

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUL 30 1986
date entered AUG 28 1986

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

1. Name

historic Benjamin H. Averiett Houses Thematic Group

and/or common

2. Location

street & number see individual inventory forms NA not for publication

city, town Talladega vicinity of congressional district 3

state Alabama code 01 county Talladega code 121

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	NA	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple owners (see individual inventory forms)

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Talladega County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Talladega 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

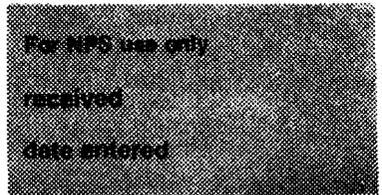
Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Between c.1830 and 1860 pioneer Alabamian, Benjamin H. Averiett accumulated more than 10,000 acres of land in the southwest corner of Talladega County centering around the Fayetteville community. For himself and his children, he bought or built six houses on this tract of land, only four of which survive today. Because of Benjamin Averiett's significant associations with the exploration, settlement and agricultural development of Talladega County and because the tremendous acreage in the original Averiett plantation is no longer intact, the Thematic Group Format was chosen for submitting the physically discontinuous but historically related unit of surviving Averiett structures.

All of the houses are located within a two mile radius of Fayetteville which is approximately ten miles southwest of Sylacauga on Highway 8. Each house is located on a natural spring and retains its rural setting and outbuildings. The Benjamin H. Averiett and William Averiett Houses are vernacular house forms with touches of high style decoration, while the Goodwin/Hamilton House is a classical adaptation. The Welch/Averiett House is a rambling bungalow.

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List of Properties and Owners

1. Benjamin H. Averiett House

Moretti-Harrah Marble Company
Mr. Mike Williams, Administrative Director
Post Office Box 330
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150

2. William Averiett House

Mr. and Mrs. Travis Wesson
Route 5, Box 47
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150

3. Goodwin/Hamilton House

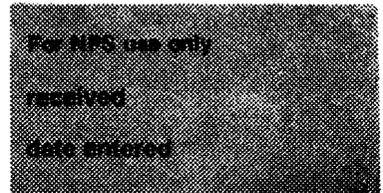
Mr. and Mrs. James T. Pursell
Post Office Box 540
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150

4. Welch/Averiett House

Mrs. Inez B. Graham
Route 5, Box 45
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150

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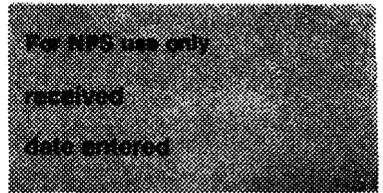
Methodology

In preparing this nomination the following was undertaken:

- A. At the request of Mr. Travis Wesson, Marilyn Sullivan, an independent consultant, met with the property owners during February, 1985, to discuss the possibility of submitting a National Register Nomination on their houses, that is, the four surviving Averiett Houses.
- B. Each of the four houses was examined and photographed.
- C. The Alabama Historical Commission was consulted to determine if any of the houses are recorded in previous surveys. (Benjamin Averiett and William Averiett Houses surveyed by department in 1973.)
- D. A windshield survey of southwest Talladega County was made by Ms Sullivan to compare construction methods and materials as well as styles of other 19th and early 20th Century houses.
- E. With the aid of the 1915 U.S.G.S. Map and other old maps, old roads and ferry locations were explored to determine early access to the county.
- F. A mass of Averiett Family business and personal papers (1825-c.1920) were examined by Ms Sullivan.
- G. Further research was carried out from the following sources:
 - 1. Talladega County Court House.
 - 2. State Department of Archives and History.
 - 3. Shelby County Court House.
 - 4. B. B. Comer Public Library, Sylacauga.
 - 5. Various publications. (Bibliography attached.)

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- H. Within the most apparent theme of Benjamin H. Aver-iett's significance to and representation of the exploration and settlement of Talladega County, and cognizant of its relationship to the broader concept of America's Westward Movement, each house was then studied individually for:
1. Contribution to the theme.
 2. Approximate dates of acquisition and/or construction and of period of significance.
 3. Architectural significance.
 4. Existence of architectural integrity for period of significance.
 5. Significant geographic features.
- I. Recognizing the uniqueness of the complete 19th and early 20th Century farming unit represented in the Averiett enclave, each house was also studied for:
1. Contribution to the theme.
 2. Existence and function of outbuildings.
 3. Dates of periods of significance.
 4. Existence of architectural integrity for periods of significance.
- H. Request for listing of the four surviving Benjamin H. Averiett Houses as a Thematic Group was made to the State Historic Preservation Office, the Alabama Historical Commission.

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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" 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 c. 1830 - c. 1920 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion A - Exploration/Settlement

The Averiett Houses are significant because the Averiett Family's route of migration into Talladega County is representative of an important early Alabama immigration and settlement pattern. The Averiett's migration from Georgia to newly opened lands in Autauga, Lowndes and Talladega Counties, Alabama, as well as their successful subsistence and ultimate prosperity from the land, are representative of Alabama's settlement and thus her place in America's Westward Movement.

* * * * *

As a young boy, Benjamin Averiett emigrated from Georgia into Alabama with his parents prior to 1820. They settled first in Autauga County in the south-central portion of the state. As a grown man, Mr. Averiett purchased land south across the Alabama River in Lowndes County (1825). In the late 1820's and early 1830's, as the Creek Indian Nation was consumed by State jurisdiction, rich land in that area became available for white settlement. Many people who lived in the already settled counties bordering the western edge of this new territory were the first to cross over into the Indian lands. Averiett was one of these early Alabamians who turned eastward to seek new land. He began purchasing large tracts of land in Talladega County in 1834 when the first public land sales were held.

Criterion B- Exploration/Settlement

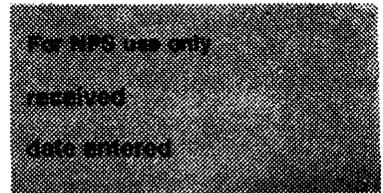
The Averiett Houses are significant for their associations with pioneer Alabamian, Benjamin H. Averiett whose activities between 1830 and 1879 were determinative in the earliest settlement and growth patterns of Talladega County.

* * * * *

Benjamin Averiett was intimately associated with the earliest settlement and highly influential in the growth of Talladega County because of his trade with the Creek Indians when the area was still a territory, his role in determining

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and maintaining the earliest county roads, his ownership of Coosa River ferries (primary access to the County) his involvement in determining the route of the County's first railroad and his ownership, maintenance and use of tremendous land holdings in the County.

Criterion A - Agriculture

The Averiett Houses are significant because the phases of development in the family farming unit that they represent are also representative of Alabama's 19th and early 20th Century agricultural development. Three generations of agricultural development and prosperity are represented in the Averiett Houses and their outbuildings.

* * * * *

The Benjamin Averiett House (c.1835) is an unusual pioneer dwelling reflecting Averiett's burgeoning wealth when he came to the county in the early 1830s. While the folk house echoes his Georgia heritage, its high style embellishments as well as the substantial stone smokehouse substantiate Averiett's position as one of the county's largest farmers by 1840.¹ Second generation prosperity is represented by the (c.1850) Greek Revival Goodwin/Hamilton House and its refined brick smokehouse, built for Averiett's daughter, Marge Goodwin, when she and her husband were also among the county's most affluent farmers.² Son, William Averiett's farm also represents second generation prosperity as well as the changes which took place in farming during the late 19th Century. The (1866-67) vernacular William Averiett House and its collection of outbuildings confirm William's successful sixty five year farming operation which began during the cotton prosperous days of the 1850's and transcended reconstruction.³

¹1830 Lowndes County Census indicates Benjamin Averiett had 16 slaves. By 1840 he had 55, a number comparable to large planters Walker Reynolds (57) and Oliver Welch (49). According to the Agricultural Census for 1860 the family was farming approximately 7,000 acres by 1859.

²1850 Talladega County Slave Census and Agricultural Census.

³1850, 1860 and 1870 Talladga County Agricultural Census.

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Third generation agricultural prosperity, as well as 19th Century agricultural development are represented in the Welch/Averiett/Dean/Graham House and its unusual collection of 19th and 20th Century outbuildings. The rammed earth smokehouse, frame springhouse and board and batten cabins exemplify a small 19th Century farm⁴ while the dairy and milking barns illustrate farming methods and diversification of the early 20th Century.⁵

Criterion C - Architecture

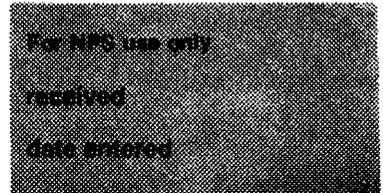
Three of the four Averietts Houses have particular architectural significance. The fourth is notable for its fine collection of 19th and early 20th Century barns, sheds, and smokehouse. The Benjamin Averietts House (c.1835) is one of Talladega's few surviving pioneer homes. Virtually unaltered, it is a good example of a Georgia folk-type adapted to the prosperous economic status of its builder. The Goodwin/Hamilton House (c.1850) is an exemplary Greek Revival Cottage, unusual to southwest Talladega County. The William Averietts House (1866-67) is an excellent intact example of vernacular housing and postwar construction. The Welch/Averiett House includes late 19th Century dairy and milking barns, an extremely unusual rammed earth smokehouse and several sheds representative of 19th and early 20th Century farming activities.

⁴Daniel Welch's small farm (7 slaves) was insolvent at his death in 1840 according to the 1840 Census and A/D/G papers dated April 23, 1839, and July 26, 1842.

⁵Moore, pp. 383-412, pp. 847-866.

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Historical Summary:

Benjamin H. Averiett was born July 18, 1806, in Georgia, but by age fourteen he and his family were living in newly created Autauga County, Alabama. A large county created by the Territorial Legislature in the center of the state, it had only 2203 white inhabitants in 1820. Benjamin Averiett's father, also named Benjamin, died there in 1824.

A year later, Benjamin H. Averiett and wife, Sarah Grubbs Averiett, bought land across the Alabama River in Lowndes County, and according to two accounts, were living there by 1828.¹ He sold at least part of the land in 1831² shortly after the area was made a county and followed the opening of new lands into what was to become Talladega County. Like most early immigration into the Talladega territory, Averiett came from the west, crossing the Coosa River and settling in the southwest corner of the county. This area was, no doubt, settled early on because of its proximity to the Coosa and well-established Shelby and Autauga Counties.

While the Treaty of Cusseta (1832) ultimately resulted in the removal of the Creek Indians from the Talladega area, it specifically called for all white intruders in the area to abandon their claims so that the newly ceded Indian lands could be surveyed, the Indian Fathers given land of their choice and the balance disposed of at public sale. Since this was considered by some, an intrusion on the state's jurisdiction, the State Legislature actually encouraged further settlement in the area by legislating Alabama's jurisdiction over the Creek Nation in 1829 and by establishing new county governments. Talladega, considered part of Shelby County from 1829 until 1832,³ was one of the new counties formed on the heels of the treaty in 1832.

It is not known precisely where Averiett was during this crucial period, nor what his political position, but by

¹ Owen, Vol. III, p. 69. Memorial Record, Vol. II, p. 948.

² Averiett/Dean/Graham (A/D/G) Papers, Deed dated February 15, 1831.

³ Acts of Alabama, 1829, p. 65.

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1834, it is clear that he was living in Talladega County less than a mile from Daniel Welch, with whom he remained a long-time friend.

Daniel Welch is generally considered one of Talladega's very earliest settlers, supposedly enamored with the area as a follower of Andrew Jackson in the Indian battles of 1813-14. Local tradition holds that Welch returned to Creek Indian territory in the 1820's⁴ and positive proof exists that he was established in the southwest corner of Talladega County at Welch Spring by 1831.⁵

With that information, it is safe to assume that both Welch and Averiett were Jacksonian Democrats who believed in Alabama's jurisdiction over her Indian lands and therefore had no qualms about making a claim in Indian territory. This gives some strength to sources which state that Averiett was a trader among the Indians and kept a store for that purpose.⁶ That statement is strengthened, too, by the fact that Averiett, son of an uneducated pioneer settler, had money enough by 1834 to begin buying up large tracts of land in Talladega County and by the fact that "Averett's [sic] store" was an established landmark by 1836.⁸ (The public land sale in Talladega County finally began in 1834. Deeds indicate that Daniel Welch bought the land on which he had been living at that time. Presumably Averiett did the same.)

⁴Luttrell Papers, Welch File. Memorial Record, Vol. II, p. 965. (Census records verify the Welches were from Tennessee.)

⁵Acts of Alabama, 1831, p. 38. (Daniel Welch's house was established as a new Shelby County voting place in 1831 and then became one of Talladega's first voting places in 1832. Talladega County Election Results, 1833, p. 52.)

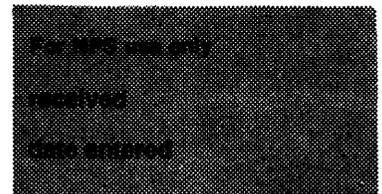
⁶Owen, Vol. III, p. 69. Memorial Record, Vol. II, p. 948.

⁷Autauga Co. Deed Book A, Vol. 1820-25, p. 107. Will of Benjamin Averiett (Sr.) (The one source located which may give insight to the elder Averiett's financial condition when he came to Alabama is the 1820 Hancock County, Georgia Census which lists a Benjamin Averiett who owns no slaves.)

⁸Talladega Co. Commissioner's Court Minutes, May 2, 1836.

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Thus began the Averiett's intimate associations with the settlement and growth patterns of Talladega County. In December of 1829, Daniel Welch and two others secured authorization from the Legislature for a "Turnpike Road on the east side of the Coosa River," which they intended to lay out across the Creek Nation to the Georgia line.⁹ In 1834, Welch was joined on the committee of road reviewers (men chosen to determine the best road routes) by Benjamin Averiett. The road developers were admonished to "make out a road leading . . . from Hatchett Creek to the county line in a direction to West Point, Georgia."¹⁰ Furthermore, by 1835 Averiett and Welch were "overseeing" the maintenance of what is essentially today's Highway 8; Welch from Lee's Ferry to Averiett's,¹¹ and Averiett from his place to "Cleavland turnpike road."¹¹ In the summer of 1836, Benjamin Averiett also served on a committee to lay out a road from the Coosa River to Marsdisville, the County's first seat of government.¹²

It was also in 1835 that Benjamin and Sarah Averiett joined the newly formed Fort Williams Baptist Church. Apparently well known to the membership, Averiett was elected clerk pro tem of the church the same day he joined and was immediately put on a committee of two to raise money for building a church house. Church minutes are not kind enough to give the particulars of the transaction, but the building and cemetery were both located on land Averiett purchased in 1839.¹³

The minutes do, however, record Averiett's intimate and oftentimes stormy involvement with the church during years

⁹Acts of Alabama, 1829, p. 70. (In January of 1832 the legislature allowed them to narrow the width of the unfinished road.)

¹⁰Talledega Co. Commissioner's Court Minutes, March 5, 1834.

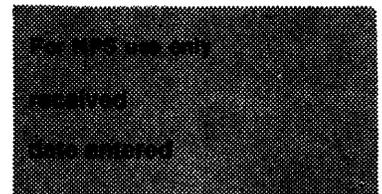
¹¹Talledega County Commissioner's Court Minutes, February 10, 1835.

¹²Ibid. May 2, 1836.

¹³A/D/G Papers, Deed dated March 16, 1939, from Ewel Harison. (In June of 1835, H. G. Woodward and Benjamin Averiett had been appointed to raise money for a church building.)

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when the church played a quasi-judicial as well as spiritual roll in the community. For over forty years Averiett and his family were vital members of the church, serving with notable consistency on most committees involved with the construction or repair of the church building. It is notable, too, that by 1838, the Averiett's lived in a house large enough to serve as the church meeting place in "inclement weather."

During those forty-five years Benjamin Averiett and subsequently six of his children, accumulated tremendous land holdings primarily in southwest Talladega County. If slave ownership was a measure of wealth, census records document Averiett's prosperity from 1830 until 1870. No research has been made to determine how much land he owned in Lowndes County but he did own 16 slaves in 1830. By 1840 in Talladega County, Averiett had increased his slave ownership to 55, making him one of the largest slave owners in the county. In 1850 he owned 69 slaves while in 1860 his slave population had increased to 102.¹⁴ According to deeds the Averietts held in excess of 10,000 acres by that year.¹⁵

The Agricultural Census for 1850 further indicates that a diversity of crops made the family farming unit practically self sufficient with primary crops being corn, cotton, oats and wool. Interestingly, Averiett was the second largest wool producer in Talladega County according to that census. By 1860 his primary crops were corn and cotton with significant amounts of wheat, oats, rye, peas, beans and potatoes being grown also. Records also indicate that at least part of the Averiett land was leased to tenant farmers, as well as a marble company, interested in the valuable marble deposits outside Sylacauga. It is worthwhile to note, too, that Benjamin Averiett, disregarding the farms he bought for his children, remained one of the county's largest farmers even in the post war decade.¹⁶

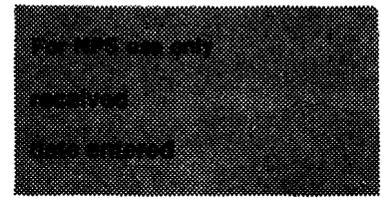
¹⁴Talladega Co. Agricultural Census for 1850 and 1860.

¹⁵A/D/G Papers.

¹⁶Agricultural Census for 1850, 1860 and 1870. Slave Census for 1850 and 1860.

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In addition to the farm lands acquired by Benjamin H. Averiett, he also bought prime acreage on the Coosa River. Between 1850 and 1853, Averiett bought at least three major parcels on both the Shelby and Talladega County sides of the river in the Wilsonville (Shelby Co.) vicinity. Two were the sites of early ferries, one Bullock's,¹⁷ the other McGowan's.¹⁸ Early maps indicate that the primary road from Wilsonville into Talladega County crossed at McGowan's Ferry and led to Childersburg, the earlier site of De Soto's visit to the Coosa Indian village.

Averiett's third site was up river about three miles.¹⁹ Research at this point has not revealed how or why this timely purchase was made in 1850, but it is safe to assume that as a planter, Averiett was keenly interested in the development of rail transportation for Talladega County since the Coosa was not navigable above Wetumpka. In fact, plans for a rail line connecting the Alabama River at Selma to the Tennessee River at some point in the northeast corner of the state had been lying dormant since the first grading, begun in 1836, had been halted by the panic of 1837.²⁰

Averiett was thus surely aware of, if not present at, the conventions which met at Shelby Springs in August of 1849 and Talladega in September of the same year to revive interest in the Alabama and Tennessee River Railroad. While the degree of his involvement is unknown, deeds and other records indicate Averiett had friends and business acquaintances who were politically active when the railroad was rechartered by the legislature in 1850.²¹

¹⁷A/D/G Papers, Deed dated August 16, 1852.

¹⁸A/D/G Papers, Deeds dated May 23, 1853, and August 16, 1852.

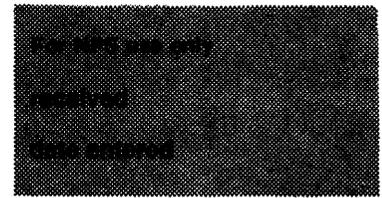
¹⁹Talladega Co. Records, Deed Bk. G, p. 190-191.

²⁰Owen, Vol. I, p. 505ff. Moore, Vol. I, p. 373ff.

²¹Ibid. A/D/G Papers.

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So whether he bought the Coosa River site and court-
ed the railroad or whether it was simply a fortuitous purchase
on his part, in 1854 Averiett negotiated a right-of-way sale
to the railroad, providing the Coosa River crossing site and
route into Talladega County,²² at time when there were less
than 1,000 miles of track in the whole state.²³ (The line
apparently reached the Coosa River from both sides in 1855 but
goods were ferried across until the bridge was opened in 1857.)

It is worthwhile to note that Averiett's contract
with the Alabama and Tennessee River Railroad, as well as sub-
sequent contracts with individuals, exercised strict control
over use of the right-of-way and the adjoining land. The rail-
road agreed not to "build, nor permit anyone to build houses
on said lands to be used for the purpose of buying or selling
merchandise, or of keeping hotels or boarding houses except
dwelling house or boarding houses" used by agents or employees
of the railroad.²⁴

Furthermore, when Daniel McIntyre and Elijah McKen-
zie bought their store site at the river crossing from Aver-
iETT in February of 1857, they were guaranteed the "exclusive
privilege of the Mercantile business on the lots located on
the lands belonging or having belonged to him [Averiett] near
said Railroad." A grocery and provision business apparently
owned by Averiett, himself, was the only exception.²⁵

One can only speculate as to the ramifications of
Benjamin Averiett's "land use plan" but the vast majority of
his 19th century holdings remain undeveloped today. One fam-
ily member characterized the family's traditional attitude
toward the land in answer to the question "when did the Aver-
ietts quit planting cotton and shift to cattle and soybeans?"
"They didn't," she said. "The land had always been planted
in cotton and so they kept planting it in cotton."

²²Talladega Co. Records, Deed Bk. K, p. 216-219.

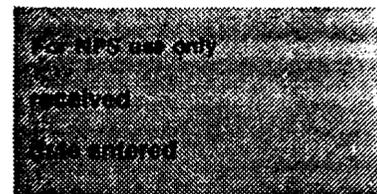
²³Griffith, p. 599.

²⁴Talladega Co. Records, Deed Bk. K, p. 216-219.

²⁵A/D/G Papers, Deed dated February 13, 1857.

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Too old to go to war, Benjamin Averiett did serve in the Home Guard and apparently shared the wealth of his land. In March of 1865 he donated \$1,000.00 to "assist families of soldiers with the purchase of supplies."²⁶

After the war, Averiett, like other large land owners, turned to sharecropping for lack of labor. Terms of sharecropping contracts give insight to the times and perhaps account for many of the approximately 50 short term notes Averiett held at his death in 1879. In one 1872 contract, Averiett agreed with an uneducated farmer named Cook

"to furnish land sufficient for the second parties hands . . . and put in two mules valued at three hundred and fifty dollars due the first day of January next conditioned that the mules and entire crop is . . . mortgaged for the prompt payment of the mules and all other advances made . . . the first party has already and is to supply corn and forage to make the crop and bread corn for the hands, he supplies a part of tools to be returned at the end of the year. The second party pays all blacksmithing and the first party is to have as rent one third of the corn and one fourth of the cotton also one third of oats and fodder then he holds a lien under the supply law on the mules and entire crop until all advances are paid for . . ."²⁷

That same year Benjamin Averiett, at age 66, presented his family with a division of his estate on Christmas Day.²⁸ Having already provided each of his children with farms, Averiett seems to have been setting his affairs in order and preparing for the final division. Records reveal in

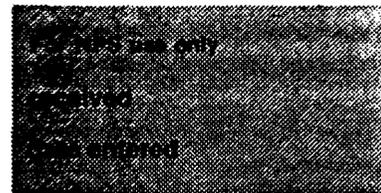
²⁶Luttrell Papers, Averiett File. (She quotes Alabama Reporter, March 30, 1865, Vol. XVII as source.)

²⁷A/D/G Papers, Contract dated March 6, 1872.

²⁸Talladega Co. Records, Bk. P, p. 256. Also see Bk. R, p. 188.

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the post war years more and more involvement in matters of family business by William A. Averiett. By 1880 he had emerged as his father's successor. (Copies of business papers of Benjamin and Sarah Averiett passed to William and were subsequently left to his daughter, Lillian, with whose grandson's widow and daughter they remain.)²⁹

In the meantime, the second generation maintained the legacy of their father, farming the land he had given them but also engaging in retail businesses. Contracts reveal that daughter Margaret and her husband, William Gooch, endured the reconstruction economy by sharecropping at least part of their farm and operating grocery and dry goods stores in Childersburg and Talladega.³⁰

William, like his father, Benjamin, farmed. Between 1845 and 1847, Benjamin Averiett acquired the tract of land which would become his son's farm. In 1852, Averiett gave his 22 year old son, William, the farm he would subsequently plant for the next 65 years. An 1860 inventory at his first wife's death gives clue to William's ensuing prosperity, listing more than thirty slaves.³¹ It is believed, however, that William's home burned in the early 1860's which would account for the modest post-war dwelling constructed during the winters of 1866 and 1867. As his son W. Wallis was later to describe it, "the house in which I live is situated on a little gravelly nole [sic]. It has only five rooms, but they are very large, and well furnished. It is surrounded on the east sid [sic] by a level pine grove, on the north, south, and west by large fields of cotton, and corn."³²

²⁹Herein referred to as the Averiett/Dean/Graham Papers (A/D/G).

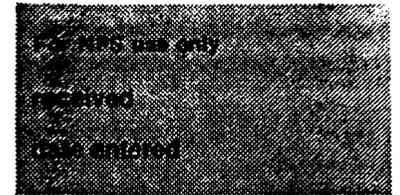
³⁰Talladega Co. Records, Bk. X, p. 39, Bk. II, p. 579, Bk. JJ, p. 168, Bk. S. p. 231.

³¹Talladega Co. Records, Bk. F, p. 135, Bk. E, p. 488, Bk. L, p. 553. Talladega Co. Wills and Inventories Bk. B, p. 579. A/D/G Papers "Appraisalment of One Lot of Negros."

³²Averiett/Holley Papers, Essay written October 15, 1885.

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An inheritance from his first wife, Margaret Hamilton, left William Averiett responsible, too, for land in Lowndes County, as revealed in an 1870 letter from his overseer. "I have tried to rent Elers [William Averiett's daughter, Ella] land as you directed. At this date I find it impossible. I am compelled to take money rent ... Come down right away and fix your matters."³³

Obviously believing in the power of land ownership, he, too, speculated in land up until his death, one of his last ventures being an investment in suburban Birmingham land in 1915.

Changing times and new technology, however, caught up with the third generation. William's daughter, Lillian married W. T. Dean, a railroad man in 1885. Shortly thereafter her father gave her the old Welch Place which had belonged to his deceased brother. In an apparent effort to help his old friend Daniel Welch, Benjamin Averiett had loaned him money against the property in 1839. At Welch's death in 1840,³⁴ Averiett bought his farm later giving it to his son, Thomas. Thomas Averiett's early death left the property William's responsibility.

The Dean's farmed, too, but also began a lumber and shingle mill, the Coosa Basin being a primary lumber producing region in the 1890s. Dean's brother, John, went on the road selling for them, and letters indicate they developed more than a local clientele. As Lillian wrote her daughter in 1901, "I should have written yesterday but was so busy unloading car of hulls and meal loaded two cars of shingles."³⁵

The letter confirms that William Dean's poor health was already evident. He died in 1908. Perhaps inheriting her

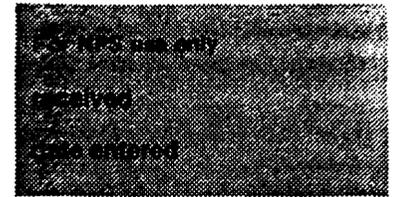
³³A/D/G Papers, Letter from J. D. Houser to W. A. Averiett, January 7, 1870.

³⁴A/D/G Papers, Mortgage dated April 23, 1839, Deed dated July 26, 1842.

³⁵A/D/G Papers, Letters dated October 23, 1901, and October 30 [?].

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grandmother's reputed tenacity, Lillian Averiett Dean not only managed the lumber mill but also began a dairy; all the while, farming. The dairy barns and other support building still survive at her Welch Spring farm.

Lillian's brother, W. Wallis Averiett and brother-in-law D. R. Collier operated a Fayetteville mercantile business in conjunction with their farming. It was Wallis who broke with the family farming tradition when he moved into Sylacauga about 1920. Leasing his father's house and land to tenant farmers, he moved to "the city" to run a mercantile store, where he was also instrumental in starting the City National Bank. But regardless of the move, his wife's obituary forty years later recalls that "these people [the Averiett Family] developed one of the best agricultural sections of Alabama."³⁶

Prior to about 1920, most sales of Benjamin Averiett's land had amounted to exchanges among family members. The third generation diverted from that pattern, selling to nonfamily members. One notable example, although not actually a sale, was about 1922, when the Averietts gave land in the Town of New Fayetteville,³⁷ (about ¼ mile south of Fayetteville) for a new high school. An obvious attempt to generate growth in the area, it was too late. The Averiett's hundred year hold on southwest Talladega County had left its mark. Growth belonged to the railroad and mining communities of Sylacauga and Talladega. The face of agricultural prosperity in Alabama had changed forever.³⁸

Benjamin Averiett and his children as far as we know, never held public office, led great armies, invented life changing machinery nor built great mansions, but their pattern of migration, successful subsistence and ultimate prosperity from the land and the resultant influence they had on the development of Talladega County, epitomize America's Westward Movement in general and Alabama's agrarian beginnings in particular. The Averiett's acquisition, use and maintenance of their

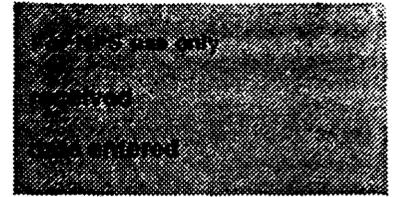
³⁶ Interviews. Sylacauga News, November 9, 1961.

³⁷ Interviews.

³⁸ Moore, pp. 383-412 and pp. 847-866.

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land characterize Alabama's economic birth and growth, her adjustments to the trauma of reconstruction and her movement into the twentieth century.

In a more immediate sense, the four remaining houses associated with Benjamin H. Averiett stand today in testimony to the Averiett's intimate associations with our past and give substance to that place in time.

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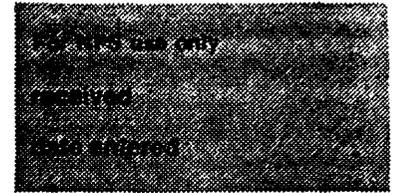
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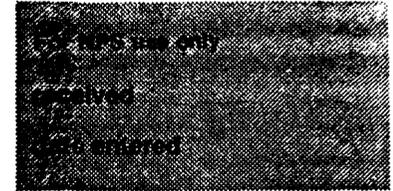
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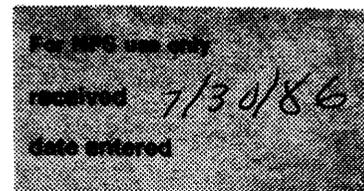
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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Averiett, Benjamin H., Houses TR
State Talladega County, ALABAMA

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Averiett, Benjamin H., House *for* Keeper

Shelton Byrum 8/28/86

Attest

2. Averiett, William, House *for* Keeper

Shelton Byrum 8/28/86

Attest

3. Goodwin--Hamilton House *for* Keeper

Shelton Byrum 8/28/86

Attest

4. Welch--Averiett House *for* Keeper

Shelton Byrum 8/28/86

Attest

5. Keeper

Attest

6. Keeper

Attest

7. Keeper

Attest

8. Keeper

Attest

9. Keeper

Attest

10. Keeper

Attest