

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Burritt, William, Mansion

other name/site number: same

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2. Location

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street & number: 3101 Burritt Drive, S.E.

not for publication: NA

city/town: Huntsville

vicinity: NA

state: AL county: Madison

code: 089

zip code: 35801

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria.      See continuation sheet.

*[Handwritten Signature]*

4-7-92

Signature of certifying official

Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.      See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

**Entered in the National Register**

*[Handwritten Signature]* 5/29/92

entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the National Register

     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the National Register

     removed from the National Register

     other (explain):                     

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current : RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Neo-Classical Revival

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation concrete roof unknown  
walls cement other stone  
asbestos

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1936 1938

Significant Dates: 1936 1938 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person(s): NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Dr. William Burritt  
Edgar Love  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreeage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>16</u>	<u>542160</u>	<u>3841440</u>	B	___	___	___
C	___	___	___	D	___	___	___

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The National Register boundaries of the Burritt Mansion, Huntsville, encompass an approximate 40,000 foot square located in E-1/2, SE-1/4 of Section 5, Township 4 South, Range 1 East, Huntsville, Alabama. For more precise boundaries, please refer to the scaled map.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries of the Burritt Mansion, Huntsville, were delineated to include the house and the area immediately surrounding it. These boundaries do not include the other buildings located in the park.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Harvie P. Jones, FAIA; Jennifer Bryant/AHC Intern Reviewer

Organization: Historic Huntsville Foundation Date: April 1991

Street & Number: 104 Jefferson Street Telephone: 205 539-0764

City or Town: Huntsville State: AL ZIP: 35801

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William Burritt Mansion

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The William Burritt Mansion, located in Huntsville, is a highly eccentric mountaintop house. It was apparently designed by its owner, William Burritt, with some assistance by an architect, possibly Edgar Love, in technical matters and other details. The house overlooks the city of Huntsville, one thousand feet below. The site, Roundtop Mountain, consists of 167 acres of cleared and wooded land, several 1850s coal mines and a late 1880 quarry which provided stone for Huntsville's jail and city sidewalks. The site also contains several relocated 19th-century and more recent structures which are all noncontributing; none of these resources are included in this nomination.

In 1935 construction began on the house. It was just completed when it burned on June 6, 1936. It was rebuilt with some modifications of details and materials and completed for the second time in 1938. The original beginning date of 1935 is cast into the concrete shield above the entry.

The plan of the house resembles a maltese cross. Four angled one-story wings join a central two-story eight-sided section which is fronted by an extremely attenuated distyle portico, a free variation of a pedimented fluted doric order. All roofs, except the small pediment, are flat and concealed by stepped parapets with molded concrete caps. The outer corners of the parapets are topped with large molded concrete palmette acroteria that could be a variation on the type shown on page 107 of Bannister Fletcher's 1956 edition of A History of Architecture on the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. At the concrete pediment, the triglyphs and guttae are widely spaced on a frieze that has no defined metopes in the classical sense. The triglyphs give the appearance of being applied rather than being an integral part of the frieze. The tympanum contains in relief an elongated elliptical shield containing the incised date "1935," the date construction began on the first house.

The exterior walls are sheathed in asbestos shingles of a light gray color with a beltcourse of fluted concrete. The wall corners are similarly trimmed with a vertical fluted concrete ell. The windows are divided-light steel casements, mostly 24 lights (16 lights on the second floor.) The frames and face-trims of the windows are molded concrete with backbands and corner-block decorations.

The three shouldered, exterior end chimneys and two interior chimneys are made of sandstone obtained on the site, faced with fluted concrete on the roof-side for added strength.

The front entry has sidelights and an elliptical fanlight, as do the two side entries at the points of the maltese cross. The concrete "keystone" has edge-molding and a raised gothic-font "B". Above the entry is a Baroque-flavored balcony with scroll brackets and a bulbous cyma-recta strap-iron-and riveted balustrade. The wall behind the portico is ashlar-pattern vee-joint "stone" cast concrete. A narrow elevated masonry and concrete terrace runs the length of the front. In recent years a visually compatible metal railing has been added to the terrace and front steps to meet current code requirements, as well as a handicapped access ramp at the southeast side.

The entrance hall contains a spiral stair whose balustrade design is similar but not identical to the 1930s HABS photograph from the early 19th century Burritt House on Eustis Avenue in

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Huntsville. This house was demolished about the same time that the Mountaintop Burritt House was completed to make way for the Madison County Health Department Building at 304 Eustis Avenue. Dr. Burritt salvaged at least two Federal Period mantels from his ancestral house with the intent of installing them at his new mansion. These were finally installed around 1958 after the house became a museum, in the southwest parlor of the southeast chamber.

The entry and parlor contain elaborate machine-made moldings and applied molded ornament of a delicate Adamesque character, with anthemias, ribbands, swags, etc. French windows, flanked by ornamented pilasters, open onto the west terrace from the southwest parlor. Some of the machine-made moldings came from demolished buildings in St. Louis. (per museum records)

The parlor walls have applied fluted half-cylinder molds that form panels, except that one or both vertical members continues up the wall about six inches above the panel top and then splits into two short, flaring sections, an eccentric and delightful non-academic detail that is surely another of Dr. Burritt's inventions. The narrow wood flooring is laid diagonal. A clever way of avoiding clumsy floor joints at the junctions of the rooms which do not meet at 90 degrees.

The dining room mantel is late Victorian, salvaged from a St. Louis building that had been demolished. (per museum records)

The most interesting mantels are again those apparently invented by Dr. Burritt, who became interested in the shapes and colors of the thin slabs of sandstone being excavated for the construction of the road in 1934-35 up to Roundtop Mountain to his house site. Of the three that remain (two were removed to install the Burritt Federal period mantels), the most flamboyant one is in the northeast room. The fluted pilasters extend up past the mantel-shelf and are topped by cones, out of which shoot "flames" of bookmatched sandstone. Similar extravagant sandstone slab patterns occupy the space between the "flames."

The second floor mantel combines a streamlined Art-Moderne design with three large slabs of sandstone forming a primitive jack-arch surround. The hearth and the three mantel shelves are elliptical in plan, as is the head of the closet door and frame nearby.

The second floor window facing-trim is another uninhibited, non-academic delight. The jambs are capped with fluted pilasters which extend up past the architraves, and thus visually support nothing. The pilasters are topped with strangely proportioned capitals of a vaguely Ionic inspiration.

At the rear of the house is a flat roofed conservatory. Its windows are 1982 replacements, and the canvas awning outside was added in 1989.

Perhaps the most interesting technical aspect of the house is the unique insulation material, hay bales. Burritt stated that he got this idea while visiting a farmhouse in Missouri on a hot day. He walked into the shadow of a haystack and immediately felt cooler. Burritt used 2200 bales of wheat straw as insulation. For the roof, the bales were first impaled with two wooden stakes. The loose bales were wrapped with criss-crossed baling wire and troweled with "brown coat" plaster. Each bale was then placed on a leveled scaffold platform at the ceiling

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elevation. Each bale stake and the baling wire was then nailed to the roof joists. The joints between the bales were stuffed with loose straw that had been treated with boric acid for fire resistance, since this loose straw, rather than the tightly compressed hay bales, had been the source of the 1936 fire. After leveling the bales and stuffing the joints, the ceiling was daubed with rough brown-coat plaster and then finished with smooth white plaster.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Newspaper or magazine article. Title of article, name of publication and date of publication is unknown.

2 "He Lives in a Southern Mansion Built of Straw," The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine. 4 November 1951.

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Criterion C (Architecture)

The William Burritt Mansion, located on Round-Top Mountain in Huntsville, is an unusual example of 20th century Neoclassical architecture. Burritt's ideas resulted in a individualized structure full of unconventional neoclassical details and unique structural features. Because of its design, size and complexity, the mansion is essentially one of a kind and especially unusual for its time period. Homes of this magnitude were not normally built during the Great Depression. The mansion has suffered minimal alterations and retains most of its details, form and shape, and materials.

Historical Summary

William Burritt was born in 1869 in Huntsville. His father, Amatus Robbins Burritt, a homeopathic physician from New York, married Mary King Robison in 1866. William Burritt also chose medicine as his profession and set up practice in Huntsville. However, in 1900, Burritt moved to St. Louis, Missouri with his second wife, Josephine T. Drummond. From 1903 to 1927, Dr. Burritt shifted his attention from medicine to the rubber industry. He received over 22 tire patents in the United States and foreign countries.<sup>1</sup>

In 1934 Burritt returned to Huntsville to build his mountain top retirement estate and community showplace on Monte Sano Mountain, the highest point in the city. 24 men were employed under the direction of G.H. Walters, superintendent of carpenters and Carney Gardiner, superintendent of labor.<sup>2</sup> In June 1936, a fire destroyed the entire building and Burritt claimed he would not build again.<sup>3</sup> However, the public sentiment and sympathy was so strong that he changed his mind and began construction again this time fireproofing the straw by soaking it in a boracic and borax solution.<sup>4</sup> The second mansion was completed in 1938.

Burritt lived in the mansion until his death in 1955 at the age of 86. Having no heirs even after three marriages, Burritt willed the mansion and the surrounding estate to the City of Huntsville. Since 1955 the site has served as the Burritt Museum and Park. It houses art, natural history and prehistoric Indian collections.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 Pamphlet from Burritt Museum and Park.
  - 2 Huntsville Times, 1 December 1935.
  - 3 Huntsville Times, 7 June 1936.
  - 4 Huntsville Times, 17 June 1936.
  - 5 Pamphlet from Burritt Museum and Park.



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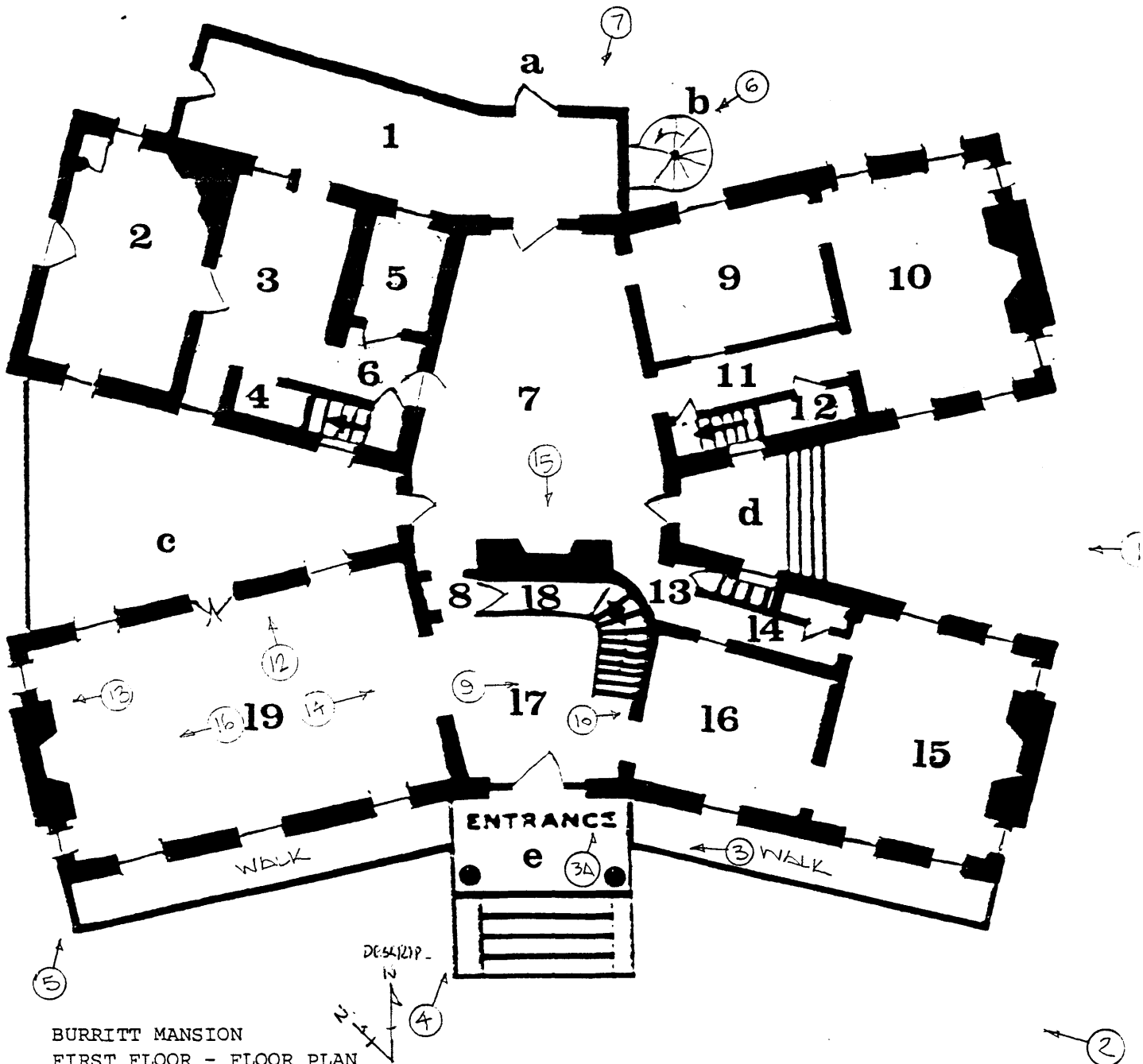
"Fire Prevention Methods Feature of Burritt Home," The Huntsville Times. 13 September 1936.

"Fire Razes Dr. Burritt's New Home on Round Top," The Huntsville Times. 7 June 1936.

"He Lives in a Southern Mansion Built of Straw," The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine.  
4 November 1951.

"Huntsville Will Open Showplace on Mountain Top Soon," Birmingham News. 16 December 1956.

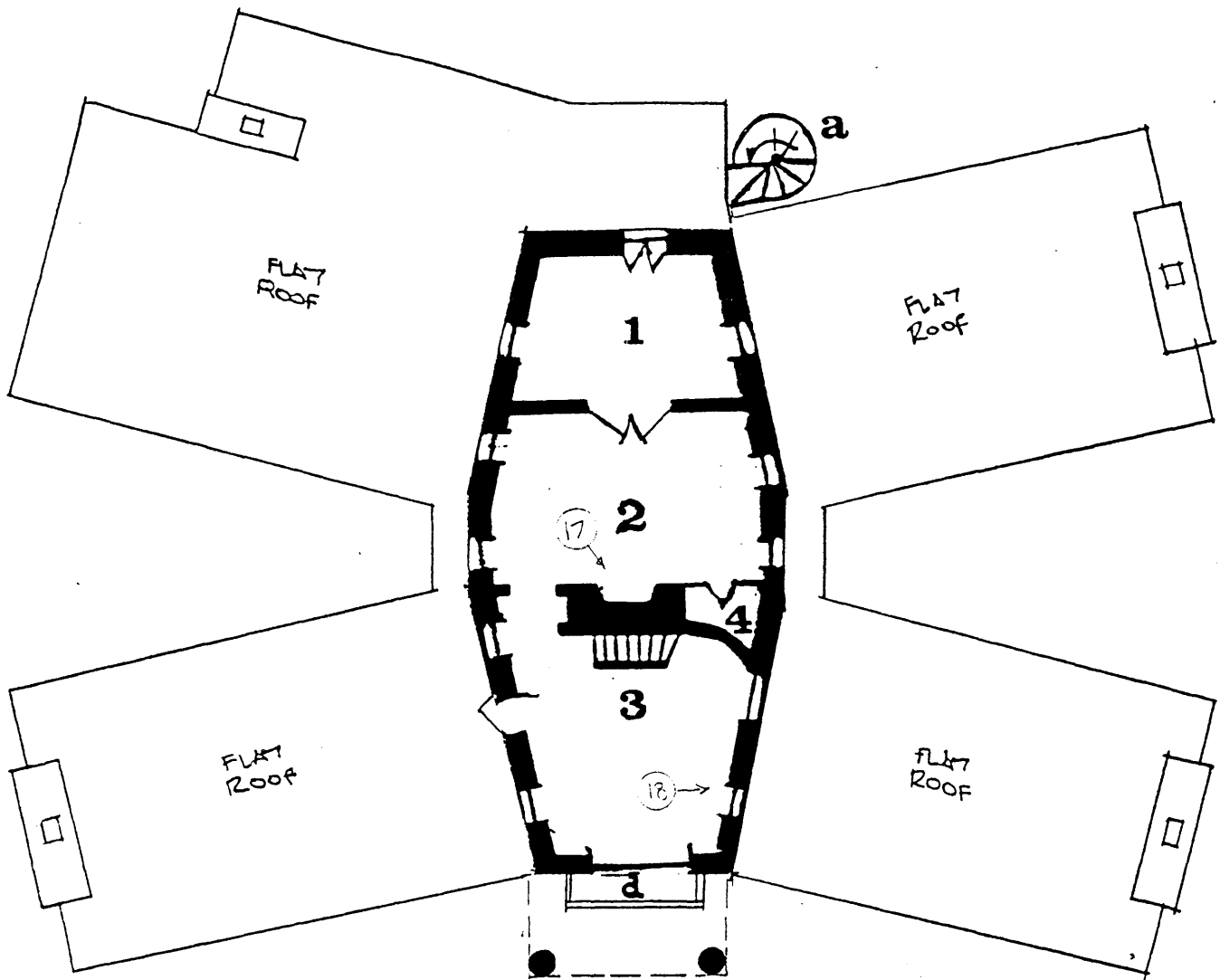
Pamphlet from Burritt Museum and Park.



- 1. Glass Conservatory Office Area
- 2. Office
- 3. Office
- 4. Office Supply Closet
- 5. Kitchen
- 6. Kitchen Hall
- 7. Exhibit Gallery - Burritt Dining Room
- 8. Hallway
- 9. Exhibit Gallery - Water Works
- 10. Exhibit Gallery - Medical Exhibit
- 11. Exhibit Gallery - Birds and Wildflowers
- 12. Restroom
- 13. Exhibit Gallery - Burritt Four Generations
- 14. Restroom
- 15. Exhibit Gallery - Changing Exhibitions
- 16. Exhibit Gallery - Changing Exhibitions
- 17. Entrance Hall - Visitors Desk
- 18. Sales Storage Closet

- 19. Exhibit Gallery - Burritt Parlor
- a. Office Entrance
- b. Exterior Concrete Fire Escape
- c. North Terrace Over Garage
- d. South Terrace
- e. Visitor Entrance to Museum

← 6 = PLOTO

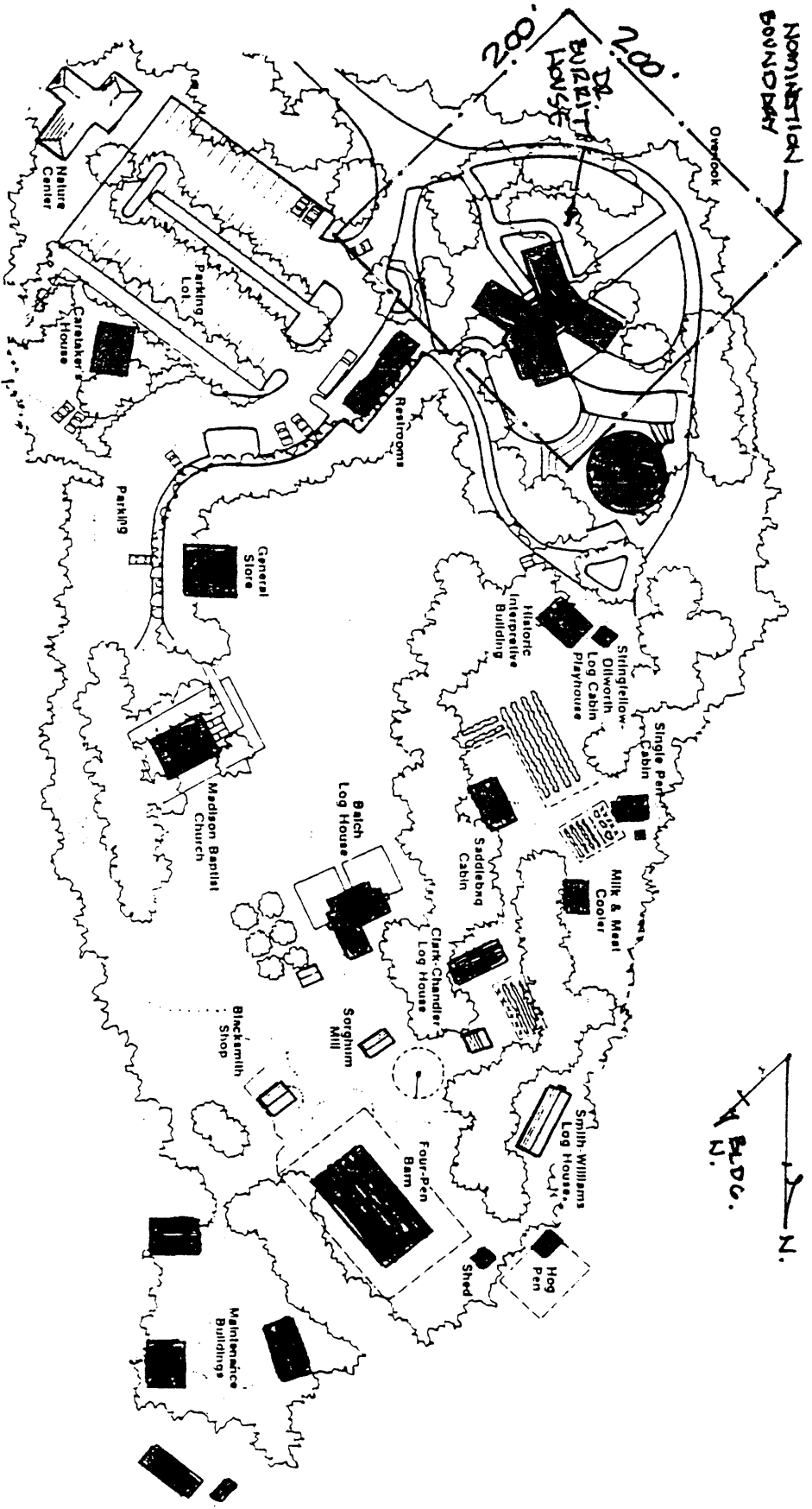


BURRITT MANSION  
SECOND FLOOR - FLOOR PLAN

1. Collection Storage Area
2. Archeology Gallery
3. Rock and Mineral Gallery

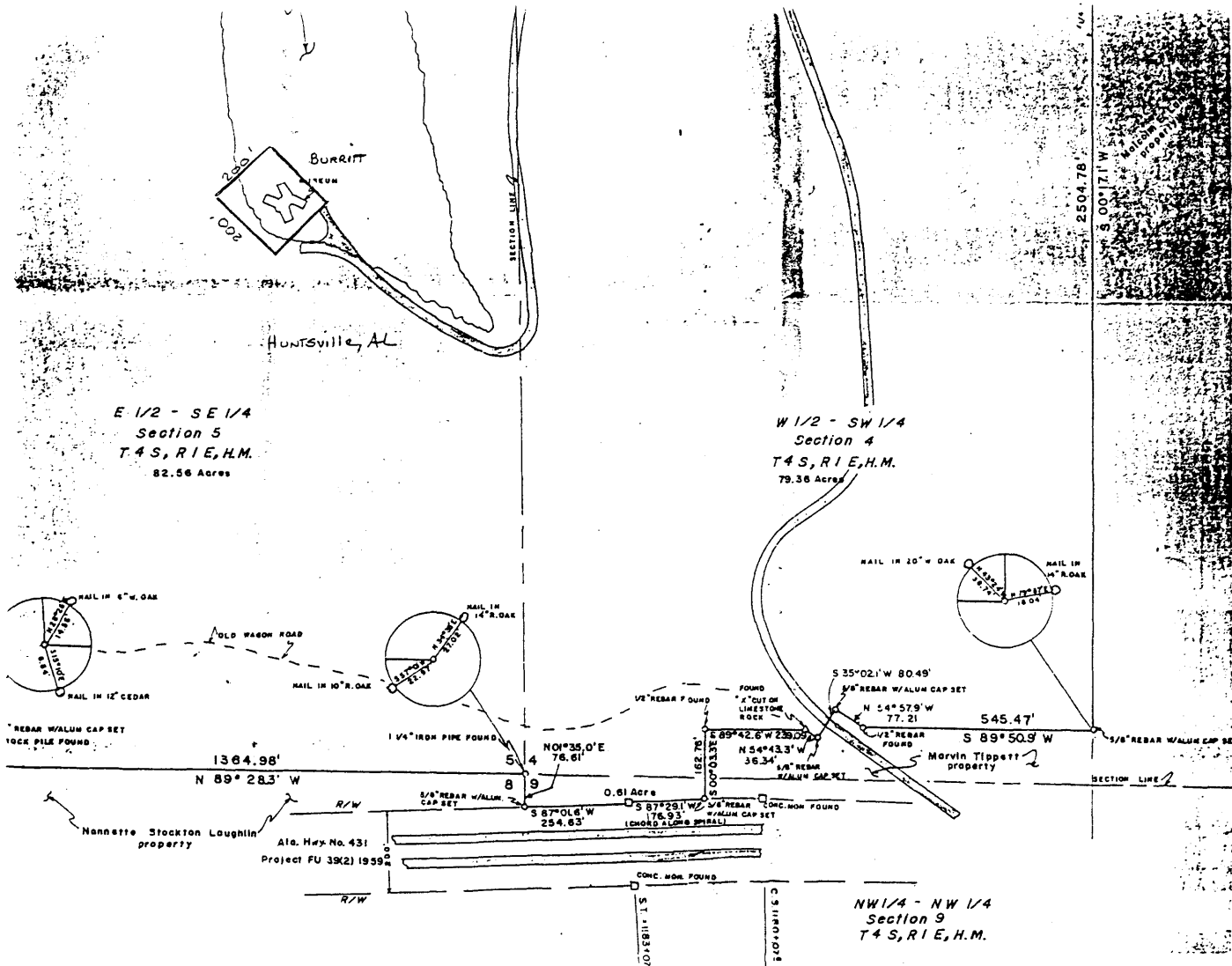
- a. Exterior Concrete Fire Escape Staircase
- b. Cat Walk Connecting Northwest and Northeast First Floor Wings
- c. Cat Walk Connecting Southeast and Southwest First Floor Wings
- d. Second Floor Balcony Over Front Entrance

BURRITT MUSEUM AND PARK SITE PLAN SHOWING EXISTING AND FUTURE BUILDINGS



KEY

- Orange Indicates Existing Structures
- Blue Indicates Structures Under Construction
- Pink Indicates Those Structures That Will Be Constructed Before 1995



Approx. Scale  
 1/2" = 200'

BURRITT HOUSE  
 HUNTSVILLE, AL

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BURRITT MANSION

3101 Burritt Drive SE  
Huntsville, Alabama (Madison County)  
H.P. Jones, Photographer  
Feb. 1991  
Alabama Historical Commission

- Photo #1) East Facade, looking West
- Photo #2) Front and Side Facades, looking Northwest
- Photo #3) Front Entrance, looking North
- Photo #3A) Balcony above Front Entrance, looking North
- Photo #4) View of Portico, looking Northeast
- Photo #5) View of Concrete Palmette Acroteria, looking North
- Photo #6) Exterior Stairs, looking West
- Photo #7) Rear Facade, looking South
- Photo #8) Interior, Hay Insulation
- Photo #9) Interior, Front Entrance
- Photo #10) Interior, Detail of Molding over Door
- Photo #11) Interior, Parlor
- Photo #12) Interior, Parlor
- Photo #13) Interior, Detail of Mantel
- Photo #14) Interior, Parlor
- Photo #15) Interior, Dining Room
- Photo #16) Interior, Stone Fireplace (Second Floor)
- Photo #17) Interior, Fireplace (Second Floor)
- Photo #18) Interior, Window