

1003

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Cotton Hill

Other names/site number: Luke Matthews House

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 23789 Huntsville-Brownsferry Road East

City or town: Athens State: Al County: Limestone

Not For Publication: ☐

Vicinity: ☒

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local
Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Lee Anne Wofford

/Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer October 15, 2014

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Alabama Historic Commission

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

4. 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:)

Don Eason H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

12.10.11
Date of Action

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 ☐
☐

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Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u></u>	sites
<u></u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u></u>	<u></u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Wood, Asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Cotton Hill is one of the most sophisticated examples of a Federal style, brick, plantation I-house still extant in northern Alabama. It is a two-story, five bay, one room deep house with a full basement, central hall plan and side gable roof. Its reconstructed, double-tier, pedimented Palladian portico was designed and built in 2011 [photo 2]. Cotton Hill became the center of a 1000 acre plantation under the ownership of Luke Matthews who acquired the land where the house is located in 1830. Today the house stands on 25 acres in a rural setting that still reflects its historic agrarian character. After years of partial neglect, the house has recently undergone an adaptive restoration. This includes construction of a rear addition (which is discussed below) and the reconstruction of the long-gone front portico [photos 3 & 4]. At the same time there has been a meticulous restoration of the main block which preserves its floor plan, the upper and lower doorways with their fanlights, the original staircase, the original built-in cupboards and mantels and the handsome Federal style woodwork.

Cotton Hill retains integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

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Narrative Description

Cotton Hill is located on top of a knoll facing south and overlooking a long paved driveway that proceeds through a stately pecan grove to Huntsville-Brownsferry Road East. An allee of maple trees flanks the driveway [photo 1]. The land surrounding the house was traditionally cleared and consisted of agricultural fields extending outward from the home site in all directions. The setting still reflects its historic agrarian character. The immediate setting of the house retains several ancient oaks and one magnolia, survivors of the destructive tornados which swept through the area in April 2011. The present owner plans to landscape the house with plantings of English boxwood, and other plants appropriate to the period of the house¹.

Cotton Hill's façade is dominated by a portico that was built in 2011 [photo 2]. The original double portico was lost before HABS recorded the house in the 1930s. Physical and historical documentation support the original presence of a double-tier, pedimented portico sheltering both the main entrance and the single door on the floor above it. Until the 1840s, a one story or two-tiered portico rather than a full-width colonnade usually graced the facades of Limestone County's plantation houses.² Excavation revealed the location of the original brick piers that supported the porch. Existing brick pilasters flanking the front entrances, as well as traces of white paint on the wall between the pilasters, provided additional evidence of the portico's dimensions. Since no photograph of the original portico has been found, the basic template for the new portico was based on this structural evidence and the extant 1829 portico of the Dancy-Polk House in nearby Decatur, Morgan County, Alabama (NRHP 1980).

Cotton Hill is entered through an original pair of Cross-and-Bible doors set in a deep paneled reveal crowned with an original fanlight transom. The fanlight, also set in a deep reveal, is accentuated by radiating brick voussoirs. The doorway located in the second story of the portico contains an original, single-leaf, Cross-and-Bible door which was found in the barn and reinstalled. This door and its original fanlight also have deep paneled reveals and voussoirs. The jambs and reveals for both doors and both fanlights have been reconstructed.

Cotton Hill's brickwork is exceptional. The front is laid in Flemish bond with struck and penciled mortar joints while common bond appears on the sides and rear, a common practice at this period. A rare holdover from Georgian tradition is evidenced in the convex molded brick water table that provides an elegant transition from the main wall to the thicker foundation wall [photo 5]. The flat arches of the main windows as well as the brick voussoirs over the front entry and the door above it, are gauged and rubbed. The attic windows have soldier arches.

¹ The description of the landscape is based on a site visit as well as conversations and e-mail correspondence with the owner Cecil Armstrong.

² Robert Gamble, "An Introduction to County Architecture" in *The Lure and Lore of Limestone County* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1978) p. xviii. Cited hereafter as *Gamble: I Intro to Lure and Lore*.

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The double-hung sash windows with twelve panes in each sash (12/12) that were used on the first floor and the 12/8 sash configuration used on the second floor were rebuilt by Larry Jaynes, who did much of the restoration work on Belle Mont (NRHP 1982) in Colbert County.

Both side elevations feature a slightly protruding, shouldered, endwall chimney flanked by 2/2 DHS attic windows in the gables. While the east elevation has no other windows or doors, the west elevation is also marked by a second story 12/8 DHS window and, at the base of the chimney, an attached wood-framed structure that shelters the entry to the basement [photo 3].

The 1935 HABS photograph of the rear (north) elevation indicates the "ghost" of a lateral one-story porch that covered the double doors at the back of the entrance hall and connected the door of the dining chamber to a service ell. Undoubtedly, this ell housed the original kitchen but it was missing in 1935³. A one-story frame room was constructed after the date of the HABS photo, but it was replaced by the current owner c. 1985 with a two-story, brick addition containing a kitchen and a family room [photos 15 & 17] on the first floor and bedrooms on the second floor. On the east side of this two-story addition is a one-story, shed-roofed section that contains the lateral hallway [photo 16] connecting the kitchen to the original back doors and a bathroom. This entire brick wing was designed to complement the original structure.

The glory of Cotton Hill is its interior woodwork, which is almost completely intact. All walls and ceilings, except those in the basement, were plastered. Laths were nailed to ceiling joists to provide groundwork for the plaster. All four rooms and the two halls in the original block of the house feature baseboards and chair rails.

The entry hall [photos 7 & 8] also retains its original open-string stair, flooring and doors. The newel posts of the stair are beautifully turned, and the stair rail is roughly circular in cross section to fit the hand. The stair balusters are small and rectangular in cross-section, a feature that is common to many surviving houses of the period in this area. The string is decorated with scroll brackets. An unusual feature of the stairway is that the wood floor boards in the second floor hall are notched to accommodate the landing balusters which pass through these notches [photo 18].

Access to the basement is provided by a four paneled door tucked under this staircase. The basement is roughly divided into three spaces by brick walls. The floor joists of the first story are supported by an infrastructure of vertical and horizontal metal beams. The basement has a brick floor. Its long, exterior brick walls are punctuated by rectangular windows. Each end wall features a simple, brick fireplace. The west end wall also has double-leaf wooden doors leading to the outside. Such basement service rooms were typical of many early Tennessee Valley plantation houses [photos 27-29].

The six-panel door into the parlor (or east room) is centered on the east wall of the central hall. It has a deep, paneled reveal. The parlor [photo 9] features a molded baseboard and a beaded

³ Historic American Buildings Survey. Library of Congress Washington, D.C. Alex Bush, Photographer, May 21, 1935, Ala, 42-Ath. V, 1-4.

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chair rail. The deep reveals of the parlor windows display reeded panels [photo 11]. The mantel on the east wall of the parlor features a rectangular opening flanked by fluted pilasters. The mantel's paneled frieze is delineated by decorative woodwork including reeded end blocks and diagonal reeding which spans the top and bottom of the frieze. Above the frieze is a corniced mantel shelf [photo 10].

A six-panel door with a deep, paneled reveal which is located on the west wall of the central hall at the bottom of the stair opens to the dining chamber. This room has built-in cupboards on either side of the chimney [photo 12]. These cupboards are original and fitted with shelves and have never been painted on the inside. The doors are made like Federal-period furniture, with the beveled faces of the panel facing inside. The tops of the cupboards are decorated with reeding made of separate glued-in panels. The bottom third of the cupboard on the north side of the chimney is boxed to create head-room for the exterior basement door. The mantel in this room is the most elaborate in the house. Its rectangular opening is flanked by fluted pilasters. Its paneled frieze features a central sunburst motif on a raised panel and is flanked by reeded end blocks. Above the frieze and end blocks is a band of "i" dentils, ornaments composed of a row of dentils with a pierced hole above, thus simulating in appearance the letter "i", primarily a Federal-period motif. Finally, a corniced mantel shelf crowns the fireplace [photo 13]. The dining chamber also features deep, paneled reveals on the windows, a chair rail and baseboards [photo 14]. On the north wall a door which presumably once led to a dependency or onto the rear porch now accesses the modern kitchen in the rear, brick wing added c. 1985 [photo 15].

The second-floor hall is lit by a window in the north wall and a fanlight over the door leading to the second story of the portico. A door to the enclosed stair in the southwest corner of the hall leads to the floored attic which is lit by a pair of attic windows flanking each chimney. The winders at the foot of this flight of stairs are reconstructions; the originals having been lost [photos 18-19, 25-26].

The paneled door of the east bedroom replicates the others in the house since the original is no longer extant. The east bedroom does, however, retain its original built in paneled cupboards on either side of the mantel [photo 20]. This mantel, which is similar to the one in the parlor, still retained its original black paint when photographed for HABS in 1935.⁴ The mantel displays plain pilasters flanking a rectangular opening and a plain frieze delineated by decorative woodwork and end blocks. It's crowned by a corniced mantel shelf [photo 21].

All of the upstairs windows have plain splayed reveals. In the west bedroom the mantel is reminiscent of the 18th-century Georgian style rather than Adamesque. It features a rectangular opening with an architrave surround, a paneled frieze and a cornice. Flanking the mantel to the south is another built-in cupboard, and to the north a window [photo 22]. A doorway was cut into the north wall of this room to provide access to the second story of the modern wing [photo 23]. The second story of the wing contains a bathroom and bedrooms but was not accessible to us on our site visit.

⁴ Historic American Buildings Survey. Library of Congress Washington, D.C. Alex Bush, Photographer, May 21, 1935. HABS, ALA, 42-ATH. V, 1-4.

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The wooden elements of Cotton Hill, for the most part, exhibit pegged mortise and tenon joints. In the attic, four by four rafters connect to a ridge board. Solid decking replaced the original spaced decking strips long ago, probably when the wood shingle roof was replaced by a metal roof around the turn of the last century. During the recent rehabilitation of Cotton Hill, a new asphalt shingle roof was installed to replace a previous one.

Other extant resources associated with the approximately 25 acre Cotton Hill site include:

1. Pump house c. 1975 NC
This small, square structure is constructed of stone and capped with a gable roof clad in metal with exposed rafter ends. It sits several yards to the west of the house. [photo 3]
2. Garage/guest house c. 1975 NC
This two story, five bay wide, brick building has four garage bays with an apartment above them. Its south elevation which faces the rear elevation of Cotton Hill has a central entrance located under a small gable roof supported by two columns. The north (rear) elevation has the garage bays, two on each side of a single-leaf door under a gabled canopy. A denticulated cornice spans each of these elevations. Its windows are 6/6 DHS. The building has a side gable roof and a chimney on each side elevation. [photo 4]
3. Barn/workshop c.1975 NC
This large wooden barn is located behind and to the east of the modern brick garage apartment several hundred yards from the main house. It is clad in board-and-batten siding. The barn's main block features a gable roof. Two side wings off the barn each have a shed roof. Extending off each elevation of the barn is a flat or slightly pitched roof supported by plain, upright timbers. [photo 6]
4. Outbuilding c. 1975 NC
Just east of the barn is a small, wood-frame outbuilding with a gable roof of uneven pitch. [photo 6 in the background]

Archaeology Component

While no archaeological survey has been undertaken on this property, the possibility of subsurface remains that would help us understand and interpret the history of this site remains high.

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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.)

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Exploration/Settlement

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Period of Significance

c. 1828-c. 1838

Significant Dates

c. 1828

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Parham, William (attributed)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Cotton Hill is locally significant under **Criterion A: Exploration/Settlement**. It represents the early settlement patterns of well-to-do planters who established themselves in the fertile Great Bend region of northern Alabama's Tennessee River Valley and developed large plantations. Cotton Hill was most closely associated throughout the nineteenth century with Luke Matthews (also spelled Mathews) who migrated from Virginia to northern Alabama in the early statehood period. Matthews purchased the southeast quarter of S36, T3S, R4W (the location of Cotton Hill) in 1830 and expanded it into a cotton plantation of over one thousand acres. As such, the property represents the imprint made upon the landscape by those Virginians who settled in northern Alabama.

Cotton Hill has local significance under **Criterion C: Architecture** because, within the architectural milieu of northern Alabama, it is an excellent example of a brick plantation I-house executed in the Federal style. According to Robert Gamble, writing in *The Alabama Catalog*, the I-house was "perhaps the most common form of two-story house in English North America"

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and the Federal style was one of the earliest high styles brought to Alabama.⁵ Consequently, the I-house (particularly those with shed rooms or porches) was once a ubiquitous landmark in those areas of the state settled by Anglo-Americans. However, no more than a few dozen exist today. Many of those, however, were never as finely constructed as Cotton Hill and were much more vernacular in design. Today, most of these extant I-houses also suffer from demolition by neglect because they are in remote rural areas and their floor plans are not conducive to modern living.

The construction date for Cotton Hill has not been conclusively determined. Traditionally, it was believed that the house was constructed for Luke Matthews shortly after he purchased this quarter section of land in 1830. Additional research conducted by local historians in recent years suggests that the house may have been built as early as c. 1824 by Theophilus Thomas. A brick discovered inside the west chimney during renovation bears an indecipherable number variously interpreted as 1224 (possibly relating to the number of bricks in a particular batch being burned) or 1824. Some interpret the numbers "1824" as the construction date [photo 24].⁶ Either date could be accurate based on the architectural style of the house. A construction date of c. 1828 would encompass both these dates and, therefore, seems to be a good compromise. Based on this compromise, the period of significance extends from c. 1828 to c. 1838. Most of the Native Americans had been removed from Alabama by the latter date and the early settlement period for the State was considered closed.

It also should be noted that even if Thomas was responsible for the construction of the house, he lost it in 1829 because he could not make his payments on the land. Matthews acquired it a year later. He did not sell Cotton Hill until 1873.⁷

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Exploration/Settlement

The United States' victory in the War of 1812 subdued the Indians and halted the geopolitical intrigues of England, France and Spain in the Old Southwest. Vast lands in the future states of Alabama and Mississippi were opened up for settlement by Americans. Most of the emigrants arriving in Alabama came from Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia and the state of Tennessee.

The majority of Alabama's settlers in the late territorial period lived in one of four districts, all associated with a river system. They were the old Mobile District, the Alabama River District between Wetumpka and Choctaw Bluff, the Tombigbee District (north to Tuscaloosa) and the Tennessee Valley. This latter district was the most prosperous and populous. It contained

⁵ Robert Gamble, The Alabama Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), pp. 29, 44. Cited hereafter as Alabama Catalog.

⁶ That brick is now located in the hearth of the west bedroom.

⁷ William J. Stubno, Jr., "Luke Matthews of Cotton Hill," Historic Huntsville Quarterly 31 (Spring/Summer 2005): 28, 30.

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Madison County, the Alabama territory's most populous county and the location of Huntsville. To the west of Madison County stretched vast public lands on both sides of the Tennessee River which went on sale in 1818. Seven million dollars worth of these lands were sold. It was the largest public land sale up to that time. Seven new counties were carved out of northern Alabama in short order: Cotaco (now Morgan), Jackson, Limestone, Lawrence, Lauderdale, Franklin and Blount. "The Tennessee Valley," according to Alabama historian Albert Burton Moore, "received a large population overnight, as it were, . . . the Valley was a beehive of industry and speculative activities."⁸

One member of that massive migration who bought land in Limestone County was Theophilus Thomas from North Carolina. He purchased the future house site of Cotton Hill around 1819 but forfeited the land ten years later when he could not make the payments. Thomas eventually established a plantation in Greene County, Alabama where he died in 1849. He may have had Cotton Hill constructed in the mid-1820s, but a more likely scenario is that the house was built for Luke Matthews (1796-1875) who purchased the property outright in 1830. Matthews was issued a land patent on August 1, 1831.⁹

Luke Matthews was born in Campbell County, Virginia, one of eight children. He served as a private during the War of 1812 and after that worked as a clerk in Lynchburg, Virginia. Matthews migrated to Limestone County with other family members, including his widowed mother, Judith, c. 1822.¹⁰

Like so many Virginians before them, the Matthews family probably traveled down the road that passed through the Valley of Virginia and then followed the Holston River to Knoxville, Tennessee. The road connecting Knoxville to Nashville had a branch running south from it to Huntsville. This branch was an important travel route into north Alabama by the time the Matthews family arrived.¹¹

Luke married Judith Peete in 1826. A few years later, he probably built Cotton Hill, although that is not conclusive. In any event, Luke Matthews and his family were living in the house by the early 1830s. Under Matthews' ownership, Cotton Hill became the center of a cotton plantation that encompassed over one thousand acres. In the 1840s, following the death of his first wife, he married Lucy Ann Spotswood of Huntsville. A Virginian like himself, she was also a direct descendant of colonial governor Alexander Spotswood, builder of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg. Soon thereafter, he began acquiring lands in Madison County, eventually creating the 2,400 acre Oakendale plantation. Redstone Arsenal and Thornton

⁸ Albert Burton Moore, History of Alabama and Her People, 3 vols. (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1927), I: 116-117, 120, 123.

⁹ Stubbs, pp. 26, 28-29 and Theophilus C. Thomas, Jr. in <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com>.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 39.

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Research Park are now located on that site. The plantation house has either been demolished or relocated and drastically altered.¹²

Luke Matthews was among those early Virginia settlers in Alabama who, according to historian Thomas Perkins Abernethy, "had an impact far in excess of their numbers because so many of them were persons of substance, who contributed immediately to the rapid rise of plantation culture" Cotton Hill best represents Luke Matthews' contribution to north Alabama's plantation culture.¹³

Criterion C: Architecture

Robert Gamble contends that "Frontier Alabama of the 1820s and 1830s was hardly a congenial setting for the bold, graceful interior spaces—the oval, circular, and octagonal rooms—and the elegant bowfront facades that distinguished some of the great Federal-period houses of Charleston, Richmond, and Savannah. Instead of innovative spatial settings and forceful changes of exterior massing, the style was more modestly articulated through the handling of specific features and details: in the delicately carved sunburst patterns, wire-fine reeding, and attenuated colonettes that appeared on drawing room mantelpieces; in paneled dados and molded chair-rails; in arched Palladian window openings; and in occasional fanlight doorways and spiral stairs."¹⁴

Cotton Hill with its I-house building typology and Federal style design elements exemplifies this type of plantation house on the northern Alabama frontier.

The house's interior spaces are not innovative, but, rather, stem from a common folk form of housing. In Limestone County from the early statehood period to beyond the Civil War, one of the most popular residential floor plans comprised a two-story house with a central hall flanked by a single room on each side on both stories. There was usually a one or two story rear wing. It may be connected to the main block of the house by an open breezeway or porch. Cotton Hill originally had this configuration but its rear porch or breezeway and the rear wing are no longer extant.¹⁵

Cotton Hill also originally featured a two-story, Federal style portico on its façade. This was a fairly common feature on I-houses built in the early to mid-19th century, but very few remain. Three such houses in Limestone County that survived into the latter 20th century are today no longer extant—the Tate-Ashford House near Mooresville, the Malone House near Tanner and the Matthews-Bridgeforth House near Lucas Ferry. A fourth one in Limestone County, the Maclin-Hobbs-Horton House was built in Athens in 1849 and is of wood-frame construction. It was dismantled and rebuilt near Greenbrier in a rural area of the county in the 1930s. The

¹² Stubno, pp. 29-30 and Linda Bayer Allen, "Luke Matthews in Madison County," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly* 31 (Spring/Summer 2005): pp. 35-36, 39-41.

¹³ Abernethy, p. 168.

¹⁴ *Alabama Catalog*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Gamble: Intro to Lure and Lore, pp. xvi-xvii.

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Dancy-Polk House in nearby Decatur, Morgan County provided the template for the design of Cotton Hill's new portico.¹⁶

Despite the loss of Cotton Hill's original Federal style portico, the house still retains the majority of its Federal design elements. These include Cross-and-Bible doors, built-in paneled cupboards, paneled reveals for the doors and some of the windows, entryway fanlights with attenuated muntins, molded chair rails and reeding on some of the window reveals and some of the mantels. The dining room mantel also displays a carved sunburst pattern. The reeding on some of the mantels is laid diagonally. Additionally, the house's façade features exceptionally fine brickwork laid in a Flemish bond with struck and penciled mortar joints.

Cotton Hill, despite its losses, still reads as the stylish home of an up-and-coming planter on the Alabama frontier.

Narrative History

At the time of the public land sales in Huntsville in 1818, the United States was experiencing a period of great inflation, brought about by the changes in the nation's economy as a result of the War of 1812. When the war ended, cotton became more expensive, not only due to the resuming of foreign trade, but also to the abundance of inflated currency.¹⁷

By 1818, the price of cotton rose to an all-time high, prompting land speculators to rush to buy the Tennessee Valley lands offered for sale at highly inflated prices with currency of dubious backing. Some of those speculators used Yazoo script, also known as "Mississippi stock" as part of the down payment. That script or stock, redeemable only in payment for land, was issued as compensation to those individuals swindled on the Yazoo Land Fraud¹⁸.

On February 9, 1818, Robert Taylor of Orange County, Virginia paid one-fourth of the purchase money, consisting mostly of "Mississippi stock," for the land where Cotton Hill would eventually stand. The price of the land was highly inflated at \$17.56 an acre, and the remaining payments were due in three annual installments, as indicated in his Certificate of Purchase¹⁹.

On May 10, 1819 Robert Taylor gave power of attorney in the Orange County Court to John M. Taylor of Huntsville, Alabama Territory, to sell "or assign" the certificate which would relieve him of the obligation to make the remaining payments. Shortly thereafter, Theophilus Thomas, originally from North Carolina, purchased the certificate and the payment obligations associated with it. Unfortunately, he bought the property at a time when the Bank of the United States was launching a program of monetary contraction to ensure that all notes in circulation were backed by specie (money in coin). This return to solvency resulted in a rash of bankruptcies, falling

¹⁶ Ibid., p. xviii and Chris Edwards and Faye Axford, The Lure and Lore of Limestone County (Tuscaloosa, AL: Portals Press, 1978), pp. 34-35.

¹⁷ Abernethy, pp. 64, 66-67

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 64-68.

¹⁹ Stubno, p. 26.

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prices in cotton and other commodities, and business failures that became known as the panic of 1819. This monetary contraction also increased the purchasing power of the dollar, forcing Thomas to pay the remaining debt on his land in dollars worth considerably more than before the panic. Thomas like many other individuals was not able to make the payments on land purchased from the government under these circumstances²⁰.

The inability of so many individuals to make the remaining installment payments on their land prompted Congress to pass a relief act on March 2, 1821, that enabled Thomas to spread his payments over an eight-year period, beginning on March 31, 1822, and ending with final payment on March 31, 1829. He made the arrangements for making these payments on August 30, 1821, and received a Certificate of Further Credit at that time from the Huntsville Land Office. If Thomas failed to make these payments, the land would revert back to the United States three months after the final installment was due. Thomas eventually forfeited the land for nonpayment, effective July 4, 1829.²¹

On March 31, 1830, Congress passed a law that enabled individuals to buy lands "sold on a credit, and on which a further credit has been taken, under any of the laws passed for the relief of purchasers of public lands, and which have reverted to the United States, on account of the balance due thereon not having been paid or discharges agreeably to said relief laws".²²

Luke Matthews took advantage of the first section of the law by obtaining pre-emption (the right of a settler on public land to purchase it at a fixed price to the exclusion of any other applicant) over the land previously held by Thomas until July 4, 1831, contingent upon full payment in cash at the minimum price per acre. On November 30, 1830, he made the payment well within the deadline at \$3.50 an acre, whereby he received a Final Certificate entitling him to a patent. The United States issued the patent or official title to the quarter section, on August 1, 1831.²³

Luke Matthews would expand Cotton Hill into a plantation encompassing just over one thousand acres.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Abernethy, Thomas P., The Frontier Period in Alabama, 1815-1828. University of Alabama Press, 1965.

Allen, Linda Bayer. "Luke Matthews in Madison County." Historic Huntsville Quarterly 31 (Spring/Summer 2005): 35-48.

²⁰ Daniel Feller, The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1884), p.22.

²¹ Stubno, p. 28.

²² Ibid., p.28.

²³ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

Cotton Hill

Name of Property

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County and State

Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A., Department of Archives/Special Collections, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, Alabama.

Armstrong, Cecil. Current owner, interview and e-mail correspondence.

Edwards, Chris, Axford, Faye and Gamble, Robert. The Lure and Lore of Limestone County. Portals Press, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1978.

Feller, Daniel. The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1884.

Gamble, Robert. The Alabama Catalog. Historic American Buildings Survey. A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State. The University of Alabama Press, 1987.

Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (ALA-343).

Jones, Pat. The Huntsville Times, Historic Athens Homes, June 23, 1935. Historic Scrapbook, Vol. 2 Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

Moore, Albert Burton. History of Alabama and Her People. 3 vols. Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1927.

Stubno, William J., Jr. "Luke Matthews of Cotton Hill." Historic Huntsville Quarterly 31 (Spring/Summer 2005): 25-33.

Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840, Confederate Publishing Company, University, Alabama.

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 # AL-343
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency

Cotton Hill
Name of Property

Limestone, Alabama
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☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 25

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 34.734826 | Longitude: -86.899562 |
| 2. Latitude: 34.734816 | Longitude: -86.897357 |
| 3. Latitude: 34.730161 | Longitude: -86.897352 |
| 4. Latitude: 34.730231 | Longitude: -86.899649 |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

As stated in the warranty deed for Cecil Armstrong, the current owner of the property, in 2001, "A tract or parcel of land lying and being in the Southeast Quarter of Section 36, Township 3 South, Range 4, West.

Cotton Hill
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And being more particularly described as beginning at the Southeast corner of Section 36, Township 3 South, Range 4 West; said point being in the center line of Huntsville and Brown Ferry Road: thence run North 89 degrees 50 minutes West and along the center line of Huntsville and Brown Ferry Road for a distance of 700 feet to the true point of beginning of the herein described real estate; thence run North 1 degree 30 minutes West and parallel with the East boundary of Section 36 for a distance of 1669.0 feet to an iron pin located in an old fence line for a distance of 652 feet; thence run South 1 degree 30 minutes East and parallel with the with the East Boundary for a distance of 1669.0 feet to a railroad spike located in the center line of the Huntsville and Brown Ferry Road; thence run South 89 degrees 50 minutes East and along the center line of Huntsville and Brown Ferry Road for a distance of 652 feet to the point of beginning. Said tract contains 25 acres, more or less, and being subject to one-half of the rights-of ways of the Huntsville and Brown Ferry Road.

See the aerial photograph of the property included with this nomination.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These are the boundaries currently associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: William Lakin Boyd, Robert Gamble & Susan Enzweiler (AHC NR Coordinator)
organization: Limestone County Historical Society & Alabama Historical Commission
street & number: 426 Eustis Ave. S.E.; 468 S. Perry St.
city or town: Huntsville; Montgomery state: Alabama zip code: 35801; 36104
e-mail lakinboyd@comcast.net & susan.enzweiler@preserveala.org
telephone: 256-534-7749; 334-230-2644
date: August 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Cotton Hill
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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Cotton Hill

City or Vicinity: Tanner

County: Limestone

State: Alabama

Photographer: Susan Enzweiler

Date Photographed: March 5, 2014 (photos #1-6) & June 16, 2014 (photos #7-29)

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0001)

Allee leading to Cotton Hill and pecan groves, camera facing N

Photo 2 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0002)

Façade of Cotton Hill, camera facing N

Photo 3 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0003)

Façade and west (side) elevation; stone pump house, camera facing NE

Photo 4 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0004)

East elevation; garage/guest house, camera facing W

Photo 5 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0005)

Façade and southeast corner of Cotton Hill, camera facing W

Photo 6 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0006)

Barn/workshop; outbuilding (in distance), camera facing NE

Photo 7 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0007)

First floor central hall, camera facing S

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Photo 8 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0008)
First floor central hall, camera facing N

Photo 9 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0009)
Parlor, camera facing E

Photo 10 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0010)
Detail of parlor mantel, camera facing SE

Photo 11 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0011)
Detail of woodwork in parlor, camera facing NE

Photo 12 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0012)
Dining room, camera facing W

Photo 13 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0013)
Detail of dining room mantel, camera facing NW

Photo 14 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0014)
Dining room, camera facing S

Photo 15 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0015)
Kitchen in the c. 1985 wing, camera facing S

Photo 16 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0016)
C. 1985 wing's lateral hall behind the central hall's original rear doors, camera facing E

Photo 17 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0017)
Family room in the c. 1985 wing, camera facing N

Photo 18 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0018)
Second floor hall, camera facing NW

Photo 19 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0019)
Second floor hall, camera facing SW

Photo 20 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0020)
East second floor bedroom, camera facing E

Photo 21 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0021)
Detail of east bedroom mantel, camera facing SE

Photo 22 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0022)
West second floor bedroom, camera facing SW

Cotton Hill

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Photo 23 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0023)

West second floor bedroom, camera facing NE

Photo 24 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0024)

Brick with number on west bedroom's hearth, camera facing down

Photo 25 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0025)

Attic staircase, camera facing W

Photo 26 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0026)

Attic, camera facing E

Photo 27 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0027)

Basement, camera facing W

Photo 28 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0028)

West wall of basement, camera facing NW

Photo 29 (AL_LimestoneCounty_CottonHill_0029)

East wall of basement, camera facing SE

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 to amend existing 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. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Cotton Hill
Name of Property

Limestone, Alabama
County and State

Cotton Hill, 23789 Huntsville-Brownsferry Road East, Limestone County, AL



Cotton Hill, 23789 Huntsville - Brownsferry Road East, Limestone County, AL



23789 Huntsville Brownsferry Rd, Athens, AL 35613 Google

3

4

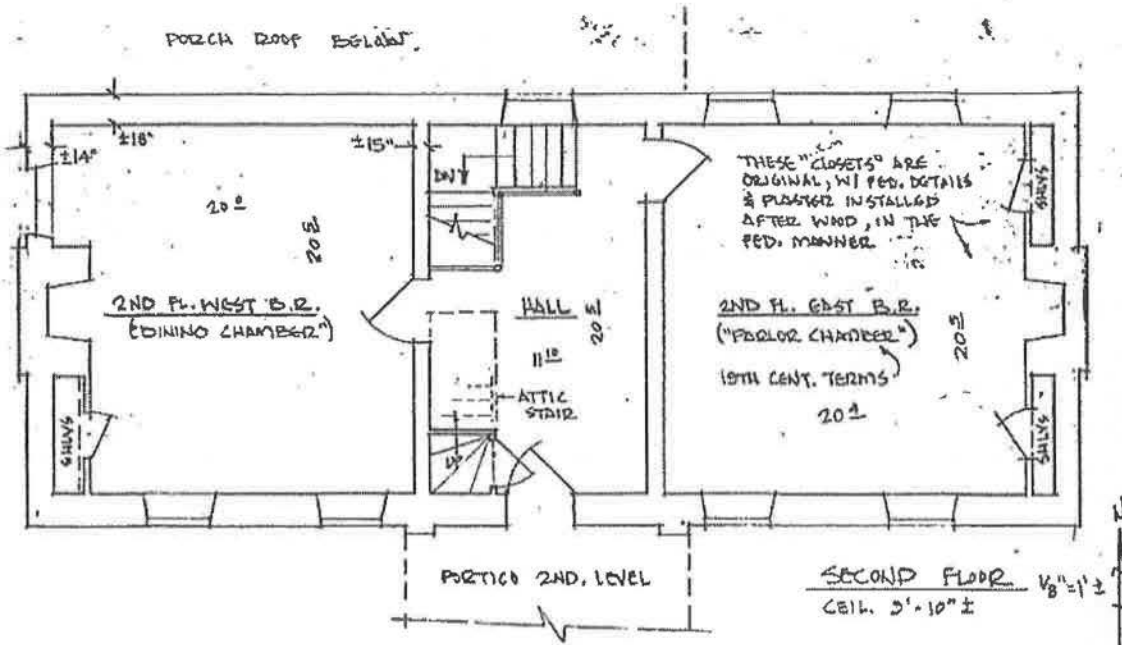
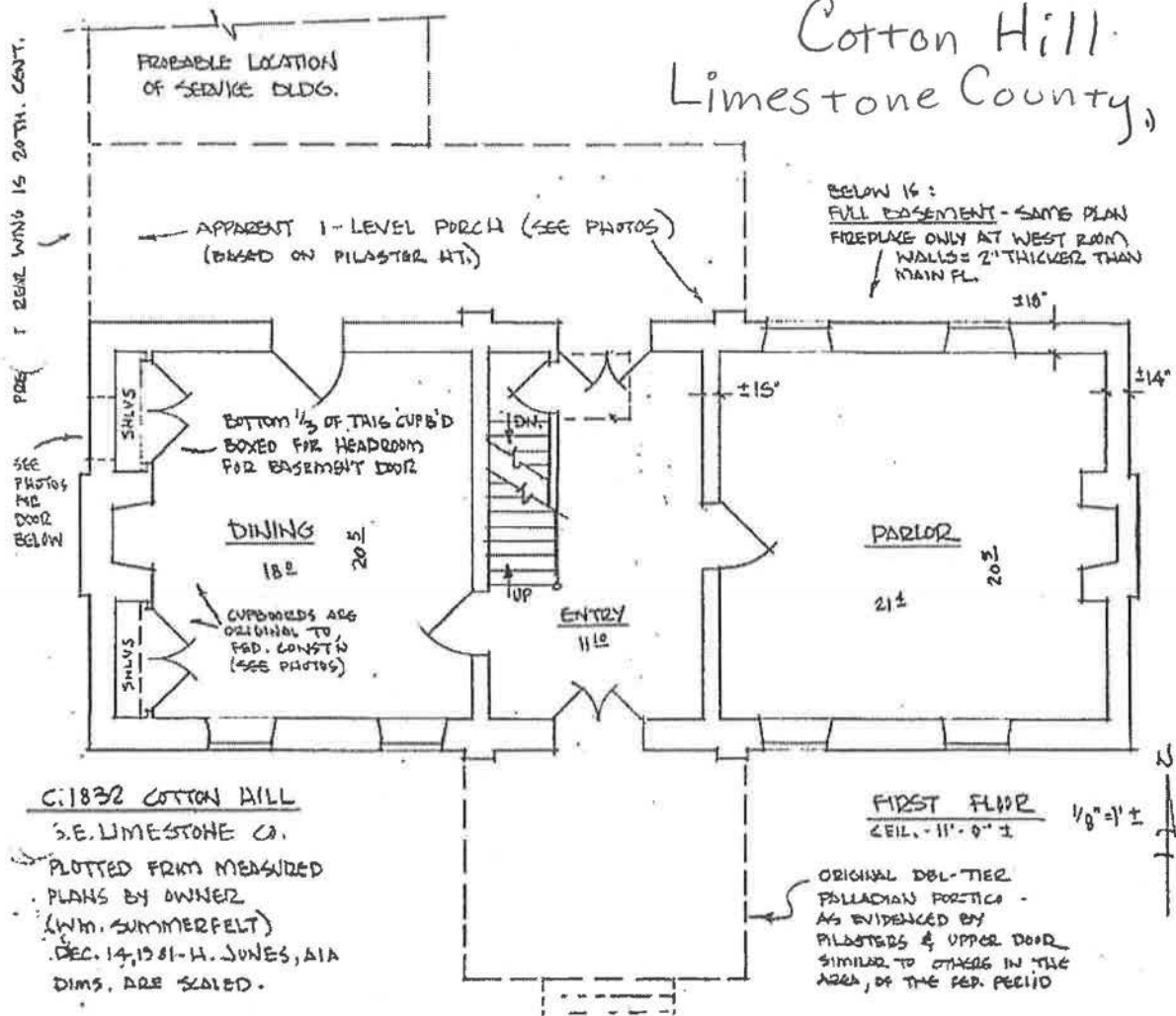
597 ft

1999

Imagery Date: 11/29/2013

Lat 34.732639 Lon -86.8880340 elev 656 ft eye alt 23

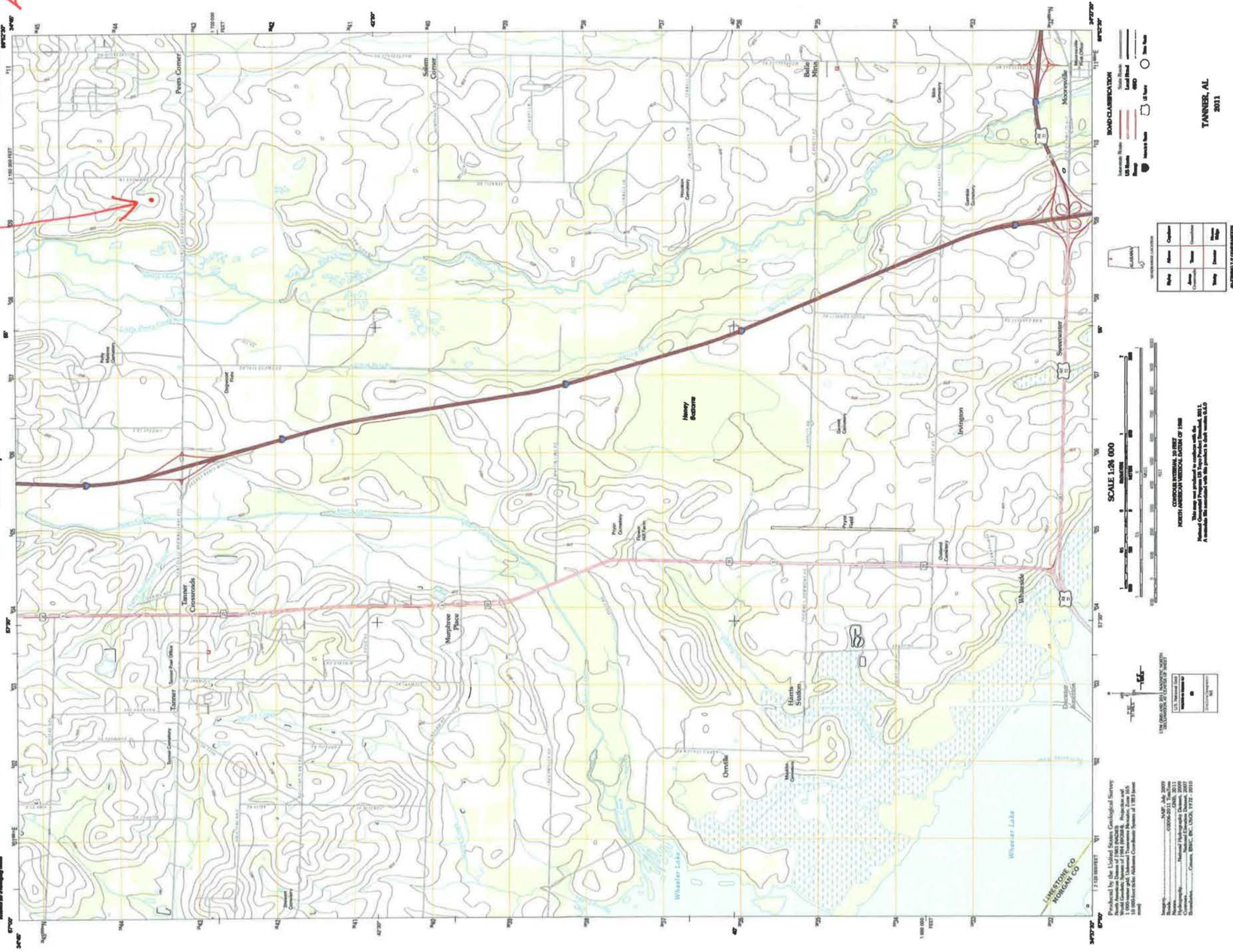
Cotton Hill Limestone County, AL



Floor plan of Cotton Hill as built. Drawings by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy
Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville

He

The National Map
US Topo

TANNER, AL
2011





























































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Cotton Hill
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ALABAMA, Limestone

DATE RECEIVED: 10/24/14 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/14/14
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/01/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/10/14
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14001003

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 12-10-14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

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

August 18, 2014

Susan Enzweiler
National Register Coordinator
State of Alabama
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, AL 36130-0900



Dear Ms. Enzweiler:

I am honored that my home, Cotton Hill, 23789 Huntsville-Brownsferry Road East, Athens, Alabama, is being considered by the Alabama Historical Commission Review Board for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

I am in agreement with this nomination.

Sincerely,


Cecil O. Armstrong

Limestone County Commission

*Chairman
Stanley Menefee*

*Administrator
Pam Ball*



*Commissioners:
Gary Daly
Steve Turner
Bill Latimer
Ben Harrison*

September 4, 2014



Alabama Historical Commission
Susan Enzweiler, National Register Coordinator
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900

Dear Ms. Enzweiler:

I eagerly recommend that the Cotton Hill property in Limestone County, Alabama be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. This property is located at 23789 Huntsville-Brownsferry Road East, Athens, Alabama.

These beautiful historic dwellings and property are within a few miles from where I grew up and where I presently live. This property is a historical landmark noticed by all who travel Huntsville-Brownsferry Road.

On behalf of the Limestone County Commission it would be an honor to have Cotton Hill on this esteemed national list of historic properties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanley Menefee".
Stanley Menefee, Chairman
Limestone County Commission



STATE OF ALABAMA
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
468 SOUTH PERRY STREET
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130-0900



October 15, 2014

FRANK W. WHITE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TEL: 334-242-3184
FAX: 334-240-3477

Ms. Carol Shull
Keeper of the National Register
U. S. Department of the Interior, NPS
Cultural Resources
National Register, History & Education Programs
1201 "I" Street NW (2280)
Washington, D. C. 20005

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the nomination and supporting documentation to be considered for listing the following Alabama resource in the National Register of Historic Places:

Cotton Hill
Athens, Limestone County, Alabama

Your consideration of the enclosed National Register of Historic Places nomination is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

LAW/sme/nw

Enclosures