

Pond House
West side Fish Pond Road, County Road 96,
0.5 miles south of intersection with Old Plains Highway
Plains Vicinity
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2204

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
19-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

POND HOUSE

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Location: West side of Fish Pond Road, County Road 96, 0.5 miles south of the intersection with Old Plains Highway.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, E 743340 N 3545080.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. James Earl Carter, Jr.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Present Use: The Carter's use it as a guest house for visiting family and friends.

Significance: Lillian Carter lived in this modern, shed-style house from 1968 until her death in 1983. Her children had the house built for her while she was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in India. Jimmy Carter used the Pond House as a conference center during his presidential campaign and it was the site of a million dollar fund raiser for his presidential campaign.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1968.
2. Architect: Hugh Gaston. Gaston was born in Gastonburg, Alabama, in 1924 and was educated at Auburn University. A member of the Georgia chapter of the American Institute of Architects, most of Gaston's buildings are located in Georgia.¹ Gaston also designed the Carter's house on Woodland Drive in 1961, the Carter Peanut Warehouse in 1968, and the 1978 addition to the Plains Convalescent Home, formerly the Wise Sanitarium. In the 1980s Gaston severed his ties with the American Institute of Architects and moved to Lebanon, Tennessee. Mack Wakeford and J.M. Yielding, now of the firm of Yielding and Wakeford in Albany, also participated in the design of the house.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Carters have owned the Pond House since its construction in 1968. It was built on the site of the old Pond House which was purchased by Earl Carter February 1, 1937.²

¹ American Architect's Directory, p. 240.

² Deed Book 18, p. 359, recorded February 4, 1937.

4. General contractor, suppliers: Junior Abbett of Americus, Georgia. Wood and materials were supplied by Shiver Lumber Company and G.A. Tye Brothers, also of Americus.³
 5. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
 6. Alterations and additions: None.
- B. Historical Context: The twelve acres on which the Pond House stands has been in the Carter family since the 1937. In 1938-40 Earl Carter constructed the first Pond House as a recreational spot with a man-made pond stocked with bream and large-mouthed bass. The old house had a juke box, a pool table, and a campfire ring - the last of which is extant. The house was mostly used by the family, but church and school functions were also held there, including the Plains School junior and senior proms. The old Pond House burned to the ground in the mid 1960s.

Also in the mid 1960s, Lillian Carter saw a Peace Corps advertisement on television that stated age was no barrier for volunteers; so in 1965, at 68 she began two years of service as a nurse in India. While there, her children, Jimmy, Gloria, Ruth, and Billy had the Pond House rebuilt for her. Jimmy worked closely with the architect, Hugh Gaston, specifying that he sought a futuristic design with a large fireplace and hearth and many windows affording different views of the pond and surrounding woodlands.⁴

Gloria remembers the day she and Jimmy picked Lillian up at the airport in Atlanta. The following day, a welcome-home picnic was held at the Pond House with all of the children and grandchildren in attendance. Lillian suspected that her children were planning some type of surprise for her, but she presumed they had bought her a trailer. She was amazed at the home they had built. At first she used the Pond House as a retreat from Plains, where she could fish and relax. But as Jimmy Carter ascended into the public spotlight, she became annoyed by the continuous invasions of her privacy by tourists and the press. Finally, after someone took the collar off her standard poodle, Periwinkle, for a souvenir, she decided to leave Plains permanently and move into the Pond House.⁵

In 1976, the Pond House was selected as the site for a million dollar National Democratic Committee fund-raising dinner. For \$5,000 per plate, notable figures, such as Armand Hammer, were served southern delicacies including country ham, biscuits, collard greens and pecan pie prepared by Plains citizens. P.J. Wise, a long time friend of the Carters, and Maxine Reese, manager of his local campaign office, planned the momentous event. "We

³ Junior Abbett, 1989 interview.

⁴ Mack Wakeford, 1989 interview.

⁵ Gloria Carter Spann, 1989 interview.

organized and gave of ourselves to help one of our own," said Reese.⁶

During Carter's presidency, Lillian also became a public figure, traveling extensively, giving speeches and attending official funerals in place of her son. She filled her home with the many gifts and awards she received from well-wishers around the world. When she was residing in the home, she fished almost every day and worked in her garden. She also kept chickens in a pen behind the house. State trooper Ray Hathcock was with her at all times as her personal bodyguard.⁷

Lillian's health began to fail in the early 1980s and she spent the last years of her life at the Pond House watching television and listening to sports on the radio. She died in 1983 and her wake at the Pond House was attended by many public figures.

The Pond House is now used by the Carter family to lodge visiting family and friends.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modern, open plan has an informal, rustic quality. It features a second story loft, an uncut-stone hearth in the living room, and plenty of large windows providing natural light and a view of the pond and surrounding woodlands.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This asymmetrical one-and-a-half story shed house has irregular bays and an uneven roofline. A 17'-wide open living room area encompasses the eastern 26' of the south facade, 15' of the north facade, and makes up the east side of the house. The western two bays of the four-bay north facade project 9'-0" from the living room area and include the second-story loft. The only unbroken facade is on the west and is 30' long with four bays. The middle three bays of the south facade are almost entirely glazed and are recessed 4' between the 6' first bay and the fifth bay which consists of a 3' x 4' closet accessible only from the exterior.
2. Foundations: Concrete block painted green with metal screen vents.

⁶ Maxine Reese, 1989 interview.

⁷ Spann, 1989 interview.

3. Walls: Homasote,⁸ a composite of wood and mineral fibers was used for the exterior walls with vertical wood battens painted pale green. The walls of the second-story in the western two bays of the north facade project approximately 2' from the first story.
4. Structural System, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops: Four risers and a wood deck stoop run along the 9' projecting wall west of the front door in the second bay of the north facade. A wood rail runs along the east side of the stairs and stoop. The stair and stoop are sheltered by a steep-sloped shed roof. A two-riser wood stoop with a wood rail leads to the double sliding glass doors in the second bay of the south facade. Two wood risers lead to the door in the first bay of the west facade.
6. Chimneys: An uncoursed stone, end-wall chimney on the east facade is 6' wide at the base and has a shoulder on the south side. It serves a large fireplace in the living room.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door in the second bay of the north facade is hollow core flush, and the door in the first bay of the west facade is six-panel. A 7'-10" double sliding glass door with a single-light transom and screens is located in the second bay of the south facade.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The sliding-glass door and two adjacent 7'-7" x 7'-8" fixed windows create continuous glazing across the recessed middle three bays of the south facade. Also on this facade is a fixed square monitor with a window and a shed roof, which serves as a skylight for the stairwell. Two narrow, horizontal fixed semi-monitor windows near the ceiling on the south wall of the second-floor loft are visible from the south side on the wall projecting above the south slope of the roof. Another fixed semi-monitor window visible from this side projects above the roof on the backside of the steep shed roof that shelters the front door on the north facade. The first two bays of the north facade also feature large fixed windows placed on two levels to suggest two stories, although they all illuminate the large living-room area. The two lower windows are 7'-0" x 3'-0" and are located east of the front door; the upper windows are 8'-7" x 3'-

⁸ Wakeford, 1989 interview. Although Homasote is generally used for interior walls, Wakeford said it endures well on exteriors, insulates well, and is inexpensive.

0"; and the third is over the front door, under the steep-sloped shed roof over the front stoop. There is also an approximately 2' x 2' awning window on the second floor under the gable on the west facade, and a 3'-0" x 3'-0", one-over-one-light jalousie window over the kitchen sink in the fourth bay of the north facade on the first floor. The remaining windows, in the first bay of the south facade, the third and fourth bays of the north facade, the third and fourth bays of the west facade, and on the 9' east-facing wall adjacent to the front door, are all 2'-0" x 5'-0" jalousie windows.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Cedar shingles clad the various shed roofs. The south slope is uniform. The north side of the roof has three different slopes; the first bay has a flat roof, the second (over the door) has a steep slope extending to the second-story floor line, and the third and fourth bays are covered by a shallow, abbreviated roof to allow for the second-story windows.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There are no cornices. The roof over the front door has open eaves.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The single front door and rear sliding-glass doors open into an approximately 17' x 26' living room with a hearth along the east wall. A hall leads west from the living room to a large bedroom in the northwest corner, a bathroom on the west wall and an approximately 18' long kitchen along the north wall of the house. West of the kitchen on the north wall of the house is a utility closet.
 - b. Second floor: The stairway leads to a second-floor loft consists of a 19'-5" x 20'-0" bedroom that extends 4'-5" out over the living-room space. On the west wall of the bedroom is a 9'-6" x 5'-10" bathroom and a closet. A door on the south wall opens to another closet in the southwest corner of the house.
2. Stairways: Fourteen carpeted risers lead from south to north along the west wall of the living room. A wall with a large triangular cutout partially obscures the stairwell from the living room.
 3. Flooring: The bedroom, hall, and living room on the first floor feature

carpeting over a wood-joint floor. The baths and kitchen are linoleum tile. The upstairs loft/bedroom is hardwood.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls in the living room are painted blue; throughout the rest of the house they are white or paneled. The living room and loft ceilings are wood. Seven rafters support the living-room ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors: Bedroom doors are hollow-core flush. Doors to the linen closet under the stairs are wood louvered.
6. Decorative features and trim: Narrow crown moldings.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: An electric heat and air-conditioning unit is located outside the house between the third and fourth bays of the west facade.
 - b. Lighting: Inset round ceiling lights are located along the hall and above the hearth.
 - c. Plumbing: Each of the two bathrooms has a sink, toilet, and tub/shower. The kitchen has a double sink.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is set among trees far back from the road on a circular asphalt drive. A wood fence with a padlocked gate surrounds the property. The front of the house faces north, and the back faces south onto a large pond. A path with a wood stairway leads to a small dock. There is a metal swingset between the house and the pond. Northwest of the house is a semicircular stone campfire area with a wood-burning stove on the west side.
2. Outbuildings:
 - a. Shed: An 8'-2" x 13'-4" gable-front shed is located northwest of the house, east of the campfire circle. It is constructed of plywood with battens and has a three-light, three-cross-panel door on the east gable end.
 - b. Chicken house: Directly west of the house is a large rectangular chicken pen enclosed with chicken wire. In the northwest corner is a plywood gable-roofed chicken house built by Lillian Carter's friend, T.R. Wakefield.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: J.M. Yielding, Yielding and Wakeford Architects, has photographs of the house under construction.

C. Interviews:

Junior Abbett, builder, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 29, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Maxine Reese, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, September 5, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Gloria Carter Spann, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Wakeford, Mack, partner Yielding and Wakeford Architects, AIA, Telephone interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 25, 1989.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Plains, Georgia.

Real property record, card 17-3-19-2, Tax Assessor's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

American Architects Directory, edited by George S. Koyl, New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.

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