THEME: LITERATURE, DRAMA, MUSIC

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

*(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)*

| STATE: South Carolina | |
|---|---|
| COUNTY: Bamberg | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | |

## 1. NAME

COMMON: William Gilmore Simms Estate

AND/OR HISTORIC: "Woodlands"

## 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Three miles south of Bamberg on Highway 78 on south bank of the

CITY OR TOWN: South Branch of the Edisto River.

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
|---|---|---|---|
| South Carolina | | Bamberg | |

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ District ☒ Building<br>☐ Site ☐ Structure<br>☐ Object | ☐ Public<br>☒ Private<br>☐ Both | Public Acquisition:<br>☐ In Process<br>☐ Being Considered | ☒ Occupied<br>☐ Unoccupied<br>☐ Preservation work in progress | Yes:<br>☐ Restricted<br>☐ Unrestricted<br>☒ No |

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ Agricultural | ☐ Government | ☐ Park | ☐ Transportation | ☐ Comments |
| ☐ Commercial | ☐ Industrial | ☒ Private Residence | ☐ Other *(Specify)* | |
| ☐ Educational | ☐ Military | ☐ Religious | | |
| ☐ Entertainment | ☐ Museum | ☐ Scientific | | |

## 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Mrs. Mary Simms Oliphant (and others)

STREET AND NUMBER: 107 James Street

| CITY OR TOWN: | STATE: | CODE |
|---|---|---|
| Greenville | South Carolina 29609 | |

## 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Bamberg County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

| CITY OR TOWN: | STATE | CODE |
|---|---|---|
| Bamberg | South Carolina 20609 | |

## 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY: ☐ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

| CITY OR TOWN: | STATE: | CODE |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: South Carolina COUNTY: Bamberg

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

## 7. DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ☐ Excellent | XX Good | ☐ Fair | ☐ Deteriorated | ☐ Ruins | ☐ Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | (Check One) | | | |
| | ☒ Altered | ☐ Unaltered | ☐ Moved | XX Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"Woodlands" is a two story building with a five bay front. The doorway, which is set in a simple frontispiece, is slightly to the right of the center of the facade. The windows of the second floor are not aligned with those below, there being one single and two double windows on this level. The gable roof has an exaggerated overhang. There are two interior chimneys.

The brick house completed by William Gilmore Simms in 1867 was a one-story building. In 1893, Simms' descendants added a second story, but a hurricane blew it off. About 1917 or 1918, the family added the present second story. At least one of the porches on the east and west ends of the house is also a modern addition.

The rooms in the present Simms house which date back to 1867 appear to have changed little. The floors, woodwork, fireplaces and fixtures appear to be original. The house is filled with items which belonged to the writer, including furniture, books, and personal mementos.

Originally, there were twelve small buildings near the mansion, and while Simms rebuilt the main residence in 1862 and again after 1864, he and his family utilized some of these structures for living quarters. Two of these structures survive: a dairy, and the study used by Simms for his writing. This one room, single story brick building is in a dilapidated condition. Unless the east wall is rebuilt or bolstered by a butress, the study will probably last only a few more years.

Boundaries of the historic area are as follows: from the Southern Railway line south along River Road to the Charleston-Augusta highway (Highway 78); east along the highway to its intersection with the property line; east along the railway line to its intersection with River Road.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 15th Century
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 17th Century
- [ ] 18th Century
- [x] 19th Century
- [ ] 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)*

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- [ ] Aboriginal
  - [ ] Prehistoric
  - [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [ ] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape Architecture
- [x] Literature
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [ ] Other *(Specify)*

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

William Gilmore Simms is considered to be the central literary figure of the ante-bellum South. Although he wrote prolifically in several fields, he is best known for his historical romances such as The Yemassee (1835) and Eutaw (1856). The scope and vigor of these works earned their author a national reputation and a secure place in the mainstream of the history of American fiction.

Simms first settled at "Woodlands" in 1836, and it remained his main home until his death in 1870. The estate was the scene of the composition of many of his best books. The mansion itself was destroyed and rebuilt three times during his tenure. The last of these reconstructions, which dates from 1867, survives as the first floor of the present house, and contains many objects which belonged to Simms. Also extant is a dairy and a small outbuilding in which Simms carried on his literary work. "Woodlands" has been substantially altered since the period of the author's residency, but the estate as a whole has many authentic association with his career, and is strongly evocative of his millieu.

### Biography

William Gilmore Simms was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on April 17, 1806, and died there on June 11, 1870. He was the son of a storekeeper, William Gilmore Simms, who left the family in 1808 to fight in the Creek Indian Wars and later under Jackson at New Orleans. Simm's mother died shortly after his father left, and the boy was raised by his maternal grandmother. Through his identification with his father, Simms led a vicariously adventurous childhood, while absorbing history from his storytelling grandmother who had lived through the Revolution.

Simms attended public schools for four years, and at the age of ten entered the college of Charleston where he acquired enough knowledge of French, Latin, German, and Spanish to dabble in translations. By the age of twelve he had completed a study of "materia medica" and left school to become a druggists's apprentice. In 1824, when he went to visit his father in Mississippi, he was a young man studying law and engaged to be married. Despite his father's appeals to stay, Simms returned to Charleston and in 1826 married Anna Malcom Giles.

(Continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Hubbell, Jay B., The South in American Literature, Duke University Press, 1954.
Ridgley, J.V., William Gilmore Simms.
Simms, William G., Collected Letters, Mary C.S. Oliphant, et al, ed.s, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952-1956.
Tant, William P., William Gilmore Simms, New York: Boinwood Press, 1892.
Welsh, John Rushing, The Mind of William Gilmore Simms; His Social and Political Theory, Nashville, 1952.
Parrington, V. L., Main Currents in American Thought, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928.


## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | OR | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CORNER | N. LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE |
| | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds |
| NW | 33 ° 16 ' 42 " | 80 ° 57 ' 55 " | | ° ' " | ° ' " |
| NE | 33 ° 16 ' 42 " | 80 ° 56 ' 27 " | | | |
| SE | 33 ° 15 ' 30 " | 80 ° 56 ' 27 " | | | |
| SW | 33 ° 15 ' 30 " | 80 ° 57 ' 55 " | | | |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 650

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

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|---|---|---|---|
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |

## 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: John D. McDermott, Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, National Park Service, History Div., OAHP

DATE: Nov. 16, 1970

STREET AND NUMBER: 801 - 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington,

STATE: D.C.

CODE:

## 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

## NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

_____
*Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*

Date _____

ATTEST:

_____
*Keeper of The National Register*

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. Significance: (1) William G. Simms Estate

Simms began publishing poetry in Charleston papers at sixteen. In 1827 he authored a volume of poetry patterned on Byron. For a short time after that he published his own magazine, The Tablet, and then for two years edited the Charleston City Gazette, making it into a vigorously anti-Calhoun journal.

By 1832, Simms' father, grandmother, and wife had died. Bereaved, isolated, and frustrated in his ambition, he left Charleston for the North. There he made lasting friendships with many literary persons, including William Cullen Bryant. His first romance, Martin Faber (1833), was published while in New York and his most important poem, "Atlantis" (1832), was written in Massachusetts; Guy Rivers (1834), The Partisan (1835), and The Yemassee (1835) followed in quick succession.

In 1835, he returned to Charleston and the following year married Chevillette Roach, daughter of a wealthy planter aristocrat. His marriage, with its life at the plantation home, "Woodlands," made things materially more comfortable for Simms and furthered his career as a writer.

Simms was a prolific writer. He enlarged his revolutionary series with Mellichampe (1836), The Kinsman (1847), Katherine Walton (1851), Woodcraft (1854), The Forayers (1855), and Eutaw (1856). His best border romances, Richard Hurdes and Border Eagles, appeared in 1838 and 1840 respectively. He also wrote a collection of short stories, The Wigwam and the Cabin (1845), A History of South Carolina (1840), over 19 volumes of poetry, and many biographies, including The Life of Francis Marion (1844), and The Life of Chevalier Bayard (1847). Simms also wrote for several literary magazines, publishing some of his most notable literary criticism in Views and Reviews of American Literature (1845). In total, Simms published over 80 volumes consisting of poetry, novels, history, biography, and criticism.

The Civil War, which both Simms and the South entered enthusiastically, ended in disaster for both. Simms' wife died in 1863, and "Woodlands" was burned by accident, rebuilt, and then sacked and burned again by stragglers from Sherman's army. Simms took refuge in Columbia, South Carolina, only to lose the remainder of his property when the town was destroyed. His last years were spent in a ceaseless effort to support his six children.

Jay H. Hubbel has written:

> (Simms) rather than Poe is the central figure of the literature of the Old South. He knew personally most of the Southern writers of his time, and he more than any other man stimulated them to write and publish. But he was a national as well as sectional figure, and he was the most important literary link between North and South.

Continued

8. Significance: (2) William G. Simms Estate

Simms' historical romances are generally considered his best work, particularly Woodcraft (1854), and Eutaw (1856). While he often wrote carelessly, not taking time to revise, he did cover a wide panorama and created a multitude of realistic characters, earning himself the titles of the "Southern Cooper" and the "American Scott." Simms' work is unique for description of the Revolutionary struggle in South Carolina and the later frontier expansion. "Lieutenant Porgy" has been called one of the most comic inventions of our literature. Critics are also beginning to recognize Simms as the best short story writer of his time.

William Gilmore Simms settled at "Woodlands" in 1836, and the estate continued to remain his official residence until his death. Part of each year Simms spent in New York, mingling with the literati of the city, but he apparently did most of his writing in South Carolina.

The original plantation house burned accidentally in 1862. With the help of friends, Simms had it rebuilt only to see it burned again in 1864, this time by Union soldiers.

Following the second conflagration, which left only the library walls standing, Simms sold his Revolutionary War documentary collection and began the job of reconstruction. His funds, however, were now very limited, and he was able to rebuild only the library wing. The " new" house was ready for occupancy in 1867, and there Simms lived until his death three years later.