

MAY 20 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE

other names/site number Sydonie Mansion; Florida Master Site File #OR7895

2. Location

street & number 5538 Sydonie Drive N/A  not for publication

city or town Mount Dora  vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Orange code 095 zip code 32757

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Missa Stone 5/16/16  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Greg Salby

6.28.2016

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	0	total

Name of related multiple property listings

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC/Girls Dormitory

DOMESTIC/Boathouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

Vacant

DOMESTIC/Boathouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL

Mediterranean Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Hollow Tile

walls Wood

roof Clay Tile

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1904

Significant Dates

1904

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arch: Atterbury, Grosvenor; Seeler, Edgar Vigners

Blder: Seeler, Edgar V.; Roberts, Frank

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of Repository

#

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 10 apprx

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	4	4	1	2	9	2	3	1	7	9	2	4	4
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
2	1	7	4	4	1	3	1	2	3	1	7	9	2	4	4

3	1	7	4	4	1	4	0	9	3	1	7	9	2	5	1
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
4	1	7	4	4	1	3	7	1	3	1	7	9	4	4	7

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carl Shiver, Historic Preservationist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date May 2016

street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Clark and Amy Frogley

street & number 5538 Sydonie Drive telephone (518) 860-4021

city or town Mount Dora state Florida zip code 32757

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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**SUMMARY**

Sydonie Mansion is a Mediterranean Revival Style residence that was constructed between 1885 and 1904 in the settlement of Zellwood, now part of the city of Mount Dora, Florida. The 22,000 square foot residence is situated on 10 acres overlooking Lake Maggiore. Designed by famous architects Grosvenor Atterbury and Edgar Vigners Seeler, for Pittsburg steel magnate James L. Laughlin, Jr., and his wife Sidney Page. The house was for Laughlin's nick-name for Sidney. The mansion features 41 rooms, including 13 bedrooms, 8 bathrooms and 13 fireplaces.<sup>1</sup> It also includes an indoor pool with shower in the basement. There are beautiful handcrafted wooden moldings throughout reflecting an era of craftsmanship difficult to find in modern homes. Outside, a huge porch, formal gardens, a workshop with separate apartment above and a two-story boathouse make up the rest of the property. James Laughlin died on October 19, 1919, and his wife eight years later. His children sold the house to Eugene Speers around 1942 and he subsequently sold the property to Dr. Pierre Wilds DuBose and his wife, who moved their school, the Hampden-DuBose Academy, from Orlando to Zellwood. They used Sydonie Mansion as a boarding school for girls for nearly forty years. The mansion was bought in 1997 by Richard and Carla Durante, who spent nearly a decade restoring it. In April of 2014, Clark Jason Frogley and Amy Colyer Frogley bought Sydonie with hopes of turning it into a living museum for all to enjoy.

**SETTING**

Sydonie Mansion is located in the Zellwood section of Mount Dora. Mount Dora is a city in Lake County, Florida. As of 2011, the United States Census Bureau estimates the Mount Dora population at 12,534. The town of Mount Dora began in 1874 when the area was settled by David Simpson, his wife, and two children.<sup>2</sup> In 1880, Ross C. Tremain became the town's first postmaster. A post office called Mount Dora has been in operation since 1883.<sup>3</sup> The town that was to become Mount Dora was originally named Zellwood and first homesteaded by Colonel T. Elwood Zell, a successful book publisher from Philadelphia. In 1880 the community was renamed "Mount Dora."

**DESCRIPTION**

**Exterior**

This 2-½ story Mediterranean Revival style residence has an irregular ground plan and walls constructed of yellow pine, poplar, oak, brick and slat. It has a hipped main roof with a clipped gable dormer on the third story of the main facade which overlooks Lake Maggiore. Hip extensions project from the main block of the house

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<sup>1</sup> Only a few bedrooms were included as examples in the photographs.

<sup>2</sup> [History Of Mount Dora Florida](#)". Florida Backroads Travel. Retrieved 2015-11-30.

<sup>3</sup> "Lake County." [Jim Forte Postal History](#). Retrieved 7 June 2015.

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DESCRIPTION

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and clipped gable and shed roofs pierce the roof sections. The exterior wall fabric is stucco and the fenestration consists of casement windows with 6, 8, 9, and 12 lights. Seven chimneys rise above the roof and the house sits on a continuous hollow tile foundation. Decorative features on the exterior include a curvilinear parapet with masonry coping. The roof is surfaced with barrel design Spanish tile. The main facade (Photo 1) features a massive 3-bay 1-story hip roof porch surfaced with Spanish tile. The existing porch is quite different from the one that appears on the 1904 first floor plan. The porch is still three bays wide and has a roof supported by massive rectangular masonry pillars surfaced with stucco. A high masonry knee wall extends between the pillars, leaving the central bay and a receding side bay open (Photo 2). Concrete steps ascend to the porch deck. The steps are quite different than the central "cement steps" that appear on the 1904 plan. The steps which extend eastward from the central bay to the secondary entrance bay rise to a platform marked by two concrete stands that support planters. The central main entrance features a segmental arched wooden door (Photo 3) with an arched screen door inserted in a classical frame with an arched pediment. The doorway is framed by massive Doric columns between which is a 6-light transom. Flanking the columns are massive piers and 18-light casement window, above which are 6-light hopper windows. Another pair of casement window are found immediately to the east of the porch where the wall is bowed outward to contain some furniture (Photo 4). An ell in the porch runs north providing access to the interior of the house by way of a pair of French doors (Photo 5). Next to the French doors is an arched passageway that runs through the base of a concrete spiral stairs the runs to the second floor (Photos 6-7). The west side of the porch (Photo 8) also runs north to provide access to a doorway (Photo 9) that opens onto what was originally the "gun room."

The house has a basic cross shape, with the footprint composed of the south section and a central section consisting of an arcaded hallway that extends to the east and west wings terminating in the two side entrances. The west wing (Photo 10) terminates in a shed roof screened porch that does not appear on the original plan. This wing provides entrance to the dining room and breakfast room. Immediately to the north is a one-story clipped-gable section originally known as the "maid's porch" (Photo 11). This small addition does not appear on the 1904 plan, but it does appear on a drawing of the elevation. The section north of the house itself reveals a concrete wall that encloses a formal garden containing various plantings and reflecting pools (Photo 12). Nearby is the Mediterranean Revival style porte-cochere (Photo 13), which is covered with ivy. The east wing (Photos 14-15) provides entrance to the arcaded corridor east-west through the center of the mansion.

**Interior First Floor**

The front door enters into the living or sitting room (Photos 16-18) which has a doorway opening onto the stair hall (Photos 19-20), also known as the music room because it once featured a baby grand piano located near the stairs leading to the second floor (Photos 19-21). You access the dining room atop a short flight of steps leading to a platform. There are two bedrooms on the first floor (Photos 22-23) found at the east end of the arcade (Photos 24-25). Between the two bedrooms, running north from the arcade is a colonnade providing a connection with the porte-cochere (Photo 26). At the west end of the arcade is the dining room (Photo 27) and

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breakfast room. The kitchen (Photos 28-29) appliances and cabinets have been modernized and remodeled since 1904.

**Interior Second Floor**

The stairs to the second floor terminate in a landing (Photos 31-32) that connects to an east-west corridor (Photos 33-34). There are six bedrooms on the second floor, the best of which have access to windows for air and light. The bedroom (F) at the east end of the corridor features a king-size four-poster bed (Photo 35). The room has French doors that open onto a small balcony and a fireplace. This room shares a bathroom with bedroom (E).

**Interior Third Floor**

The third floor has four bedrooms and two baths. The stairs rising from the second floor access a small landing (Photo 36) that directly accesses a bedroom to the south (Photo 37). A short hall running north (Photo 38) leads to a bedroom with a private bathroom. West of the landing is another larger bedroom (Photo 39).

**Interior Cellar**

The cellar rests on a continuous brick foundation whose interior walls and footings support the structure of the large house resting on them. Not all of the areas within the foundation were excavated. A major room was used as a wine cellar and for storage, but the most notable area contains a swimming pool (Photo 40) with a nearby shower (Photo 41).

**Enclosed Garden**

The formal garden at the rear of the house is bordered by the west and north wings, a bowed concrete wall on the north, and the colonnade leading to the porte-cochere on the east. The wall encloses a formal garden containing various plantings and reflecting pools (Photos 42-43)

**Secondary Buildings**

The property has two secondary buildings, the boathouse and the old laundry building. The laundry building (Photo 44) has an upper apartment. At present it is vacant. The boathouse (Photos 45-46) once stood within the water of Lake Maggiore but now rests high and dry with the shrinkage of the lake.

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SIGNIFICANCE

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**SUMMARY**

The Sydonie Mansion has state-wide significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as outstanding early example of the Mediterranean Revival Style. It was constructed in 1904 as a winter home for James H. Laughlin, Jr. and his wife Sydney Ford Laughlin (nee Page) for whom the house was named.<sup>4</sup> James Laughlin, Jr., was the son of James H. Laughlin, Sr., the owner of the owner of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania a wealthy Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania banker, manufacturer, philanthropist, and steel executive. The mansion was designed by Grosvenor Atterbury (1869-1956) an American Architect and urban planner and architect Edgar Vigners Seeler (1867-1929). The residence was named Sydonie, the nick-name for Laughlin's wife. The design of the house was said to have been inspired by the Alhambra Castle in Spain, and included sculpted gardens with rare plants from around the world, citrus groves, a dairy farm, power plant and a bowling alley. Laughlin often entertained guests in the three-story mansion decorated with European artwork.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Zellwood was first homesteaded by Colonel T. Elwood Zell, a successful book publisher from Philadelphia, who visited the area in 1875 during an extended trip through Florida. In search of land suitable for citrus cultivation, Zell was taken by the beauty of two small lakes, which he named Maggiore and Minore in resemblance to a pair of lakes he had visited in Switzerland. Zell applied for and received a 160-acre homestead surrounding the lakes and returned the following year to erect a house and plant citrus groves at his estate, which he named "Zellwood."<sup>5</sup>

In 1878 a group of Pittsburg men started coming to Zellwood to hunt and break away from the harsh winters in the North. The first man to discover the area as a prime hunting area was Hill Burgwin who convinced his cousins William Oden Hughart and James L. Laughlin Jr. to join him. When they first came to Florida, conditions were rugged and travel was by steamship up the St. Johns and Ocklawaha rivers from Palatka to Fort Mason on Lake Eustis. An ox team, which was the first means of transportation through the deep sand, would transport the hunters to and from locations to meet the other hunters. The ox team was owned and operated by Robert Holland Williams of Plymouth, which today is an unincorporated area located northwest of Apopka, who covered the trail from Fort Mason to Tangerine, Zellwood, and Apopka. In 1884 the Tavares, Orlando, and Atlantic Railroad reached Zellwood and traveling to Zellwood was much easier.<sup>6</sup> William Ogden Hughart, who was president of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad brought down his private railroad car. With this

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<sup>4</sup> James H. Laughlin, <http://www.geni.com/people/James-Laughlin/6000000033642608324>

<sup>5</sup> National Register of Historic Places Form for Zellwood Inn, FMSF #7887, p.7 (not listed).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mulligan, Railroad Depots of Central Florida (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008) p. 104.



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convenience, the wives joined the winter treks to Florida. The families fell in love with the area, land was purchased and the story of Sydonie Mansion began.<sup>7</sup>

William Oden Hughart was the first of the group to build a three-story wood frame house in 1879 on a lot which would be next door to the Sydonie Mansion. The residence was named Odenwald. It survives today in a fraction of its original form and is almost unrecognizable with the numerous additions and alterations made to the original form.<sup>8</sup> In 1885, James L. Laughlin, Jr., the head of J&L Steel, bought a substantial amount of property next door to his brother-in-law at Odenwald and started devising a plan to build a substantial home that would be called Sydonie. Eventually, he would purchase and cultivate a total of 500-600 acres by 1915.<sup>9</sup> James Laughlin, Jr., was born on June 18, 1847, the youngest son of James Laughlin, Sr. (1819-1882) who had emigrated from Ireland and became a partner in the J&L Steel Company in Pittsburg. His son was educated in private schools in Pittsburg and graduated from Princeton University in 1868. After graduation he became a partner in the firm of Laughlin & Company and was connected with the firm until his death 51 years later. In 1870, he became a partner in his father's firm and married Sydney Page, the daughter of John H. Page of Pittsburg. They had four children. In 1883, he established a winter home in Zellwood, Florida. From 1901 to 1903, he served as an Alumni Trustee of Princeton University. He lived most of his later life at Sydonie, and died in 1919 at his Florida home. Laughlin was an officer of Jones & Laughlin Steel Co., a graduate and trustee of Princeton University, a benefactor of Rollins College and a devoted member of the Presbyterian Church.

Laughlin was also an avid hunter who fell in love with the beauty and seclusion in Zellwood. In 1885, he purchased the large tract of land so that he could build a wintertime home for himself, his family, and his domestics. Laughlin's rustic retreat in Florida was equipped with cooks, gardeners, valets and personal maids just like his permanent residence up north. Many dignitaries of the day, including Andrew Carnegie, were entertained at this imposing and delightful estate. Although the construction of Sydonie Mansion started in 1895, it was not fully completed until 1904. This main house, overlooking what was then Lake Minore, was named "Sydonie" for Mr. Laughlin's wife, Sidney Page Laughlin. It consisted of three floors, including thirteen (13) bedrooms and seven (7) baths and was the ultimate luxury even for those days. The main house and subsidiary buildings had their own power generator, hot and cold running water, and indoor plumbing. For recreation, there was a bowling alley in a separate building and a swimming pool in the basement. Laughlin and his family traveled by rail, in their own private railroad car, from Pittsburg to Sanford, Florida, and then braved the overland trip from Sanford to Zellwood in order to spend the winter months among the healthful pines.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "History of Hampton Dubose," anonymous, no date.

<sup>8</sup> Florida Master Site File #OR7894, 3/29/2013.

<sup>9</sup> "History of Hampton Dubose," anonymous, no date.

<sup>10</sup> Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, Nomination Form-Award for Preservation "Sydonie," Zellwood, Florida, 2006.

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The architect for Sydonie Mansion was Grosvesnor Atterbury with Edgar Viguer Seeler, and Frank Roberts as the engineer. The original floor plans for the mansion date from 1904.<sup>11</sup> Grosvenor Atterbury (1869-1956), a native of Michigan, received a bachelor's degree in 1891 from Yale University and was a Phi Beta Kappa. He studied architecture at Columbia University and furthered his skills studying at Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, France in 1894. In 1895, he opened a practice in New York City. Atterbury was quite successful and was hired as a consultant for Johns Hopkins University, he was in the Society of Columbia Architects, was an associate professor of architecture at Yale, earned a fellowship in the American Institute of Architects and the National Institute of Social Sciences. Additionally, he was the chairman of the war industry housing committee during World War II. His passion was community planning. He had a concern for Americans of little means that caused him to invent and patent an apparatus used in the mass production of prefabrication building units. He designed precast building sections for low-cost housing.

The marriage of his ability to design and his patents launched him onto the national scene at the turn of the turn of the 20th century. Sydonie is the only known example of his work in Florida. Atterbury pulled in architect Edgar Seeler and builder Frank Roberts to collaborate on the 1904 drawings and construction of the mansion. Roberts earned a civil engineering degree from Princeton in 1883 and went on to teach there. He was internationally known for his specialty in designing construction and steel plants. He did many projects for J&L Steel plants as well.

Edgar Viguer Seeler (1867-1929) graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) then went on to study at École de Beaux Arts in Paris. On his return to Philadelphia in 1893, he was appointed assistant professor of architectural design at the University of Pennsylvania, filling the position for five years. Among the prominent structures he designed in Philadelphia were the Curtis Publishing Company Building, Bulletin Building, Real Estate Trust Building, Department of Architecture Building at the University of Pennsylvania, First Baptist Church, and Flower Observatory on West Chester Pike. He also planned the James V. Brown Memorial Library in Williamsport, Pennsylvania and the Cannon Club in Princeton, New Jersey. He was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1900. He was a member of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects, a trustee of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, and a director of the Fairmount Park Art Association. XXVII - 1930. In 1905, he married the daughter of James and Sydney Laughlin, the owners of Sydonie.

It should be noted that Laughlin's J&L Steel Company was said to be the largest independently owned steel company at the time. It was worth about 200 million dollars at the time Sydonie was being completed. Thus, no expense was overlooked when building Sydonie Mansion. Sydonie had a massive water system. Sprinkler systems were set up extending from the vast reaches of the citrus groves to the far reaches of the driveways. The well was said to be big enough that the town of Zellwood asked to use it for the community. The main

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<sup>11</sup> Florida Master Site File #OR7895; Floor Plans for the James L. Laughlin House, 1904.

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septic tank was said to have been the “biggest thing anyone has ever seen.” Supposedly, Thomas Edison designed the irrigation grid at Sydonie and planned the electrical system. The blue print for the irrigation grid is still extant but the signature showing who had designed it has long since worn off. There is no way to prove any Edison connection, although Laughlin would have gladly paid the expense. It is clear that the irrigation went into the mansion as there are remnants of old fire hoses in five locations on the wall today that would have been sourced by the old water tower on the north side of the property.

Originally the Laughlin family had citrus groves and barns associated with the groves, a working dairy farm, a poultry farm, a power house, bowling alley, shuffleboard court, laundry building, cottages for each of their five children, a greenhouse, a swimming pool, a fountain and reflecting pool, two water towers, a pump house, a dog kennel, a gatehouse, a garage, a boathouse, and a stable. Today all that exists with the current Mansion’s property are the boathouse and the old laundry building. The rest of the buildings if they still exist are on adjacent properties.

The Laughlin family kept Sydonie until James and Sydney Laughlin’s daughter Martha Page Laughlin Seeler died in 1938. At that point, Sydonie was sold to Eugene M. Speer. Speer must have had an eye for botany. The Laughlin Family traveled the world and brought back seeds of varying kinds to cultivate in the greenhouses at Sydonie. Once mature, the young plants were planted on the property. There was bougainvillea from Cuba, rare palm and aquatic plants, and others. In the ten months or so that Mr. Speer owned Sydonie, he sold all of the rare exotic plants. He was also responsible for cutting down and selling the 50 acre pine forest in 1943. Hampden DuBose Academy took ownership on December 31, 1942. In a last minute plea Speer told the DuBoses that they could only have the property if he could cut down the pine. The Laughlin children had put a clause in their sale of Sydonie to Speer saying that the pine forest could only be cut when the property changed hands again. They must have known he was interested in the value of the pine and were trying to preserve it. In the end, the federal government was paying big money for pine during the war. In the end, Speer, got back all the money that he paid for Sydonie through the sale of these plants and trees.

The Hampden DuBose Academy was founded by Dr. Pierre Wilds DuBose and his wife, Gwynn Ewell Dick DuBose. They moved their school from Orlando to Zellwood. The school had been established in 1934 as an interdenominational preparatory school. Hampden DuBose Academy used Sydonie as a boarding school for girls for nearly forty years. They bought Sydonie furnished, although the stepmother of Mr. Speer had removed nearly all of the furniture, but was made to return it. The bedrooms were each used to hold about six girls. A few rooms were reserved for company such as the Reverend Billy Graham whose daughter's lived at Sydonie. Sydonie's dining hall was used as a lounge and its kitchen used as their nurse's office, Most of the school's social events took place at the mansion. The laundry continued to be used for that purpose by the school and the upper apartment was used as dormitory space. The house was meticulously maintained until 1980. In 1980, the school was mismanaged, discontinued its boarding practices and became a day school. Once the academy no longer needed to house girls at Sydonie, it was virtually ignored. The swimming pool had been emptied of water

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and was used by the school to store canned goods, which were promptly forgotten. A eucalyptus tree had fallen through the kitchen wing and lawn care ceased. Sydonie sat empty and forgotten for nearly twenty years.

In 1997, Ronda Masemen was looking through the classifieds and found an old mansion that she thought her mother and step father, Dick and Carla Durante, could rescue. They were offered 30 acres of land Sydonie and the crumbling Odenwald Mansion next door. They spent eight hours wandering the “old thing” with one of their daughters. The Titusville, Pennsylvania, couple originally balked at buying the house because of its size. Carla Durante recalled that the house was too big and would take too much work after standing empty for about two decades. At the time, the Durantes were living in a 6,000-square-foot house in Pompano Beach. The Durantes purchased the house in 1998 for \$363,000, according to Orange County property records. Today, Sydonie is worth about \$2.6 million, the records show.

Too much to tackle, they carved out ten acres in the middle, focused on Sydonie and spent the next 17 years refinishing one room at a time. Future generations have the Durantes to thank for saving this American Treasure from ruin. Without their efforts, it would have been bulldozed long ago. There is still much in the line of restoration that needs to be done today and Sydonie will continue to be an ongoing project. In order to pay off those who mismanaged the school, all of Sydonie's antiques were sold prior to 1997. When the Durantes took over, Barbra Streisand bought the signature blue urns on the front porch. We are told only an outdoor patio set, a claw foot table, and some rose chairs in the dining room remain from the Laughlin household. In April of 2014, Clark Jason Frogley and Amy Colyer Frogley bought Sydonie for \$1,500,000 with hopes of turning it into a living museum for all to enjoy. They have hopes of creating a visitor center, gift shop, art studios and galleries and much more. Previously, in 2006, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation recognized Sydonie Mansion as an outstanding example of restoration and rehabilitation.<sup>12</sup>

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Sydonie Mansion has state-wide significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as outstanding example of the Mediterranean Revival style. It was constructed in 1904 as a winter home for James H. Laughlin, Jr. and his wife Sydney Ford Laughlin (nee Page) for whom the house was named.<sup>13</sup> James Laughlin, Jr., was the son of James H. Laughlin, Sr., the owner of the owner of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania a wealthy Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania banker, manufacturer, philanthropist, and steel executive. The mansion was designed by Grosvenor Atterbury (1869-1956) an American Architect and urban planner and architect Edgar Vigners Seeler (1867-1929). The design of the house was said to have been inspired by the Alhambra Castle in Spain, and included sculpted gardens with rare plants from around the world, citrus groves, a dairy farm, power plant and a bowling alley. Laughlin often entertained guests in the

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<sup>12</sup> [www.floridatrust.org/file\\_download/9/2006+Preservation+Awards.pdf](http://www.floridatrust.org/file_download/9/2006+Preservation+Awards.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> James H. Laughlin, <http://www.geni.com/people/James-Laughlin/6000000033642608324>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
SIGNIFICANCE

---

three-story mansion decorated with European artwork. The original entrance to the estate, off Sadler Avenue in Zellwood, replicated St. Augustine's city gates.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number   9   Page   1  

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number   9   Page   2  

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
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**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 10 Page 1

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Property Description BEG N1/4 COR OF SEC TH S89-53-12E 171.13 FT S00-16-43E 140 FT S89-53-12E 50 FT N00-16-43W 140 FT S89-53-12E 123.88 FT S00-16-43E 670 FT S14-43-10E 124.27 FT S00-16-43E 414.23 FT S89-43-13W 207.31 FT S4213-13W 286.66 FT N00-16-43W 1418.25 FT N89-37-57E 24.98 FT TO POB IN SEC 22-20-27

Parcel No. 22-20-27-0000-00-030

Begin at the North 1/4 corner of Section 22, Township 20 South, Range 27 East, Orange County, Florida; thence South 89 degrees 53 minutes 12 Seconds East along the North line of the Northeast 1/4 of said section 22 a distance 171.13 feet; thence South 00 degrees 16 minutes 43 seconds East a distance of 140.00 feet; thence South 89 degrees 53 minutes 12 seconds East a distance of 50.00 feet; thence North 00 degrees 16 minutes 43 seconds West a distance of 140.00 feet to said North line; thence South 89 degrees 53 minutes 12 seconds East along said North line a distance of 123.88 feet; thence South 00 degrees 16 minutes 43 seconds East a distance of 670.00 feet; thence South 14 degrees 43 minutes 10 seconds East a distance of 124.27 feet; thence South 00 degrees 16 minutes 43 seconds East a distance of 414.23 feet to a point on the North line of Terra Bona as recorded in Plat Book 24, Page 99, Public Records of Orange County, Florida; thence South 89 degrees 43 minutes 13 seconds West along said North line a distance of 207.31 feet to the Northwesterly corner of said Terra Bona; thence South 42 degrees 13 minutes 13 seconds West along the Northwesterly line of said Terra Bona a distance of 286.66 feet; thence North 00 degrees 16 minutes 43 seconds West a distance of 1418.25 feet a point on the North line of the Northwest 1/4 of said Section 22; thence North 89 degrees 37 minutes 57 seconds East along said North line a distance of 24.98 feet to the Point of Beginning.

**Boundary Justification**

All of the historic resources encompassed by the above boundaries, contribute to the National Register nomination for the Sydonie Mansion. The boundaries are shown as a dashed line on a AutoCAD map of the property.



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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Photos \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE

5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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**LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. James Laughlin House
2. 5538 Sydonie Drive, Mount Dora (Orange County), Florida
3. Amy Frogler
4. April 2015
5. Amy Frogler
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking North from Yard
7. Photo 1 of 46

**Numbers 1-5 are the same for all of the remaining photograph.**

6. Masonry Knee Wall of Front Porch, Looking Northeast
7. Photo 2 of 46
  
6. Main Entrance, Front Porch, Looking North
7. Photo 3 of 46
  
6. Front Porch, Looking Northeast
7. Photo 4 of 46
  
6. Front Porch, Looking North at French Doors
7. Photo 5 of 46
  
6. Front Porch, an Arched Passageway, Looking North
7. Photo 6 of 46
  
6. Concrete Spiral Staircase, Looking North
7. Photo 7 of 46
  
6. Front Porch, Looking West
7. Photo 8 of 46
  
6. Single Doorway on West Side of Porch, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 9 of 46
  
6. West Wing of Mansion, Looking Northeast
7. Photo 10 of 46

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number          Photos          Page   2  

LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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6. "Maids Porch" Extension, Looking East

7. Photo 11 of 46

6. Concrete Garden Wall, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 12 of 46

6. Porte-Cochere, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 13 of 46

6. East Wing, Northeast Corner, Looking Southwest

7. Photo 14 of 46

6. East Wing, Looking West

7. Photo 15 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Front Door of Sitting Room. Looking South

7. Photo 16 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Sitting Room, Looking East toward Fireplace.

7. Photo 17 of

6. Interior, First Floor, Sitting Room, Looking West toward Mirror and Cabinet

7. Photo 18 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Stair Hall, Looking Northwest toward Stairs and Dining Room

7. Photo 19 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Stair Hall, Looking Southeast toward Sitting Room

7. Photo 20 of

6. Interior, Stairs to Second Floor, Looking North

7. Photo 21 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Bedroom at Intersection of Arcade and Colonnade, Looking South

7. Photo 22 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Bedroom at East End of Arcade, Looking South

7. Photo 23 of 46

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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6. Interior, First Floor, Arcade Looking East toward Wrought Iron Gate

7. Photo 24 of 46

6. Interior, First Floor, Wrought Iron Gate, Looking East

7. Photo 25 of 46

6. View of Colonnade toward Porte-Cochere, Looking North.

7. Photo 26 of 46

6. View of Dining Room from West End of Arcade, Looking Northwest

7. Photo 27 of 46

6. View of the Kitchen, Looking South

7. Photo 28 of 46

6. View of the Kitchen, Looking North

7. Photo 29 of 46

6. Interior, Stairs to Second Floor, Looking North

7. Photo 30 of 46

6. Second Floor Stair Landing, Looking North

7. Photo 31 of 46

6. Second Floor Corridor, Looking West

7. Photo 32 of 46

6. Second Floor Corridor, Looking West

7. Photo 33 of 46

6. Second Floor Corridor, Looking East

7. Photo 34 of 46

6. Second Floor Bedroom at East End of Wing, Looking Northeast

7. Photo 35 of 46

6. Stairs to Third Floor Landing, Looking South toward Bedroom

7. Photo 36 of 46

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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LAUGHLIN, JAMES HOUSE  
5538 SYDONIE DRIVE, MOUNT DORA, ORANGE COUNTY  
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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- 6. Third Floor Bedroom South of Stairs, Looking South
- 7. Photo 37 of 46
  
- 6. Hall on Third Floor, Looking North
- 7. Photo 38 of 46
  
- 6. Third Floor Bedroom West of Landing, Looking Southeast
- 7. Photo 39 of 46
  
- 6. Cellar, Swimming Pool, Looking West
- 7. Photo 40 of 46
  
- 6. Cellar, Shower, Looking North
- 7. Photo 41 of 46
  
- 6. Enclosed Garden, Looking Northeast
- 7. Photo 42 of 46
  
- 6. Enclosed Garden, Looking Northeast
- 7. Photo 43 of 46
  
- 6. Old Laundry Building, South and West Elevations, Looking Northeast
- 7. Photo 44 of 46
  
- 6. Old Boathouse, Looking Northwest
- 7. Photo 45 of 46
  
- 6. Old Boathouse, Looking Southeast
- 7. Photo 46 of 46



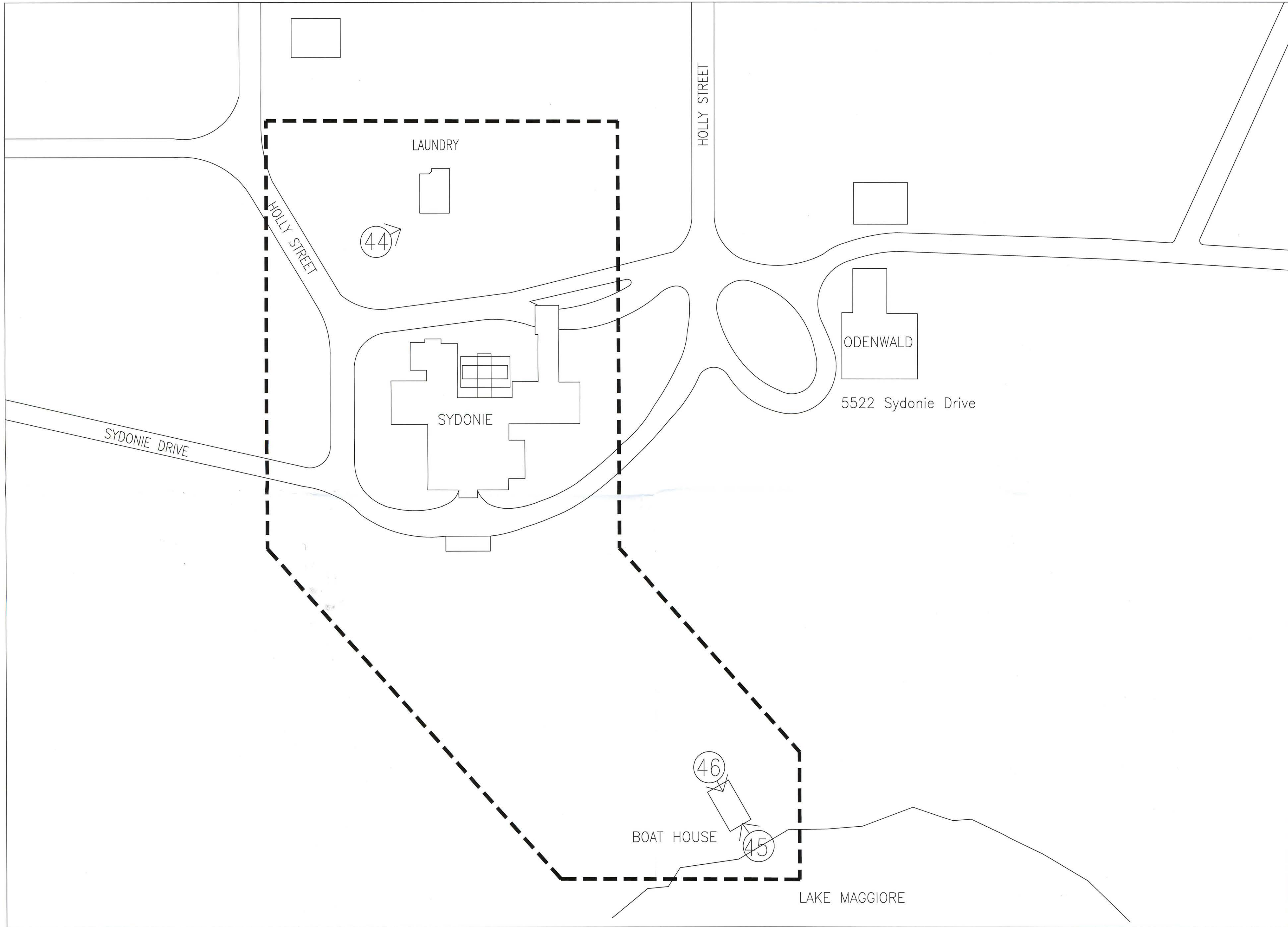
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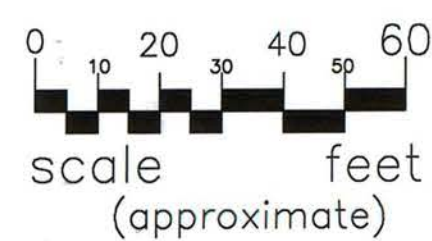
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**JAMES LAUGHLIN HOUSE**  
 (SYDONIE MANSION)  
 5538 SYDONIE DRIVE  
 MOUNT DORA (ORANGE COUNTY), FLORIDA



**Owner**  
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 Email: sydoniemansion@gmail.com

**DRAWN BY:** Carl Shiver  
**DRAWING DATE:** MAY 2016

THE SYDONIE MANSION FLOOR PLANS WERE DRAWN TRACING PLANS OF THE PROPERTY WHICH HAVE BEEN CONVERTED INTO RASTER IMAGES AND IMPORTED INTO AUTOCAD AND REPRODUCED INTO THE SAME SCALE. SOME MINOR DETAILS WERE NOT INCLUDED AMONG THE AVAILABLE IMAGES. THE ORIGINAL SCALE HAS BEEN RETAINED WHERE POSSIBLE.

**PLAN REVIEWED BY:** CARL SHIVER  
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 TOLL FREE NUMBER 1-800-7278  
 FAX NUMBER (850) 245-6437

**N.R. PROPOSAL PREPARED BY:**

**SHEET NO.** 1 **OF** 5

**HISTORIC BOUNDARY**

**PHOTO NUMBERS** 45

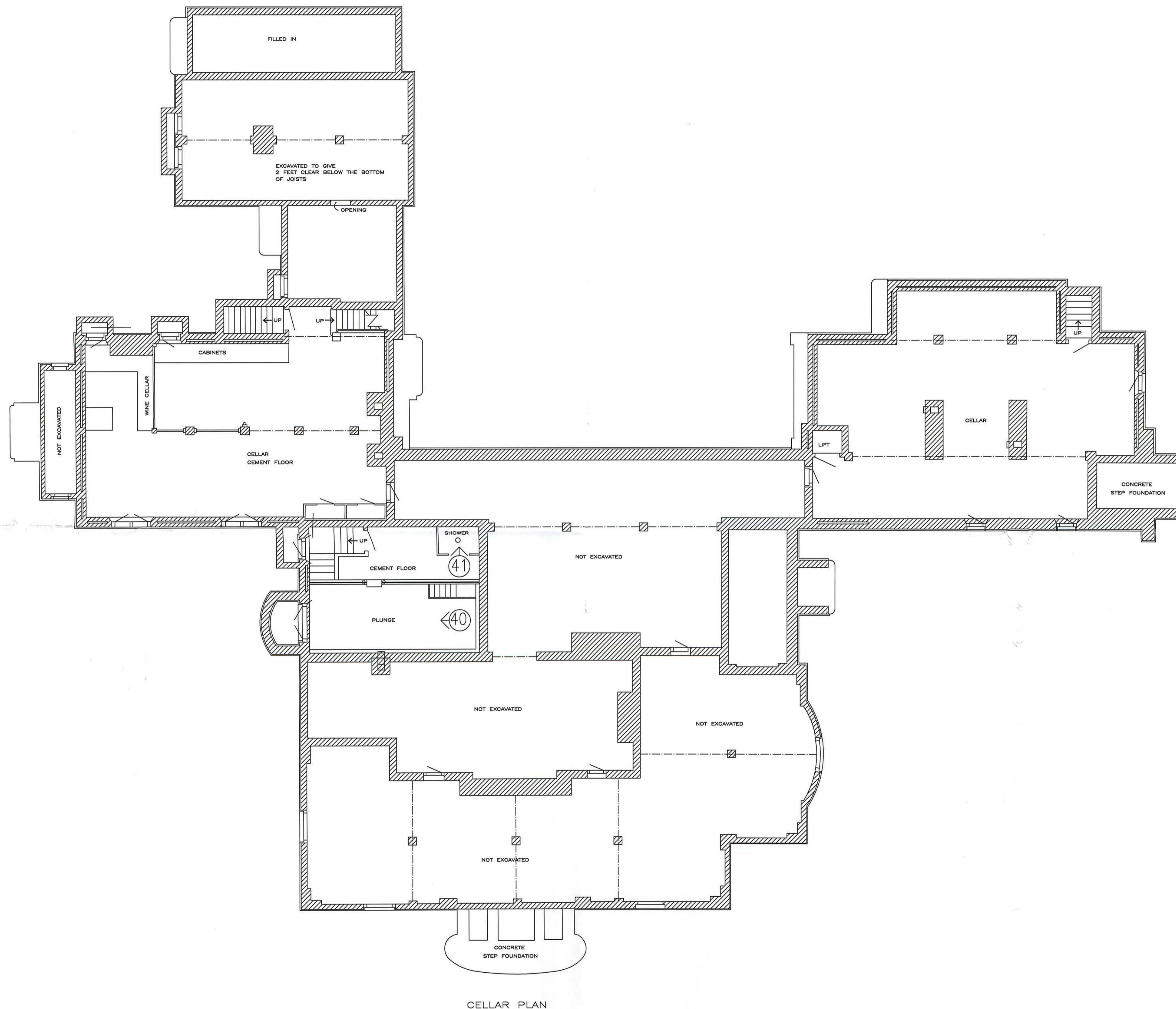
Amy Colyer Fragley

5538 Sydonie Drive

Mount Dora, Florida

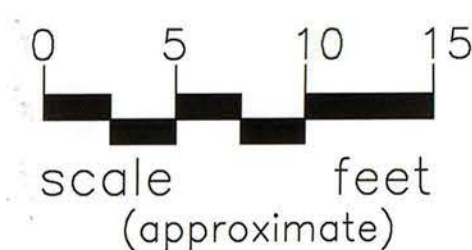
Telephone: (518) 860-4021 Email: sydoniemansion@gmail.com

**SITE PLAN**



CELLAR PLAN

**JAMES LAUGHLIN HOUSE**  
 (SYDONIE MANSION)  
 5538 SYDONIE DRIVE  
 MOUNT DORA (ORANGE COUNTY), FLORIDA



Owner  
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DRAWN BY: Carl Shiver  
 DRAWING DATE: MAY 2016

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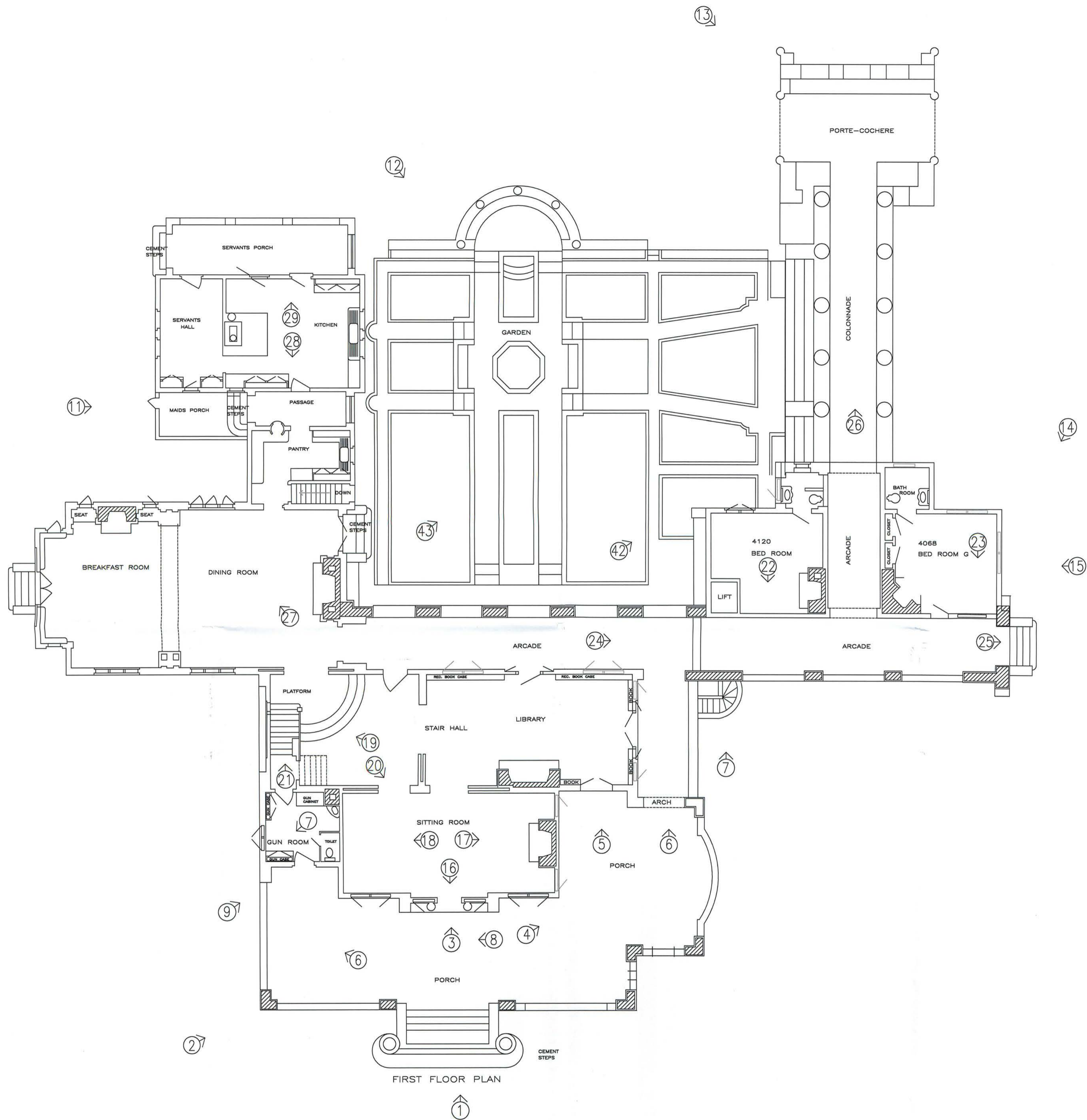
PLAN REVIEWED BY: CARL SHIVER  
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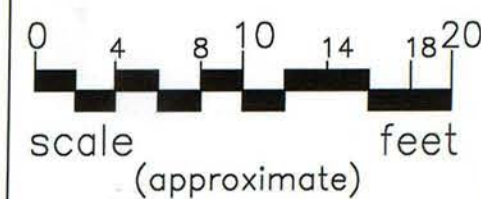
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PHOTO NUMBERS 15

CELLAR PLAN



**JAMES LAUGHLIN HOUSE**  
 (SYDONIE MANSION)  
 5538 SYDONIE DRIVE  
 MOUNT DORA (ORANGE COUNTY), FLORIDA



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**DRAWN BY:** Carl Shiver  
**DRAWING DATE:** MAY 2016

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**PLAN REVIEWED BY:** CARL SHIVER  
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**N/R PROPOSAL PREPARED BY:** SHEET NO. 2 OF 5

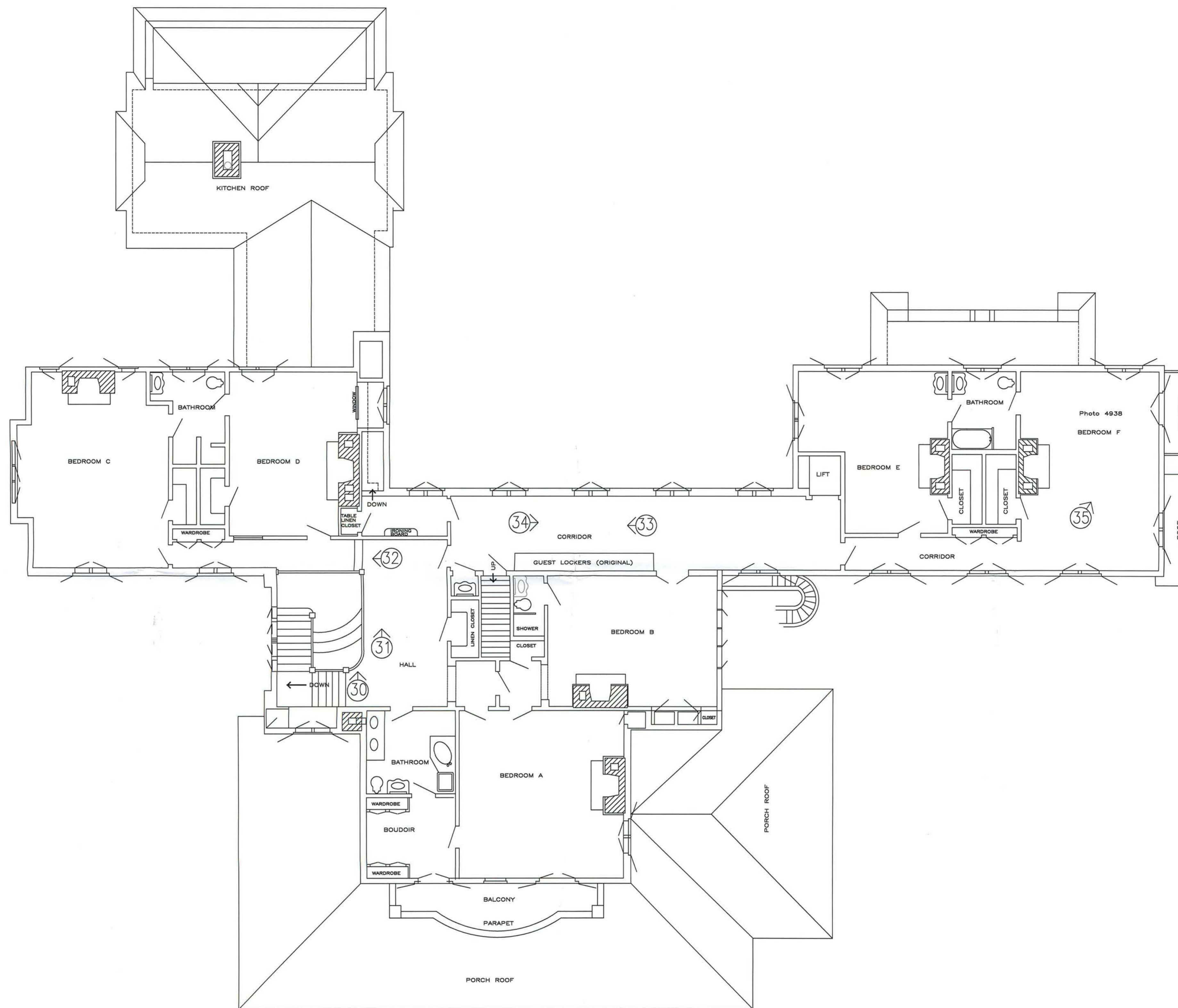
Amy Colyer Fragley  
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**PHOTO NUMBERS**



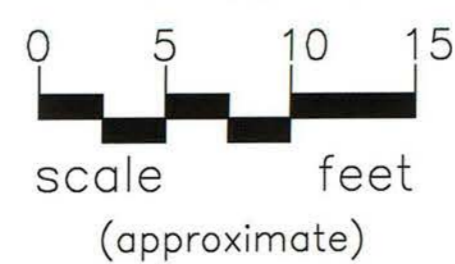
FIRST FLOOR PLAN





SECOND FLOOR PLAN

**JAMES LAUGHLIN HOUSE**  
 (SYDONIE MANSION)  
 5538 SYDONIE DRIVE  
 MOUNT DORA (ORANGE COUNTY), FLORIDA



**Owner**  
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**DRAWING DATE:** MAY 2016

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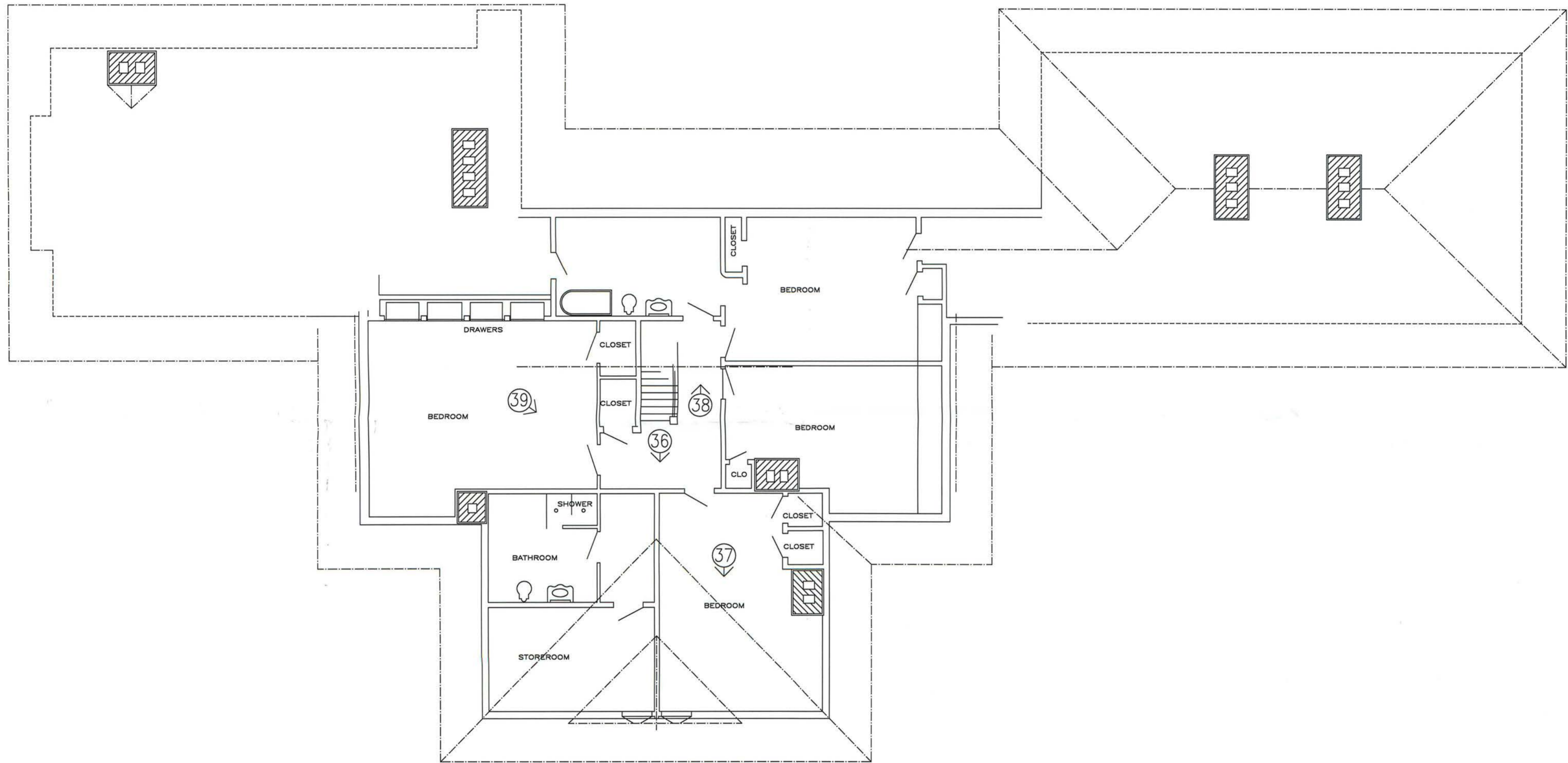
**PLAN REVIEWED BY:** CARL SHIVER  
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**SHEET NO.** 3 **OF** 5

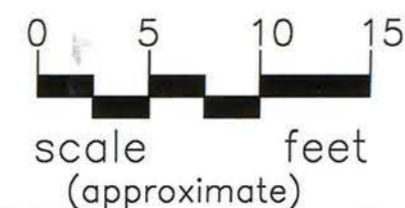
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SECOND FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

**JAMES LAUGHLIN DOUSE**  
 (SYDONIE MANSION)  
 5538 SYDONIE DRIVE  
 MOUNT DORA (ORANGE COUNTY), FLORIDA



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DRAWN BY: Carl Shiver  
 DRAWING DATE: MAY 2016

THE SYDONIE MANSION FLOOR PLANS WERE DRAWN TRACING PLANS OF THE PROPERTY WHICH HAVE BEEN CONVERTED INTO RASTER IMAGES AND IMPORTED INTO AUTOCAD AND REPRODUCED INTO THE SAME SCALE. SOME MINOR DETAILS WERE NOT INCLUDED AMONG THE AVAILABLE IMAGES. THE ORIGINAL SCALE HAS BEEN RETAINED WHERE POSSIBLE.

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PHOTO NUMBERS 15

THIRD FLOOR PLAN

























5538

















































































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Laughlin, James, House  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: FLORIDA, Orange

DATE RECEIVED: 5/20/16 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/02/16  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/17/16 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/05/16  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000423

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 6-28-2016 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Excellent example of Med. Revival style*

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept C

REVIEWER J. Gubbart DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/ see attached SLR Y/

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



RECEIVED 2280

MAY 20 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of STATE

RICK SCOTT  
Governor

KEN DETZNER  
Secretary of State

May 16, 2016

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmark Programs  
Department of the Interior  
1201 Eye Street, N.W., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington DC 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Laughlin, James House (FMSF #8OR7895), in Orange County**, to the National Register of Historic Places. The related materials (digital images, maps, and site plan) are included.

Please do not hesitate to contact Bob Jones at [Robert.Jones@DOS.myflorida.com](mailto:Robert.Jones@DOS.myflorida.com) or (850) 245.6349, if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Alissa Slade Lotane  
Chief, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
& Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer