NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

1. NAME

Warren House

Rolle-Warren House

2. LOCATION

SR 31

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

District
Site
Object

Areture:

Public
Private
Both

Owner of Property

Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities

2705 Park Avenue

Richmond Virginia

4. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Surry County Courthouse

5. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Buildings Survey

Inventory

Title of Survey

Historic American Buildings Survey

Date of Survey: 1934, 1937, 1939, 1940

Federal State County Local

Library of Congress

Washington D.C.
The one and one-half story house of brick, laid in Flemish bond both above and below the water table, is five bays wide and one room deep. What appears at first to be a symmetrical facade with two windows flanking a central door is actually off center with a central axis slightly west of center. The raised basement is lighted by rectangular wooden grilles with diagonally placed horizontal bars set within segmental arches. The main floor windows have nine-over-nine sash, held by wide muntins. The gauged brick flat arches are partially obscured by the molded box cornice which is terminated by pattern boards at each end. The steeply pitched roof is pierced by three regularly placed flush-sided pedimented dormers containing windows of nine-over-six sash. At either end of the main roof is an interior end chimney with molded brick corbels.

The landward entrance, reached by replacement steps, is set within a segmental arch of rubbed and gauged brick, springing from rubbed brick piers. The entrance, possibly widened at an earlier date, had been reworked during the 1930s restoration. The door, composed of six raised panels, is set within a robustly molded architrave.

The north facade, which faces Gray's Creek, is almost identical to the landward elevation, except for the lack of the brick panels flanking the entrance. The gable ends are without openings except for a reconstructed basement entrance containing double doors in the south corner of the west end.

The interior follows a central hall plan one room deep. Along the west wall of the hall the handsome closed-string stair rises to a transverse landing and returns in a shorter reverse flight. The newel is square in plan, and turned balusters carry a molded rail. The walls are plastered above and below a wide heavily molded chair rail.

The east room, the larger of the two first floor rooms, has a flat-paneled wainscot on three walls. The central section of the wide chair rail forms the sill for the windows, which are set within splayed reveals. The focal point of the room is the east fireplace wall which exhibits striking floor-to-ceiling paneling. In the center above a segmental-arched fire opening is a paneled over-mantel. Stop-fluted pilasters set on pedestals flank the central area with the arched cupboards to either side. Two panels fill the arch, beneath which are double doors in two ranges giving access to the cupboards which are semi-circular in plan. The wall treatment is surmounted by a deep cornice articulated with a dentil course, all of which breaks about the pilasters.

In the west room the mantel has a segmental opening beneath two flat panels, the whole contained within an architrave capped with a molded shelf. To the left side of the fireplace is a cupboard similar to those flanking the fireplace in the east room, except that the panels beneath the chair rail are fixed to accommodate the exterior basement entrance below. To the right of the chimney is a six-panel door opening into the closet.

The second floor is similar in plan to the first, but the finish is considerably simpler. The west room mantel is composed of a rectangular architrave with a large flat panel above a segmental-arched opening. Narrow closet doors with four raised panels flank the mantel. The east room has no decoration around the segmental-arched fire opening. Doors to either side of the chimney lead to closets.

The basement is reached from the inside by a stair under the first flight of the main stair. It contains a large room to the west and a smaller one to the east.
The Warren House is an early Tidewater Plantation House well known for its traditional association with Thomas Rolfe, son of John Rolfe and Pocahontas, to whom the land descended as a gift from the Indian king Powhatan. The house is situated about one-half mile southeast of a promontory on the banks of Cray's Creek that is the location of Captain John Smith's "New Fort" from which the early plantation took its name.

According to a deposition made March 5, 1677, a fifty-foot brick house was built by Thomas Warren in 1652 at Smith's Fort Plantation. The house on the land previously owned by Thomas Rolfe had been sold to Warren, who resided there until his death in 1669, when the property was willed to his son, William.

Stylistically, the age of the existing house with its large regular window openings and superbly crafted woodwork exhibits characteristics more commonly associated with houses of at least one-half a century later. If it is a later house on the same site, it is ironic that it fits the dimensions described in 1652. Architectural evidence has not indicated that it was reconstructed on earlier foundation, but archaeological investigation revealed the presence of other early structures nearby.

The architectural merits of the structure and the degree of early fabric lasting into the twentieth century alone give it superlative significance. The original woodwork and hardware, when examined by specialists, were found to be of exceptional quality. Although the house was acquired in 1929 by the Williamsburg Trust, established by W. A. M. Rockefeller, Jr., it had fallen into disrepair. Ownership of the property was transferred to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities in 1933, and it was carefully restored by the firm of A. E. Kendrew and Singleton P. Moorehead, architects of the Williamsburg Restoration, at a cost of approximately $8,500.

A high degree of early fabric was present allowing most of the restoration to consist of replacement of deteriorated fabric. However, a rear addition was removed and reconstruction occurred where earlier evidence had all but disappeared such as the exterior basement entrance, front entrance, window sash. Archaeology at the site was done by Arthur A. Shurcliff.

The Warren House stands as a remarkably complete vestige of early Virginia Plantation life in the Tidewater. Though its form is compact, it exhibits sophisticated detailing of unusual quality.
Major Bibliographical References

Henderson, and Gardens in Old Virginia, Garden Club of Virginia, Richmond, 1962.


Geographical Data

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Approximate acreage of nominated property: 210

For preparation of nominated properties: overlapping State or County boundaries

Form prepared by

Bruce MacDougall

Organization: National Register Keeper of National Register

Date: Sept. 11, 1973

State Liaison Officer Certification

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

Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Date: OCT 16 1973
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY MAP FORM

1. NAME
COMMON: Warren House
AND/OR HISTORICAL: Rolfe-Warren House

2. LOCATION
STREET AND NUMBER:
SK 31
CITY OR TOWN:
Surry
STATE: Virginia
CODE 51
COUNTY: Surry
CODE 181

3. MAP REFERENCE
SOURCE:
U.S.G.S. 7 1/2' quadrangle Surry, Virginia
SCALE: 1:24000
DATE: 1965

4. REQUIREMENTS
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS
1. Property boundaries where required.
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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STATE: Virginia
CODE 51
COUNTY: Surry
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3. PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
DATE OF PHOTO: 1968
NEGATIVE FILED AT:

4. IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

View from southeast.