

VLR-12/12/89

NRHP-12/28/90

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Paxton

other names/site number DHR file # 72-34

2. Location

street & number 3032 Genito Road

not for publication N/A

city, town Powhatan

vicinity Dorset

state Virginia

code VA

county

code 145

zip code 23139

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private (checked)
public-local
public-State
public-federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 38 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date 14 Nov 1990

Director, VA Dept. of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register,

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC

Single dwelling

Secondary structure

AGRICULTURE

Storage; Animal facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC

Single dwelling

Secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

EARLY REPUBLIC

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK; STONE

walls BRICK

WOOD: weatherboard; shingle

roof STONE: slate; METAL

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Located in southeastern Powhatan County, Paxton is a well-preserved rural domestic complex established about 1819 by physician and mill owner Ennion W. Skelton. Originally thirty-six acres, the property today consists of eight acres in a rural setting a few hundred yards north of the Appomattox River. The main dwelling, built 1819-20, is a well-detailed and little-altered brick I-house with original story-and-a-half side wing. Behind the main house stand two small early-nineteenth-century one-room-plan frame dwellings, one of which reputedly housed the original owner's family while the main house was being built. Other outbuildings include an original Flemish-bond brick smokehouse, a nineteenth-century brick and frame icehouse, and a late-nineteenth-century frame barn. An early stone-fenced family cemetery stands behind the main complex. Noncontributing elements on the property include a 1920s garage, a mid-twentieth-century poultry house, and a 1950s wellhouse.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Situated in a thoroughly rural area of Powhatan County, the Paxton tract lies on the north side of Genito Road (Rt. 604) at its intersection with Rocky Ford Road (Rt. 603). The main house stands about forty yards from the road. It occupies a slightly elevated, level site with views of the Appomattox River valley to the south and west. The yard is largely open, with a few shade trees and shrubs; open cultivated fields surround it on all sides.

The main house stands at the center of the yard, with its outbuildings being arranged on two axes: in a row about twenty-five yards behind the house, and along a perpendicular drive

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

ARCHITECTURE

Ca. 1810 to 1910

1819-20

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Paxton, an early-nineteenth-century rural domestic complex, is located in southeastern Powhatan County. It represents a property type once common in such rural settings but now steadily disappearing due to neglect and development pressures. The main dwelling, a brick I-house with Federal details, was constructed about 1819-1820 and has been little altered since. Coeval outbuildings include a brick smokehouse, two small frame dwellings or offices, and a brick and frame icehouse; a frame barn dates to the late nineteenth century. Nearby is the rock-walled family cemetery in which the builder of Paxton, Ennion W. Skelton, and other family members are buried. Skelton, a rural physician and mill owner, was a prominent local citizen; Paxton well represents the sort of complex that a prosperous nineteenth-century physician would construct.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

Paxton is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. It is an unusually well-preserved rural domestic complex that dates from the early nineteenth century. Both the main dwelling and the outbuildings have retained much of their integrity, making Paxton an important survival of an early-nineteenth-century farm complex, once a familiar sight in Powhatan County.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Dept. of Historic Resources, Richmond

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 9.52 acres

UTM References

A 18 247050 415000
Zone Easting Northing

C 18 247060 414978

B 18 247190 414984
Zone Easting Northing

D 18 246920 414990

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A 18 247050 415000, B 18 247190 414984, C 18 247060 414978, D 18 246920 414990.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The entire 9.52-acre parcel is included in the nomination, providing a buffered setting for the early-nineteenth-century domestic complex. This acreage was part of the original acreage purchased by Paxton's builder in 1818.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeff M. O'Dell, architectural historian; John S. Salmon, historian

organization Dept. of Historic Resources date January 1990

street & number 221 Governor St. telephone 804 786-3143

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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forty yards east of the house. The dwelling and most outbuildings face southeast, in the direction of Genito Road.

The main house is a single-pile Flemish-bond brick structure set on a full, raised basement. The three-bay central-passage-plan main block measures 20' x 49' and has two-story elevations, a shallow gable roof, and interior end chimneys. Joined to it on the east end is an original, slightly inset one-room-plan wing. Measuring roughly 20' x 17', it has 1 1/2-story elevations with a single dormer on either slope and an interior chimney at the east end. The half-length Colonial Revival porch at the front of the main block is an early-twentieth-century replacement for the original, narrower porch, whose shadow is still visible. Similarly, at the rear, the original one-bay porch was replaced by a full-length veranda in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this century, a second-floor bathroom was added above this porch at the center of the rear facade. No other additions interrupt the original lines of the house.

The mansion's original Federal-style exterior detailing remains largely intact, with only the shutters missing. The building is presently painted white, but a 1940s photo shows it unpainted, displaying handsome staggered-Flemish-bond brickwork. Windows have elaborate architrave casings and mid-nineteenth-century six-over-six-light sashes; fluted end blocks add emphasis to the plain wooden lintels. At second-floor level on the main facade, a central tripartite window provides balance and a decorative focal point. The building's wide fanlight entry features sidelights with diamond-shaped muntins and double-leaf three-panel doors. Of particular interest is the floral spray carved on the semicircular block at the base of the fanlight. This signature detail, together with other distinctive features such as the tripartite window, fluted end blocks, and eaves cornice with unorthodox modillions, may help identify the master builder who designed and erected Paxton.

The interior of the house is as complete and unaltered as the exterior. It retains its original pine flooring, wall plaster, plain-board wainscot, six-panel doors, and Federal-style mantels. Door and window openings are cased with symmetrical trim with bulls-eye corner blocks. Though similar throughout the house, the trim in the west first-floor room

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(or parlor) is slightly more elaborate than the other rooms. Mantels are of rather simple, standard Federal design, featuring symmetrically molded or reeded pilasters and entablature blocks, and a high shelf supported by multiple elliptical moldings. The main stair is of open-string, half-turn form, with low risers and a broad intermediate landing. The main newel is a Colonial Revival replacement, but the rectangular-section balusters and molded handrail are original. An enclosed stair beneath the main one leads to the basement. A similar stair originally led to the attic from the upper landing, but it was removed when former owners installed a bathroom on the landing in the 1950s.

Originally, the basement probably served as a work and food-storage area. A former earthen pit, known traditionally as the "wine cellar," was reached by an opening in the floor of the east room, or present kitchen. As in many similar-sized houses of the period, the basement at Paxton was used for dining and cooking from at least the late nineteenth century onward. Mirroring the main floor in plan, the basement rooms are lighted by three-over-three-light sash windows. The west room, still used for dining, has exposed brick walls painted white; the former plaster ceiling was removed in the mid-twentieth century to expose the hewn and straight-sawn joists. The kitchen, or east room, has been thoroughly modernized, but the room under the east wing remains little altered, now serving as the furnace room. Doors open from both main-block rooms onto a sunken walkway beneath the rear veranda, which stands on tall brick piers.

Originally the dining room probably occupied one of the main-floor rooms, most likely the east room of the main block. The opposite room would have been the parlor, and the room in the east wing may have served as a sleeping chamber or as a service room adjoining the dining room. Formerly a second stair connected this room directly with the basement; the stair was removed in the 1950s. Originally this room was roughly 18' x 16', but in the 1980s it was divided into a bathroom, dressing room and closets. All other rooms in the house retain their original configurations.

The plan of the second floor is identical to that of the first, having large bed chambers on either side of a central passage. In both rooms, a pair of original closets flanks the

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chimney breasts; some retain their early-nineteenth-century gray-blue paint. An oddity in the east room is the way the two doors open into the room from the passage: both swing inward toward the center of the room--i.e., against the bed, rather than against the wall, as was standard practice. Perhaps the doors were hung this way to provide some measure of privacy to those occupying the bed: the occupants would not have been visible immediately to someone suddenly entering the room.

Another, even more curious feature on this floor is the extremely low-ceilinged loft room in the original east wing. Finished with early plaster and lighted by a single (original) dormer on either slope, the room is not tall enough for an adult to stand upright; access, moreover, is through a closet in the main block's east chamber. The closet door is so low that even a child must stoop to enter. Presumably this room was always occupied by a servant or, more likely, young children. The most unusual feature of the room is its fireplace, now blocked. Though as wide as a standard fireplace opening, it rises only fifteen inches above the floor. The mantel here has been removed, but its shadow is clearly visible (see photo). Soot surrounding this improbably low fireplace indicates that it actually was used.

Outbuildings

Possibly the oldest building on the property is the small, one-room-plan box-framed dwelling standing roughly forty yards behind the main house. According to oral testimony of the 1930s, this building housed Ennion Skelton and his family while the main house was being erected in 1819-20. The wrought nails used in its framing and stair suggest a pre-1820 construction date, thus supporting the oral tradition.

How this building was used after completion of the main house is unknown. It may well have served during at least part of its history as an office (Ennion Skelton and his son John were both physicians), or as a secondary dwelling for guests or other family members.

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(Sometimes on Virginia plantations adolescent boys were shunted to a detached house in the yard.) Too, the building might have served as a servant's dwelling or as a schoolhouse and schoolmaster's dwelling. While there is no positive evidence of a school operating at Paxton, private schools were commonplace features of large plantations in antebellum Virginia.

Measuring 16'-3" square, the original unit of the house has rubblestone foundations and a steep gable roof containing a finished loft; a rear lean-to was added in this century. A full-length porch with chamfered posts extends across the front, and an original exterior chimney of carefully laid coursed rubblestone feeds fireplaces on both floors. While the house retains its original configuration, much of its detailing has been replaced. The exterior is now sheathed with asbestos shingles, the porch roof has been rebuilt, and the window in the east end is a mid-twentieth-century addition. Inside, fiberboard replaces the original plaster, and the Federal-style mantel downstairs, while old, was recycled from a larger house and installed here probably in the 1950s. The Federal period railing in the loft was also recycled from an old building, though probably not the main house at Paxton. Other features, such as the flooring, black-painted baseboards and boxed corner stair, remain intact. Some window sashes are original, and the front door retains an early wooden lock and latch.

A similar dwelling stands at the opposite corner of the back yard, somewhat farther from the main house. This two-bay, one-room-plan structure, also roughly sixteen feet square, was built with cut nails and probably dates to 1820-40. It retains its early plaster, original flooring, and some original woodwork, which is characterized by simple beaded finishes. The present plain Greek Revival mantel was probably installed after the Civil War, as was the north gable-end window. The partially enclosed winder stair, however, is entirely original. Somewhat unusually it features a run of ladder-form steps above the winders. This run has a plain-board soffit similar to the flush-board sheathing on the rest of the stair. A simple railing in the loft consists of a square-section post and a rail with rounded top. The loft was heated by a fireplace that still remains open. It receives light from a pair of four-pane casement windows flanking the fireplace and by a six-over-six-light sash window in the

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opposite gable. The present random-American-bond chimney may be a late nineteenth-century replacement of an original rock or brick chimney. Like the other small dwelling at the west end of the yard, this building could have served as an office, schoolhouse, guesthouse, or secondary dwelling for members of an extended family. Generally buildings so well finished did not house servants in the antebellum period. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, the house probably did function as a servant's or farm laborer's dwelling.

The smokehouse, which stands directly behind the main house, was probably built at the same time as the dwelling. A 12'-3" square structure with gable roof, it features good quality Flemish-bond brickwork with queen closers. The present exterior parging (with painted score marks to simulate ashlar) was added in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, but the interior parging may be original. This building stands essentially intact, retaining its original boxed wooden cornice with cyma bed molding.

The icehouse may also be original to the complex. Surviving nineteenth-century icehouses are unusual, and this is one of the few in Powhatan County. On axis with the main house, it measures roughly nineteen feet square and has tall brick foundations of three-course American bond. Openings centered on the north and south sides of the foundations give access to the rubblestone cistern, which is roughly twelve feet in diameter and twenty to thirty feet deep. Originally, the icehouse may have been capped by a gable roof sitting directly on the foundations. The present framed superstructure, however, dates to the late nineteenth century. Comprising a single large room, it is entered through a door in the east gable end. This room was probably used for storing food and miscellaneous items: there is built-in shelving on the west wall. It has no interior sheathing, and there is no loft, although a few loose boards have been thrown across the three light tie beams, which are simply nailed to the rafter feet. The building does not employ a false plate. A small cupola at the center of the roof allows heat to dissipate, an important feature in an icehouse.

The latest contributing building at Paxton is the barn, which stands north of the icehouse along a farm lane giving access to several other small farm buildings that now fall within

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the bounds of a separate tract. Erected about 1880-1910, this three-bay, two-story, gable-fronted barn has a 27' x 37' main block flanked by integral two-story lean-tos. Circular-sawn timbers and wire nails are used throughout. (It is worth noting that formerly unsupported, twenty-seven-foot-long ceiling joints span the main unit.) This barn is typical of others of its period, having ample loft space for storing hay and fodder, and room below for wagons and livestock. The ground level was converted for vehicle use in this century; it now has cement floors and a rectangular pit believed to have been installed in the 1950s to manufacture the false-stone facing blocks used on the wellhouse and other outbuildings. The barn, like most other buildings on the farm, is now sheathed with asbestos shingles. A small cupola similar to that on the icehouse crowns the roof.

North of the barn and the east dwelling lies the Skelton family cemetery. Marked by tall cedars and surrounded by a partially ruined rubblestone wall, this cemetery contains a tall late-nineteenth or early-twentieth-century granite obelisk commemorating Ennion Skelton, his wife Catherine Gifford, and other members of the family.

Noncontributing elements on the property include a 1920s garage, a 1950s wellhouse, and a dilapidated mid-twentieth-century poultry house. Along the east side of the drive stand two small early-twentieth-century farm buildings formerly belonging to Paxton but now part of an adjoining parcel.

Jeff M. O'Dell

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INVENTORY

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Status</u>
1. Main dwelling	1819-20	Contributing building
2. West secondary dwelling	ca. 1810-20	Contributing building
3. East secondary dwelling	ca. 1820-40	Contributing building
4. Smokehouse	ca. 1820	Contributing building
5. Icehouse	ca. 1820; late 19C	Contributing building
6. Barn	ca. 1880-1910	Contributing building
7. Cemetery	ante 1840	Contributing site
8. Poultry house	mid 20C	Noncontributing structure
9. Wellhouse	1950s	Noncontributing structure
10. Garage	ca. 1920s	Noncontributing building

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Paxton was constructed for Ennion W. Skelton in 1819-1820, just after he purchased thirty-six acres of land on Genito Road from David Rattray and his wife Elizabeth on 19 August 1818. Skelton (12 September 1779-4 November 1836) was a New Jersey-born physician who had moved to Powhatan County about 1804. During the construction of the main dwelling the Skelton family may have lived in the small, one-room-plan, frame dwelling a few yards away; this house may have been the Rattrays' residence.

Skelton had attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. Before 1815 he married Catherine Gifford. Among their children was John G. Skelton (19 April 1815-31 October 1899), who followed his father into the practice of medicine.

Ennion W. Skelton, like many rural physicians in the early nineteenth century, obtained his income from sources other than his medical practice alone. On 1 March 1826 he formed a partnership with William L. Montague and William Murray to operate the Genito Mill that stood on the northeast bank of the Appomattox River about half a mile from Paxton. In July 1826 he and Murray purchased Montague's share in the partnership, and after Skelton's death his family inherited his own share. By 1860 there were fourteen mills in Powhatan County that were engaged in the milling of corn or wheat; the Genito Mill was the largest operation, employing two hands and producing two thousand bushels of corn meal annually. The mill continued in operation at least through the mid-1880s.

Skelton died on 4 November 1836, the night he dictated his will to his wife and children; his will was recorded on 1 December 1836. He directed that the expenses of the education of his son John G. Skelton, who probably was in medical school at the time, be paid out of the residue of his estate. He also told his family that he wished his "residence and the lot, thereto belonging with all the household and Kitchen furniture, stock, utensils, and everything on it except the slaves shall

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belong to my wife during her life & at her death to my son John." Upon Catherine Skelton's death in 1849, in accordance with his will, the house became the property of their son, John G. Skelton.

Dr. John G. Skelton was educated in private schools and at the University of Virginia. He graduated from the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in April 1838 and returned to Paxton, where he established a general practice. He married Charlotte F. Randolph about 13 October 1841; she died three years later. By 1860 Skelton was one of the most prosperous men in Powhatan County, due to his medical practice, his share in the Genito Mill, and his farming operations at Paxton. Besides raising livestock consisting of horses, mules, milch cattle, oxen, other cattle, and swine, Skelton produced corn, wheat, oats, tobacco, hay, peas, beans, Irish and sweet potatoes, honey, butter, and even a gallon of wine at Paxton. He was a large slaveholder, with forty-seven slaves including twenty-two males and twenty-five females.

During the Civil War, according to the University of Pennsylvania alumni directory, Skelton "dispensed medical aid to the wounded soldiers and their families in the neighborhood of his plantation and surrounding country." Skelton moved to Richmond in 1866, where he joined the Virginia State Medical Society and became president of the Richmond Academy of Medicine. In 1869 he was appointed a lecturer at the summer session of Richmond Medical College; his subject was "diseases of women and obstetrics." Perhaps because of this appointment, Skelton made permanent his move to Richmond, where he resided at 505 East Grace Street. In June 1869 he sold the Paxton house and tracts of land totaling 720 acres to Charles Richards, of New York. The property has changed hands many times since then, until its current owners purchased it in 1989.

Except for the addition of modern amenities, Paxton has changed little over the years since it was built. It retains several of its outbuildings, including a smokehouse, icehouse, and two small secondary dwellings or offices. Near the house is the Skelton family cemetery, which contains not only the grave of Ennion

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W. Skelton, the builder of Paxton, but also those of his parents (Josiah and Mary Skelton) and several of his descendants. The cemetery was mentioned in John G. Skelton's deed of 1869; he reserved

to himself and his heirs the small enclosure in rear of the Paxton house used as a burying ground for his family with the right of approach or entry to the same for the purpose of interment therein or to repair and improve the same. The said lot being now surrounded by a rock wall.

The rock wall still stands, as does a memorial obelisk for the family buried there.

Today Paxton remains an unusually well-preserved domestic complex in a serene rural setting. Both the main dwelling and the outbuildings have retained much of their integrity, making Paxton an important survival of an early-nineteenth-century farm complex, a sight once common in Powhatan County.

John S. Salmon

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9. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

77°52'30" 247000m E. 248 249 50' 37°30'

4153000m N.

References:

- 24105 - 4150000
- 247170 - 4149840
- 247060 - 4149780
- 246920 - 4149900

PAXTON

27'30"

4149

4148

