

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Cowper-Thompson House
other names/site number William Cowper House; Reverend Thompson House

2. Location

street & number 405 North Street N/A not for publication
city, town Murfreesboro N/A vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Hertford code NC 091 zip code 27855

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

William S. Fair, Jr. Signature of certifying official 11-8-91 Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Domestic/secondary structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Domestic/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Transitional Georgian/Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Weatherboard

roof Shingle

other Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet.

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Cowper-Thompson House, Hertford County, N.C.

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Architectural Description--Part 7

The Cowper-Thompson House, a handsomely restored transitional Georgian-Federal style dwelling, stands together with a modern frame barn on one acre of its original five-acre site at 405 North Street. The house and its grounds are on the north edge of both the town of Murfreesboro and the Murfreesboro Historic District and a short distance southeast of the Meherrin River. When the property was acquired by the present owners in 1978 it was in a long-vacant and deteriorated condition; the grounds were likewise in an unkempt and overgrown state. During that period of neglect the old trees and shrubs had been unpruned and allowed to grow untended. In 1978-1979 the exterior of the house was restored and clearance work on the grounds undertaken. Work on the grounds was continued in 1979-1980, when the interior of the house was restored, and it continued through the early 1980s. Today, the white-painted house stands in a setting similar to its original one on the east edge of a woodland now surrounded by mostly replacement trees, shrubs, grape vines, and other plantings that is evocative of house yards in the small towns and villages of northeastern North Carolina.

The one-and-a-half-story beaded weatherboard frame house is one-room deep and follows a center-hall plan; it stands on a shallow brick foundation and is covered by a side-gable roof of wood shingles. The five-bay front (south) elevation is crowned by a quintet of dormer windows; Flemish bond brick (replacement) chimneys, flanked by windows at both levels, stand on both the east and west gable ends. The original one-and-a-half story kitchen that first stood in closer proximity to the house was moved back some nine feet and a recessed hyphen--containing the new kitchen--built in 1978-1979 now connects the front block of the house to its former dependency. This block occupies the western third of the house's rear (north) elevation; most of the remainder of the elevation is covered by a screened porch that is recessed just inside the east gable end.

The components of the house's five-bay front (south) elevation are symmetrically arranged and focused on the entrance that occupies the center bay on the first story. It is preceded by a shallow two-level brick stoop with a perimeter brick frame. The stoop replaces a Victorian porch that was installed by a nineteenth century owner; by 1978 it had become deteriorated beyond repair. The raised six-panel door is enframed in a two-part Federal surround that is unlike the window surrounds and appears to be somewhat later in date. The flanking window openings, holding nine-over-nine sash, have three-part molded Georgian surrounds; these windows are fitted with replacement louvered blinds. The vents under the first story windows are fitted with round vertical members. While some of the weatherboards and the blinds are replacements, the window sash and surrounds are original as is the boxed cornice that carries across the top of the elevation. The distinguishing feature of the elevation--and of the house--is the quintet of dormer windows that are set into the roof above the first story openings. The

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gable-front windows hold four-over-four sash set in simple framed surrounds. The pedimented gable ends above the windows have molded rakeboards. The sides of the dormers are flush sheathed with wide boards applied on a diagonal that is parallel with the pitch of the gable roof.

A replacement double-shouldered chimney built of "Old Carolina" brick, laid up in Flemish bond, replicates the original chimney and stands in the center of the east gable end. It is flanked by vents in the brick foundation, nine-over-nine sash windows in the first story, and four-over-four sash windows in the second story. The window surrounds on the first story are like those on the front elevations while those on the smaller windows above are made of narrow plain boards with beaded inner edges. There are simple, plain rake boards carrying along the flush eaves of the roof.

On the west gable end there is a single-shoulder chimney of "Old Carolina" brick, also laid up in Flemish bond, that stands in the center of the elevation. It is flanked with fenestration at each level like its pendant on the east gable end. The only difference is that the sill of the second-story window to the south of the chimney is round whereas all the others in the front block of the house are square; it may have been reused here from elsewhere.

The new hyphen that connects the main block to its former kitchen dependency is inset about eighteen inches behind the face of the west gable end. It is sheathed in replica beaded weatherboards and has a two-bay elevation. The window openings have a three-part molded surround and contain six-over-six sash windows; they are fitted with louvered blinds with center bars. The pitch of the hyphen's gable roof is lower than that of the main block and the old dependency. Two skylights are set into the face of the roof above the first-story openings.

Local tradition suggests that the former kitchen--now comprising the north end of the present ell--is appreciably older than the main block. This derives in part from the fact that the boxed cornice along its west and east sides is more heavily molded than the one on the main block and that the window surrounds on those elevations are made up of plain boards with beaded inner fillets and round sills. This is indeed possible as is an alternative theory that the main block and the dependency could have been built/finished by different carpenters. Until its relocation to the north in 1978 the kitchen stood on its apparent original location. It was originally freestanding and connected to the main block by the rear porch or a walkway extension. At some point in the nineteenth century the west end of the porch was enclosed as a passage and took on the appearance of a shed room. It was unfinished on the interior and the original weatherboards on the north wall of the house had remained in place.

The west and east sides of the old dependency have two-bay divisions and contain six-over-nine sash windows with companion blinds. There are vents in the foundation below all four windows. There are skylights in the roof above the

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west first-story windows. The north gable end of the ell is dominated by a brick replacement chimney of "Old Carolina" brick laid up in Flemish bond. Openings in the first story and attic level hold six-over-nine and four-over-four sash respectively. There are no blinds on the gable end. The narrow plain board surrounds have square sills.

The remainder of the rear elevation of the main block is taken up with a screened porch, measuring sixteen feet wide by nine deep, that is inset about eighteen inches behind the east gable end. It has a wood floor, simple two-by-four and four-by-four vertical supports, and a shed roof. It, too, rests on a low brick foundation and has a trio of brick steps with board tops. Under the porch the two windows, corresponding to those east of the door on the front elevation, hold six-over-nine sash; they retain their original molded Georgian surrounds and louvered blinds that have three fixed louvers forming a center bar. The door into the center hall has a replacement plain board surround. At the west end of the porch a pair of doors and a five-pane transom are surrounded by plain boards with beaded inner edges. It was reused from the earlier shed connector.

The interior of the house follows a center hall plan: the hall is five feet wide and has rooms of nearly equal size to either side. The rooms have pine floors and a combination of Georgian, transitional Georgian-Federal, and Federal woodwork that is original to the house. The walls and ceilings of the house are sheetrock that replaces the original plaster. The hall is a narrow chamber with raised six-panel wood doors at their front (south) and rear (north) ends. The doors into the living room on the right (east) and the dining room on the left (west) are not centered on the respective walls but are opposite each other near the south end of the hall. As a consequence, they are not on axis with the respective fireplaces that are centered in each gable end. There is a local tradition that the house was built originally on a hall-and-parlor plan and that a center hall was partitioned off the west end of the hall in the early nineteenth century. This appears likely and is supported by the fact that the reeded woodwork of the two rooms is largely the same. A second factor that would support this thesis is the outline of the profiles of the doorways in the hall. The surrounds at the doors at the front and rear and into the dining room are identical and have a three-part Georgian division. The surround at the six and raised door into the living room--in the partition wall--also has a three-part division except that its center element is unusually wide and appears to be chronologically later.

The arrangement of the baseboard, wainscot, and chair rail is also identical in the two rooms. An unusual feature here is the arrangement of the high twelve-inch baseboard to which is affixed a lower approximately eight-inch secondary baseboard. These paired horizontal boards act as the base of the wainscot that is formed by a single-width pine or cypress board; these boards are about twenty inches wide. Carrying across the top of the wainscot in both rooms is a molded chair rail with a center band of reeding carrying in a horizontal

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rather than vertical fashion. In the living room reeding recurs on the mantel that follows a traditional Federal form. Here reeded pilasters rise beside the brick firebox to molded architrave, also carrying a reeded band, that extends across the top of the firebox. It serves as the base of a wide frieze that has a five-part division featuring a wide projecting center block and narrower blocks above the pilasters. A reeded band carries across the top of the frieze and serves as the base of the molded mantel shelf that breaks above the pilasters. The brick firebox and hearth were rebuilt in 1978-1979. The window surrounds in the living room have a three-part Georgian arrangement.

In the hall the enclosed stair to the second story rises from an opening in the extreme north end of the west partition wall with the dining room. A plain board chair rail rises with it and serves as the backing for a modern handrail. In addition to the ghost marks for their original H-L hinges, the front and rear doors have a somewhat unusual feature to their panels. The upper pair of panels in both six-panel doors are arranged so that the grain of the wood is on the horizontal while the center and lower pairs of panels were cut with a vertical grain.

The six-panel door connecting the hall and the dining room, as well as the four-panel door in the closet under the stair in the northeast corner of the dining room, also have ghost marks of original H-L hinges. Like those in the hall they were replaced with butt hinges. The finish of the dining room is plainer than the hall and living room. It has a nine-and-a-half-inch high molded top, single-board baseboard that serves as the base for the wide single board wainscot. A simply molded chair rail carries around its top. The window and door surrounds have three-part profiles. The mantel in the dining room is comprised of a three-part architrave, enframing the painted black face around the firebox, and a projecting frieze and molded shelf; it dates to 1979-1980.

A door in the north wall of the dining room, to the immediate west of the projecting stair enclosure, opens into the new kitchen. It is finished with new materials handled in a traditional way. Counters and wall-hung cabinets carry on the south, west, and north walls. The floors are covered with brick-imprinted sheet vinyl. The walls and ceiling are sheetrock. Double-leaf three-panel doors below a five-pane transom are set in the east wall and open onto the screened porch.

A raised six-panel door connects the kitchen with the library contained in the former kitchen dependency. The finish of this room is relatively plain. The deteriorated plaster walls were replaced with sheetrock in 1979 and the pine floor, also heavily deteriorated, was replaced with like flooring of seven-inch wide boards. A simple low baseboard carries around the room as does a like molded chair rail. The door and window surrounds are two-part with molded backbands. On the north end a fireplace, oven, and recess for wood are fitted into the chimney. A bracketed mantel shelf carries across the composition. The

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enclosed stair to the bedroom above begins and turns in the southwest corner to rise (to the east) along the south wall of the library. Originally its enclosure projected into the room with a closet below. At a later date a larger closet was created by enclosing the entire area under the stair. A length of old wainscoting was reused here and hung as a door; the H-L hinges were removed from the door on the original closet for use on the new door. In 1980 a desk and bookcase unit were built onto the north face of this closet wall. The bedroom on the second level of the dependency is simply finished. It has its original wide-board pine floors and sheetrock walls. A shallow baseboard carries around the base of the walls. There are two closets fitted under the west eaves and a taller closet enclosed in the southeast corner of the room. All three and the door from the stair landing into the roof have board and batten doors mounted on H or H-L hinges in plain board surrounds. The windows in the north gable end have plain board surrounds with beaded inner edges.

The shallow landing at the top of the stair up from the library also has a door opening into a closet at its east end and another door on the south wall that opens into the suite of two connecting bathrooms that serve the aforementioned bedroom and the one in the west gable end of the main block. The fixtures in the north bathroom include a shower; the south bathroom is fitted with a tub. The floor of the bathrooms is lower than that of either bedroom and there are short steps up to the bedroom levels.

The second story of the main block of the Cowper-Thompson House contains the stairwell, a shallow hall at the head of the stair and parallel with the front elevation, and two bedrooms and a bathroom that open off the hall. The floors of the hall and bedrooms are continuous pine boards that carry under the partition walls. The plaster walls here were replaced with sheetrock. The east bedroom is the more thoroughly finished of the two and has a simply molded chair rail and a mantel above the brick fireplace. The mantel consists of a molded three-part architrave around the firebox, a tall five-part frieze, and a molded projecting shelf. There are closets fitted below the windows on the south wall, and a taller closet enclosed in the southwest corner. The door into the hall has six raised panels on the hall side while the closet doors are board-and-batten with either H or H-L hinges. This same pattern is repeated in the finish of the west bedroom where there are closets under the front (south) windows and along the north wall flanking the door into the bathroom suite. The door and gable end window surrounds are made up of plain boards with a beaded inner edge. The bathroom occupies the space beside and east of the stairwell. It is fitted with a board and batten door on H-L hinges and is finished with plaster walls, sheet vinyl flooring, and white fixtures.

When the present owners acquired the property in 1978 there were two insubstantial twentieth century frame outbuildings on the property that were taken down. In 1980 a small frame barn was erected to the north/northwest of the house to be used for storage. It is a rectangular weatherboarded frame building

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standing on low brick piers. A boxed cornice carries along the north and south eaves of the wood shingle side-gable roof. The south front elevation has a two-bay arrangement with a six-over-six sash window at the west end and a broad opening toward the east end. It is fitted with a board-and-batten door on long strap hinges that were salvaged from the Wissler Mill in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; the mill was owed by Mr. Myers's ancestors. The opening is preceded by a shallow wood ramp to facilitate moving the lawnmower into and out of the barn. There is a little six-over-six sash window in the center of the east gable end on the main level; it and the front window opening are simply enframed and are both flanked by fixed-louver blinds. Directly above the east window is a board-and-batten door, also mounted on strap hinges, that opens into the loft.

As noted in the introduction, the grounds of the Cowper-Thompson House have been planted with mostly replacement trees, shrubs, flowers, and vines during the past ten years by the present owners. There are, however, several trees including the towering pecan tree in the rear yard and old cedars on the west property line that date from the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century. There is also an old trifoliolate orange shrub off the southeast corner of the house that also appears, despite heavy pruning, to be nineteenth century. The present owners have planted a shrub border along the west property line, boxwoods across the front and gable ends of the house, and a broad range of flowering shrubs about the house and grounds. This group includes: crepe myrtle, azalea, hibiscus, camellias, wisteria, snowball shrubs, and hydrangeas. They have also added a number of trees to the grounds including: maples, magnolias, dogwood, and various fruit trees at the rear. The backyard also includes a Scuppernong grape arbor, other grape vines, and fig bushes.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

Ca. 1790

Significant Dates

Ca. 1790

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

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Statement of Significance

The Cowper-Thompson House, a small one-and-a-half-story frame house, covered with beaded weatherboards, is architecturally significant in the town of Murfreesboro, in the county of Hertford, and in northeastern North Carolina despite its seemingly modest appearance and size. In a region of the state where there was an influx of settlers from Virginia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the house is one of the few surviving dwellings whose style or appearance recalls the architectural traditions of Tidewater Virginia. There were many houses built in the border tier of counties in North Carolina in the one-and-a-half-story form, but there is no other known example in North Carolina of a late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century house that boasts a like quintet of dormer windows across its facade.* Although its singular existence might give it the character of an anomaly, that would be greatly underestimating its importance as a representative example in North Carolina of a once-common Middle Atlantic building form. According to local tradition the house was built about 1790 by William Cowper (1766-1819), a member of the large and prominent family of that name who lived in the area of Suffolk and Norfolk, Virginia. Cowper had three sons who rose to prominence in Hertford and adjoining Gates County in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was Lewis Meredith (1800-1870), the Clerk of Court in Hertford County for some forty years, who sold the house in 1839 to the Reverend George Matthias Thompson (1803-1850). Then pastor of the Meherrin Baptist Church, Thompson is credited with leading the effort in the 1840s to establish a Baptist congregation in the town of Murfreesboro and is locally recognized for his support of the establishment of the Chowan Baptist Female Institute, now Chowan College, in 1848. Thompson's widow owned the house until at least 1869 and for the next one hundred years it had a series of owners who made remarkably few changes to the house. In 1970 it was acquired by the Murfreesboro Historical Association which sold it eight years later to the present owners. During their restoration of the house in 1978 to 1980, they sympathetically restored the main block while relocating the kitchen dependency some nine feet to the north and replacing the later shed connector with a shallow one-story kitchen hyphen. The essential integrity and significant architectural features of the house were preserved and it retains its role as an exemplar of a Middle Atlantic building tradition.

*Because several counties in the region have not been comprehensively surveyed, it is not possible to make a claim of statewide significance for the Cowper-Thompson House at this time. When those surveys are completed, the significance of the house may be established on a statewide basis.

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Part Eight--Historical Background

The town of Murfreesboro in Hertford County was established in 1787 by the North Carolina legislature and named for William Murfree who donated some ninety-seven acres on the Meherrin River as the site of the new port city. During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century an influx of citizens and merchants from New England and Virginia swelled the population of the emerging trading center in northeastern North Carolina. There is an impressive collection of large brick and frame houses from the early nineteenth century that attests to the growing affluence of the town and its merchants. During the antebellum period major female academies were established by the Baptist and Methodist congregations; the Wesleyan Female College burned in 1893 but Chowan Baptist Female Institute, the Baptist-sponsored school, survives today as Chowan College.

One of the earliest surviving houses in Murfreesboro is the one-and-a-half-story frame house known as the Cowper-Thompson House. It stands on its original site at 405 North Street one block north of Broad Street, the handsome residential avenue that parallels Main Street. The early history of the house is virtually impossible to document accurately as nearly all of the Hertford County land records and most other public records were destroyed during the sacking and burning of Winton, the county seat, on 20 February 1862 by Union troops. Some records did survive in private hands and it is these that confirm the sale of the house and grounds in 1839 by Lewis Meredith Cowper to George Matthias Thompson. Thompson occupied the house until his death in 1850 and it remained in his family's possession until at least 1869. For the next hundred years the house had a series of owners of little acclaim. The Murfreesboro Historical Association recognized the value of the house and purchased it in September, 1970, from members of the Benthall family. The Association held the property until 31 May 1978 when it was sold to Jacob Christian Myers and his wife Ruth Kennedy. Later that year the couple undertook the restoration of the house and in the spring of 1980 they first occupied it as a seasonal residence.

There is a strong local tradition that the transitional Georgian-Federal style house was built by William Cowper (1766-1819), a man of probable means and property. Cowper was a member of the large and prominent southeastern Virginia family. He was the grandson of John Cowper (1700-1768) and Elizabeth Wills of Nansemond County, Virginia, and the son of Revolutionary War major William Cowper (1735-1784) and Mary Godwin. According to THE COWPER FAMILY, William Cowper came to Hertford County and Murfreesboro in the early 1800s, but that is incorrect. It appears more likely that he came to the county about 1790 when it is thought he was married to Rebecca Meredith; the couple's first child was born in 1791. Rebecca Cowper was one of at least three daughters of Capt. Lewis Meredith (1747-1803) of Murfreesboro, a man of means. Benjamin B. Winborne in his THE COLONIAL AND STATE POLITICAL HISTORY OF HERTFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA (1906) writes that "He (Meredith) was a man much valued in his day."

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Local tradition has suggested that the house was built about the time of William Cowper's marriage to Rebecca Meredith, ca. 1790. That appears likely. The late-eighteenth century date is reasonable since the finish of the house--excepting the handsome tier of dormer windows on the facade--is not unlike that of other transitional Georgian-Federal style houses erected in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth century. Whatever the date, it appears that the house was originally built on a hall and parlor plan. In the early nineteenth century the house was altered to a center-hall plan when the west five feet of the old hall was partitioned off to form a center entrance/stair hall. During this effort the new entrance/stair hall and the companion chamber to the east were remodeled and fitted up with reeded Federal style woodwork. It is possible that the west end of the rear porch was enclosed as a sheltered passage between the main house and the freestanding kitchen dependency at this time. Likewise, it could also have been done later in the century. The interior of this shed room was never finished and the weatherboards remained in place on the north wall of the main block and the south wall of the old kitchen.

If the house was built about 1790, then it was the probable birthplace of the couple's five children. Mary, born in 1791, was married in 1812 to Bridger Montgomery (1780-1835), a general in the militia. Julia, the second child, was married to Colonel Kerr Montgomery. William Wills Cowper (1795-1860), the first son, was married to Frances Ann Speight of Gates County in 1818. He spent the remainder of his years in Gates County, which he represented for five terms in the State Legislature in the 1830s. His descendants remained prominent in Gates County into the twentieth century and a number of their residences survive. The second son, Lewis Meredith Cowper (1800-1870), was married in 1825 to Annice (Annis?) Collins of Southampton County, Virginia, the daughter of William Collins. He is best remembered and respected as the long-time Clerk of Court for Hertford County, a position he held from about 1825 until after 1865. His son Pulaski Cowper (b. 1832) removed to Raleigh where he married Mary Blount Grimes. It was in memory of their daughter Lucy Olivia Blount Cowper (1861-1896) that her husband Richard Beverly Raney (1860-1909) gave the funds for the Olivia Raney Library in Raleigh, North Carolina. The couple's third son, Richard Green Cowper (1806-1872), also had a long career in public life in Hertford County. He served as sheriff of the county for seventeen years and was six times elected to the state senate. Through his marriage to Margaret Long (1809-1850) in 1826, he would come into sizable property. His Federal-style plantation house, Vernon Place, has been listed in the National Register.

Rebecca Meredith Cowper died 15 February 1808 and was buried in a family cemetery beside her father who had died five years earlier. Her concern for her children is reflected in an inscription on her gravestone:

My blessing to my babes: thou wilt be kind
To the dear Infants whom I leave behind
Train them to virtue piety and truth
And form their manners early in their youth.

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According to family tradition, William Cowper was married in 1809 to Martha Ballard Cowper (1775-1845), the daughter of Jethro Ballard and the widow of his cousin John Cowper (1777-1809) who died on 9 January 1809. It is believed--and likely--that the remodeling of the house and the installation of the Federal-style reeded woodwork dates to the time of this marriage. Three children were born to the couple: Eliza G. (born ?) who would later marry Redmond Parker; Martha (born 1810) who would marry F. M. Capehart; and a son Joseph G. (1813-1861) who married Narcissus S. Brown (1822-1903) of Northampton County. William Cowper died in 1818 or 1819 and in the 1820 Census his widow Martha is listed as the head of a household probably residing in the Cowper-Thompson House. She was again listed as the head of households in 1830 and 1840, but in 1840 she had presumably moved elsewhere since the house was sold in 1839 to George Matthias Thompson. She died in 1845.

A short biographical sketch of Thompson appears in A CENTURY AND A QUARTER OF SERVICE: A HISTORY OF THE MURFREESBORO BAPTIST CHURCH, 1848-1973 (1973). It states that Thompson (1803-1850) was a native of London, England, and that he migrated with his family to New York City in 1815. He came southward in 1828 and was ordained a Baptist minister in Richmond, Virginia. Thereafter he served as minister of churches in Elizabeth City, N.C. and Suffolk, Virginia. In 1838 he accepted a call to Meherrin Church--the oldest Baptist congregation in Hertford County. Although the church stood some distance outside the town limits of Murfreesboro, it was the principal church for the Baptists residing in town. Apparently, Thompson occupied a rental property before buying the Cowper House on 17 December 1839 from Lewis Meredith Cowper who had obtained title to the property either through inheritance or purchase.

Once he had taken up residence in Murfreesboro, Thompson began holding services in the town. As a result of this and a series of revival sermons in June of 1842, the decision was made to organize a Baptist congregation in the town of Murfreesboro. The first meeting toward this purpose was held on 18 July 1842 at which Thompson presided. The church apparently obtained land in 1843 on which the young congregation began construction of a church in May, 1843; it was dedicated in November, 1843, and in 1844 the first services were held therein. It was a handsome Greek Revival style building with a portico of Tuscan columns. In addition to the Rev. Mr. Thompson, one of the five commissioners who oversaw the construction of the building was Lewis Meredith Cowper. The church remained a branch of Meherrin Church until November, 1848, when it became independent of Meherrin's oversight. On 23 January 1849 the governing body of the Murfreesboro Church issued a call to Rev. Mr. Thompson to be its minister. Whether due to ill health or because of a reluctance to give up his existing ministerial duties, Thompson did not accept the call. In the summer of 1849 the Rev. Martin Rudolph Forey (1817-1881), the newly-appointed president of Chowan Baptist Female Institute, became the church's pastor. Given the fact that Rev. Mr. Thompson was residing in Murfreesboro and had been instrumental in the founding of the institute and pivotal in the organization of the church, it seems likely that it was poor health that influenced his decision. He died on 27

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November 1850 and was buried to the east of his house on his town lot (which is now separated from the current house tract).

The language of legal proceedings involving the former adjacent John Wheeler property strongly suggests that Thompson's widow was still living in the house in 1869. How much later she occupied the house remains to be confirmed. The history of the ownership of the house between 1869 and 1900 is unconfirmed. Sometime in that period the property came into the ownership of Kate Wynns, the wife of James Wynns. She would lose the property in 1900. On 31 August 1900 the house and lot were put up for auction. Sue Lawrence bought it for \$650. She owned the property until 1917 and it is likely that she added an elaborate scroll-sawn entrance porch to the front entrance that appears in documentary photographs of the house.

On 22 November 1917 the property entered the Benthall family where it remained until 1970 when it was acquired by the Murfreesboro Historical Association. On that day Sue S. Lawrence sold the house and its lot of approximately three acres to Mamie E. Benthall, the wife of R. Benthall, for the sum of \$720. On 4 February 1939 Mamie Benthall deeded the house and lot to T. J. and Albert Benthall who appear to have been her sons. Nearly thirty years later, on 28 July 1967, the bachelor Albert Benthall sold his undivided one-half interest in the property to Anna W. Benthall, identified as a widow, and Thomas Julian Benthall. Three years later in two transactions in May and September 1970, the Murfreesboro Historical Association purchased the undivided interests in the property from members of the Benthall family. Apparently during much, if not all, of the Benthall ownership the house was a rental dwelling. Curiously enough during this long period from 1869 until 1970 few alterations were effected to the house. When acquired by the historical association the house was deteriorated but surprisingly intact.

On 31 May 1978 the house was sold to Jacob Christian and Ruth Kennedy Myers who undertook a major restoration of the house that was largely completed in 1980. Mr. and Mrs. Myers, then residing in a historic house at 40 Division Street, Newport, Rhode Island, were strangers neither to North Carolina nor to old dwellings. Ruth Kennedy Myers was born in Raleigh in 1911, the daughter of Oscar Clement Kennedy and Mary Dowell. Miss Dowell was the daughter of Clarence Leslie Dowell (1861-1947) a Baptist minister. Mr. Kennedy moved his family from Raleigh to Chatham County where he was first manager and later president of Cherokee Brick Company. Ruth Kennedy graduated from Salem Academy in 1928 and from Meredith College in 1932. In 1932 she was married to Jacob Christian Myers (born 1909), a native of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Mr. Myers had a career in the United States Navy and retired in 1961 with the rank of captain. During much of his period in the Navy Mr. and Mrs. Myers lived in Virginia. For some sixteen years after World War II, they lived at 213 Prince Street in Alexandria, Virginia, and afterward removed to Shadyside, Maryland. In 1954, they acquired and restored an early-nineteenth century house in King William County, Virginia, built by James Fox in 1808, that they used as a weekend retreat. They owned that house until 1974. Meanwhile, in 1968, they bought the Augustus Lucus House at 40 Division Street in Newport, Rhode Island, that became and remains their primary residence.

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The couple's connections to Murfreesboro began in 1935 when Mrs. Myers's widowed mother, Mary Dowell Kennedy, came to Chowan College as dean of women and served in that position until the school closed in 1942. She returned after the war and remained on the staff until about 1955. Afterwards Mary Dowell Kennedy moved to Ahoskie with her sister Della Reams Dowell; they lived there with their third sister, Ruth Dowell Curtis (died 1964). Mary and Della remained in the house on Pembroke Street in Ahoskie until 1975; that year Della went to a nursing home in Rich Square where she died in 1988. Mary moved to Newport, Rhode Island, where she died in 1979.

Having a well-versed experience in restoring historic houses, the Myerses developed their plans for the renovation and restoration of the Cowper-Thompson House and subcontracted the work themselves. Work on the exterior was undertaken in 1978 and largely completed in 1979. This involved repair and replacement of wood surfaces, the rebuilding of the three brick chimneys, the building of a low brick foundation to replace the original brick piers, the installation of a new wood shingle roof, and the relocation of the old kitchen and construction of the new kitchen. The interior renovations were begun in 1979 and largely completed in the spring of 1980 when the Myerses first occupied the house. They continue to occupy the house from about 1 April until 15 October when they return to Newport. In 1980 they added the barn to the property and in 1981 they acquired the Jenkins House, a rural eighteenth-century frame house, which the Murfreesboro Historical Association had moved onto the lot behind their holding on North Street (outside the boundaries of the nominated property) and restored it as a guest house.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The loss of so many of the Hertford County public records that occurred during the sacking and burning of Winton, the county seat, on 20 February 1862, has made it impossible to document the early origins of the Cowper-Thompson House. That loss, likewise, has made it impossible or difficult to establish the history of the other late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century houses and buildings that survive in the town of Murfreesboro. In the twenty years since 1971 when Murfreesboro undertook an extensive preservation project known as "Renaissance in Carolina" and the greater part of the town was listed in the National Register as the Murfreesboro Historic District, research has been conducted on various individual houses and buildings; however, a comprehensive architectural history of the town and county remains to be produced.

Nevertheless, it can be said with authority that the Cowper-Thompson House is one of a small group of surviving houses in Murfreesboro whose architectural fabric clearly establishes their construction in the later-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century. Within this group the majority of the houses that survive are two-story dwellings of substance and presence in the townscape. Their brick or weatherboarded frame elevations are ornamented with molded and/or carved woodwork that dates from both

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Cowper-Thompson House, Hertford County, N.C.

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the original period of construction and to later remodeling efforts. Included in this group are some eight buildings that have been individually listed in the National Register and most of these are dated to the first decades of the nineteenth century, particularly the 1810s, when Murfreesboro enjoyed commercial expansion and a broad affluence.

The Cowper-Thompson House is a contemporary of these houses but unlike them in its scale and origins. The Cowper-Thompson House is one of only three known one-and-a-half-story frame houses to survive in Murfreesboro into the mid-twentieth century. The history of two of these--the "Britton House" and the "Edward Murphy House"--remains to be established. The Greek Revival style door and window surrounds on the "Edward Murphy House" suggest that it was built after 1830, probably in the 1840s. It is likely that the Cowper-Thompson House is the oldest of this trio and, therefore, the earliest example of the one-and-a-half-story form in the town.

Whereas the greater number of its contemporaries are larger and more substantial houses, the Cowper-Thompson House is also important as an example of the smaller, neat, and well-finished house. These dwellings were probably the residences of the townfolk and merchants in its earliest days, having been built before the affluence of the early-nineteenth century supported the construction of more imposing two-story houses with late-Federal and transitional Federal-Greek Revival finish. Its early date of construction is also associated with its role as an important example in North Carolina of a Middle-Atlantic building form--the one-and-a-half-story single-pile dwelling--that appeared so frequently in Virginia. William Cowper (1766-1819), a native of Virginia, would have been well aware of this house type and it is not surprising that he would have chosen to replicate it when he built his new house in Murfreesboro. Unfortunately, there are no published architectural surveys for either of the cities of Suffolk or Norfolk where members of the Cowper family lived; no direct ties to specific buildings can be established. Nevertheless, the popular architectural literature of Virginia includes many houses of this type and form. The majority of these houses have either three or four dormer windows on their facades. The existence of the five original dormer windows on the Cowper-Thomson House provides it with both a handsome appearance and a well-illuminated second story while placing it in an even smaller category of such five-bay dwellings in either North Carolina--where it is the only known example of its period--or in Virginia.

FOOTNOTE

1. Because of the loss of the majority of the public records of Hertford County in the sacking and burning of Winton, the county seat, on 20 February 1862, the available primary and secondary records for Murfreesboro and Hertford County for the period prior to 1862 are few in number. The principal primary record is the United States Census. The major secondary source is THE COLONIAL AND STATE POLITICAL HISTORY OF HERTFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA (1906) by Benjamin B. Winborne that

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includes good accounts of many of the individuals and families who lived in the town and county. Judge Albert Wallace Cowper's THE COWPER FAMILY IN NORTH CAROLINA is the only available source on the genealogy of the branches of the family who made their homes in North Carolina. For the relationship of the Cowper-Thompson House to the architectural fabric of Murfreesboro the two publications of the Renaissance in Carolina Campaign were useful: RENAISSANCE IN CAROLINA, 1971-1976 (1971); and RENAISSANCE IN CAROLINA II (1973). In the first volume "The Reverend Thompson House" is discussed on pages 70 through 75. It includes documentary photographs that show the house with a wood shingle roof, before the gable-end eaves were extended, and afterward when the standing seam metal roof had been installed. At that time the association of the house with the Cowper family was unknown. There was a single photograph of the house on page 119 of the second volume with the caption, "Lack of maintenance has threatened this very important structure." The activities of the Rev. George Matthias Thompson in Murfreesboro are discussed in Raymond Hargus Taylor's A CENTURY AND A QUARTER OF SERVICE: A HISTORY OF THE MURFREESBORO BAPTIST CHURCH, 1848-1973 (1973) on pages 2 through 12. Information on the restoration of the house in 1978-1980 by Jacob Christian and Ruth Kennedy Myers was obtained during the author's interview with the couple on 10 June 1991. Notes of the interview are contained in the file for the Cowper-Thompson House at the Survey and Planning Branch, State Historic Preservation Office.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Cowper, Albert Wallace. THE COWPER FAMILY OF NORTH CAROLINA. N. p. Privately printed, n.d.

Stephenson, E. Frank, Jr. RENAISSANCE IN CAROLINA 1971-1976. N. p.: n.p., 1971

Winborne, Benjamin B. THE COLONIAL AND STATE POLITICAL HISTORY OF HERTFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA. Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1906.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Approximately one acre.

UTM References

A

118	311210710	41031511810
Zone	Easting	Northing

B

Zone	Easting	Northing

C

Zone	Easting	Northing

D

Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property included in this nomination is Parcel #8324 on Hertford County Property Map 5958.12 as outlined on the enclosed copy of the map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The property included in this nomination is the house lot, described above and outlined on the enclosed map, that includes the house and its surrounding lawn and yard. This is the property that was purchased by the present owners in 1978 with the house and comprises a portion of the house's original acreage.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Davyd Foard Hood
organization _____ date 2 September 1991
street & number Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road telephone 704/462-4331
city or town Vale state North Carolina zip code 28168

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National Park Service

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Cowper-Thompson House, Murfreesboro, Hertford County, NC

Section number _____ Photographs _____ Page 1.

COWPER-THOMPSON HOUSE: SCHEDULE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The following lettered list of photographs is a schedule of those photographs included in this nomination. The following information applies to all of the photographs.

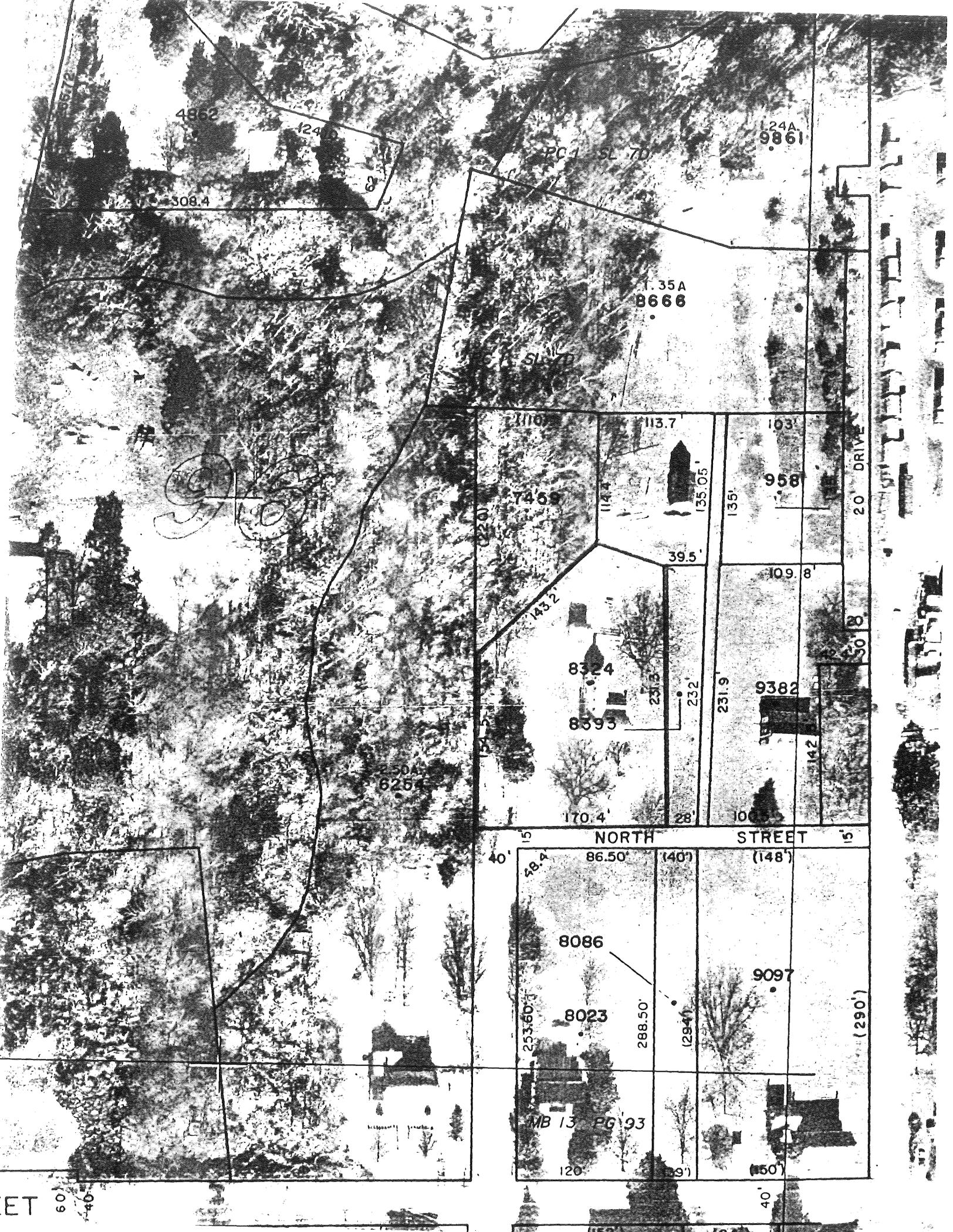
Name of Property: Cowper-Thompson House
405 North Street
Murfreesboro
Hertford County
North Carolina

Photographer: Davyd Foard Hood

Date of Photographs: 10 June 1991

Location of Original Negatives: Division of Archives and History
109 East Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

- A. Cowper-Thompson House: South(front) elevation
looking north
- B. Cowper-Thompson House: Overall view
looking northeast
- C. Cowper-Thompson House: Dormer windows
looking northeast
- D. Cowper-Thompson House: the Barn
looking northwest
- E. Cowper-Thompson House: the Living Room
looking east
- F. Cowper-Thompson House: the Dining Room
looking southwest
- G. Cowper-Thompson House: the Library(former kitchen)
looking south/southwest into present kitchen and
dining room
- H. Cowper-Thompson House: Second-story east bedroom
looking east/northeast
- I. Cowper-Thompson House: Second-story hall and west bedroom
looking west from east bedroom



4862

4240

24A
9861

PC 1 SL 7D

308.4

1.35A
8666

1116

113.7

103

90

7459

135.05'

958

20' DRIVE

39.5'

143.2

8324

109.8'

8395

231.3

9382

50' 8"

2.50A
6254

170.4'

232

231.9

142

40' 15' NORTH STREET 15'

58.4

86.50'

(140')

(148')

8086

9097

8023

288.50'

(294')

(290')

MB 13 PG 93

120

39'

(150')

ET 60' 40'

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91001908

Date Listed: 1/9/92

Cowper-Thompson House
Property Name

Hertford NORTH CAROLINA
County State

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

1/9/92
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 3

The count on this nomination was amended to show 2 contributing buildings, rather than one, since the currently attached kitchen was originally built as a separate structure.

The amendment was confirmed by phone with the North Carolina SHPO (1/8/92).

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

Cowper-Thompson
House
Murfreesboro, N.C.
Quad-Zone 18
HERTFORD Co., 1:24000
Easting: 312070
Northing: 4035180

