

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

For NPS use only

received AUG 14 1987

OCT 19 1987

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

RECEIVED

1. Name

historic Davidson-Smitherman House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 167 Third Avenue, South

NA not for publication

city, town Centreville

NA vicinity of

congressional district 7

state Alabama

code 01

county Bibb

code 007

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. Gladys (C. Pittman) Leggett

street & number 167 Third Avenue, South

city, town Centreville

NA vicinity of

state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bibb County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Centreville

state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1970-present

federal state county local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery

state Alabama

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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 Davidson-Smitherman House is situated on a high hill southeast of town square in the small west-central Alabama town of Centreville. Facing west, the house overlooks most of the town and affords distant views of the Cahaba River.

The 2 1/2-story, 1837 residence is sheathed in shiplap siding, has a full brick basement and is located on 4 7/8 acres of land. Originally the center of a 2000-acre plantation, the house is the only building that survives the pre-Civil War era Davidson estate. None of the support buildings dating from the 19th century remain except the one-story kitchen building, which was connected to the main house c. 1950. The construction of the 1837 house is attributed to local builders George Howard and Enoch Carson. Howard and Carson were largely responsible for much of Centreville's more substantial pre-Civil War homes and public buildings.

The massing of the Davidson-Smitherman House is symmetrical with a three-bay facade at both the front and rear. The house is flanked by four exterior end-wing chimneys and surmounted by a gable roof. The open, extended eaves at each side suggest that the tin-clad roof has been slightly altered, since flushed eaves were typical of the period. A typical feature of the period is the predominant window treatment of 12/12 lighted sash windows downstairs and 12/8 windows above. Entrances, at both the main and second floor levels, are surmounted by multilighted transoms and flanked by sidelights. The basement area also has exterior access provided at the south side of the building.

While it is highly probable that the original porch at the facade was two-tiered, no evidence has been documented or found to support this suspicion. What survives is a two-tiered veranda with cusped brackets and slightly tapered round posts that support a blind screen in the upper portion of the bays. Along the second level, square supports align with the posts below, while a low rail of cutout patterned panels line the front and sides.

A c. 1890's photo (The Centreville Press, June 18, 1936) shows a two-tiered veranda with cusped brackets surmounted by a lattice-like screen in the upper portion of the bays. The porch supports at the lower level appear to be somewhat larger replicas of those presently supporting the porch at the rear, therefore, suggesting that the rear porch probably dates from the same period. The present owners report that when the house was purchased in 1972, the trelliage work had been replaced with the blind screen, and that metal supports were used along the lower tier of the porch. In 1977 the Colonial Revival tapered posts (found on the property) were used to replace the metal supports. Speculatively, it is assumed that the present porch treatment of the house reflects the third 20th-century modification of a late-19th-century porch.

The interior features a center hall plan, eight Federal Period mantels, heart pine wood floors, wainscotting and a reverse flight stairway which rises from the first floor to the half-story attic area. A secondary stairway, a feature more typical of Virginia and North Carolina domestic architecture, was originally incorporated in the construction, but the area was enlarged approximately three feet, and sacrificed to

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accommodate the incorporation of baths at the first and second levels in 1936.

Following the merging of the house and kitchen building in the 1950s, a double carport was added. The most recent alterations to the house include the screening of the concrete porch and the addition of cusped bracket supports resembling those along the adjacent rear porch of the house.

Nestled in the heart of a recently cultivated fruit orchard, the Davidson-Smitherman House is approached by a long circular drive entered from Third Street, South along the property at the rear. There is no direct street access to the front of the building. Along the southside of this house is a swimming pool, and a bit farther beyond is a building, recently erected by the present owners with lumber from old rail boxcars.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" 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 1837 **Builder/Architect** George W. Howard
C. Enoch Carson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

CRITERIA B & C - ARCHITECTURE

The Davidson-Smitherman House is significant as one of the remaining two outstanding pre-Civil War residences in Bibb County and as one of the two earliest and least altered extant residences constructed by Centreville's premiere building partnership. Built in 1837, the Davidson-Smitherman and Henry-Kennedy (NRHP 10/19/78) Houses illustrate the first wave of substantial home building in Centreville and are among the earliest domestic buildings attributed to George Howard (1802-67) and Enoch Carson (1797-1846). Only two other local houses document the work of Howard and/or Carson -- the 1834 Howard House (which has suffered substantial cosmetic alterations) and the 1846 Mayberry-Moren House (locally believed to have been completed after Carson's death). The 2 1/2-story Davidson-Smitherman House has a full brick basement and an abundance of Federal Period detailing best exemplified in the window treatments (12/12 downstairs and 12/8 upstairs), the center hall floor plan, exterior end-wing chimneys, continuous reverse flight stairs to the 3rd floor and the Federal Period wainscotting, trims and mantels.

CRITERION B

The Davidson-Smitherman House is also significant for its associations with an early Bibb County settler and with his son who, during the 19th century, served in an important capacity as a military figure.

SETTLEMENT - In 1823 North Carolina native Samuel Wilson Davidson (1789-1863) was among the first to purchase lots along Centreville's east bank of the Cahaba River, where in 1837 this 2 1/2-story residence was constructed for his family. By 1850 Davidson had acquired one of the area's largest landholdings with property assessed at just \$20 less than Centreville's wealthiest citizen. Within a span of ten years, Davidson's plantation and personal estate increased considerably and by 1860 the value of his assets exceeded \$150,000. On the eve of the Civil War, Davidson was the most extensive planter and wealthiest citizen in the area.

MILITARY - James LaFayette Davidson (1837-1900) was one of the four Davidson children still residing in this house in 1860. In 1861 he organized Bibb County's first infantry company (Company F, 11th Alabama Infantry Regiment) and served as its captain until 1862. Serving under Davidson's command in the "Bibb Greys" were his brother S. W. Davidson, Jr., T. J. Smitherman, and the sons of several other prominent families in Centreville, including the Kennedys, Gardners, Mayberrys and Carsons. Davidson resigned as Captain of the Bibb Greys in 1862 and served as lieutenant-colonel until the end of the war.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 4 7/8 acres

Quadrangle name Centreville West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	4	8	7	5	0	0	3	6	4	4	7	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The west portion of Lot #1 of Block #8 of the Smitherman's South Centreville Subdivision. See red line on the attached scaled plat map.

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 Shirley Qualls/Cultural Resources Coordinator

organization Alabama Historical Commission

date 6/17/87

street & number 725 Monroe Street

telephone 205 261-3187

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 December 1, 1987

For NPS use only

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

date 1/6/88

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The 2 1/2-story Davidson-Smitherman House was built in 1837 by Samuel Wilson Davidson (1789*-1863). A North Carolina native, Davidson was the son of Revolutionary War veteran and merchant John and Margaret Davidson. In 1819, S. W. Davidson, accompanied by his sister Mary (1787-1831), moved to Alabama and settled near Pratt's Ferry in the newly created Cahaba (Bibb) County. By 1822, Mary Davidson had married Bibb County Judge Thomas Crawford.

According to local historian Dr. Rhoda C. Ellison (1984; Bibb County: The First Hundred Years, 1818-1918), Davidson was among the first in 1823 to purchase lots along the east bank of the Cahaba River in Centreville. Situated at the highest point of navigation on the Cahaba River, and thus called the Falls of Cahaba, Centreville offered an established conveyance route to and from Mobile for transporting cotton to market; mail service; a location near the center of the state considered a prime location for the state capitol; and an advantageous position at the crossroad of two chief postal routes. Surveyed in 1822 by Thomas Crawford for land grantee Mrs. Sarah Chotard, the prospective river town covered 105 acres west of the Cahaba River and 55 acres east of it. The streets were named, primarily, in honor of military heroes from the War of 1812. After the 1825 flood that temporarily devastated the state capital (Cahaba), Centreville offered to provide the site of the new capitol. Receiving only one vote (from the Bibb County representative), the town failed to win the state capitol in 1826.

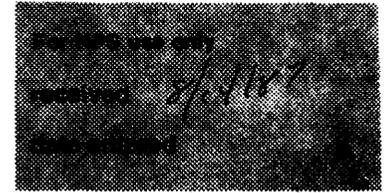
During the 1827-28 legislative session, Alabama lawmakers passed an act authorizing the citizens of Bibb County to hold an election to choose a permanent seat of justice. The selection of a county seat in Bibb County had been a bone of contention throughout the decade; however, eleven years after the creation of the county, Centreville became the permanent county seat.

Following the election, provisions to secure a site on the eastern hilltop above the mosquito-infested river banks were initiated. A commission, chaired by S. D. Davidson, was charged with this responsibility. Davidson detailed the commission's activities beginning March 1828 in a journal. Title to the parcel of land was granted in 1829 and a survey was conducted shortly after. In September 1829 lots for sale were advertised by the commissioners, and thirty-three people made purchases. According to Davidson's journal, the town was laid off in 78 lots around a spacious courthouse square. The courthouse was completed in 1832 -- the same year Centreville was incorporated. (1832 courthouse razed 1858 and replaced with a two-story brick

(*some sources list 1791)

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building in 1859. 1859 structure razed in 1902 for construction of present courthouse building.) Built by Enoch Carson, Daniel Sneed and possibly with the assistance of George Howard, the two-story frame courthouse became the impetus for renewed growth in the area and popularized the newly survived town site.

The 1830s became an era of building in Centreville. In 1834 Rowan County, North Carolina native George W. Howard (1802-67) constructed a two-story plantation home for Dr. David D. Boyd (1802-35) and his wife Theresa Coleman Boyd on the west side of the river (Walnut Street). Four years later, Howard married Boyd's widow and moved into the earliest documented residence attributed to him as a local builder. During that same year (1834), Howard teamed up with Enoch Carson (1797-1846) to build the Centreville Academy; and later, in 1837 they built the Eagle Tavern (Henry-Kennedy House, NRHP 10/19/78) and Davidson's 2 1/2-story plantation residence.

Shortly after the completion of Davidson's home, his sixth child (James LaFayette Davidson, 1837-1900) was born. Davidson and his wife, Frances Stringfellow Davidson (1801-48), had nine children. He acquired over 2,000 acres and farmed extensively. In 1840, the demonstration of his leadership abilities during the establishment of the county seat afforded him election to the 1840-41 State Legislature.

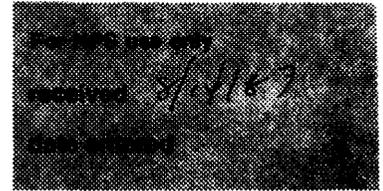
By 1850, Davidson's personal estate and landholdings ranked second in the area. Jacob Newell Mayberry, a local innkeeper, had assets of \$12,020 and 142 slaves; while Davidson's assets were valued at \$12,000 and he owned 98 slaves. Within a span of ten years, Davidson's landholdings and personal estate increased 12 1/2 times over. By the close of the decade Davidson was the most extensive planter and wealthiest citizen in the area.

Eighteen years after Davidson completed his term in the State Legislature, his son S. W. Davidson, Jr. was elected to the same post (1859-61). Young Davidson, Jr. and his brother James LaFayette (1837-1900) were among the county's first volunteers for military service when war was declared in April 1861. It is said that James Davidson organized a company of young officers and served as its first captain. The company, locally called "The Bibb Greys" procured tents and camped at Brown Springs and later at Gary Springs where they were often visited by the young girls of Centreville. On June 22, the company was to leave for the battle zone. The day before their departure they were presented with a silk battle flag presented by Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Howard; and probably by design, the flag was accepted by her finance, Private Thomas J. Smitherman. That evening they married; and eight years later, they bought the Davidson-Smitherman House.

S. W. Davidson died in 1863; and his oldest daughter, Catherine (1826-71) (widow of Attorney Pleasant Hill, 1817-1853) inherited the house. Apparently, the specifications of Davidson's will were not finalized until the end of the war. Although there is evidence that Davidson's son-in-law (Mary Frances, 1842-1927)

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Dr. E. H. Moren (1825-86), administered the estate, Catherine did not occupy the house until 1865.

Attorney Thomas and Betty Smitherman bought the house and 100 acres of land in 1869. It remained in their family for almost 95 years. Smitherman (1837-96), who served under Captain Davidson during the war, was a prominent local attorney and public official. Between 1869 and 1896, he was active in local, county and state politics. From 1870-72 he served in the State Legislature and beginning in 1876, he served as Probate Judge for four years. Additionally, Smitherman was the county solicitor, a member of the City Council, and County Administrator for over ten years. After his death, his wife "Bettie" (1842-1916) retained ownership until 1910, when her daughter Nell became owner. Mary Elizabeth ("Bettie") Howard Smitherman was the daughter of George W. Howard, one of the builders of the Davidson-Smitherman House.

During the late-19th century, probably at the peak of Smitherman's political career, the porches of the house were enlivened with ornamentation. The exposed wooden structural members (cusped brackets), lightweight supports and the trellis-work were ornamentations generally associated with cottage orne designs. In this instance, the design elements were probably employed to update the house and animate the facade.

Nell Smitherman Gardner and her husband Fred occupied the house for 53 years. In the 1930s they altered the secondary stairway to accommodate baths on the main and second floors. Around 1950, they attached the kitchen building, a storage room and double carport to the rear south side -- aligning the addition with the original one-story porch. The Gardners also replaced the trelliage-work and porch supports on the facade and installed Colonial Revival Style posts.

Between 1963 and 1972, William E. Henderson maintained ownership of the house for two years, followed by Charles L. Hollinsworth. Hollinsworth removed the early 20th-century porch posts on the facade and replaced them with wrought-iron supports. Hollinsworth had planned to convert the house into five apartments in 1972 when Mrs. Gladys Pittman Leggett bought it and the surrounding 4 7/8 acres.

In 1977 she re-installed the Colonial Revival porch supports and the cusped brackets. She also screened the concrete porch along the rear south section. Mrs. Leggett and her husband have filled the house with antiques and hope to eventually establish a historic house museum in the original portion of the house.

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Ellison, Dr. Rhoda C., Bibb County: The First Hundred Years, 1818-1918: 1984.

Abrams, Ulysses Huey, A History of Early Bibb County, Alabama 1820-1870: 1981.

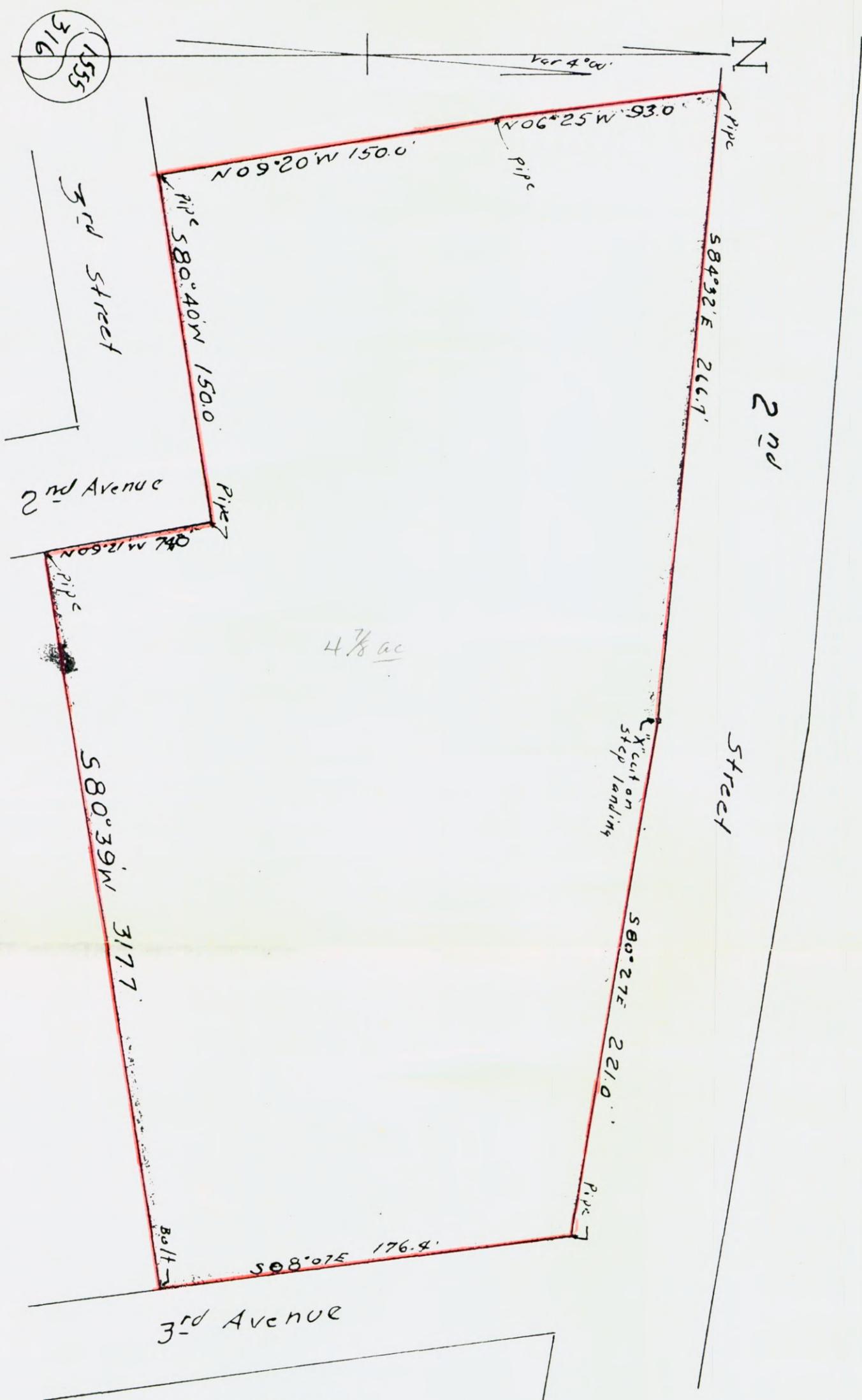
West Alabama Planning and Development Council, Bibb County Survey: An Inventory of
Historic Sites and Structures: 1973.

Bibb County Census: 1830-1900.

Owen, Thomas M. History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography: 1921.

"Personal Memoirs - Bibb County" in Memorial Record of Alabama, Vol 1: Brant and
Fuller, 1893.

The Centreville Press, June 18, 1936.



WILLIAM E. HENDERSON

Map showing the WILLIAM E. HENDERSON lot in the City of Centreville, Alabama and being the West part of Lot No. 1 of Block No. 8 of the Smitherman's South Centreville Subdivision as shown by Map thereof on recorded in the Probate Office of Bibb County in Deed Book No. 12 at page 627.

In the survey of this lot stakes (pipes) were set at intervals of 50 feet, 75 feet, or 100 feet clockwise around the perimeter of the lot. The accompanying map representing the WILLIAM E. HENDERSON lot was compiled from my survey of said lot and the accuracy of the survey and said map thereof are hereby certified to by the undersigned County Surveyor.

Given under my hand and seal this 26 day of September, 1960.

B. E. Reed
 B. E. Reed,
 County Surveyor
 Jones, Alabama

