

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: <b>South Carolina</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Charleston</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Robert Barnwell Rhett House**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Robert Barnwell Rhett House**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**6 Thomas Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Charleston**

STATE <b>South Carolina</b>	CODE	COUNTY: <b>Charleston</b>	CODE
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**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Mr. Peter Manigault, Post-Courier**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**134 Columbus Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Charleston**

STATE:  
**South Carolina**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Charleston County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**2 Courthouse Square**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Charleston**

STATE:  
**South Carolina**

**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:  
COUNTY:  
ENTRY NUMBER  
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7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Robert Barnwell Rhett House, ca. 1832, is a large single-family clapboarded frame dwelling of two stories on a raised basement. It has a modified Charleston "double house" plan: The front door enters to a small foyer instead of the usual central hall. Flanking the foyer are two octagonal rooms each with a pair of French doors leading to the front porch. From each of these front rooms the central hall is reached through sliding doors. Flanking the central hall are the two rectangular rear rooms. The stairway is at the rear of the central hall.

The upstairs central hall is flanked by the two rectangular rear rooms. Two partially octagonal front rooms are separated by a rectangular room all entered from the central hall and each with a pair of French doors to the front porch.

On both floors, interior fireplaces abut each other on the common wall of the front and rear rooms in each wing, the flues rising to two brick arch-covered interior chimneys. The interior woodwork is simple and plain.

The doubled-tiered porch is colonnaded, four Ionic columns on the upper tier over four of the Doric order on the first tier which is reached by a split staircase joined at a landing.

With the exception of the installation of two baths, a modern kitchen, and apartments in the basement, little alteration has taken place.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1844(?) - 1876

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

Known as the "Great Secessionist," Robert Barnwell Rhett was one of the most effective and prominent of that circle of proslavery "fire-eating" radicals. Rhett in South Carolina joined with others like William Lowndes Yancey in Alabama to launch a carefully programmed campaign to sever the slaveholding states from the Union. Unlike the constitutional unionists or cooperationists of Robert Toombs brand for whom secessionist feelings evolved from the collapse of the compromises and disintegration of the national parties, Rhett sought secession early and eagerly. He utilized his newspaper, the Charleston Mercury and his eloquence to discredit any opportunity of compromise and was instrumental in unifying South Carolina's resistance to the central government. He successfully fought off attempts to postpone the State's secession convention. In addition, he had a major influence on the State's Ordinance of Secession and wrote the "Address to the Slaveholding States"--a report of South Carolina's act of separation and a call to like-minded states to join her.

Biography

Robert Barnwell Rhett was born an aristocrat of Beaufort, South Carolina in 1800. Educated for the law, he entered practice in 1821. By wise investment in plantations he increased his wealth until by 1850 he had 190 slaves on two estates. He maintained a town residence first in Walterboro and later, both in Charleston and Georgetown. Today, only the boyhood home in Beaufort and the Charleston townhouse remain.

Rhett's fiery character was ripe for his political baptism in 1826 with his election to the state legislature. He became a passionate devotee of Robert J. Turnbull, who, in The Crisis summoned men to resistance against the protective tariff. Turnbull's notions of revolution and independent action left an indelible mark on Rhett's mind. For Rhett, logical conclusion relentlessly arrived at, had also to be relentlessly translated into action. His intellect, moral attitudes, and forceful character combined with a talented eloquence to win fervent loyalty of his constituents.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Channing, Edward, A History of the United States, 6 vols., New York, Macmillan Co., 1937.

Hesseltine, William B. and Smiley, David L., The South in American History, 2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1960.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES								
CORNER	LATITUDE				LONGITUDE			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	32°	47'	10"	79°	56'	33"	
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"							
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"							
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"							

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 3/4 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Benjamin Levy

ORGANIZATION Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service DATE 1/29/73

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE D.C. CODE

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Robert Barnwell Rhett  
House (Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance (Continued) page 1

He became associated with John C. Calhoun, but only grudgingly, and never quite successfully, accepted Calhoun's theory of peaceful, constitutional nullification. From 1837 to 1849 he was a member of Congress and was thrust to the forefront of the Calhoun "party." The failure of the "Southern Convention" of 1837-38, which sought the redress of abolitionist "excesses," reinforced Rhett's belief that radical action was called for. However, for the time being he sided with Calhoun's program for the control of the Democratic Party and his securing the Presidency as a means "to right the government."

When Calhoun's presidential bid failed, Rhett despaired of success in the central forum and led the Bluffton movement for separate state action against the tariff. The Bluffton movement was defeated but Rhett was not. He began to oppose Calhoun and support Polk's administration. In 1850, the year of the Great Compromise, Rhett attended the Nashville Convention, assembled to create a Southern Right's Party and wrote its address. Returning to South Carolina he declared himself in opposition to the compromise and began his campaign for secession. Elected as Calhoun's successor he called on the state to secede once and alone. He expressed his confidence that South Carolina could go it alone, but assured his audiences that other slaveholding states would follow inevitably. Alarmed by new talk of cooperation and national unity, in 1858 he met with William Lowndes Yancey and other kindred firebrands, and together they decided that a Republican victory in 1860 was the only way to secession. Consequently, he set out to use his influential newspaper, the Charleston Mercury, to undermine confidence in the Democratic Party while proclaiming his adherence to it.

In the meantime, Rhett had joyously learned of Yancey's success in breaking the Democratic Convention at Charleston. With a Republican victory in sight Rhett intensified his eloquence in support of resistance being cautious not to divide his audience with quibbles over method. His son became his instrument in the state legislature to block postponement of the proposed secession convention and to keep the body in session throughout the election to be prepared for immediate action following Lincoln's victory. Just as Rhett had calculated, action was swift, and, what's more, unanimous.

Ironically, once separation was achieved and the Confederacy created, Rhett failed to secure the Presidency or any appointment. His proposals for diplomatic openings to Great Britain were rejected and nearly all the provisions he proposed for the new constitution were defeated. He



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8. Significance (Continued) page 2

lived through the Civil War a critic of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy. His apologia--a history of the Confederacy--was never published. This arch revolutionist lived to witness the centennial anniversary of the American Revolution and died two months later.