

"TIDEWATER COTTAGES" IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

(Thematic Group)

Owner: Preuitt Mauldin  
510 N. Walnut St.  
Florence, AL 35630

Historic name: John Johnson House  
Common name: "The Green Onion"

Location: Cobert County near Leighton, Ala., one half mile west of the intersection of River Road, Fosters Mill Road and Mt. Stanley Road, NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of 26 T3/R9.

Acreage: 80 UTM: A-16/458/060/3847/400  
B-16/458/860/3847/370  
C-16/458/850/3846/970  
D-16/458/040/3846/990

Verbal Boundaries: T.3S.R.9W. N. $\frac{1}{2}$  of N.W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of S.26, includes house on original plat still in possession of current owner.

Date of Construction: c 1825

State of Significance:

Criterion C - Architecture:

"The Green Onion" is an exceptional Alabama example of a "Tidewater cottage." It is one of four examples in this thematic group which has the dimensions of the "double square" formula. The house is also one of three examples in the group of single pile brick construction. "The Green Onion" is probably the most closely allied architecturally to the 18th century eastern seaboard progenitors of this particular house type. Outstanding 18th century features are the overall form, exceptional brickwork and exterior arrangement of void and solid wall surfaces.

Criteria A & B - Exploration/Settlement:

"The Green Onion" is significant for its associations with the establishment of large, slave based cotton plantations in the Tennessee Valley area of North Alabama by the descendants of planter families of Virginia. The original owner of the house, John Johnson, was born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. He emigrated first to middle Tennessee and later to North Alabama, c 1829. This migration pattern into Alabama via Tennessee was common amongst Virginia born immigrants during that period.

Integrity:

"The Green Onion" has retained its integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling and to some degree its materials. The most important feature - the overall form - remains and is one of the closest in the theme group to the 18th century

Virginia prototypes based on the "double square" formula. While portions of the interior woodwork have been lost (only fragments of the wainscot, chair rail and baseboards remain), the window sash and exterior doors are gone, and an exterior end wall has collapsed (the brick remains on site), the fabric that does survive is of such superior craftsmanship as to contribute to a fuller understanding of the house type.

#### Description:

"The Green Onion" is a story-and-a-half, three bay brick "Tidewater cottage" with a metal gable roof flanked on either end by a single exterior brick chimney. Amongst the houses in this thematic group, "The Green Onion" is probably the most closely allied architecturally to the 18th century Virginia progenitor of this particular house type. The exterior, for example, is constructed of a very high quality brick rarely seen in Alabama houses of this period. The craftsmanship of the brickwork is superb with very narrow mortar joints (see photograph 4). The house is raised approximately four feet off the ground on brick foundation walls. The crawl space beneath the structure is ventilated by rectangular wood framed openings which originally had vertical wooden bars (see attached sketch). The foundation is laid in common brick bond with one decorative row of headers approximately eighteen inches from the ground around three sides of the house (see photograph 5). Above the foundation level, the facade is laid in Flemish bond. Over each doorway and window there is a jack arch. Across the entire width of the back of the house is the remains of a wooden porch with a metal shed roof. One exterior gable end wall and chimney have collapsed exposing both interior floors (see photograph 3).

The interior has a single pile arrangement with a central hall (see attached plan). The partition walls on either side of the central hall are brick. All of the flooring and window and door surrounds are original. Some of the original interior cross and Bible doors have survived (see photograph 7) but all of the window sash has disappeared. A few remnants of chair rail and baseboard on the first floor have survived, but none of the wooden wainscoting or mantels are extant. The original plaster above the wainscoting, however, does exist.

Access to the second floor is by way of a wooden stairway which has lost its railing. The second floor has two large rooms with beaded tongue and groove paneling. Each room has a fireplace flanked on either side by small windows (see photograph 11). The main front and back entries probably once had double-leaf paneled doors. There is also a side entry, which currently has a plank door that is not original.

#### Historical Summary

On September 16, 1818, this land was purchased by the assignees of John Hughes at the U. S. government land sales in Huntsville. Hughes, like many other initial buyers of the rich Tennessee Valley cotton lands, appears to have been interested primarily in the speculative value of the 160-acre parcel. At any rate, a decade later, on April 8, 1829, eighty acres of this tract--including the house site on a hill above Kittikaski Branch--was conveyed to John Johnson for six hundred dollars.<sup>1</sup> Johnson may have been living on the land for several years prior to this time, so that the 1829 deed represents only the final conveyance. Indeed, circumstantial evidence suggests that this was the case.

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence County Tractbook, p. 196, Lawrence County Courthouse, Moulton, Alabama (Note: This portion of Colbert County was originally part of Lawrence.) Lawrence County Orphan Book D, pp. 133-34.

Born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, Johnson lived for a short time in Middle Tennessee before emigrating to northern Alabama. He was the father-in-law of Major Lewis Dillahunty, one of the earliest settlers of the western Tennessee Valley and a member of Alabama's territorial legislature. Dillahunty was probably instrumental in bringing his father-in-law to the Valley, since James Saunders records in his Early Settlers of Alabama that Dillahunty secured lands in the Mount Pleasant area, a few miles west of the land on Kittikaski Creek, for both his father and his father-in-law.<sup>2</sup> Thus Johnson may well have been living on The Green Onion place, his home plantation, by the time Dillahunty died in 1826.

The story-and-a-half brick residence itself was old-fashioned when built. In overall form and feeling, it is basically an 18th-century Virginia house in 19th-century Alabama. This archaic quality may well have been the result of a remembered folk form which Johnson and his wife, or perhaps the unknown builder of the house, brought with them from the Atlantic seaboard--a form and domestic arrangement which was comfortably familiar. Johnson, however, did not live many years to enjoy his home and its hilltop setting. In the early 1840s he died and his son and executor, George B. Johnson of Carroll County, Mississippi, apparently sold the house out of the family.<sup>3</sup> Later the land was owned by Stewart Hennigan,<sup>4</sup> and still later by the Reeder family. The tract is now part of the Leonard Preuitt estate. The farm's colorful name, "The Green Onion," was applied by the Preuitt family many years ago.<sup>5</sup>

Long occupied by tenants, the Johnson house was eventually stripped of its original window sashing, doors, and mantelpieces. Several years ago, the west end wall collapsed and more recently vandals stripped away all but remnants of a handsome paneled wainscoting. Nevertheless, the house remains to a surprising degree structurally sound, and boasts some of the finest brickwork to be found anywhere in early Alabama. The present metal roof, probably put on in the early 1900s, remains intact. In 1980, the area immediately surrounding the house was enclosed with barbed wire to prevent further damage from cattle and other stock.

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<sup>2</sup>James Edmonds Saunders and Elizabeth Blair Saunders Stubbs, Early Settlers of Alabama (originally published in New Orleans, 1899; reprinted by Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1969), p. 197.

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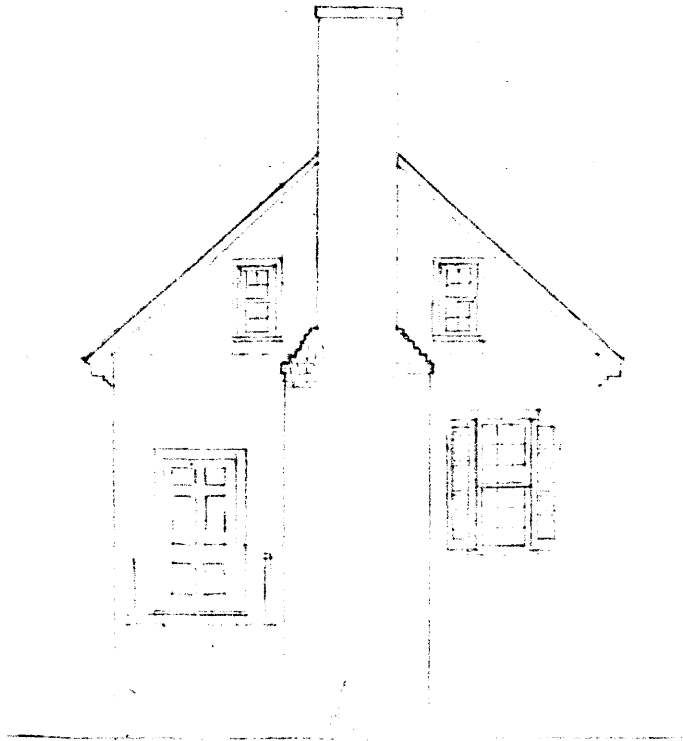
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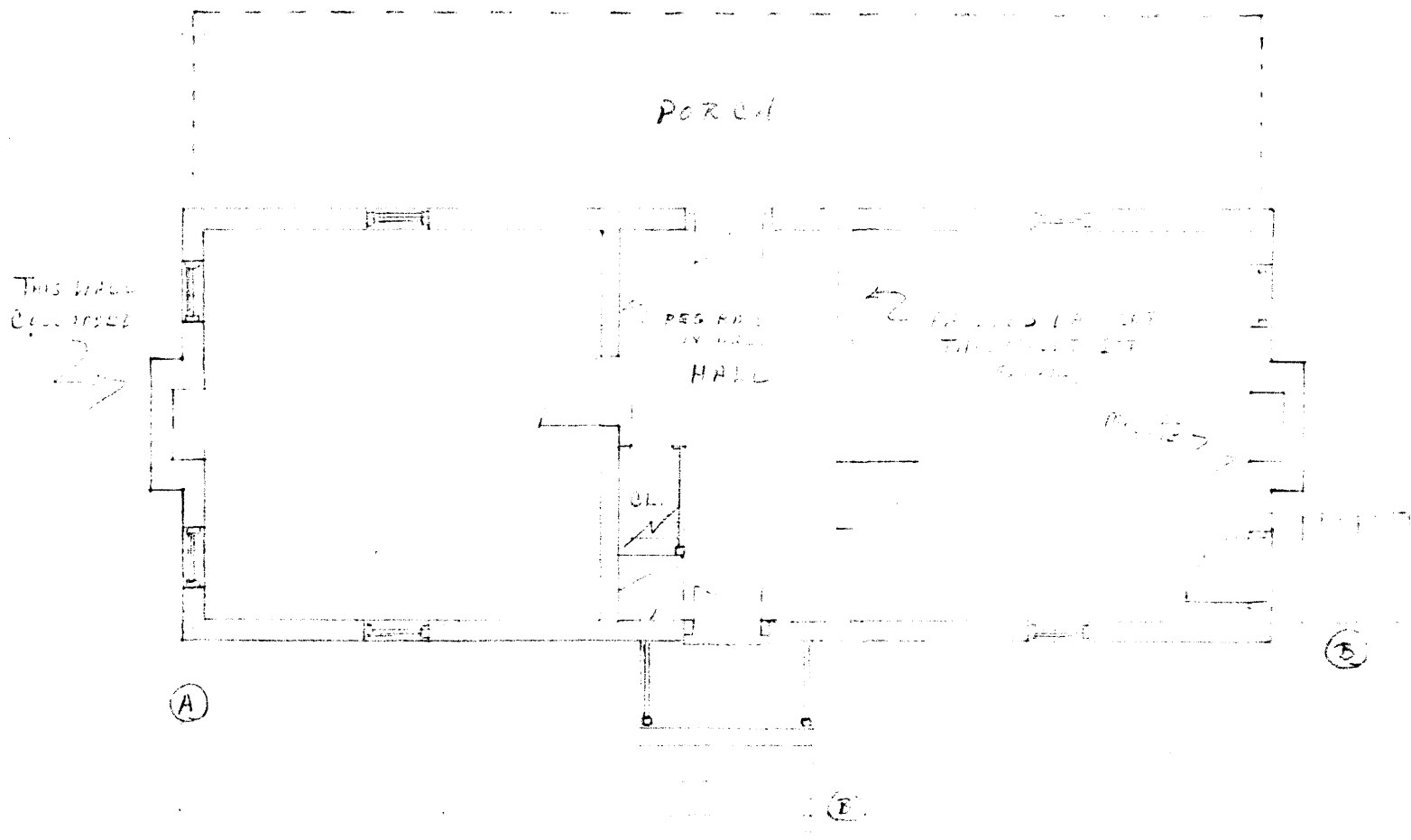
142.  
 The front elevation  
 is shown in the sketch  
 of the west end of the  
 house, showing the  
 chimney and the  
 dormer windows.  
  
 John S. [unclear]  
 [unclear]

WEST END ELEVATION  
 (E END COLLAPSED)

12-17-77



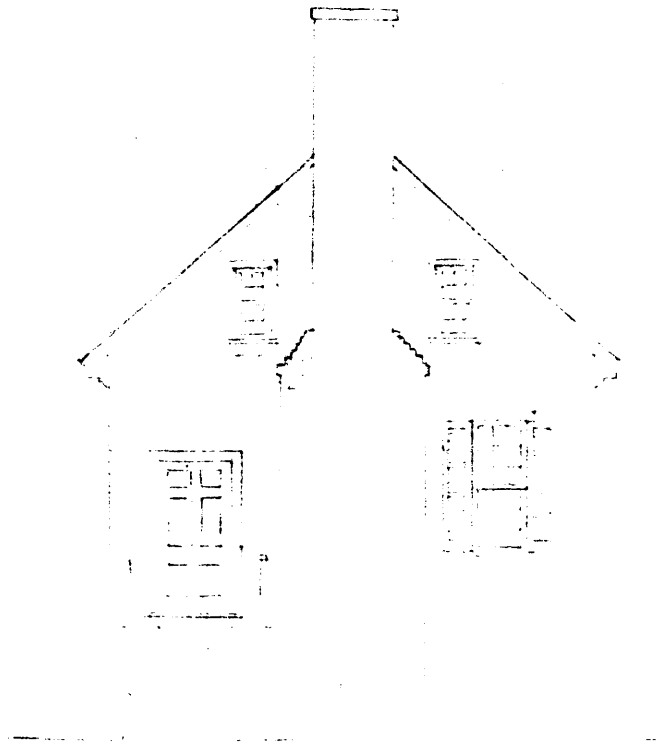
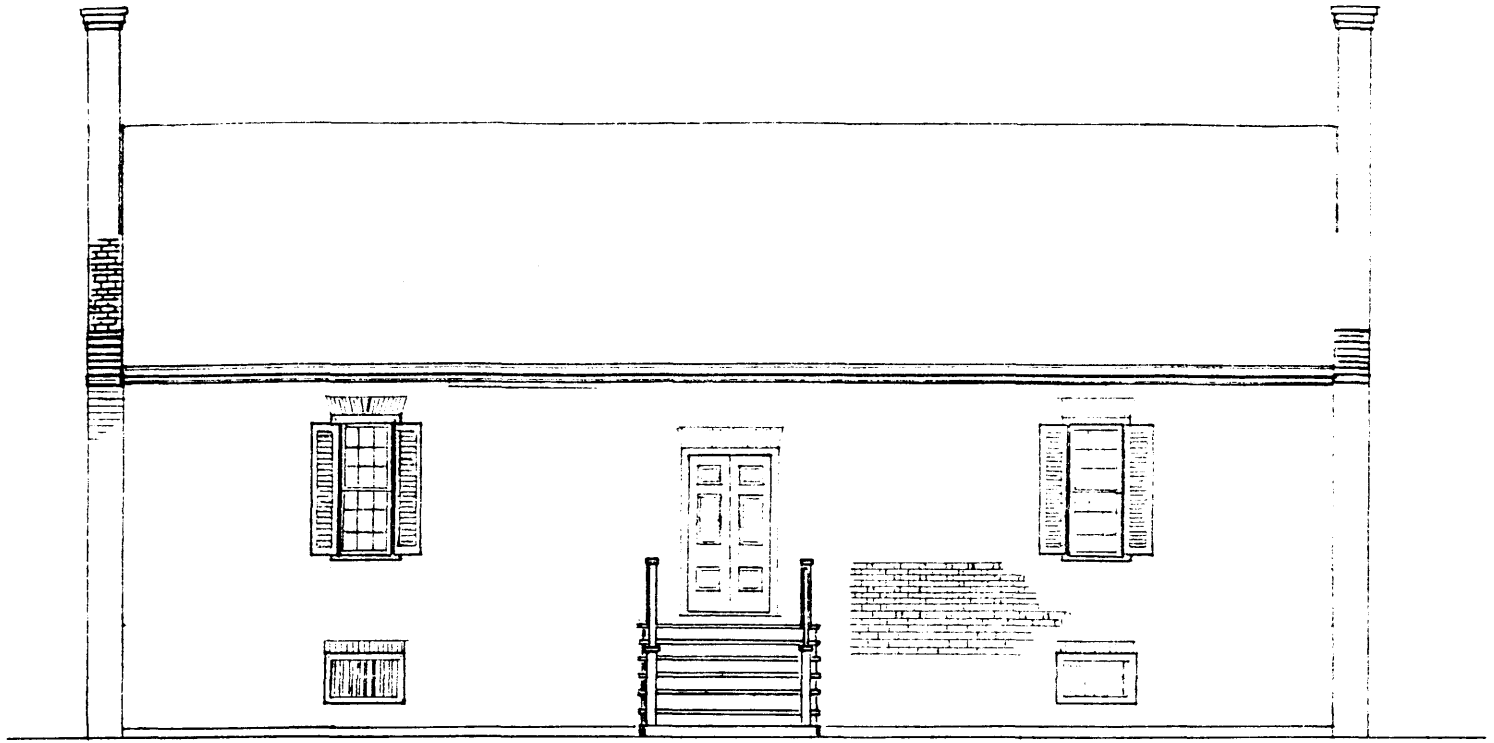
GEOMETRY - 1:2 1/2



- (A) FLUOROCARBON FACADE
- (B) wooden stoops (conjectural)







WEST SIDE VIEW  
1/2" = 1'-0"