

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received SEP 5 1985

date entered

1. Name

historic Historic Resources of Gainesville, Alabama
(Historic Archaeological Sites and Historic Properties)
and/or common

2. Location

street & number Section 2 on South Side of Tombigbee River and NA not for publication
R2W, T21N Section 11city, town Gainesville NA vicinity of Congressional District 7state Alabama code 01 county Sumter code 119

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 type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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
	<u>NA</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
Multiple Resources		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership

street & number

city, town Livingston NA vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Judge's Officestreet & number Sumter County Courthousecity, town Livingston state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate 1970-present ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ localdepository for survey records Alabama Historical Commissioncity, town Montgomery state Alabama

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☒ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☒ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☒ moved date 1970

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Multiple Resources of Gainesville contain some 34 architecturally and historically significant buildings. Most of the buildings themselves date between 1832 and 1910, with the majority predating 1880. The latter year roughly marks the end of Gainesville's days as a prosperous river port. Twenty-three buildings predate the War Between the States, and of these, two retain a small complex of early dependencies. Few of the buildings have been significantly altered to a point where the original fabric has been lost.

The entire Historic Resource area lies on the south bank of the Tombigbee River a mile and a half below the Gainesville Lock and Dam. This tract included two districts which contain most of the town of Gainesville as it was originally platted between 1832 and 1835 as well as contiguous buildings to the east, south and west which are intimately linked to the community's history. Bisecting the resource area from north to south is Alabama Highway 39 (McKee Street). This main thoroughfare is paralleled to the west by Webster Street, and to the east by Sanders and Church Streets. Intersecting these four north-south arteries are the cross streets of Pearl, Chestnut and Spruce. Within a grid defined by these thoroughfares, and along Main or "Yankee" Street which runs east from McKee Street atop the bluff overlooking the river, are concentrated most of the extant structures which contribute to the history and physical character of Gainesville. The boundaries of the two districts of the Multiple Resource Area were drawn to include the historic core of the community as it developed after 1832 and to embrace all significant historical components, as well as notable vistas and linkage. Excluded are areas within the original town limits, which although projected, were never developed or have developed since the period during which Gainesville achieved the zenith of its importance. Also included in the resource area is the park and pavilion which is a triangular plot of land formed by the convergence of State and McKee Streets. This park dates from the ante-bellum period and includes a pavilion which is an opened framed structure dating from the 1850s, an enclosed well and brick watering trough.

The architecture found within the Multiple Resource Area reflects the area's shifting socio-economic patterns; from simple structures exhibiting little if any formal pretense of style, to homes, to buildings showing the successive influence of Federal, Greek Revival, and early Victorian tastes. As in most relatively isolated pre-industrial communities, the architecture of Gainesville is characterized by local preference and idiosyncracies, the origins of which are not altogether clear. Of special note is the recurrence during the mid-19th century of an interior arrangement which was different from the typical central-hall plan favored in Alabama architecture. Instead, a "two-room" plan is employed, with no bisecting passage and double front entrances. Inside, a wide doorway with hinged or sliding double-leaf doors usually connects the two front rooms.

Another local architectural trait is the elongated facade which was favored for several mid-19th century Gainesville residences. Practically speaking, such a ground plan facilitated cross ventilation, a major consideration in a region where hot, rather than cold, weather was the determinant in building.

Although many early buildings, including virtually the entire 19th century business district, have disappeared over the years--victims of neglect, fire, and ill-advised demolition--more than thirty dwellings, churches and stores, survive with the majority

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dating from the 1800s in a semi-rural and largely unspoiled setting. The physical layout of the original community remains clearly discernible in the street patterns, vistas, and interrelationships of buildings and complexes within the resource area. Several grassy thoroughfares, no longer utilized, are nevertheless kept open by the municipality, creating green alley-like vistas at several points throughout the community. Although few of the dependencies that formerly surrounded the larger houses remain today, most of the 19th century residences retain their large fenced lots. One-story buildings of frame construction predominate in the area. However, the Mobley House also known as "The Magnolia" with its colossal order, pedimented tetrastyle Ionic portico, represents the zenith of the Greek Revival period in Gainesville's history. The Magnolia which lies within the Gainesville Historic District was previously added to the National Register of Historic Places in January, 1982.

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 checked="" 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1832-1900 Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion A - Agriculture, Commerce:

The Historic Resources of Gainesville are significant as part of the town of Gainesville and the area immediately surrounding it that grew into a major river port in western Alabama through the development of an agricultural complex based on cotton as the main crop. During its mid-19th century heyday, Gainesville was one of western Alabama's most important trade centers. The town ranked as the second leading port on the Tombigbee River behind only Columbus, Mississippi which was approximately eighty miles upstream. The area is located at the northern edge of a broad strip of fertile prairie land that forms part of the Alabama "Blackbelt," and was the cotton-shipping point and social and economic locus for the flourishing agricultural district. During the 1880s the Tombigbee River declined as an avenue for shipping, having been replaced by the rapidly expanding railroad systems and the town began its gradual decline in importance. By the early 20th century most of the commercial buildings of the town had been abandoned and had disappeared leaving only the residences and churches intact.

Criterion C - Architecture

The architecture of the historic resources of Gainesville reflects the shifting socio-economic patterns of the area. The architecture ranges from simple buildings with little if any formal pretense of style to houses exhibiting the successive influence of Federal, Greek Revival and early Victorian taste. The architecture found throughout the resource area is characterized by local preferences and idiosyncracies, the origins of which are not altogether clear.

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Historic Resources of Gainesville

Gainesville is located on a spur of elevated land in a sandy wooded bluff overlooking the Tombigbee River and the low-lying swamplands and rich bottom-lands to the north, east, and west. By the terms of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, of 1829, the future town site was conveyed to an early settler named Coleman who had taken an Indian wife and settled among the Chickasaws. Three years later, in 1832, Coleman sold the 400-acre tract to Col. Moses Lewis, a New Hampshire born entrepreneur who subsequently hired Issac Wright to survey the land. Wright layed the town off into lots oriented 12 degrees east to north, and following the usual grid pattern. Col. Lewis named the new town Gainesville in honor of his friend George Strother Gaines, agent to the Choctaws and a figure instrumental in the settlement of west central Alabama.

Between 1835 and 1837--a period which an early Gainesville resident, the humorist Joseph G. Baldwin, later recalled as "that golden era, when shinplasters were the sole currency; when bank-bills were 'as thick as autumn leaves in Vallambrosa,' and credit was a franchise"--the community flourished. Settlers from older parts of Alabama, and from the Carolinas and Virginia, were joined by an influx of New Englanders, due, perhaps, to the influence of Moses Lewis. Annually, 6,000 bales of cotton were shipped down river to Mobile, and in 1836, as indicative of Gainesville's prospects and status, the imposing American Hotel was erected. Two-and-a-half stories high, with broad double galleries across the front and an ornate two-tiered belvidere, the hotel became the symbolic locus of the town.

Although hard-hit by the Panic of 1837, Gainesville soon assumed a more solid character and entered upon half a century as an entrepot for the planters of the upper Tombigbee. While most of the structures surviving today cannot be dated precisely, at least five buildings appear to have been erected before 1840. The oldest is the William Colgin House or "Colgin Hill," a clapboard-covered log dwelling, reputedly first erected on the bluff overlooking the river and moved, in 1832, to its present location on the southern outskirts of Gainesville, where it was afterward remodeled as it stands today.

The Lewis-Long House, which occupies Block No. 1 on the original town plat, would also seem to date from the same period, both because of its association with the founding family and its conservative exterior architectural demeanor. Inside, a graceful stairway as well as mantelpieces and door and window surrounds are doubtless inspired by designs published in Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter (1830) and The Practice of Architecture (1833). The restrained Federal air of the Stein-Garth House suggests that it may also have been built during the 1830s. Local tradition assigns the Roberts-Parham and Minniece-Robert Houses to the same decade, although the original appearance of both structures has been obscured by later alterations.

The minutes of the Presbyterian Church, Gainesville's oldest house of worship, reveal that the congregation was organized in April of 1837 through the joint efforts of a small group of Southern-born Presbyterians and New England Congregationalists, including the Lewises. That same month, a contract was awarded for the construction of the present building, which was opened for services the following year. Except for the renovation of the pulpit dais and the removal of the paneled pew-gates, this

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Historic Resources of Gainesville

edifice has been little-altered since its completion. A large U-shaped slave gallery is supported by Tuscan colonnettes, while the tall four-part sash windows are protected by fixed, louvered exterior blinds.

Throughout the ante-bellum period, Gainesville's architecture mirrored the town's close commercial ties with Mobile. It is conceivable, in fact, that the two-room plan already mentioned as a characteristic of mid-century domestic building may be traced to Mobile. In addition, the important Russell-Woodruff-Turrentine House, now shorn of its dormers and badly deteriorated, echoes the traditional story-and-a-half raised or "Creole" cottage style which abounded in Mobile, Pensacola, and along the Gulf coast during the 19th Century. Certainly, the Greek Revival elements employed at Aduston Hall (1844) and the Travis-Harwood House (1846)--erected as summer homes for the Travis family of Mobile, and at the contemporary Green G. Mobley House, reflect the sophisticated interpretation of neo-classical motifs introduced to the Gulf city by James Gallier and Charles and James Dakin.

The two-story Mobley House, with its colossal-order, pedimented tetrastyle Ionic portico, represents--along with the long-destroyed Whitsett House on Yankee Street--what is perhaps the zenith of the Greek Revival period in Gainesville. Surrounded by extensive grounds and with its garden enclosed by a century-old brick wall, the Mobley House--also known as The Magnolia--occupies a key position in the historic area. The Greek Revival influence emanating from Mobile is also suggested in the Howard-Goodloe-Bolton House, reminiscent of Mobile's 1836 Beale House, as well as in the now enlarged Meek-Mitchell-Norwood House.

The two-story Cash House (ca. 1840), which stands opposite the Mobley House, represents a simpler application of neo-classical principles, with its pedimented two-tiered porch. Elsewhere in the district, the Schiffman-Syring House, a small one-and-a-half story residence recalling the Greek Revival cottages of the Northeast and Midwest, illustrates the utilization of classically-derived ornamentation to embellish an otherwise totally unpretentious structure in its rare-to-Alabama use of a fretted entablature pierced by frieze or "eyebrow" windows.

Gainesville, as it had developed by the 1850s, centered upon a business district stretching for three blocks along State and McKee Streets, south of their convergence at the triangular municipal park opposite the American Hotel. This commercial area was densely built up with one and two-story structures housing drygoods firms and grocers, law offices, saloons, cabinetmakers and blacksmith shops. Because of the unsuitability of the local clay for the making of brick, masonry construction was rare, either for commercial or domestic building.

The residential sector lay to the east of the business area, atop the bluff along Main or "Yankee" Street--a thoroughfare which early acquired its sobriquet because of the number of New England-born merchants who lived there--and to the south along Webster, lower McKee, Sanders, and Church Streets. For the most part, the southeastern quadrant of the town, as platted in the early 1830s, remained undeveloped except for an occasional residence such as the Jackson-Smith House and the home of legislator Turner

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Historic Resources of Gainesville

Reavis. The two town cemeteries, the municipal burial ground and the Oddfellows' cemetery, were situated respectively to the southeast and southwest, just beyond the incorporated limits.

As characteristic of most inland southern towns, a pattern of extensive rather than intensive residential land-use prevailed. A single domicile, together with its gardens, kitchen or "cookhouse," servants' quarters, barns, stables, and pasturage occupied as much as an entire three-acre block. Most residences stood at the corner of the block, not only to leave room for dependencies but to facilitate access to the plank sidewalks which then laced the town.

On the eve of the War Between the States, Gainesville possessed a large academy, three churches, a bank, and several scores of dwellings situated on spacious lots, usually enclosed by picket fences fashioned from the cedar and heart cyprus found in the nearby Tombigbee bottoms.

Because of Gainesville's relatively secure situation well away from the main areas of combat and its accessibility by riverboat, the town became a Confederate hospital center during the Civil War. The Gainesville Academy building and the American Hotel were operated jointly as the "Buckner Hospital." Hundreds of wounded from Shiloh, Corinth, and elsewhere were cared for in the makeshift wards, and a separate section of the municipal cemetery was set aside for the scores of men who died at the hospitals. On April 15, 1865, Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest established his headquarters in Gainesville. It was here soon afterward that he learned of Lee's surrender at Appomattox and the fall of Mobile. On May 9th, Forrest met with the Union command at the small Greek Revival-style law offices of F. P. Snedecor, on State Street, to negotiate terms for the surrender of his troops. A marble monument, erected in 1923 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, marks the site of this event today.

The sociological change precipitated by the end of the Civil War is manifested in the black residential community which developed along the lower part of State Street during the post-bellum period. Most of the dwellings found in this neighborhood today, chiefly nondescript tenant houses, date from the 20th century.

The Laura Watson House, on the Epes Road at the southeastern outskirts of town, and the small house at the northeast corner of Chestnut and Sumter Streets, are good examples of the dwellings built by black freeholders during the late 19th century.

For two decades after the Civil War, Gainesville remained a commercial center and shipping point for the western Blackbelt, although its physical development was more muted than during the ante-bellum years. Structures erected between 1860 and 1880 display a decided, if conservative, leaning toward the Victorian. During this period, Edward N. Kring (1836-1910) emerged as the leading carpenter and builder of the town. The similarity of decorative detail—in scrollcut balustrades, trellis-supports, bay windows, and brackets--between such structures as the Alison-McLelland House, the Minniece-Roberts and Roberts-Parham Houses (as renovated), and Kring's own residence suggests that Kring may have been responsible for each. In 1872 he

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built a new church for Gainesville Methodists, and in 1879 he was responsible for the construction of St. Alban's Episcopal Church. The exterior of the Methodist Church, with its pilastered and pedimented facade, is a belated exercise in the Greek Revival--an anachronism which is possibly an architectural carry-over from the previous church building. But its unaltered interior is an eclectic mixture of influences. Particularly noteworthy are the unusual semicircular acoustical recesses framing both the pulpit dais and the organ and choir area, beneath the rear gallery. The modified Gothic structure which Edward Kring erected for the Episcopalians is a more conventional structure of this period, and a conscious reflection of prevailing Episcopal architectural esthetics--notworth today primarily for its unaltered character and fine Victorian stained-glass windows.

In the 1880s Gainesville began to feel the impact of declining river traffic, and the reorientation of farm-to-market routes along the major rail lines. Sanborn insurance maps chronicle the gradual abandonment and disappearance of commercial structures from 1884 until the early 1900s when Gainesville was no longer regarded as being of sufficient importance to warrant coverage. The town's population, still at something over a thousand people in 1890, fell to 817 in 1900 and to 532 by 1910. Its congregation defunct, the large Greek Revival-style Baptist church, dating from 1858, was demolished in 1912. Three years later, the dilapidated American Hotel was torn down.

The commercial district dwindled to a half block long row of small mercantile firms, in spite of the fact that a precast concrete block store-interesting today for its mode of construction--indicates that building was not totally moribund in the early 1900s. About 1960, fire destroyed three of the oldest stores on State Street. The earliest extant commercial structure remaining in 1979 is a portion of Edward Kring's carpenter shop-known locally as "the coffin shop" because the small structure was, at some time in its history, used for the display of burial coffins.

Gainesville is now primarily a residential community made up of families who own or work the surrounding farmlands. Its 1970 population was 255. The past four decades have seen the loss of a number of significant early structures such as the old Presbyterian Manse, the Barrett House, and the Stewart House, a pre-Civil War dwelling razed only in 1978. Others, such as the ca. 1845 Lee-Snow-Earle House and the very important Lewis-Long and Russell-Woodruff-Turrentine Houses, are currently endangered by neglect or abandonment.

One significant structure has been moved. In 1970, the Warner Foundation, a private non-profit philanthropic organization, acquired the ca. 1845 Greek Revival-style Bank of Gainesville, dismantled it, and moved it to the North River Club in nearby Tuscaloosa, where it was re-erected and restored as part of a complex of early Alabama buildings.

Physical encroachment in the district has, however, remained minimal and confined, in large degree, to the accelerated construction of mobile homes since 1970. The atmosphere of the 19th century still lingers in and about the town, and, besides the

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Historic Resources of Gainesville

intrinsic value of the older buildings themselves, the historic area offers immense potential in the realm of historical archaeology.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approximately 210 acres

Quadrangle name Gainesville

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

See individual inventory forms.

A

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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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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Section 2 on south side of Tombigbee River and R2W, T21N Section 11.

Area contains concentration of contributing buildings in and immediately surrounding the town of Gainesville.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	NA	code	county	code
-------	----	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael Bailey

organization Alabama Historical Commission

date November 28, 1984

street & number 725 Monroe Street

telephone 205 261-3184

city or town Montgomery

state Alabama

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

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8-15-85

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

date

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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- Newspapers of Gainesville: Probate Office, Livingston, Alabama.
- Personal interviews conducted June-October, 1980, by members of Sumter Co. Preservation Society, with the following persons, all of Gainesville: Mrs. Carolyn Smith Cargile, The Rev. Edward T. Cate, Mr. and Mrs. Selman H. Falls, Mr. M. C. Fields, Mrs. Ruby Fields Ford, Mrs. Kathryn G. Bolton Harrison, Mr. and Mrs. Barnes A. Rogers, Mrs. John A. Rogers, Jr., Miss Susalee Smith, Mr. Booker Watson.

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Rieves, Louise Goodloe. Historic Gainesville. Birmingham: privately published, no date.

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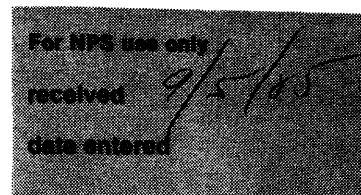
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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Gainesville MRA
State Sumter County, ALABAMA

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Coffin Shop

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/29/85

Attest

2. Colgin Hill

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/3/85

Attest

3. Gainesville Historic
District

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/3/85

Attest

4. Gibbs House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/3/85

Attest

5. Lee-Snow House

Keeper

Attest

6. Main-Yankee Street
Historic District

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/3/85

Attest

7. Park and Bandstand

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/29/85

Attest

8. Watson, Laura, House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Almona Byers 10/3/85

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest