

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received MAR 26 1982

date entered APR 29 1982

1. Name

historic Chinaberry (preferred), (Williams-Converse House)

and/or common Chinaberry

2. Location

street & number 441 York Street, S. E. N/A not for publication

city, town Aiken N/A vicinity of congressional district Third

state South Carolina code 045 county Aiken code 003

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<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:

4. Owner of Property

name J. V. Burgess

street & number 441 York Street, S. E.

city, town Aiken N/A vicinity of state South Carolina 29801

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registrar of Mesne Conveyance

street & number Aiken County Office Complex, 828 Richland Avenue W.

city, town Aiken state South Carolina 29801

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of Historic Places
title in South Carolina

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1973 federal state county local

depository for survey records South Carolina Department of Archives and History

city, town Columbia state South Carolina 29211

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located within the present city limits of Aiken, South Carolina, Chinaberry is believed to have been constructed ca. 1824 as a residence for Dr. William White Williams and enlarged for John Williams Converse after he purchased the house in 1926. Chinaberry represents a synthesis of early nineteenth century construction and design with twentieth century Colonial Revival elements.

A two and one-half story wood frame residence covered with weatherboard, Chinaberry is set on a low brick foundation. The front slope of its medium gable roof with boxed cornice is broken by a large shed dormer extending almost the entire width of the front elevation; a smaller dormer with shed roof interrupts the rear slope of the composition shingle roof. Extending from the north end of the rear of the building is a gabled, one-story wing with interior chimney.

Marking the center of the symmetrical facade (southwest elevation) of the house are its entrance, which features double doors, rectangular sidelights, and semielliptical fanlight, and a small porch with slender Tuscan columns, which support a flat roof with metal railing. On either side of the front porch, and the two small windows above it in both the second floor and dormer, are two larger windows. Prominent features of Chinaberry's asymmetrical southeast side are a French window with shutters near its south corner, a large, partially-stuccoed brick exterior chimney slightly to the right of the ridge of the roof, and a recessed porch with slender Tuscan columns and plain balustrade in the east corner of the house. The southeast elevation apparently had a second exterior chimney, as does the northwest elevation, located in the gap between windows to the left of the standing chimney. At the north corner of the rear dormer is a fourth exterior chimney. The placement of doors and windows in the rear (north-east) elevation and one-story wing is irregular.

Windows are double-hung sash, nine-over-nine lights on the first floor, except for four paired six-over-six light windows to the left of the central gable end chimney of the northwest elevation, and those of the one-story ell, which are six-over-six. Second and third story windows have six-over-nine lights except for the four small six-over-six windows in the facade, and a small window to the right of the chimney of the southeast side. All but the rear windows and those in the front dormer are flanked by louvered shutters.

When it was built as a plantation house, Chinaberry originally faced northeast in the direction of the old Augusta Road. In 1918, the house was delineated by the Sanborn Map Company as a rectangular, two-story wood frame building with a two-story porch extending across the front elevation. A one-story ell projected from the south end of the rear of the building, to the left of which was a small, one-story porch. On a later Sanborn map drawn in 1925, the house was indicated to be two and one-half stories, but otherwise identical in form. After John W. Converse acquired the property in 1926, he reversed the plan of the house. A 1935 Sanborn map of Aiken shows Chinaberry's shape essentially as it was ten years earlier, only with the front of the building facing southwest.

8. 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Local history, decorative arts, society and customs
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				
Specific dates	ca. 1824, 1920s	Builder/Architect	Unknown	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Thought to have been built ca. 1824 for William W. Williams, Chinaberry incorporates materials and methods of construction characteristic of an early nineteenth century Carolina farmhouse, and is the only known surviving landmark in Aiken, South Carolina, associated with the founding of the town in the mid-1830s. Local tradition indicates that this house was a focal point for activity during a Civil War skirmish in February 1865. In the 1920s during Aiken's heyday as a resort for wealthy sports-loving northerners, who called themselves Aiken's "Winter Colony," Chinaberry was modified by John W. Converse for use as a winter residence.

Dr. William White Williams (1787-1845) was a locally prominent individual, who, in addition to being a planter, served in the South Carolina House of Representatives, 1830-31.¹ It is not known precisely when W. W. Williams built his house; however, evidence indicates the date of construction to have been ca. 1824. This evidence includes the materials and method of construction used in the nineteenth century core of the house and the fact that a dwelling in this location occupied by W. Williams is indicated on the map of Barnwell District included in Robert Mill's Atlas of the State of South Carolina, published in 1825.² Williams was influential in the decision of the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company to locate the route of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad and to plan a town on his land. In legal agreements with the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company recorded in 1832-33, W. W. Williams promised to give the railroad half of the part of his property that was to be divided into lots for a town.³

In charge of locating and taking charge of the most difficult section of the railroad's route near Hamburg was Andrew Alfred Dexter.⁴ Dexter boarded with the Williams family, and fell in love with Sarah Williams, whom he married in 1834.⁵ According to local legend, this romance was responsible for the path of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad being located through Aiken rather than earlier proposed routes.⁶ Because of the abrupt descent along the chosen course, it was necessary to build an inclined plane and a steam engine to lower railroad cars over the slope.⁷ Dexter is reputed to have designed this inclined plane, and has also been credited with laying out Aiken's unusual and beautiful town plan, which is characterized by 150 foot right-of-ways for streets and blocks measuring 300 by 600 feet.⁸

During February of 1865, it is believed that the Williams House, then owned by W. J. Williams, was used as a headquarters for Confederate Major-General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry during a skirmish with a detachment of Federal troops under Major-General H. J. Kilpatrick.⁹ In this action, the Confederates successfully stopped Kilpatrick, thus deterring Federal advances beyond Aiken to Graniteville and Bath, where textile and paper mills were still in operation, and on to Augusta, Georgia!¹⁰ Local tradition indicates that some of the action during the Battle of Aiken occurred on a field near the Williams home, and that wounded were taken to and cared for at the house.¹¹

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approximately .9

Quadrangle name Aiken, S.C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 1 7 4 3 3 0 1 0 3 7 1 2 6 3 2
Zone Easting Northing

B [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []
Zone Easting Northing

C [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

D [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

E [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

F [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

G [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

H [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Verbal boundary description and justification The boundary of the Chinaberry nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying Aiken County Tax Map 30 - 052, which is drawn to a scale of 100 feet to the inch. The nominated property includes all significant buildings and structures.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

Sally Farrie, Helen Randall, Mary Bess Epps - Historic Aiken Foundation Inc.
name/title Margaret Marion, Historic Preservation Planner

organization Lower Savannah Council of Governments date 1981

street & number Post Office Box 850 telephone (803) 649-7981

city or town Aiken state South Carolina 29801

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Charles E. Lee (cz) 3 March 1982
Charles E. Lee
title State Historic Preservation Officer date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for *Selma Byers* Entered in the National Register date 4/29/82
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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Interior: On the first floor, Chinaberry features a central hall plan with a double parlor on its southeast side. The rectangular sidelights and semielliptical fanlight of the front entrance are repeated in the hall, separating the foyer from the stairway. A bathroom was added at the hall's northeast end, facing the foot of the stairs. To the left of the hallway are the dining room, the largest room in the house, and the kitchen. A door in the northeast wall of the kitchen opens onto a hall that provides access to a game room, laundry room, and back stairs.

Like the first floor, the second has two rooms on either side of a central stair hall. At the southwest end, two bathrooms were added, and along the northeast side, three servants bedrooms and two baths. Third floor space, expanded by John Converse, contains servants rooms and bathrooms.

The four main rooms of the first and second floors, with the exception of the kitchen, have high hewn board ceilings, heart pine floors, wainscoting, paneled doors four feet wide, and wide baseboards. Covered with plaster or paper, the walls are said to be constructed of wide pine boards. The dining room features woodwork with graining, which was redone when the Burgesses purchased the house in the 1950s, and an antique wall-covering, which depicts scenes of America, and which was probably installed by John Converse. Federal mantels of varying designs are found in five of the eight original rooms. In the room now used as a kitchen, the original mantel has been replaced, and the ceiling lowered.

Surroundings: Situated at the corner of Ray Lane and York Street within the nominated acreage is an L-shaped weatherboard building with gable roof and cupola, constructed ca. 1930 by John Converse, and containing apartments and a south-facing stable. The property also contains a noncontributing swimming pool northwest of the house. An eight feet high brick wall extends from the sides of the L-shaped building and surrounds the property, separating it from adjacent residences.

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In 1926, John Williams Converse of Pennsylvania bought the Williams house for use as a winter residence.¹² Converse was a member of the board of directors of the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Rosemont, Pennsylvania, a special partner in the Philadelphia banking firm of Cassatt and Company, a director of the General Steel Casting Corporation and of the Bryn Mawr Trust Company, and was a trustee of the Drexel Institute of Technology. A well known polo player in the early days of the sport in this country, Converse built stables adjacent to his winter home, which he called Chinaberry.¹³ He also adapted the design of the house to suit the life style of Aiken's "Winter Colony," adding servants quarters, and relocating the main entry of the house from the north to the south side.

Decorative Arts: John W. Converse is reputed to have installed Chinaberry's dining room wallcovering, which is similar to wallpaper printed in 1834 by Zuber and Company of Rixheim, Alsace, and found in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House. Based on engravings of the 1820s, the paper depicts views of America admired by Europeans: Niagara Falls, the Natural Bridge of Virginia, West Point, and other historic scenes. Scenic wallcoverings of this type were popular in America during the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Architecture: Chinaberry is an outstanding example of the architectural outgrowth typical of the influence and architectural needs brought about by Aiken's "Winter Colony." Although the architectural details of the ca. 1824 house are in themselves significant as existing features contemporary with the founding of the town of Aiken, the rehabilitation of the building in the late 1920s documents the cultural changes that accompanied the "Winter Colony's" need for housing wealthy families, guests, and their accompanying staffs. The Colonial Revival taste of the era is well exemplified and complements the earlier vernacular design elements of the original ca. 1824 building.

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Page 2

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Footnotes

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⁴ Letter, Alex F. Black to Colonel A. Blanding, July 8, 1834, Andrew Alfred Dexter Personal and Business Papers, Manuscript Collection, South Caroliniana Library.

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⁷ Derrick, pp. 32-33.

⁸ Hayne.

⁹ Elizabeth C. Teague, "The Battle of Aiken," Centennial Celebration Commemorating the Founding of Aiken, South Carolina, April 4th-6th, 1935 (Aiken, S. C.: by Edgar N. Braddy, 1955).

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¹¹ Teague.

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¹³ Obituary of John W. Converse, New York Times, October 2, 1944, p. 19.

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