

**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 AUG 1 1979

date entered SEP 10 1979

**1. Name**

historic Riverdale

and/or common

**2. Location**

NE of Selma on River Rd.

River Road, approximately 1,000 feet north of the plant  
street & number of the Hammermill Paper Company not for publication

city, town Selma  vicinity of congressional district 7

state Alabama code 01 county Dallas code 047

**3. Classification**

| Category  | Ownership                                   | Status  | Present Use                            |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <input type="checkbox"/> public             | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture   | <input type="checkbox"/> museum                   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" 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 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> no                         | <input type="checkbox"/> military      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant |

**4. Owner of Property**

name Hammermill Paper Company, a Pennsylvania Corporation (c/o Mr. M. P. Ames)

street & number P.O. Box 457

city, town Selma vicinity of state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dallas County Courthouse

street & number Alabama Avenue

city, town Selma state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

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## 7. Description

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|   |                                       |   |   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Condition</b>                              |                                       | <b>Check one</b>                              | <b>Check one</b>                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good                 | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins        | <input type="checkbox"/> altered              | <input type="checkbox"/> moved                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair                 | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed    |   | date _____  |

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Riverdale is an excellent example of the late "Federal" style of architecture as it appeared in the Southeast in the 1820's. In plan, it is two stories, one room deep with a central hall flanked by single rooms on both floors. A one-story wing over a full, partially raised basement, extends to the rear at the southeast corner. A two-storied portico, light and delicate in appearance, covers front entrances on both floors. Most of the distinguishing details of the Federal style are present -- the arched fanlights over the front entrances, the Adamesque mantels, the raised panelled wainscot downstairs and the chairrail upstairs. The eave soffits are decorated with modified modillion, alternating with carved leaf decorations.

On the lower floor, door and window casings are built of symmetrical molded stock with corner blocks. Window casings terminate on the upper rail of the wainscot which continues across the window openings as the window stool. Door casings terminate on molded plinth blocks, shaped to receive the base at the wainscot. On the upper floor, architrave trim is employed and, in lieu of the full wainscot, only the chairrail is used. Some of the original cast iron rim locks are still in place and the doors are hung on butterfly butt hinges -- quite uncommon in Alabama. The main stair to the second floor consists of a round rail, square balusters, turned newels and carved scroll ornamentations on the string. A secondary stair, leading from the upper right bedroom to the rear hall has been converted to a bath and a dormer window installed on the wing roof.

Plaster ceiling molds are a delicate combination of molded shapes with egg and dart bands where the molds terminate at both wall and ceiling. Plaster rosettes with alternating Greek key and acanthus leaf motifs may be later additions. A particularly interesting feature is the fact that the building still displays its original decorations. Plaster walls and ceilings have a lime putty finish and were never painted or papered. Wainscots are grained, the raised panels to simulate maple or birch, and the panel edges to simulate black walnut. The edges of the vertical and horizontal rails are gilded, and the railings themselves are grained to simulate mahogany. Bases and most mantels are painted black, with the capitols of the mantels columnettes gilded. This was probably the original treatment.

The house has had surprisingly few alterations - the above mentioned bathroom, the loss of two lower columns on the portico, replacement of original shutters, and some alterations to the rear porch. Two outbuildings, a servants house and a barn remain, though both appear to be of later construction.

## 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/         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> theater         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900-                | <input type="checkbox"/> communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government    | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation  |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> invention              |   | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

**Specific dates** c. 1829      **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Riverdale is the most elegant and refined house of its period in Dallas County and perhaps in the entire Alabama Black Belt. Constructed around 1829 as the plantation home of Virgil Gardner, it is one of the few early Alabama houses to have retained its original graining and finishes. Additionally, the house is noted as the scene of one of the county's most lavish entertainments - the 1854 wedding of Mary Gardner to Henry Quitman, son of the Governor of Mississippi.

In 1819, Jason Gardner, formerly of Georgia, received from the United States government patent to 7,000 acres of land bounded by the Alabama River and Mulberry Creek about 10 miles east of Selma. Gardner was accompanied to Alabama by his son, Virgil H. (born John's County, Georgia, 1808). From age fourteen to his twentieth year, Virgil attended school in Vermont. After his father's sudden death in 1829, he returned to Alabama and in 1829 constructed Riverdale, on the occasion of his marriage to Margaret Louise Aylette. Margaret had come to Dallas County from Virginia as a child and was known for her charity and generosity, as well as for her gracious manner and cultivated intellect.

Colonel Gardner held no personal political aspirations but was recognized as a faithful and ardent supporter of the Whig party "so long as it existed in Alabama". When he died in 1881, over 100 former slaves returned to Riverdale for his burial in the family cemetery east of the house. His wife was buried beside him in 1884. During her lifetime the house was noted as a social center of the county. The house was purchased by W. P. Watts, a planter, and his widow, Mrs. Lucy Houston Shepard, was the subsequent owner. The last private owner was Houston Alexander, who sold the house and about 1,500 acres to Hammermill Paper Company, Inc. in 1961. Hammermill has offered to donate the house and some funds to the local historical society, provided it is relocated.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Selma Sesquicentennial Committee. "One Hundred and Fifty Years, Selma and Dallas County." Selma Printing Service, 1969.

Selma Times Journal. "Riverdale After 100 Years". updated clipping in files of Selma-Dallas County Preservation Society.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.3 acres

Quadrangle name Benton 15' series

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UMT References

A 

|      |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 6 | 5       | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5        | 0 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| Zone |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

C 

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D 

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E 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

G 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

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|      |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

see accompanying map.

### 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 Ellen Mertins

organization Alabama Historical Commission date July 23, 1979

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone (205) 832-6621

city or town Montgomery state Alabama 36130

# 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 Neil B. Howard Jr.

title SHPO Alabama date July 23, 1979

For HCERS use only

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

for factory Coal Shul date 9-10-79

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: and A Dubie date 9/10/79

Chief of Registration

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

|                     |
|---------------------|
| FOR HCRS USE ONLY   |
| RECEIVED AUG 1 1979 |
| DATE ENTERED        |

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

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