

RECEIVED JAN 12 1978

DATE ENTERED

APR 19 1978

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
 INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

 SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS
**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Assembly Hall, (The Charles DeFrance House, Richard Fletcher's Tavern)

AND/OR COMMON

Serio House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Southwest corner of Assembly and Main streets

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Mississippi

CODE

28

COUNTY

Adams

CODE

001

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

 BUILDING(S)

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ SITE

\_\_\_ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

\_\_\_ PUBLIC

 PRIVATE

\_\_\_ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

 BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**

\_\_\_ OCCUPIED

 UNOCCUPIED

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_\_ NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_\_ PARK

\_\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

 OTHER: vacant**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

S. Frank Serio

STREET &amp; NUMBER

P. O. Box 363

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

Mississippi 39190

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE.

Office of the Chancery Clerk

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Adams County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Natchez

STATE

Mississippi 39120

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

no card in HABS

DATE

1972

 FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Assembly Hall is a two-story frame building set on a heavily wooded lot at the southwest corner of Assembly Street and Main Street in Washington, Mississippi. The principal exterior element of this simple structure is the facade porch, which is treated as an open gallery with four columns at the first floor but which has fully enclosed, lighted rooms at the second floor. Ascending at the center of the porch is the main stair. The porch rooms, added in the 1820s to the original two-story, single-pile structure, give Assembly Hall its awkward but intriguing top-heavy appearance. On the lower floor are six irregularly spaced bays with single doors in the second and fifth positions, and on the second floor, porch rooms feature five regularly spaced bays. Identical side elevations have one bay on the first floor and two bays above; the rear elevation has three equal bays on the second floor, the first floor having been altered with modern window units. Of the original nine-over-six, double-hung sash windows, only one remains, as a result of later additions of six-over-six and two-over-two sash. Wide boards now framing each window cover the original beaded architrave. A simple box cornice defines the top of the front and rear walls, which are protected by a gable roof. There is one central brick chimney. On the north side of the building is a small shed porch, a much later addition.

Inside are two major rooms on the ground floor, both with entrances from the porch and from one another, and three smaller rooms at the rear which were at one time part of the back porch. The two large rooms feature delicate Federal mantels of the simplest design, and the beaded architrave around all doors and windows is in keeping with the light scale of the interior. Though covered by later ceilings, the ceiling joists in these rooms are also beaded, suggesting that at one time they were exposed. Six-panel doors are used at the front of the house, but beaded plank doors with their original wrought-iron strap hinges lead to the rear rooms.

At the top of the stairs is an original built-in cupboard with fielded panel doors and brass hinges. The small porch rooms on either side of the stair have horizontal plank walls, a simple chair rail, and thin, paneled doors with original hardware. Above the large rooms on the first floor are rooms of equal size with similar Federal mantels and other details. On the panel doors into these rooms are the original wrought-iron HL hinges. Flooring throughout the building is pine, in approximately five-inch widths.

Assembly Hall, in spite of its age and many uses, has remained amazingly intact both on the interior and the exterior. The building is threatened, however, by neglect and encroaching highway development, and work is under way to insure its protection and complete preservation.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 4 & 8 PAGE 1

4 - OWNER OF PROPERTY

Mrs. T. Hardy Jackson  
4263 East Ridge Drive  
Jackson, Mississippi 39211

Mrs. Clarence J. Weeks  
309 Armstrong Street  
Natchez, Mississippi 39120

Mrs. Joe P. Campiere  
2828 Jean Lafitte Parkway  
Chalmette, Louisiana 70043

Mrs. Sarah Shill  
Catholic-Presbyterian Apartments  
655 North Street, Apt. 1005  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

Territorial legislators continued to meet at the tavern through 1812, and DeFrance drew income from rents, candles, and firewood. But in December, 1812, the assembly rented another Washington structure for its meeting place, just two months after DeFrance had deeded his Block 8 property back to William Brooks, probably because of default on the mortgage (Deed Book H:166). The following year, however, the assembly appropriated \$150 to Charles DeFrance once again for house rent. In 1813, DeFrance owned two lots on Block 10 fronting Assembly Street, which according to a May 10, 1812, mortgage contained "houses," and this constituted his only Washington property at that time. Today no structures remain on this property, which was the site of the assembly meetings from 1813 until statehood in 1817. The assembly's move to another building at the same time DeFrance lost the Assembly Hall property in the autumn of 1812, and the legislative body's subsequent rental from him again in 1813, suggest that the territorial government utilized both the Block 8 and the Block 10 buildings. A deed book account dated April 6, 1839, "Plan of Washington, Mississippi," describes "Assembly Street West of square 8 and 9 and on which the House now stands in which the legislature of the Mississippi Territory held its sessions."

Assembly Hall, after being deeded back to William Brooks in 1812, soon changed hands again. As a result of a suit brought by the Bank of Mississippi against the goods, chattels, lands, and tenements of William Brooks, there was a public sale of the property by White Turpin, the local sheriff, to Charles Miles on April 26, 1814 (Recorded May 19, 1814, Deed Book H:129).

In 1815, the house became known as Fletcher's Tavern when Charles Miles conveyed the house to Richard Fletcher, who was already operating the property as a tavern. Fletcher seems to have recaptured some of the government business, but Assembly Hall was never again to attain the political importance it had enjoyed during earlier years. During this period the porch rooms were added to the facade to enlarge the tavern.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1808

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Assembly Hall, in Washington, Mississippi, believed to be the meeting place of the legislative body of the Mississippi Territory (1798-1817), served in that capacity from the time of its construction ca. 1808 until 1811. One of the few surviving buildings from the territorial period in Mississippi, it is a remarkably intact example of Federal period architecture both on the exterior and the interior. It is also the sole known example remaining in Mississippi of a Natchez Trace tavern built specifically for commercial (rather than combined commercial-domestic) use.

In the spring of 1802, Territorial Governor William C. C. Claiborne and his Republican allies removed the capital of the newly formed Territory of Mississippi from Natchez to Washington, closer to the stronghold of Republicans in Adams County. The village had been in existence only since 1798, when John Foster had subdivided a part of his plantation into town lots.

A traveler passing through Washington in 1808 counted thirty buildings there, including private dwellings. Of three taverns, the one belonging to Charles DeFrance seems to have supplied most government needs. The DeFrance house was the site of the 1808 session of the general assembly and provided a room for the use of the Supreme Court of the Mississippi Territory. In June, 1808, Charles DeFrance had purchased the four lots of Block 8 on which the tavern stands from William Brooks for \$6,000 and mortgaged the property to Brooks the following month (Deed Book E:19,20). Officials allotted DeFrance over three hundred dollars in compensation.

One of the most significant activities of the territorial legislature between the years 1808 and 1811 was the charter of Mississippi's first bank. Established by the general assembly December 23, 1809, the Bank of the Mississippi was an important factor in the financial development of both the territory and later the state, since it was adopted as the official state bank in 1818.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Acts . . . of the . . . General Assembly . . . of the Mississippi Terri-  
tory . . . . Natchez, Miss., 1801-1816.

Carter, Clarence E. The Territorial Papers of the United States. 15 vols.  
Washington, 1934-1962.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 3.25  
UTM REFERENCES

A	1,5	6,6,1	5,2,0	3,4	9,4	8,7,5	B			
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C							D			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 comprising the whole of Square 8 in the Town of Washington, being 300' on each side, bounded on the north by North Street, on the east by Fountain Street, on the south by Main Street, and on the west by Assembly Street.

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Gregory B. Free, Restoration/Preservation Specialist

ORGANIZATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE

October, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 571

TELEPHONE

(601) 354-6218

CITY OR TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elbert R. Hilliard

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

January 9, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

<p><u>Matthew Cole</u></p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER</p>	<p><u>W. Hilliard</u></p> <p>DATE</p> <p><u>4/19/78</u></p> <p>KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER</p> <p>DATE</p> <p><u>1-13-78</u></p>
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 & 9 PAGE 2

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

Charles DeFrance continued to operate his second Washington tavern, which became closely associated with the village's most noted institution--Jefferson College--and housed students from that school in later years. Richard Fletcher died in March of 1823, and Assembly Hall returned to the hands of Charles Miles. Nine years and two owners later, the building was sold to James and William Norman. The Norman family retained possession of the house until 1924, when it was sold for \$800, which was \$1,200 less than Richard Fletcher had paid in 1815. In 1928, the property was sold to Mrs. K. E. Serio and still remains in the possession of her family.

An important, but still somewhat conjectural part of Mississippi history--that of social, cultural, architectural, and political beginnings--is clarified by a study of Assembly Hall. Long neglected and overlooked, the building is finally being granted due attention, and it is hoped that public acquisition, restoration, and development will soon insure its preservation.

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Claiborne, John F. H. Mississippi, as a Province, Territory and State, with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens. Jackson, Miss., 1880.

Clayton, James D. Antebellum Natchez. Baton Rouge, 1968.

Jackson. Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Jefferson College Papers.

McCain, William David. "The Charter of Mississippi's First Bank." The Journal of Mississippi History 1:251-63.

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Mississippi. Adams County. Chancery Court. Personal Tax Rolls.

Mississippi. Governor Papers. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Record Group 27.

Mississippi. Territorial Governor. Papers, 1797-1817. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Record Group 2, vol. 8.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 3

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rowland, Dunbar, ed. Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801-1816.  
6 vols. Jackson, 1917.

Sydnor, Charles S. A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L. C.  
Wailes. Durham, 1938.

Washington, Miss. Republican. 1813-1817.