

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED AUG 29 1980

DATE ENTERED NOV 25 1980

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**HISTORIC  
Charles Irving Thornton Tombstone (preferred)  
AND/OR COMMON

Thornton Tombstone

VLR Listed: 6/17/1980

NRHP Listed: 11/25/1980

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Oak Hill Road, Route 629 (Thornton Family Cemetery)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Cumberland State Park

X VICINITY OF Fifth (W. C. Daniel)

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Virginia

51

Cumberland County

049

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

## OWNERSHIP

## STATUS

## PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

## ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

X OBJECT:

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

Tombstone

BEING CONSIDERED

X YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

X OTHER: Cemetery

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Fred W. Walker, Director

Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Conservation and Economic Development

STREET &amp; NUMBER

1100 State Office Building

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Richmond

VICINITY OF

Virginia 23219

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cumberland County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Cumberland

STATE  
Virginia**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE

1980

FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

221 Governor Street

CITY, TOWN

Richmond

STATE  
Virginia 23219

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☒ GOOD although  
☐ FAIR broken

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED  
☐ ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Thornton Family Cemetery is located in the southernmost section of Cumberland State Forest off Oak Hill Road, a secondary road off Route 629 in Cumberland County. The cemetery is situated approximately 200 feet to the east of Oak Hill, the former homestead of the Thornton family. The site contains a number of mid-19th century marble gravestones and is surrounded by giant boxwood and covered by periwinkle.

Of principal interest is the Charles Irving Thornton marble headstone which has a rectangular body with rounded shoulders and a semicircular top. The stone bears the following carved inscription written by Charles Dickens:

THIS IS THE GRAVE of a little Child whom God  
in his goodness called to a Bright Eternity when  
he was very young. Hard as it is For Human Affection  
To reconcile itself To Death In any shape (and most  
of all, perhaps at First In this) HIS PARENTS can  
even now beleive (sic) That it will be a Consolation to  
them Throughout their lives and when they shall have  
grown old and grey always to think of him as a Child  
IN HEAVEN And Jesus Called a little Child unto him,  
and set him in the midst of them. He was the son of  
ANTHONY and M.I. THORNTON Called CHARLES IRVING. He  
was born on the 20th day of January 1841, and he died  
on the 12th day of March 1842. Having lived only  
13 months and 19 days.

At this writing, the stone has broken from its base and is scheduled to be repaired in the immediate future.

RCC

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The Charles Irving Thornton Tombstone is contained in the Thornton Family Cemetery. The nominated property of one acre is drawn to include the tombstone within the family cemetery which provides the appropriate setting. The cemetery site is defined by overgrown boxwood within an open field near the old Thornton homestead.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Charles Irving Thornton Tombstone, Cumberland County, Va.

Continuation sheet

#2

Item number

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received 11/24/80

date entered NOV 25 1980

7. DESCRIPTION

The Thornton Family Cemetery contains the Charles Irving Thornton tombstone along with a stone obelisk for "Little Kate," a marker for Eliza Allen, who died in September 1847, and a marker for Lucy Allen who died in October 1847. The one-acre cemetery tract also contains a number of unmarked graves that may be those of family slaves. The unmarked graves are scattered throughout the tract. The graveyard is distinguished by giant boxwood, magnolias and periwinkle that provide a marked contrast to the surrounding landscape that consists of open fields and farmland.

RCC

# 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 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 type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES                      1842                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT                      Carver unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Charles Irving Thornton Tombstone in the Thornton Family Cemetery, Cumberland County, is the only tangible reminder of Charles Dickens' visit to the Commonwealth during his United States tour of 1842. Already regarded as a major literary figure, the author penned the stone's inscription to commemorate the death of the Thornton infant in 1842. Only one other Dickens epitaph is known, that of his sister-in-law, making the Thornton example unique among his American writings.

The Richmond Whig of March 18, 1842 reported two seemingly unrelated incidents: the first, in the form of a notice, stated, "Mr. Dickens (the celebrated Boz) and his lady arrived in the City last evening, and took lodging at the Exchange."<sup>1</sup> The second incident was reported as an obituary: "On Saturday morning, the 12th instant, Charles Irving, son of Mr. Anthony Irving, of this city, aged 12 months."<sup>2</sup> The incidents became linked when the child's attending physician, Dr. Francis Henry Deane, asked the English author to write an epitaph for the child's grave. Deane was a native of Cumberland County, and was undoubtedly very close to the child's parents. Dickens responded by mail from Cincinnati, Ohio on April 4 with the hope that, "my good friends (for whose Christian names I have left blanks in the Epitaph) may like what I have written; and that they will take comfort, and be happy again."<sup>3</sup> Dickens' original text read as follows:

This is the Grave of a little child, whom God in his goodness called to a Bright Eternity, when he was very young. Hard as it is For Human affection To reconcile itself To Death, In any shape; (and most of all, perhaps, at First, In This) His Parents can even now believe That it will be a consolation to them, Throughout their lives, and when they shall have grown old and grey, always to think of him as a child. In Heaven. "and Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them." He was the son of A                      and M                      Thornton. christened Charles Irving 20th - - - He was born on the ~~twentieth~~ day of January 1841, and he died on the 12th day of March 1842, having lived only Thirteen Months, and nine days.

In an article appearing in the Virginia Cavalcade in the summer of 1971, Randolph W. Church speculates on Dickens' motivation for writing the epitaph: "Irving family tradition has it that Mrs. Thornton was a particularly beautiful woman to whom Dickens was greatly attracted. Also he may not have been unmindful of her relationship to his friend, Washington Irving. In any event Dickens was ever stirred by the death of the young innocent."<sup>4</sup>



## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Church, Randolph W. "Charles Dickens Sends His Sympathy." Virginia Cavalcade 21  
(Summer 1971): 42-47.

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

UTM NOT VERIFIED

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Hillcrest, Virginia

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1 : 24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 117 7375110 41521700  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Beginning at a point 2300' W of State Route 629, on N side of Oak Hill Road, approximately 1750' SE of Oak Hill Lake; thence extending 200' NNE; thence extending 200' SSE to N side of said road; thence extending 200' SW along said side of said road; thence extending 200' NNW to point of origin.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE

June 1980

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 X

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

TITLE Tucker Hill, Executive Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE JUN 17 1980

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
ATTEST: Emma Jane Saxe  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 11/25/80

DATE 11-80

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Charles Irving Thornton Tombstone, Cumberland County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET

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ITEM NUMBER

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Dickens returned to the United States in 1867 but traveled no farther south than Washington. The Thorntons moved permanently to New York City, leaving the grave of their infant child to the care of family and friends. The cemetery is now part of the Cumberland State Forest.

MTP/RCC

1

Richmond Whig, 18 March 1842.

2

Ibid.

3

Randolph W. Church, "An Epitaph for a Virginia Child," Virginia Cavalcade 21 (Summer 1971): 46.

4

Ibid.



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES  
JAMES L. CALVER, STATE GEOLOGIST

HILLCREST QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)  
NE/4 FARMVILLE 15' QUADRANGLE

