

OCT 27 1987

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name McMahon, John, House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Corner South Lane and Jefferson Street NA not for publication
city, town Courtland NA vicinity
state Alabama code AL county Lawrence code 079 zip code 35618

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

[Signature] 10-20-87
Signature of certifying official Date
Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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:) _____

Amy Schlager Dec 11, 1987

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic - single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Brick

roof Tin
other Weatherboard addition

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION

The McMahon House is a two-story, five-bay, I-house with a one-story ell projecting from the northeast corner. The house is constructed in brick laid in common bond and has an end gable roof flanked on either side by an interior chimney. Built c. 1828, the house has maintained its integrity remarkably well. A framed kitchen wing was added to the east side of the house in the late 1880s. Some time before the turn-of-the-century, the orientation of the main entrance was changed from the south to the north and in c. 1945 a 3/4 length porch was added to the south elevation. The interior plan and interior woodwork are virtually unchanged since it was constructed.

* * * * *

The main mass of the McMahon House measures 52 feet wide by 24 feet deep. Both the north and south elevations have five bays with the low, paneled entrance doors centrally located. The narrow, 9/9 double-hung sash windows are placed singly in symmetrical rows and topped by flat brick lintels. The windows are flanked by louver shutters with original hardware.

Originally, the main orientation of the house faced south across an expansive lawn with a dining room ell extending to the rear (or north). A small pedimented portico once sheltered the original front (or south) entrance. Ghost marks of the Tuscan-order pilasters, with astragal moldings that once flanked this doorway can still be discerned. Some time in the late 1800s, the house was reoriented to the north to face the present Highway 20, and the present small entrance porch was constructed. In c. 1940, a one-story, 3/4 length porch with a railed upstairs deck was added to the south elevation and a second-story central door with transom replaced the original central window to provide access to the deck.

Extending from the north elevation is an original one-story, gabled roof dining room wing. It measures approximately 25-feet long and 19-feet wide with two narrow, 9/9 double-hung sash windows on the east and west elevations. There is a flush end chimney on the north elevation. Extending from the east elevation of the main house is an 18-foot by 16-foot, one-story frame addition. Built in c. 1880, this kitchen wing has a steep gabled roof and a screened porch with a shed roof on its north elevation. The main mass of the house as well as its extensions are covered with a standing seam metal roof.

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The house has a single-pile linear plan featuring a central hall and flanking rooms. The hall features an open string, reversed flight of stairs with a landing. The fine detailing includes slender turned balustrades and newels, decorative running brackets under the return nosing of the threads, and decorative knobs under the stair return. The two main first-story rooms, dining room and second-story bedrooms feature finely executed Federal mantelpieces from standard patternbook designs. In the dining room and both upstairs and downstairs east rooms, the mantelpieces are flanked by handsomely paneled chimney cupboards. Other notable elements in the house include original floorboards, narrow baseboards, molded chairrails, and six-paneled doors with original hardware. The only interior modification to the house is an early twentieth-century bathroom located in the south half of the second-story hall.

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

John Jordan McMahon is the earliest documented owner of the McMahon house. Family tradition says that the structure, which occupies lot #292 on the original (1818) town plot, was completed by 1828, though its original owner is not altogether clear.

Born on October 22, 1805, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, McMahon migrated to the Tennessee Valley of Alabama in the 1820s. He settled in Courtland to manage a branch of a Huntsville mercantile firm owned by fellow Virginian Andrew Bierne. He quickly prospered and was soon joined by his parents who came to Alabama to be near their son and settled on a plantation not far from Courtland.

On August 20, 1835, McMahon married Harriet Catherine Shackelford (born November 16, 1812), daughter of local physician, Dr. Jack Shackelford. Dr. Shackelford was a native of Richmond, Virginia and was an early settler of Courtland. In 1835, Dr. Shackelford organized the legendary "Red Rovers," a company of military volunteers who joined the struggle against Mexico for Texas independence. The company was captured near Goliad and executed. Dr. Shackelford's life was spared in order to aid the Mexican wounded. "Remember the Goliad" became a rallying cry for the Mexican war.

John and Harriet McMahon had four children: Fortunatus Shackelford (Nate), (b. 1836); William Jackson (b. 1839); Robert B. (b. 1845); and Lillie (b. 1850). John McMahon spent many years in New Orleans as a cotton broker, leaving his family in Courtland. McMahon died on June 3, 1857.

During the Civil War, both Fortunatus and William Jackson served as surgeons in the Confederate Army. Their younger brother, Robert, was in the Confederate cavalry and rode with an outfit known as "Roddy's Bull Pups," a group of young men who acted as bodyguards for General Roddy.

After the war, Dr. Fortunatus McMahon returned to Courtland and set up practice. A nameplate inscribed "Doctor McMahon" is still on the north door of the McMahon House. Dr. McMahon moved to New Orleans, leaving the house to be occupied by his spinster sister, Miss Lillie McMahon. It was Miss McMahon who added the frame kitchen addition in the 1880s.

At Miss McMahon's death in 1941, the house and property were inherited by her niece, Mrs. Louise French of New Orleans. Louise was married in c. 1898 to Terrance Evans French, a cotton broker from Seacombs, Cheshire, England. The Frenches used the Courtland home as a summer retreat away from hot and humid New Orleans.

Mrs. French died in 1972 leaving the house to her daughter, Louise French Harris, and son, Terrance (Ted) French, Jr. The house was used only as an occasional retreat by their heirs until donated to the Alabama Historical Commission in 1987.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Exploration/Settlement

Period of Significance

c. 1828 - c. 1890s

Significant Dates

c. 1828

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Person

NA

Architect/Builder

NA

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

INTEGRITY

The McMahon House has retained its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The exterior of the house has undergone minor changes which include an 1880s addition and a 1940s porch. The interior has undergone little change to plan and architectural details. None of the outbuildings remain which were located to the northeast of the house.

The house has suffered from constant drainage problems induced several years ago by the regrading of Highway 20 which passes by the north of the house. A portion of the northwest corner wall subsequently collapsed in the fall of 1986. Efforts have been made to stabilize the structure.

CRITERION C - ARCHITECTURE

The McMahon House is architecturally significant as a surviving example of an early Alabama Federal-style domestic structure that reflects the carryover of 18th- and early 19th-century Atlantic Seaboard architectural forms introduced to Alabama by native Virginia settlers. The characteristic form includes the tall, symmetrical original facade with the prominent chimneys at each end of the gable roof. The McMahon is one of the oldest brick dwellings still surviving in North Alabama, and is one of only six two-story brick dwellings south of the Tennessee River believed to pre-date 1830. It is estimated that less than 50 Federal-style brick dwellings survive throughout the state. The significance of the McMahon House is seen in the sophisticated Federal-style interior woodwork which is virtually unchanged since its construction. This includes the staircase, six mantelpieces and built-in cupboards.

CRITERION A - EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

The McMahon House is significant for its association with the establishment of the cotton economy in the Tennessee Valley area of northern Alabama by descendants of planter and mercantile families of Virginia. The original owner, John McMahon, was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He emigrated to northern Alabama in the early 1820s to manage a cotton mercantile firm owned by a fellow Virginian. This migration pattern into northern Alabama was common amongst Virginia-born immigrants during this period.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Alabama Records Vol. 89

Alabama Department of Archives and History, May 1947.

Gentry, Dorothy. Life and Legend of Lawrence County, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1962.

Interview with Jim Harris, descendant of John McMahon (graduate student University of Colorado, editing family papers) April 1987.

Tidewater Cottages in the Tennessee Valley (John Johnson House/The Green Onion), National Register of Historic Places Thematic Nomination, Alabama Historical Commission, 7/9/86.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than 2 acres

UTM References

A

1	6
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4	7	1	9	8	0
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3	8	3	6	1	3	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description A portion of Lot 292, Town of Courtland, Lawrence County. Begin at the point of the intersection of the South lane of Jefferson Street with the East lane of Van Buren Street in Courtland, Alabama, (the Point of Beginning) then run South 335 feet, then run East 250 feet, then run North 140 feet, then run West 15 feet, then run North 190 feet, then run West 225 feet to the Point of Beginning. Also known as the McMahon property with the Lawrence County tax number 42-07-09-30-04-002-04.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the house and the city lot that historically has always been associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steven M. Kay/Cultural Resources Coordinator
organization Alabama Historical Commission date June 1987
street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 205 261-3184
city or town Montgomery state Alabama zip code 36130

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

