

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina	
COUNTY: Brunswick	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Orton Plantation

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Junction of S.R. 1530 and S.R. 1529, .8 mile drive to office on private road

CITY OR TOWN:
Smithville Township (Seventh Congressional District, The Hon. Alton Lennon)

STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37 COUNTY: Brunswick CODE: 019

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
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) _____ _____ _____

Yes:
 Restricted (gardens)
 Unrestricted
 No (house)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Mr. J. Laurence Sprunt

STREET AND NUMBER:
P.O. Box 3645

CITY OR TOWN: Wilmington STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Brunswick County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Southport STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37

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:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input 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

Orton is a large, imposing Classical Revival mansion set amid great magnolias and live oaks draped with Spanish moss. The present house combines elements from three centuries. The earliest elements (the first-story front and side brick walls) were built about 1735 as part of a one-and-one-half story dwelling. In the 1840s the house was enlarged into a two-story Greek Revival temple-form structure. Evidence in the attic suggests a possible intermediate stage of development, with the front part of the house being raised to two stories (a center hall plan one room deep) earlier, and the portico and rear section following in the 1840s. Neoclassical Revival wings were added in 1910, and other work was done in the main house, blending with what was built in the 1840s. To the rear is an expansion done in the early 1960s.

The temple form main block of Orton retains much of its original character. It is a two-story stuccoed brick structure and has a gable roof covered with slate. The main (east) facade features a massive tetrastyle Doric portico. The entablature carries around the sides of the building. The elliptical lunette in the center of the pediment is apparently a 1910 elaboration of an earlier louvered lunette.

The facade has at both levels a central doorway, which is flanked at the first level by single wide three-part windows and at the second by pairs of normal size windows; this arrangement existed at least as early as 1890. The first-level entrance consists of a single door flanked by fluted Ionic columns and sidelights. An entablature with pulvinated frieze breaks out over the columns; above it is a wide transom with tracery. These elements, within paneled soffit and reveals, are framed by a symmetrically molded architrave with roundel corner blocks and base blocks featuring a Greek fret. The first-floor facade windows have nine-over-nine sash in the center section (replacing the original six-over-six) and three-over-three in the sidelights. They are framed and divided by symmetrically molded architraves with roundel corner blocks. At the second level, the doorway, of twentieth century design, consists of a double door beneath a transom; the upper part of each leaf is glazed. The symmetrically molded architrave has corner blocks and base blocks featuring a Greek fret. This doorway serves a balcony which, though it had an earlier precedent, was elaborated in 1910. It is supported by large, carved scroll brackets and enclosed by turned balusters and paneled pedestals that carry a molded rail. The four windows at this level contain six-over-six sash and are framed by symmetrically molded architraves with roundel corner blocks like those below. Louvered shutters appear on all windows of the main block and wings, except at the rear.

The addition of the wings about 1910 altered the side elevations. As seen in a circa 1890 photograph, the widely spaced two front bays of the south side of the main block were identical at both levels, with windows containing six-over-six sash flanking an interior end chimney. Behind these (but within the block of the house) was a porch with a two-bay elliptical-arched open arcade; four closely placed windows appeared above. Today the wing covers the second bay and the rear porch is enclosed; the second-floor fenestration is undisturbed. No early picture of the north elevation has been found; the present scheme with six bays and two interior end chimneys may be the original one.

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The one-story side wings echo many of the features of the Greek Revival main block; the wall, cornice, and window treatments are identical. The south wing is a single room. Three arched openings occur in the south wall, that in the center containing a French door. The northern wing is much larger and contains three bedrooms and several baths. The flat roofs of the wings are enclosed with balustrades identical to that of the gallery on the temple form section.

The plan of Orton would seem to have developed as follows: a center-hall plan, one room deep, ca. 1735; perhaps then raised from a story-and-a-half to two full stories with the same plan; in the 1840s a transverse stair hall and rear rooms added. This plan probably was maintained until the 1910 renovation. An 1872 notice of the auction of Orton, states that "The Improvements consist of a TWO STORY DWELLING HOUSE, containing 10 Rooms, Brick Basement. . . ." Ten rooms can be accounted for in the pre-1910 portion of the house. Besides adding the wings, Kenneth Murchison, architect for the 1910 additions, altered the floor plan and some of the interior trim of the house--mainly at the first level. On the first floor, the walls which formed the center hall were removed, creating a large parlor, extending the width of the main block. The windows to the rear of the fireplaces were enlarged as entrances to the wings. The rear porch was enclosed and some alterations made to the rear.

The two stylistic eras (1840s Greek Revival and 1910 Neoclassical Revival) present in the interior features are so compatible that identifying all of them is impossible. In addition, it appears that some of the Greek Revival molding was either reused or reproduced. In the parlor, all the windows are framed with symmetrically molded architraves with round corner blocks. The reveals are flat-paneled with alternating square and vertical panels. A panel also occurs beneath each window. The doors are framed with a modified version of the front entrance, each employing a pair of Ionic columns and an entablature with a pulvinated frieze. The fireplace at each end of the room features a gray-black marble mantel with engaged Ionic columns which support a frieze of serpentine with faceted panels in the center tablet and end blocks. Elaborate plaster work of classical motifs dating from 1910 forms the cornice and adorns the ceiling. The stair located in a transverse hall behind the parlor rises in two flights with a landing in between. The newel is turned and covered with acanthus leaves. Turned balusters carry a handrail oval in section. Behind the stair hall is the billiard room which has a tall neo-Federal style mantel, a molded chair rail, and a deeply molded baseboard. In the dining room, a shallow dome forms the central portion of the ceiling. The woodwork consists of a high flat-paneled wainscot, symmetrically molded architraves with paneled corner blocks, and a neo-Federal style mantel. The south end of the dining room is treated as a solarium. Its terrazzo floor is raised one step, and the room is visually divided by a pair of Tuscan columns which occur at each end of the step. A handsome art nouveau copper chandelier is the focal point. The central spherical globe is encircled by a filigree ring from which hang eight smaller

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7. B

bulbs, each with a foliated cup.

The second floor, although partitioned to create dressing rooms, bathrooms, and closets, retains much of its simple Greek Revival finish. The hall is unusually narrow and has a heavily molded transverse elliptical arch carried on paneled pilasters. The architraves in the hall and those in the southeast bedchamber are symmetrically molded and have faceted corner blocks. Plaster cornices also occur in those two areas. Mantels remain only in the two front bedchambers. They are wood and follow simple straight lines. Molded chair rails also occur in those rooms; however, their era is undeterminable.

The Orton Plantation gardens, open to the public, are among the best-known in the southeast. The gardens were developed in the early twentieth century, and "many of its important parts were designed by the . . . landscape architect, Robert Swann Sturtevant." Live oaks shade extensive plantings of azaleas, and other flowering trees and shrubs abound. A formal "scroll garden," a "white circle garden" and a "sun garden" are individually treated. A 1915 Memorial Chapel and a curious tomb said to be that of the first owner of Orton, "King" Roger Moore are on the grounds as well. The vast rice fields have been leased to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission as a waterfowl sanctuary. Still visible are many of the old ditches and drains, part of the elaborate irrigation system for the rice fields; some are still used to flood the fields for the autumn migration of the birds.

3. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

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/Phi- | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | losophy | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human- | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | itarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Orton Plantation is an impressive and intriguing composite of three centuries of remarkably eventful history. It was a vast and fertile plantation yielding great wealth first from naval stores, then from rice production. The house began as the relatively small circa 1735 home of the colorful and powerful early settler, "King" Roger Moore; saw the rising and falling fortunes of a series of notable owners including Governor Benjamin Smith; grew to a sophisticated and imposing Greek Revival temple-form structure in the 1840s; suffered the vicissitudes of the Civil War and Reconstruction; was reclaimed in the 1880s as a luxurious winter hunting retreat; and in the twentieth century has been lavishly expanded and renovated, so that today, with its superb gardens it is perhaps the best-known antebellum showplace in North Carolina, typifying the romanticized ideal of the Southern mansion.

Among the first settlers along the lower Cape Fear River were the Moores, sons of James Moore, a governor of the province of South Carolina. They became acquainted with the area while on a military expedition to relieve North Carolinians embattled by fierce Tuscarora Indians. By 1728, Maurice Moore had patents amounting to 9,210 acres and his brother Roger, 12,780 acres. Roger Moore built on this land probably about 1725. His house was located on the west bank of the Cape Fear River between present cities of Wilmington and Southport. Known as Orton, probably after an English place name associated with the Moore family, it was burned by Indians whose encampment was across the river from it. The imperious and opulent Moore is supposed not long after to have armed his many slaves and entirely eradicated the Cree band responsible. Sometime before 1734 "King" Roger Moore, as he was called, built the house whose walls form the core of the present Orton. A traveler's letter dated 1734 relates

Mr. Roger Moore, hearing we had come, was so kind as to send fresh horses for us to come up to his house, which we did and were kindly received by him, he being the chief gentleman in all Cape Fear. His house is built of brick and exceedingly pleasantly situated about two miles from the town and about half a mile from the river, though there is a creek that comes up close to the door between two beautiful meadows about three miles in length. He has a prospect of the town of Brunswick, and of another beautiful brick house, a building about half a mile from him belonging to Eleazer Allen, Esq., late speaker to the Commons House of Assembly in the province of South Carolina.

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Still another nearby house, Russellborough, was owned by the Moores and served as the residences of royal governors Arthur Dobbs and William Tryon. The only lucrative trade of the Cape Fear area at this time was in naval stores purchased by England for her ships. Orton with its rich pine forests no doubt contributed much lumber, turpentine, tar, and pitch to this trade. King Roger Moore died in 1750 leaving a vast estate including 250 slaves.

A few years later Orton was bought by a wealthy local merchant, Richard Quince. A lady diarist writing about 1775 mentions Quince and includes a reference to the pre-Revolutionary tenor of the times.

We got safe on shore and tho' quite dark landed from the boat with little trouble, and proceeded thro' rows of tar and pitch to the house of a mercht to whom we had been recommended. . . . These [houses] are inhabited by merchants of whom Mr. Quence, our host, is first in consequence. He is deeply engaged in the new system of politicks, in which they are all more or less, tho' Mr. Dry the Collector of Customs, is the most zealous and talks treason by the hour.

A year after these words were penned, British soldiers burned William Dry's home, Russellborough, the former governor's residence. Its ruins are one-half mile from the entrance to Orton.

In 1796, Richard Quince, Jr., sold Orton to Benjamin Smith, an aide to General George Washington in the Revolution and a grandson of King Roger Moore. Smith was one of the first trustees of the University of North Carolina and became its first benefactor when in 1789 he gave it land warrants for 20,000 acres. Smith Hall, built in 1850 as hall for literary societies and now serving as the Playmakers Theater, was named for him. He was fifteen times a state senator and was serving as such when he was elected governor of North Carolina in 1810. Though an able man, Smith suffered financial reverses that forced the sale of Orton. In 1824 it was advertised as

the late residence of Governor Benjamin Smith, containing 4,975 acres, more or less. Of this track between 400 and 500 acres is swamp land of a strong and fertile soil, which, it is believed will produce at least 1,000 lbs. of cotton or four times of rice to the acre. . . . Included in the premises is a very superior and never failing mill stream with an excellent dam, wanting only flood gates. The rice machine mill and gin having been recently destroyed by fire. The pond may be used at all times as a reservoir of water to flow the low lands, thus rendering Orton one of the most valuable rice plantations in the country.

In 1826, Dr. Frederick Jones Hill bought Orton. Hill was a state senator in 1835, and a representative the succeeding three legislative sessions; it was his education bill, passed in 1839, that put into operation a public school system for the state. During Hill's ownership Orton house was enlarged and

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the central block took on its present rather typical antebellum appearance with a full Doric portico.

Thomas Calezance Miller bought Orton in 1854. According to the census of 1860 he had 417 acres in cultivation and 8,276 unimproved or fallow. There were 561,000 pounds of rice on the plantation, indicating it was still the chief crop. The estate contained 144 slaves and was valued at \$42,500. The Civil War apparently caused the abandonment of Orton. It is said to have been used around that time as a hospital for smallpox victims. An auctioneer's handbill of 1872 advertised Orton and "Lands adjacent thereto, 9,026 acres by actual survey." Among other particulars listed are its two-mile front on the river, water power from a pond seven miles in length, ten-room dwelling house, and houses for 200 hands.

About 1880 Orton became the property of Colonel K. M. Murchison, a former Confederate officer who after the war had built a successful cotton and naval stores trade in New York. Murchison built the first hotel of any note in Wilmington and called it "The Orton". He restored the decayed Orton Plantation, and spent his winters there, where hunting on its vast acreage was his frequent pastime. When Colonel Murchison died in 1904, his son-in-law James Sprunt bought the estate. Like most of Orton's owners, James Sprunt was a noted figure. During the Civil War, when a youth of seventeen, he went to sea as purser on ships running the Federal blockade of Wilmington. While so employed he was captured and imprisoned for some months. After the war, he was a member of his father's cotton export firm and become a well-established civic leader and philanthropist. His interest in history led him to become a knowledgeable writer on historical events and to endow the publication of historical studies by the University of North Carolina. Mr. Sprunt lavished care on Orton and undertook the addition of wings to the main structure in 1910. Orton remains in the Sprunt family. In the mid-twentieth century Orton has come to be the state's most widely recognized example of "Southern" architecture; its romantic facade amid lush gardens is widely pictured on travel posters, wallpaper, and most recently, represents the South on boxes of Scotties Tissues in the "Rediscover America" series (see enclosure).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Research by Charles Blume, survey specialist; architectural description by Janet Seapker, survey specialist.
 New Hanover County Records, New Hanover County Courthouse, Wilmington, North Carolina, Office of the Register of Deeds (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).
 New Hanover County Records, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).
 Brunswick County Records, Brunswick County Courthouse, Wilmington, North Carolina, Office of the Register of Deeds (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).

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			LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	34°	03'	54"	77°	57'	02"
NE	34°	03'	54"	77°	56'	25"
SE	34°	03'	09"	77°	56'	25"
SW	34°	03'	09"	77°	57'	02"

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 12 acres

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Survey and Planning Unit Staff

ORGANIZATION: State Department of Archives and History DATE: 13 December 1972

STREET AND NUMBER:
109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh STATE: North Carolina 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 H. G. Jones

Title State Historian/Administrator

Date 13 December 1972

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 _____

Orton Plantation
 Junction of S.R. 1530 and S.R. 1529, .8 mile drive to office on private road
 Smithville Township, North Carolina

USGS Map, Wilmington Quadrangle
 Scale: 1: 62,500
 Date: 1948

	Latitude			Longitude		
	degrees	minutes	seconds	degrees	minutes	seconds
NW	34	03	54	77	57	02
NE	34	03	54	77	56	25
SE	34	03	09	77	56	25
SW	34	03	09	77	57	02



