

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received SEP 23 1986

date entered 23 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Nelson-Kirby Farm

and/or common Kirby House

2. Location

street & number 6792 Poplar Pike

N/A not for publication

city, town Germantown

N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee

code 047

county Shelby

code 157

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Walter D. Wills III

street & number 6792 Old Poplar Pike

city, town Germantown

N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee 38138

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Shelby County Registrar

street & number 160 North Mid-America Mall

city, town Memphis

state Tennessee 38103

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Nelson-Kirby Farm is an assemblage of buildings that occupies a 10.048 acre tract at the western boundary of the City of Germantown (pop. 27,213) in Shelby County, Tennessee. The slightly rolling terrain of the property contains heavily wooded areas and open pastures, as well as expansive lawn areas that surround the principal building of the site--the Nelson-Kirby House (ca. 1869-1871). The single-story, balloon-framed farm house has a principal north/south axis facing Old Poplar Pike and the Memphis and Charleston (now Southern) Railroad.

Associated with the Nelson-Kirby House are the outbuildings of the property, and numerous sites for outbuildings that are no longer extant. The buildings work in concert to reinforce the evolutionary growth of the farm property. All elements of the farm complex have been labeled on the attached site plan to show their relationship with the house.

The Nelson-Kirby House is situated on the highest point of the property, and is surrounded by remnants of the historic landscaping of the grounds, which include oaks, cedars, white mulberry, magnolia, and holly trees. Outlines of paths, drives, and flowerbeds remain to indicate the location of other landscape features, including the original post and plank fence that extended along the property's southern border with the railroad.

The exterior of the Nelson-Kirby House follows an irregular plan that has been shaped through several periods of alterations, each providing a major contribution to the historic character of the house. The complex asphalt shingled gabled roof reflects these changes. The weatherboarded house rests upon brick piers, although the perimeter of the foundation has recently been enclosed with brick to facilitate the installation of a modern heating and air conditioning system.

The front (southern) facade is divided into four bays, three of which lie within an offset covered by a shed-roofed porch. The entrance lies in the westernmost of the three porch bays. The remaining bay of the front facade contains a polygonal bay window. The southern facade is highly decorated with a wide range of late-Victorian carpenter details. The porch roof is supported by narrow turned posts, connected by a railing and tightly spaced balusters. The porch cornice features a post-and-ball motif, scroll brackets, a modillioned frieze, and an unusual nailhead molding. The entrance door is framed by a simple composition of a large fixed light transom with narrow sidelights. Narrow, chamfered piers form the stiles that flank the door. The door is an example of the applied turnings and impressed decorations that hallmarked the Eastlake style. This may indicate that the door framing remains from the original Italianate design of the structure (ca. 1869-1871) and the door from the alterations of ca. 1890-1895. The dominant feature of the front facade is its large bay window, which is highly decorated with sawn brackets, panels, and several moldings. Another feature of the bay is the series of large nailhead bosses located on the stiles between the 1/1 double-hung sash windows. The cornice of the front gable end is embellished with a sawn bargeboard designed in a foliated pattern.

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The bargeboard pattern continues under the eaves along the sides of the house. A sawn attic vent lies between the bay window and the elaborate end piece, which is comprised of a turned fan surrounded by a post-and-ball pattern screen.

A principal feature of the western (side) facade is the cistern room, located at the northwestern (rear) corner. This is actually an open-air porch-like enclosure that provides cover for the massive below-ground cistern. The room is covered by a hip roof and is supported by chamfered posts. Lattice panels fill the spaces between the posts, while decorative segmental arches (complete with keystones) are placed near the eaves. The remainder of the western facade is plainly detailed, save for the foliated eave trim that continues from the front facade. Fenestration on the western facade is comprised of 1/1 double-hung sash windows.

The rear (northern) facade features little ornamentation, given that it provides the entrance for the service area of the house. A portion of the facade is covered by a hip-roofed rear porch that is supported by thin posts. Two 6/6 double-hung sash windows flank a simple four-panel door.

The side (eastern) facade is composed of a number of projections and setbacks that form an irregular plan. One major feature of this facade is the projecting polygonal bay of the dining room. A gabled roof extends over the canted corners of the bay to protect the dining room doors from the elements. Narrow, segmentally-arched brackets are situated below the roof overhang of the bay, while a fan-shaped end-piece decorates the gable. More of the sawn eave trim and bargeboard embellish this facade.

Recently, the detached kitchen for the property was relocated to the east of the dining room area as part of a planned reuse for the structure. The kitchen was originally located near this position (according to family members), but was moved in ca. 1898 for use as a tenant farm house. During the recent renovation work, a pair of enclosed walkways were constructed to connect the kitchen with the doors of the dining room. The walkways were constructed to be fully reversible, and may be removed with no disruption to the historic fabric of the house and kitchen. (The kitchen is described further in the section detailing the outbuildings of the property.)

In plan, the front half of the house conforms to a traditional arrangement of two rooms on either side of a central hall. However, the rear portion of the house departs from this regular arrangement for a more complex plan, thus reflecting the growth of the structure over a number of years (ca. 1869 through ca. 1900). The sill and floor joist pattern beneath the house indicates that the rear portion of the house was constructed first, with later portions added over a span of years to complete the existing plan.

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Beyond the front entrance lies the wide and tall central hall that services the front core. The hall ends with a transomed door, leading to the porch/hall of the rear core. Ornamentation in the front hall is minimal, except for the simple arrangements of Italianate moldings surrounding the doorways.

The formal parlor lies to the immediate left of the front door. It is notably detailed by its floor-to-ceiling bay window, which features a complex arrangement of reed moldings, panels, nailhead moldings, and other details of the Eastlake period. An Eastlake mantelpiece made of slate, cast iron, and brass is featured on the wall opposite the bay window.

The living room is located to the right of the front door, and features floor-to-ceiling windows facing out on the porch. A Renaissance Revival mantle in cast iron and slate is featured on the wall opposite the porch windows.

Immediately beyond the living rooms of the home are the family bedrooms, lying on either side of the hall. Both rooms are simply detailed, except for vernacular Italianate mantles. The mantelpieces in the bedrooms are further indications of an earlier Italianate design phase for the house. A bathroom, once connected to the western bedroom by a door, was added to the structure by the Kirby family in ca. 1898.

The door at the northern end of the hall leads to a combination hall/porch providing access to the rear portion of the house. The hall opens to the cistern room on the left. Doors from this space lead to the dining room, service pantry and servant's quarters.

Directly across the hall/porch from the cistern room lies the dining room, with its bay wall and Eastlake style china closet. The bay wall is composed of two doorways that flank a central window. The doors now lead to the walkways that connect the dining room to the detached kitchen. The doors are examples of Eastlake styling and feature a single glass pane above small panels filled with diagonally-laid matchstick paneling. The room's china closet is another example of Eastlake styling. The closet is capped by a pediment that employs many of the details used in the bay window and porch design of the front facade. Glass doors enclose the upper portion of the closet, while solid matchstick panels resembling the dining room doors enclose the bottom portion.

An unusual aspect of the dining room is that it was once finished in lath and plaster before the addition of the bay wall in ca. 1890-1895. At this time, the lath and plaster were removed and replaced by horizontally-laid board sheathing. The sheathing was then covered with a layer of primitive fiberboard before the application of wallpaper. The fiberboard and sheathing were recently removed due to severe deterioration. Sheetrock and plaster will replace these elements in the near future. Original wallpaper samples were removed during this work to guide the installation of a suitable reproduction paper in the future.

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The rear of the structure contains two service areas for the house -- a pantry and a servant's quarters. The pantry is a simple room sheathed in matchstick paneling. The servant's quarters is also sheathed in matchstick paneling, and contains a vernacular Italianate mantelpiece featuring a shield design.

During the present rehabilitation work on the Nelson-Kirby House, exhaustive measures were undertaken to retain and repair as much of the original materials as possible. Broken or missing parts of the exterior detailing such as bargeboard and brackets were carefully pieced onto the surviving fabric; broken areas of the plasterwork were repaired with new plaster or replaced with sheetrock. The porch required the most effort, since it was near collapse at the time work began. A major portion of each element on the porch survived to guide the work. A gentle slope was added to the porch roof to improve its drainage, which had been the source of its original deterioration. In all, the vast majority of the original materials in the house at the time work began remain to this day.

Outbuildings (Keyed by letter to the attached site plan) All outbuildings are contributing.

A. Kitchen (ca. 1875-1880)

The detached kitchen at the Nelson-Kirby Farm is a one-story, balloon-frame, gable-roofed structure with a central brick chimney. The tinned roof extends over the porch to provide shelter for the double entrance. The exterior is sheathed in weatherboard, while the interior surfaces are sheathed in a simple tongue-and-groove paneling. The kitchen was removed from its original location in ca. 1898 for use as a tenant house. The current owners have returned the kitchen to approximately its original location. The kitchen was joined to the Nelson-Kirby House by a pair of gable-roofed, glassed walkways. The walkways have been designed to be completely removable in the future. (Although the kitchen has been moved, it is now near its original location and historic setting and, therefore, still contributes to the architectural significance of the farm complex.)

B. Smokehouse (ca. 1870-1875)

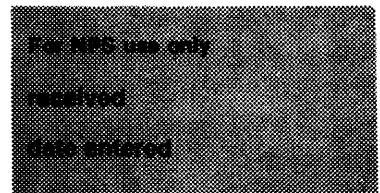
One-story, balloon-frame structure covered by a tinned gable roof and weatherboard siding. The structure rests upon brick piers. The smokehouse appears to predate all other extant outbuildings.

C. Chicken House (ca. 1875-1880)

One-story, balloon-frame structure covered by a tinned gable roof and vertical board siding. A wide band of latticework extends from the top of the siding to the eaves, providing ventilation for the structure in conjunction with its latticed door. Ornamental bargeboard once decorated the eaves (it was designed in a similar style as that of the house) and will be restored in the near future.

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D. Cotton House (ca. 1880-1885)

One-story, balloon-framed structure covered with a tinned gable roof and vertical board siding. The structure was used for the storage of unginned cotton. The interior is partially covered with matchstick paneling.

E. Horse Barn (ca. 1890-1895)

One and one-half story, balloon-frame structure with a vented monitor roof covered in sheetmetal. The exterior is covered with board and batten siding, and an open shed addition is placed on the eastern side. The interior is divided mainly for horse stalls. This structure was greatly modified in height and roof profile ca. 1910-1915.

F. Cow Barn (ca. 1875-1880)

One and one-half story structure, partially built in balloon frame and part with heavy hewn framing members. The structure is covered with a tinned monitor roof and vertical board siding. A shed addition is attached to the eastern side. The mixture of construction materials in the barn's frame indicates the replacement of the original hewn frame by lighter framing members during renovations of its structure.

G. Gazebo (1875-1880)

One-story, post and frame structure with a pyramidal roof and latticework ornamentation.

Sites (Keyed by letter to the attached site plan)

A number of sites of demolished buildings associated with the Nelson-Kirby Farm are known. Among these are the Automobile Garage (H), constructed in ca. 1910-1915, demolished ca. 1965-1970; the Carriage Barn (J), constructed in ca. 1875-1880, demolished in ca. 1950; and, the Engine House (I), constructed in ca. 1885-1890, demolished in ca. 1965-1970. The Engine House is notable, given that the ca. 1890-1900 oil-fired engine remains extant. The engine drove a number of pieces of agricultural equipment, including a water pump and a grist mill. (All sites are non-contributing.)

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

Specific dates ca. 1869–1936 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Nelson-Kirby Farm is being nominated under National Register criteria A, B, and C for its local historical significance. Under criterion A, the property is significant as the headquarters of the Brooks-Kirby plantations, a major commercial farm in Shelby County. The farm is significant under criterion B because of its association with Thomas A. Nelson, James Brett Sr., and James Brett Jr., important local businessmen and/or politicians. Finally, the Nelson-Kirby Farm has local significance under criterion C as an excellent example of a late nineteenth century farm complex centered around the Nelson-Kirby House, with its vernacular Eastlake detailing. The complex retains much of its architectural and historical integrity.

The early history of the property is steeped in local history and tradition. The Nelson-Kirby Farm stands today upon a part of the original 143½ acre land grant that was deeded to Charles Dougherty in 1831. The land was subsequently regranted to Col. Eppy White (d. 1854) in 1834 by the State of Tennessee. The present house site (or a site close by) was occupied by White's home by as late as 1836, when White's house was used as a polling place. The location of the polling place in this area of Shelby County was probably due in part to the activity surrounding the ill-fated Nashoba Colony, a communal experiment begun by Francis Wright in 1825 on the tract bordering White's to the east.

Local tradition has often pointed to the Nelson-Kirby House (or at least to part of it) as the structure developed by White in ca. 1834–1836. Another local tradition states that the house was developed by Wilks Brooks (1785–1849) for the use of his son, Joseph Brooks (1819–1897), or for a plantation overseer. Wilks Brooks owned the property as part of his massive neighboring plantation, the Wilks Brooks House (NR 5/16/80). While the historical record makes an undeniable case for the occupation of the property from ca. 1836 through 1869, no physical evidence has been found to place the construction date of the existing residence prior to the Civil War.

Given the available information in the historic record and the structural evidence embodied in the Nelson-Kirby House, it is apparent that the Nelson-Kirby House and farm complex were begun in ca. 1869–1871 for Thomas Adderton Nelson (1819–1887), a prominent figure in the ante- and post-bellum history of Memphis and Shelby County. Nelson began the farm during the most productive and significant years in his life, and the property remains today as the last surviving tangible link to his accomplishments. The property was officially purchased by Nelson's wife, Miriam Moseley Nelson (b. 1824) from John D. Carroll, a real estate speculator, in August of 1869. A strong tradition among the surviving members of the

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 10.048 acres

Quadrangle name Germantown, Tennessee

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	6	2	4	1	4	2	0	3	8	8	7	3	8	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

1	6	2	4	1	5	4	0	3	8	8	7	3	6	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

1	6	2	4	1	5	0	0	3	8	8	7	1	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

1	6	2	4	1	3	6	0	3	8	8	7	1	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Linn Hopkins, Preservation Consultant

organization N/A date July 1, 1986

street & number #2 2175 Harbert telephone (901) 278-5186

city or town Memphis state Tennessee 38104

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 National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Hays

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 9/19/86

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

for [Signature]
Keeper of the National Register Entered in the National Register

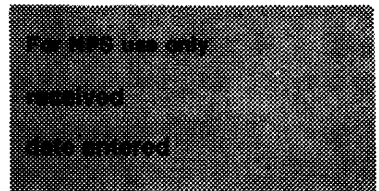
date 10-23-86

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Nelson family states that the purchase of the property was hastened by the outbreak of Yellow Fever in Memphis during 1868. Nelson may have desired a rural retreat from the spread of the disease, as well as a second home to escape the city's summer heat. The tradition continues that the farm was used for these purposes throughout the decade of the 1870s, and particularly during the other Yellow Fever epidemics of 1873 and 1878. It is assumed that construction of the Nelson-Kirby House was begun soon after the land was purchased in 1869.

Thomas A. Nelson was a major figure in the banking, cotton, and life insurance businesses in Memphis before and after the Civil War. Nelson was born in Athens, Alabama in 1819, but did not move to Memphis until 1856. He built a major financial base in the cotton industry as a commission merchant. He was named president of the Bank of West Tennessee in ca. 1858 and served as such until the seizure of the institution by Federal occupation troops in 1862. Nelson fled Memphis for the duration of the war, and returned to reestablish his business interests in 1865.

Following the war, Nelson became an instrumental figure in the commercial development of the Mid-South and its revival during Reconstruction. He succeeded in establishing the region's cotton seed oil industry in 1868 with the formation of the Memphis Oil Company. In succeeding years, his interests in the cotton seed oil business were expanded through the establishment of four other mills, in both Memphis and Waco, Texas.

Nelson is also recognized as a major figure in the insurance field for his organization of the Southern Life Insurance Company in 1870. He was also responsible for the rebirth of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce in 1860, and served two terms as its first post-Civil War president from 1866-1869. Another effort at boosterism came with his organization of the Memphis Industrial Exposition in 1872--an effort cut short by the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1873. Nelson continued to champion his own interests as well as those of the Mid-South region until his death in 1887 at the age of sixty-eight.

During the period from 1865 to 1887, Nelson's official address was located at 87 Adams Avenue, except for a brief four year period from 1870 to 1874, when he lived at 121 Court Avenue (the home once occupied by Jefferson Davis). Both structures have long since been demolished. However, during the 1870s, Nelson is often referred to as a boarder at these addresses in city directory listings, in spite of owning these properties outright. These facts strongly support the Nelson family tradition of Nelson's use of the farm home as a second residence, especially during the plague-filled decade of the 1870s.

Architectural and physical evidence in the Nelson-Kirby House is consistent with the estimated construction date of 1869-1871. It appears as though the rear portion of the house was built first, and additions made over the next few years. It is most likely that the

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majority of the existing structure was in place by ca. 1880. At this time, the home lacked its fine bay window and Eastlake detailing. It likely appeared as a more simplified Italianate residence.

Miriam Moseley Nelson deeded the property to her daughter, Laura F. Brett (1841-1895) in 1877 "for her sole and separate use, free from the debts of her present and any future husband...." Mrs. Brett, along with her husband, James Brett, Sr. and their children, had lived with the Nelsons in their Memphis home from their marriage in 1865 until 1871. It is assumed that the Bretts moved to the Nelson's rural farm home at this time, though no documentary evidence has been found to support their use of the property prior to 1877. In spite of this, it is likely that the Bretts participated in the expansion of the farm home prior to or immediately following the transfer of the property to their ownership.

James Brett, Sr. was a prominent figure in the history of the bar and the judicial system of Memphis and Shelby County. He was born in South Carolina in 1836 and graduated from Tennessee's Cumberland University in 1858. Brett came to Memphis soon after to practice law with Gen. Luke Wright, a major figure of the Memphis bar prior to the Civil War. Brett married Laura Nelson in 1865 and lived with his wife's parents in their Memphis home. He was a partner with Marland L. Perkins under the name of Perkins and Brett. Brett abruptly turned his back on this practice and moved from the city of Memphis. By 1877, the Brett family had moved to the Nelson-Kirby Farm. There, he became a gentleman farmer on the modest 75 acre tract of land. He continued his law practice before the Circuit Court at Germantown, and was later selected as Magistrate of the District Civil Court during the 1880s. He continued to work in this capacity until retiring to his son's home in Memphis around 1895. He died in Memphis in 1917.

It was during Brett's ownership of the property that the majority of outbuildings were constructed, thus establishing the farm complex in part as it exists today. Though the 75 acre tract could have provided little significant value as a working farm, it nonetheless displayed Brett's interests outside of the courtroom.

James Brett, Jr. (1871-1953) was another important figure in the history of Memphis and Shelby County government. The younger Brett was born in Memphis, but spent most of his childhood growing up on the Nelson-Kirby Farm and in the political and legal atmosphere of his father's life. The younger Brett followed in his father's footsteps by becoming the Deputy of the Shelby County Probate Court in 1894, a state legislator in 1912, and Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court of Shelby County in 1914. He retired from this position in 1951 and died in 1953 at age eighty-one. His record of continuous service as a public official remains unmatched by any other in Shelby County history. The Nelson-Kirby House is the only extant residence associated with James Brett, Jr.

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The Bretts sold the Nelson-Kirby Farm to John Louis Ebling and Lucy Carroll Ebling in 1890. The sale was likely a result of Laura Brett's failing health, since it was noted in her 1895 obituary that she died "at her home in Germantown, Tenn..." after a five-year illness.

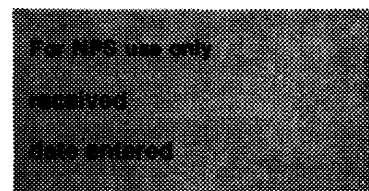
John Louis Ebling (ca. 1852-1920) and Lucy Carroll Ebling (ca. 1856-1901) moved to the Nelson-Kirby Farm from Bolivar County, Mississippi. It was likely the Eblings who made the substantial improvements to the Nelson-Kirby House through the installation of the Eastlake style bay window, bay wall, mantelpieces and other fine details that give the house its special character. J. L. Ebling graduated from Center College in Danville, Kentucky, though little else is known at present about his professional and personal life. The Eblings were forced to sell the Nelson-Kirby House in 1898 when Lucy Ebling contracted a case of tuberculosis. The Eblings moved to Temple, Texas in search of a healthier climate. Unfortunately, the effort was to no avail, as Lucy died from her disease in 1901. J. L. Ebling returned to Germantown, Tennessee following the death of his wife, and died there in 1920.

The Nelson-Kirby Farm was next purchased by John A. Kirby in 1898, and it has remained in the hands of Kirby's descendants ever since. John A. Kirby was born in Halifax County, Virginia in July of 1842, and came to Memphis in 1860 to enter the wholesale grocery business. He enlisted with the Shelby Greys at the onset of the Civil War, and served at the battles of Belmont and Shiloh before being captured during the Battle of Missionary Ridge. He spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner at the Rock Island, Illinois prison. He returned to the grocery business following the Civil War, and worked in this field the rest of his life, most notably with the firm of W. B. Mallory and Co. In 1870, Kirby married Anna Eliza Brooks, daughter of Joseph Brooks, who had sold the Nelson-Kirby Farm property in 1853 as a settlement of the estate of his father, Wilks Brooks. Kirby was an active member of the South Memphis Masonic Lodge for sixty years, and was an early member of the Confederate Historical Society. He died at the old home on Poplar Pike in November of 1929, at the age of eighty-eight.

Kirby's purchase of the Nelson-Kirby Farm in 1898 began the association of this property with the legacy of the Wilks Brooks plantation holdings, whose roots can be traced back to 1835. By the turn of the century, the plantation holdings owned and directed by Kirby exceeded eight thousand acres in Shelby County, northern Mississippi, and eastern Arkansas. The Nelson-Kirby Farm has served as the headquarters for the disposition of these extensive holdings ever since. Kirby was also responsible for many of the improvements to the farm property, especially in updating its outbuildings for more modern service, and through the installation of gas heat and electricity to the farm home.

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John Kirby transferred the ownership of the Nelson-Kirby Farm to his son, Joseph B. Kirby, in 1926, some three years before his death. Joseph Brooks Kirby was born on Christmas Day in 1877, and grew up in the commercial plantation business tradition of the Brooks and Kirby families. The younger Kirby found time for other interests, including banking, charitable, and social involvements. Kirby also passed the legacy of plantation agriculture and the family plantation lands on to his children and grandchildren, who maintain the tradition to this day. Joseph Kirby died on April 13, 1950.

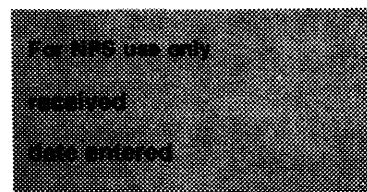
The plantation holdings administered by the descendants of the Kirbys remain among the most extensive in Shelby County. This legacy has in its own way contributed to the developmental pattern of eastern Memphis and Shelby County as parts of the lands were disposed of over the succeeding years and developed for suburban homes and office parks. None-the-less, it was the Nelson-Kirby farm that served as the center for the agricultural activities, a tradition itself now eighty-eight years old.

During the period following the death of Joseph Kirby, the Nelson-Kirby Farm was allowed to deteriorate in spite of its continued use by Kirby's descendants. Many alterations, such as drop ceilings were installed in the house in an attempt to modernize its appearance. Many of the farm's outbuildings suffered from neglect and were demolished. However, the current members of the Kirby family, Walter D. Wills, Jr. and Walter D. Wills III, have undertaken the task of restoring the property to return it to its turn-of-the-century appearance. The Wills have made a meticulous effort to carefully repair and restore the deteriorated elements of the farm property, while removing its later alterations. The house is currently under restoration in this effort, which will continue for some time in the future. It is the desire of the Wills family to one day seek a compatible reuse for the property that may incorporate the display and interpretation of the history of the property and the lifestyles of the people in the surrounding region.

The restoration of the Nelson-Kirby Farm will serve to reaffirm the significant associations to the history of Memphis and Shelby County represented by the farm complex and its owners. In so doing, the effort will also see to the preservation of a significant example of late Victorian architecture and its associated farm complex for the benefit of present and future generations.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Nelson-Kirby Farm Item number 9 Page 2

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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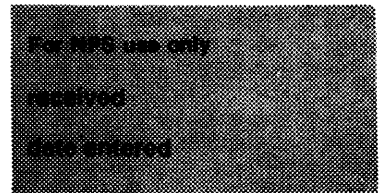
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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

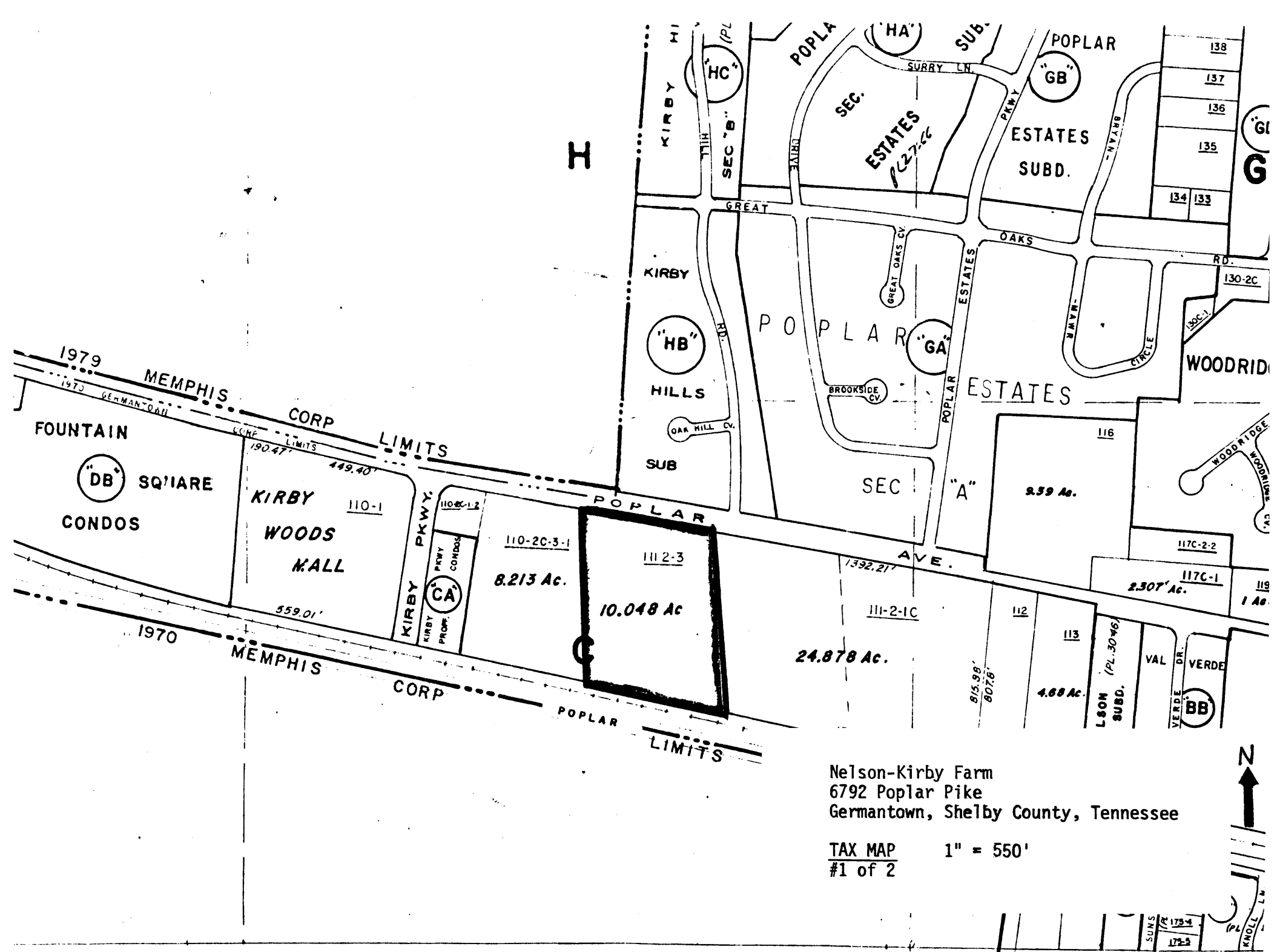
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Nelson-Kirby Farm Item number 10 Page 2

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the nominated property is as follows: beginning at a point in the north right-of-way line of the Southern Railway (100 feet wide) 776.72 feet eastwardly from the east line of Kirby Parkway, said point being the southwest corner of the Joe B. Kirby Property and the southeast corner of the Westminister of Germantown Townhouses; thence northwardly with the east line of the Westminister of Germantown Townhouses, 751.77 feet to a point in the south line of U.S. Highway No. 72, said point being the northwest corner of the Joe B. Kirby Property and said point being 33 feet southwardly from the center line of said Highway; thence eastwardly with the south line of U. S. Highway No. 72, 561.49 feet; thence southwardly, making an exterior angle of 81 degrees .04 minutes 40 seconds, 775.94 feet to a point in the north right-of-way line of the Southern Railway, said point being 598.14 feet eastwardly from the point of beginning; thence westwardly with the north right-of-way line of the Southern Railway and making an interior angle of 79 degrees 12 minutes 40 seconds, 598.14 feet to the point of beginning and containing 10.048 acres of land. This is the last remaining undeveloped property associated with the farm. It includes sufficient land to protect the historic setting and architectural integrity of the Nelson-Kirby farm. (See tax map.)



Nelson-Kirby Farm
 6792 Poplar Pike
 Germantown, Shelby County, Tennessee

TAX MAP #1 of 2 1" = 550'








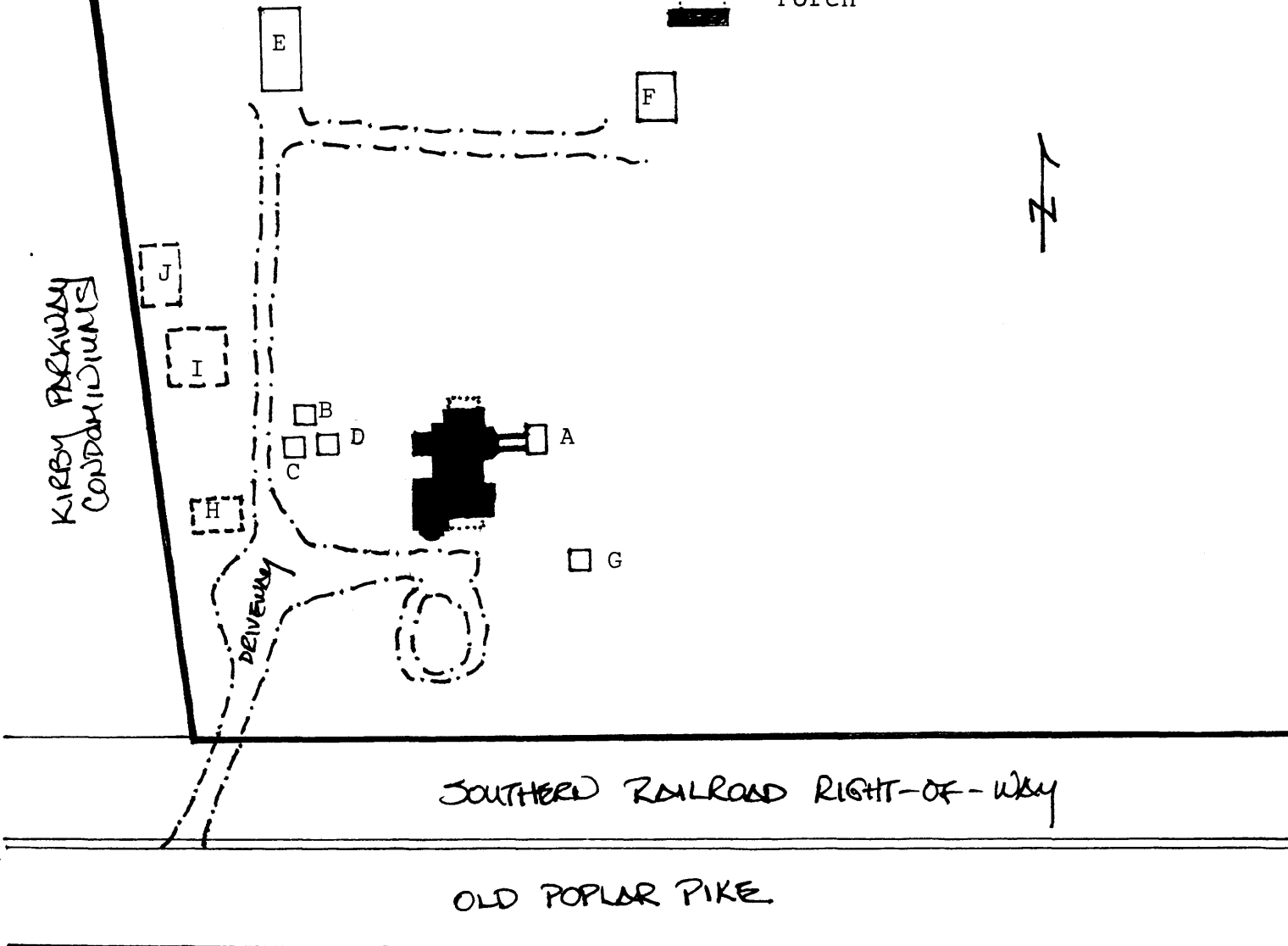
POPLAR AVENUE RIGHT OF WAY

Schematic Site Plan

Nelson-Kirby House
6792 Old Poplar Pike

Lettered Buildings correspond to identifications in the description of the property.

-  Property Line
-  Driveway
-  Extant Structure (outbuilding)
-  Site of non-extant structure
-  Porch



Nelson-Kirby Farm
6792 Poplar Pike
Germantown, Shelby County, Tennessee

SITE PLAN MAP (not to scale)
#2 of 2