

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 93000468

Date Listed: 6/3/93

Allison-Robinson House
Property Name

Owen
County

IN
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus
Signature of the Keeper

6/3/93
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Significance: The nomination form is amended to check **Criteria Consideration B**, for a moved property.

The date of birth for John C. Robinson provided in Section 8 page 5 paragraph 4 is revised to read 1840. This corrects a minor typographical error in the original form.

This information was confirmed by telephone with Paul Diebold of the Indiana SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

44-8

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECEIVED

APR 29 1993

NATIONAL REGISTER

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 an 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 Allison-Robinson House

other names/site number Robinson, John C., House

2. Location

street & number 3 North Montgomery Street N/A not for publication

city or town Spencer N/A vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Owen code 119 zip code 47460

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.)

Patrick R. Roberts

4-19-93

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

State of 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.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Patrick W. Andrews

6/3/93

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)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(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

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: I-house

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other BRICK, WOOD

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet.

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

LAW

Period of Significance

c1855 - 1914

Significant Dates

c1855

1878

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

ROBINSON, JOHN C.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

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 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

Name of repository:

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

The Allison-Robinson House is a two-story, wood frame building located at the northwest intersection of Franklin and Montgomery Streets in the original town plat of Spencer in Owen County, Indiana. Montgomery Street which runs north-south is tree lined with mature trees that provide shade for the front of the residence. Franklin Street running east-west to the south of the house is not tree lined at that intersection. The house is set back from the sidewalk on a raised yard that is retained at the sidewalk by a low stone wall.

The house was originally built between 1855 and 1860 by George Allison at the southwest corner of the intersection. In November 1990 the entire house was moved from lots 235 and 236 directly across Franklin Street to lot 237. The new site shares many characteristics with the original setting including the elevated yard, the stone retaining wall along the streetside lot lines, and the large walnut trees along Montgomery Street. The retaining wall along the east lot line was moved from the original site and reconstructed at the new site. The wall on the south side of the property was existing and is similar in age and appearance to the retaining wall at the original site. For purposes of this nomination both section of wall are accounted as one contributing structure. The house retains its original orientation eastward toward Montgomery Street.

After the move new mechanical systems were installed. The back porch was rebuilt using original porch elements and some new material where necessary. The front portico steps and foundation were replaced and a crawl space was dug within the new concrete block foundation. This foundation has coloring similar to the stone used in the retaining walls.

The Allison-Robinson House is a central-passage I-house with evidence of several stylistic influences. In plan the house consists of two wings running perpendicular to each other creating an L-shaped footprint. The roof is of medium pitch with an interior brick chimney at each end.

The east or main facade facing Montgomery Street has horizontal poplar clapboard sheathing over frame construction (photo 1). The facade corners are articulated with applied Greek Revival pilasters. These in turn support a wide frieze and a thin, molded cornice. The frieze is enriched by paired Italianate brackets.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

There are five bays of openings. Included in these are four bays of six-over-six, double hung wood sash windows with wood louvre shutters and modern storm windows plus a center bay of entries on each story. The entrances are wide with multi-pane transoms and sidelights. The entry door has unusual oculus panels in the midsection. From this central bay there is a projecting Greek Revival portico. The ground floor of the portico has two fluted Doric columns and open wood square columns supporting a second story with only two open square columns supporting a cornice and pedimented roof. The paired Italianate brackets along the eaves are modified S-shaped scroll with small, acorn-shaped pendants hanging from the top of the S. The decorative vergeboard is Gothic Revival tracery with a fleur-de-lis motif. The portico ceilings have recessed wood panels and the second story has a lattice railing (photo 2).

The south side of the house faces Franklin Street (photo 3). This elevation consists of the gable end of the main wing and the side of the rear wing. The walls are again sheathed in horizontal clapboard. There is decorative vergeboard along the roofline and wood cornice returns with paired Italianate brackets on the east return only. The corners of the main section of the house are articulated with pilasters. There are two bays of six-over-six, double hung wood windows on both stories with louvre shutters and modern storm windows. The windows are placed close together toward the center of the gable end.

The rear wing south elevation is also two stories (photo 4). The roof is of medium pitch, however this wing is lower in overall height than the main wing of the house. The frieze on this wing is plain. Windows are the same six-over-six, double hung sash found on the main wing. There are two early additions to the first story of this rear section but these windows are placed farther apart than their southern counterparts. The first addition, located at the intersection of the two wings is one story in height with a shed roof. It is sheathed in horizontal clapboard siding and has two four-over-four, double hung windows with louvre shutters. The second addition is also one story in height and houses the rear porch and a stairway leading to the second floor of the house. The porch has wood lattice walls and a shed roof. The wood porch deck contains a trap door entry to the crawl space under the house.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

The north side of the house is like the south side in that it is composed of the gabled end of the front wing and the side of the rear wing (photos 1 & 5). The gable end is two stories with wood clapboard, wood cornice returns, and corner pilasters. The easternmost cornice return is enriched by two brackets but there is no decorative vergeboard in this gable as on the south elevation. There are two bays of six-over-six, double hung windows in this section. The rear wing has clapboard siding and a plain frieze. The three second story windows, of six-over-six, double hung sash, are not evenly spaced across the wing. A one story, shed roof section containing three double hung windows spans the rear wing.

The rear of the house (photo 5) is unadorned. It consists of the gable end of the rear wing flanked by the one story, shed roof sections. The gable frieze is plain and the molded cornice has a profile like that on the main section of the house. The narrow, shuttered window in the first floor of the gabled section is inoperable because the rear stair now ascends directly in front of it. The window opening in the shed roof section has been altered so that it now contains one-over-one, double hung sash. The original opening as been infilled below the sill level and evidence of that change is clearly visible.

The interior of the Allison-Robinson House is arranged in a typical central-passage plan with a spacious central hall flanked by large rectangular rooms. The flooring is of wide poplar boards that have been painted. The walls are of original plaster except where it has been replaced by drywall as necessary. The baseboards, windows, window and door surrounds, and most of the early light fixtures and hardware have been retained. All of the window and door surrounds in this front section are poplar and exhibit Greek Revival influence. All surrounds in this section are painted now and evidence suggests that they were probably originally painted with a wash of some kind. The staircase and the front entry door appear to be the only woodwork on the first floor that was originally varnished. The doors are four-panelled elements with porcelain door knobs and original latches (photo 6).

The central hall is a stair hall with a U-shaped stairwell (photo 7). The stair is walnut and has a beautiful railing and fleur-de-lis stringer detail reminiscent of the decorative vergeboard on the exterior (photos 8 & 3). The room to the south of the central

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 4 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

hall is the more decorative of the two front rooms. It has elaborate pedimented window surrounds and wood panels between the baseboards and the window sills (photo 9). This room was heated by a stove while the room to the north of the hall has a fireplace with a cast iron insert. The woodwork in this room is not as decorative as in its counterpart but does contain a built-in cabinet to the right of the fireplace and a built-in window seat to the left (photo 10). The cabinet covers the window immediately east of the fireplace. Since the built-ins throughout the house appear to be original, the windows which they conceal must have been intended solely to maintain a balanced exterior appearance.

On the upper floor of the front section the room arrangement is repeated. A doorway in the central hall gives access to the upper level of the front porch (photo 11). Much more of the original plaster has been replaced by drywall on this level. Baseboards, door and window surrounds are simpler on this floor. Those details in the south room are painted however those in the north room remain natural.

The rooms in the rear sections of the house have been altered over the years. At an undetermined time a stair to the second floor was added from the rear porch. In recent years however only minor changes have been made to room configuration. Kitchen and bath areas were modernized in the 1960s and other spaces drywalled and carpeted. On the second floor the single large room has apparently always been left in an unfinished condition. Horizontal wood sheathing covers the walls; there are no baseboards or door and window surrounds (photo 13). The ceiling in this space recently has been drywalled as part of the current work in progress.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

The Allison-Robinson House is eligible for inclusion in the National Register under Criteria B and C. The property is significant for its association with successful Spencer attorney Judge John C. Robinson (1840-1914) who achieved local and, in some respects, statewide prominence. It also is locally significant as an outstanding and very intact example of an I-house, a distinctive regional vernacular type. The house is the only known example of a central-passage I-house within the corporate limits of Spencer. Although the house has been moved from its original location, it meets criterion consideration B as a result of the very short distance of the move and the great care taken to provide a similar setting.

The house was built on land owned by Orin Gallup until 1855 when he sold it to George Allison. From all available transfer book and census records, George Allison probably built the house some time between 1855 and 1860.

The Allisons were a very prosperous merchandising family in Spencer. John B. Allison, George's grandfather, first settled in the Owen County area in 1818 and established a general merchandising business. John's son, Noah, subsequently moved the business to Spencer and also passed it along to his sons upon his retirement. Although the Allisons were all very wealthy, the family had a history of health problems and premature deaths. Of Noah's thirteen children, only four survived to adulthood and of those four, three died before the age of fifty five. George was the seventh Allison child and he lived to be forty six dying in 1876 in Denver, Colorado.

In 1878 the house was purchased by Judge John C. Robinson. Robinson had been born on February 29, 1940 in New Salem, Rush County, Indiana. His parents were Osmyrn and Nancy Robinson. Osmyrn was born in Kentucky in 1803 and was elected to the Indiana Legislature in 1839. He however died in 1847 at an early age and left his wife with seven small children to raise and educate. [1]

John was prepared for college at the Fayetteville Academy in Fayetteville, Indiana and in 1857 he entered Indiana University. He graduated in 1861. After graduation, he taught school while preparing for a legal profession in the evenings. In 1865 he began practicing law in Spencer. Also in 1865 he was appointed deputy district attorney serving until 1866 when he was elected

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 6 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

district attorney for the district of Putnam, Clay, Owen, and Greene counties. In 1868 he was elected prosecuting attorney for the circuit composed of Morgan, Monroe, Putnam, Clay, Owen and Greene counties.

In 1869 Robinson married Martha J. Cooper who was reportedly a distant relative of Daniel Boone. In 1870 he was re-elected prosecuting attorney. In 1872 Robinson received the nomination from the Democrat Party for Reporter of the Supreme Court however he was defeated by James B. Black of Indianapolis. In 1876 he was nominated for Judge of the Fifteenth Judicial Court and was elected by the largest majority ever given any person in the circuit. Robinson served in that office until 1882. In 1878 after this important election he and his wife purchased the house on Montgomery Street.

In 1881 John C. Robinson formed a law partnership with Inman H. Fowler which lasted until 1887. In the spring of 1883 he was appointed one of four commissioners for the location and erection of three new state insane asylums. Then from 1885-1890 he served as Journal Clerk for the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Called a "Gold" Democrat for supporting the gold standard, Robinson was known as one of the best jurists in southern Indiana. [2]

In addition to Robinson's law and political accomplishments, he held the editor's chair of the Owen County Journal newspaper. He was president of the Indiana State Christian Sunday School Association. When Judge Robinson died in April 1914, the Owen Leader newspaper ran a lengthy obituary reporting on all his accomplishments. Many important people attended his funeral including Indiana Governor Ralston who began his law career in the office of Robinson and Fowler.

Two sons, Ralph and Jesse, survived Robinson. Jesse and his wife, Della, lived in the house on Montgomery Street until 1960. Because of the judge's solid local reputation and the eighty two year ownership of the property by the Robinson family, the house is commonly known in Spencer as the Robinson House.

The Allison-Robinson House also is significant as a good example of one of Indiana's earliest building types - the I-house. The I-house was first termed so in 1936 by historical geographer Fred Kniffen. Kniffen named this house type the I-house in recognition

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

of its frequent appearance in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. According to sources the I-house form was an "...old world form inspired by Renaissance ideas" that descended from the tidewater south tradition and remained a dominant folk dwelling type for many years. [3] It became associated with economic success in an agricultural society. Facades facing public roads with centrally positioned entries, symmetry, balance, and wide front elevations became indicators of economic status. [4]

There are several subtypes of this form. However there are some qualities that all I-houses have in common such as side gable orientation, two-room width, one-room depth, and two-story height. [5] While these elements constitute the basic type, there are several elements and variations that determine subtype. Those elements include chimney position and number, number of bays, and entry position. [6]

The Allison-Robinson House is a central-passage I-house. This subtype has a centered entry into a stair hall with one room on either side of the hall. Typically this subtype has five bays of openings across the facade and one chimney at each end. [7] This subtype, best known for its symmetry and simplicity of form, is a descendent of such British folk dwellings as the single-pen. [8] Any type of stylistic detail can be, and typically was, applied to this form. In Indiana I-houses exhibiting the severe simplicity associated with the American Federal style are commonly found. I-houses that reveal Greek Revival or Italianate stylistic influences also are fairly common throughout the state. These demonstrate the long-lived popularity of the form through several stylistic generations.

The Robinson House is unusual as a stylistic hybrid. The two delicately proportioned Greek Doric columns in-antis on the first floor of the entry portico, the pilastered central entrance with side lights and transom, the corner pilasters on the facade and the wide frieze all indicate a more than passing familiarity with the Greek Revival idiom on the part of the builder. The delicate tracery in the entrance portico pediment and the similar treatment on the south gable, though not solely associated with the Gothic Revival, is a characteristic feature of that style. Finally, the paired cornice brackets on the facade are a hallmark of Italianate stylistic influence.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 8 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

The Allison-Robinson House illustrates the basic formal components of the central-passage I-house very well. The house has undergone only minimal alterations over the years; changes occurring mostly in the rear wing. As a result the house is a good example of the type. Although Owen County has not undergone an intensive level historic sites and structures survey, a windshield survey of Spencer conducted in 1991 revealed that this house is the only example of a central-passage I-house within the city limits. The house also illustrates very well how stylistic tastes sometimes converged in the residential architecture of rural Indiana. The clear references to three successive stylistic idioms provides insight into the ways academic styles were interpreted and melded in the hands of unschooled carpenter-builders. The results here, as often is the case, are not without charm.

In 1990 the Allison-Robinson House was scheduled to be demolished to provide additional parking. Local preservationists, after exhausting all efforts to preserve the house in situ, raised the funds to relocate the building. Great care was taken to find the most appropriate site. After considering several options, Owen County Preservation, Inc. moved the house to the lot immediately to north across Franklin Street. [9] As indicated in section 7 of this nomination, the house was oriented eastward toward Montgomery Street and its raised setting above sidewalk level was maintained. Thus, although the house has been moved from its original location that loss of integrity is not sufficient to render the property ineligible under criteria B or C.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 9 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

NOTES

- 1 History of Owen County. (Spencer, Indiana: Owen Lith Service, INC., vol. 2, 1962), p.94.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Upton, Dell and John Michael Vlach. Common Places. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 6.
- 4 Davis, J. Marshall. Vernacular House Types in Indiana: An Expanded Methodology for the Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory (unpublished Master's thesis, Ball State University, 1990), p. 62.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Noble, Allen G. Wood, Brick and Stone. (Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, v.1, 1984), p. 52.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Davis, p. 73.
- 9 Spencer Owen Leader, August 31, 1990.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 10 Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 237 of the original plat in the town of Spencer, measuring 68' along Montgomery Street and 126' along Franklin Street.

Boundary Justification

This nomination includes all of Lot 237 which, although not the original site of the Robinson House, is extremely similar in dimension and topography to the original site. Lot 237 is representative of residential lots within the historic plat of Spencer and thus forms an appropriate physical context for the Robinson House.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number Photos Page 13

Allison-Robinson House
Owen Co., IN

1. Judge John C. Robinson House*
2. Spencer, In.*
3. Marsh Davis*
4. September 12, 1991*
5. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana*
6. Camera pointing southwest at east facade.
7. #1

* Information is the same for all photos.

6. Camera pointing west at east facade entrance.
7. #2

6. Camera pointing northwest at south facade.
7. #3

6. Camera pointing northeast at south facade.
7. #4

6. Camera pointing southeast at west facade.
7. #5

6. Camera pointing north into central hall.
7. #6

6. Camera pointing northwest at stairwell.
7. #7

6. Camera pointing east at entry door.
7. #8

6. Camera pointing east at south parlor windows.
7. #9

6. Camera pointing northeast at north parlor fireplace.
7. #10

6. Camera pointing southeast at upper hall entry.
7. #11

6. Camera pointing northwest in north room of second floor.
7. #12

6. Camera pointing northwest in second floor rear wing.
7. #13

Photo Identification - Site Plan
Judge John C. Robinson House

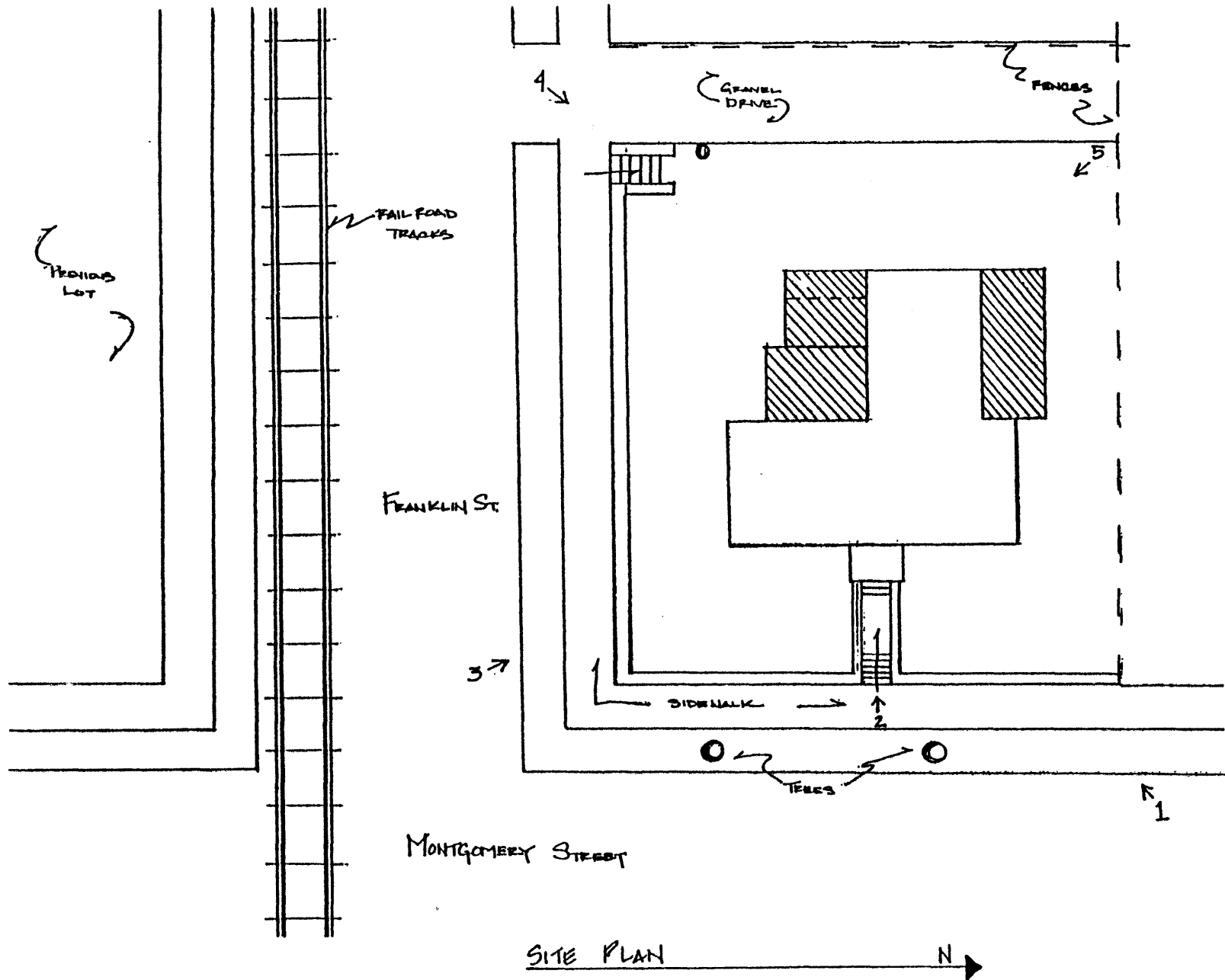
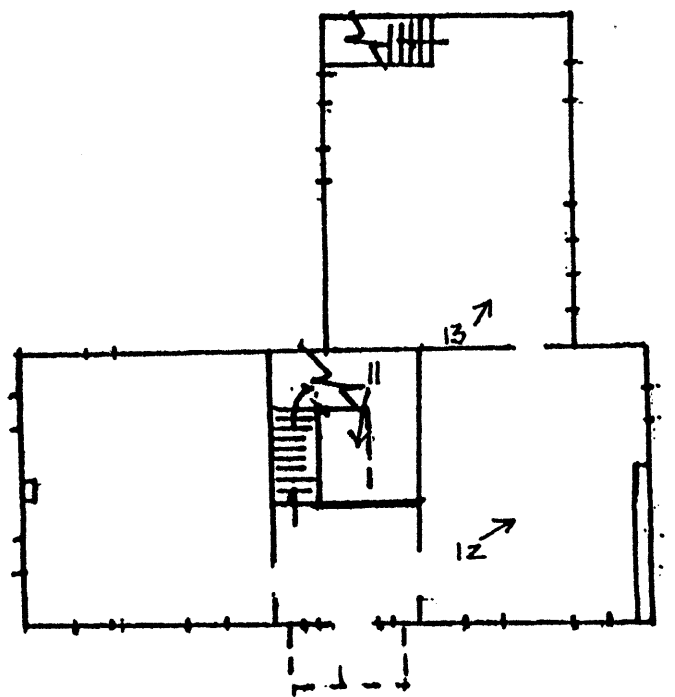
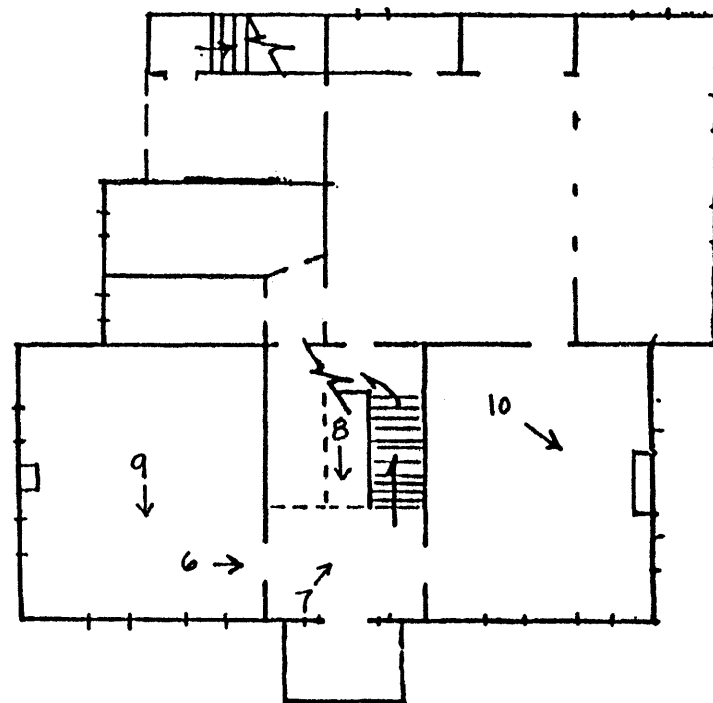


Photo Identification - Floor Plans
Judge John C. Robinson House



2ND FLOOR PLAN N →



1ST FLOOR PLAN N →