

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAR 8 1988

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

RECEIVED

For NPS use only

received MAR 22 1988

date entered

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

**1. Name**

historic Davis/Oak Grove District

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number W side of Oak Grove Rd. just N of Kali Oka Rd. NA not for publication

city, town Mauvila vicinity of congressional district 1

state Alabama code 01 county Mobile code 097

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<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 type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Spring Hill College

street & number 4000 Dauphin Street

city, town Mobile vicinity of state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Mobile County Courthouse

street & number 109 Government Street

city, town Mobile state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Alabama Inventory Mobile County Architectural Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date 1970-present 1986 federal  state  county local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input 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 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 Davis/Oak Grove District is the best remnant of the commercially successful late nineteenth--early twentieth centuries sawmill established and operated by M. L. Davis. It was located in the area of the earlier community of Oak Grove between Williams Creek and the M & O Railroad tracks. Today the site contains the two main houses with their numerous attendant outbuildings.

- (1) The M. L. Davis house is oriented to the east facing the road and located to the north of the Ben Davis house on the same property. Irregular in form, the house presents a five bay front and has a large bay on the right (N) side and a small one room addition to the rear. Attached at the rear of the house under their own gable are two rooms which serve as the kitchen and pantry. The central section of the building is one and a half stories while the remainder of the structure is one story. The complex roof is interrupted by six chimneys and a number of cast-iron attic vents. The house is raised high on brick pier foundations, and is clad in lapped siding.

An unusual feature is the front gallery which wraps around the left side and forms a continuous gallery with the gallery on the wing. In addition, there is an L-shaped rear porch with an attached rain porch, more typically seen on the bay houses of the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. The porch and gallery columns are simple and rectangular with plain square balusters between. The porches and galleries create an exterior emphasis to the rooms of the house, blending the exterior and interior while providing additional living space with the communal aspect of the shared gallery.

Centered on the front is a pedimented inset dormer with a pedimented window. The front dormer and the two on either side of the house are covered with asbestos shingles. The ornate door has two lights over two panels, each detailed with reeded and bull's-eye mouldings. The doorway is plain but frames a three light full transom and two light sidelights over panels.

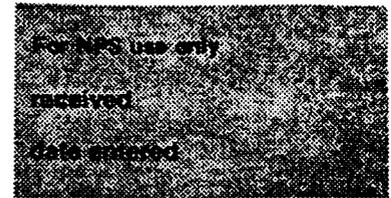
The windows of the house vary. Those on the front are 6/9 to the floor. The south side has four 6/6, and two 2/4 to the floor which are duplicated on the front of the south wing. These slide-bys allow direct access to the gallery from most of the rooms off the porch. The dormer windows are new 6/6 while the rest of the the windows are mainly older 6/6. Several doors and windows access the house from the rear porch.

The interior plan is complex. It has a central hall with a transverse stair hall. This allows for two rooms to the front on the north side of the house and two to the rear of the stair hall. The south side of the house has three rooms off the central hall and a passageway which leads to the two room south wing and to the pantry/kitchen wing. The upper half story is divided into several rooms to either side of a central hall.

The interior of the house is primarily finished with beaded board but there is some plaster in the dining room, hall, southeast parlor and south wing. The dining room is the only room with any elaboration: it has strap work on the ceiling and walls, a built-in china cabinet and a chair rail carved with an organic pattern. The fireplaces tend to be simple, and most are double with closets in several rooms. The interior doors have transoms for ventilations. There is an ornate Victorian grille in the central hall.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 7. Page 1.

- (2) The Ben Davis house located to the south of the M. L. Davis house is also oriented to the east. Two stories and irregular in form, the plan is L-shaped with a one story rear kitchen wing. The roof is cross hipped and pierced by two chimneys with a lower gable over the kitchen wing. The house is raised on brick pier foundations and is constructed with lapped siding.

A distinctive feature of the house is the two story, L-shaped double decked gallery which wraps around the facade and south side of the main block and continues across the front of the off-set wing. The first story facade windows are 6/9 and extend to the floor, the only exception being the 6/6 window on the south side of the forward part of the house. All other original windows are 6/6. The second story south wing rooms have doors giving access to the porch.

The rear of the house has an L-shaped one story porch which leads down the kitchen wing and south across most of the rear of the house. Access is given by irregularly placed doors and windows. Off the rear gallery is a rain porch probably used to protect the gallery from the afternoon sun. An unusual feature, it is more often associated with the bay houses on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay.

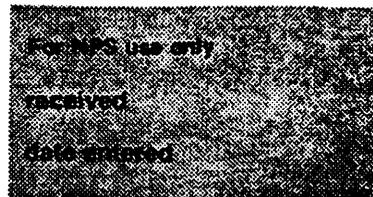
The porch columns on the front and rear are boxed and simple with plain rectangular balusters between. The front porch is reached by a set of eight steps composed of concrete treads and brick dogtooth risers with brick cheeks capped in concrete. The front of the house is three bays with the left most (south) bay containing a door leading into the stair hall. The doorway is plain with a four light full transom and two side lights over panels. The door is half glass.

The interior plan of the house is quite simple. The stair hall leads from the front to the rear on both floors with a bath at the back of the second floor. To one side, the left (north), are two rooms with double fireplaces and a connecting door. At the back of the hall, a door leads to the south wing comprised of two interconnecting rooms and a double fireplace. On the first floor, the two room kitchen wing opens into the northwest room.

The house is plastered throughout and is simply decorated. A large archway leads into the front first floor room. The fireplace in this room has a brick dogtooth surround similar to the brick dogtooth risers of the front porch steps. The remaining fireplaces are quite simple. The interior doors have two light transoms and the simple stairway runs from the back to the front.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 7.

Page 2.

Outbuildings

A group of outbuildings is associated with the two houses at Oak Grove. A garage and servant's quarters are near the Ben Davis house, and all other buildings are associated with the M. L. Davis house. A church, originally located to the southeast of the Ben Davis house, burned in the early nineteen-seventies.

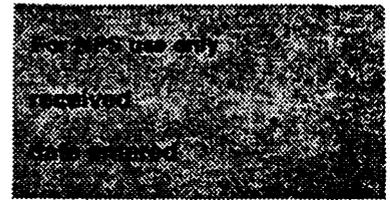
- (3) Garage: south of the Ben Davis house; frame, of various siding materials; one story; gable to front; large front door for automobile; oriented to north; fair condition; probably from the late 1930s. (Non-contributing)
- (4) Servant's house: west of Ben Davis house; frame, board and batten; one story; gable to front; shed porch with central door; one room; rear exterior end chimney; oriented to south; very poor condition; probably c. 1900. (Contributing)

Behind the north end of the M. L. Davis house is the following group of buildings:

- (5) Servant's Quarters/Bath house: frame with lapped siding; one story; full length recessed front porch; three front doors (altered facade); two interior chimneys; oriented to east; very good condition; c. 1890; now used as a bath house. (Contributing)
- (6) Cistern Building: frame, board and batten; two story with round cistern on upper level; hipped roof; considerable siding is gone from first floor; raised aqueduct leads to house; poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (7) Cistern: round metal cistern set atop of truncated pyramidal base clad in corrugated metal; c. 1910. (Contributing)
- (8) Shed: frame, lapped siding; one story; gable to front; central door with wood stoop; one room; oriented to west; poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (9) Servant's Quarters: frame, board and batten; one story; gable to sides; irregular facade with full length shed awning; originally one room, this structure was virtually doubled in size by the Davis family attaining its present appearance during the 1890-1931 period; exterior end chimney; oriented to east; very poor condition; c. 1840 and 1900. (Contributing)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 7.

Page 3.

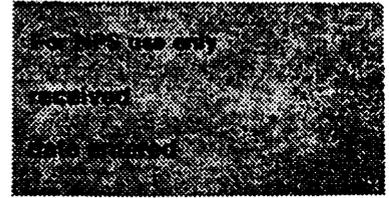
Set farther back (west) from the house and to the south is another group of three structures:

- (10) Chicken House: frame, lapped siding; one story; low gable to sides; central door; one open room, divided by wire cages; oriented to east; fair condition; probably c. 1920. (Contributing)
- (11) Chicken Coop: frame, board and batten; one story; gable to front; central door; one room; oriented to east; poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (12) Shed: frame, board and batten and vertical boards; low one story; gable to front; central door; one room; oriented to east; very poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (13) Barn: located behind the chicken coop; frame, board and batten; one and a half stories; gable to front; large door at left; divided interior with loft; oriented to north; fair condition; c. 1910. (Contributing)
- (14) Outhouse: set north and slightly east of barn; frame, vertical boards; gable to sides; two front doors; two small rooms; oriented to east; dilapidated; date unknown. (Contributing)
- (15) Barn: located about 100 yards to the rear of the main complex down a winding road at one time reached by rail; frame; one and a half stories; gable to front; divided interior with loft; oriented to the south; obscured by undergrowth; poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (16) Barn: located north of the M. L. Davis house; frame, vertical boards; one and a half stories; gable to front; central doorway; pent down west side; divided interior with loft; oriented to south; poor condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)
- (17) Schoolhouse/Carriagehouse: located due north about 100 feet from the M. L. Davis house; frame, lapped siding; two story; first used as a carriagehouse with two large doorways, and second floor used as a schoolroom for the Davis children; low hip roof truncated by centered, hipped belfry; balcony centered on front with central door flanked by a window to either side; exterior stair on west side; rear (north) one story gabled addition; building oriented to south; good condition; c. 1890. (Contributing)

Contributing	16
Noncontributing	<u>1</u>
Total	17

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 8.

Page 1.

Period of Significance

The Davis/Oak Grove District is significant from 1890, the construction date of the first large Davis house to 1931, the closing of the mill. The one nominated structure dating prior to 1890 was substantially altered by the Davis family, attaining its present appearance during this period. All other contributing structures in the district were built during the period of significance.

Historic Summary

In 1886 M. L. Davis, a resident of West Florida, moved to Oak Grove in central Mobile County to establish a saw mill. He selected the area due to its proximity to the M & O Railroad, the availability of a logging pond, the location of nearby tracts of timber and the remains of an earlier settlement that could provide housing.

The mill was begun in 1887. It was a circular saw mill designed to produce 20,000,000 to 30,000,000 board feet annually. It was considered a large mill for its day and its operations were very efficient. The steam driven carriage which carried the logs past the saw was over fifty feet long and designed specifically to handle the long and heavy timbers used in the construction of docks, railroad cars and the like. In fact, the mill provided materials for the docks in Rio de Janeiro and for the forestry pavilion at the St. Louis World's Fair. The Davis operation exclusively milled long leaf yellow pine and produced a variety of different kinds of lumber. There was a large planing mill so that much, though not all, of the timber was finished.

In 1890, the house on the north side of the property was built by M. L. (Matthew Livingston) Davis after a fire destroyed the earlier house which the family had bought. In 1900, Ben Davis, the younger brother of Matthew Livingston, had a house built near his brother's. The lumber used in the construction of both residences came from the Davis mill. The numerous contributing outbuildings are associated mainly with the M. L. Davis house and the majority date from around 1890, except for one very early structure probably dating from the 1840s and which was heavily modified by the Davis family.

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

**Specific dates** 1890 & 1900      **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### Criterion A: Commerce

The sawmill established by the Davis family rejuvenated the faded community at Oak Grove and helped develop a large portion of central Mobile County by spreading its influence west almost to the Mississippi State line. Evidence of this impact can be seen just east of Georgetown in Mobile County where two workers' houses remain. Aside from these structures which have been heavily modified, the two Davis houses with their numerous outbuildings, advantageously located between the stream used by the mill and the railroad also important to the business, are the last physical remnants of this prosperous venture.

#### Criterion C: Architecture

The buildings constructed for the Davis family represent the finest extant examples of architecture in the Oak Grove vicinity. With their numerous outbuildings, they are an excellent illustration of a late nineteenth century household, being perhaps the most complete and best preserved such group in Mobile County.

The two houses at Oak Grove evidence traditional influences and unusual adaptations to the local environment. They are both characterized by Greek Revival elements in plan and decoration but also show indications of local adaptations of a Creole dominance. The basic plans are somewhat conventional, but the use of the extended side ell with its gallery bridged to the front porch by a side gallery is extremely unusual and may be unique. These adaptations to the climate may have their origins in the wrap-around porches of the French Colonial Plantation House which emphasized exterior-living through the use of galleries.

#### Integrity

The two houses on the old Davis property in Oak Grove are in good condition with relatively minor changes. Baths have been added to the rear of the buildings, and have no impact on the visual or architectural integrity of the structures. The outbuildings vary in condition and have been changed very little or not at all, except for the 1840 structure which bears a secondary date of 1900.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Oral History tape of: William Watson Davis (Son of M. L. Davis)  
Correspondence with: Lane Davis (Grandson of M. L. Davis)  
149 Magowan Avenue  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 12.2

Quadrangle name Kushla

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

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

B 

1	6	3	8	6	6	2	0	3	4	1	4	7	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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

D 

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

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

\* \* \* SEE ATTACHED \* \* \*

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Devereaux Bemis, Architectural Historian

organization Mobile Historic Development Commission date August 19, 1987

street & number P. O. Box 1827 telephone (205)438-7281

city or town Mobile state Alabama 36633-1827

## 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.

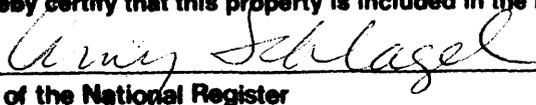
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 3-16-88

### For NPS use only

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



date 5/3/88

Keeper of the National Register

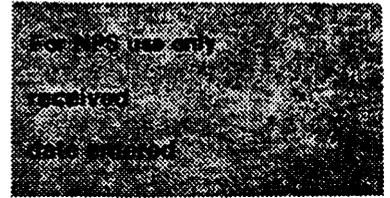
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 8.

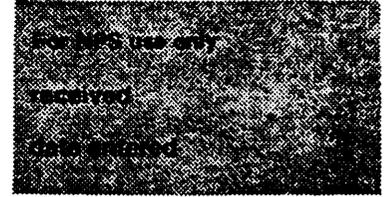
Page 2.

Historic Summary - Continued

The Mill revitalized the Oak Grove area and spread its influence as it expanded in search of new sources of timber. Rail spurs, roads and workers' houses were built as far west as the early nineteenth century settlement of Georgetown near the Mississippi State line. In 1931, after the death of Matthew Davis, the mill gradually ceased operations. R. J. Walker managed the mill for a while and it was then torn down. The metal in the rails and the machinery was sold for scrap. As the houses for the workers became vacant, they and the mill office (which also held the company store) were torn down. Today, the two houses and their outbuildings are the best surviving remnants of the Davis Mill. The property now belongs to Spring Hill College and is used for retreats.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet Davis/Oak Grove District Item number 10.

Page 1.

Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

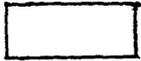
Proceed along Oak Grove 3/10 of a mile northwesterly from the intersection of Oak Grove Road and Kali Oka Road to the Point of Beginning: Thence west 1000 feet, running south of the herein described garage, to a point; thence north 650 feet, running west of the herein described barn located to the rear of the major complex, to a point; thence east 825 feet, running north of the above mentioned barn, to Oak Grove Road; thence south 700 feet along Oak Grove Road to the Point of Beginning, containing all the structures herein described and containing 12.2 acres more or less. The above boundaries include all nominated structures and contiguous land, all being the property of Spring Hill College and protected by covenant agreed to by the College.

(15)  
Barn

THE DAVIS/OAK GROVE COMPLEX

(Not drawn to scale.)

W  
S + N  
E



Contributing



Noncontributing

(13)  
Barn

□ Outhouse (14)

Chicken Coop (11)

□ Shed (12)

Chicken House (10)

(9) Servant's Quarters

Cistern Building

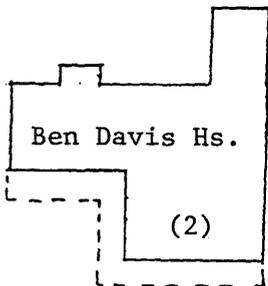
(6) (7) Cistern

(8) Shed

Servant's Quarters/Bath House (5)

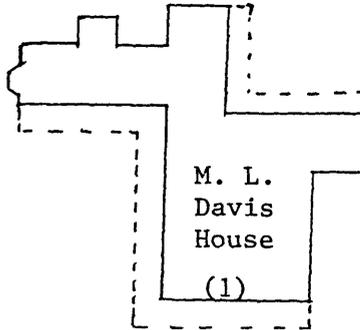
(4)

Servant's House



Ben Davis Hs.

(2)



M. L.  
Davis  
House

(1)

Barn  
(16)

(17)

Schoolhouse/  
Carriagehouse

Garage

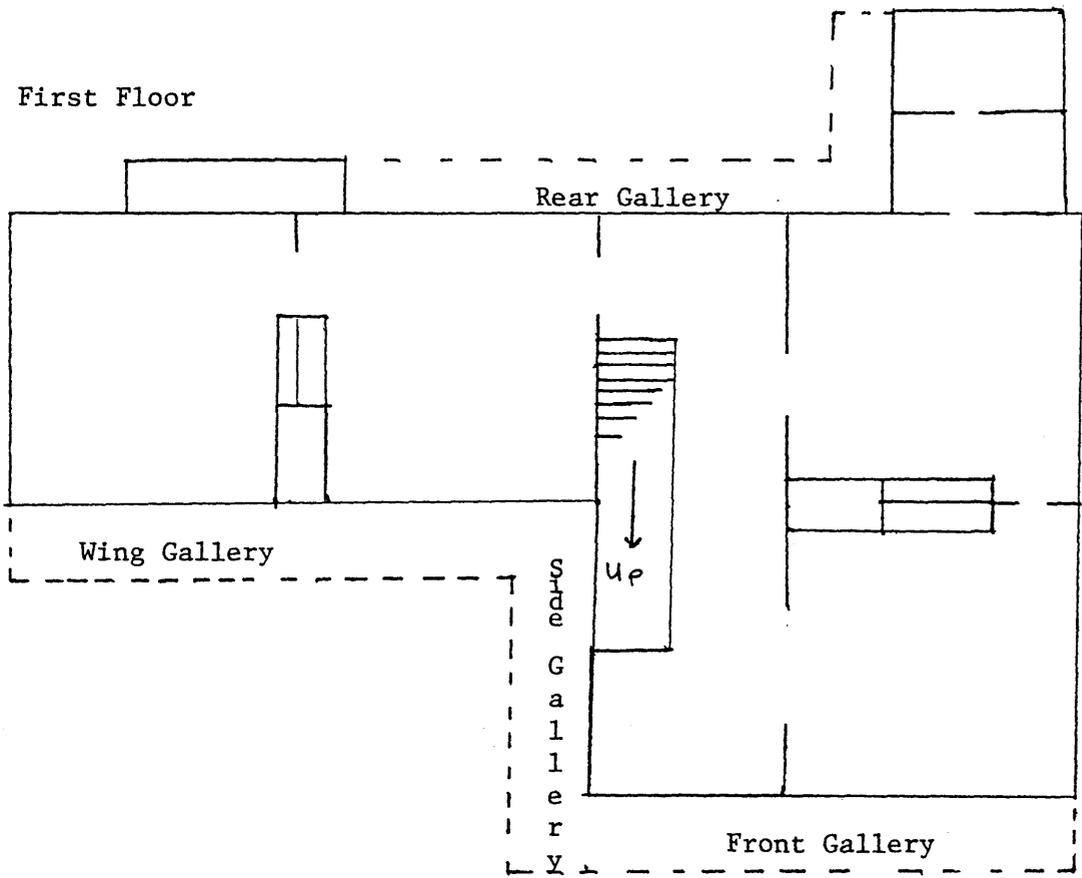


(15)

First Floor

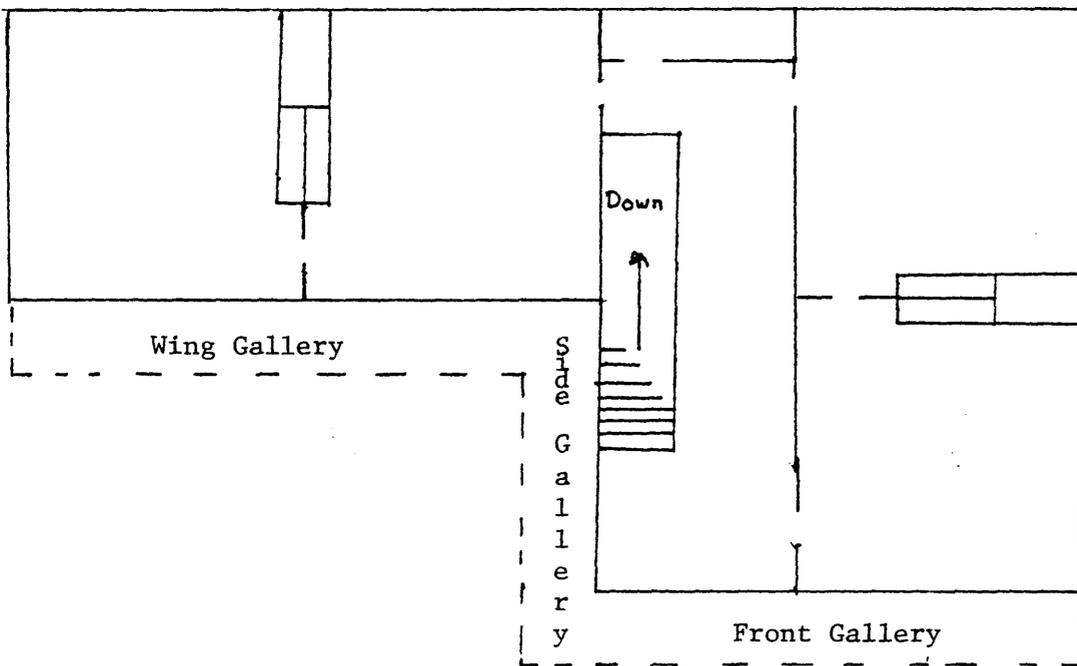
Ben Davis House

Ground Plans\*



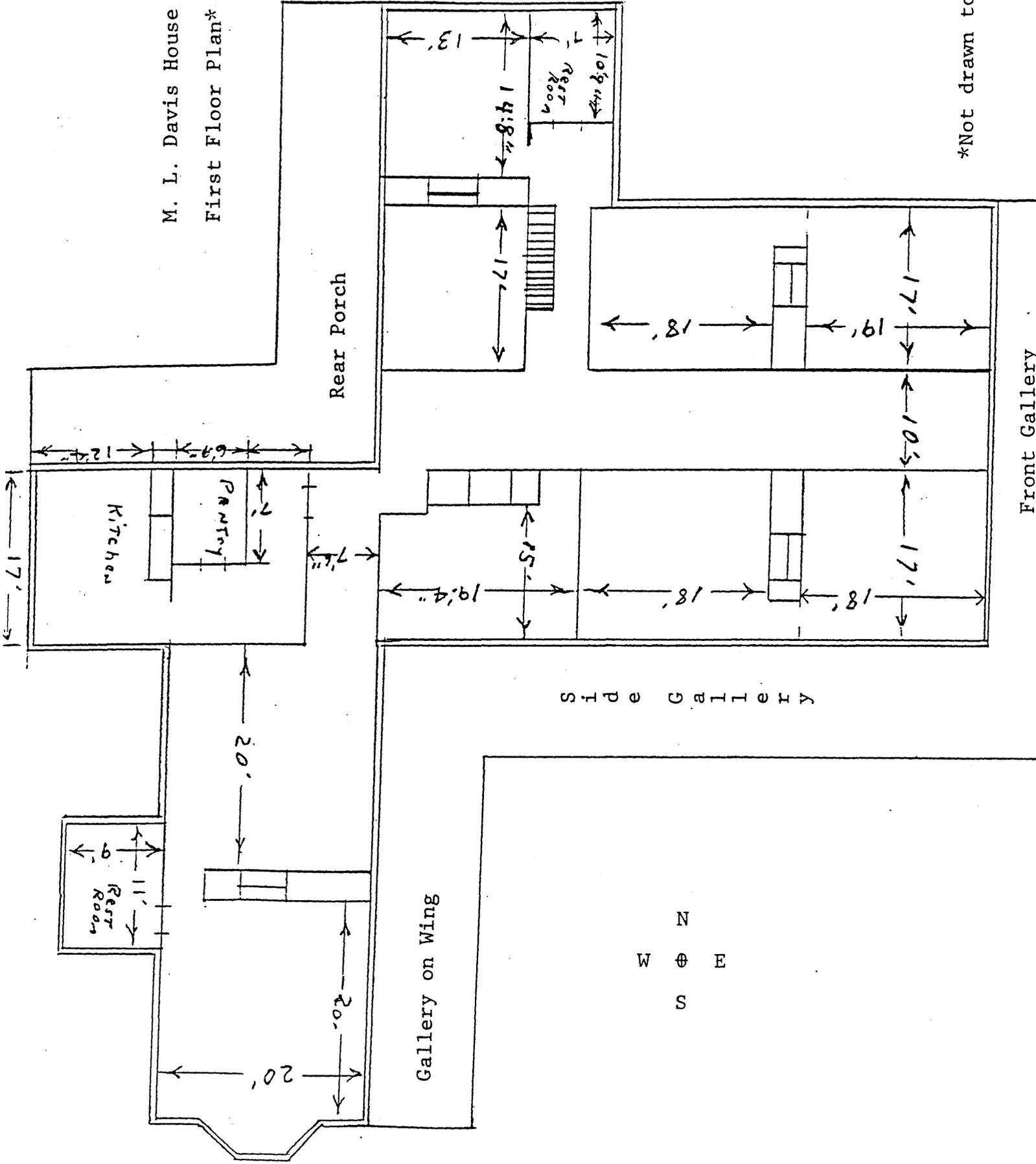
W  
S ⊕ N  
E

Second Floor

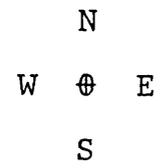


\*Not drawn to scale.

M. L. Davis House  
 First Floor Plan\*



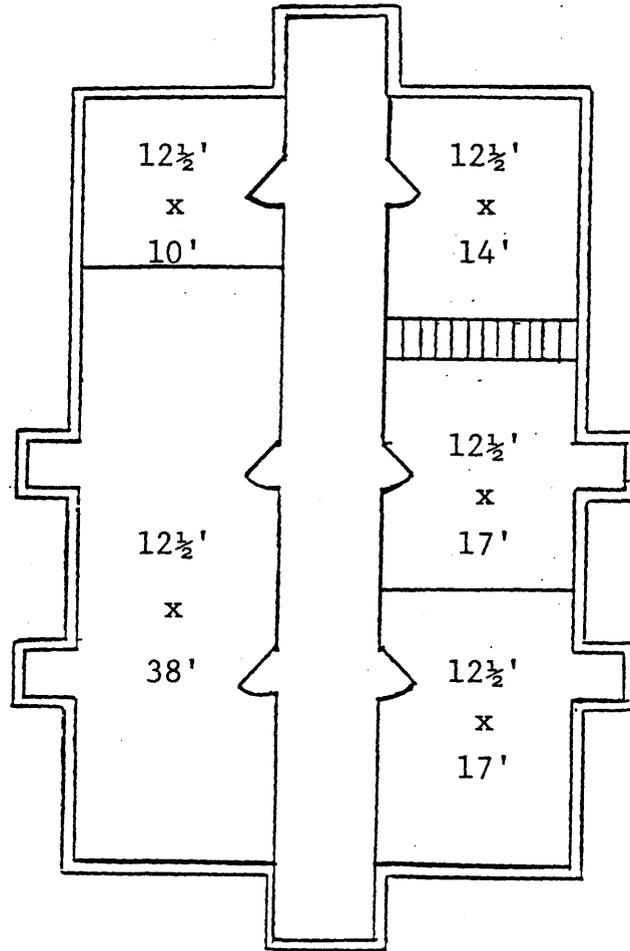
\*Not drawn to scale.



M. L. Davis House  
Second Floor Plan  
(Not Drawn to Scale.)

S  
W  
E  
N

REAR



FRONT

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 88000445

Date Listed: 5/3/88

Davis-Oak Grove District

Mobile County

AL

Property Name

County

State

N/A

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*Amy Schlegel*  
Signature of the Keeper

*May 3, 1988*  
Date of Action

-----  
Amended Items in Nomination:

The resource count is not broken into categories because this nomination is on the old nomination form. It should read 13 contributing buildings and three (cistern, cistern house, and chicken coop) contributing structures and one non-contributing building, the garage.

Discussed and concurred in by Alabama SHPO, 5/3/88.

-----  
DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)