

James K. Polk Birthplace



Rebuilt Structures



Commemorative Marker

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the James K. Polk Birthplace is located on Polk St. in Pineville, N.C.

2. Name address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property: The present owner of the property is the State of North Carolina. The property is a State Historic Site and is administered by:

The Division of Archives and History
Historic Sites Section
109 E. Jones St.
Raleigh, N.C. 27611

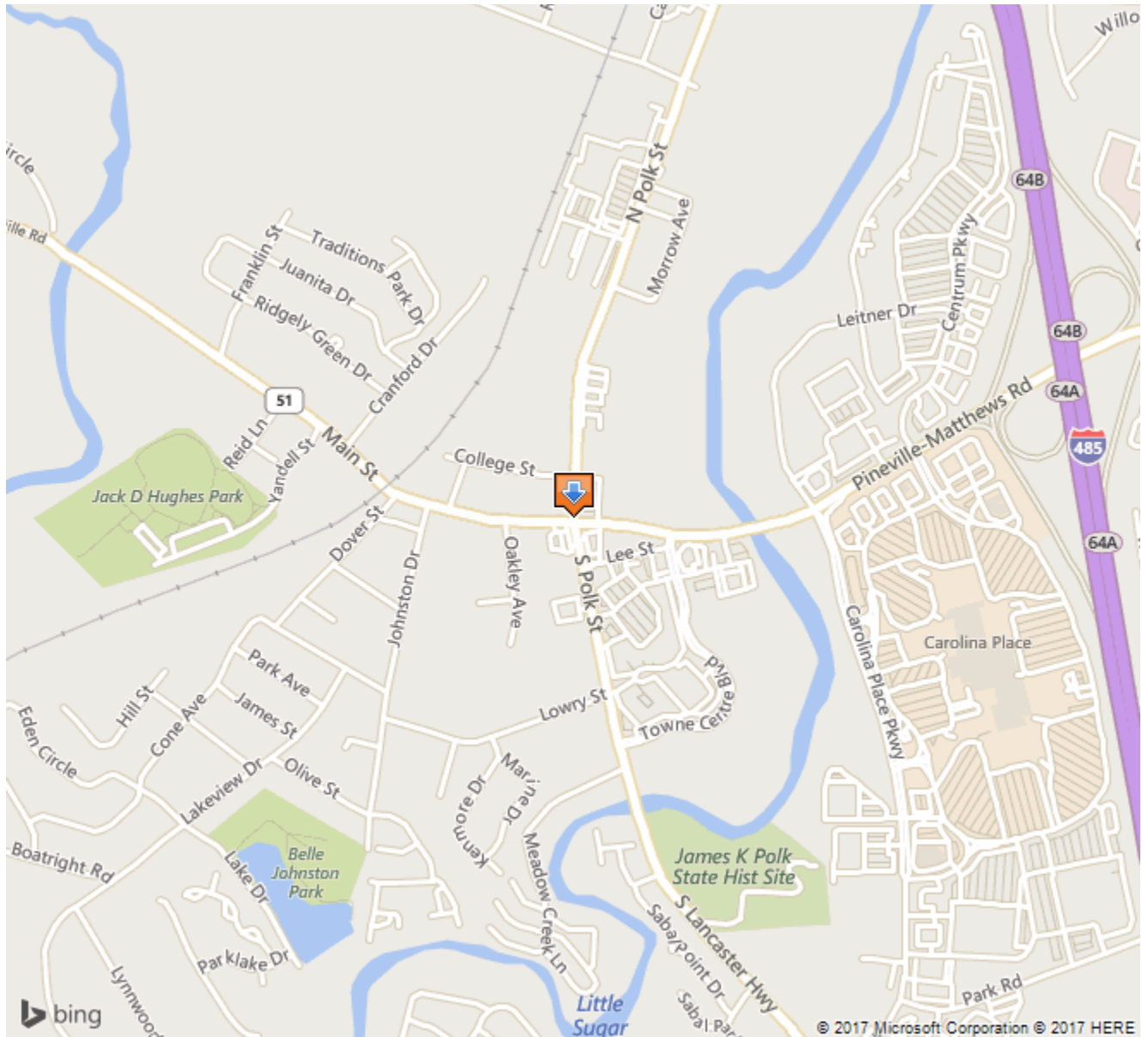
The local address and telephone number of the James K. Polk Birthplace is:

The James K. Polk Birthplace
Box 475
Pineville, N.C. 28134

Telephone: (704) 889-7145

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2563 at Page 564. The Tax Parcel Number of this property is 221-131-02.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

James K. Polk was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, on November 2, 1795. ¹ The Polk family (the original family name was Pollock) came to Maryland in 1680 and gradually moved southward to North Carolina. In 1806, when James was eleven years old, the Polk family moved to Tennessee where James' father was a farmer and surveyor. Young James attended nearby academies and in 1815 entered the sophomore class at the University of North Carolina. He was graduated in 1818 with high honors.

Polk returned to Tennessee and practiced law until his election as president. His success as a lawyer brought him into politics and his speeches won him the nickname "Napoleon of the Stump." He was a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives when he married Sarah Childress in 1822.

In 1825 Polk was elected to the first of his seven terms in Congress and in 1835 he was chosen Speaker of the House. He refused renomination for Congress in 1839 to become a successful Democratic candidate for governor of Tennessee. In 1840 public sentiment began to favor the Whigs, and consequently in 1841 and 1843 Polk was defeated in his attempts to be re-elected governor of Tennessee.

Polk was the first "dark horse" in American politics when he was the party's choice over Martin Van Buren as the Democratic nominee for president against Henry Clay, the Whig nominee. The chief issues of the 1844 campaign were the re-annexation of Texas and the re-occupation of Oregon, both of which Polk favored. With a strong stand on these issues and the battle cry, "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight," Polk rode into the White House.

Determined and stubborn, Polk came into the office of president with a clear-cut program. "There are four great measures which are to be the measures of my whole administration: one, a reduction of the tariff; another the independent treasury; a third, the settlement of the Oregon boundary question; and lastly, the acquisition of California." All of these ambitions were fulfilled within Polk's four-year term.

Polk regarded the Texas question settled. Texas had been annexed to the United States, but Mexico had not recognized the annexation. Mexico insisted that the Nueces River was the legal boundary between Mexico and Texas. The Texans, supported by Polk, insisted that Texas extended to the Rio Grande.

In May, 1846, after a clash between Mexican and American troops, Congress recognized the existence of a state of war "by act of the Republic of Mexico." The war

with Mexico (1846-1848) ended after more than a year of fighting and Mexico ceded Texas to the United States.

During the Polk administration over 500,000 square miles of territory were acquired by the United States. Three new states were admitted to the Union: Texas in 1845, Iowa in 1846, and Wisconsin in 1848. In 1849 California, although not yet admitted to the Union, organized its own government. During these years the Mormon state of Utah was established and settled.

In accepting the nomination for president in 1844, Polk had declared that he would not be a candidate for re-election in 1848. He held firmly to his word and when Zachary Taylor became president Polk retired to his home in Nashville, Tennessee, where he died on June 15, 1849.

A log house and outbuildings thought to be similar to the original Polk properties in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (now in Pineville, N.C.) were reconstructed in 1967 at the James K. Polk Birthplace. Both the house and an accompanying kitchen contain furnishings dating prior to 1806 when the Polk family moved to Tennessee. A modern visitor center serves as an orientation point and offers exhibits relating to the life and times of James K. Polk.

Notes:

¹ The material in this essay is quoted directly from a pamphlet, "President James R. Polk Birthplace, prepared and distributed by the Historic Sites Section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

7 A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Caroline Mesrobian, architectural historian.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in NCGS 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in term of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the James K. Polk Birthplace does possess special significance in terms of the history of the United States. The Commission bases its judgment on the fact that President James K. Polk was born at this site in 1795. Furthermore, the Concussion judges that the property

possesses special significance in terms of the history of Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the fact that the property contains a representative frontier farm of the late eighteenth century.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission judges that the architectural description included herein demonstrates that the property known as the James K. Polk Birthplace meets this criterion. Admittedly, the three buildings (house, kitchen and barn) were reconstructed in 1967 and are not on their exact original locations. However, the buildings were erected according to the highest professional standards.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes historic property." The current tax appraisal on the 21.19 acres of land is \$137,740. The current tax appraisal on the improvements (including the visitors center) is \$107,060. The land and improvements are exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes.

Bibliography

"President James K. Polk Birthplace", a pamphlet prepared and distributed by the Historic Sites Section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this Report: March 5, 1980.

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
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Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Architectural Description

*Caroline Mesrobian
September 1, 1979*

The James K. Polk Memorial is located in Pineville, ten miles south of Charlotte, on US 521. The original buildings were torn down around 1920;¹ no photographic sources of the complex exist. A log house and outbuildings thought to be similar to the original Polk properties were reconstructed on the site in 1967 on the basis of a survey of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century buildings in Mecklenburg County and a description of the Polk place from an address given by Governor David L. Swain in 1867. The report reads: "The place where President Polk was born was, in 1849, the property of Nathan Orr. The house pointed out to me was of logs, had never been weather-boarded, and was much dilapidated. It was formed by two pens, one about 20 by 16. the other about 12 by 16, making a structure 32 by 16, with a single roof and brick chimney at the north end, and stood about 200 yards south of Little Sugar Creek."² The reconstructed buildings stand on a twenty-one acre tract that encompasses the original Polk homestead. The site of the present buildings is within a few hundred yards of the original homestead location. The small farm complex consists of two single pens which have been joined; a one story kitchen with loft situated northeast of the main house; and a small barn (originally the packhouse) to the north of the main house and kitchen buildings.

All of the [log structures](#) were brought from other Mecklenburg County sites. The large pen of the main structure is the Coffey Log House (16 by 22 feet), which was constructed about 1810 on a site approximately seven miles southeast from the Polk homestead. The oak logs of the Query Cabin, a log house built around 1805 and located near Harrisburg just off US 49, were employed in the construction of the smaller pen. The kitchen cabin is the Kuykendall or Billy Rea log house (circa 1805) which stood near [Providence Presbyterian Church](#) on NC 16. The outbuilding (packhouse) was formerly located on the Kinsey family property at the intersection of NC 16 and 51.)

The squared logs of each structure are notched with [half dovetail joints](#), the interstices plugged with cement colored to resemble clay. Each building has a [gable roof](#) covered with cedar or cypress shingles, slightly overhanging eaves, and weatherboarded gables. The shingles are overlapped so that there are small openings for ventilation; they swell and close with rain. Both the dwelling and the kitchen have single exterior end chimneys, the main dwelling chimney located on the north side, the chimney of the kitchen on the east side. Each chimney is of brick laid in [Flemish bond](#), with

stepped shoulders and a moulded cap. Rough stone piers beneath each corner of the structures serve as foundations. A split rail encloses the entire complex.

The main (west) facade of the dwelling has a board-and-batten door in the central bay of each pen, and a window in each outer bay. On the south end a central window occurs at the first level and in the gable, while on the north end, a small window is located in the gable to the west of the chimney. The first story windows have [six-over-six sash](#), and the smaller windows above are unglazed and were protected by board-and-batten shutters hung on strap hinges at one time. A simple architrave borders each opening, and below each window is a plain wooden sill with diagonally sawn corners. The rear facade is marked only by a board-and-batten door in the north pen.

The interior of the main house consists of two rooms at both the first and second levels with an enclosed two-flight [stair](#) rising in the northeast corner of the north room. Around the loft stairwell is a simple balustrade consisting of square [balusters](#) and a moulded [handrail](#). The walls of the first story are finished quite simply with vertical pine sheathing. The chair rail in the north room is from the Query Cabin. The ceiling has exposed beams and is eight feet seven inches in height. The pine mantel in this room, which was originally in the Kuykendall House, is of simple late Georgian design with a flat-paneled frieze beneath a moulded shelf. The doors between the rooms on each level are constructed of wide vertical boards and hung on HL hinges. Door hardware is of the period. The walls in the attic are left unfinished. A fireplace with wide brick surround and brick hearth without mortar filling is located in the north side of this floor.

The kitchen contains a room on each floor, with a central entrance surrounded by a plain architrave on the main(north) facade. The two windows which formerly pierced this side (later additions) have been closed up. The only functional windows -one located in the first story and one in the gable of the west side - are unglazed and are protected by board-and-batten shutters with strap hinges attached with rosehead nails. The south facade also contains a centrally located door. The interior walls of both the first story (white washed) and the loft are unfinished, and the first story fireplace consists of a simple large rectangular opening. The ground story ceiling has exposed beams and is eight feet three inches in height. The enclosed stair rises in two flights in the southwest corner, and a plain balustrade encloses the stairwell at the loft level. The original floor level of the loft was raised during reconstruction. Both the main cabin and the kitchen contain period furnishings.

The outbuilding, to the north of the main house and kitchen, is a cotton and meat house, a type of storage building typical of the North Carolina Piedmont. On the upper level cotton was stored; on the lower, meat. It is presently used as a barn. Access to each level is through a square opening closed with vertically sheathed doors, the upper

reached by an exterior ladder. Widely overhanging- gable eaves protect the front (south) of the building.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Kays Gary, "Did Polk Paint Panel From Home?", *Charlotte Observer*, July 26, 1974, Section B, page 1.

² Eva M. Young, "Polk, the Forgotten Man," *State* (N.C.), April 15, 1967. page 11.

³ Polk Memorial Files; and "Early Log Buildings Moved to James K. Polk Birthplace Site," *Enquirer-Journal*(Monroe, N.C.), June 20, 1966, page 2.