

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1** NAME

HISTORIC

GENERAL JOHN THOMPSON HOME

AND/OR COMMON

Plum Bottom

**2** LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

3/10 mi. east of Pa. Rte. 322 on E. Branch Road

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

State College

\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

23rd

STATE

Pennsylvania

CODE

42

COUNTY

Centre

CODE

027

**3** CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY  | OWNERSHIP                                   | STATUS                                       | PRESENT USE                            |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT               | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE   | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM                       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED          | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL    | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE              | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH               | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS    | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE                   | <b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>                   | <b>ACCESSIBLE</b>                            | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT                 | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS         | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED     | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC                   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED   | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL    | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION               |
|   |   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO       | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY      | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:                       |

**4** OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon D. Kissinger

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Branch Road

CITY, TOWN

State College

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania 16801

**5** LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Centre County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

High Street

CITY, TOWN

Bellefonte

STATE

Pennsylvania 16823

**6** REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

9-3-76

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDSPennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission  
P. O. Box 1026

CITY, TOWN

Harrisburg

STATE

Pennsylvania 17120

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                     |                                       | CHECK ONE                                   | CHECK ONE   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD                 | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR                 | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |   |   |

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

The General John Thompson Homestead (1813-1814) is a two story, three bay, limestone and sandstone house (45' by 20') with two story stone and frame kitchen ell (18' square). The frame summer kitchen behind was reconstructed in 1958-1959. While this construction was too far gone to be preserved, the new work repeated the style and configuration of the original. The same board-and-batten construction was employed in the addition of a large one-story family room (1958-1959), off-axis at the eastern end of the house. As it stands today, the house offers one of the best examples of correct restoration and appropriate adaptation to modern living.

The stone house, with walls two feet thick, is a typical example of the Georgian farmhouse as constructed in rural Pennsylvania. The plan of the main body of the house is symmetrical with central hall separating two rooms on either floor. Workmanship is conservative and practical throughout.

On the first floor a dining room lies to the west of the hall and a parlor to the east. Chairrails and mantelpieces are intact along with original built-in cupboards flanking the fireplaces toward the front of the house. Floors throughout are yellow pine with boards of varying widths, tongue and grooved.

The hall perhaps best displays the anomalies of local workmanship. The stairway, for example, lacks balusters along its first run of steps. At the top of these steps a turn to the landing is effected by two triangular steps. Finally, the post at the landing extends entirely to the ceiling.

Also, it is in the hall that one can experience the honest use of materials characteristic of the house. The walls, for instance, are simple planks, without bead. An exceptionally wide door (3'4") and a very short door (5'8") beneath the stairs also bespeak the predominance of practical intentions. Consistent with this is the design of original forged-iron hardware still intact.

All features upstairs are predictable extensions of the plan and finish of the first story. The fireplaces are small and simple in design.

The exterior character of the house is enhanced by the play of tonalities between limestone and sandstone. The facade, for whatever reason, was built of sandstone up to the second story and then finished in squared limestone blocks above. Remaining sides of the house feature both limestone and sandstone, resulting in cooler or warmer, smoother or rougher accents.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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One feature not at all typical is the design of the transom over the main door. This is preserved complete with original glass and provides subtle curvilinear counterplay to the fundamental rectilinear character of the house.

The house stands today in excellent condition. There is a full, dry basement and new sawed cedar-shingle roof.

Finally, it must be said that the General John Thompson Home is effectively complemented both historically and environmentally by the Plum Bottom Farm. This farm has been preserved essentially intact (today 196 acres neat measure) and has been established historically through reference to land records in Harrisburg. (In the immediate vicinity of the house is a large barn built about the time of the Civil War by the Thompson family.)

# 18 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD  | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |   |  |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC          | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING     | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION           | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW                    | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE             |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS              | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE           |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION              | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                  | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY             | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900-                | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY               | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |  |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |  |  |

SPECIFIC DATES      1813-1814

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The General John Thompson (1783-1833) Homestead, Plum Bottom, located on Slab Cabin Branch, in College Township, stands as a landmark to the industry and initiative of one of Centre County's earliest settlers. The house is intimately tied with the County's early history, both by virtue of its location along one of the first roads established in the county and through its construction by one of the area's best-known families of settlers. The building reflects the early craftsmanship and design of its rural Pennsylvania builders.

John Thompson was born in 1783 in the large stone house, still standing in Milroy, known as "Thompson Tavern." This substantial stone house was erected by John's father, Moses Thompson. Since education in these very early times was almost unheard of, it is recorded that John received about three months formal education.

In 1804, <sup>d</sup> at an age of 21, he married Elizabeth McFarlane, of Jack's Creek, Mifflin County. During the first several years, the young couple lived at John's father's home in Milroy. It was during this time that their first two children, Matthew and Nancy were born.

In 1809, they moved from Milroy to a farm which John's father had bought the previous year. On this farm, which was located on Slab Cabin Branch, their first home was a small log house. They lived in this log cabin five years, during which time two more children, Moses and Mary, were born.

In 1813-1814, they built a stone residence about 100 yards north of the log house; it would be here that they would live for the rest of their lives. Their children, John I., James and William, were born here. Mrs. Thompson died in 1822 and John died in 1833 from a severe cold received when going to Bellefonte for business.

From 1811 until his death, John Thompson was a justice of the peace appointed by Governor Simon Synder. From 1829 until his death, he was elected Major General of the Militia.

General John Thompson was very concerned with the importance of education. An excerpt from his biography in Linn's History of Centre and Clinton Counties reads as follows:

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He was a public-spirited, enterprising man, and soon after settling upon Slab Cabin Branch, he began to urge his neighbors to assist in building a school-house, after accomplishing which he was instrumental in securing as teacher, or "master," Exekiel Dunbar, a graduate of Dickinson College.

Further evidence for Mr. Thompson's concern for education is suggested in his last will and testament where he provides an opportunity for his son, James, to go to school. The will states:

. . . if my son, James, should desire to go to school, I allow \$150 a year to be taken for his support until such time as my farm may be disposed of, this amount to be deducted from his inheritance.

Evidence of John Thompson's industry and initiative is indicated by the growth of his farm. Not only did he build the "substantial" stone house, but he built a large stone bank barn (no longer in existence) and added many tracts of land to his Plum Bottom tract (in excess of 1,000 acres). These other tracts were sold, according to his will, shortly after his death and the profits divided among his many children. Only two tracts of land remained in the family -- one which we willed to his eldest son, Matthew, a plantation of 300 acres in Clearfield County, and the Plum Bottom tract which was set aside for his children who were yet unmarried.

The Plum Bottom tract was located on one of Centre County's earliest roads, laid out in 1790. This road ran from Slab Cabin Branch (the general vicinity of General Thompson's) down along Spring Creek, past the end of Nittany Mountain (now Lemont) on to Milesburg. This road became a much traveled road serving the local community as well as the growing iron industry concerns. This road went around Nittany Mountain, the only place to easily by-pass its difficult grade. Eventually, this road became known as the "Bellefonte to Huntingdon Highway." Both the original log cabin and the large stone house were very near the road and Moses Thompson, son of General Thompson, although young at the time, could recall the excitement created as the soldiers going to and returning from Erie to Bellefonte at the time of the War of 1812.

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Moses Thompson (1810-1891), son of General Thompson, was quite an influential person in Centre County history. Moses, at the age of 19, took over the management of his father's farm interests due to his father's ill health. In 1839, he turned over the farm to his brother and became involved in the iron industry after marrying Mary Irvin, daughter of a wealthy iron master in Centre County. After several successful business ventures and by this time quite wealthy, in 1865 he became sole owner of Centre Furnace, the first and one of Centre County's largest. He was quite interested in and played a large part in the establishment of transportation in Centre County. He heavily supported the Bald Eagle Valley Canal, Bald Eagle Valley Railroad, and both the Boalsburg to Bellefonte Turnpike and the Agricultural College and Junction Turnpike. He was also one of the largest contributors to the Lewisburg, Centre, and Spruce Creek Railroads. Coinciding with his father's interest in education, he assisted greatly in the establishment of Pennsylvania State College and was its treasurer for many years.

Finally the stone house, presently owned by Gordon Kissinger, stands as not only a monument to its early rural Pennsylvania craftsmen, but a tribute to its owner who with a great amount of care, renovated the house to its original condition, extremely aware of the value of proper preservation methods. (1958-1959).

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania.  
Chicago, J.H. Beers and Company, 1898.

Linn, John Blair. History of Centre and Clinton Counties.  
Philadelphia, L.H. Everts, 1883.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .3 acre (house alone)

UTM REFERENCES

|   |           |                 |                   |
|---|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| A | <u>18</u> | <u>26,103,0</u> | <u>4,51,914,0</u> |
|   | ZONE      | EASTING         | NORTHING          |
| C |           |                 |                   |

|   |      |         |          |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| B |      |         |          |
|   | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| D |      |         |          |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

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

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Gregory Ramsey, Coordinator & Michael Halm, Assistant

ORGANIZATION

Centre County Historic Registration Project

DATE

September 1, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

Centre County Library, 203 N. Allegheny St.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Bellefonte

STATE

Pennsylvania 16823

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

WILLIAM J. WEWER, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

DATE

11/2/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

General John Thompson Homestead  
— Plum Bottom —  
181261030/4519140

