

Benjamin H. Averietts Houses

(Thematic Group)

Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Travis
Wesson
Route 5, Box 47
Sylacauga, AL 35150

Historic name: William Averietts House
Common name: The Averietts Place

Location: Talladega County on a private road approximately
½ mile south of Highway 8 in the Fayetteville
Community

Acreage: Approximately 2 acres UTM: A. 16/556/060/3666/160
B. 16/556/060/3666/060
C. 16/556/030/3666/040
D. 16/556/000/3666/040
E. 16/556/000/3666/180

Verbal boundary: Identified as Parcel 1.01 on the attached
Plat Map. Boundaries reflect current ownership of approxi-
mately 2 acres. Spring is located within boundaries approxi-
mately 200' north of the house.

Date of Construction: 1866-67

Statement of Significance:

Criterion A - Agriculture

The William Averietts House is significant because of its place in the evolution of a family farming unit which is representative of Alabama's 19th and early 20th Century agricultural development. Second generation agricultural prosperity and reconstruction farming are represented in this house which emerged as the center of the family farming empire about 1880 and remained so until about 1920 when, at William Averietts's death, the family matriarchs gathered at the Welch/Averietts House.

Criterion C - Architecture

The William Averietts House (1866-67) is an excellent example of mid 19th Century vernacular housing identified with the "cottage orné" movement. The house is characteristic in plan and materials of pre-war dogtrots in southwest Talladega County, and has a typical shed extension to the rear. It varies in mass, however, having a two room L and a hipped

rather than gabled roof. The exterior of the house is also unusual for its suggestion of Carpenter Gothic treatment. The board and batten finish on the north and west faces of the house compliments the curvilinear gingerbread, latticed porch baluster and perforated porch columns. Native building materials, primarily wood, brick and stone and very simple interior millwork further characterize its post war construction which apparently took place during the winters of 1866 and 1867 in order to conserve labor during the off-season for farming.

Additionally, the house is surrounded by a collection of 19th and 20th Century support buildings representative of Alabama farming during that period.

Integrity:

The William Averiet House retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Only two significant alterations have been made to accommodate modern habitation. A breezeway which connects the house to an 1890's addition has been closed to the elements and the back hall has been partitioned to allow installation of a bath. Otherwise, the house retains its historic identity. Its plan, materials and design are intact as is its rural setting and outbuildings.

Description:

The William Averiet House appears little changed since William Averiet's son, W. Wallis Averiet described and sketched his boyhood home in 1885. Built by William A. J. Averiet and his father, after the first home his father gave him burned, the house has "only five rooms, but they are very large and well furnished." The basement, is accessible by a stairway from the back hall and apparently served as a dining or kitchen area, according to 19th century family correspondence.

The L-shaped house has a central hallway flanked by two parlors and a shed extension which face the north. Two large rooms adjoin on the west side forming the L. Each room has a fireplace served by a brick, exterior, end wall chimney with the exception of two rooms and the basement which share an interior chimney situated in the L. The house rests on brick as well as fieldstone piers.

The northern and western exposures of the house are board and batten while the rest of the house is clapboard. A porch with perforated posts and latticed balusters runs the full extension of the L. Both the porch and the eave of the house are embellished with a simple but delicate, scalloped gingerbread. All of the windows are 6/6 and the roof is tin.

Porch floors as well as interior floors are all 6" pine with the exception of a brick floor in the basement. The interior has 1" x 12" board walls, four paneled doors with box locks and porcelain knobs. Six panel doors lead onto the west porch. Simple Greek Revival mantelpieces embellish the fireplaces, one of them a paneled mantel which is decorated with delicate floral vignettes painted by William's daughter, Oneta.

About 1890, a two room addition was made to the rear of the house and connected by an open breezeway. Vacant for many years, the William Averiett House was reinhabited by his great-granddaughter and her husband in 1973. They enclosed the breezeway against the elements. Few other changes were made to the original house except for the partitioning of the back of the hall to allow for the installation of a bathroom.

Outbuildings include an old two room board and batten tenant house with 12" pine floors and walls, brick and stone chimney and shed room to the rear. A hen house, an office and various sheds complete the complex. The office is a pyramidal roofed, two room tenant house relocated closer to the house from elsewhere on the farm.

Historical Summary:

Born in 1830, William Averiett was a baby when his parents migrated from newly formed Lowndes County to the Creek Indian Nation east of the Coosa River. A letter he wrote his parents from school in 1845 expressed great homesickness and gives insight to William's pioneer childhood. "I haven't had a bite of fresh fish or venison in six months o [sic] that I was at the mouth of mud creek [sic] around my tent and the smok [sic] curling off into the air and the fish a frying and the hocake [sic] a baking or that I was in the old fort and heard my houns [sic] a coming and my gun cocked . . ." ¹

Between 1845 and 1847, Benjamin Averiett acquired the tract of land which would become William A. Averiett's farm when he came home from school. ² In 1852, ³ Averiett gave his 22 year old son, William the farm he would subsequently plant for the next 65 years. An 1860 inventory gives clue to his ensuing prosperity, listing more than thirty slaves, and

¹A/H Papers. Letter dated June 6, 1845. Mud Creek flows into the Coosa River north of Cedar Creek.

²Talladega Co. Records, Deed Bk. F, p. 135, Bk. E, p 488.

³Talladega Co. Records, Deed Bk. L., p. 553.

Agricultural Census records document his success as a farmer despite reconstruction economics.⁴

Family tradition holds, and examination of the site seems to confirm that there was an earlier house on the farm (about a mile from the present) which burned in the early 1860's. Receipts for building materials during the fall and winter of 1866 and 1867 serve to further confirm the construction date traditionally given the present William A. Averiett House.⁵

By the 1880's, William had emerged as his father's successor as family patriarch, his mother had come to live with him and he was handling all family business and legal matters. Upon his death, the house was, for a time, occupied by his son W. Wallis Averiett but by the mid 20th Century had become a tenant dwelling. When purchased from the family by William's great granddaughter and her husband in the early 1970's, the house was vacant, overgrown and deteriorating. Restoration is now complete.

⁴Talladega 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."

⁵A/D/G Papers.