PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) _002-0154_

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

We wish to record the history of the house and the plantation community that lived here. That history includes both the physical improvements on the land -- the architectural features of the house and outbuildings in their historical setting, their modification over time, and their present condition – and the families of the owner and the enslaved who lived here, their origins and fates, and the relationships among them. Our documentation of that history includes substantial original research, including oral histories from descendants of the enslaved families here, that we believe it will be important to collect and preserve in materials supporting a historic register designation.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits?  Yes _____  No __x___
Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR’s easement program?  Yes ______  No ____x_

1. General Property Information

Property name: ____Bleak House__________________________________________

Property address:  3941 Bleak House Road _______________________________________
City or Town: Earlysville _____________________
Zip code: ___22936________________

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located:  _Albemarle________________________

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):
Building _X_  Site ____  Structure ____  Object ____

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: __________19+_______________________

Setting (choose only one of the following):
Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural__X___

Briefly describe the property’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

Bleak House is built on a ridge overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. Tall American boxwoods obscure the house from full view and many mature trees surround it. Towards the mountains, the adjoining heavily wooded property which was originally part of the Bleak House tract is now in conservation easement. Fields surround the house and garden area, one part of which is an old kitchen garden. Old plum trees lie between the kitchen and its garden.
3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Italianate

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: _______________________________________________________

If the builder is known, please list here: built by Dr. James Baber Rogers with enslaved labor. One of the enslaved, Armistead Woodfolk, was a carpenter and brick mason._____________________________________

Date of construction (can be approximate): ______1854-56__________________________

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

Bleak House was originally a two-story T-plan with an I-house front. It is made from bricks that were made and fired on location and laid in 5 Course American Bond with Flemish Variant on the exterior walls. The bricks show penciling both in the main house and in the outside kitchen. The house has deep eaves supported by carved brackets with corner brackets at each end. There are two triangular windows at the attic level on each of the side peaks and on back of the house, where the original windows were moved when a two-story addition was built in the 1950’s. At the attic level on the entrance side of the house, is a lunette window under the center peak. The roof is metal and steeply pitched.

Bleak House was modernized after having been abandoned for some years and indoor plumbing, central heat and electricity were added and a two-story addition was built at the back which contains a kitchen. What may have been an original porch area was in coming years enclosed to make a sunroom, and the kitchen was expanded in the early 2000’s.

The original sash windows are six over six. Those on the ground floor are eight feet in height. All windows have louvered shutters with hardware. Many have panes of original glass.

The front door is flanked by sidelights with a transom above of separate panels of glass. It opens into a hall with an open string quarter turn stair with ramped rail and a turned newel that is shaped something like a large crayon. There is a room on either side of the center hall and one behind it. There are fireplaces in the two parlor rooms and in the two original upstairs bedrooms. The mantels are simple pilasters with plain frieze and shelf, although two have fluted pilasters, one in one parlor and the other in one of the two original upstairs bedrooms. The doors are 4 panel doors with moldings on only one side. The ceilings are ten feet high. The dining room, behind the hall, has had its fireplace covered. The upstairs has two bedrooms on either side of the hall and the third bedroom is part of the 1950’s addition. (The original third bedroom was taken up with two upstairs bathrooms.)

The front of the house has a single-story porch with columns. A photograph in Historic Virginia shows that there was once a two-story porch, but the upper porch roof does not seem original to the house when it was built. The earlier columns were simple posts, not the Doric columns that have replaced them.

The attic has circular sawn rafters and roofing boards. The floors upstairs and in the attic are made from wide wooden boards. Those downstairs in the house had to be replaced during the 1950’s renovation because the house had been damaged by livestock entering it during the years it had been vacant.
Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

Immediately behind (to the north of) the house is a kitchen building that was constructed at the same time as the main house. This building has the same brickwork as the main house and similar eaves and brackets, although they are not so deep. The walls of the cellar of the kitchen also have the same brickwork pattern. The kitchen building has triangular vents under the overhang at the fireplace end. The roof is asphalt shingle. A single-room addition was made to the kitchen building around 1958. The kitchen building was the first to get indoor plumbing, heat and electricity and was lived in while the main house was modernized.

The barn was built in the early 1900’s when George Crickenberger and his family lived in and farmed Bleak House. It replaced and earlier barn which was nearby. The barn is now used for storage and for a workshop. It is a bank barn and is in stable condition.

There is a small wooden shed next to the kitchen garden which was built in 2021. It replaced a metal roofed L shaped building which we tore down as it was collapsing that was behind the house on the east side.

A number of outbuildings, including nine dwellings for African Americans enslaved on the property, are referenced in archival records. Historic architectural and domestic artifacts observed during utility trench excavations and eroding from landforms suggest that intact archeological deposits associated with those buildings and other structures and activity areas, are likely preserved on the property within and beyond the current architectural resource boundaries.
4. Property’s History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

The 692 acres of land on which Bleak House was later built, was purchased from three siblings, Dr. James W., David and Frances Michie, in 1836 by Dr. James B. Rogers (Albemarle County Deed Book 33, p. 168.). The land was part of an original land grant to John Henry, father of Patrick. The Michie siblings were the grandchildren of William Michie, who founded Michie’s Old Tavern, once located at the end of Bleak House Road on Buck Mountain Road. The Michies lived at Horseshoe Farm which is across Buck Mountain Creek from the original Bleak House land parcel. Another Michie family lived in Chestnut Avenue on the Eastern border of the land Rogers purchased.

James B. Rogers was the son of Parmenas Rogers, a magistrate and farmer, and a member of one of Albemarle’s prominent families, and married Margaret Lewis Wood, daughter of David Wood and Mildred Walker Lewis. Rogers’ mother-in-law was the daughter of Nicholas Lewis of the Farm and Mary Walker, daughter of Dr. Thomas Walker of Castle Hill. Several of those enslaved at Bleak House originally were enslaved by the Lewis family. Margaret and Dr. James Rogers had several children, Dr. William G. Rogers, Martha, wife of Dr. Alfred Wood, Charles P., and Margaret, wife of William Overton Terrell.

James B. Rogers spent 1817-1818 in Philadelphia studying at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. He married in 1819 and in 1824 bought land across from Longwood, a Michie property owned by James “Beau Jim” Michie on Buck Mountain Road. Following his father’s death, Rogers purchased the Bleak House land, although he did not move there until around 1854. It seems likely that he farmed it and may have had an overseer there living in an earlier farmhouse. In 1854, he turned over his house on Buck Mountain Road to his son, Charles P. Rogers, and by 1856 Bleak House would have been completed because there is a rise in taxes on the property tax records. In 1860 the census shows Rogers owned 41 slaves and they were housed in 9 slave houses.

In 1863, Rogers died without a will. There is no death register for that year, but a Fiduciary Accounting Record and the 1863 and 1864 Inventory and Appraisal of his estate tell much about the plantation he ran and those who were enslaved on it. There was a total of 50 slaves connected to Rogers at this time, either directly “owned” or advanced during his lifetime to his children, Dr. William G. Rogers, Martha Rogers Wood, and to his grandson Edward, son of his deceased son Charles. Although there was an 1864 sale of the personal property and animals inventoried, the enslaved were not sold. Rogers’ son, Dr. William G. Rogers, and his son-in-law, Dr. Alfred Wood, were executors of the will.

In 1870, the property went to S. V. Southall to settle debts owed to him by the Rogers’ estate. William G. Rogers noted that although at the time of the 1864 sale the revenue generated was adequate to pay off debts owed by the estate, the creditors would not accept Confederate money which was how the sales were made. A judge had told William to put the money in Confederate bonds which after the war had become worthless.

Southall sold several parcels of Bleak House land near the area of the estate that was close to Old Michie’s Tavern to African Americans, and this area remained an African American community until almost the mid-20th century. Another parcel was sold to an African American that was on the eastern part of the property adjoining Chestnut Avenue. The Bleak House land was rented for some years and then sold to George Crickenberger who farmed the land with his family until his death in 1944 (?)
There were several distinct families among those enslaved at Bleak House. Oral history of one family, the Evans, recounts that Hannah Wood, on the inventory of 1863 as 85 years old and with a negative worth of $300, was the cook and her daughter, Mariah, 47 years old and valued at $1000, was the housekeeper and perhaps the mother of several of Rogers's children. One of her children, Nathaniel “Link” Evans, became a blacksmith in Earlysville, where he purchased land and was a well-respected citizen. The small family cemetery where he and several other family members are buried was located on his property in Earlysville. His brother, William Bernard Evans, went to Storer College in Harpers Ferry and became a principal in the Bolivar, WV segregated school system. Another brother, Calvin, went to West Virginia where he first worked as a cook for the railroad and raised his family.

Lucy Wood Woodfolk, 63, and valued at $100 at the time of the 1863 Inventory, had been with the Rogers family since she was a young teenager. Lucy was the mother of at least seven children who were born into slavery while she was considered the property of James B. Rogers. Those children and their families made up a substantial part of Rogers workforce and his wealth. One of her children, Judy Woodfolk Reed, was the third African American woman to get a patent, Patent No. 305, 474, is dated Sept. 23, 1884. A son of Lucy’s, John, left Bleak House before Emancipation, perhaps during Custer’s Raid on Rio Mills, and soon enlisted and served in the Union Army. He later became the senior doorman for the Supreme Court. His brother, Armistead Woodfolk, was a carpenter and brick mason. Armistead’s hands would have been among the most skilled that worked to build Bleak House, perhaps supervising the work. Another of Lucy’s sons, Nelson, left Albemarle County after Emancipation for Iowa and lived in the unique community of Buxton, and worked for Consolidated Coal. Arthur Jefferson, 60, was the first enslaved to join the Rogers family. He was around 12 when he was listed in the division of slaves in David Woods’ will as going to Margaret Wood (soon to be Rogers). He died in 1818. Other family surnames are Walker, Whipps, Bibb and Houston.

Some of the Bleak House enslaved may have been taught during slavery by Fannie Rogers, James B. Rogers half-sister. She was an educator and taught in the first school for African Americans in Free Union, a neighboring town. A newspaper article by Vera Via from the 1950’s says that she taught the family slaves to read and write, and oral history from the Evans family says that Calvin Evans was taught by a “woman in the Rogers family.”

However, what emerges from learning about those enslaved at Bleak House is not that this was a group of people who received special training, special opportunities or special treatment, but rather that this was a place where we know that, once freed, its people began to make use of their freedom to achieve meaningful and important lives as contributors to the community and nation. Bleak House was built and farmed and cared for by these people and stands today as a visible reminder of all they created. The house and kitchen and landscape evokes the starting place they left to create new lives in freedom, fanning out away from the place where they had once lived enslaved.

5. Property Ownership  (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: ___ X ___ Public / Local _____ Public / State _____ Public / Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)
name/title: Alice P. Cannon and Jonathan Z. Cannon

organization:
street & number: 3941 Bleak House Road

city or town: Eadysville state: VA zip code: 22936

e-mail: jcannon@law.virginia.edu; bleakart@gmail.com telephone: 434 975-5497

Legal Owner's Signature: __________________________ Date: May 21 2022

* * Signature required for processing all applications. * *

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: __________________________

Daytime Telephone: __________________________

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: __________________________

organization: __________________________

street & number: __________________________

city or town: __________________________ state: __________________________ zip code: __________________________

e-mail: __________________________ telephone: __________________________

6. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title: Jeff Richardson, County Executive

locality: Albemarle County

street & number: 401 McIntire Road

city or town: Charlottesville state: VA zip code: 22902

telephone: 434 243-7929
Bleak House (Holly House) 002-0154

Bleak House Rd
Longwood 002-0380

Woodlands 002-0621

Created By: D. Bascone 5/26/2022
Sources: VDHR 2020, ESRI 2020, VDOT 2020, VGIN 2020
Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years and the representation depicted is based on the field observation date and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general illustration purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. The map may contain errors and is provided “as-is”. Contact DHR for the most recent information as data is updated continually.