

VLR-3/20/84 NRHP-5/3/84

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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date entered

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic MOREA

(VHLC 104-44)

and/or common N/A

## 2. Location

street &amp; number 209-11 Sprigg Lane

N/A not for publication

city, town Charlottesville

N/A vicinity of

state Virginia

code 51

county (in city)

code 540

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: arboretum

## 4. Owner of Property

name University of Virginia, c/o President

street &amp; number P.O. Box 9004

city, town Charlottesville

N/A vicinity of

state Virginia 22906-9004

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City of Charlottesville Circuit Court

street &amp; number 315 East High Street

city, town Charlottesville

state Virginia 22901

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys (2) (See Continuation Sheet #1)

(1) Charlottesville Historic  
title Landmarks Studyhas this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1976

☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records City Hall, East Main Street

city, town Charlottesville

state Virginia 22901

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Situated in a 2.6-acre yard a quarter mile northwest of the University of Virginia's original campus, Morea is a substantially unaltered 2½-story brick dwelling built in 1835. While the house shares many features with the standard vernacular buildings of the area, it exhibits others that are highly unusual, if not unique. These include an original recessed second-story veranda, an interior structural arcade, and a semi-detached office wing.

Later additions to the house are concentrated to the rear and one side of the original unit and blend harmoniously with it. The property as a whole is enhanced by the well-kept yard planted with boxwood hedges, ancient shade trees, and a wide variety of ornamental plants and shrubs.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Originally a 106-acre farm situated a quarter mile northwest of the Rotunda at the University of Virginia, Morea is presently a 2.6-acre tract surrounded by private suburban residences and university buildings. The focus of the property is the 1835 dwelling, which stands near the center of the tract, 40 yards north of Sprigg Lane and 150 yards west of Emmet Street (U.S. 29). Facing due east, it occupies a level yard and is surrounded by mature shade trees. The Albemarle Garden Club currently maintains the yard as a botanical garden.

The house at Morea is a rectangular, 2½-story brick structure with a small original southwest wing, a 19th-century north addition, and two shallow 20th-century rear extensions. The main block of the house is substantially unchanged from its 1835 appearance, and the recessed north addition does not intrude on its visual integrity.

Although the original part of the house conforms in most respects to the standard building traits of the region, it does incorporate several features that make it unique among contemporary Virginia dwellings. These features include the recessed second-story piazza, or veranda; the exposed structural arcade in the front room; the absence of a fireplace or stove flue in this same room; and the semi-detached position of the original southwest wing.

Judging from an 1834 letter, John Patten Emmet, the original owner of the house, played a key role in its design.<sup>1</sup> Emmet, the first professor of natural history at the University of Virginia, was widely known for his scientific experiments and inventions. He was also a skilled draftsman, though his known drawings are confined to images of people, plants, and animals and diagrams of such abstract physical phenomena as light refraction.<sup>2</sup> Based on the unusual character of the house, on two surviving documentary sources, and on Emmet's known penchant for invention, it seems reasonable to attribute the design of the building to him.

The actual builder of the house is not known. Emmet purchased the basically unimproved property from John M. Perry, a local builder and contractor, in 1831. Perry,

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

History of American education.

**Specific dates** 1835 **Builder/Architect** Designed by John Patten Emmet

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Located a quarter mile northwest of Thomas Jefferson's "academical village" at the University of Virginia, Morea is the only surviving dwelling built by one of the original university faculty members approved by Jefferson. Erected in 1835, the largely unaltered two-story brick structure was designed by its owner, John Patten Emmet, the school's first professor of natural history. Emmet's design is of particular architectural interest, being inventive but unpretentious and combining traditional Virginia building forms with Classical details popularized by Jefferson. The dwelling's innovative features reflect the character of its first owner, who was a noted inventor as well as a teacher and scientist. Morea was acquired by the university in 1960 to serve as a residence for visiting professors, scholars, and artists. Since 1962 the grounds have been cultivated as a botanical garden by the Albemarle Garden Club--an appropriate tribute to Mr. Emmet, who bought the property mainly to pursue his hobbies of silk making, horticulture, and wine making, and who developed Morea's original landscaping. Morea is named after the Chinese mulberry tree, Morus multicaulis, the leaves of which form the silkworm's principal diet.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Morea is essentially the creation of one individual: John Patten Emmet, who lived there during the last six years of his life. Emmet was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1796, the second son of Irish nationalist Thomas Addis Emmet (1764-1827) and nephew of Irish patriot and folk hero Robert Emmet. In 1804, having been held as a political prisoner for four years in a Dublin jail, Thomas Emmet arranged to move his family to New York City. There, he rose rapidly to become one of the nation's leading lawyers, espousing the cause of New York's burgeoning Irish population.<sup>1</sup>

John Patten Emmet began his schooling at a classical academy on Long Island and at age eighteen entered the United States Military Academy at West Point. There, his outstanding mathematical abilities earned him an assistant professorship while still an undergraduate. Because of chronic health problems, he was forced to withdraw from West Point in 1817. He spent the next year recuperating in Naples, Italy, where he studied music, sculpture, and painting. In 1819 he returned to New York City and entered medical school, working as a special assistant to the professor of chemistry. On graduating in 1822, he moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where he established a short-lived private medical practice.<sup>2</sup>

Because of his reputation as an inventor and chemist, Emmet was recommended in 1825 for the chair of Professor of Natural History at Thomas Jefferson's newly formed University of Virginia. Accepting the post with enthusiasm, he arrived in Charlottesville

## 9. Major Bibliographical References (See Continuation Sheet #10)

Albemarle County Deed Books, Will Books, Plat Books, and Land Tax Books.

Bruce, Philip Alexander. History of the University of Virginia, 1819-1919. 5 vols. New York: Macmillan Company, 1920-22. Vol. 2, pp. 14-18, 52, 57, 99-100, 388; Vol. 3, p. 15; Vol. 4, p. 131. Also on W. Echols, Vol. 4, pp. 254-62, 285.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property 2.6 acres

Quadrangle name Charlottesville West, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	1	7
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 Zone 

7	1	8
---	---	---

 Easting 

6	1	3	1	0
---	---	---	---	---

 Northing 

4	1	2	1	1	2	9	1	2	1	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

B 

--	--	--

 Zone 

--	--	--

 Easting 

--	--	--

 Northing 

--	--	--

C 

--	--	--

 Zone 

--	--	--

 Easting 

--	--	--

 Northing 

--	--	--

D 

--	--	--

 Zone 

--	--	--

 Easting 

--	--	--

 Northing 

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E 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing 

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F 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing 

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G 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing 

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H 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on N side of Sprigg Lane, about 350' NW of intersection with U.S. 29; thence extending about 325' NE; thence about 355' NW; thence about 325' SW to N side of Sprigg Lane; thence about 355' along said side to point of origin. (Charlottesville Deed Book 218, p. 425, March 28, 1960.)

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries** (See Continuation Sheet #11)

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date March 1983

street & number 221 Governor Street

telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond

state Virginia 23219

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date March 20, 1984

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Continuation sheet #1

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey  
1967, 1977, 1983 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

7. DESCRIPTION--Architectural Analysis

among others, had a hand in constructing Thomas Jefferson's original "academical village," and he is known to have directed other private building projects in the area after the university was completed in 1824. However, the county tax records show that the present house at Morea was not constructed until 1834-35, and Perry is known to have moved to Missouri around 1834, if not before.<sup>3</sup>

Morea displays a number of minor affinities to Thomas Jefferson's nearby university buildings. The house contains a three-arched masonry arcade, a Classical device seldom employed in private dwellings in Virginia before Jefferson helped popularize it in the early 19th century. (It should be noted, however, that at Morea the arcade is used for purely structural purposes, not as a decorative device, as on the Lawn buildings.) The detailing of the house also conforms to that used at the university. As at the university pavilions, a Chinese trellis railing circles the second-floor porch at Morea. The Roman Doric columns are simplified versions of those used on several university buildings, and the architrave door and window trim is all but identical to the type found at the university. (It was also used at other contemporary dwellings in the area.) Oversize windows with large panes of glass resemble those used at the university, and the second-story window sills are positioned only a foot above floor level--another distinctive characteristic of some Jeffersonian buildings.<sup>4</sup>

Because of its idiosyncratic features and its relation to the nearby Jeffersonian buildings at the university, Morea is a particularly noteworthy architectural survival. Its interest is enhanced by the existence of a detailed drawing made in 1879 by Thomas Addis Emmet, son of the house's original owner. This sketch, which is appended to this report, was drawn by Emmet as he knew it at age sixteen. The inscription at the lower left-hand corner of the drawing reads: "'Morea,' drawn by T.A.E. from memory after an interval of 34 years. Jan. 20, 1879." Emmet's memory was uncannily accurate, and his drawing clearly shows the changes made to the house since 1845, as well as the form and location of an early outbuilding and the now-missing rear veranda.<sup>5</sup>

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

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**7. DESCRIPTION--Architectural Analysis**

Following is a detailed description of the original portion of the house. The main block is a 2½-story brick structure with low-pitched gable roof and two pedimented front dormers. The house rests on continuous masonry foundations with a windowless basement under its rear half. The building has an unconventional double-pile floor plan and a symmetrical three-bay front. It is heated by a single interior end chimney centered on the ridge. This chimney feeds a single fireplace on the main floor and two corner fireplaces on the second floor. The most distinctive exterior feature of the house is its second-story front piazza, which rests not on a lower veranda, but on the front half of an original enclosed room. The brick wall facing on this piazza is supported by a series of three brick arches longitudinally bisecting the front room.

At the south rear corner of the main block stands an early if not original one-room-plan brick wing. This wing, which probably served as an office, has no direct communication with the main block and is attached to it by only a three-foot length of wall. Originally this wing, whose gable end parallels the east front of the main block, had 1½-story elevations with a single north dormer. The roof of this unit was raised to a full two stories in the 20th century and was extended about eighteen feet south to form the present two-room-plan wing.

The brickwork of both the main block and the southwest wing is closely similar, if not identical. High-quality Flemish bond appears on the east front and south sides of both units, while less costly five-course American bond with Flemish variant appears on the north side and west rear of the main block. Queen closers are used at all openings and corners. Visible brick arches are not used over any doors or windows; instead the openings are bridged by hidden masonry, wooden, or metal lintels. Although the brickwork has been patched and repointed in several places, it is by and large intact, forming a continuous, uninterrupted skin. It is clear from examining this brickwork that the entire main block was built as a unit.

Exterior detailing on the original sections of the house remains largely intact. Doors and windows have wooden two-tier architrave casings. Most windows--which are the same size on both upper and lower stories--contain their original oversize 6/6-light sash. An exception is the second-floor windows on the south facade, which now contain casements. Pairs of small four-pane windows light either gable end at the third story. Original louvered shutters remain at some windows. (It is worth noting that the 1879 drawing of the house shows horizontally split, two-tier shutters at the south windows--a type that is rarely seen today.) Originally raised-panel doors with double leaves open at the front of the house, but the top light appears to be a later addition.

The second-story front piazza is supported by four identical hollow wooden Roman Doric columns. The porch railing follows a Chinese trellis motif similar to the railings used on the Jeffersonian buildings at the university; all segments are identical but the central one, which has a slightly more detailed design. The wooden cornice of the porch is simple and, like most other detailing, appears to be original. The two front dormers

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

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**7. DESCRIPTION--Architectural Analysis**

with undersize pediments are unusually deep because of the low pitch of the main roof. They are embellished at the cornice by multiple cyma moldings and a bed mold of dentils. Though the present red-painted metal roof sheathing is not original, structural evidence in the attic suggests the roof may have been covered with metal from the beginning.

One of the few significant changes to the main block has been the addition of the present first-floor deck and entry porch. Though modern, they are of pleasing form and in keeping with the style of the house. Judging from Thomas Emmet's 1879 drawing, the house originally had only a stoop at the front entry, with no door hood or shelter of any kind. Other alterations include transforming two original windows to doors: one on the south facade of the main block, and the other on the south facade of the southwest wing. In addition, a modern brick flue was installed at the southeast corner of the house to accommodate a 1960s kitchen.

The first-floor plan of the main block at Morea is quite simple, though unconventional. A large rectangular room spanning the front of the house is bisected by a structural arcade supporting the brick wall above. The space behind this room is occupied by a single large room (formerly a parlor, but now a dining room) with an enclosed stair along its north wall. The unusually wide (4'-10") straight-run stair is entered from a small vestibule at the rear of the house. This stair, according to oral testimony, was reversed in the second quarter of this century; originally it led upstairs from the front room.

The second-floor plan in the main block is even simpler, being of standard double-pile, side-passage configuration. The third or attic floor is divided into three small rooms separated by vertical-board partitions.

Like its exterior trim, most of Morea's interior detailing is intact. Bold architrave casings similar to those used elsewhere in Albemarle and at the university define all openings.

There are no chair rails and no ceiling cornices in any of the original rooms, and there probably never were any. The present plastering has been renewed, but the six-inch-wide pine flooring is mostly original.

The classical revival mantel with fluted Ionic pilasters in the main rear room is a 20th-century replacement. The front room never had a fireplace or stove flue, but a wide doorway opening into the rear room would have helped circulate heat. A fireplace was not installed in the front room for a variety of aesthetic and practical reasons. First, an end chimney would have had to be squeezed to one side of the brick arcade, thereby visually unbalancing the room. Moreover, a chimney rising from the ends of this room would have either blocked a downstairs opening or enclosed one side of the upper veranda. A chimney positioned at the rear, or west wall, of the room would have protruded through the middle of the upstairs bedroom. The lack of a fireplace in the front room, then, can simply be attributed to the technical difficulty of inserting

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

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7. DESCRIPTION--Architectural Analysis

one. Considering that in the antebellum period sleeping chambers were often entirely unheated, the absence of a fireplace here is not surprising. Moreover, the large south and east windows--unblocked by porches--would have provided some added measure of warmth to this room during the winter.

Most original interior detailing survives on the second as well as the first floor of the main block. The rear or southwest chamber retains its corner-fireplace mantel with simple architrave surround and plain shelf. The railing guarding the stairwell in the passage is also original, consisting of a delicate turned Federal-style newel, rectangular-section balusters, and a round banister. The mantel in the front bedroom, though, has been removed, and the original flooring throughout the second story has been covered with narrower pine boards.

The third, or attic story, has never been remodeled. Reached by an enclosed, straight-run stair, it is divided into three small rooms by beaded, vertical-board partitions. Except for their beaded edges, door and window casings are utterly plain. The walls retain their original plaster, and some display patches of early stenciled papering. This wallpaper probably antedates 1875 and may be original to the house. (In an 1834 letter, the original owner asked his sister-in-law to send wallpaper matching a sample he had enclosed.)<sup>6</sup> This paper, which is now in poor condition, features a delicate stippled floral pattern in red, bluish green, and white. A contrasting edging paper with light green and gold stripes and repeating floral motif serves as a border at the top of the kneewall and around openings.

Morea's only early addition is the two-story north wing, probably erected by the Duke family in the third quarter of the 19th century. Recessed eleven feet from the front of the main block, it is built of brick laid in five-course American bond with Flemish variant and features a brick dentil cornice. This wing originally had two front (east) openings, but the door, which featured a round- or elliptical-arched head, was blocked up during the 1962 renovations. The frame first-floor bay window on the north side of this wing is probably a late 19th-century addition.

The north wing contains a single large room on the main floor and two bedrooms above. The original detailing downstairs was replaced by the present Jeffersonian-style trim when the university remodeled the house in 1962. A notable feature of the parlor is the late 18th- or early 19th-century, Adam-style English mantel. Installed in the 1960s, it is richly embellished with applied molded-paste floral decoration. The frieze tablet, molded in high relief, depicts a scene from Classical mythology.

The only other additions to the house consist of a rear extension to the southwest wing; a one-room-plan rear addition to the north wing, and a nine-foot-deep brick extension at the back of the main block. This latter addition, built in the mid-20th century, provides a brick porch arcade on the first floor and an enclosed passage and bath on the second. The only major change to the interior of the house was the insertion in the 1960s of a kitchen in the south third of the original front room.



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7. DESCRIPTION--Architectural Analysis

Today the only outbuilding on the property is a modern brick garage at the south-east corner of the yard. Formerly, an early one-room-plan brick structure--perhaps originally a kitchen--stood in the back yard about forty feet northwest of the main block. This was demolished in the early 1960s. Another outbuilding stood on the north side of the house in the 1840s, according to Thomas Emmet's 1879 drawing. This one-room-plan brick structure may have been the dwelling's original kitchen, as it had a fenced yard and was connected to the main block by a ten- or fifteen-foot breezeway. This building was probably demolished when the north wing was built.

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<sup>1</sup>Emmet proudly wrote his sister-in-law that the house at Morea was "contrived by myself." Quoted in Thomas Addis Emmet, A Memoir of John P. Emmet, M.D.... (New York: By the author, 1898), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Many of Emmet's original drawings exist in leather-bound notebooks at the Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville. Several sketches of people and room interiors--as well as the exterior view of Morea--are reproduced in T.A. Emmet, A Memoir of John P. Emmet, M.D....

<sup>3</sup>Albemarle County Land Tax Books; and William B. O'Neal, "The Workmen at the University of Virginia, 1817-1826: With Notes and Documents," The Magazine of Albemarle County History, Vol. 17 (1958-59), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>For floor plans<sup>and elevations</sup> of the university Pavilions, see Frederick D. Nichols, Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Drawings (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1961),

<sup>5</sup>The writer has noticed only three inconsistencies between Thomas Emmet's 1879 sketch and the actual house at Morea. First, Emmet shows a window at the eastern extremity of the south wall of the main block. Actually, this window was probably located further west, where the present door is. The brickwork around this door suggests it was fashioned from a former window, and there is no change in the brickwork at the eastern end of this wall indicating an earlier window has been filled in. Second, the 1879 drawing shows all segments of the Chinese lattice porch railing to be identical. Today, however, the central segment differs from the others, and the architectural evidence suggests it is early if not original. Third, Emmet shows both a window and a door opening onto the front of the east piazza. Today both openings are doors, and both appear to be original.

<sup>6</sup>In a December 7, 1834, letter to his sister-in-law in New York City, John Emmet writes, "Mary requests me to ask that you will give the enclosed sample of room paper, No. 43, to Margaret with the view of procuring a piece of the same kind to be sent to us in the Spring. Mary Ann, I believe, purchased it." Reproduced in T.A. Emmet, p. 41.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

that same spring, taking up residence in Pavilion I on the West Lawn. As head of the department of Natural History, he was initially charged with delivering lectures in the fields of zoology, botany, mineralogy, chemistry, geology, and rural economy. Two years later, the Board of Visitors lightened his responsibilities by assigning him the more manageable post of Professor of Chemistry and Materia Medica.<sup>3</sup>

Emmet proved to be one of the school's hardest-working and most popular lecturers. He was noted for his wit and humor, and his well-attended classes were filled with professors and townspeople as well as students.<sup>4</sup> Despite a heavy teaching load, Emmet managed to pursue a broad range of scientific studies and experiments while at the university. He was among the first scientists to suggest the use of a vacuum as a source of motive power, and he published numerous articles in the fields of optics, chemistry, and electricity. He also engaged in more practical pursuits, experimenting with chemical fertilizers, establishing a local porcelain manufactory, and inventing a cement said to be impervious to water.<sup>5</sup>

In 1831 Emmet purchased a 106-acre farm near the university from John M. Perry, who lived at nearby Montebello. Perry had been employed by Jefferson as one of the university's chief builders during construction of the Rotunda and other original buildings. The improvements on Emmet's new tract, however, were rudimentary, showing a tax value of only \$300. It was at Morea--several years before silkworm culture became a popular mania in Virginia--that Emmet carried out a series of successful silk making experiments. Having planted a good stock of Chinese mulberry trees, he invented a machine that refined and speeded the thread-reeling process. He also erected a brick structure on the property<sup>6</sup> for spinning the silk, and he drew on his knowledge of chemistry to develop a series of brilliant dyes for coloring the cloth. Nevertheless, after several years of work, he abandoned the project, concluding that the high cost of labor made local silk production impractical. His discoveries, though, were adopted by those who came after him, and his dyeing methods remained popular until the discovery of aniline products several decades later.<sup>7</sup>

Some time after acquiring the Morea tract, Emmet received special permission from the Board of Visitors to transfer his residence from Pavilion I to Morea.<sup>8</sup> (According to Jefferson's original plan, all professors were to live on campus in specially designed residences, or pavilions, which also served as lecture halls.) In 1834-35, Emmet spent \$2,500 building his new home. He describes it proudly in an 1834 letter to his sister-in-law: "Although contrived by myself, I may venture to assert that a more comfortable country house does not exist in these parts for the same cost..."<sup>9</sup>

Emmet clearly designed the dwelling to fit his own peculiar needs and tastes. The house has two very large main-floor rooms--one of which may have been used as a lecture hall<sup>10</sup>--and a rear stair for privacy. Windows are oversize, admitting ample light, and a semi-detached wing probably served as an office.<sup>11</sup> The distinctive upper-level verandas at Morea may have been designed in part to accommodate Emmet's extensive collection of plants. His colleague Dr. A.T. Magill wrote that Emmet "had designed a roof garden for Morea, from which novelty in architecture great wonders were expected. (One day) a heavy rain had fallen, and I found Dr. Emmet on the roof up to his knees in mud, trying

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

to stop the leaks... The garden was being rapidly transferred to the lower stories."<sup>12</sup> It is uncertain whether the roof garden Magill describes was part of the present dwelling or a separate, now vanished structure. Nonetheless, the present upstairs piazza at Morea remains an architectural novelty.

Emmet married Mary Byrd Tucker in 1827, two years after arriving at the university, and in 1835 he brought his wife and three children to live at Morea. His father-in-law, George Tucker, wrote that:

After remov(ing) to the land he purchased, (Emmet) turned his attention to horticulture, and the subject of husbandry generally. Here he was constantly planning improvements, making experiments on manures, and introducing delicate fruits, new species of esculents, and, above all, rare flowers. His experiments in live hedges were various; and his pyrocanthus fence, had he lived to perfect it, promised to keep out even that part of our live stock which has hitherto defied every form of this species of enclosure. It would be impossible for me to enumerate all that thus employed him. It ranged from the petty concerns of domestic economy to the highest effort of practical science--from the pyroligneous acid, by which the housewife was taught a shorter and better process of curing her hams, to the direct application of steam to rotary motion.<sup>13</sup>

Emmet, who had been plagued with ill health since childhood, died suddenly in August 1842 while traveling from Charleston to New York. He was buried in the Marble Cemetery in New York City. At their first meeting in the fall of that year, the University of Virginia faculty passed a resolution paying tribute to Emmet for his seventeen years of distinguished service to the community.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after returning to Morea, Emmet's widow began taking in boarders to help meet expenses.<sup>15</sup> She died three years later, and in 1847 Richard Duke purchased the 106-acre parcel from John Emmet's estate. Duke died two years later, but the property remained in the hands of his descendants for the next half century. Duke's daughter Mary, wife of Frank Willoughby Smith, also kept boarders in the house after her husband's death. According to tradition, the Rev. William H. McGuffey, author of the McGuffey Reader and other children's books, took his meals at Morea for several years.<sup>16</sup>

During the Civil War, Morea was filled with members of the Duke and Smith families who had fled from various parts of the South. Over twenty people occupied the house during the final years of the war, and the porches were partitioned off into sleeping rooms in warm weather.<sup>17</sup> The house also saw service as a hospital for wounded soldiers. R.T.W. Duke, Jr., wrote in his memoirs that "some of the wounded 'Canvalesced' at Morea. One was a Texan by whom I saw the first cigarettes made. He used the tender inside of the corn shuck instead of paper & I took great pride in getting the shuck for him and cutting it into proper lengths."<sup>18</sup>

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

Soon after the war Mary Smith died, leaving Morea to her niece Nancy Deskins Robinson. In 1895 Mrs. Robinson sold the house with twenty acres of land for \$6,750. The property subsequently passed through the hands of several short-term owners, including James C. Sprigg, for whom nearby Sprigg Lane is named.<sup>19</sup> In 1929 Prof. and Mrs. William Holding Echols purchased Morea as their retirement home. Echols (1859 - 1934) held long tenure as head of the university's School of Mathematics. He is perhaps best remembered for the crucial role he played in the university's Great Fire of 1895. Echols was one of the first to spot the burning Rotunda Annex, and he quickly commandeered enough dynamite to destroy the arcades connecting the Rotunda and the Ranges. Though sustaining a serious injury in the process, he managed to save the rest of the university buildings.<sup>20</sup>

Echols's widow and son lived at Morea until Dr. Sam Vest acquired the property in the 1950s. Vest planned to develop the parcel into small house lots but died before he could carry out his plan. Vest's action alerted alumni and local residents who wanted to see the property preserved. A group led by Dr. William S. Weedon, Mary Stuart Cocke Goodwin, and others raised enough money from alumni and interested citizens to purchase the parcel in 1960. In March of that year the Alumni Association donated the property to the Rector and Board of Visitors of the university, with the intention that it serve as a residence "for...distinguished visitors to the University."<sup>21</sup> Since then, residents have included the architect Joseph Stein, Spanish writer Anna Maria Matute, legal authority Dr. Arthur L. Goodhart, and French novelist Michel Chaillou.<sup>22</sup>

Two years after Morea had been presented to the university, members of the Albemarle Garden Club established a botanical garden on the property. The club intended to commemorate Thomas Jefferson, who during his later years planned to build a botanical garden at the university for study purposes. Jefferson discussed this project with John Emmet, delegating him the task of laying out a garden of "useful plants" on university grounds. Emmet started directing work on the garden in the spring of 1826; however, following Jefferson's death that July, the Board of Visitors called off the project, and future attempts to resurrect the garden scheme fell prey to budgetary shortages.<sup>23</sup>

The Albemarle Garden Club chose Morea as the site for its proposed garden because of its accessibility to the university and its associations with Emmet, who had carried out a variety of botanical experiments there. (Today several 19th-century shade trees--some possibly planted by Emmet--stand on the property, including black walnuts, locusts, Kentucky coffee bean trees, and a gigantic basswood.) Over a period of twenty years, the garden club has planted, catalogued, and mapped over eighty varieties of plants at Morea. Today the grounds are open periodically to the public and are used regularly as a teaching laboratory by the university.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Columbia Encyclopedia, s.v. "T.A. Emmet;" "Robert Emmet;" and B.F.D. Runk, "John Patten Emmet," The Magazine of Albemarle County History, Vol. 13 (1953), p. 54.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--Footnotes

<sup>2</sup>Philip Alexander Bruce, History of the University of Virginia, 1819-1919, 5 vols. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1920-22), vol. 2, pp. 14-16; Runk, pp. 55-57.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce, vol. 2, p. 100; Runk, pp. 58-59, 61.

<sup>4</sup>George Tucker, Memoir of the Life and Character of John P. Emmet, M.D. (Philadelphia, 1845), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-16.

<sup>6</sup>This building burned in the 19th century, apparently during Emmet's tenure, and no detailed description of it exists. Thomas Addis Emmet, A Memoir of John P. Emmet, M.D.... (New York: By the author, 1898), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Tucker, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>T. Emmet, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup>It is not proven that Emmet used Morea for his lectures, but it seems a reasonable possibility. The Pavilions were all used for lectures, Emmet was given special permission to leave Pavilion I for Morea, and Morea was close enough to the university to make attendance no burden.

<sup>11</sup>A similar semi-detached office wing exists at Point of Honor in Lynchburg (ca. 1815).

<sup>12</sup>Bruce, vol. 2, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Tucker, pp. 18-19.

<sup>14</sup>This resolution appears in full in Runk, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup>Bruce, vol. 3, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Bruce, vol. 3, p. 90; Telephone interview with Miss Martha W. Duke, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2 March 1983.

<sup>17</sup>Martha Duke interview.

<sup>18</sup>John Hammond Moore, Albemarle, Jefferson's County (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 204.

<sup>19</sup>Miscellaneous interviews and Albemarle court records.

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<sup>20</sup>Bruce, vol. 4, pp. 254-63, 285.

<sup>21</sup>Marion Nolan, "Historic Property Threatened by Plan for Student Housing," (Charlottesville) Daily Progress, 6 March 1983, p. E-3.

<sup>22</sup>Miscellaneous newspaper clippings, Charlottesville file 104-44, Morea, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives, Richmond, Va.

<sup>23</sup>Bruce, vol. 2, pp. 99-101.

<sup>24</sup>Nolan; miscellaneous interviews.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA--Boundary Justification

Boundary Justification: The bounds have been drawn to include the entire 2.6-acre property as shown in the plat in the City of Charlottesville Deed Book 217, p. 373, the last surviving intact portion of the original 106-acre farm.

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USGS 7.5' quadrangle  
Charlottesville West, VA

(scale:1:24000)  
1973 (PR 1978)

● Morea, 209-11 Sprigg Lane  
Charlottesville, VA

UTM Reference:

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