive feature of the house is the handsome and relatively sophisticated one-story Greek Revival Doric porch sheltering the front entrance. The porch is supported by paired unfluted Doric columns of solid wood. Its entablature is academically correct, having triglyphs and mutules with guttae. Unlike a pure Greek Doric entablature, the end triglyphs are centered above the end columns. Instead of side railings, the porch has early wooden benches still in place. Marks on the weatherboarding above the porch indicate that the porch roof originally had a railing and was probably flat. The house also has an early porch on the east end and small porch sheltering the east entrance to the wing. The

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wing has a one-story lean-to addition on the rear. In the basement are remnants of two brick ovens built into the chimney foundation.

The windows preserve their original frames and six-over-six sashes. In the wing are nine-over-nine sashes on the first floor and six-over-six on the second. The front windows are hung with louvered shutters. The entrance has its original eight-panel door with early lock, and plain sidelights with transom. Typical of many such doorways in Virginia, the panels flanking the transom are solid rather than glazed. Heating for the house was originally provided by the two interior-end chimneys of the main section and by the exterior-end chimney on the wing, the bottom portion of which is hidden by the lean-to.

Like many of the more commodious farmhouses of the period, the house has a center passage with stair, a formal parlor to one side and a chamber to the other. Two additional bedrooms are on the second floor. Following the traditional Virginia pattern, the dining room is in the basement. The interior trim is sparse, the parlor has plain plaster walls without cornice or chair rail, but with baseboard. The main decorative element of the parlor is a country Greek Revival mantel with plain Doric columns supporting the paneled architrave. The windows and door have symmetrical architrave trim with turned corner blocks. A modern closet has been inserted to the right of the chimney breast. The first-floor chamber is treated similarly, but to reflect its lower status, it has mitered architrave trim and a simpler mantel. The center passage features an open-well stair with round handrail, slender square balusters, and elongated, baluster-type newels. The stringer brackets and landing fascia are decorated with somewhat whimsical scrolling. The second-floor chambers have mantels stylistically similar to those below but without columns. Flanking the mantels in both rooms are closets with their original doors.

The basement dining room has been sheathed with modern laminate paneling. Its mantel was removed by the present owners and placed in the first floor of the wing. Another original mantel, similar to those on the second floor, remains intact in the opposite (east) basement room, now used as an office. Interestingly, each of the doors leading from the basement passage to the flanking rooms dates from the colonial period. These doors, one with four panels, the other with six, may have been salvaged from the original colonial house on the site. The basement of the wing has been completely remodeled for a family kitchen. It originally was used as a kitchen and has a working fireplace. Except for the mantel noted above, the woodwork in the main first-floor room of the wing is Colonial Revival installed by

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the present owners. The lean-to addition, built to hold a study and closet when the house was used as an academy, has had its partition removed but still serves as a study.

In the passage connecting the main house to the wing, the original exterior weatherboarding of the main house rear wall has been left exposed. Immediately to the north of this space, an enclosed stair leads to the second story of the wing. This upper space is divided into one large room, originally a dormitory, and two storage rooms. The rooms are excessively plain; the large room's only feature is a big, very simple mantel. The paneled door between this room to the space at the top of the stair preserves original graining.

As noted in the summary description, the house is well-preserved and maintained in excellent condition. It retains most of its original fabric, including hardware, and has undergone few significant alterations.

The present owner stated that three early outbuildings stood to the east of the main house but were in such deteriorated condition when he took possession of the property that salvage was impossible and thus they were removed. The only contributing outbuilding remaining is a plain wooden stable down the hill from the main house (Photograph 10). Probably dating from just after the Civil War, the stable is sheathed in vertical board siding and is covered by a slate roof. Most of the original framing (much of it circular sawn) is intact as are some of the early stall partitions. The stable is not used but receives minimal maintenance.

To the west of the main house, just beyond the garage, is the Nicholas family cemetery (contributing property) containing only three markers, one of which is a mid-nineteenth-century slate slab with handsome lettering. This, like many slate slabs in the vicinity, was likely executed by the Welsh slaters of the nearby quarries.

The property is bisected laterally by a county road (652), an early trace paralleling the river. The main house is sited on a knoll facing the road. Its immediate grounds, informally planted with boxwood and other shrubbery, and dotted with large shade trees, is surrounded by a white board fence. It was originally approached by an axial drive leading from the county road. This drive has since been replaced by a long curving drive. The house is believed to be located on the site of the colonial-era Nicholas family residence. The site was well-chosen for it offers commanding views of the surrounding countryside in all directions.

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Particularly impressive are the views of the bottom lands, the James River, and the wooded hills of Fluvanna County beyond. Just upstream from the nominated property are the seven islands from which the place takes its name.

Most of the property on the north side of the road is pasture bordered with trees. A farm road leads down from the main house to the lower fields. Some wooded area is to the west of the main house. The land to the south of the county road consists of a large pasture with a steep wooded slope ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~, the southern boundary of the nominated tract.

### NON-CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES

The non-contributing archaeological properties include 44BK227 and 44BK233. The first site, 44BK227, is manifested by a single quartz flake which may have derived from nearby site 44BK226 and which therefore may not reflect in-situ occupation at that location. The latter site, 44BK233, constitutes an upland procurement camp adjacent to site 44BK223 at which modern construction has significantly compromised subsurface integrity within known site boundaries.

Noncontributing architectural resources include a shed, a garage, and a barn to the west of the main house, and a storage building to the east. Down the hill to the northwest of the house is a tomato-packing shed. With the exception of the tomato-packing shed, all of the non-contributing outbuildings are less than fifty years old. The tomato-packing shed is older but is twentieth century and thus outside of the period of significance.

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high above [REDACTED] it maintains the lonely ambience of Virginia's rural seats of the antebellum era.

### HISTORIC CONTEXT

The archaeological resources of the Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District provide important information concerning past settlement patterns of the Native American and Euro-American inhabitants of the south-central Virginia piedmont. The presence of Archaic and limited Woodland period occupations in both upland and riverine settings can be contrasted to the almost exclusive use of riverine areas during late Middle Woodland and particularly Late Woodland times. This is consistent with the postulated intensification of riverine adaptive systems during the Late Archaic and Early Woodland periods that culminated with the increasingly sedentary settlement practices of Late Woodland horticultural groups after approximately A.D. 1000. Additional research at the contributing archaeological resources within the district can provide important, detailed information concerning the temporal and functional differences between upland and riverine Native American settlement practices on the property and in the region.

The recovery of maize remains from undisturbed archaeological deposits at 44FV134 further emphasizes the intensive use of riverine areas for horticultural purposes during the early portion of the Late Woodland period between approximately A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1200. The high integrity of those deposits, associated with some of the earliest radiocarbon dates for maize cultivation in Virginia, indicates that substantial additional information is present which could contribute to a more explicit understanding of the origins of sedentism and of changing subsistence practices on both a regional and state-wide basis.

The arrival of Euro-American society in the south-central Virginia piedmont during the early eighteenth-century disrupted the Native American settlement and subsistence systems that had been operative since the beginning of the Late Woodland period. While the newcomers also practiced intensive agriculture, their settlement values instead emphasized upland locations above the immediate riverine environment which was reserved for the cultivation of food and cash crops such as corn and tobacco. The mid-nineteenth-century occupation of the Seven Islands tract by the Nicholas family, as well as the possible mid-eighteenth-century component present at the same upland location overlooking the James River floodplain, reflects

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the imposition of Euro-American settlement values and completes the variable use of the local landscape that had evolved over several thousand years. Additional historic archaeological research at Seven Islands also could provide information concerning the spatial configuration of the colonial and antebellum residential complex, the most intensively occupied portion of the district during the historic period.

The Seven Islands Archaeological and Historic District takes its name from a cluster of islands in James River just upstream from its junction with the Slate River. The nominated property includes the core of the 1,600-acre tract purchased in 1728 by Dr. George Nicholas. Nicholas, an English immigrant, became a prominent physician and founder of a distinguished family of Virginians whose members include Governor Wilson Cary Nicholas. Seven Islands is one of the upper James River places identified on the Fry-Jefferson Map of 1755. George Nicholas's eldest son, John, took up residence at Seven Islands, then in Albemarle County, and served as the Albemarle County clerk. Prior to the formation of Buckingham County in 1761, the Albemarle County seat was located (conveniently for John Nicholas) not far upriver at Scottsville. The property eventually passed around 1825 to John Scott Nicholas III, during whose ownership, the original house burned and was replaced by the present, more commodious dwelling circa 1847.<sup>1</sup> The plantation's principal crops were corn, wheat, and tobacco. John Scott Nicholas III became so successful as a tobacco planter that he was selected by the British government to prepare a treatise on the culture of tobacco when the crop was being introduced to India.

The present house reflects the conservative architectural taste of Virginia's planter society in the years between Independence and the Civil War. While Virginia possesses from this period a number of stylish and stately plantation mansions including Bremo, Oatlands, and Berry Hill, such places were the exception. The majority of the more prosperous landowners chose not to display their prosperity or prestige in architectural monuments but erected instead restrained and generally compact dwelling houses at the core of their plantation complexes. Seven Islands follows this trend by being in the standard I-house format: single-pile, center passage, and two stories above an English basement. Also, it is constructed of the more economical wood rather than brick.

The I-house was favored for rural areas throughout Virginia in the antebellum era particularly because it combined essential commodity with basic formality. Illustrating the fact that the form could be given

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architectural dignity, Seven Islands' roof has a central pediment and pedimented gable ends. Also, the front entrance is set off by a finely articulated porch employing the Greek doric order. It is possible that the porch, with its entablature of triglyphs and metopes, was inspired by the Temperance Temple designed by Alexander Jackson Davis and erected in 1847 for General John Hartwell Cocke just across the river from Seven Islands. The porch and the temple are approximately the same scale and are vaguely similar in appearance. In contrast to the exterior, Seven Islands is plain on the interior, lacking cornices, chair rails, or elaborate trim. Like many of its contemporaries, its chief interior details are the handsome but provincial Greek Revival mantels and a stair with scrolled brackets.

The Seven Islands dwelling gains interest as an architectural document for being little altered and in an excellent state of preservation. It retains its original beaded siding, window sash, cornices, interior trim, and hardware. The house thus preserves the essential character of a typical plantation dwelling of its time and place, a character intensified by its unspoiled rural setting. The fact that the property remained in the ownership of Nicholas family descendants until 1921 likely contributed to its little-altered state.

During the Civil War, Seven Islands served the Confederacy in a variety of ways. The plantation supplied young horses and cattle as well as large quantities of wheat to the Confederate government. Also, a number of Confederate soldiers were cared for at Seven Islands. Serving with General J. E. B. Stuart was John Scott Nicholas III, of Seven Islands, who lent Stuart his large black mount, raised at Seven Islands, for Stuart's famous "ride around McClellan" in June 1862. Despite its remote location, Seven Islands barely escaped being raided during the war. A group of Union cavalymen doing mischief along the canal towpath on the north side of the James were prevented from crossing into Buckingham County by a fortuitous flood.

Like many Virginia planter families that suffered economic loss following the Civil War, the owners of Seven Islands sought to overcome deprivation by operating a boys' academy at the plantation. Known as Seven Islands Academy, the school was founded in 1881 by Phillip Barbour Ambler, husband of Willie Harrison Nicholas, heir to Seven Islands, and lasted until 1901. The academy catered principally to the sons of the neighboring farmers. Like many such institutions of the rural South, the curriculum stressed teaching the students first to be gentlemen and then scholars. A relic of this period is the two-story wing added to the rear of the house to provide

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dormitory and other spaces necessary for the academy. Following the deaths of Willie Nicholas Ambler and Phillip Barbour Ambler in the early 1900s, the property passed to John Nicholas Ambler, their sole heir. In 1921 it was sold to N. E. Spessard, a timber businessman from New Castle, Virginia. Spessard's grandson and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Rutherford H. Spessard, Jr., make Seven Islands farm their permanent home.

1. The 1847 date of construction is Nicholas family tradition. The Buckingham County tax records indicate that the land on which the house stands had come into the ownership of an H. W. Scruggs in the early nineteenth century and was sold to J. S. and G. W. Nicholas in 1844. Although it has not been verified, Scruggs may have been a Nicholas descendant himself. The tax records further show that the \$1000 value for improvements on this property, referred to as Seven Islands, was increased in value to \$2500 in 1851. This may indicate that the current house was constructed in that year or that the tax assessor may have been delayed in the revaluation.

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Farmville Herald

1935 Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia. Historical Research in Cumberland, Buckingham, and Prince Edward Counties. Farmville, Virginia.

Golladay, Victor Dennis

1973 The Nicholas Family in Virginia. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Virginia.

Klatka, Thomas, Michael Klein, Gary Dunham, and Jeffrey Hantman

1986 Archaeological Survey in Buckingham County, Virginia. Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Records of the Auditor of Public Accounts. Land Tax Books. Buckingham County, 1843-1851. Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

WPA Historical Inventory, Buckingham County Historic Houses, 67-1675 "Seven Islands" (1937). Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

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UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
E	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
F	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
G	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
H	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
I	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
J	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
K	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
L	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

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core of the original Seven Islands patent of 1723. The main house occupies a high knoll in the approximate center of the property and commands the view **[REDACTED]** toward the James River **[REDACTED]**  
**[REDACTED]**.

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information applies to Photographs 3-9 only:

CREDIT: Calder Loth

DATE: 1990

NEGATIVE FILED: Virginia State Library, Richmond

NEGATIVE NUMBER: DHR 10676

DHR FILE NUMBER: 14-23

1. 44FV134, view of archaeological features 86-1 (background) and 86-3 (foreground), facing south; photograph provided courtesy Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia
2. 44FV134, profile view of archaeological feature 86-3 with well-preserved faunal remains, facing south; photograph provided courtesy Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia
3. view from main house across James River valley; facing north
4. south elevation of main house; facing northeast
5. main house parlor: view of west wall
6. main house: detail of southeast corner of front porch
7. west elevation of main house; facing southeast
8. main house: stair in center passage; facing west
9. view of nineteenth-century frame stable; facing east