

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUL 17 1978
DATE ENTERED 16 478

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 Reuben Davis House
AND/OR COMMON
Sunset Hill

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
803 West Commerce Street
CITY, TOWN
Aberdeen
STATE
Mississippi
VICINITY OF
Second
COUNTY
Monroe
CODE
28
CODE
095
NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Mrs. W. Emerson Jones
STREET & NUMBER
803 West Commerce Street
CITY, TOWN
Aberdeen
STATE
Mississippi 39730
VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Office of the Chancery Clerk
Monroe County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
Chestnut Street
CITY, TOWN
Aberdeen
STATE
Mississippi 39730

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic American Buildings Survey
DATE
1936
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Library of Congress
CITY, TOWN
Washington
STATE
D.C. 20540
 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Reuben Davis House is a two-story frame residence situated prominently on the south side of Commerce Street, just west of the Aberdeen town center. The first of its two construction phases occurred in 1847, with expansion/remodeling taking place in 1853. Striking variations in the interior millwork and the uneven floor in the second-story center hall attest to the two building programs.

The north (front) elevation features a Doric-order hexastyle portico with eight massive fluted columns. The narrower intercolumniation of the two outer bays, corresponding to the two recessed side galleries, emphasizes the three center bays. Further articulating the five bays of the north wall are paneled pilasters, two of which flank the central frontispiece entrance inspired by Plate 28 of Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter.

The portico is crowned by a low-rise metal-seamed hip roof with ridge pole running east-west, perpendicular to twin hip-roof extensions which share a central valley on the east and west sides of the rear section of the house. On the east elevation the side gallery extends out from the main house, with two chimneys rising on the north and south ends of the rear section. The side gallery on the west elevation is continuous with the rear section, with gable-roof porte-cochère attached. The south (rear) elevation has a one-story gable-roof children's nursery with an exterior end chimney at the west corner of the facade. A shed-roof screened sun porch and gable-roof kitchen, both later additions, are located on the east side. The house is supported by a brick foundation wall and has a dug cellar.

The original kitchen was located in a structure, no longer extant, on the southwest side, connected to the house by a walkway now used as the porte-cochère. A carriage house, barn, and slaves' cabins were located south of the residence in an area now subdivided and occupied by several smaller homes.

The conventional center-hall interior plan is varied by the addition of a back service stair on the southwest end of the house, leading originally to a second-floor hallway that provided access to the north and south chambers on the west side of the house. The former hall, blocked off and used for closet space, extended west to the second-floor center hall. On the first floor the center hall runs the full length of the house, providing access to the four main rooms; a double-run staircase leads to the second floor.

Benjamin-meander fretwork on the pilasters of the frontispiece entrance is repeated on the two Asher Benjamin-inspired chimney pieces in the north and south parlors on the east side. The chimney piece on the northwest wall has a Greek key design on the frieze, with Benjamin-meanders on the pilasters. The first-floor chimney pieces on the west side of the house vary considerably: that in the north room has a projecting, flat-faced pediment with acroteria supporting the shelf; the one in the south room features simple wood trim and curved shelf; and the smaller-scale nursery chimney piece is enriched with an

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---------------|--|---|---|--|
| __PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> __ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> __COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> __LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> __RELIGION |
| __1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> __ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> __CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> __LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> __SCIENCE |
| __1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> __AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> __ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> __LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> __SCULPTURE |
| __1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> __ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> __EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> __MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> __SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| __1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> __ART | <input type="checkbox"/> __ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> __MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> __THEATER |
| __1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> __COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> __EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> __PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> __TRANSPORTATION |
| __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

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Reuben Davis House is an imposing example of the Greek Revival style popular in the South during the prosperous years before the Civil War. The dramatic monumentality of the archtypical Greek Revival Doric portico is expressed through massive scale, exaggerated horizontality, and subtle use of entasis in the columns. Constructed in 1847 by D. F. Alexander (Deed Book 13:283) and extensively remodeled and expanded in 1853 by William Reid Cunningham (Deed Book 16:541), the house exhibits major stylistic references to Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter (1830) and Practice of Architecture (1833). Well known also as the residence of Reuben Davis, prominent attorney, statesman, and author, the property has assumed important historical associations for the town of Aberdeen and the State of Mississippi.

Incorporated in 1837, Aberdeen (population 6,157) is said to contain more antebellum homes than any other Mississippi town comparable in size (Aberdeen Examiner, March 13, 1972). The early growth of the community was fostered by the development of an active cotton port facility on the Tombigbee River. The town was made the county seat in 1849 and attained a population of 5,000 by 1850. Its prosperity and economic growth diminished, however, after the Mobile and Ohio Railway Company's plans to construct a line through Aberdeen during the 1850s were not encouraged by local planters. The line was constructed eight miles west of the town.

Architecturally, the Reuben Davis House epitomizes the material excesses of successful business entrepreneurs and cotton planters in the South before the Civil War. William Reid Cunningham, responsible for the 1853 construction, also owned a plantation containing 2,240 acres and 104 slaves west of Aberdeen in the Black Prairie, a fertile, relatively treeless region which was a stronghold of cotton cultivation.

Cunningham produced in his residence a monumental if not heavy-handed exercise exemplary of the period. The frontispiece entrance introduces the Greek Revival theme to the interior, where it is further expressed by chimney pieces and Asher Benjamin-inspired millwork. Ceiling centerpieces said to have been located in the first-floor center hall and east parlors are no longer extant, apparently destroyed after blasting for construction of nearby Davis Street (Mrs. Richard Kolb, Writers Project).

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Aberdeen (Miss.) Examiner. May 20, 1937; March 13, 1972.

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi. 2 vols. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1891. 1:632-634; 2:42, 43, 135, 250, 252, 255.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Three

QUADRANGLE NAME Aberdeen, Miss.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 356000 3743660

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots numbered One (1) and Two (2) of the Colonial Heights Subdivision of the City of Aberdeen, Monroe County, Mississippi, Said Colonial Heights Subdivision being a

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

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jack A. Gold, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE

July, 1978

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 X

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

Elmer B. Hilliard

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

July 13, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

for Charles [Signature]
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11.16.78

ATTEST: CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

Ann A. Gilmore

DATE

11/15/78

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| DATE ENTERED | NOV 16 1978 |

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 6,7,8 PAGE 1

6 - REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Statewide Survey of Historic Sites
1974 X State
Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Jackson Mississippi 39205

7 - DESCRIPTION

inset four-pointed arch, imposts, pilasters, and bases. The second-floor chimney pieces all share similar Greek Revival characteristics, each decorated with pilasters and entablature.

Millwork on the first floor displays interesting period variations. Doorways and windows in the parlors feature battered and eared architrave trim with paneled transoms, while in the southwest parlor the window and door trim is symmetrically banded with corner blocks embellished with turned rosettes.

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

In 1869 the property was purchased by Reuben Davis, prominent prosecuting attorney for Mississippi's Sixth Judicial District from 1835 to 1839, judge of the High Court of Appeals in 1842, and colonel in the Second Regiment of Mississippi Volunteers to the Mexican War. He was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1855 and to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1857. Davis withdrew from the latter body in 1861 to become the Monroe County candidate for the state secession convention. The same year he was elected the Mississippi representative to the Confederate Congress in Richmond, Virginia. During the Civil War he served in the Confederate Army as a brigadier general and in 1863 ran unsuccessfully for governor. Davis resumed his law practice in Aberdeen after the war and moved from his former Aberdeen residence, Suristan, to the house on Commerce Street. His reminiscences were published in Atlantic Monthly and appeared in book form in 1889 as Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians.

After Davis's death in 1890, his former property was held by a succession of owners, including his grandniece, Mrs. Edmonia Nichols, from 1937 to 1943 (Deed Book 106:162). During the 1940s the home was divided into apartments and deteriorated considerably. Drs. Chester and Catherine Brummett purchased the property in 1948 (Deed Book 121:411) and were responsible for its preservation. The present owner, Mrs. W. Emerson Jones, is planning further restoration work.

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ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Crocker, Mary Wallace. "Nineteenth Century Builder's Guides: Influence on Mississippi Architecture," Home Economics Research Journal, September, 1977, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 21-37.
- Gold, Jack A., architectural historian. Personal inspection, March 19, 1978.
- Hamilton, Charles. "Sunset Hill," Aberdeen (Miss.) Examiner. February 23, 1978.
- Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964.
- Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson. Subject File. Aberdeen.
- Monroe County, Mississippi. Chancery Clerk. Deed Books 7:658; 13:74, 283; 16:541; 21:305; 24:383, 385, 386; 74:219; 84:284; 88:424.
- Peacock, Lucille. Historical Sketches of Aberdeen, Mississippi. Aberdeen, 1961.
- Rodabough, John. "Port of Aberdeen," Aberdeen Examiner. February 17, 1972.
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- Smith, J. Frazer. White Pillars. New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1941.
- United States. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules, Lowndes County, Mississippi, 1850.
- United States Congress. Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1774-1949. Washington. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961.
- United States. Works Progress Administration. Monroe County, Mississippi. Source Material for Mississippi History: Writers Project. Compiled by Mrs. Richard Kolb and Georgia Dortch, 1935, 1936. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson. Subject File. Aberdeen.

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10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA (Verbal Boundary Description)

subdivision of Block "C" and located in that part of the aforesaid City of Aberdeen known as "New Aberdeen," a plat of which subdivision is of record in the Chancery Clerk's Office of Monroe County, Mississippi, in Plat Book No. 1 at page 130 thereof. The lots are more particularly described as follows, to-wit: Beginning at the Northeast Corner of Lot No. 1 and running thence West along the South side of Commerce Street one hundred and sixty-three feet (163) to a point; thence South two hundred and fifty-three feet (253) to a point, which point is the Southwest Corner of Lot Two (2) of the aforesaid subdivision; thence East one hundred and sixty-three feet (163) to the Southeast Corner of the aforesaid Lot Two (2); thence North two hundred and fifty-three feet (253) to the point of beginning.