

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

LISTED ON:  
VLR 06/06/2007  
NRHP 03/28/2008

**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 The Old Thomas James Store  
other names/site number The Old Store, James Store, VDHR# 057-5027

**2. Location**

street & number Main & Maple Streets not for publication N/A  
city or town Mathews Court House vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Mathews code 115 zip code 23109

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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] 2/14/08  
Signature of certifying official Date  
**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows: buildings, sites, structures, objects, 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: Commerce Sub: Department Store (General Store)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant/Not in Use Sub:

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other-19th century Antebellum Store/Storehouse

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
roof Asphalt
walls Weatherboard
other

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

Old Thomas James Store

Mathews County, Virginia

**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.
- 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  
Commerce  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** c.1810-1899

**Significant Dates** N/A

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Old Thomas James Store

Mathews County, Virginia

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

State Historic Preservation Office

\_\_\_ Other State agency

\_\_\_ Federal agency

\_\_\_ Local government

\_\_\_ University

\_\_\_ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** 0.256 acres

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

| Zone | Easting | Northing |
|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|
| 18   | 383166  | 4143837  | 2    |         |          | 3    |         |          | 4    |         |          |

\_\_\_ 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 Meg Greene Malvasi  
organization Paciulli, Simmons & Associates date 23 March 2007  
street & number 11212 Waples Mill Road, Suite 100 telephone 804.545.3153  
city or town Fairfax state VA zip code 22030

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
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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 Mr. Michael J. Brown  
street & number 32 Church Street telephone 804.725.2292  
city or town Mathews Court House state VA zip code 23109

**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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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**Architectural Description  
Summary Statement**

Standing on less than a half-acre lot, just behind the former Sibley General Store on Main Street in Mathews Courthouse, Virginia is the one-story, frame and weatherboard commercial building known as the Old Thomas James Store. The James Store is an excellent example of an early nineteenth-century, commercial building that has long disappeared from the rural southern landscape. The building, while having undergone alterations, changes and being moved, still retains much of its original architectural fabric. However, given its current location and the growth of the street, the building's current context has been somewhat compromised. Colonial Williamsburg architectural curator Willie Graham identified the store as being among a handful of surviving antebellum commercial buildings in the South today and a rare example of a basic, one-story commercial building consisting of only one large room, a smaller counting room and no chimney.

**Detailed Description  
Exterior**

Positioned on an east-west axis, just behind the former Sibley Store and Main Street is the Old Thomas James Store, a rectangular-shaped block measuring fifteen feet by twenty-five feet and standing one-story high with a front-gable roof of asphalt shingle. The building now rests on a foundation consisting of brick piers laid in English bond with concrete block infill. The Old James Store is surrounded by commercial development and buildings. Situated on a half-acre lot, the store sits on a small well-tended lawn; a curving asphalt driveway and parking lot is located to the east of the building ending just behind the Sibley Store. The building is currently vacant, but in its various incarnations served as a store or storehouse and later, a storage building for the Sibley Store.

The wood frame of the Old Thomas James Store is that of an English frame with continuous sills located at the bottom of a joined box frame. The lumber shows evidence of being hewn square and pit-sawn. The joints consist of mortise and tenons; the more important joint areas are pegged, while the building studs are not. The walls are flush framed with the posts cut to the same thickness so that any interior finishes applied would hide the frame. Nails used for the construction include double-struck heads and flat heads. A variety of wood was used for building the frame; sills and corner posts are oak, while other framing material is yellow poplar. The boards used for the exterior clapboard sheathing were mill sawn. The roof structure is that of a common rafter roof, i.e. a series of rafters of uniform size that are spaced evenly along the roof length. In general, the overall construction of the building is consistent with building techniques in vogue during the first quarter of the nineteenth-century.<sup>1</sup>

Not all of the original openings of the store's exterior are visible today. Remaining intact are two openings located on the south elevation of the store; the first a double-leaf wood door of batten board which now serves as one of the building's entrances. Directly above in the gable end is a smaller, single-leaf wood vertical board hinged opening. There were two openings located on the north elevation gable end. However, it is not clear why these two windows were placed here. Willie Graham has suggested that at first glance, the two windows were situated to flank either side of a chimney stack; however, Graham also saw no evidence to suggest that the store ever had a chimney or heating source of any kind, which was typical of stores during this period.<sup>2</sup>

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It is not until studying the interior that the original form and plan of the Old Thomas James Store becomes evident. The original front elevation of the building is located along the long east wall. This orientation would be in keeping with current practice during the antebellum period where longer wall facades were more common, particularly in rural areas. The opposite was true in towns and urban areas where the cost of a front lot often determined what side of the building—gable end or long wall—would face the street.

Situated on the east wall are two windows and a double-leaf, double sheathed wood batten door. The window openings consist of 4/4 wood sash with a wood double-sheathed batten shutter; the shutter is notable for its system of pins and a wrought-iron bar that made it possible to lock the shutter from the inside. The bar situated on the exterior window pivoted on a pin near the top of the window jam; by running the bar diagonally across, and placing a removable pin through the opposite corner secured the window from the interior. Another security measure is seen in the double-sheathing for both the door and shutter, a common method for securing a building such as a store. There is also a doorway found in the north gable end which might have at one time served as a rear door entrance to the counting room. Like many early commercial buildings, windows were few in order to gain the most use from wall space for shelving.<sup>3</sup>

The interior walls of the original sales room are covered in wide horizontal boards trimmed with a narrow bead and the planed and beaded ceiling joists are exposed. The counting room has a surbase, or chair rails consisting of a planed board with a beaded top and bottom. Rough-cut ceiling joists suggests that the counting room was going to be plastered but as of yet, there is no evidence to support this. What is left of the original flooring is seen in the attic loft. Here the floor boards are neither gauged nor undercut which was common during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Instead, the flooring tended to be a more uniform thickness, a practice that was more common by 1820, but in 1810 may have just begun surfacing in building construction. In this case, the store's exposed attic flooring has been planed on the lower face; something that was done more for decorative purposes than for practical reasons. It also suggests that the store was built during a period when new developments and methods in building were taking place. The presence of hardware such as H-hinges and wrought-iron straps help support the building's construction as falling somewhere between 1810 and 1820.

**Additions and Alterations**

The Old Thomas James Store has undergone a number of changes through the years. Based on the current orientation of the building, it appears that the building was moved at least once from its original location fronting Main Street. With the construction of the later Sibley Store in 1899, the building was again moved and turned; based on Willie Graham's observations it appears that the current south-facing gable would have in fact opening out onto a side street and used as a loading door for supplies and goods. The first floor flooring was replaced sometime in the twentieth century. The current foundation piers and infill would have also been added as the structure was removed from its original brick foundation. There is also evidence that at one time, the building had some sort of cellar as seen in the remnants of lime whitewash on the floor and joists, which was typically used during the antebellum period.

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At some point after 1900, shed roof additions were built on the east and west sides of the building, most likely for additional storage space. Evidence suggests that at one time there was a porch—a typical feature of many stores—that spanned the length of the east wall. The area has since been frame and enclosed with beaded weatherboard and is marked by a central front-gablet. The central entrance is a single-leaf wood paneled door with four lights; flanking the door are modern wood tripartite windows consisting of a central fixed light with 2/2 wood sash windows. Each addition consists of one open room. Inside the east, frame and clapboard addition on the west wall can be seen the original façade of the store. Situated on the south wall of the east addition is a single-leaf wood batten entrance door. At this time, the Mathews County Historical Society, which maintains the building, proposes to remove these additions in order to restore the building to its earlier form. Because these additions were added to the Old James Store after it ceased operation as a commercial establishment, the removal of these wings— although technically of historic construction—should not detract from consideration of the building’s overall significance, as they have nothing to do with the building and its original use as a commercial structure.

Mr. Graham also notes that sometime in the mid-to late nineteenth century, the building’s interior underwent a renovation. The wall separating the two rooms was removed, as was the stairway in the counting room. In its place was a larger one room store; the counting room was now sheathed in wide boards with a counter and shelves probably installed. The east shed addition may have been added during this period which shifted the main entrance to the door located on the south gable wall.<sup>4</sup>

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**Statement of Significance  
Summary Statement**

Located behind the late-nineteenth century Victorian structure known as Sibley's Store is the smaller, one-story, frame and weatherboard building known as the Old Thomas James Store. This property is eligible for consideration for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in that the Old James Store is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, specifically antebellum economic patterns in the South and Virginia. The property is also eligible for inclusion on the National Register under Criterion C, in that the building is an excellent example of an early nineteenth-century commercial building. The significance of this property does not lie in who owned or used the building, but in the role, the building played in the historic events that took place in Mathews Courthouse and the surrounding county. In addition, the structure itself is significant, making invaluable contributions to the antebellum architectural, social, and cultural history of Virginia. It also is considered under Criterion Consideration B due to its historic move. It is locally significant with a period of significance from 1810 to 1899.

**Detailed Statement**

Created by an Act of Assembly in 1790, Mathews County is located on a peninsula, bounded on the north by the Piankitanck River and the Chesapeake Bay; to the south by Mobjack Bay, the North River, and small piece of land that connects the county to neighboring Gloucester County. Considered part of Virginia's Middle Peninsula, Mathews County is also the state's smallest rural county, measuring barely twenty miles long and eight miles wide bounded 200 miles of shoreline.

Mathews was formerly a part of Kingston Parish, Gloucester County, one of the first areas established in Gloucester. The earliest records date to 1657 and, throughout the eighteenth century, Kingston Parish established itself as prosperous and populous. In 1700, 115 landowners were recorded with total landholdings amounting to more than 46,000 acres; eleven properties were recorded as having one thousand acres or more. At the same time, Kingston Parish boasted a population of "above 2,000 souls."<sup>5</sup>

The decision to divide Gloucester County arose from practical and geographic considerations. The current county seat and court house were located almost forty miles away from the lower part of the county, where most of the white population lived. Because travel was difficult on the county's rough roads, particularly during periods of bad weather, the General Assembly was presented with a petition asking that the county be split in two sections; on May 1, 1791, the assembly passed the new resolution. In gratitude, the county's residents named the new area Mathews after Thomas Mathews, Speaker of the House of Delegates, who championed the cause. Despite the new name and a new county little had changed, for the boundary of Mathews was almost identical to that of Kingston Parish.<sup>67</sup>

By 1835, Mathews County was a bustling area with three post offices and several small villages. The county seat and courthouse were located at Westville, later renamed Mathews Courthouse. In *A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia*, published in 1835, Joseph Martin provided a description of Westville:

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Westville contains about 30 houses, 4 mercantile stores, 1 tanyard, 3 boot and shoe factories, 1 tailor, 2 blacksmiths, 1 saddler, 1 carriage maker and 1 tavern. The public buildings are very neat, new C.H. [Court House], 2 jails, 1 for criminals and the other for debtors, and a clerk's office. These houses are all well built of brick. Westville is a port of entry; there are two regular packets which ply between this place and Norfolk weekly, and 1 that runs from it to Baltimore. Population 150 including 3 regular physicians.<sup>8</sup>

As Martin described it, Westville/Mathews Courthouse was a growing town center for the county with a diverse variety of services and goods to be had.

Mathews was also an established shipbuilding center for the Chesapeake Bay. The county was once covered with forests of Live Oaks, the wood of which is well suited to ship construction. The Continental Navy built many of its ships in Mathews during the American Revolution; in 1791 alone, twelve sailing ships weighing more than twenty tons each were built in Mathews. Between 1790 and 1820, at approximately the time the James Store is thought to have been built, an estimated one-third of the ships built in Virginia came from Mathews. Between 1802 and 1844, Mathews, known as the "Port of East River," was an official port of entry for the registration and enrollment of ships. The customs house, located at Williams Wharf, was a center of maritime activity.<sup>9</sup>

Because many of Mathews County's records were destroyed during the Civil War, piecing together the story of the Old Thomas James Store and the James family is difficult. Based on land and genealogical records and parish registers, however, a basic narrative can be reconstructed. Born on February 24, 1777 in Kingston Parish, Gloucester County, Thomas James was the son of Matthias and Elizabeth David James. In 1815, Thomas James appeared twice in county records: the first time to record his marriage to Frances Lewis and the second time as the new owner of 54 acres bought from John Patterson. Thomas James seems to have been an upstanding citizen of the county, serving as Justice of the Peace between 1819 and 1821 and again in 1824, and as postmaster of Mathews Court House in 1810. Of particular interest, James was held retail license between 1815 and 1820. Whether he renewed the license after 1820 is unknown, for in that year the county stopped recording merchant licenses.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the census of 1820 identifies Thomas James as the head of a household that included three males and two females under the age of ten, one male under sixteen, one male and one female between twenty-six and forty-five. The census also states that two members of the family were engaged in commerce. James also was a slaveholder with eight slaves: two males and one female under fourteen years old, three males and one female between the ages of fourteen and twenty-six, and one female aged forty-five years or older. By antebellum standards, owning eight slaves demonstrated prosperity, considering the comparatively small amount of land that James owned. As James' fortunes improved so did his landholdings and the number of slaves. According to the census of 1830, James owned fourteen slaves: two males and one female under the age of ten, four males and two females between the ages of ten and twenty-four years old, two males and one female between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-six years of age, one female aged fifty-five years or older, and one slave that was blind. By 1840, the census listed James with sixteen slaves including two males and four females under the age of ten, three males and one female between the ages of ten and twenty-four years old, one male and one female between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-six years of age, and three males and one female between the ages of thirty-six and fifty-five years old. By this time, there is no mention of anyone engaged in commerce; instead the census lists six individuals occupied in agricultural pursuits.<sup>11</sup>

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James appears to have also had the money to build and pay heavy taxes for his property and its buildings. By 1819, James was paying \$630 in taxes for buildings on his property; it is possible that one of these might have been the store; however no research has uncovered what structures besides his house were constructed. By 1826, James's land holdings had grown to 74 acres with \$666 paid in taxes for buildings; when he sold the property in 1845, his estimated holdings were almost 130 acres with approximately with the buildings taxes at \$2,000.

The James Store in Mathews County was part of an already established architectural style that played a vital role in the development of southern economic and social life. Early colonial stores provided a place for the exchange of crops for goods, which in Mathews County meant tobacco and later cotton. There are records of colonial stores operating as early as the middle of the eighteenth century, when an increase in population and settlement created a growing demand for goods. With these developments, the store (also known as a storehouse) building form, such as that which the Old James Store represents, comes into being. By the end of the century, stores, whether located on plantations, in towns, or at country crossroads, were perhaps the most common non-domestic buildings in Virginia.<sup>12</sup>

According to the architectural historian Carl Lounsbury, these mid-to-late eighteenth-century stores consisted of two rooms: a larger salesroom and a smaller counting room. In the case of the Old James Store, the front door led directly into a sales room; walking through another doorway there was the smaller counting room. A stair generally rose from the counting room to an upper floor loft that was used probably for storage before the building was first moved. Many stores used this upper floor for living accommodations; however this does not appear to be the case for the Old James Store. Doors and windows were located on the front wall (in this case, the west wall on the Old James Store) to make room for shelves on the other three walls. A counter was also built to separate the customer from the goods.<sup>13</sup> One interesting note about the James Store is its two exterior doors that suggest the rising popularity of a secondary loading door in the early decades of the antebellum period.

Throughout the South, it was common to find stores or storehouses on plantations and farms. These buildings served a variety of purposes; if there were a particularly bountiful harvest, for example, the surplus could be sold or bartered in return for other needed goods. Slave artisans, who produced more goods than the residents of the plantation could use, stored the excess in such a building. Some stores not only held tools, provisions, and other materials, but might also provide temporary storage for goods awaiting shipment, such as foodstuffs, tobacco, or cotton. By the same token, planters and storekeepers stored imported goods that they intended to sell to local residents.

It is reasonable to assume that Thomas James's store began as an outbuilding on his property, though this is unproven. What does seem certain is that by roughly 1815 or so, the Old James Store was built at its original site fronting Main Street in the village of Mathews. The location of the store would have not been far from James's house, which according to an 1830 plat map shows the dwelling located "Beginning at . . . a corner on the north of a small creek on the shore of Mob Jack Bay." This creek was possibly Put In Creek, not far from the village of Mathews.<sup>14</sup> This relatively close proximity to the water would have provided an ideal location for James to build and operate a store or storehouse on his property to serve the needs of the surrounding community. As James was not a large landowner, it is likely that he supplemented the income earned from farming by engaging in commercial activity, or vice-versa.

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Historian Lewis Atherton, in his research on these small southern commercial establishments, states that the southern storekeeper occupied a number of roles and performed a wide variety of tasks. Not only was he a collecting agent for farm crops from yeoman farmers and small planters, the storekeeper also arranged to sell the goods. In turn, the storekeeper filled his shelves with an array of goods, including farm implements, dry goods, staple groceries, cloth, and books. He even acted as the local banker, offering credit to farmers against future crops earnings which were used to purchase goods from the store. This arrangement may have been convenient, but it tended to retard the development of banks. Like Thomas James, the storekeeper often held the office of postmaster which allowed him to frank his own correspondence and attract trade. While storekeepers also held other important municipal offices such as Justice of the Peace, just as Thomas did or an administrator of estates, it was the postmaster in the end, who had the best access and means to attract other businesses and businessmen.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, the storekeeper in the South did not occupy the status of a lowly tradesman. For many, commerce was a respectable and a potentially lucrative profession. In many cases, young men were sent to learn the commercial trade by apprenticing at a store. While there, they might work for their board; some received a small salary. During the course of their apprenticeship, they learned the basics of literacy and arithmetic, if they had not already mastered these skills. They also were required to learn the basics of bookkeeping and salesmanship. Since stores often doubled as post offices, an apprentice would have access to newspapers, and thus become familiar with state, national, and sometimes world events. In some cases, some store owners themselves subscribed to newspapers and magazines. If successful, the young man might become a junior partner in the store or possibly open a branch store. In a family business, the son might look forward to becoming a partner or owner of the establishment. Given that at least one of Thomas James's sons held a retail license, it is entirely possible that he worked with his father in the store and was being groomed one day to take over the business. Upon retirement, many successful storekeepers became men of leisure, often acquiring a small estate. If such was the case with Thomas James, his accrued land holdings throughout between 1820 and 1845 may have resulted from using commercial profits to buy additional land and eventually leaving the world of commerce and pursuing instead an agrarian life.

In 1846, John Dixon Jarvis and Elijah Barnum purchased the property, consisting of one acre fronting Main Street, the store building as well as an additional storehouse buildings valued at \$300. While the occupation of John Dixon Jarvis, is uncertain, Elijah Barnum was a merchant. During the antebellum period, southern commercial establishments were emerging as increasingly important elements within the plantation economy, not only as important centers for local economies, but for organizing and linking regional economies, and at least for awhile maritime traffic at Williams Wharf.

It appears that by 1862, Barnum became the sole owner of the property that was held by him and his family until 1893, when the property and its buildings, now known as the "Barnum Store house Lot" was bought by William N. Trader and John W. Dixon. In 1899, in a lawsuit over the partnership, Trader became the sole owner of the property. It appears too, that the property was still operating as a store, serving the town of Mathews and nearby residents. Given the overwhelmingly rural character of the county, the Old James Store was one of the few ongoing commercial establishments in the area.

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In 1899, Trader sold one-half acre of the property including the store to Henry and Francis Joseph Sibley. Sometime during that year, the store was moved to its current site to make way for a brand new commercial establishment, the Sibley Store. It seems certain that by this time, the store was no longer used for its original purpose, but was now relegated to use as a storehouse or storage facility. The building now stands empty, though there are plans to renovate and restore the building by the Mathews County Historical Society to its early appearance before the porch and additions were added.

The property and store remained in the Sibley family for almost a century. In 1989, Mary C. Sibley sold the property, which now consisted of a little more than a quarter-acre to Jerry L. Fruehbrodt and his wife, Carol. In 2003, the property, now consisting of 0.1268 acres was sold again, to Michael J. Brown. The store is now owned by Mathews County; the Mathews County Historical Society maintains the property.

Although the sparse record limits our knowledge of Thomas James and of the Old James Store, this store, like other country stores throughout Virginia and the South, occupied an important place in the economic and social history of Mathews County. The fact that the building is a rare example of an early nineteenth century commercial building type only underscores the importance of including the Old James Store on the National Register.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The legal description of the Old James Store property, located in the town of Mathews, Mathews County Virginia as found in Deed Book 295, page 299 is as follows:

ALL that certain parcel of land, together with all improvements thereon and all appurtenances thereunto belonging, lying in the Westville Magisterial District of Mathews County, Virginia, containing 0.1268 of an acre more or less, and bounded as flows: On the North by a private road known as Maple Avenue; on the East by the land now or formerly of the County of Mathews; on the South by the land now or formerly of the County of Mathews and the land now or formerly of Thomas Witt Hix, Trustee; and on the West by State Highway Route No. 14; and being more fully and accurately described on a plat of survey made by Wayne E. Lewis (of Keller, Lewis and Associates, P.C.), Land Surveyor, dated March 10, 1989, and recorded in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Mathews County, Virginia, in Plat Book 17, page 73.

**Boundary Justification**

These are the original boundaries as deeded to Michael J. Brown and wife, Lisa A. on November 18, 2003 and included the building historically associated with the property.

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The following is the same for all photographs:

Old Thomas James Store, Mathews County, Virginia #057-5027  
Photos taken February 2007 by Meg Malvasi  
Digital images stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources

View: Old James Store, North Elevation  
Photo: 1 of 15

View: Old James Store, West Elevation  
Photo: 2 of 15

View: Old James Store, South Elevation  
Photo: 3 of 15

View: Old James Store, East Elevation  
Photo: 4 of 15

View: Old James Store, South Elevation Entrance and  
Loft Opening  
Photo: 5 of 15

View: Detail, 1899 Shed Addition, South Elevation  
Photo: 6 of 15

View: Detail, Sawn Clapboard Siding  
Photo: 7 of 15

View: Detail, Foundation  
Photo: 8 of 15

View: Main Room, North View  
Photo: 9 of 15

View: East Interior Wall, Original Store Entrance  
Photo: 10 of 15

View: Detail, Window East Wall  
Photo: 11 of 15

View: Detail, Window and Shutter  
Photo: 12 of 15

View: Detail, Flooring  
Photo: 13 of 15

View: First Floor Joists  
Photo: 14 of 15

View: Detail, Door Lock  
Photo: 15 of 15

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Willie Graham, "Sibley Store, Mathews Courthouse, Virginia, ca. 1810-20," report, 3 March 2006, pp.3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Mathews County Historical Society, "History of Mathews, from Earliest Days, Compiled from Early Virginia Files," in *History and Progress Mathews County, Virginia: Reprints from 1949 and 1979 Special Editions Gloucester-Mathews-Gazette-Journal*, (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Company, 1982), p.4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Martin, ed., *A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia, containing a copious collection of Geographical, Statistical, Political, Commercial, Religious, Moral and Miscellaneous Information, collected and compiled from the most respectable, and chiefly from original sources; by Joseph Martin. To which is added a History of Virginia from its first settlement to the year 1754: with an abstract of the principal events from that period to the independence of Virginia, written expressly for the work, by a citizen of Virginia* (Westminster,MD: Willow Bend Books, 2000) p. 228-229.

<sup>8</sup> Mathews County Historical Society, "Mathews County History," accessed <http://www.visitmathewsva.com/statistics.html>, 8 March 2007

<sup>9</sup> Interview and research materials provided by Becky Foster Barnhardt, a descendant of the James family, February 4, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen E. Bradley, Jr., *Mathews County Virginia, Censuses 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840*, (Self-published, 1992), p. 15-16, 45, 58.

<sup>11</sup> Green, Bryan, Calder Loth and William M.S. Rasmussen. *Lost Virginia, Vanished Architecture of the Old Dominion*, (Charlottesville VA: Howell Press, 2001), pp. 194-195.

<sup>12</sup> Lounsbury, Carl L. *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 355-356.

<sup>13</sup> Mathews County Plat Book 1817-1921, p. 106, fig. 185.

Old James Steve  
Mathews Co VA  
051-5027  
UTM ZONE 18  
993166 E  
443837 N

5758 IV NW  
(WARE NECK)

