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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Louisiana COUNTY

West Feliciana INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER DATE (Type all entries - complete applicable sections) 2 6 1973 I. NAME COMMON: PROPINQUITY AND/OR HISTORIC: 2. LOCATION STREET AND NUMBER: Royal and Johnson Streets -East CITY OR TOWN: St. Francisville, STATE COUNTY: CODE CODE 125 022 Louisiana West Feliciana 3. CLASSIFICATION CATEGORY ACCESSIBLE OWNERSHIP STATUS (Check One) TO THE PUBLIC ☐ Public Yes: Public Acquisition: ☐ District 🕱 Building 🔼 Occupied ☐ Restricted X Private ☐ In Process Site ☐ Structure Unoccupied ☐ Unrestricted Being Considered ☐ Both ☐ Object Preservation work ☐ No in progress PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) ☐ Park ☐ Government Agricultural ☐ Transportation Comments Commercial Industrial X Private Residence Other (Specify) ☐ Educational Military ☐ Religious Entertainment Museum ☐ Scientific OWNER OF PROPERTY OWNER'S NAME: THEODORE H. and MABEL S. MARTIN STREET AND NUMBER: Drawer #40 Corner Royal & Johnson Streets CITY OR TOWN: CODE St. Francisville 022 Louisiana 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Courthouse, West Feliciana Parish. STREET AND NUMBER: Ferdinand Street CITY OR TOWN: STATE CODE St. Francisville Louisiana 022 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS TITLE OF SURVEY: ENTRY NUMBER FOR NPS DATE OF SURVEY: ☐ Federal State County Local DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: **USE** STREET AND NUMBER: ONLY STATE: CITY OR TOWN: CODE

	(Check One)					
CONDITION	🗽 Excellent	☐ Good	☐ Fair	Deteriorated	Ruins	Unexposed
		(Check Or	ne)		(Ch	eck One)
	K Alter	ed	Unaltered	,		X Original Site

Propinquity is unusual for its locale. The walls of the original 2 story structure, measureing 43' 6" x 39' 8", rise from ground level to gables on the north and south ends. The walls are 4 bricks thick downstairs and 3 bricks thick upstairs. The original plaster in this structure was bousillage.

The thickness of the exterior walls in conjunction with the over all appearance of the original structure suggest that the builder may have had not only protection from the numerous Indians then nearby in both Louisiana and Mississippi, but also an eye toward the future growth of Bayou Sara and St. Francisville as trading centers. The walls would have made excellent common walls for future structures, particularly on the north and south ends.

As nearly as can be determined, the original Propinquity consisted of 6 rooms, 3 upstairs and 3 downstairs. The center room upstairs apparently opened onto a porch which afforded a view of the Mississippi River on the southeast. The porch was enclosed at a later date (unknown) but it is only upstairs that the bricks bear witness to any addition or enclosure. Directly below, the enclosure seems to have been made with the carefulness of an excellent mason. There is no evidence of any changes. The joining of brick mortar all appear the same.

In the long, ground floor room which formerly was the porch (east front), there were two windows which reached almost to the floor. Structural evidence uncovered during restoration-renovation work in 1966-1968 pointed to a stairwell where the original is now located, but entering the southernmost room on the second floor via a window on the east front which had been made into a door. This may well have been the case if the present front stairs were reversed, thereby providing access to not only the second floor but also to the cellar, which runs the length of the original porch and house on the east front.

The cellar is as wide as the original porch (circa 10 feet). The original cypress beam is still cemented into the brick cellar walls. The floor is brick. There are two air vents on the east wall of the cellar where the floor of the present porch and wall join. These are exposed and covered with iron grates. The cellar is entered by a door from the south end.

The south end of Propinquity has a single chimney rising through the gable from within the brick wall. The north end of the structure has a half round wooden window in the attic and a balcony on the second floor. The balcony is supported from below by simple iron struts. The balustrade is wrought iron in a lancet-arch motif, echoing the arch of the fan light in the north gable. The balcony was apparently added later in the 19th century. There is evidence that louvered shutters were on the north front windows. The door which exited onto Royal Street during the 19th century has been sealed with brick in the restoration renovation work of 1966-68, but was treated in such a manner as fitte were entrance.

Another unusual architectural feature of Propinguity is the west chimney. This chimney services only the second story length does not extend down to the ground floor. The chimney is supported at the thick brick wall by a wooden cradle covered with iron. This interesting feature was discovered when the present owners began restoration work in

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SIGNIFICANCE			
PERIOD (Check One or More as A	ppropriate)		
☐ Pre-Columbian	☐ 16th Century	☐ 18th Century	20th Century
☐ 15th Century	17th Century	- 🔭 19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable	and Known) Lots pu	rchased May 11, 1809	House begun before
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Chec	k One or More as Approp	oriate) an LOLZ When	purchaser died.
Abor iginal	Education	or 🖭 Political of the good	Urban Planning
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Agriculture	Invention	Science	c3
`	Landscape	Sculpture	
☐ Art	Architecture	Social/Human-	
☐ Commerce	Literature	itarian	
☐ Communications	☐ Military	Theater	
☐ Conservation	Music	Transportation	
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	74.3 -3.27	**************************************	

As far as can be ascertained this house in the town of St. Francisville, Louisiana was never formally named until "Propinquity" was chosen by the owner in 1966. "Propinquity" is appropriate for several reasons: it is, on one side, resting upon its boundary line; it has been close to all important events of Feliciana History; and so far as is known, it has been close to the heart of each and every owner.

The original claimant to the land upon which "Propinquity" and the present town of St. Francisville stand was William Williams. The date of his claim was January 4, 1795. (From the State Land Records in that office in Baton Rouge, La.) John Hunter Johnson purchased the land from William Williams upon which Johnson was to lay out his town. (In Section 44, Township 3, South Range 3 West.) St. Francisville was first known as the Villa of St. Francis, and was then under the dominion of Spain.

On May 11, 1809, John H. Johnson executed the first deed to the property upon which "Propinquity" was constructed in favor of John Mills. The deed was in Spanish, and the purchase price was 900 pesos. Approval was required from Don Thomas Esteven, Lieutenant of the Regiment of infantry, Military and Political Commander of this Jurisdiction. (The deed is in three parts, on a double sheet of paper and bears the numbers 101, 102, 103, 104.) This was apparently Johnson's twenty-sixth property sale, but not necessarily of town lots as he also owned country property.

John Mills, a patriot and soldier of the American Revolution (DAR Patriot Index, page 471) was the founder of Bayou Sara. Mills and Christopher Stewart had established a trading post on the site of the abandoned (1736) French Fort St. Reine on the Mississippi River. Their trading post became known as Bayou Sara, and was perhaps the most flourishing settlement between Natchez and New Orleans. The property acquired from Johnson by Mills was apparently intended to serve as Mills' town residence and business establishment. By the purchase of these two and one-half lots in Square 8 in the Villa of St. Francis, he acquired the only Rtown property he was to own, for he had been granted land elsewhere by the Spanish Government upon which he lived. This land is known now as Rosedown Plantation, but the dwelling there today is not the original one.

Sohn Mills was among those unhappy with Spanish rule of West Florida. There were secret meetings throughout the area and finally at four a. m. on September 23, 1810, the West Florida Rebellion became a reality when NATION Spanish Fort in Baton Rouge fell and the blue flag with a single star

made by Melissa Johnson replaced the Spanish Flag. John Mills was important in that incident and had a large part in the Convention. proved by the claim of John Mills' grandaughter, Elizabeth Swindler, against the estate of her father, Dorsey P. Swindler, (West Baton Rouge,

Arthur, Stanley C. <u>Audubon</u> : <u>An Intimate Life of the American Woodsma</u> (New Orleans, 1937) p. 197 <u>DAR Patriot Index</u> , (Washington, D. C., 1966 Supplement, 1969) p. 471 Davis, Edwin A. <u>Louisiana, A Narrative History</u> (Baton Rouge, 1972) Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge) Archives and Manuscripts Dep				
(New Orleans, 1937) p. 197 <u>DAR Patriot Index</u> , (Washington, D. C., 1966 Supplement, 1969) p. 471 Davis, Edwin A. <u>Louisiana, A Narrative History</u> (Baton Rouge, 1972)				
(New Orleans, 1937) p. 197 <u>DAR Patriot Index</u> , (Washington, D. C., 1966 Supplement, 1969) p. 471 Davis, Edwin A. <u>Louisiana, A Narrative History</u> (Baton Rouge, 1972)	Arthur, Stanley C. Audubon: An Intimate Life of the American Woodsman			
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Court of the Court work of Michitage and Handscripes Dep	t.:			
Bowman, James P., Family Papers, 1826-1829;				
Dobbs and Keaslet Ledger, 1828-1831				
Nubling, Maxmillian, Letterbook, 1822-1826, 2 vols.				
Marriage Records, Ascension Church, Donaldsonville, La., pp. 141-142,				
Archives Dept., Diocese of Baton Rouge (pagination by the Dept.)				
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA	، نسب			
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11. FORM PREPARED BY				
NAME AND TITLE:				
NAME AND TITLE: Mrs. T. H. Martin	72			
NAME AND TITLE: Mrs. T. H. Martin ORGANIZATION DATE	72			
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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8. Significance (cont'd)

Succession 165) in which she named her father as being indebted to her, among other amounts, for a claim of \$299.74 being the portion coming to her in a claim on the government of the United States for advances made to the Florida Convention by John Mills, deceased, the grandfather of Elizabeth Swindler. As legal guardian of his child, Dorsey P. Swindler had evidently received this amount along with others.

John Mills died intestate some time in the first few days of January 1812. In the same month his widow requested that an inventory of his property be made. This inventory of the lots and improvements upon them appraised Mills' property at \$1,200.00. (This is item 6 in the inventory) Also inventoried were 29,000 brick already paid for and then upon the property. Mrs. Mills was most unhappy and asked that a second inventory be taken. This appraisal is dated July 24, 1813. From these inventories, it appears that John Mills began the construction of "Propinquity" after May 11, 1809 when lots were purchased by him, that the work continued after his death and was finished by his widow as executrix.

The grandchild Elizabeth Swindler was not recognized as an heir until her father requested a settlement of the child's interest in the Mills estate. On July 13, 1814 a settlement was finally reached and agreed upon by her father. (Probate Book 1, page 306) In September 1815, Parene Mills, the widow of John Mills, died. Elizabeth Swindler's father made several efforts to sell the property, but was not successful.

On March 28, 1816 Heywood Pierce, Parene Mills' son-in-law, appeared in court to ask for a sale of all her possessions on the 9th of September 1816. The inventory of her possessions included her most personal items: thirteen dresses; two paris of shoes; nineteen female shirts; eight petticoats; even six pairs of drawers. There were four pairs of stockings; two shawls, one silk shawl, and her scarlet cloak. Her jewelry included four pairs of earrings, a watch and six rings for her fingers. There were slaves, land, and farm items of all kinds to be appraised. Two spinning wheels were valued at \$6.00. There was a little spice mill and a solid brass skillet, -- a total inventory of \$24,108.16. (Probate Record 1, page 303)

The little spice mill brought only ninety-three and 3/4 cents, but her brass skillet sold for \$15.00 and three demijohns brought \$3,37½ for the three. Four pairs of "pea fowel" brought \$8.50, \$7.50, \$5.00, and \$4.50 respectively. Later, when the settlement was agreed upon and presented to the Judge, the Court was dutifully informed that the "pea fowel" cannot be delivered for they have strayed off. The stage coach noted in the inventory of John Mills' estate was not mentioned in Parene Mills' inventory. However, the Chart of New Orleans by Lafores appears in both inventories. Although Lafores' chart was valued at \$10.00 in 1812, it was appraised at \$5.75 in 1816 and sold to Samuel McCaleb.

Mr. Doresey P. Swindler apparently ignored life ghild's interest but pressed for final settlement and a final partition was entered into on March 21, 1817.

On March 18, 1819 Swindler again perisioned, this time in the Court of West Baton Rouge Parish, where he and his child resided. Judge Philogene Favrot ordered a family meeting, which was attended westly by her

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8. Significance (cont'd 2)

stepmother's relatives, and ordered the property advertised and sold on Credit Sale, covering a three year period. The property was duly advertised in the <u>Sentinal</u> and its editor, Mr. James Bradford, equipped with Power of Attorney from Dorsey P. Swindler bought the property. He then re-sold it immediately to Dorsey P. Swindler. (Notarial Record "B", page 56, April 16, 1819) Judge William Center Wade of the Feliciana Court purchased the property on April 24, 1819 for \$3,600.00 (Notarial Record "B", page 416)

Family tradition states that Judge Wade occupied the house as a home and office, He was then single, but in October of 1820 he married the widow Olivia Lane Ratliff, granddaughter of the matriarch of the Barrow family, and the mother of two living children. Mrs. Ratliff's husband had been killed in a hunting accident.

A more central location for the Feliciana Parish Seat was established in Jackson in 1816 and Judge Wade was forced to move to Jackson. After his return to St. Francisville in 1828, however, he began the construction of "Ellerslie". This country home, owned by the Edward Percy family since 1916, contains a family cemetery and it is here that Judge Wade and his family are buried.

On January 22, 1822, William C. Wade sold to Dietrich Holl and Dietrich Carstens

"A tract, parcel of land or lots lying and being in the town of St. Francisville fronting ninety (90) feet on Royal Street and running back in the same measure one hundred eighty (180) feet on Johnson Street, being lot number eleven (11) and part of ten (10), and twelve (12) in Square eight (8) and improvements."

The selling price was \$3,700.00 (Notarial Record "B", page 452)

On May 3, 1822 Dietrich Holl purchased from Dietrich Carstens his half interest for \$1,850.00.

About this time a new citizen to be, Maxmillian Nubling, a young nephew of Dietrich Holl, left Germany for America bringing with him his dog, "Dingi". The ship Fortuna upon which they traveled was beset by storms which terrified the young man. He recorded his experiences in letters (L. S. U. Archives). Upon arrival in Louisiana, Nubling made his home with his Uncle "Dieter", the new owner of "Propinquity".

Maxmillian Nubling was constantly plagued with fevers and illnesses which he faithfully reported in his letters home even recording the medicines with which he broke the fevers. His separation from his parents, his illnesses and all his minor troubles failed to change his opinion of America. As he told his family, "A man is valued here according of that 12 is and what he can do, and not the position he holds..." Again, "Liberty is the greatest gift of manhood and here we have real liberty...."

Dietrich Holl was said to be a widower. He owned several

properties and operated a store in partnership with John H. Mills, a nephew of John Mills the original owner of "Propinquity". According to Nubling,

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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8. Significance (cont'd 3)

Prince Paul of Wurtenberg paid a fourteen day visit to Dietrich Holl. His gift to the Prince wasthe skull of a very large alligator.

In 1825, Nubling stated in a letter to his father, "Most of the houses are made of wood but we have a very large stone house and several smaller ones..." Since there is no native stone, or remaining evidences of it, he must have been speaking of brick. Dietrich Holl, having left his nephew in charge of his properties, went north on a buying trip and took time to return to Germany for a visit.

Then Maxmillian Nubling wrote to his uncle reporting on the work being done on various properties. One of his letters contains one sentence of interest. "By tomorrow your room will also be completed and I will make an itemized statement of the cost and send it to you..."

The reason for such refurbishing is apparent after Dietrich Holl's return. With the full consent and approval of her relative, Mrs. Robert (Jane) Percy, Virginia Martha Brent Chisholm, a minor living with the Percy family, married Deitrich Holl on May 11, 1826. John James Audubon's Diary of 1826 mentions his attendance at this wedding. It was to be expected that the Audubons would attend since Lucy Bakewell, wife of John James Audubon, opened a school at the home of Mrs. Percy on January 1, 1823. The school was on a plantation now called "Weyanoke" but at that time known as "Percy Forest". It was here in these woods that Audubon spent much of his time while visiting his wife and two sons.

Nubling liked his new aunt very much and mentioned the date of her marriage to this uncle as his own birthday. In August he wrote again, "I can now also tell you that my aunt has hopes of becoming a mother to the joy of uncle." This was the only child of Dietrich Holl, born posthumosly, for Holl died on the morning of September 18, 1826.

Holl had been a friend of John James and Lucy Bakewell Audubon, and Virginia Chisholm Holl naturally had contact with Lucy Audubon who taught at her relative's home. On one trip to the Parish, Audubon mentioned being loaned a horse by a German merchant living in Bayou Sara. The office begun by John Mills and used after he re-located in "Propinquity" appears, therefore, to have been continued in use by Holl. Equally significant, "Propinquity" stands near the top of the bluff which has historically divided Bayou Sara and St. Francisville. The former is often referred to locally as "under the hill."

Lucy Audubon was a patron of Dietrich Holl's store. The inventory of his accounts lists two for her for 1826. Account 90 is for \$35.00 and account 418 is in the amount of \$500.00, and the store with living quarters above is "Propinquity". Many people believe that Dietrich Holl's friendship and faith in Audubon's abiltiy made it possible for Audubon to travel to England.

Dietrich Holl's contribution to Propinquity lives on. His

Dietrich Holl's contribution to Propinquity lives on. His succession papers include statements of his purchases to which his estate is obligated.... 108,000 brick from Asa Brow at \$8.00 per thousand, the fan shaped window and grates for three cellar windows are listed.

On January 16, 1827 a baby girl was born to Virginia Holl. She

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8. Significance (cont'd 4)

was named Margaret Ann Holl and owned her late father's estate. Her mother and her uncle were her guardians. They were not good business people, however, and the two year partnership of her late father and Mr. Mills came to an end.

Virginia Chisholm Holl then married her late husband's nephew, Maxmillian Nubling, on February 3, 1829. Their only child, a son, John Maxmillian Nubling was born on November 5 of the same year. At a family meeting in 1832, Margaret Ann Holl's trustees agreed "for the good of her estate" to accept responsibility for the repairs made by Maxmillian Nubling to the brick store on Royal Street"... and to the building nearby, the second from the corner on Johnson Street, formerly a warehouse and now rented to Canal Banking Company as an office."

At another meeting of the family, mention is made of the large brick building in the Town of St. Francisville, formerly used as a store by M. Nubling. The building was then unoccupied, but Canal Banking would occupy it for three years at \$500.00 per year.

Margaret Ann Holl grew up, became the second wife of Seymour Lurty, Sheriff of West Feliciana. They had a daughter, Virginia Lurty, who died as a young woman. There is no documentary proof available, but old settlers have told it that Sheriff Lurty at various times used the cellar of the house as a temporary jail, and that soldiers were hidden in the cellar during the Civil War. Since the cellar, which in unusual in the area, is well ventilated, such was certainly possible.

Several years after her daughter's death, Mrs. Lurty died and left "Propinquity" to her half-brother, John Nubling, for his sole use and benefit. John Nubling became a Deputy Sheriff of the Parish. At John Nubling seath, the property was left to two children, Charles and Christine Dashill Howell "to repay kindness". It has been said that the parents of these children were not relatives but very kind to a lonely ill man.

After Charles and Christine grew up and married, Charles sold his interest in the house to his sister's husband, J. Hereford Percy. Later on the Percy family became involved financially with Jos. Gottlieb of Baton Rouge and Mr. Gottlieb filed suit on February 26, 1916.

At a Sheriff's sale (Record 29, page 593), J. N. Anglin bought a half interest in the property for \$1,000.00. Mr. Gottlieb than sold his interest to Mr. Anglin on September 2, 1916 for \$700.00 (Notarial Record 30, page 6). Jasper Newton Anglin was a bachelor from Vernon Parish, Louisiana. In 1916, he was connected with the schools of West Feliciana Parish.

On March 16, 1917 (Natarial Record 30, page 289) there was a sale from Anglin, then a resident of Weston, Lewis County, Virginia of the property to G. T. Barrow for the sum of \$2,300.00. The Barrow name was and still is well known in the Felicianas. Deeply loved by Mr. and Mrs. Barrow, "Propinquity" remained their private home until after Mr. Barrow's death. Mrs. Barrow and her two children occupied the house until Mrs. Barrow died. Before her death it was converted into three appartments, one occupied by Mrs. Barrow and two of which were rented. As her children were married and in their own homes at the time of her death, the two heirs continued it as rental property. In time the daughter, Mrs. Gordon Dippel, purchased her

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8. Significance(cont'd 5)

brother's rights.

It was from Mrs. Dippel that the property was purchased by former West Feliciana Sheriff Theodore H. Martin and his wife Mabel S. Martin on January 11, 1966 and restoration was begun.

7. Description (cont'd)

1966.

The original portion of Propinquity dates from <u>circa</u> 1809-1826. James Coulter of Coulter and White, the architect-builder who built Greenwood Plantation (burned 1960) did <u>some</u> work on Propinquity in 1826.

Six solid brass locks with iron jackets are still in use in the house. When they were placed on the house is unknown.

Before the present owners acquired Propinquity in 1966 and began restoration-renovation, the structure housed three apartments, two upstairs and one downstairs. The stairwell inside and to the left of the present front door had been cut and boarded off to make a small bedroom. The porches on the east and south sides had been converted into kitchens and a bath. The present owners removed these additions to the original house. Much of this woodwork was badly infested with termites. All the original bousillage had to be removed in the interior because of deterioration caused by the badly leaking roof.

A 2-story wing of antique brick was built to abut the south end of the original 2-story structure between 1966-68. This wing houses the new kitchen (ground floor) and back stairwell to new bathrooms and new closets.

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