



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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  3  </u>	<u>  5  </u>	buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  3  </u>	<u>  5  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
 walls WOOD: weatherboard  
 roof METAL  
 other \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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)

- 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.)

- 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 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1839-1895

Significant Dates 1839

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

(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 100 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	293560	4163780	2	18	293630 4163300
3	18	293700	4163320	4	18	293720 4163140

\_\_\_ 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 Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian

organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date January 10, 1994

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804-786-3143

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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 Mrs. Elizabeth B. Gayle  
street & number Route 8, Box 443 telephone 804-746-5551  
city or town Mechanicsville state VA zip code 23111

=====  
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.

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Oakley Hill  
Hanover County, Virginia

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### SUMMARY ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Oakley Hill is an antebellum Hanover County plantation located between Mechanicsville and Cold Harbor. The property consists of approximately 100 acres and is dominated by a wood-frame two-story I house erected around 1839. The house began as a story-and-a-half structure but was raised to two full stories in the 1850s. Although the house is very simple, it maintains a high degree of architectural integrity having been owned by only two families. Adding interest is its unspoiled setting at the end of a cedar-lined avenue, amid stately old trees and surrounding fields. Preserved on the grounds is a rare servants' house and a contemporary smokehouse.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Oakley Hill is located off Walnut Grove Road (county route 615), approximately two miles east of Mechanicsville. Most of the neighboring land in recent years has been subdivided into housing estates; Oakley Hill is one of the area's few remaining historic farms. The house is seen across broad fields and is approached by a long, cedar-lined avenue. The avenue dramatically cuts through steep banks as it nears the house. The house itself is set in an informally planted yard dominated by several very large, very old oak trees, at least one of which is said to be some four hundred years old. Behind the house are two contributing outbuildings--a wood-frame servants' house and a wood-frame smokehouse. A depression in the lawn approximately thirty feet in front of the house is said to be the road bed of an old country lane.

The main dwelling began as a story-and-a-half I house but was raised to two full stories in the 1850s. The present shallow gable roof is currently covered with standing-seam sheet metal. The house is set on a high brick basement laid in five-course American bond painted red with penciled joints. At each end of the house is brick interior end chimney with an exposed shaft. The placement of the haunches on the shafts is evidence of the original story-and-a-half configuration. A one-story front porch with four Tuscan columns and a Tuscan entablature shelters most of the first floor of the facade. Paint marks on the weatherboarding indicate that the porch originally sheltered only the front door and was later extended to its present length, probably when the roof was changed. It is possible that the present columns belonged to the original porch. On the rear of the house is a 1910 one-story ell. A mid-twentieth-century addition, also on the rear, contains the present kitchen.

The house is sheathed entirely with early beaded weatherboards. Some may be original; however, the second-floor weatherboards can date no earlier than the 1850s. At the eaves are somewhat deep box cornices. The windows on the main part of the house have six-over-six sash. Some are hung with what appears to be original louvered shutters. The first-floor sash is probably original. That on the second floor likely dates from the 1850s roof change. The first-floor windows on the east end appear to be later alterations, perhaps added when the roof was

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Oakley Hill  
Hanover County, Virginia

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changed. The front entrance is a modified Greek Revival composition with sidelights and transom.

Through the front door one enters a narrow center passage which is dominated by a simple but refined two-flight, open-well stair.

The stair has slender square balusters, turned newel, round handrail, and paneled spandrel. The stair brackets are decorated with simple but elegant scrolls. The first-floor doorways have six-panel doors and architrave trim frames. The backbands on the architraves have quirked Greek Revival moldings. To the west of the passage is the parlor, a somewhat austere room with no cornice or chair rail. The main architectural feature is a plain mantel with simple shelf supported on two slender columns. Set within the fireplace is an original cast-iron grate framed by Ionic pilasters and topped with brass finials. The recess on the left of the chimney breast has been filled in with a modern cupboard with semi-dome top.

On the east side of the passage is the chamber, now used as a dining room. This room originally was similar to the parlor but the chimney breast has been paneled and the room is now topped by a modern crown molding. The chair rail as well is a modern addition. As noted above, the windows on either side of the chimney breast appear to be an 1850s alteration. The doorway from the present dining room to the front part of the passage is a modern alteration.

The two second-floor rooms have plain mantels ornamented only with symmetrical architrave trim used as pilasters. A turned corner block is at the top of each pilaster strip. In each room a closet is located on one side of the chimney breast. Each closet has a six-panel door with Greek Revival moldings. Also, beneath each second-floor window is a wooden panel with Greek Revival moldings. A small room in the center of the second floor now is used for a bathroom.

As with many nineteenth-century Virginia houses, the dining room was originally in the basement--to accommodate the hot summers. This space, on the west end of the house, is now used as an informal living room. It has a brick floor (relaid, using the original bricks) and a rebuilt fireplace. The batten door leading to the exterior has a Carpenter lock. To the east of the former dining room is a narrow space originally used as a serving pantry and later converted to a bar. It is separated from the dining room by a vertical board partition. The room in the east end of the basement was probably first used for storage; it is now the furnace room. The area beneath the present kitchen is now a glassed-in porch.

The servants' house is located just to the southeast of the main house. The wood-frame structure has a two cell plan with a central brick chimney. Each cell is entered by an exterior doorway with a batten door located near the respective corners of the facade. Beside each door is a narrow double-hung window. Although the structure was probably weatherboarded originally, the present weatherboarding appears to date from the early twentieth century. It presently is covered by a sheet-metal roof. Voids in the roof framing the roof framing indicate that the building originally had dormers. The gable windows are later alterations.

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Hanover County, Virginia**

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The interior of the servants' house has never been modernized and is currently used for storage. The northern room is plastered as is the space above. The southern room has never been plastered and has exposed, whitewashed brick nogging between the framing members. The space above also is not plastered. The upper level is reached by a narrow, rather crude steep stair set against the eastern side of the chimney stack. Each room also originally had doorways opening from the back. Each of these openings has had their batten doors nailed in place.

The smokehouse is located immediately to the east of the servants' house. It has a steep gable roof covered in sheet metal and its walls are sheathed with weatherboards some of which are beaded and may be original. At the eaves is a plain box cornice. The entrance has an early batten door with strap hinges.

Although an archaeological survey has not been conducted at Oakley Hill, the area around the house likely contains the sites of various other outbuildings. In addition to the existing structures, there probably at least was an exterior kitchen and a dairy.

To the east of the house are four non contributing buildings: a twentieth-century garage, two metal sheds, and a tenant house. The present owner stated that the tenant house has as its core an office used by the original owner. No evidence of this early core is evident on the exterior, and if it exists, it has been so compromised with later additions and alterations that it does not possess sufficient integrity to be considered a contributing structure. A fifth non contributing structure, a one-story mid-twentieth-century brick house, is located about a hundred yards to the south of the main house.



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**Oakley Hill  
Hanover County, Virginia**

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Built in the 1840s by the Sydnor family, the dwelling house at the Oakley Hill is representative of the numerous simple wood-frame dwellings that served as the master's residence for the many small post-colonial plantations in the counties around Richmond. Most of these houses were situated inland, near creeks and springs, as opposed to the large colonial plantation houses that were concentrated along the tidal rivers. Typical of these small plantation houses, Oakley Hill has little architectural pretension but achieves dignity by its siting at the end of a cedar-lined avenue amid broad fields. The conservative character of the house illustrates the persistence of vernacular forms, particularly the I-house plan, in rural Virginia. The property gains additional interest by preserving a rare two-unit servants' house<sup>1</sup> as well as an early smokehouse. Because they are in the path of the suburban sprawl of greater Richmond, many of these small plantations are being lost to development.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the inland areas of the counties around Richmond, including Henrico, Chesterfield, Goochland, and Hanover, were largely divided into small plantations with simple wood-frame plantation dwellings and a scattering of outbuildings. The older, larger establishments--colonial plantations such as Wilton, Tuckahoe, and Amphill--were concentrated along the James and other tidal rivers. The lesser places took advantage of creeks and springs for water sources. Because level, fertile land was scarce away from the rivers, the inland plantations were rarely large; most never exceeded a several hundred acres.

Contrasted with the great colonial mansions, the dwelling houses on the inland plantations were very modest, with little architectural pretension. Oakley Hill's residence is typical, being built originally as a story-and-a-half wood-frame I house on a high brick basement. The room use in these houses followed a pattern maintained in Virginia from the late eighteenth century until after the Civil War. In the basement was a storage room and the dining room. The first floor held the parlor, the principal bed chamber, and center passage with the staircase. Above were two additional bedrooms. Scattered about the main house was the usual collection of outbuildings: a kitchen, laundry, smokehouse, a dairy, a servants' house, and others as needed. Oakley Hill preserves its early smokehouse and two-unit servants' house. The latter is a rare survival and is particularly significant in this instance for having suffered few alterations and essentially no modernization.

Oakley Hill was originally the property of the Sydnor family, which owned a variety of tracts in the Cold Harbor vicinity of Hanover County. The house was constructed around 1839 for Edward Sydnor and his wife Sarah E. (Ladd) Sydnor. Title to the land, however, was held by Edward's brother, William B. Sydnor, who eventually sold Oakley Hill to Edward and Sarah

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Oakley Hill  
Hanover County, Virginia

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Sydnor in 1858.<sup>2</sup> This may have been the year in which the roof line was altered to create the present full second story.

Although various Civil War battles were fought around Oakley Hill, no fighting is recorded to have occurred on the property itself. One anecdote of the war concerning Oakley Hill, however, has been passed down and is quoted here:

"When the Yankees were driven out and Hill's men swept along in pursuit, a number of officers gathered upon her [Mrs. Sarah E. Sydnor] front porch for rest and to enjoy the fine view. Presently an officer, accompanied by attendants, rode up, and wishing perhaps to speak to some subordinate in the group, boldly came on his fine steed through the yard gate into the enclosure where the evergreens and flowers were growing. In an instant, seeing the ruthless invasion, the form of Mrs. Sydnor appeared and in not very patient tones she cried, 'Go Back! Go Back, sir! I do not allow any mounted soldier in this yard.' The officer saluted, turned quietly and rode out amid the laughter and cheers of the throng. It was General A.P. Hill."<sup>3</sup>

Sarah E. Sydnor died in 1895 and Oakley Hill with 140 acres was sold by her executors in 1898 to Edward Lee Bowles. The property is currently owned by Bowles's daughter Elizabeth (Bowles) Gayle (Mrs. Preston Gayle). The property is maintained in excellent condition and preserves much of its nineteenth-century character despite the surrounding suburbs.

*ENDNOTES*

1. This structure is referred to as a slave house by the current owner. There is no question that it was occupied by slaves but more likely by house servants rather than *field hands*. Quarters for field hands normally were located away from the domestic complex.
2. Hanover County Historical Society. *Old Homes of Hanover County, Virginia*. p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

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Hanover County, Virginia**

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**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Old Homes of Hanover County, Virginia.* Hanover, Virginia: The Hanover County Historical Society. 1983. pp. 38-39.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**UTM References (continued):**

5. 18/293780/4163100
6. 18/293780/4163020
7. 18/293340/4162820
8. 18/293210/4163000
9. 18/293080/4163520
10. 18/293110/4163560
11. 18/293100/4163640
12. 18/293060/4163640
13. 18/293020/4163760

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Beginning at a point on the southern right-of-way of county route 636, delineated by UTM reference 1. 18/293560/4163780, proceed south some 1600' to a point delineated by UTM reference 2. 18/293630/4163300, thence east some 100' to a point delineated by UTM reference 3. 18/293700/4163320, thence south some 600' to a point delineated by UTM reference 4. 18/293720/416140, thence southeast some 200' to a point delineated by UTM reference 5. 18/293780/4163100, thence south some 200' to a point delineated by UTM reference 6. 18/293780/4163020, thence westerly along an unnamed creek some 1900' to a point delineated by UTM reference 7. 18/293340/4162820, thence northwesterly some 600' to a point delineated by UTM reference 8. 18/293210/4163000, thence east some 100' to a point delineated by UTM reference 10. 18/293110/4163560, thence north some 200' to a point delineated by UTM reference 11. 18/293100/4163640, thence west some 100' to a point delineated by UTM reference 12. 18/293060/4163640, thence north some 300' to a point on the southern right-of-way of county route 636 delineated by UTM reference 13. 18/293020/4163760, thence along said right-of-way some 1800' to the point of beginning.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundaries of Oakley Hill have been drawn to include the 100 acres that currently make up the plantation. This acreage provides the historic rural setting for the plantation house and includes the long, cedar-lined avenue leading to the house from the county road. The house is located near the center of the property with open fields to the east and west and stretching north to the county road. The western property line conforms to a tree line and extends to the south into the woods to a creek which forms the southern boundary of the property. The eastern boundary follows the edge of the eastern field and separates the property from subdivided parcels to the east. The northern boundary follows Walnut Grove Road (county road 615).

**DAKLEY HILL**  
HANOVER Co., VA

**TM REFERENCES:**

- 18/293 560 | 4163 780
- 18/293 630 | 4163 500
- 18/293 700 | 4163 320
- 18/293 720 | 4163 140
- 18/293 720 | 4163 100
- 18/293 780 | 4163 020
- 18/293 340 | 4162 820
- 18/293 210 | 4163 000
- 18/293 080 | 4163 520
- 18/293 110 | 4163 560
- 18/293 100 | 4163 640
- 18/293 060 | 4163 640
- 18/293 020 | 4163 760

