FHR-8-300 (11-78)

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

1. Name

historic Belmont

and/or common Isaac Winston House, Henry B. Thornton Plantation House

2. Location SE of Tuscumbia

street & number 0.4 mi. W of U.S 43 about 3.5 mi. S of U.S. 72 intersection ___ not for publication

city, town Tuscumbia vicinity, ___ x vicinity of **congressional district** 5

state Alabama **code** 01 **county** Colbert **code** 033

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	___ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
_x_ building(s)	_x_ private	_x_ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		_x_ no	___ military	_x_ other: abandoned

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. Ben Fennel, Jr. (telephone: 446-8318)

street & number County Line Road

city, town Leighton ___ vicinity of **state** Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Office, Colbert County Courthouse

street & number Main Street, between Third and Fourth

city, town Tuscumbia **state** Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey **has this property been determined elegible?** ___ yes _x_ no

date 1935-37 _x_ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

city, town Washington **state**

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	_X_ deteriorated	_X_ unaltered	_X_ original site
___ good	___ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This house is composed of a two-story, hipped-roof central pavilion measuring 24 feet square, abutted by single-story wings. The wings likewise measure 25 feet across, and extend back some 65 feet to either side of the rear courtyard. A two-tiered pedimented porch distinguishes the facade, each tier being composed of four slender, square posts with simply molded caps and a very pronounced entasis. But detailing of the porch is crude in comparison with other exterior and interior finish. The portico shelters a broad, elliptically-arched fanlight entrance, with a square-headed doorway opening onto the gallery above. The upper door has a transom and sidelights and is framed by a narrow architrave of modified Adamesque design. The courtyard behind the main block of the house is terraced several feet above grade level, and enclosed on three sides by a loggia. The walls of the loggia are stuccoed and scored to imitate ashlar, while lattice-work once screened each end, above the terrace wall.

Inside the house, a parlor lies to the right of the square entrance hall; a dining room to the left. Each is 20 by 24 feet in size. Beyond each of these rooms, flanking the courtyard, are a pair of bedchambers. A small vestibule just off the dining room formerly opened onto a walkway that linked the east wing with the separate kitchen. Ceiling heights throughout the first floor of the house are uniformly 14 feet.

From the northeast corner of the reception hall, a broad stair ascends in to long flights to the single upstairs chamber. The wooden balustrade, now destroyed, had two balusters to each tread, with slender turned newel posts that received a three-quarter round bannister. One of the oddest features of the house is the "hanging" stair between the second floor and the attic. Rising against the east wall of the upper room, the stair then turns and springs in mid-air to the center-point of the ceiling, the highest part of the attic.

Beneath each of the rear wings lies a two-room basement, with fireplaces and barred wooden grilles at the windows. The cellars can be entered only from the outside, through a pair of doors in the end-elevation of the wings.

In the 1930s, an early frame privy still stood some 100 feet west of the house. This and all other dependencies have since disappeared, while only faint traces remain of the cedar-lined walk--bordered by ornamental plantings--that led from the front of the house down the sloping lawn to the base of the knoll.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	_X_ architecture	___ education	___ military	_X_ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
_X_ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates ca. 1835 **Builder/Architect** Possibly John Dinsmore

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

ARCHITECTURE: Belmont represents the rare occurrence in the Deep South of the style which architectural historian Marcus Whiffen has labeled "Jeffersonian Classicism."[1] Born in Virginia, this style was, in essence, Thomas Jefferson's distinctive reinterpretation of the Palladian inspired domestic forms popularized in the English-speaking world through the works of James Gibbs, Robert Morris, Giacomo Leoni, and others. Together with Sauders Hall in neighboring Lawrence County, Belmont is a unique reflection in Alabama of Jefferson's far-reaching influence upon early American domestic design. Of the two houses, Belmont -- although smaller in scale and less visually grandiose--adheres far more consistently to Jeffersonian precepts. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Belmont's "Jeffersonian connection" may be direct; indeed, that the house was designed and executed by one of the artisans trained by Jefferson himself. Despite its ruinous condition, Belmont is of incalculable importance as an artifact of Alabama's early architectural development.

SOCIAL: The house also illustrates the strong cultural ties that persisted throughout the ante-bellum period to link the planter class of the cotton states with the cultural traditions of the older, seaboard South.

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[1]Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles (Cambridge, the M.I.T. Press, 1969), pp. 31-35

9. Major Bibliographical References

Gamble, Robert S. Manuscript architectural and Historical notes on Belmont.
Historic American Buildings Survey. Belmont drawings and photographs, Library of Congress.
Waterman, Thomas T. The Mansions of Virginia. Chapel Hill: Unversity of North Carolina Press. 1945.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 5.510
Quadrangle name Tuscumbia Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	16	438800	385600
B	16	438980	385600
C	16	438980	384800
D	16	438800	384800
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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 Robert S. Gamble, Architectural Historian (202-667-4193

organization Alabama Historical Commission date Jan. 1981

street & number 818 Johnston Street, S.E. telephone (205) 353-8652

city or town Decatur state Alabama

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

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 1-6-82

For HCRS use only

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

William H. Brannon date 2.23.82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date 2/22/82

Chief of Registration

GPO 938 835

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

The house was built for Isaac Winston (1795-1863), one of a closely-knit circle of genteel Viginians who settled about Tuscumbia during the 1820s. (Winston's nephew, John Anthony Winston, was Alabama's first native-born governor.) Family tradition places the date of Belmont's completion at around 1835. This tradition is supported by a notation in the Colbert County tractbook, which records that Winston purchased the house-site in 1833.[2]

Although later in time, Belmont generically belongs to the same group of residences that includes, in Virginia, such well-known mansions as Brandon, Battersea, and the Randolph-Semple House in Williamsburg--all ascribed to Thomas Jefferson. His own Monticello, as initially built, falls into the same category. These houses mark the breaking down of the large-scale block of the typical Georgian mansion into smaller units, centering upon a narrow, two-story main pavilion with low symmetrical wings.[3] The scheme was Jefferson's transliteration of the Palladian "Roman country house," a format which he thought peculiarly suitable to the American milieu, and eminently adaptable to the indigenous materials of brick and wood. Warm, red-brick walls and white wood trim eventually became a hallmark of Jeffersonian Palladianism.

Belmont's principal elevation bears striking resemblance to that of Brandon, a similarity that must have been even more pronounced before the alterations which removed the latter's two-tiered pedimented portico and replaced the original nine-over-nine sashing. The compact two-story main pavilion at Brandon has three bays at each level, while at Belmont this same central block is given over to a single, monumentally scaled doorway above and below. In overall massing and proportion, however, the facades of the two houses are quite similar, and characteristically Jeffersonian. Likewise, the entire first-floor central section at both Brandon and Belmont is devoted to an enormous stair hall--doubtless intended to double as a lofty salon. This arrangement appears to be a later innovation at Brandon, although the alteration which produced it still predated the construction of Belmont and was evidently carried out during Jefferson's lifetime.

At Brandon, as a Battersea--the other Virginia house which perhaps most closely resembles Belmont, the central unit and its wings became the axial point of a traditional five-part arrangement with end-pavilions and connecting hyphens. At Belmont on the other hand, the needed space which such contiguous units afforded was secured by extending the wings in parallel fashion to the rear--thereby forming a terraced courtyard, embaced by a loggia, directly behind the great stair hall-salon. This U-shaped arrangement again finds precedent in Palladio, who recommended such an "economic layout" for rural villas. Jefferson's final design for Monticello implemented this concept, as did his plan for the East Lawn of the University of Virginia. In addition, preserved among Jefferson's architectural sketches in the Coolidge Collection at Harvard are several unidentified schemes utilizing the same arrangement. One of these, Number 231 in Fiske Kimball's annotated list of

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[2]The destruction of all county records prior to 1890 precludes further research.

[3]This scheme should not be confused with the Lafeveresque "temple-with-wings" dwelling type which appeared during the Greek Revival period.

Jefferson drawings, correlates particularly to the layout followed at Belmont. In the case of the Alabama house, the U-shaped disposition may have been dictated by the constricted site, on a high, steep knoll. This commanding situation itself recalls another of Jefferson's dictums: that a residence be placed on an eminence whenever possible. From its hilltop location, Belmont overlooks a panoramic sweep of cottonlands spreading north toward the Tennessee River, while behind the house rises a range of low, rugged hills.

Beyond his precise handling of the Roman Classical orders, Jefferson tended to concern himself more with the total geometry of a design--the rhythm of solid to void, the mathematical interplay of height to width, the harmonious relationship of one unit to another--than with decorative detail. It was this "Architecture of mathematics," based on Palladian and hence classical ideas of proportional perfection, that he sought to instill into the artisans he trained at Monticello and during the course of the construction of the University of Virginia. Thus, while Belmont's form and layout are distinctly Jeffersonian, some of the woodwork and trim conforms to standard handbook designs of the 1830s. The treatment of the tall windows, for example, with their paneled and splayed reveals and their channeled architraves accented by bulls-eye cornerblocks, is probably derived from Plate 43 in Asher Benjamin's The Practice of Architecture (1833). Yet minute elements of construction again point to Jeffersonian craftsmanship: shutter and door hinges buried deep in the bead so as to open hard against the frame; the preference for eight-panel doors which, although not peculiar to Jeffersonian design, was a favorite Jeffersonian device. The small, glazed ellipses which pierce the two topmost panels of the double-leaf side door opening into the east wing are very possibly unique in Alabama.

Belmont's extraordinarily fine brickwork is yet another hallmark of the Jeffersonian ideal in architecture. At Monticello and at the University of Virginia, Jefferson experimented tirelessly with brick manufacture and mortar composition, and placed great emphasis upon the art of brick -laying itself. The workmanship evidenced in the masonry walls at Belmont, some 14 inches thick and laid in a carefully worked Flemish bond pattern, is unexcelled if indeed equalled by no other structure of the same period in the state. Gauged and rubbed lintels accentuate the principal openings, while the three-eights inch mortar joints are themselves meticulously tooled.

How such a lucid example of Jeffersonian maxims and craftsmanship in architecture occurred in northwestern Alabama remains a mystery. No documentation has yet come to light bearing upon the circumstances of Belmont's construction. It is plausible--even likely--that an artisan or group of artisans trained by Jefferson could have been recommended to Belmont's original owner, Isaac Winston. By blood, both he and his wife, Catherine, were extensively connected with several of the leading families of Virginia. Winston's cousin, Isaac A. Coles (1780-1841), was Thomas Jefferson's confidant and his private secretary. For another cousin, Mary Coles Carter, and her husband, Jefferson had designed Redlands near Charlottesville early in the 19th century. Significantly, still another of Isaac Winston's kinsmen, John Coles III, moved into his own home--Estouteville--only a short time before Belmont was presumably begun. Estouteville was designed and built by two craftsmen whom Jefferson had trained as architects. They were the brothers, James and John Dinsmore. James Dinsmore died

in 1828, but two years after Jefferson's own death. John Dinsmore continued to enjoy a far-flung architectural practice, primarily in Virginia but elsewhere as well. Albemarle County records reveal that some time in the mid-1830s, Dinsmore went to Alabama, though the exact location is not specified. Since the time of Dinsmore's departure corresponds with the period during which Belmont was seemingly under construction, this may have been one of the commissions that drew him to the Deep South.

Belmont continued to be the home of Isaac and Catherine Winston through the rest of their lives, and the center of a plantation valued at $54,000 in 1850. Though in his sixties when the Civil War began, Isaac Winston volunteered for Confederate service. During the second year of the war, he contracted an illness that forced him to return to Belmont, where he died not long thereafter. Catherine Winston's death occurred in July 1884. The event prompted editorial reflection in the local newspaper. After lauding Mrs. Winston as "a Christian" and "a consistent member of the Episcopal Church," the Tuscumbia North Alabamian mused that "One by one those of the old regime are passing away, until very soon the present generation will have none of them left in our midst to remind us of . . . the days of social joys and pleasures in this happy valley, half a century ago."

The house and surrounding acreage passed to the Winston daughters: Ella (Mrs. Gustave B. Thornton of Memphis), and Mary (Mrs. Peter Fontaine Armistead II of nearby Melrose). Another daughter, Catherine (Mrs. James L. Burt), had died several years before. From that time on, the mansion was used primarily as a family retreat. In 1901, a five-acre parcel of the Belmont tract, containing a small frame house, was deeded to an old family retainer by Ella Winston Thornton, "in consideration of the regard she bears Bertha Witkins, colored," and "as an award of her faithful service in the past." The transaction was duly recorded at the courthouse. The mansion itself and most of the surrounding land remained in the hands of the Winston heirs until sold in 1941 to Gordon Preuit and J. C. Fennel. Between 1935 and 1937, the Historic American Buildings Survey recorded the house with photographs and a detailed set of measured drawings.

Through the 1960s Belmont remained intact and remarkably unaltered from its original state, although dilapidated. As late as 1967, it was occupied by tenants. However, its abandonment as a residence soon afterward resulted in the rapid onset of deterioration. In the early 1970s, the house was severely vandalized. Its black marble mantels were removed; window-sashing and paneled doors smashed; the elliptical fanlight destroyed; and the balustrade of both the main stair and the unusual "hanging" stair leading to the attic torn away. The square bricks which paved the rear courtyard and loggia were also taken up. In recent years, the massive chimney between the two back rooms of the west wing has collapsed into the cellar. The surrounding lawn is now densely overgrown. Because of continued exposure to the elements--all doors and windows are broken and the roof is beginning to leak--Belmont is quickly falling into a state of irremediable ruin.

This unusual house expresses a narrow but immeasurably significant current of early American architecture as it appeared in Alabama and the Deep South: the distinctive brand of American Palladianism evolved by Thomas Jefferson himself. It is a current that has, heretofore, gone virtually unnoticed.

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

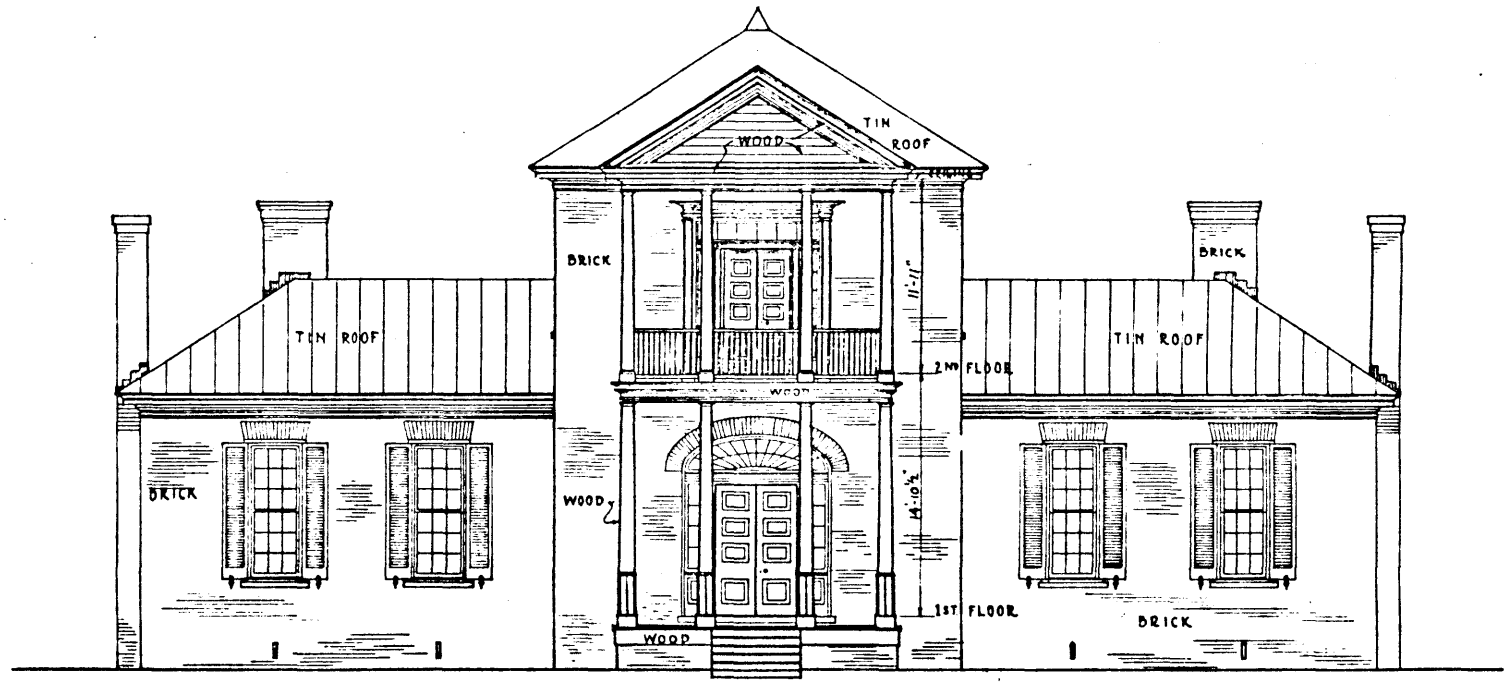
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 2 0 1982
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Beginning at a point on the boundary line between Sections 34 & 35, T.4S, R.11W 1400' N of the intersection of said Sections with corresponding Sections 2 & 3, T.5S, R.11W, thence due E 400' to the True Point of Beginning: Thence continue due E 600' to a point; thence due N 400' to a point; thence due W 600' to a point; thence due S 400' to the True Point of Beginning. Said boundaries include the house and related site.



FRONT ELEVATION
SCALE 3/16" = 1'-0"

NOTE: BRICKWORK IS LAID IN FLEMISH BOND.

1 0 1 2 3 4 5
SCALE OF METERS
1 0 5 10 15 20
SCALE OF FEET

CLIVE RICHARDSON - DEL-

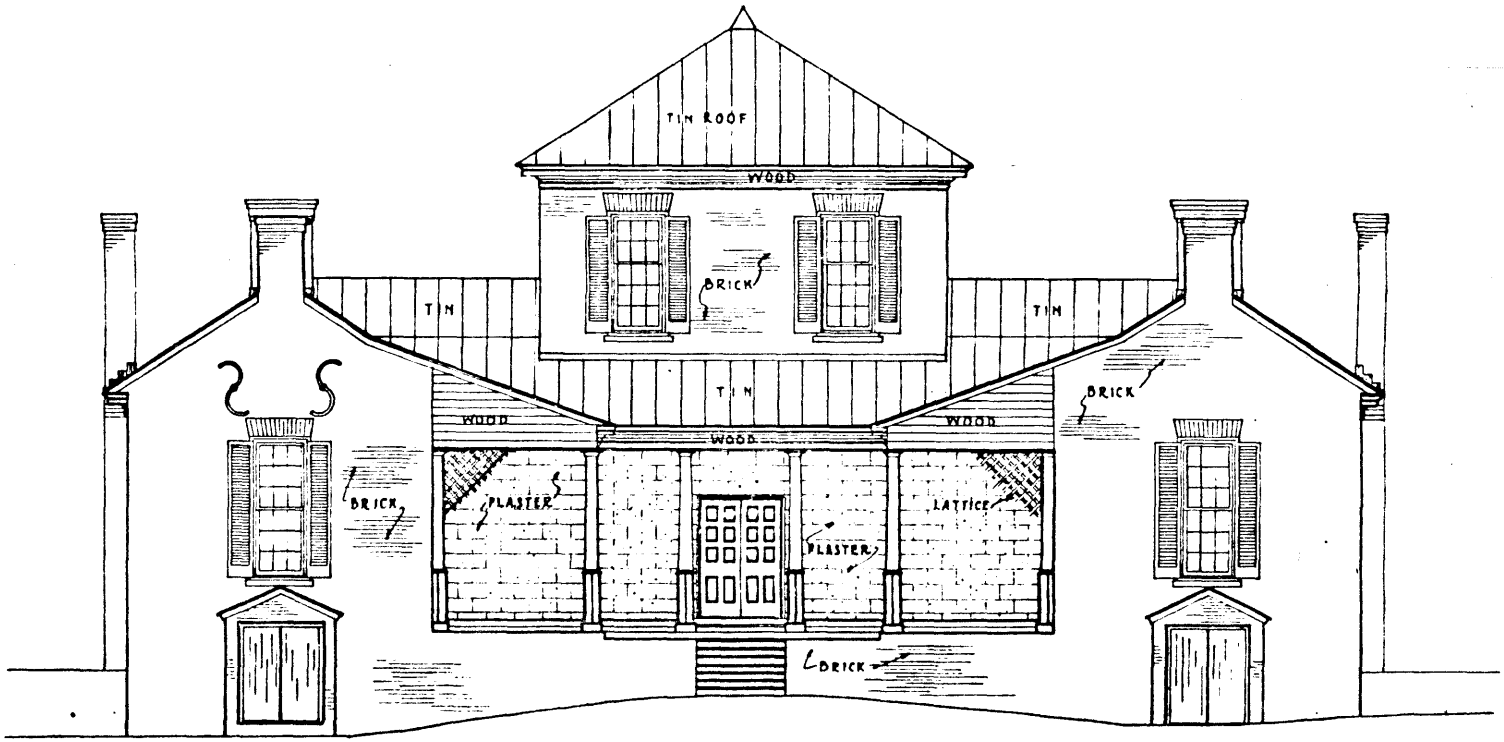
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
OFFICIAL PROJECT NO. 265-6907
UNDER DIRECTION OF UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE
"BELMONT"- THE HENRY THORNTON PLANTATION
NEAR SPRING VALLEY- COLBERT COUNTY- ALALAMA

SURVEY NO. ALA 388

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 5 OF 13 SHEETS

ALA 17-SPRIVA V 1-



REAR ELEVATION
SCALE 3/16" = 1'-0"

1 0 1 2 3 4 5
SCALE OF METERS
10 5 10 15 20
SCALE OF FEET

CLIVE RICHARDSON - DEL.

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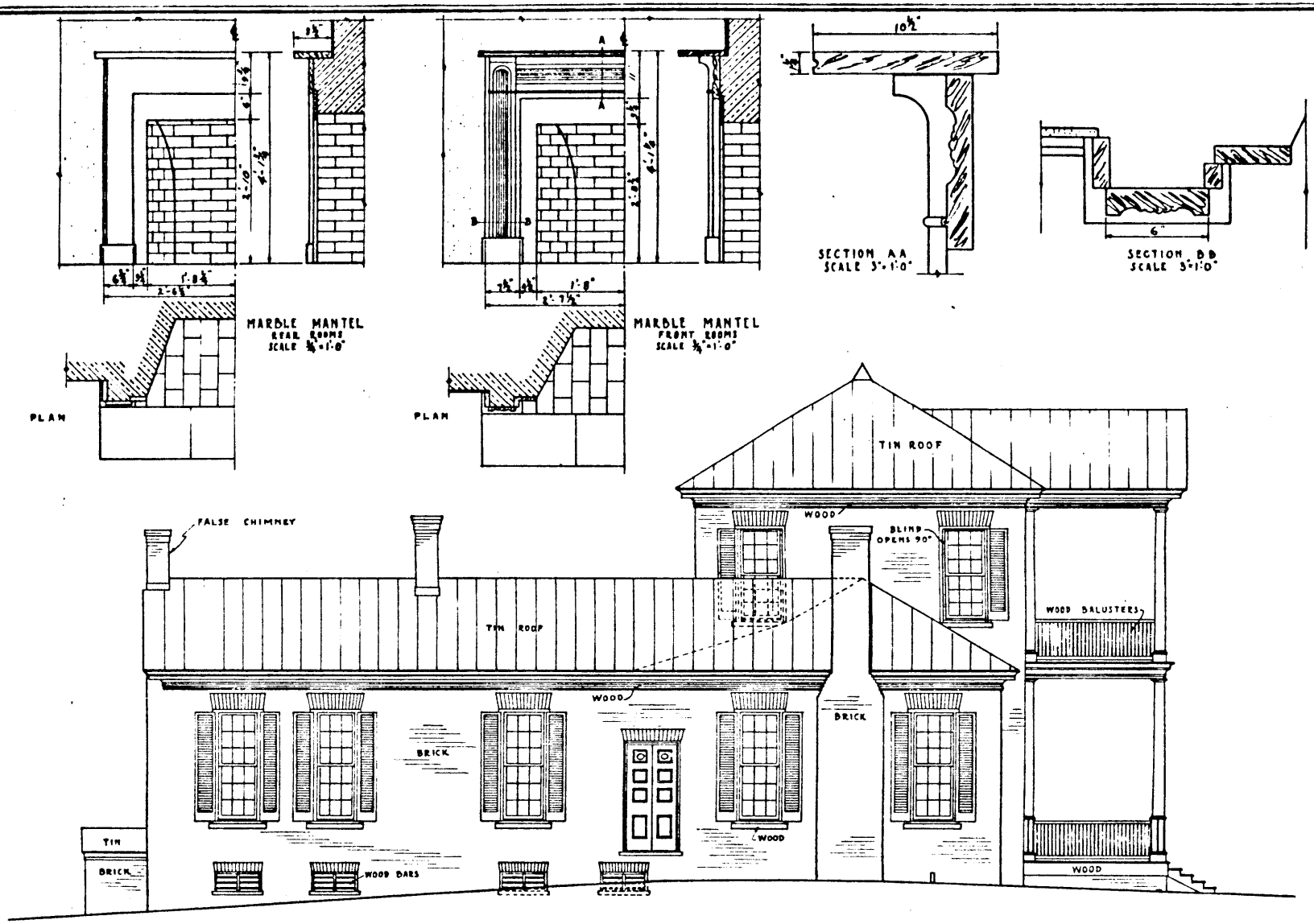
NEAR SPRING VALLEY-COLBERT COUNTY-ALABAMA

SURVEY NO.
ALA
388

HISTORIC AMERICAN
BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 7 OF 13 SHEETS



LEFT SIDE ELEVATION
SCALE 3/16"=1'-0"

METRIC SCALE
SCALE OF INCHES
SCALE OF FEET
SCALE OF FEET

CLIVE RICHARDSON - DEL-

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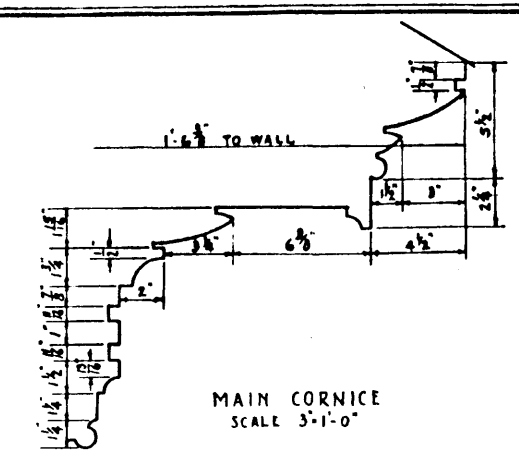
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 6 OF 13 SHEETS



MAIN CORNICE
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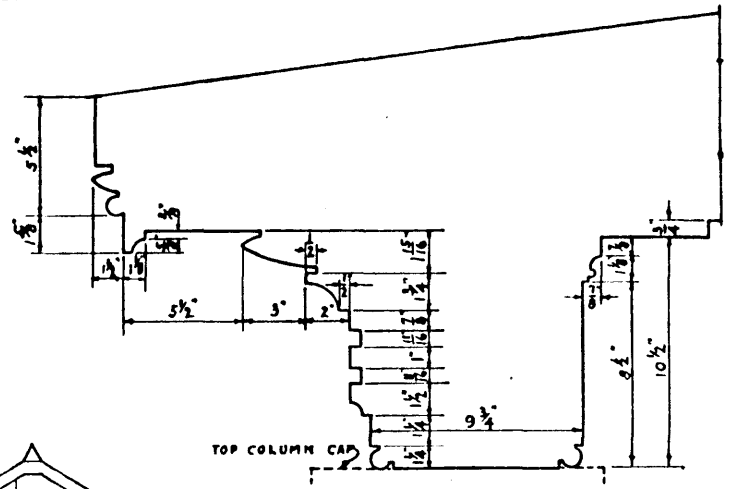
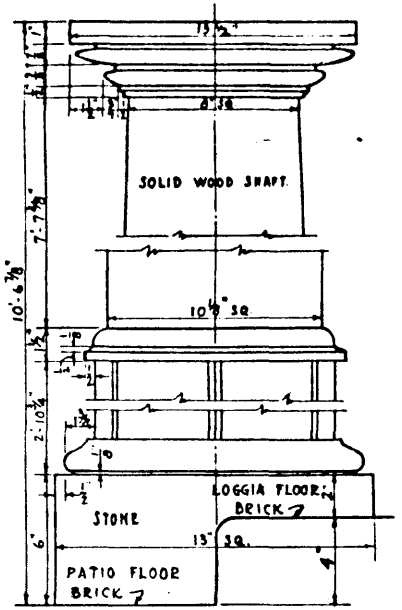
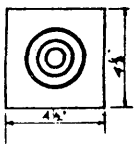
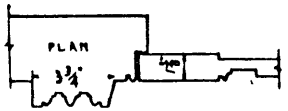


REAR PORCH CORNICE & COLUMN
SCALE 3"=1'-0"

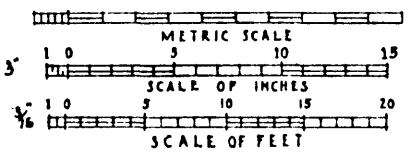






2ND FLOOR STAIR CLOSET DOOR
SCALE 1/4"=1'-0"

SECTIONAL ELEVATION
SCALE 3/16" = 1'-0"



CLIVE RICHARDSON - DEL.

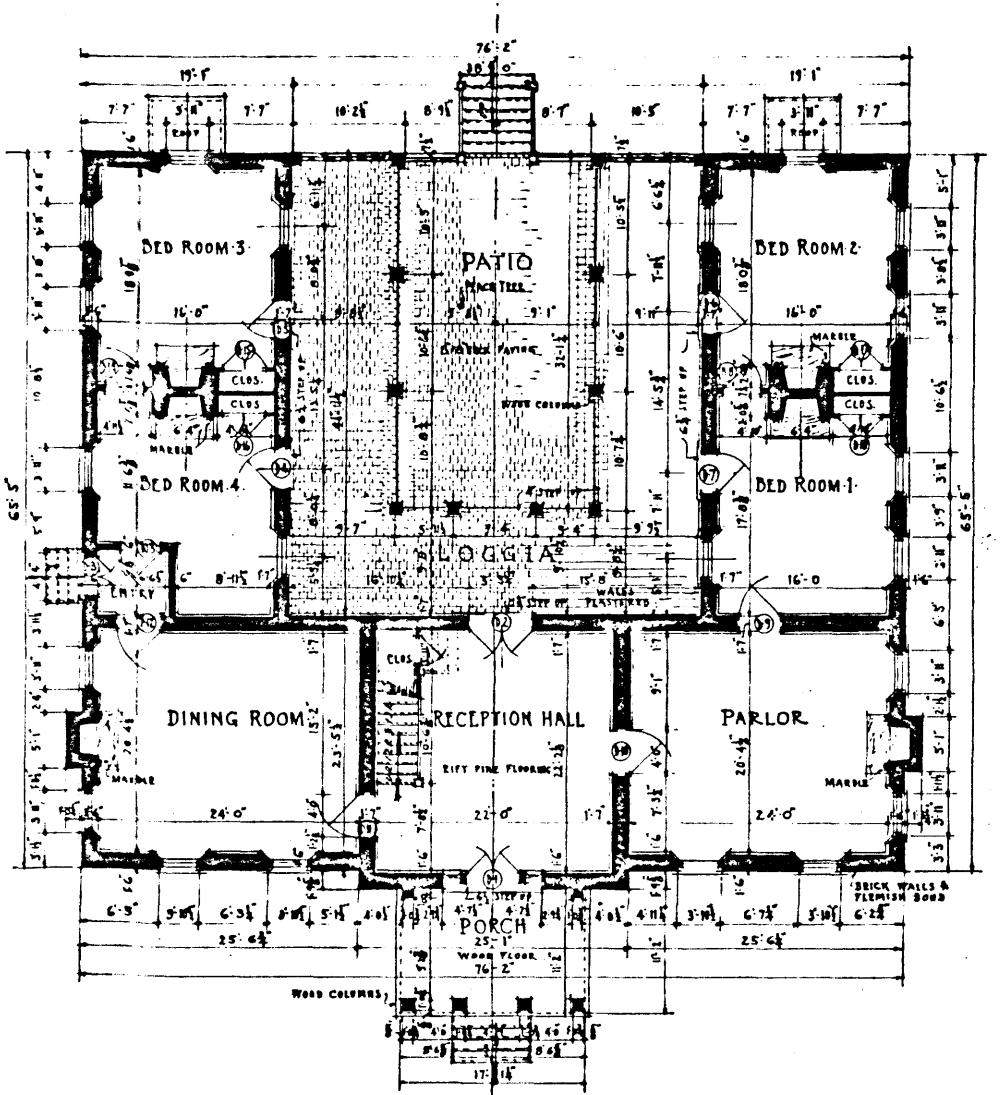
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
OFFICIAL PROJECT NO-265-6907
UNDER DIRECTION OF UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE
"BELMONT"- THE HENRY THORNTON PLANTATION
NEAR SPRING VALLEY- COLBERT COUNTY- ALABAMA

SURVEY NO.
ALA
386

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 9 OF 13 SHEETS

ALA
17-SPRIVA.V
1-



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
SCALE 1/8" - 1'-0"

SCALE OF METERS
SCALE OF FEET

PHILIP S MEWHINNEY - DEL.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
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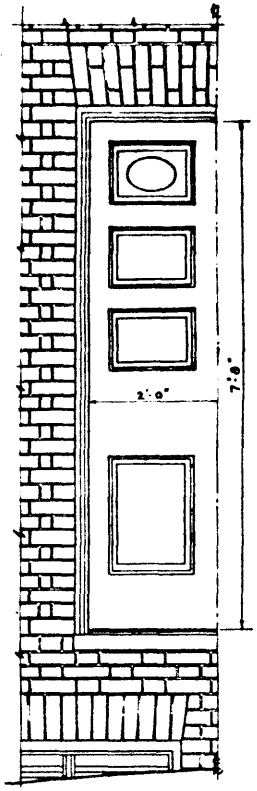
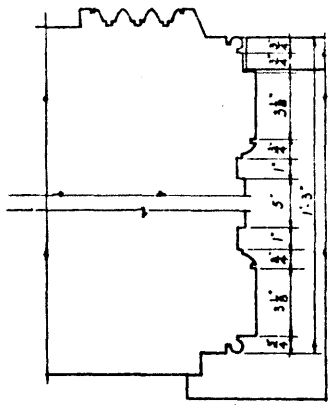
SURVEY NO.
ALA.
388

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 3 OF 13 SHEETS

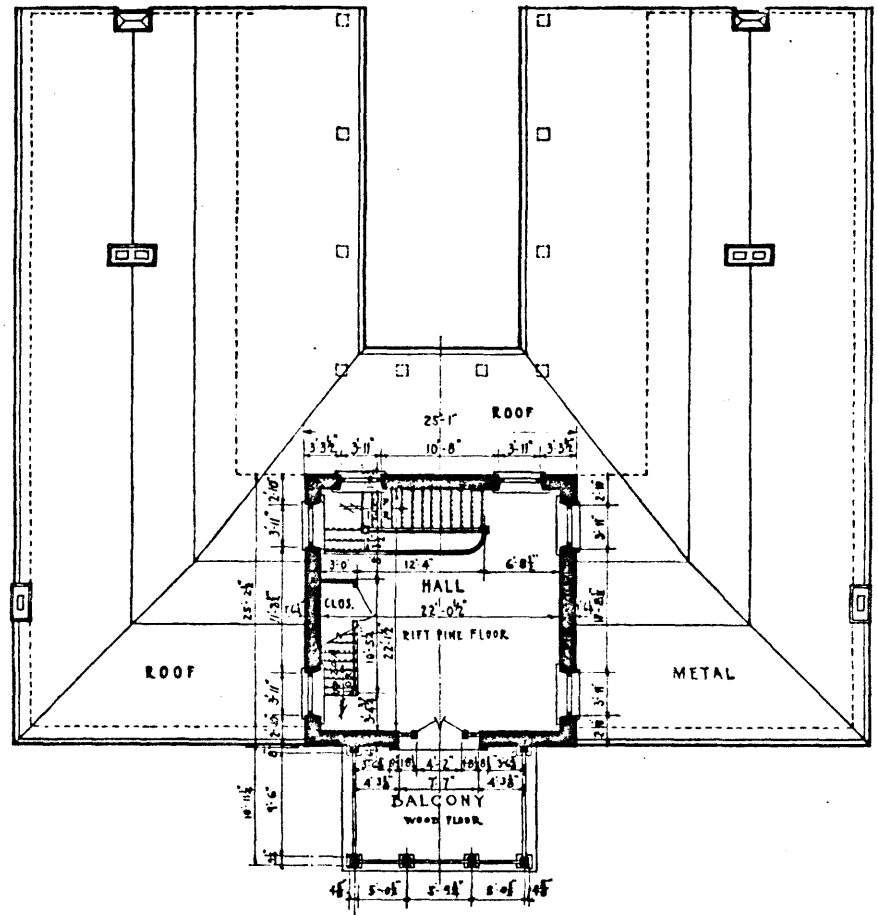
ALA
13 SPRING VALLEY
1-



½ ELEVATION SIDE ENTRANCE DOOR
SCALE ¾" = 1'-0"



PLAN SIDE ENTRANCE DOOR JAMB
SCALE 3" = 1'-0"



- SECOND-FLOOR-PLAN -
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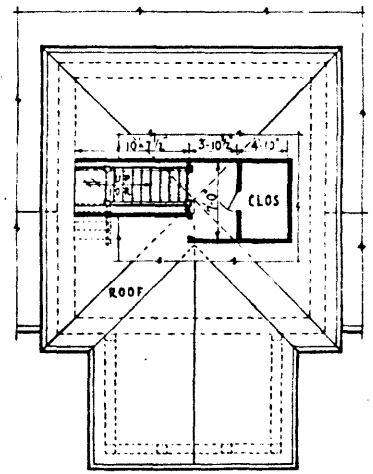

- ATTIC-PLAN -
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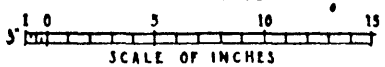

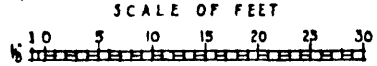

CLIVE RICHARDSON DEL.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
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UNDER DIRECTION OF UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE
"BELMONT"- THE HENRY THORNTON PLANTATION
NEAR SPRING VALLEY- COLBERT COUNTY- ALABAMA

SURVEY NO. ALA 388

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 4 OF 13 SHEETS

ALA
(T. SPRING VALLEY)
1-