



**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

*Mark R. Edwards*

Signature of certifying official

*2/06/96*  
Date

Mark R. Edwards  
State Historic Preservation Officer,  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

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 or bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

*Edson H. Beall*

*3/7/96*

Entered in the  
National Register

Signature, Keeper of the National Register

Date

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## 6. Function or Use

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### Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE/department store  
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

### Current Functions:

VACANT

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification:

NO STYLE

### Materials:

foundation	cement block
walls	wooden
roof	asphalt shingles
other	N/A

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Dismuke Storehouse is a one-story, wood-framed commercial building constructed in 1899. It is located on a corner in a former historic neighborhood that has recently been "revitalized" using Federal funds. It is located due north of the central business district of Americus in an African-American neighborhood.

The building is covered with weatherboarding and has a hipped roof with hipped front dormer. The full-facade front porch is recessed under the hipped roof and supported by five square wooden posts and an entablature of vertical tongue-and-groove boards. Under the front porch are two front entrances leading into the two separate commercial spaces inside. A built-in sitting bench is also on the cafe side of the structure. The building's windows are covered with operable wooden shutters. A rear corner of the building has a recessed corner porch with an entrance into the rear rooms.

On the interior, two large open commercial spaces remain. These spaces have beaded board ceilings and both plaster and tongue-and-groove board walls. The building is divided into two parts, a barbershop and cafe, separated by a 9 inch wall. One small room and a restroom are located in the back of the barbershop. Two small rooms and a restroom are located in the back of the cafe. These smaller rooms once served as living quarters for the Dismuke family and as storage space.

The barbershop side of the storehouse has a high, beaded-board ceiling. The south wall is made of plaster. The east wall joining the ceiling is made of pieces of 1x6 wood strips spaced one inch apart for

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attractiveness and beauty. The bottom half of the wall supporting these strips are made up of 1x6 pieces of wood. The North wall entering the front door is also made of 1x6 solid wood pieces. The cafe side is of the same dimensions with high beaded ceilings with all walls made of plaster.

The barbershop is equipped with a pre-1917 decorative piece of furniture made especially for barbershops. This piece of furniture is made of wood, and it covers the entire east wall of the building. This barber furnishing is composed of ten mirrors. Each is surrounded by a cluster of smaller mirrors. Five of these mirrors measure 39" x 17" and five measure 29" x 22". The smallest mirrors are 5" x 8". The furnishing has four marble counter tops and five cabinet drawers. Underneath each drawer is a shelf for a waste paper container or other apparatus that may be useful to the barber. One chair was made in the late 1800s and was restored in the 1980s. Three other barber chairs were made prior to the 1920s. The shop is also equipped with a metal frame shoe shine stand. This stand can easily be moved and is sometimes used to service customers on the front porch of the shop. Still another shoe shine stand was recently restored. It is a classic and represents the highest quality in craftsmanship of its day. It stands 7 feet high with a cushioned chair which is supported by a marble top with a pair of metal foot supporters that extend from a marble woodbase. This stand has a built-in drawer that is used to store shoe polish, rags, brushes, etc.

The foundation underneath the building was reconstructed in June 1984.

The building was moved back 20 feet in 1987 because of a street widening and drainage improvement project. Due to the move the original four columns were replaced by five columns and the new siting was high enough, even on the same property, to require front steps and railings which were added. The new location, away from the open drainage system, no longer necessitated the culvert under the building. It now rests on a flat, cement block base.

The storehouse originally sat at the edge of the property line near the streets of Ashby and Lee before the 1987 move. This project also caused other nearby historic buildings to be demolished. The store remains at an intersection that has been transformed by the project with only a modern building diagonally across the intersection. A city drainage system runs underneath the property.

The building is currently vacant but the owner is attempting to reopen for business once local permits and other details can be arranged.

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The building was damaged by the July, 1994 flood and was subsequently a recipient of Historic Preservation Division Flood Recovery Grant.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally     statewide     locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A     B     C     D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**     N/A

A     B     C     D     E     F     G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE  
ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

**Period of Significance:**

1899-1945

**Significant Dates:**

1899

**Significant Person(s):**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

Dismuke, Joseph H., builder

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**Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:**

**Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Dismuke Storehouse is a historic African-American commercial building that served the commercial needs of its surrounding community. The property is significant in architecture as an intact example of a turn-of-the-century "corner store" commercial building historically found within residential communities. This store served both as commercial space and as a residence for the operator and his family. The building's large hipped roof and recessed front porch give it more of a residential appearance than many similar commercial buildings.

The property is significant in commerce for its role in serving the commercial needs of the surrounding community. The store housed a number of businesses, including a grocery store, cafe, barber shop, and dance hall. It was a popular gathering place for the entertainment and social activities of the local African-American community.

The property is significant in ethnic heritage: black as an example of a commercial establishment constructed, owned, and operated by African-American businessmen that served the surrounding African-American community as a commercial and social gathering place. The building was constructed by Joseph H. Dismuke, a businessman and carpenter, in 1899. Dismuke operated a grocery store where he sold vegetables purchased from local farmers. In 1922 the store was purchased by businessman John Minyard, who operated a grocery store as well as a cafe that became a well-known gathering place for entertainment and social activities for the local African-American community. The barbershop was not added until late in the historic period.

**National Register Criteria**

The building meets National Register Criterion A because of its association with important events in the African-American heritage of Americus: as a meeting place, a place of relaxation and entertainment, and for various black-owned businesses: a cafe, a grocery, and a barbershop. It meets criterion C because it retains its original architectural styling as a residential-looking commercial structure built to house a store and a partial residence for the owner. Almost all of the original features remain as does a historic barbershop centerpiece.

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**Criteria Considerations (if applicable)**

The Dismuke Storehouse meets Criterion Consideration B because it derives its primary significance as a good and intact example of a residential type corner store and for its commercial and historical importance in the surrounding African-American community. Moving the building a short distance back on the original property in 1987 provided the only alternative for saving this building. This was done due to a road-widening project. It retains its original orientation to the intersection and thus its significance and historical association to the black community.

**Period of significance (justification)**

The period of significance runs from the construction of the building in 1899 until 1945, the end of the historic period. The building was used throughout this period for its original use.

**Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)**

There is only one contributing building on the property.

**Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)**

HISTORY OF THE STOREHOUSE  
based on 1985 submission by Karl Wilson

Records dating back to the late 1800s show that the area located at the intersection of Ashby and North Lee Streets now designated as a barbershop and cafe business has always been a convenient place where people gathered for various reasons. It seems that people were naturally attracted to this spot.

H. E. Allen, a wealthy gentleman, who owned large tracks and parcels of land throughout Americus and Sumter County, was recorded as being the first owner of the corner lot.

Later, Elbert Head, a well-to-do black farmer and philanthropist and owner of several acres of land, acquired the lot. Elbert Head also owned several houses on Ashby, McCoy, Poplar, Academy, Mayo, Jefferson and Lee Streets. This area is now referred to as the McCoy Hill Community. Elbert also owned land on Jackson Street. He donated, free of charge, the land where Campbell Chapel AME Church is

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located, at the corner of Lee and Wild Streets. This kind gesture eliminated a small band of AME Christians from having to worship in a bush harbor near the site where McCoy Hill School once stood. Head felt that all Christians should have a decent place to worship God.

Head's Alley, which stretches from Wynn Street to the intersection of Prince and Lee Streets near the Old Taylor House, was named in honor of Elbert Head.

Dismuke acquired the corner lot from Elbert Head as a gift and in 1898 sold it to H. E. Allen. Through a business transaction the following year, the land was again acquired by Joseph H. Dismuke, a black land owner and nephew of Elbert Head. In the same year of 1899, Dismuke, an experienced carpenter, built the storehouse structure which is located on the corner of Lee and Ashby Streets.

For years, the Dismukes operated a grocery where they sold collards, peas, okra, tomatoes, corn and other vegetables which were purchased from local gardeners and farmers. Also for sale were homemade pies, cookies and delicious cakes carefully prepared by members of the Dismuke family. He sold other popular items such as chewing tobacco, snuff and eating chalk that was gathered from the nearby mines of Andersonville, Georgia.

In the winter months, the store was equipped with a large pot belly wood-burning stove, that when heated was quite cozy for customers who stopped to shop, chat or chew before going out again into the cold winter weather. During the summer months, he always had free lemonade or a cool glass of Kool-aid for his best customers and close friends. The compartment on the south side, and back of the building was used for cooking purposes and living quarters for family members. Through the years, the Dismuke storehouse became a familiar gathering place for young and old alike.

In 1919, the Dismukes were burdened with financial problems which resulted in the selling of the Dismuke storehouse to Janice Coleman. The Colemans were thrifty workers. One Coleman brother was an insurance agent and the other was a railroad worker. According to old timers, Janice Coleman later lost the corner property to W. C. Flatt.

W. C. Flatt owned the property for only a short while before selling it to the up and coming John Minyard, a sharp and shrewd businessman. Minyard had earned a large sum of money and had given W. C. Flatt an offer for the storehouse that he could not refuse. The purchase was made in 1922.

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Through the years the storehouse on the corner had become a well known location where black seasonal laborers would wait to be picked up and driven to where work was needed. These workers would be hired by the day to labor under the hot Georgia sun in cotton fields, peanut fields, and peach orchards. These workers left home at the crack of dawn, would meet at the corner and climb aboard various farm trucks driven by foremen of prosperous farmers. In late afternoon or near dark, the weary workers, tired and dusty, returned to the corner. They could be found telling jokes or laughing at some of the hardships that had been endured during the day. They would tarry a while, purchase a cold drink from the storekeeper and return home, only to repeat the same venture the following day.

The storehouse was also the location where domestic maids and cooks gathered to be picked up by "The Missey", the female employer. However, some maids would walk in groups to the southside of town to their places of employment.

As the years passed, Minyard continued to buy property and houses around this place of business. He became so well-known within the area that it became known as "John Minyard's Bottom". John maintained one side of the storehouse for selling groceries, which was fully stocked to supply the needs of the community. He turned the southside of the storehouse into a cafe, where he sold chicken sandwiches, chitterlings plates, fish sandwiches, pickled pig feet, and a variety of other tasty dishes. On occasions, especially weekends, these foods were gulped and washed down with beer, home-brew and other drinks.

Friday and Saturday nights were the busiest nights of the week. All working people were released from work on Friday, town and country folks alike. Farmers and farm hands would come into town in old dusty cars and on the back of their boss's truck and one and two horse wagons. Some would bring their entire families to shop at the dry goods stores in downtown Americus. These country neighbors were from various farms throughout Sumter County and bordering counties. Families and friends would exchange conversations and talk about what had transpired over the past week, recalling deaths, births, church news and other concerns of their friends and relatives.

Many of the unmarried and unspoken for country folks would not go back home until late Saturday night or early Sunday morning. Some spent the night with relatives or friends in town so they would not miss the weekend pleasures.

At dusk on Saturday evening, when the town stores were closed, the women and children were gathered up by the husbands, fathers and older brothers and taken back to their rural quarters, to prepare for church

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on Sunday. However, many fathers and older brothers swiftly returned to downtown Americus after dropping their spouses and relatives off to get one last glimpse of the town's night life. They would return to John Minyard's Bottom and Cotton Avenue.

Often on Saturday night at the Storehouse Cafe, John would have what was called a "Saturday Night, Fish Fry" which was laced with fun and frolic. The neighborhood harmonica players, guitarists, rub-board players, and drummers would display their musical talents.

Graphophone recordings also supplied some of the music. Blues and a mixture of Jazz and folk music were the order of the hour. Black men and women who felt cramped, threatened, confined, pressured by hard task masters and uncompromising straw bosses during the long weekdays, uncoiled their deep tensions on Saturday night at Minyard's place.

The Cafe, filled with smoke from cigarettes and the odor of fried fish, barbecue and other cooking foods and drinks, blanketed the hall. The night was full of "looseness", and freedom of loud embarrassing talk and dancing was prevalent. Chocolate, black, mulattoes, caramel, brown, girls kicked their lithe long legs high, as they rolled and tossed their bodies and hips. Belly rolling and buck dancing could also be seen. As the night progressed and the drum beats became faster, the volume louder--heads swaying rolling and jerking, hair flying wild, or standing straight up, arms and legs pumping. They were having a ball!

Truly Minyard's storehouse in the bottom had become a place of entertainment. A place for party goers and perhaps a place where a young man could pass into manhood or have that first drink or lose that first dollar in a game with crap shooters.

This gaiety continued through the late forties and early fifties. During the middle fifties', businesses in the area began to decline. Later members of the Minyard family moved to places like New York City and Atlanta, Georgia. However, some family members still reside in the Americus area today. For a spell the storehouse was closed down.

During the fifties, the city's urban renewal project was underway. Many black businesses had to be relocated from the downtown area. Earnest Wilson, first licensed black barber in Americus, Georgia had to relocate also. His original barbershop stood at the site where the Southern Loan Company is located on Lee Street. Earnest, being a long time friend of the deceased John Minyard and the Minyard family, contracted a deal with the Minyard family to relocate his business in the once grocery store side of the storehouse building.

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Earnest Wilson retired in 1954, and his son Clyde Wilson continued to operate the business until his illness in 1978. In 1982, Simmie Mercer contracted with Karl Wilson, the son of Clyde Wilson, to operate the business. The present barbershop is equipped with huge mirrors. Surrounded by carefully carved furniture with marble counters, which are still preserved and usable today; barber chairs which date back to the early 1900's, and a shoeshine stand which was made around the turn of the century. In 1982, Clyde Wilson purchased the barbershop side of the building and in 1984 he purchased the other side of the building. Mr. Wilson renovated the building but it remained open only until the road-widening caused the building to be moved in 1987.

From evidence of the past and present, the history of the storehouse is linked to that of the town's people of color. It is remembered with fondness and excitement by those who knew it "when".

Like much of the old and good, especially the old and good in Americus' inner city, this section of our town fell into hard times, becoming a little tarnished here, a little run-down and worn there; but fortunately it has never lost its spirit. It will continue to survive and prosper when it can reopen once again as a viable institution.

Addenda 1996

In 1987 the storehouse was moved 20 feet back on the original lot. The move was necessitated by a road widening and a sewer project. This project also caused the demolition of nearby historic structures, thus this storehouse is the only historic building remaining at this intersection. In 1994 it was damaged by the great flood that July and later received a Flood Recovery Grant. Currently, in 1996, it is not in use pending receiving permission to reopen businesses in the building.

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## **9. Major Bibliographic References**

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Wilson, Karl. "Dismuke/Minyard's/Wilson's Storehouse." Historic Property Information Form, August, 1985. Original on file at the Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A**

**(X) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.** Note: This property was considered eligible for the National Register in 1986, under the provisions of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations, in conjunction with a Federally assisted neighborhood revitalization project. The Memorandum of Agreement for this project stipulated that the Historic Preservation Division would nominate this property to the National Register subsequent to the completion of the project.

- 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:**

**Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A**

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property** less than one acre.

**UTM References**

A) Zone 16 Easting 761260 Northing 3552160

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is marked by a heavy black line on the enclosed plat map drawn to scale.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property follows the current legal boundaries and is all the owner owns at this location.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**name/title** Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian  
**organization** Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**street & number** 500 The Healey Building, 57 Forsyth St., NW  
**city or town** Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303  
**telephone** (404) 656-2840 **date** January 31, 1996

(HPS form version 10-29-91)

United States Department of the Interior  
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Photographs

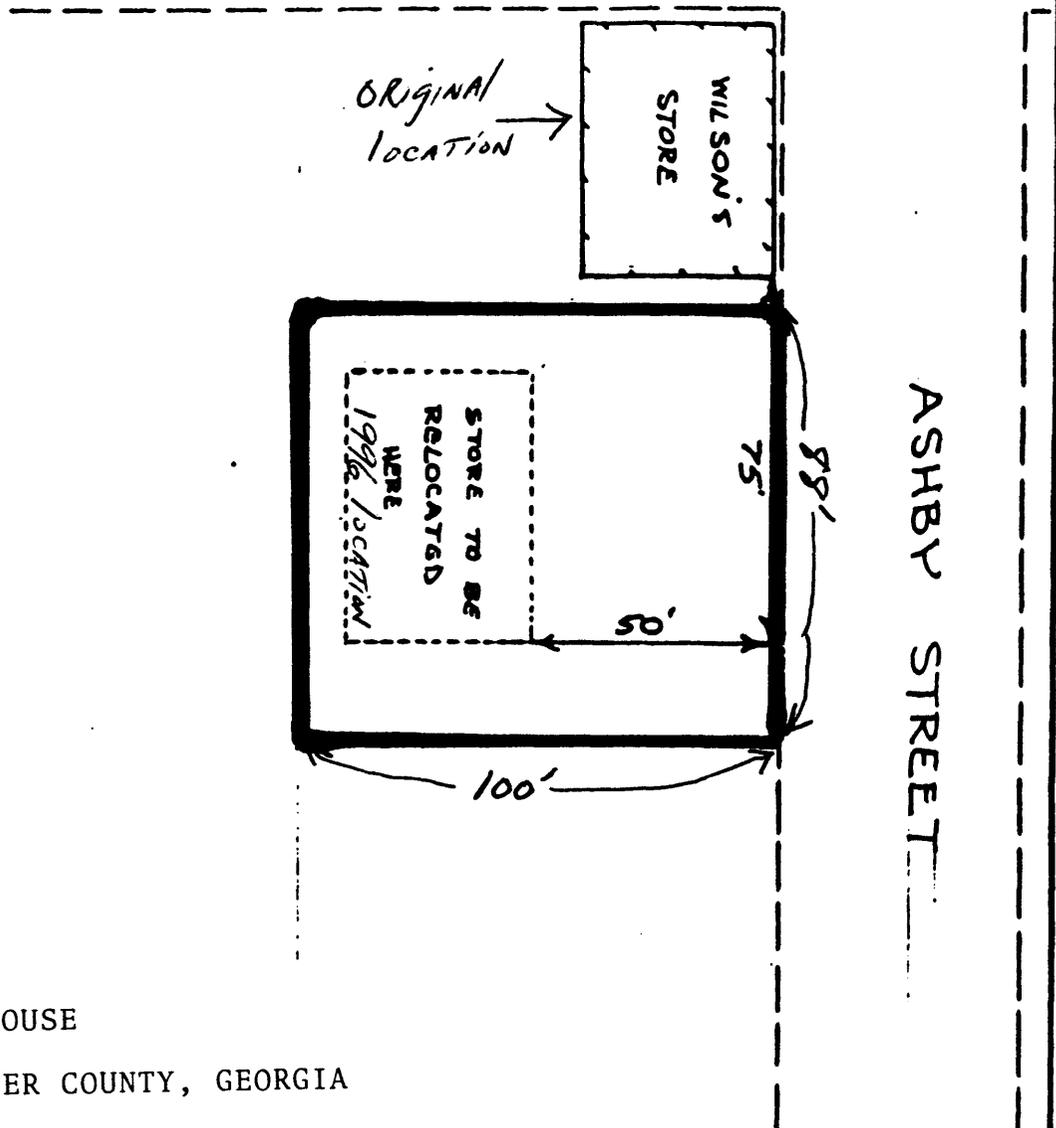
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**Name of Property:** DISMUKE STOREHOUSE  
**City or Vicinity:** Americus  
**County:** Sumter  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** April, 1995

**Description of Photograph(s):**

- 1 of 5: Front Facade, photographer facing northeast.
- 2 of 5: South Facade, photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 5: Rear and North Facades, photographer facing southwest.
- 4 of 5: Interior, Cafe (south) side, photographer facing southeast.
- 5 of 5: Interior, Barbershop (north) side, photographer facing southeast.

NORTH LEE STREET



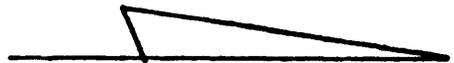
DISMUKE STOREHOUSE

AMERICUS, SUMTER COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCALE: 1" = 50'

NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY

DIMENSIONS INDICATED BY 



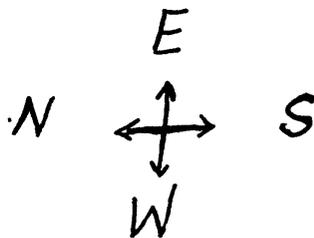
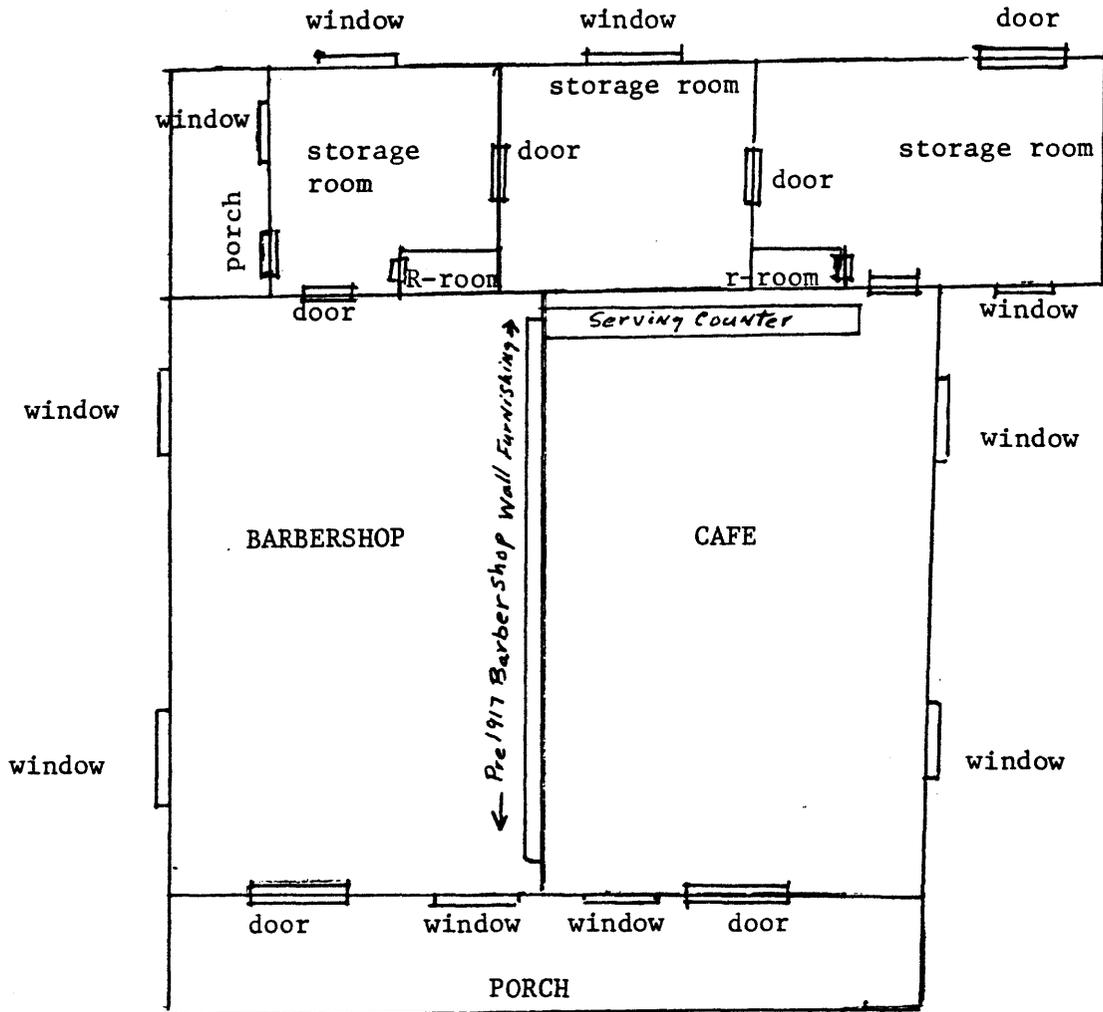
MOVING LOCATION SKETCH

**JAMES R. LITTLEFIELD - LAND SURVEYOR**  
**502 BARLOW STREET - AMERICUS, GEORGIA 31709**  
**912-924-4204**

Exhibit A

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FIGURE 6: INTERIOR SPACES



DISMUKE STOREHOUSE  
AMERICUS, SUMTER COUNTY, GEORGIA  
FLOORPLAN  
NOT TO SCALE  
ALL ORIGINAL ROOM USE MARKED.