

VLR - 6/16/99
NRHP - 8/5/99

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Pleasant Grove
other names/site number VDHR File No. 041-5033

2. Location

street & number Deer Run Road (SR 679) N/A not for publication
city or town Halifax X vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Halifax code 083 zip code 24558

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 6/30/99
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
 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):

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
17	4	buildings
2	0	sites
2	1	structures
0	0	objects
21	5	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
AGRICULTURE	processing
AGRICULTURE	storage
AGRICULTURE	animal facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
AGRICULTURE	processing
LANDSCAPE	gate

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Victorian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Stone
walls	Wood
roof	Metal
other	Brick

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past fifty years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1888-1949

Significant Dates

1888-90

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 290 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing		
	1	17	674000	4066640	3	17	674360	4066290
	2	17	674430	4066640	4	17	675000	4066000

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>J. Daniel Pezzoni</u>	date	<u>March 3, 1999</u>
organization	<u>Landmark Preservation Associates</u>	telephone	<u>(540) 464-5315</u>
street & number	<u>6 Houston St.</u>	zip code	<u>24450</u>
city or town	<u>Lexington</u> state <u>VA</u>		

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	<u>Blythe-Halifax, L.L.C., c/o Dr. William B. Blythe</u>		
street & number	<u>114 Hillcrest Circle</u>	telephone	<u>(919) 942-6500</u>
city or town	<u>Chapel Hill</u> state <u>N.C.</u>	zip code	<u>27514</u>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

Pleasant Grove is a 290-acre farm located in the southwest quadrant of Halifax County, Virginia, on waters of Miry Creek, a tributary of the Dan and Roanoke rivers. Established by David Samuel Farmer in the late 1880s, the farm lies partly in cultivated fields rotated between tobacco, wheat, and other crops, and partly in woodland comprised of a mix of pine and deciduous species. At the heart of the farm lies the main house complex featuring Pleasant Grove, a two-story frame dwelling completed in 1890 in the Victorian style with Italianate and Greek Revival secondary characteristics. The house features a two-tier front porch engaged under a gabled extension of the primary hipped roof, an integral two-story ell, and minor one- and two-story rear additions and enclosed porches. Its fabric consists of metal roofing, novelty weatherboard siding, a stone foundation, and interior stretcher-bond brick chimneys. The one-room-deep center-passage-plan interior retains its original mantels and double-run passage stair as well as other details. Behind the house lies a domestic outbuilding complex consisting of a smokehouse, pumphouse, and other resources; to the south stand a cow barn, granary, and corncrib; and to the north stands a row of three tobacco barns and miscellaneous other resources. Beyond the main house complex are four tenant house and house site complexes. The Owen complex includes a two-story frame tenant house with Victorian detail built in two phases beginning about 1900; the Ferrell complex includes a one-story cinder-block tenant house of ca. 1940 and a log corncrib; the Blackstock complex features a ruinous story-and-a-half log tenant house of ca. 1900; and the fourth complex features a tenant house site.

Inventory

Main House Complex

1. Main House. 1888-90. Contributing building.
2. Smokehouse. Ca. 1940. Contributing building.
3. Pumphouse. Ca. 1940. Contributing structure.
4. Watering trough. Ca. 1940. Contributing structure.
5. Cow barn. 1932. Contributing building.
6. Granary. Ca. 1890. Contributing building.
7. Corncrib (log). Ca. 1930. Contributing building.
8. Tobacco barn (east). Ca. 1890. Contributing building.
9. Tobacco barn (middle). Ca. 1890. Contributing building.
10. Tobacco barn (west). Ca. 1890. Contributing building.
11. Corncrib (frame). Ca. 1930. Contributing building.
12. Hog pen. Ca. 1930. Contributing building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Description (continued)

- 13. Bulk barn. Ca. 1990. Noncontributing building.
- 14. Poultry/guinea pig house. Ca. 1950. Noncontributing building.
- 15. Poultry/guinea pig house. Ca. 1950. Noncontributing building.

Owen Tenant House Complex

- 16. Owen Tenant House. Ca. 1900. Contributing building.
- 17. Workshop. Ca. 1930. Contributing building.
- 18. Pumphouse. Ca. 1940. Contributing building.
- 19. Hog pen. Ca. 1940. Contributing building.
- 20. Chickenhouse. Ca. 1940. Contributing building.
- 21. Garage. Ca. 1950. Noncontributing building.

Ferrell Tenant House Complex

- 22. Ferrell Tenant House. Ca. 1940. Contributing building.
- 23. Corncrib (log). Ca. 1930. Contributing building.

Miscellaneous Resources

- 24. Blackstock Tenant House Ruin. Ca. 1900. Contributing site.
- 25. Tenant House Ruin. Ca. 1900. Contributing site.
- 26. Gates. 1997. Noncontributing structure.

Main House: Exterior

Pleasant Grove's notable exterior features include its front porch, cornice, front entry, and windows. The first tier of the porch extends across most of the three-bay front elevation; the second tier shelters only the center bay. The porch stands on tapered square wood columns with molded caps and connected by balustrades with square-section balusters (the columns and balustrades are modern replacements based on the originals). On the second story the balustrades extend out onto the roofs of the two ends of the first tier. The pedimented gable over the porch has horizontal flush-board sheathing, a circular vent with a pierced floral panel in place of the customary louvers, and a raking millwork trim in the tympanum.

The bracketed Italianate cornice has floral cut-outs applied to the faces of the brackets and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Description (continued)

molded panels in the interstices between brackets. At the tops of the molded corner boards are scrolled cut-outs reminiscent of the brackets often found at the tops of Victorian porch posts. The windows have molded trim and slightly peaked hoods supported by small sawn brackets. The two-over-two windows of the front of the house have segmental-arched upper sashes; the two-over-two ell windows have regular sashes. The first- and second-story front entries have peaked and bracketed hoods similar to those over the windows, as well as sidelights with arched upper panes and translucent patterned stencilling on the panes, and Italianate four-panel doors with arched upper panels.

The bracketed cornice extends to the integral ell, which has a one-story porch along its south side (screened in the 1930s and first enclosed in the 1950s), an enclosed porch extension to the east end, and a modern two-story bathroom addition on the north side. The paired windows on the north side, which illuminate the dining room within, are original. The foundation under the ell, originally stone, has been replaced with brick-faced cinder block. The coursed rubble foundation under the main house remains. The tops of the interior stretcher-bond brick chimneys were repointed during the 1998 rehabilitation. The house is presently painted white with dark green trim.

Main House: Interior

Throughout the house are wooden floors, plaster-and-lath walls and ceilings (many wallpapered), four-panel doors (some with porcelain door knobs), molded baseboards and window trim and (in the downstairs) chairrails, and turned corner blocks in the door surrounds (lacking in the ell). The center-passage stair has a handrail and a bulbous turned newel post--both walnut--painted turned balusters, and scrolled tread brackets. The first-floor north room, which originally served as the parlor, is depicted in a hand-tinted photograph from about 1900 which shows walls painted white or covered in light-colored wallpaper, and a putty color on the trim. The room features an ornate mantel with turned pilasters, a turned pendant in the frieze, and curved brackets and a channeled band running under the shelf. Under the windows are panels with milled borders. The first-floor south room, which served as a bedroom in the early twentieth century, has double panels under the windows and an ornate mantel with reeding, turned bosses, brackets, and milled borders in the pilasters and frieze. This room is the only one in the front of the house that originally had an open fireplace; the other rooms had stoves.

The second floor contains two bedrooms: a "company room" on the north side of the center passage and a "family bedroom" on the south side. The rooms have mantels that are transitional

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Description (continued)

Greek Revival/Victorian in character, with pilaster-and-frieze compositions, projecting panels with round ends in the pilasters and friezes, floral decoration incised into the surfaces of the panels, and milled borders under the shelves. The south bedroom, which served for a time as the bedroom of tutor Nanny Carlton, has a room off of it that was built onto the roof of the ell porch in the 1930s and made into a bathroom in the 1940s when the farm was electrified.

The ell contains a second stair in a passage that runs transverse to the front stair passage, like the cap on the letter "T." The handrail of this stair is carved out of poplar, as is the turned newel, which is somewhat more slender than the one in the front passage. The balusters of the back stair are identical to those of the front stair. Under the stair is a "sugar closet" where the family stored sugar. Attached to one wall is a molded nail rail from which hunting jackets and other articles were hung. The dining room just beyond the back passage has a pair of French doors that replaced the original double windows on the south side of the room in the 1930s. The kitchen at the end of the ell has 1990s cabinetry designed in part by Gloria Blythe. The second floor of the ell contains the back stair passage, a bedroom, and, at the end, a schoolroom of which half has been made into a bathroom. The schoolroom retains its simple pilaster-and-frieze mantel; the blackboard that formerly hung in this room is now in storage on the farm. The home's circular-sawn framing members, joined with cut nails, are visible in the basement and attic.

Main House Complex

The main house is surrounded by a tended yard with gravel turnarounds in front and to the rear. Specimen tree species in the front yard include magnolia, maple, cedar, and dogwood. To the north and east of the house stand two pear trees that may be original plantings. (An orchard formerly extended to the west of the house.) Behind the house (to its east) stands a cinder-block pumphouse dating to about 1940 with an asphalt-shingled pyramidal roof. Behind it is a poured-concrete watering trough of similar age. To the south of the pumphouse and watering trough stands a one-story frame smokehouse with weatherboard siding, a metal-sheathed gable-fronted roof, exposed rafter ends, a batten door, and stone footers. This ca. 1940 smokehouse replaces an earlier smokehouse that stood nearer to the pumphouse. Farther to the east stand two small frame buildings that were built in the early 1950s to house pheasants, guinea pigs, and "chuckers" (quail). The buildings have weatherboard siding, metal-sheathed shed roofs, poured-concrete foundations, and front windows with chickenwire screens.

To the south of the main house and its domestic complex stand three farm buildings: a 1932 cow

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Description (continued)

barn, a ca. 1890 granary, and a ca. 1930 corncrib. The two-level cow barn is constructed of poles with circular-sawn secondary framing members, and it is sheathed mostly with vertical boards set with small gaps between them for ventilation. The north-facing elevation has board-and-batten sheathing and the gable roof has metal sheathing. The foundation consists of poured-concrete piers with rubble infill. A pier under the south-facing front elevation was scratched while wet with the initials "J.P. & D.S." and the date 1932. (The initials probably stand for David Samuel Farmer's sons Joseph Pleasant and David Samuel Jr.) Other features of the barn include weatherboarded gables, a side shed wing, batten doors on triangular strap hinges, remnants of Dutch doors on the front of a central drivethrough or aisle, and remnants of a concrete floor and feed troughs on the interior.

The granary and corncrib stand apart from the cow barn a little to its west. The one-story frame granary has a metal-sheathed gable roof and weatherboard siding attached with cut nails. The foundation consists of piled stone footers with several cinder-block replacements. The batten door, on which may be traces of red paint, is constructed with wire nails. On the door's inside face are a wooden lockbox with metal corners, and strap hinges attached with nails hammered through leather washers. The exposed structure of the interior is lined to waist height with beaded matchboard sheathing. A blackboard from the former schoolroom in the main house is stored here.

The corncrib is constructed of unchinked saddle-notched logs with their ends protected by corner boards. The metal-sheathed gable roof cantilevers on all four sides as a protection against the elements. Hatches in the front and rear gables provide access to a loft. The crib rests on three cross-joists which are in turn supported by stone footers. Other features include small brackets in the eaves, a floor of wide planks, a batten door hung on triangular strap hinges, and wire nails throughout.

To the north of the house stand buildings devoted largely to tobacco processing, including a modern Powell "bulk barn"--a prefabricated metal tobacco-curing barn--joined to a pole shelter. Beyond the bulk barn stands a row of three flue-cure tobacco barns dating to the early years of the farm's operation. (A packing house with an ordering pit and three other log tobacco barns formerly continued the row to the east; two of the barns burned during the mid-twentieth century as a consequence of overheating during firing, and one was burned by vandals more recently.) These barns are typical of their era, with log construction (one is v-notched--presumably the others are as well), gable roofs, and square or nearly square plans. The barns have metal roofing, exposed rafter ends, vertical-board and tar-paper sheathing, and rubble foundations. An unusual

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 6

**Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.**

Description (continued)

but practical feature in each is a six-light window set into the weatherboarded south gables; the windows provided a weak illumination for the otherwise dark, smoke-blackened interiors. As originally constructed the barns had two brick fireboxes at the north corners of the foundation, and mud-and-rubble flues formerly conducted hot air from the fireboxes across the floors on the interior. These flues were removed in the mid-twentieth century and replaced with oil burners set on the barn floors with exhaust holes cut in the sides. The barns retain their tier poles, five tiers to a barn. The westernmost barn has a modern side shed on its north side that replicates in form and construction a historic shed in the same location. All the barns formerly had similar sheds on their firebox elevations; the sheds sheltered farm workers who tended the fireboxes for extended periods during the curing process. To the north of the tobacco barns stand a collapsing frame corncrib with a metal-sheathed gable roof and slatted sides, and a dilapidated hog pen of frame construction formerly covered with a shed roof. Both the corncrib and the hog pen likely date to the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Owen Tenant House Complex

Down a farm lane to the east of the cow barn stands a tenant house that was occupied by Charlie Owen in the 1930s. The east end of the north-facing house is the earliest section, probably dating to about 1900 at the latest. The two-story frame house has weatherboard siding, a metal-sheathed gable roof, and a poured-concrete foundation. The east gable-end chimney has a stone first-story firebox with brick shoulders and a brick stack above; the west stove flue, which is brick, rises on the inside of the gable end. The one-story front porch stands on Craftsman brick and wood supports and was apparently once fitted with screen mesh. A one-story shed wing extends across the rear, resided with wood-fiber-impregnated concrete siding during a 1998-1999 rehabilitation.

Inside, the original section has an unpainted Victorian mantel with chamfering, turned ornament, and a bracketed shelf. The center passage, which represents part of the addition to the original dwelling, has a stair with square-section newels and balusters and a closed stringer. Other interior features include five-panel doors, molded baseboards, a second Victorian mantel in the second-floor west room, and a mix of original beaded matchboard sheathing and modern drywall. The tenant house is in the process of being rehabilitated as a caretaker's residence.

Behind the house stands a one-story frame workshop with weatherboard siding, a metal-sheathed gable-fronted roof, stone footers, and a bird house attached to the front gable. To the west stands a cinder-block pumphouse with an asphalt-shingled gable roof. To the east stand a one-story garage supported on poles with a gable roof and metal siding and roofing; a frame chickenhouse

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Description (continued)

(later used as a kennel) with horizontal board siding and a metal-sheathed shed roof; and a frame hog pen with horizontal board siding and a metal-sheathed shed roof.

Ferrell Tenant House Complex

To the north of the main house and tobacco barns lies a second tenant house complex. A log dwelling occupied by the family of Henry and Inez Ferrell originally stood at the location. In the 1940s this was torn down and a one-story cinder-block house built in its place. The house has a stuccoed exterior with mica flecks mixed into the stucco, an asphalt-shingled gable roof, asbestos shingles in the gables, two interior cinder-block flues, a front door with window panel, and replacement vinyl windows dating to a 1998-1999 rehabilitation. The interior has plastered walls and ceilings and simple molded door and window surrounds. The tenant house is in the process of being rehabilitated as a guest house. Behind it stands a log corncrib similar in form and date to the other log corncrib on the place, but smaller.

Miscellaneous Resources

The two remaining known tenant houses on the property are in ruins. Approximately 1,500 feet southwest of the main house stands the ruins of a story-and-a-half, one-bay log dwelling that was occupied by the family of Elmer Blackstock in the 1930s and was apparently abandoned by the early 1950s. The standing walls of the house are constructed with v-notched corners and suggest the house consisted of one room with a garret. The stone chimney has crude stepped shoulders. Other features include remnant board-and-batten siding and metal roofing, interior door trim with a convex molding profile. Wire nails were used in the dwelling's construction, suggesting a date of construction about 1900, with cut nails used on the interior as clothes hooks.

The other tenant house ruin is located between the Blackstock tenant house and the main house. Abandoned by the mid-1930s, the south-facing, story-and-a-half house was either "boxed," that is, supported by the vertical boards of its enclosure, or it was frame with board-and-batten siding. At the west end of the entirely collapsed ruin is a stone and brick chimney fall.

At the north end of the property, flanking the approach drive, is a pair of stone gates constructed in 1997. Set into one of the gate posts is a brick bearing the initials "JF" and the date 1820 that was salvaged from the nearby Jeremiah Farmer House (burned by vandals in recent years). The posts were built with stone salvaged from the foundation of the main house ell.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 8

**Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.**

Description (continued)

Approximately one half of the Pleasant Grove property is cleared, generally the high ground, whereas the low ground along Miry Creek and its branches is wooded. Historically, more ground was likely cleared than today, but the basic pattern of cleared high ground and wooded low ground has probably remained the same since the property was first brought under cultivation. A majority of the cleared ground is presently fallow; some fields are planted with wheat and tobacco. A small pond was created in the 1990s near the center of the parcel, roughly midway between the two tenant house sites.

Integrity Statement

The main house, tenant houses, outbuildings, and farm landscape of Pleasant Grove retain a high degree of integrity. The main house was sympathetically rehabilitated in 1998. Nearly all of its character-defining exterior and interior features were retained and, when necessary, restored. Alterations were restricted to the rear ell. These included the addition of a two-story bathroom wing in the angle of the house and ell, detailed similarly to the house, the modernization of the kitchen, the insertion of a bathroom into one half of the former second-floor schoolroom, and the replacement of a 1950s enclosure of the south ell porch with modern windows. Particularly praiseworthy in the ongoing rehabilitation of the property is the reuse of the two surviving tenant houses--the sympathetic rehabilitation of tenant houses in rural Virginia is rarely encountered. Most of the historic farm buildings have been stabilized and maintained, even though few are presently in use except for storage, and the basic pattern of cleared land and woodland remains the same as portrayed on a 1952 USGS map.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Pleasant Grove, located in Halifax County, Virginia, is a large tobacco farm established by David Samuel Farmer in the late 1880s. At the heart of the farm stands the house Pleasant Grove, a two-story Victorian dwelling distinguished by a double-tier front porch, an Italianate bracketed and paneled cornice, and other period embellishments. Pleasant Grove's domestic and agricultural outbuildings include tobacco barns and corncribs of log construction, a frame granary, and a frame smokehouse. The property preserves its complement of tenant houses and tenant house sites of log, frame, and cinder-block construction. Two of these tenant houses have accompanying outbuildings and are being restored as rental and guest housing. Surrounding all are 290 acres of rolling fields, woodlots, and watercourses.

Justification of Criteria

Pleasant Grove is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of agriculture as a relatively complete Southside Virginia tobacco farm of the 1880s-1940s period. The farm's four tenant houses and house sites, which date from all periods of the farm's historic operation, illustrate the range of living accommodations provided for the area's tenant farmers. Pleasant Grove is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of architecture for its 1888-1890 main house, a well-preserved Victorian residence with secondary Italianate and Greek Revival characteristics. The property's period of significance extends from 1888, the year construction work is thought to have begun on the main house, through 1949, embracing the construction dates of the farm's tenant houses and outbuildings and encompassing the first sixty-one years during which the property was operated as a tobacco farm. Pleasant Grove is eligible at the local level of significance.

Acknowledgments

A number of individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Foremost among these were the sponsors of the nomination, William and Gloria Blythe of Blythe-Halifax, L.L.C. Also of assistance were architectural historian Gary R. Grant and staff members of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources including June Ellis, Marc Wagner, and Jack Zehmer.

Historical Background

The Farmer family has owned the Pleasant Grove property since the mid-eighteenth century, when Archer Farmer moved from Henrico County to Halifax County, then a part of Lunenburg

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 10**Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.****Statement of Significance (continued)**

County. A local historian has described the Halifax County Farmers as "well-to-do land and slave owners" who grew wealthy "by economy and persistence." Pleasant William Farmer (1803-1884), a grandson of Archer Farmer, farmed the property but lived on an adjoining parcel. The eldest son of Pleasant and his wife Mary was David Samuel Farmer (1862-1919), who was listed in the 1880 census as a student residing in the home of his parents. After Pleasant Farmer's death in 1884, his extensive landholdings in Halifax and Pittsylvania counties were divided between his widow and children. David Samuel received 290 acres of high ground between two branches of Miry Creek. The present boundaries of the farm are virtually identical to those surveyed in January 1885 as a result of the division.¹

When David Samuel inherited the land there were no habitations standing on it, as indicated by the 1885 plat, so construction of a home for David Samuel, his wife Mary Lovelace (1860-1943), and for the couple's family (a first child was born in 1886) figured as a priority. Construction began in 1888 or 1889 and was completed in 1890, according to family tradition and county land books, which show an increase in the value of buildings on the property from zero in 1889 to \$1,200 in 1890. David Samuel named the farm Pleasant Grove after a nearby Christian Church--which was itself named after Pleasant W. Farmer, who donated the land for the church--and on account of the pleasantly cool elevation of his homesite.²

Pleasant Grove was established after the last surviving federal agricultural census was taken, but an examination of the 1880 returns for Pleasant W. Farmer's operation provides a sense of the farming activities his son would have engaged in a decade later. Pleasant Farmer raised horses, cows, sheep, swine, and poultry, and he cultivated a range of crops including corn, oats, wheat, apples, and potatoes. Farmer's principal cash crop was tobacco: 16,000 pounds harvested from thirty-two acres. Likewise, David Samuel's focus from the beginning was tobacco cultivation, and one or more of Pleasant Grove's three log tobacco barns survive from the farm's early years.³

¹ Blythe, "Pleasant Grove;" Carrington, *History of Halifax County*; 1880 federal census; Halifax County Will Book 34, p. 83, and Deed Book 77, p. 407.

² Halifax County Deed Book 77, p. 407, and 1888-1890 land books; 1900 federal census; Blythe, "Pleasant Grove;" and Blythe personal communication.

³ 1880 federal census; Blythe personal communication.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Statement of Significance (continued)

Pleasant Farmer farmed his land with the aid of tenants, and his son followed the practice. David Samuel's grandson, Dr. William B. Blythe, recalls several tenant families--black and white--living on the farm in the 1930s, including the Ferrells, Owens, and Blackstocks. The 1900 census suggests a number of sharecropping families lived in the vicinity of Pleasant Grove, including the family of freedman Henry Ferrell (b. 1860) and his wife "Aunt Bet," who lived on the farm. In the 1930s Henry Ferrell's son, also named Henry Ferrell, lived in the log tenant house that stood approximately 250 yards north of the Pleasant Grove house, and his wife Inez worked in the Farmer family's kitchen.⁴

In 1900 the Farmer household included six children ages one through thirteen. A seventh child--Esther Emily, Dr. William B. Blythe's mother--was born in 1902. To educate their children and those of their neighbors the Farmers hired a tutor, Nanny Carlton, who used the upstairs end room of the ell as her schoolroom. The family interest in education contributed to the choice of a career in teaching by all the daughters and a son. One daughter, Nannie Baker Farmer (b. 1888), taught in county schools for forty to fifty years. The family also played an active role in the affairs of Pleasant Grove Church and the Christian Church-affiliated Elon College in Elon, North Carolina. Several family members have served on the Elon College Board of Trustees.⁵

In the 1930s and 1940s LeGette Blythe, the husband of Esther Emily, used Pleasant Grove as a retreat for the writing of two novels: *Alexandriana* (Stackpole, 1940) and *Bold Galilean* (UNC Press, 1948). A *New York Times* critic called the Biblically-inspired *Bold Galilean* "compelling drama, extremely readable--both old and modern in its wisdom." Pleasant Grove's literary associations continued into the latter twentieth century. A grandson of LeGette Blythe and a present owner of the farm, William LeGette Blythe II, wrote at the house his prize-winning short story "The Taming Power of the Small," which was included in *The Best American Short Stories, 1988* (Houghton-Mifflin).⁶

After Mary Lovelace Farmer's death in 1948 the farm passed to David Samuel's heirs. Tenant farmers continued to live on the property until the 1970s. In 1997 Dr. William and Gloria Blythe

⁴ 1900 federal census; Blythe personal communication.

⁵ Ibid.; Blythe, "Pleasant Grove."

⁶ Blythe, "Pleasant Grove;" James and Brown, *Book Review Digest*, 81-82.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

Statement of Significance (continued)

gained sole ownership of the farm and created a limited liability company, Blythe-Halifax, L.L.C., with their selves and their four children as stockholders. The family has recently completed a sympathetic rehabilitation of the Pleasant Grove house and rehabilitations of the two surviving tenant houses are in progress. In his preliminary application for historic designation Dr. Blythe wrote: "It is the intent and hope of Dr. and Mrs. Blythe that the house and farm will remain in the family for numerous generations to come, and will serve as a family rallying place and as an impetus to remember and appreciate the accomplishments of those who have come before."⁷

Architectural Analysis

As a two-story center-passage-plan dwelling, Pleasant Grove is a representative Southside Virginia house form of the late nineteenth century, although with a number of distinctive features. According to architectural historian Gary R. Grant, the home's bracketed and paneled Italianate cornice and peaked and bracketed door and window heads are very similar to treatments at Laurel Grove, a house built in 1888 in the Sutherlin vicinity of southeastern Pittsylvania County, several miles to the west of Pleasant Grove. The similarities between the two houses point to construction by the same as yet unidentified homebuilder.⁸

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Pleasant Grove is not architectural, strictly speaking. Preserved in the house are many of its original walnut furnishings, purchased about the time the house was completed in 1890, including tables, love seats, chairs, rockers, a bedstead, and a vanity. Other (architectural) features of note include the apron panels under the first-floor windows--a late occurrence of a treatment that was more common before 1880--and the second-floor ell schoolroom.

⁷ Blythe personal communication; Blythe, "Pleasant Grove."

⁸ In an effort to locate additional houses with similar styling, a number of roads in rural Halifax and Pittsylvania counties were driven by the author in February 1999. Sections of the following state routes were driven: 751 (Piney Grove Road), 658 (Melon Road), 691 (Stebbins Road), 659 (River Road), 683 (Oak Level Road), 684 (Hummingbird Lane/Mount Zion Church Road), 662 (Birch-Elmo Road), and 726. A house with a bracketed and paneled frieze somewhat similar to that of Pleasant Grove (but no floral decoration) was identified on SR 684 about a quarter mile east of the junction with SR 662.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 13

**Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.**

Statement of Significance (continued)

Notable aspects of the farm buildings include the two twentieth-century log corncribs, built when most corncribs were constructed of light framing members with slatted sides, and the gable windows in the tobacco barns, a functional feature rarely encountered in Piedmont Virginia tobacco barns. The tobacco barns once had mud-and-rubble flues on their floors that required frequent rebuilding because of heat cracking. Mud-and-rubble flue construction prevailed before the introduction of sheet-metal flues about the time of the Civil War and the wide-spread acceptance of the improvement that followed. The ca. 1890 Pleasant Grove barns represented a holdover of the older technology, made even more remarkable by the fact that the mud-and-rubble flues were in use as late as the 1930s.⁹

⁹ Scism, "Carolina Tobacco Barns," 123.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 14

Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blythe, William B., Dr., personal communication with the author. Halifax Co., Va.,
January and February 1999.

_____. "Pleasant Grove." Virginia Department of Historic Resources Preliminary Information
Form, 1998.

Carrington, Wirt Johnson. *History of Halifax County, Virginia*. Richmond, Va.: Appeals Press,
Inc., 1924.

Grant, Gary R. Personal communication with the author, Danville, Va. January 1999.

Halifax County deed, land book (tax), and will records. Halifax County Courthouse,
Halifax, Va., and Library of Virginia, Richmond.

James, Mertice M., and Dorothy Brown, editors. *The Book Review Digest*. 44th Annual
Cumulation (March 1948-February 1949). New York: The H. W. Wilson Company,
1949.

"Milton, Va./N.C." United States Geological Survey 15-minute quadrangle map, 1952.
Filed at the Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, Charlottesville.

Scism, Laura. "Carolina Tobacco Barns: History and Function." In Doug Swaim, ed.
Carolina Dwelling. Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 1978.

The New York Times Book Review Index, 1896-1970. New York: Arno Press, 1973.

United States Census. Halifax County agriculture and population schedules for 1880 and
population schedules for 1900. Microfilm at the National Archives, Washington, D.C.,
and at the Roanoke Public Library, Roanoke, Va.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 15

**Pleasant Grove
Halifax Co., Va.**

UTM References

5. E674560 N4065260
6. E674580 N4064540
7. E673840 N4064530
8. E673860 N4065420
9. E673720 N4065820
10. E674060 N4066020

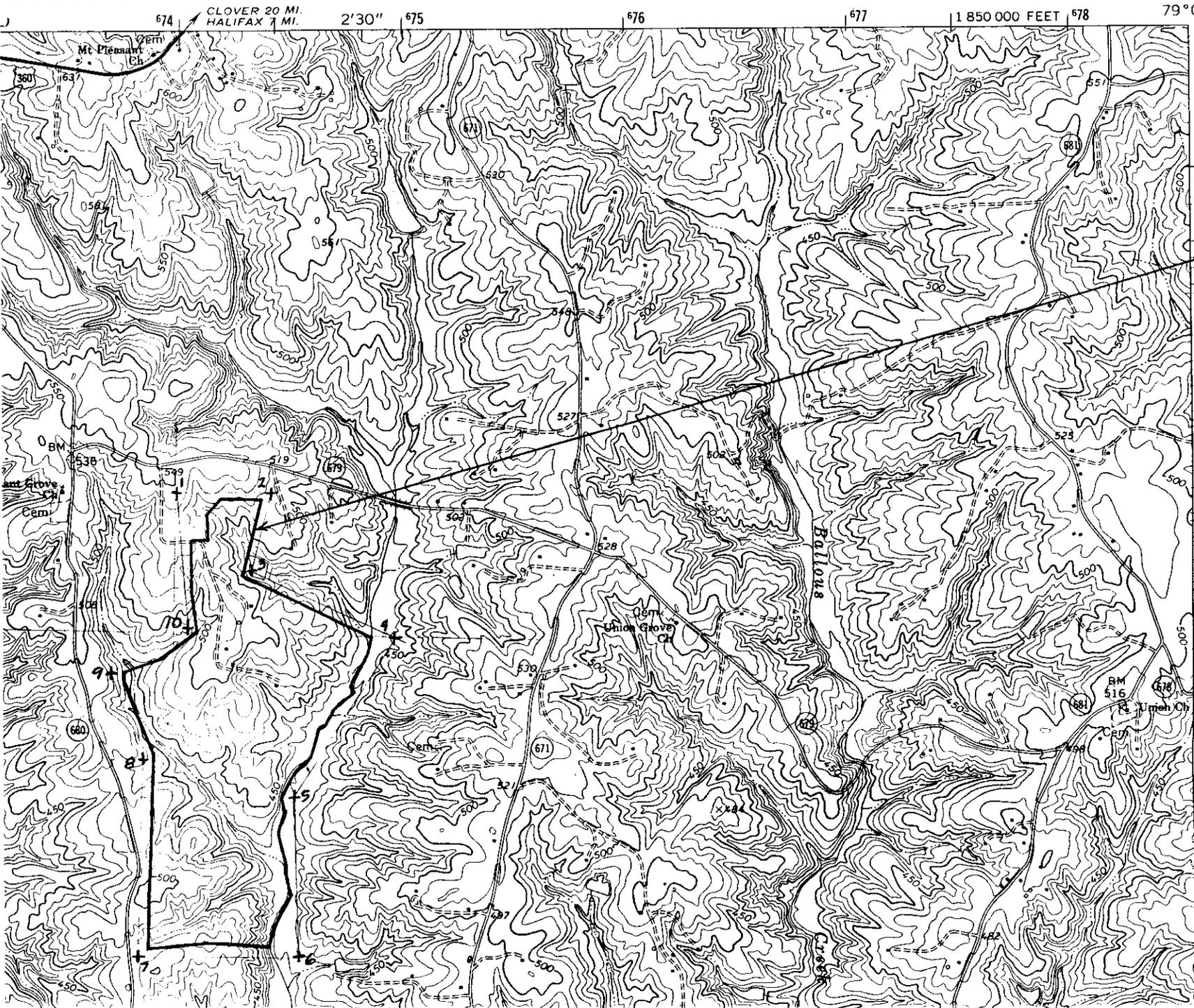
Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated parcel are portrayed on the USGS and 1:200-scale maps that accompany this nomination, and are essentially the same as the 1885 metes and bounds described in Halifax County Deed Book 77, p. 407, which appear in photograph number 9 (no surveys of more recent date are known), and as portrayed on Halifax County tax parcel map 2MM-142 parcel 427. The boundaries correspond to the historic and present property lines of the Pleasant Grove farm.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated parcel match the boundaries of the Pleasant Grove farm as established in 1885. They encompass all known historic resources associated with the farm.

5257 IV SW
(HALIFAX)



79°00'
36°45'

150 000
FEET

4068

4067

4066

4065

Pleasant Grove, Halifax Co., Va.

- UTM references (zone 17):
1. E674000 N4066640
 2. E674430 N4066640
 3. E674360 N4066290
 4. E675000 N4066000
 5. E674560 N4065260
 6. E674500 N4064540
 7. E673840 N4064530
 8. E673860 N4065420
 9. E673720 N4065820
 10. E674060 N4066020