

MULTIPLE RESOURCES OF PLANTERSVILLE

#1

DALLAS AND CHILTON COUNTIES, ALABAMA

Historic name: Driskell-Martin House Owner: Wm. Robert Martin
Common name: Driskell-Martin House Box 13
 Plantersville, AL 36758
Address: NW intersection of Cherry
 Street and 1st Avenue
Acreage: less than 1; 130' x 220' UTM: 16/507/125/3613/400
Verbal boundary: See attached maps; includes house and immediate acreage.
Architectural design: Greek Revival
Date of construction: 1850
Architect, Builder: Builders, Nelson Mitchell and Massena Godwin

Statement of Significance:

Criterion C, Architecture

The Driskell-Martin House (1850) is a very fine example of a mid-19th century, Greek Revival house. It is Plantersville's oldest surviving high style residence and reflects the antebellum period of affluence in Alabama's black belt region.

Description

A picket fence and abundant plantings surround the two-story frame, 5-bay home. The hip roof is of metal shingles. A three-bay projecting pedimented portico is supported by square wooden columns in the giant order with moulded capitals. The corner pilasters are of the same style. The three-bay balcony on the second story contains urn-shaped balustrades between square posts, also with moulded capitals. There are 2 interior chimneys. The double door entrance is within 3 bays of ship lap siding. The 3 pane side lights are set on panels with a transom above the door. The single door entrance onto the balcony above is framed by a panel with sidelights within. The windows are shuttered, 6 over 6, with cornices.

The center hall contains a wide staircase. The rear entrance repeats the form of the front entrance. The floors are pine, painted, random width. There are two large square rooms on either side of the central hall. The front right parlor has especially noteworthy plaster cornices and center medallion.

ALTERATIONS: The original portion of the building is essentially unaltered except for the introduction of bathrooms and electricity. A small wing has been added to the north side to accommodate a kitchen. The additions do not seriously detract from the original appearance of the building.

Historical Summary

#1

The Driskell-Martin House represents the affluence obtained in the antebellum period by its owner, Thomas Sanford Driskell, a planter and a merchant. A native of Virginia, he came to Alabama with his father-in-law, Davis McGee (#1). He and his wife, Emily, the eldest of McGee's daughters, first lived in a two-room cabin behind the site of the present house. The land had been patented from the public lands in 1832 by Ferrel Gorman. Driskell's store was on the corner of First Avenue and Cherry Streets, the present site of a brick store now owned by the Martin family. Annually Driskell went by horseback to Charleston to buy merchandise, which was then shipped to the port of Mobile, went by steamer up the Alabama River to Selma and then over land by wagon. The quality of his residence indicates familiarity with the architectural fashions of the day. The house was built by carpenters Nelson Mitchell, Massena Godwin, and others. The interior plaster work is said to have been executed by French craftsmen. As the finest residence in Plantersville, it was commandeered by General Alison for Federal headquarters. This may have prevented its destruction. Major General Wilson occupied the house as his cavalry fought from Ebenezer Church, in Stanton, to Selma in April 1865. After 65 years of Driskell ownership, the mansion was purchased by Dr. Thomas Munroe Martin in 1915. Today it is the home of his son and his family.

In various manuscripts there have been several spellings of this name. Driskell is preferred as that is the spelling used by E. E. Todd, a grandson, in his manuscript and the spelling to be found carved in a joist of the house.