

**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 Boligee Hill (1840-ca. 1869) (Myrtle Hall) (ca. 1869-present)

and/or common Myrtle Hall

2. Location NE 1/4 of NE 1/4 of Sec. 33, T.21N, R.1E

0.2 mi. S of Greene Co. 34, approx. 0.7 SE of intersection
street & number with U. S. Highway 11 SE of Boligee — not for publication

city, town Boligee vic. vicinity of congressional district 7th

state Alabama code 01 county Greene code 063

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: none

4. Owner of Property

name Dr. and Mrs. George Overstreet

street & number 3373 Spring Valley Court - Mountain Brook

city, town Birmingham — vicinity of state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Eutaw state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1934, 1936 federal state county local

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

city, town Washington state D. C.

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Crowning one of several high, wooded knolls that overlook the rich prairielands about the community of Boligee, Myrtle Hall is a frame structure rising one-and-a-half stories above a full brick groundfloor. A broad gable roof covers the house, the rear slope breaking slightly to extend low over a back gallery and flanking shedrooms. Abutting each gable end of the house is a pair of brick chimneys. Of the central tetrastyle portico which once framed the main doorway, only the pediment--temporarily underpinned--survives today. Fluted half-columns that functioned as pilasters corresponding with the outer pair of Doric pillars are presently in storage. The original torus bases of the columns were replaced in the early 1900s, but the columns themselves survived until the 1960s. A pair of pilastered and pedimented dormers punctuate the sloping roof to either side of the pediment. Three dormers across the rear slope are similarly treated.

The house measures approximately fifty-two feet square, including the rear gallery and flanking shedrooms. Front and rear elevations are five bays each. Clapboards sheath the exposed portion of the frame superstructure, while flush or matched boarding is used on the porches--a treatment often seen throughout central and southern Alabama. The brick ground floor was formerly stuccoed and scored to imitate ashlar (traces of the scored stucco still remain in places).

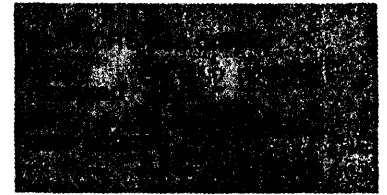
A box cornice, accenting the formality of the main elevation, returns at either side to terminate against each forward chimney. Windows in both the main floor and half story above are filled with 12-over-12 sashing, the upper windows being proportionately reduced in size. Basement windows are unusual in that they have casements instead of being filled with the more typical guillotine sashing. The date of the casements is unknown. All windows, including the dormers, were once hung with exterior louvered blinds.

Inside, a hallway bisects each floor, with two large rooms to either side. Ceilings of the main floor are 13 feet high; those above, 9 feet 10 inches at the highest point. A pair of sliding doors, paneled and nearly 10 feet in width, connect the parlor and dining room on the west side of the main hall. Original mantelpieces in these rooms followed a familiar early 19th-century pattern: a modified Adamesque design composed of engaged colonnettes--a pair to each side of the fireplace opening--carrying an unadorned frieze with a wide molded mantelshelf or cornice. The crowding of elements in both rooms--mantelpieces partially covered adjacent window facings, the door between the dining room and the hall was placed so close to one corner that the facing is partially embedded in the plasterwork--bolsters the likelihood that the trim was manufactured elsewhere.

A pair of small shedrooms lie directly behind each of the north rooms, opening onto the loggia-like raised gallery between. These were reconstructed in the 1970s. The east shedroom visible in HABS photographs of the mid-1930s was evidently an early 20th century addition and utilized an original 12-over-12 sash removed when the shed was added. The west shedroom, possibly built as a butler's pantry, seems to have been original and had 9-over-9 light windows. As rebuilt, both shedrooms have 9-over-9 sashing. HABS photos also show a small offset wing at the northwest corner of the house, off the dining room and very likely a late 19th or early 20th-century addition. This wing no longer exists.

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Upstairs, each of the four rooms is lighted by a single dormer and a window adjoining the fireplace in each gable end. A crawl-through in the ceiling of the second-floor hall leads to the attic, where the remains of non-functional supports would seem to corroborate Hays family tradition that a small observation deck once straddled the ridge of the roof. By the early 1900s, this feature had disappeared.

From the front of the main hall, a straight-run stair rises to the floor above. There is a secondary flight to the basement directly beneath. The wall under the main stair is paneled, while the profile of each tread and riser is accented by a single run of stepped molding. Applied scrollwork dates from the 1960s. A graceful balustrade, with two turned and tapered spindles to each tread, terminates at the bottom in a scrolled volute.

The basement has doubtless served a variety of functions through the years. By 1920 certainly, one of the four rooms had been converted into a kitchen--replacing the original detached cookhouse. In the early 20th century, wide double doors also opened from the area beneath the front and rear porches into the center passage. Two wooden steps at each end of the passage descended to a floor approximately a foot and a half below grade level. HABS photographs reveal that the area beneath the rear gallery was partially enclosed. On axis with the gallery steps was a vehicular gate--swing between finial-capped posts--opening into the rear yard from the north.

None of the outbuildings and only a few traces of the landscaped grounds exist today. Below the brow of the hilltop house-site, to the southwest, is a small 20th century tenant house. Today, Myrtle Hall is approached from the rear, by means of an unpaved farm lane off Greene County Road 34.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input 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 1840 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

ARCHITECTURE, EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT, AGRICULTURE: Architecturally, Myrtle Hall represents the formalization of a vernacular dwelling type, the "raised cottage," through an adherence to academic principles of symmetry and proportion, and the application of fashionable stylistic detail. Brought to west central Alabama by settlers from the South Atlantic seaboard, the raised cottage itself exemplifies in architecture the cultural transplantation that recurred again and again on successive American frontiers.¹ Myrtle Hall once may have been only one of several such dwellings in an area dominated by planters from Piedmont South Carolina. Today, however, it is unique as a type among surviving Greene County plantation houses.

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT: Myrtle Hall is also significant as the home of Charles Hays, Reconstruction-era Congressman from Alabama and a leader of the state's Radical Republican party during the stormy years following the Civil War.

The house was erected for Dr. John D. Means and his wife, Charlotte Johnston Means, from Fairfield District, South Carolina. A memoir written in old age by a daughter of the Means household, Eliza Gould Means Picton, enables us to piece together the earliest days of Myrtle Hall with unusual clarity. Mrs. Picton describes the family's month-long journey from Fairfield District to Alabama in 1831, with "negroes. . . tents, carriages, wagons, and all necessary things." After residing at Huntsville for a year, the Means moved to the lower part of Greene County, in the fertile Blackbelt region of the state. They arrived in December and immediately turned their attention to preparing the fields for spring cultivation--living in tents until time could be spared for the construction of a one-room log cabin for the family. This eventually evolved into a typical dogtrot dwelling, with two large rooms to either side of an open hall, shedrooms at the rear (as in the present house), and a gallery across the front.

In the late 1830s, Dr. Means began the construction of the house standing today. It was a mile from the previous structure, "on a high hill"--as his daughter would recall--"with just enough level ground in which to build the house." Facing south toward a main road long since closed, the house was occupied in 1840. Mrs. Picton describes it:

. . . a basement and two storied, four large rooms on each floor, a wide hall extending the length of . . . the first floor, with wide double doors, back and front. There was a portico in front, reaching almost to the windows on each side, with four fluted columns; a flight of steps extended entirely across. At the back was a wide gallery.

¹Whether the raised-cottage formula as it developed earlier in the Atlantic states was a purley spontaneous response to local coniditons, or a much-modified provincial echo of an arrangement advocated by Palladio, is unclear. Significantly, Drayton Hall near Charleston is perhaps the quintessential formal statement of the latter in North America.

9. Major Bibliographical References

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.06

Quadrangle name Eutaw 7.5

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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

B						
	Zone	Easting		Northing		

C						
	Zone	Easting		Northing		

D						
	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 attached plat

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert S. Gamble, Architectural Historian for

organization Alabama Historical Commission date February 1981

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 832-6621

city or town Montgomery 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 *[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
Entered in the National Register

for
factory *Albous Byers*
Keeper of the National Register

date 2/19/82

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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The complex also included a separate kitchen "with rooms above for servants, "a brick dairy the roof of which extended over the well, and a two-room log building--located some distance from the main residence in case of fire--which served as a smokehouse and for storage. On an opposite hill were barns, pens for the livestock, stables, and a carriage house. The entire domestic ensemble, together with vegetable and flower gardens, an orchard, a chicken yard, and "a large cistern dug out of the limerock," covered some sixty-three acres.

Mrs. Picton also leaves us an intriguing glimpse of the ornamental landscaping about the house:

The graveled walk in front of the house was straight for some distance, then curved to the left to the front gate. The curve was bordered with Cape Jessamines. On each side of the front yard was a varnish tree, with brick circles to protect them from the encroachment of the Bermuda grass. The seeds were brought from South Carolina by Father On the left side of the house a walk led to the garden, passing through a summer house in the center, which was covered with honeysuckle and wild yellow jessamine vines. Around the half circles outside the summer house, there were large Cape Jessamine bushes. On the right of the house at the edge of the yard the hill was terraced and was narrowed as it curved to the front gate and was covered some distance down with grass and, beyond, with small forest trees. There were three fig trees at each end of the house, small green figs with red meat, and in the garden there were other figs and a Smyrna fig tree. The garden had all the beautiful old fashioned flowers, many fine roses, and later on, the modern varieties, all in great abundance.

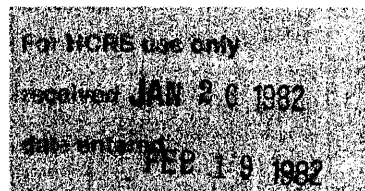
During this, the first years if its existence, the estate was known as "Boligee Hill." According to Mrs. Picton, the word "boligee" derived from an Indian phrase meaning "splash in the water." A nearby marshland, eventually drained and cultivated by Dr. Means, was called Boligee Swamp. And by the mid-19th century, Boligee Post Office had been established some three miles from Boligee Hill.

Dr. Means had studied medicine in New York. In 1824, he was licensed to practice by the South Carolina Medical Board. But like many other professionally trained Southerners of the period, he elected to devote most of his energies to cotton-planting. Thus in V. Gayle Snedecor's 1856 Greene County directory, he is listed as a "planter and physician." Each winter, Means and his wife went downriver to Mobile, where they purchased staples and other commodities for the plantation. At the same time, the year's cotton crop was consigned to brokers in the port city.

Despite the extensive improvements he had made at Boligee Hill, Dr. Means decided not long before the Civil War to dispose of his Alabama holdings and move to the promising lands of the Mississippi Delta. With him went his son, Dr. Hudson Means, and a son-in-law, Charles Graham. Mrs. Picton places the date at 1860, though this is not documented further. For a time, the house was owned by Bradley H. Ridgeway. Then, in 1869, it came into the possession of Charles B. Hays.

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Born at neighboring "Hays' Mount" in 1834, Charles Hays had grown up amidst the privileges of the local planter oligarchy. He was educated at the universities of Georgia and Virginia. Returning to Alabama, he entered local politics. In 1860, he joined his stepfather, Col. John W. Womack of Eutaw, as a delegate to the national Democratic convention in Baltimore. When Alabama seceded from the Union shortly thereafter, he entered the Confederate army, serving with the rank of major. But Hays' post-Civil War career earned him the bitter epithet of "Scalawag" among his defeated neighbors.

Aligning himself with the Republican party, he became a member of the State Constitutional Convention which, in 1867, imposed Radical Reconstruction measures upon Alabama. A year later, he was elected to the State Senate with the support of the newly enfranchised freedmen in his heavily black district. And finally, in 1869, he was chosen for the first of three consecutive terms in the U. S. House of Representatives. Although he counseled a moderate approach with regard to some specific issues such as mixed schools and unrestricted rights for the Southern blacks, he had irrevocably alienated himself from his own class. This was especially true after publication of the so-called "Hays-Hawley letter," in 1874. Written by Hays was a delegate to the Republican national Senator Joseph Hawley, the letter enumerated purported atrocities committed against both blacks and white Republicans in Alabama. Hays was a delegate to the Republican national convention in 1876, but retired from Congress the following year. In July of 1878, the ex-Congressman was elected president of the Republican State Convention.

Throughout this period, Hays and his family maintained their permanent residence at the estate they had purchased in 1869. It was Hays' wife, Cornelia Ormond Hays, who discarded the old name of Boligee Hill and renamed the place Myrtle Hall--for the sweet myrtle shrubs she had planted about the grounds. Mrs. Hays herself came from a prominent Alabama family. She was the daughter of Judge John Ormond of Tuscaloosa, member of the State Bar and sometime Justice of the State Supreme Court.

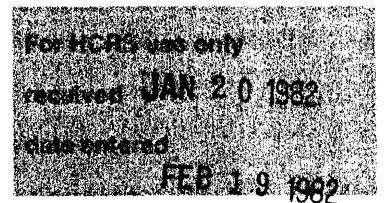
Charles Hays died at Myrtle Hall on June 24, 1879, and was buried in the nearby family cemetery at Hays' Mount. Mrs. Hays continued to maintain Myrtle Hall as a working farm until her own death, when house and land descended to her children. Well into the 20th century, Myrtle Hall remained the home of two unmarried daughters, the Misses Mary Hairston and Anne Miller Hays. About 1920, plumbing was installed in the main dwelling--replacing a spacious four-hole privy, white with louvered blinds, that stood on the brow of the hill east of the house.

Since the Hays ownership, Myrtle Hall has passed through a number of hands. During the 1950s, the house was owned and occupied by J. Dennis Herndon, Sr., and his family. When Herndon was killed in a 1959 farming accident, the house and three acres were sold to Mrs. John D. Lacefield of Birmingham, although the Herndon heirs maintained the contiguous land under cultivation.

Mrs. Lacefield subsequently made a number of physical changes to the house, including construction of a frame wing at the northeast rear and installation of large picture windows on both the north and west sides of the shedroom at the west end of the adjoining gallery. The columns of the front portico were removed in an abortive renovation attempt, and have since disintegrated. Inside, the mantelpieces in the parlor and dining room were

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replaced by others which, although of vintage origin, are inappropriate to the house. A second bath was installed in the southeast upper bedroom, and scrolled trim applied beneath each tread of the main stairway.

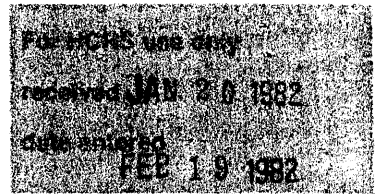
Since Myrtle Hall was acquired in 1976 by the present owners, Dr. and Mrs. George Overstreet, the rear gallery has been reconstructed along the lines shown in the Historic American Buildings Survey photographs of the 1930s. The house has also been covered with a shake roof. Other restoration-related tasks--including replacement of the original columns, structural stabilization at both the foundation level and in the western main-floor rooms, as well as replacement of deteriorated lathe and plaster--still await completion.

Within the raised-cottage format, Myrtle Hall combines an academic center-hall plan with details derived from standard architectural handbooks of the period. Doors throughout the main floor feature a pattern of equal-sized elongated panels characteristic of the Greek Revival era. Although it is conceivable that the doors were fashioned by a local joiner, their design--one of the most distinctive of the "Grecian" configurations of the 1830s--also suggests Mobile as their possible point of origin. Certainly, the pattern is a recurring motif in the port city which provided the upriver plantations with most of their milled and manufactured necessities. Especially notable are the broad, high double-leaf doors at each end of the main hall. Each leaf is composed of ten panels, arranged in two vertically parallel rows of five each. Framing the doors are sidelights and transoms which employ a muntin pattern first appearing in Asher Benjamin's 1830 edition of The Practical House-Carpenter. (Glen Alpine, another plantation house in the area which is now demolished, has very similar doors opening onto a two-tiered portico.) The original mantelpieces in the two main-floor east rooms likewise may be traced to Benjamin's design plates: that in the northeast room to Plate 51 from The Practical House-Carpenter; that in the southeast room to general schemes illustrated in the slightly earlier American Builder's Companion. The treatment of the portico was perhaps an adaptation of Benjamin's "new order," which added a torus molding and plinth to the conventionally baseless Doric shaft, combining this with a somewhat Ionic entablature. At Myrtle Hall, however, the design was simplified by the elimination of the channeling in the torus and a reduction of the entablature itself. The intercolumniation, slightly wider between the inner pair of columns, recalls Plate 76 from Edward Shaw's Civil Architecture (1836)--a "Doric Portico," based on that of the Propylon of the Agora, at Athens. Window treatment, too, follows handbook archetypes--again from Benjamin--in the use of channeled facings with cornerblocks and of paneling beneath each double-hung sash.

For the most part, Myrtle Hall is in sound condition, although the inherent porosity of the foundation brickwork and the structural warping which has occurred in the main-floor west rooms pose formidable restoration problems. In spite of its current condition, Myrtle Hall's architecture as well as its historical associations make it one of the most significant landmarks in the Warrior-Tombigbee region of Alabama.

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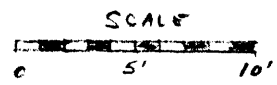
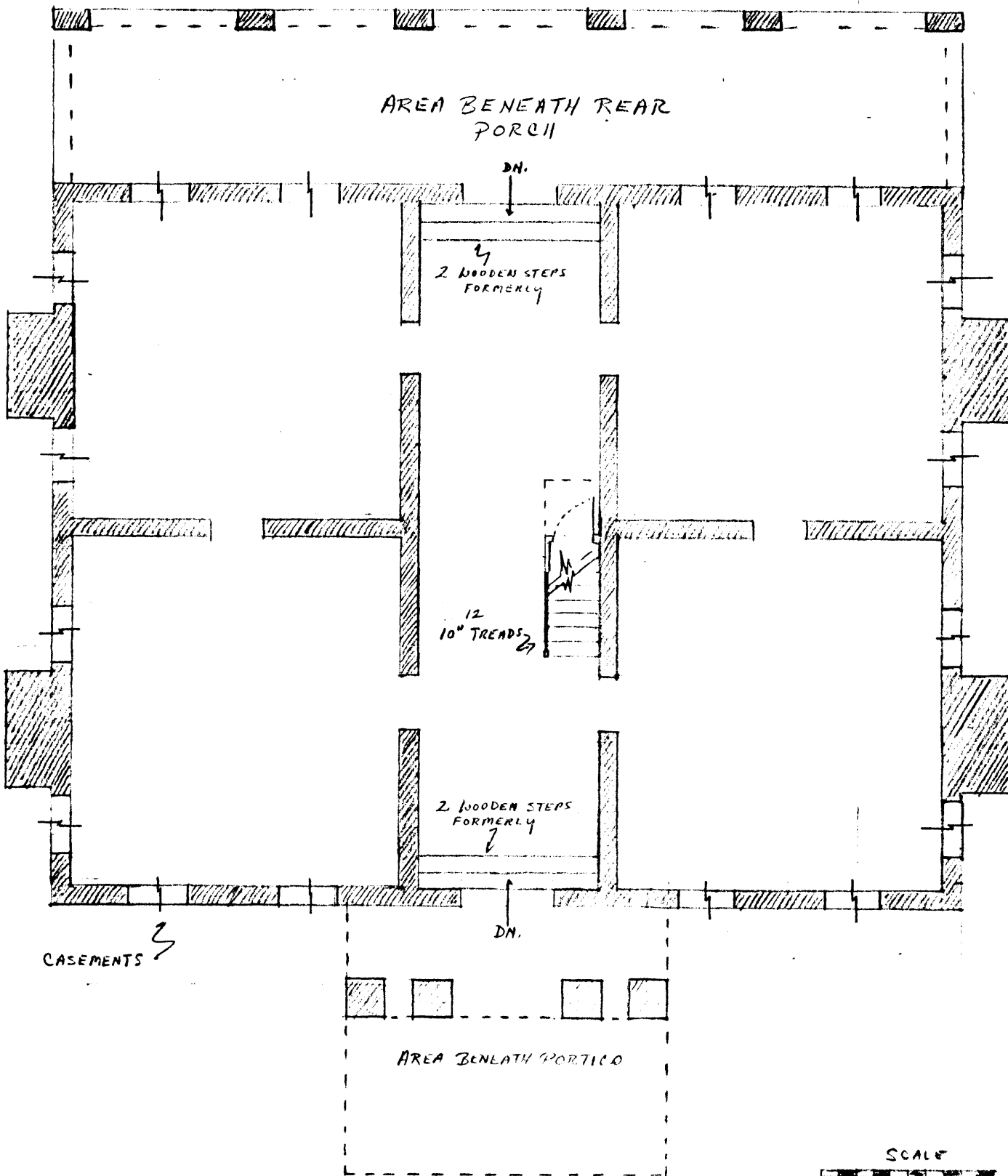
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Glass, Mary Morgan, ed. A Goodly Heritage: Memories of Greene County. Clarksville, TN
Josten's, 1977. Published for Greene County Historical Society.
Overstreet, George, & Robert Gamble. Miscellaneous notes.
Wiggins, Sarah W. The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865-1881. Tuscaloosa: University
of Alabama Press. 1977.

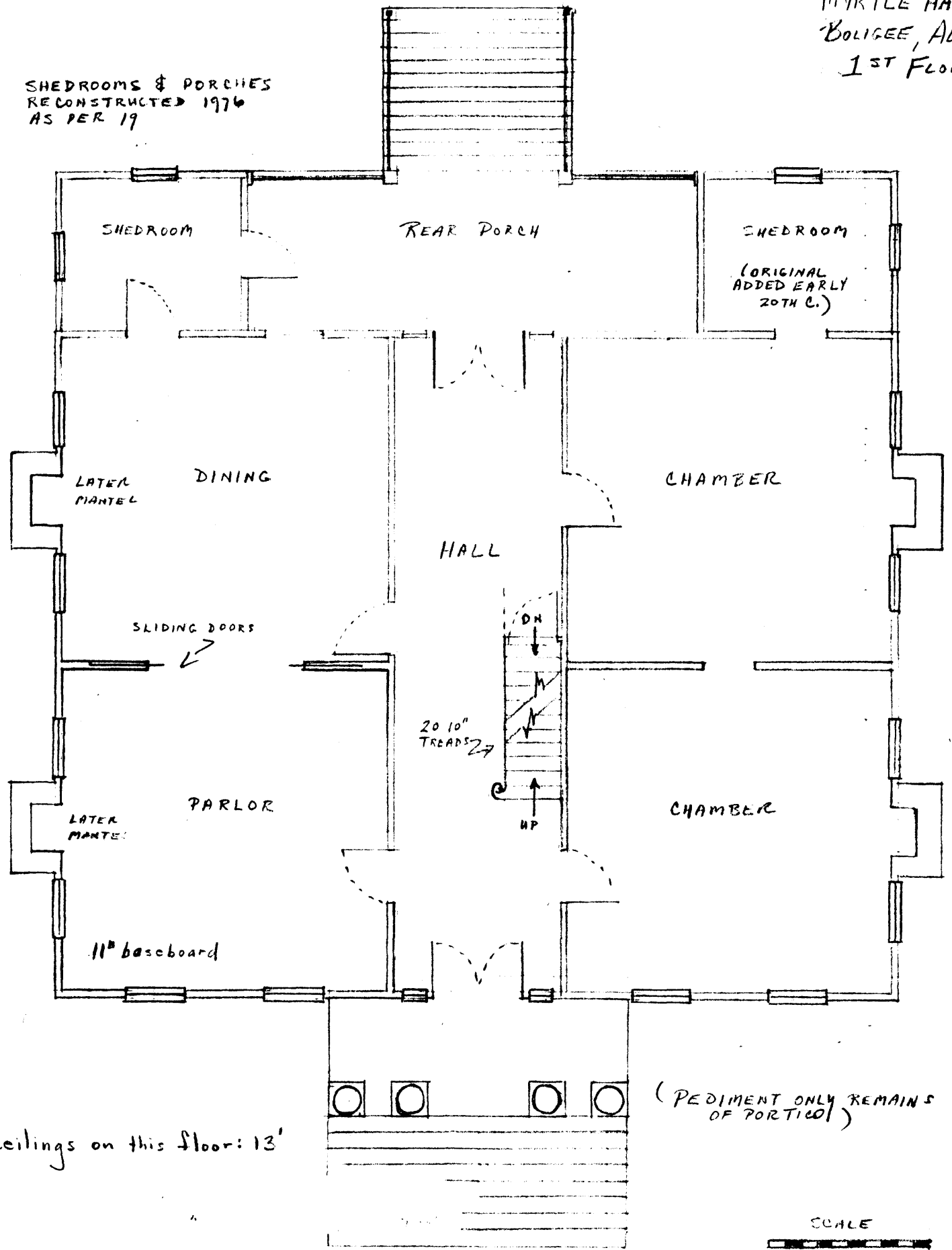
MYRTLE HALL
BOLIGEE, ALA.
BASEMENT



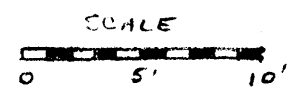
MEASURED & DRAWN BY R. GAMBLE

MYRTLE HALL
BOLIGEE, ALA.
1ST FLOOR

SHEDROOMS & PORCHES
RECONSTRUCTED 1976
AS PER 19

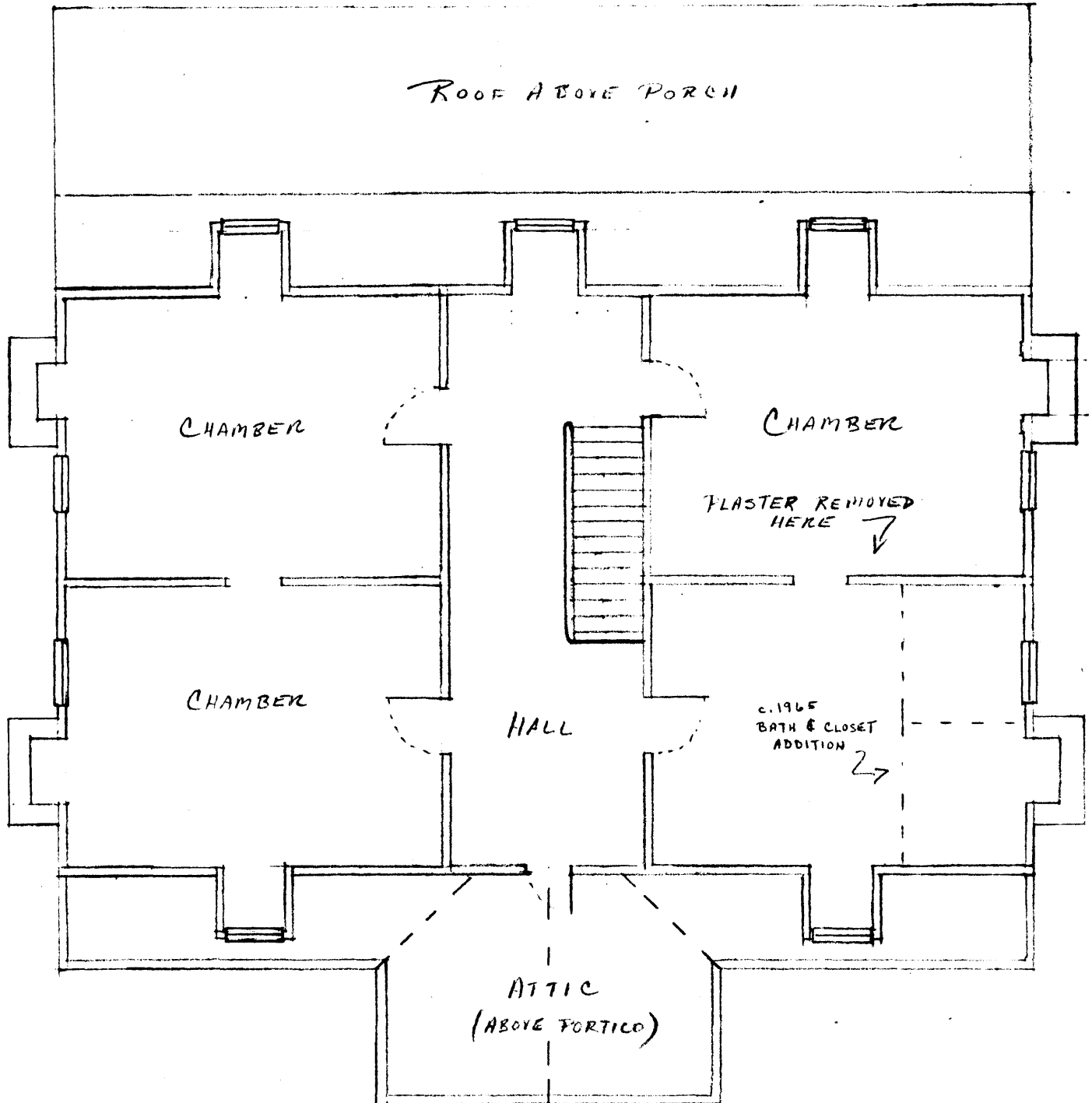


ceilings on this floor: 13'



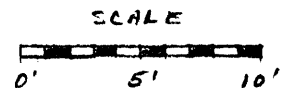
MEASURED & DRAWN BY R. GAMBLE

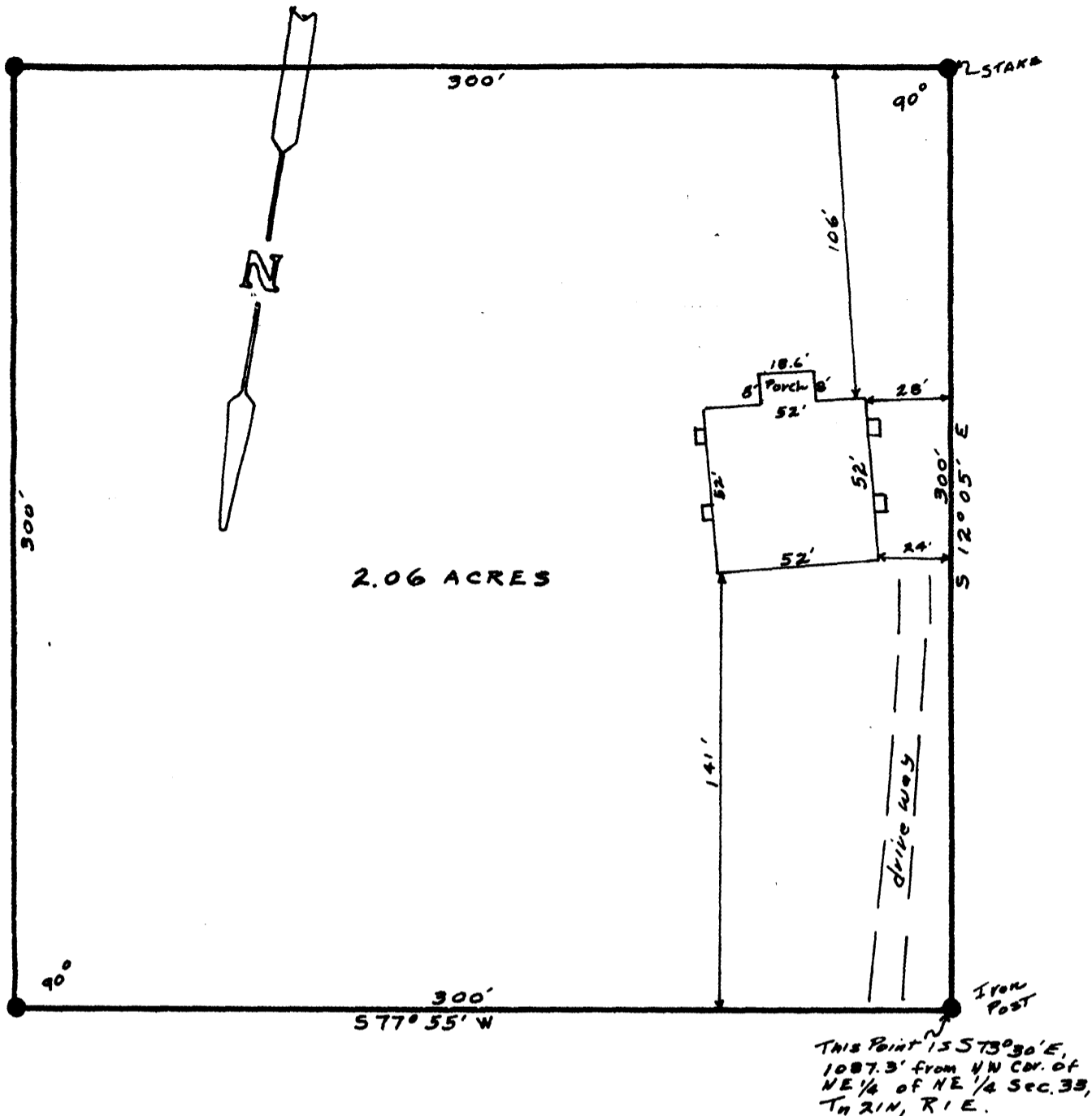
MYRTLE HALL
BOLIGEE, AL.
2^D FLOOR



ceilings on this floor: 9'-10"

MEASURED & DRAWN BY
R. GAMBLE





"MRYTLE HALL"

**PROPERTY OF GEORGE OVERSTREET
IN NE 1/4 OF NE 1/4 SEC. 33, TN 21N, R 1E.,
GREENE COUNTY, ALABAMA**

STATE OF ALABAMA
GREENE COUNTY

I, Jack A. Fox, a registered surveyor of the State of Alabama certify that this is a true and correct plat of a two acre lot in Section 33, Township 21n, Range 1e, as recorded in Book 80 Page 457, in the Probate Office in Greene County, Alabama; that the building now erected on said land is within the boundaries of same; that there are no encroachments by buildings from adjoining properties; that there are no rights of way, easements or joint driveways over are across land visible on the surface except as shown; that the property shown is not in a special flood hazard area.

According to my survey this 11 th day of May, 1976.

Scale: 1" = 50'

Jack A. Fox

Registration No. 9230