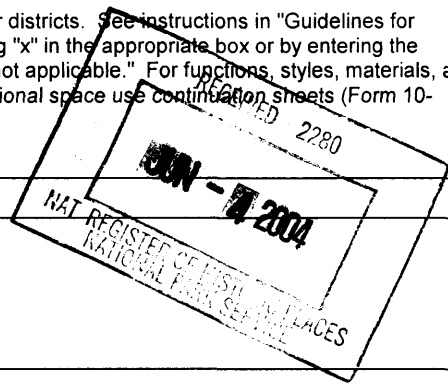


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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.



1. Name of Property

historic name Alston, Robert A., House
other names/site number Meadow Nook

2. Location

street & number 2420 Alston Drive, SE off Eastlake Road
city, town Atlanta (n/a) **vicinity of**
county DeKalb **code** GA 089
state Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 30317

(N/A) not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings	1	2
sites	0	0
structures	0	1
objects	0	0
total	1	3

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Richard Coates

6-1-04

Signature of certifying official

Date

for W. Ray Luce, Ph.D.
Historic Preservation Division Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

Edson H. Beall

7/14/04

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

for

Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

MID-19TH CENTURY: Greek Revival style

OTHER: Georgian Cottage house type

Materials:

foundation	brick piers
walls	wood
roof	asphalt shingles
other	n/a

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

Summary Description:

The Robert A. Alston House, called Meadow Nook, built c.1860, is a Georgian cottage with Greek Revival details. It is located in the East Lake area of central DeKalb County, several miles south of Decatur, the county seat, and several miles east of downtown Atlanta, just south of Memorial Drive, a major east-west thoroughfare. Although the house is situated diagonally to the present Alston Drive, it was originally entered by a sweeping horseshoe driveway from the then-Fayetteville Road. The exterior of the one-and-a-half story, weatherboarded house is enlivened by such Greek Revival details as Doric columns, trabeated doors in the front and back, and a wrap-around porch. The first floor has French doors in the front rooms that open onto the porch. The half story rises over the wrap-around porch with dormers in the front and back. Inside, the house is laid out in a four-room, central-hall plan with two rooms upstairs in the half-story. The central hall is dominated by a spiral staircase. The living room features a gray Italian marble fireplace with lancet panels incised across the lintel and on each post. Throughout the house, the doors and windows feature Greek Revival-style moldings. The dining room features the same fireplace and molding as the living room. The library has a black, Austrian marble, Greek Revival-style mantel. The master bedroom also features Greek Revival-style moldings that are found in the other rooms on this floor and a wood Greek Revival-style mantle. Each of the two second floor bedrooms has a central fireplace facing the doors to the hall and the same molding used in the downstairs rooms. The house is constructed using mortice-and-tenon joints with wooden pegs. Changes include the replacement of the detached kitchen with one formed from the back porch, and the addition of a bathroom in the dormer over the front door on the second floor. The original Doric columns were removed because of decay and replaced by a wrought-iron porch railing in the 1970s. The current owners have replaced these columns with replicas of the original columns,

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

patterned after one original that had survived. The current owners have added a bedroom and bath as a wing to the house. The noncontributing outbuildings consist of a 1940s two-car garage, a 1950s cottage used as an office, and a modern gazebo.

Full Description:

The Robert A. Alston House, called Meadow Nook, is a plain Georgian Cottage enriched by the addition of Greek Revival details with strong coastal influences. The relationship of the house to the street and the neighboring houses of today shows how the surroundings of this house have changed but have not destroyed the character of the house. The property is sheltered by several large hardwood trees, and various oaks on the property and on the neighboring property suggest an outline of the original drive. The drive is said to have been lined with hollies, but these have not survived. There is an old cedar on the property near Alston Drive. (Photographs 1 and 2.)

Although the house is situated diagonally to the present Alston Drive, it was originally entered by a sweeping horseshoe driveway from the Fayetteville Road. The exterior of the story-and-a-half, weatherboarded plain house is enlivened by such Greek revival details as Doric columns (photograph 2), trabeated doors in the front and back (photographs 8 and 14), and a temple form porch (photographs 1 and 2). The columns, which are replacement duplicates for the missing originals, were carved from cypress wood to support the sloping porch roof all around the first floor of the house. The first floor also has long windows, including French doors in the front rooms that open on to the porch (photographs 2 and 8). The half story rises over the spreading porch with dormers in the front and back that open on the porch roof (photographs 1, 2, and 5) and small windows in the side walls under the eaves of the roof (photograph 1). All of these windows except for the dormers have shutters which further break up the outside wall surface of this house. The Alston House was built, according to tradition, by Andrew Marshall, a local carpenter, and became a full-time residence in the early 1860s.

Inside, the house is laid out in a four-room central-hall plan with a two-room plan upstairs in the half story. This hall is dominated by an oval spiral staircase (photographs 15 and 16). A small living room, which opens off the hall to the right, features a gray Italian marble fireplace with lancet panels incised across the lintel and on each post. (Photograph 9.) The French doors in the living room are surrounded by a wide, simple, beveled molding that runs around the baseboard and up over the other doors in the room, including the elaborately arched folding door to the dining room. The dining room features the same fireplace and molding as the living room although it may be a bit longer. (Photograph 10.)

The library, across the hall from the living room, has a black, Austrian marble, square, Greek Revival fireplace with a mantel that curves twice horizontally and a medallion carved in the shape of a leaf in the center of the lintel, as well as the simple beveled moldings from the other rooms as its main assets. (Photographs 11 and 12.) After the rich marble mantels of the living room, dining room, and library, the plain early nineteenth-century mantel of the master bedroom, across from the dining room, comes as a dramatic change. (Photograph 13.) The master bedroom also features the wide, simple

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

beveled moldings that are found in the other rooms on this floor. The diagonal fireplaces are another asset of all of these rooms

On the second floor are found the other two bedrooms, which divide the upper floor in thirds with the hall. They are very large, simple rooms with central fireplaces in each facing the doors to the hall, and the same molding that was used in the downstairs rooms. The outside ends of each of these rooms have large dormer windows that look out over the porch and make them appear longer. (Photograph 17.)

The house is constructed using mortice-and-tenon joints with wooden pegs and wrought iron nails in a few places to hold the joints together. The removal of one of these carefully joined and pegged beams under the house during the installation of a furnace in 1975 caused the right side of the house to sag in the only major structural damage to occur to this soundly built nineteenth-century building. This problem has been corrected.

Changes to the house include the replacement of the detached kitchen with one formed from the back porch (photograph 14), the electrical wiring and plumbing, and the addition of a bathroom in the dormer over the front door on the second floor. The original Doric columns were removed because of decay, and replaced by wrought iron porch railing in the 1970s. The current owners have replaced these columns with replicas of the original columns, patterned after one original that had survived. The current owners have also added a bedroom and bath as a wing to the house. (Photographs 3 and 4.) This addition and the other restoration by the current owners won an Award of Excellence from the Atlanta Urban Design Commission in 1998.

Outbuildings include a two-car garage that appears to have been built around the 1940s, that is directly in front of the house at the end of the new driveway. It is a wooden structure with double doors, painted white. (No photograph.) A white, one-story wooden cottage behind the house was built in the 1950s. It is currently used as an office. (Photograph 6.) There are only dirt or gravel paths approaching it. There is a gazebo added in the early 1990s. (Photograph 7.) Nearby is the commemorative burial marker honoring Pvt. George M. Rikard dedicated in 2001. None of these are considered contributing due to the period of significance ending with Robert Alston's death in 1879.

The property is located within the early to mid-20th-century East Lake neighborhood and only a short distance from the East Lake Golf Club and golf course, carved in the early 1900s from the original Alston property. The recent restoration of the clubhouse and the golf course and other developments have revived the neighborhood.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Politics and Government

Period of Significance:

ca. 1860-1879

Significant Dates:

ca. 1860

Significant Person(s):

Alston, Robert A.

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Marshall, Andrew, traditionally the local builder/carpenter

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Statement of significance (areas of significance)

The Robert Alston House is significant in architecture as an excellent example of a Georgian Cottage with Greek Revival details including Doric columns on the front porch. Its overall form and floorplan are intact. It retains almost all of its original materials in the house including floors, mantels, doors, and moldings. Some of the most important interior details are the extraordinary spiral staircase and the original mantels in the three main rooms on the first floor of Italian and Austrian marble. The intact nature of this once rural property is quite remarkable, given its years of being rental property. It is one of the few houses in Atlanta surviving from the Civil War period, and possesses a Greek Revival style with strong coastal, South Carolina, influences. It was built late in the antebellum period, perhaps as a summer home, but quickly became a permanent refuge during the Civil War, and has survived the creation of a city around it. It has survived urban blight almost intact, and can be the centerpiece of the restoration of the neighborhood.

The house is also significant in politics and government because of the role played in Georgia politics by the original owner, Robert A. Alston (1832-1879), who was an attorney in Charleston when he returned to his birth state of Georgia in the early 1860s as the Civil War began. Moving to this house during the Civil War, the family was forced from the home during the war, when the house became the headquarters for Union General John Schofield during the Battle of Atlanta. In 1872 Alston became editor of the *Atlanta Daily Herald*, eventually having Henry W. Grady (who later wrote Alston's obituary) as a partner. Before it closed in 1875, Alston's paper had championed women's rights. Alston was elected a State Representative in 1878, and during this time many famous people came to the house. He often took unpopular stands on important social issues of the day. He opposed the convict lease system, and due to an argument over this he was killed in a duel at the State Capitol in 1879. For years afterwards, African-Americans honored him with an annual ceremony at his grave for his stance on the lease system. While the family sold the house and surrounding farm in 1886, Alston's daughter and husband lived in the house until the early 1900s. The attached farm was eventually subdivided, becoming the East Lake neighborhood which now surrounds the house as well as the East Lake Golf Club and golf course, across the street. The house itself had numerous later owners. Alston's role in Georgia history was significant enough for his inclusion in the *Dictionary of Georgia Biography* in 1983.

National Register Criteria

The Robert A. Alston House meets National Register Criterion A because of the role Robert Alston played in post-Civil War Atlanta in his role as a newspaper owner/editor, as an elected representative who took stances opposing the convict lease system, and his support of other causes. His death in a duel was the last of its kind in Georgia politics. The house meets National Register Criterion B because of Alston's role and his previously recognized significance by being included in the *Dictionary of Georgia Biography*, published by the University of Georgia Press in 1983. That two-volume set contains biographical sketches of 1,000 Georgians deemed by the editorial board to be the most important Georgians to qualify for inclusion. The property meets National Register Criterion C because it is a remarkably intact example of a late antebellum Georgian Cottage with Greek

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Revival details and an extraordinary amount of remaining original materials including doors, walls, mantels, spiral staircase, floors, pocket doors, and French doors. The recently constructed wing addition is clearly subsidiary to the main historic house and does not compromise its historic architectural qualities.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

N/A

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins with the apparent completion of the house circa 1860 to the death of Robert A. Alston in 1879. This covers the time that Robert A. Alston lived in the house and thus its greatest association with historical personages and events.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

Contributing: Total 1

Buildings: (1) Main House

Structures: 0

Noncontributing: Total 3

Buildings: (2) the cottage, and the garage

Structures: (1) gazebo

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

Introduction

The subject of this nomination, the Robert A. Alston House, is the house also known today, and since the mid-1860s, as "Meadow Nook." It was completed in 1860 or shortly thereafter in rural DeKalb County, Georgia, for [Col.] Robert Augustus Alston and his wife Mary Charlotte Magill Alston, he a native of Georgia, she from Georgetown District/County, just east of Charleston, S.C. The house sits on Land Lot 181 in the 15th District of DeKalb County, on land opened for settlement by the 1821 Land Lottery. The house, while in a rural area for decades, is located only five miles from the Georgia State Capitol and the heart of Atlanta.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

The History of the Land, 1821-1861, Before the House

The history of the land lot's first forty years, 1821 to 1861, before the Alstons settled there permanently, is not easily compiled, due in part to a fire in the DeKalb County Courthouse in 1842 which destroyed deeds recorded up to that time. To determine when a house is completed on property, often the price increase of the land sales is one indicator, another is by analyzing the workmanship of the house. There is no reason to doubt that this house was completed by 1860-1861, during the last years before the Civil War began, at the very end of the Antebellum era. It is impossible to prove, with currently available documents, that the house was completed as early as 1855, as suggested by the Alston family tradition.

The present legal parcel on which the house sits is the remaining land associated with the house from a much larger lot, Land Lot 181, which originally consisted of 202 ½ acres. The lot was won in the 1821 Land Lottery and later granted in 1828 to Mrs. Jemima Williams of Warren County, Georgia. Presumably she, like many other lottery winners, did not move to the land and it was sold. Due to the aforementioned 1842 fire at the DeKalb County Courthouse, and the loss of the early deeds, the intervening years of ownership from 1828 to 1842 are not clearly known. The land reappears in the records in 1842 when Robert M. Brown, (who coincidentally after 1866 became a brother-in-law to Alston, an attorney in Decatur, the county seat of DeKalb, and also clerk of the DeKalb County Superior Court from 1848 to 1856), mortgaged Land Lot 181 and the west half of Land Lot 182 to one of his Decatur neighbors, Tunstall B. George. On February 25, 1843, he sold the 303 ¾ acre property to George for \$800. [DeKalb County, GA Deed Book H, pp. 49-50, and 169-170.] Mr. George was sometimes a hotel owner. In the 1850 census both men appear to be living in or close to the city of Decatur and not on this property which is approximately three miles from the center of Decatur. There is a deed in 1855 showing Mr. George selling the adjacent Land Lot 180 to one Benjamin Y. Martin for \$1,000, a fairly high price. Martin sold it a month later for \$1,000 to Edward B. Walker of Fulton County, an uncle of Robert A. Alston. [DeKalb County, GA Deed Book O, pp. 173-174.] When combined with the acquisition (below) of the property on which the house sits by another uncle, Thomas C. Howard, it shows that Alston's relatives became involved in this area of the county by this time.

Another gap in the records follows and on January 25, 1859, Thomas C. Howard (1817-1893), of Fulton County, a maternal uncle of Robert A. Alston, is shown mortgaging Lot 181 and the west half of 182 to one James Gardner of Augusta, Georgia, for an unspecified amount. The deed/mortgage contained all the lands Howard owned in several places and made it clear that he lived in Fulton County on a three-acre house lot in the City of Atlanta. If Howard paid off the loan/mortgage, then Gardner would not get the land. While it is not known when or how Mr. Howard acquired the land, it does indicate a family connection to the property (with another relative owning the adjacent lot, see above) although the value of the property cannot be determined in this mortgage to determine whether Lot 181 had any house on it at that time. Since this include the future Alston House lot, which within a year (see below) appears to be owned by Howard's nephew Alston, it can be inferred that Howard must have paid off the loans and somehow transferred the property to his nephew. [DeKalb County, GA, Deed Book P, p. 131.]

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Thomas C. Howard (1817-1893), the uncle of Robert A. Alston and the first family member associated with this property, was an attorney, co-editor of the *Atlanta Daily Intelligencer* in the 1850s, and postmaster of Atlanta from 1856 to 1858 and from 1861 to 1865.

The first recorded deed showing Robert A. Alston's association with the land is a June 20, 1860 deed in which he, then of Charleston, South Carolina, sells for \$50 a small adjacent parcel, 25 acres, a part of the west half of lot 182, to Elizabeth S. [Howard] Alston, his widowed mother. In this deed, when mentioning the neighboring parcels, it indicated that Robert Alston owned the land on the north and east sides, which would be consistent with lot 181, the lot on which this house is located. Alston calls it "his land" but makes no reference to a house, but by selling to his mother land adjacent to where the house sits today, the implication is strong that he would be living nearby. His uncle and her brother, Thomas C. Howard, witnessed the deed. The deed was recorded on August 7, 1861. [DeKalb County, GA, Deed Book P, pp. 160-161.]

Alston also took out a loan for \$500 in a deed dated June 28, 1861, giving his residence as DeKalb County, GA. and his property on lots 181 and 182 as collateral to be lost if the loan from William A. Fuller was not repaid. This deed was recorded June 28, 1861. [DeKalb County, GA, Deed Book P, pp. 161-162.] This loan/mortgage was paid off or satisfied on December 26, 1862.

Robert A. Alston, the builder/owner

At this juncture, we should turn to information on Alston and his background and family to place them in the context of this house and the area.

Alston's younger half-brother, Thomas H. Alston (1851-1944), was interviewed and quoted in an article, "Random Remarks" by James A. Hall, editor of Decatur's *New Era* newspaper, subtitled "Recollections of Old Decatur" that appeared in the 1920s, presumably in the local newspaper:

"My brother, R. A. Alston, lived in a large house at East Lake. He owned three hundred acres of land and the house, which was erected shortly before the war and which is still standing in the town of East Lake, required five years for its construction. All the work was done by carpenters on the spot except the large front columns and these were made at a planing mill in Marietta and shipped to Decatur. There was no planing mill then in Atlanta. Most of the work of building this house was done by a man named Marshall. "

[*DeKalb Historical Society Bulletin* 1 (1)1976, pp. 33-34, original not seen.]

Alston's father was Willis Alston (1803-1842), who married Elizabeth S. Howard, daughter of the Rev. John Howard, a Methodist minister, in 1828, and the family lived in Macon, Bibb County, Georgia when Robert Augustus was born in 1832. They eventually had four children during their marriage: John Howard, John Floyd, (both of whom died in infancy) Robert A., and Susan Willis, born in 1834. [*The Alstons and Allstons of North and South Carolina* (1901), p. 96.]

By 1835 the family was in Florida, where Willis' father, Robert W. Alston, moved about that time. By

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

1839 Willis Alston had moved to Texas, living in Brazoria County. He had briefly returned to Florida in 1840 and 1841 to avenge the death of his older brother, Augustus, due to a duel, and after killing his brother's assailant in April 1841, Willis returned to Texas. After killing another man in Texas who harangued him about the Florida murder, Willis was killed while being held in jail-his death being announced on January 8, 1842 in one newspaper. (*The National Intelligencer*, January 27, 1842) A Florida newspaper, in announcing his death, commented on the Alston family's "passion at the slightest insult" and that they had "imperious habits and princely ways." [Burnett, Gene M., *Florida's Past* (1986), p. 230.]

Presumably, Elizabeth S. (Howard) Alston and her son Robert and her other children returned east, if they had gone to Texas with Willis, although their exact whereabouts are not clear for the period 1842-1850 . The Georgia General Assembly Sketch of Alston, presumably supplied by him in 1878, states that after his father's death: "Returning to Georgia in 1842, Robert A. went to school until he was fourteen years old [1847], when he went to Charleston, S. C., and obtained a situation in a mercantile house, presided over by E. W. Bancroft. Remaining in business until he was twenty-four years old [1857], he married...and then began the study of law. He was admitted to practice in 1858, and followed his profession until South Carolina seceded [late 1860], and then joined the State troops as a private in the Charleston Light Dragoons, which company was sent to Sullivan's Island to prevent the re-enforcement of Fort Sumter [in Charleston harbor]. He was there during the bombardment of [Ft.]Sumter [April 1861]. [Echols, Samuel A., *Georgia's General Assembly of 1878: Biographical Sketches of Senators, Representatives, The Governor and Heads of Departments*. (1878), pp. 91-94.]

Robert A. Alston married in an Episcopal service in Charleston on January 28, 1857, Mary Charlotte Magill, daughter of Dr. John D. Magill (1795-1864) of Georgetown District/County, a county area just east of Charleston.[*The Charleston Daily Courier*, January 31, 1857.] Magill was a very wealthy planter as well as a doctor. John B. O'Neill in his Biographical Sketches of the South Carolina Bench and Bar (1859) indicated that Alston was admitted as an attorney in 1857. He is shown living and working in Charleston as early as 1855 in the City Directory of that year in which he is a clerk on Meeting Street. In 1860, the same year he is selling to his mother land in Georgia, R. A. Alston paid real estate taxes in Charleston for \$2400 worth of land and a sizeable number of valuable slaves. He has not been located in the 1860 Census of South Carolina or Georgia.

After describing his early service in the Civil War, mentioned above, and his subsequent role with Col. John Hunt Morgan, mentioned below, the 1878 biographical sketch of Alston resumes the chronology of his life:

"Believing from its outbreak that the war would be a long and bloody affray, Col. Alston, in 1861, moved his family to DeKalb county, Ga., upon the place where he now [1878] lives, --the little farm of 'Meadow Nook,' one of the most charming retreats in all the land."

Thus by his own words, Alston moved with his wife and two small children both born in South Carolina to Georgia, and settled on Land lot 181 where his house, according to his brother's statement, had been completed. His wife is cited as being at a rally in Decatur as a soloist on May 15,

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

1862. [Price, Vivian. *History of DeKalb County, Georgia (1822-1900)* (1997), p. 336)

A letter written on December 6, 1863, by R. G. Matthews to Col. Alston, refers to the Alston house as "Meadow Nook" and the letter writer states he was glad Alston had written him and that he, Matthews, "was not forgotten at Meadow Nook" and obviously indicates the house was there on his recent visit. [Copy of original letter sent to Mrs. Sylvia Harrison from Carol Melton of Elon College, N.C. in 1995, original is in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.]

Alston's mother has not been located in the 1850 Census of either Georgia, South Carolina, or Florida, either in her own household, or living with her mother, or her father-in-law who was in Florida until he returned to Georgia in the mid-1850s and died in 1859 in Thomas County, or with any of her siblings.

While Robert Alston has not been located in the 1860 Census, his mother is found in the 1860 Census of Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia, adjacent to DeKalb. Mrs. Elizabeth Alston, his mother, is shown living with her two youngest children, Augustus and Thomas H., and her own mother, Mrs. Susan P. Howard. It was the same day the census was taken that Robert sold her, on June 8, 1860, the property on lot 182, adjacent to "Meadow Nook" on lot 181 and to which she presumably moved. She died on January 3, 1866, age 53 [*The Christian Index*, January 13, 1866.] and the responsibility of her two younger children fell to Robert, although given his mother's impoverished state in the 1860 census, (she had no values for personal or real estate) he was no doubt helping provide for them earlier, his younger half-brother, Thomas, born c.1851, being young enough to be Alston's son.

The Naming of the House

The Alston family story is that they named the house "Meadow Nook" because it was situated in a meadow on the banks of Doolittle Creek. At this time the house was reached by a sweeping horseshoe driveway from the Fayetteville Road, flanked by giant holly bushes, and surrounded by outbuildings.

The Civil War Years, 1861-1865

After his service in the Charleston Light Dragoons, and by early summer 1861, in the early days of the Civil War, Robert A. Alston, his wife and two children had moved to DeKalb County permanently, even with her father and other family members remaining in the Charleston area. Alston joined John Hunt Morgan's cavalry by May 1862 as a private but was soon promoted to Chief of Staff. His journal for July 1-8, 1863 survives, as it was captured during the war and reflects on his duties and war time travels during that week.

However, the house became important in the war when Alston, who became a Lt. Col. in Morgan's Raiders (the 9th Tennessee Cavalry), and other members of that unit camped out in the meadows below the house. General Morgan is supposed to have stayed in the house and written a speech to his troops there. After the Alstons were forced to leave their home, the house became the headquarters for Union General John Schofield of Ohio, who took part in the battle of Atlanta. Alston's

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

brother, T. H. Alston recalled in his 1920s memoir: "My brother had gone to the Confederate army and when his family had to leave [,] the place was rented to other people, who promised to take care of it. It fell to my lot to carry several of the pictures, a costly Madonna among them, and hide them in the woods under some old lumber. This I succeeded in doing and saved the pictures, except from damage by rain. The people in the house boxed up most of the furniture and shipped it to some of their friends in the north. My brother succeeded in getting most of it back after the war. "

Nicks from the union soldiers' rifle butts are still visible in the bannister and newel post of the staircase in the house. There is also an 1864 letter from S. M. McCrary, a neighbor of Alston's, concerning an Alabama soldier who died in battle nearby in 1862 and was buried in the garden. The letter was written to the widow of George M. Rikard. In 2001 his grave was recognized with a marker in an appropriate ceremony on the house's grounds.

Reconstruction. 1865-1870s

After the end of the Civil War in April 1865, Col. Alston returned from his military service, and gathered his family back to occupy their home and to run his farm peacefully from his elegant house. His 1878 sketch indicates he resumed the practice of law in 1865 but that by 1868 he "retired from it" and took up farming. But the farm appears not to have held his attention for long because by 1872 he was commuting to Atlanta to edit the *Atlanta Daily Herald* with Alexander St. Clair-Abrams, and eventually Henry W. Grady, who was to become one of the most famous editors of his day. The paper was crisp, smart, and newsy as its advertising stated and well known for its controversial stand on the issues of the day, but never really financially sound. In 1875, just before it closed, the paper published several long articles on women's right to work and be educated for work by Maria Jordan Westmoreland, the founder of the Women's Industrial school in Atlanta, and reports from the *New York Herald* on the trial of Victoria C. Woodhull as well as her letters of defense to the editor of the *Herald*. That same year it published *The History of Atlanta* by Henry W. Grady, his first book. By early 1876 the paper had been crushed by the older, larger, and more solvent *Atlanta Constitution*, which remains in publication today (2004) as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The biographical sketch of 1878 indicates that after the newspaper folded, Alston resumed his role of a planter/farmer briefly from 1876 to 1877, then resumed his law practice.

During this time Alston was also an agent for the Southern Life Insurance Company which provided general insurance but specifically was designed to supplement the income and pensions of Civil War veterans. When this company collapsed in 1876 there were charges of fraud against General John B. Gordon, a friend of Alston. The collapse of this company also left a huge debt, but there is no way of knowing how much of it was Alston's. He was also practicing law to pay off these debts. The DeKalb County deed books of the 1870s show him arranging to share-crop, mortgaging the farm and even having the land attached by creditors. Alston's career reached its height when he was elected to the state legislature in 1878 to serve as a state representative for the session of 1878-1879. All of this activity brought famous people of Atlanta in the 1870's to the house, "Meadow Nook." He became quite well known, the sketch's author, Mr. Echols, stating "There are few men in Georgia who do not know R. A. Alston." The sketch, in introducing him to other members of the Georgia General

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Assembly stated: "There will not be a more alert man, a more shrewd man, a more irrepressible man, or a harder customer if he is tackled, in the Georgia Legislature, than Col. Robert A. Alston."

The Death of Robert A. Alston, 1879

As a legislator Alston became involved with controversy over the practice of leasing convict laborers to private businesses through his friends Edward Cox (1843-1901) and General John B. Gordon. Gordon was one of Georgia's U.S. Senators at this time, serving from 1873 to 1880, and who would later to be governor of Georgia and again a U.S. Senator. The experience of selling two leases for convict labor turned Alston against this deeply entrenched system. As chairman of the Committee on the Penitentiary, from which the convicts were leased, he issued a report dated December 11, 1878, on how the system operated. The issue of the convict lease system was a major one at that time.

Alston's opposition to the practice caused Cox, who had originally held one of the leases, to threaten him with a gun and to the last duel fought in the then State Capitol, at Forsyth and Marietta Streets. Alston was shot on March 11, 1879 and died in a building across the street, where 50 Marietta Street now stands, "independent in politics and neutral in nothing," as the slogan for his newspaper read.

According to the *Daily Constitution* at the time of his death, the Alston family's "dash and courage made them remarkable. They were duelists born and men who rated life as a bauble in a combat for principle or a sentiment of honor and pride, or in vengeance for a wrong inflicted. Col. Robert A. Alston was to this manner born, and he succumbed to that fatality which he so often declared was an inheritance of his name - a death by violence." This was in reference to the deaths due to duels and their repercussions of both his elder brother and his father, as mentioned above.

Alston, the owner/occupier of this land roughly from 1861 to 1879, due to his public career after the Civil War and his resumption of his occupation as an attorney, was a major figure in Georgia and knew many important people. This list of his accomplishments ending in his tragic murder/assassination qualified him for inclusion in the *Dictionary of Georgia Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), in which only the most significant Georgians were included through a review committee/editorial board.

Alston was connected by birth or marriage to many important people of the era. On his mother's side, one aunt was married to David S. Walker, the Reconstruction era governor of Florida from 1865 to 1868, another aunt was married to Dr. George G. Smith (1815-1891), postmaster of Atlanta from 1851 to 1855, and father of the Rev. George Gilman Smith, noted Methodist historian and author. His uncle Thomas C. Howard's family produced some luminaries in the years after Alston's death, including a congressman and a lieutenant governor of Georgia. Alston's half-brother, Thomas H. Alston (1851-1944) had a grandson who served as president of Agnes Scott College, in Decatur, for over twenty years. Thus Alston's relatives then and later have remained among the better-known people of their era.

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Alston's Legacy and Family

After his death, the "Annual Decoration of the Grave of Col. Robert A. Alston," a memorial decoration day, was held at his grave every year by the "colored people of DeKalb County." [Quote from the program for the event.] He was, according to an advertisement of the day, "the first to expose, condemn, and denounce the workings of the vile penitentiary lease system, under which so many of our race are doomed to horror, agony, and pollution..."

A monument to his memory was also suggested in late 1879. It was not until August 1929 that the Georgia House of Representatives passed a resolution suggesting that the Alston family "be requested to erect a memorial to him in the State Library or in other suitable place in the Capitol of the State."

At his death, Robert A. Alston and his wife Mary C. (Magill) Alston had four surviving children. Elizabeth "Bessie" Howard Alston (named for his mother) was born in 1857 in South Carolina. She married November 16, 1882, in DeKalb County, Dr. Robert W. Trotter, and later lived in Madison, Georgia, where she died in 1944.

Robert West Alston was born ca 1860 in South Carolina. He studied at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and at the University of Georgia. After his father's death he worked in Washington, DC, at the Treasury Department, while studying law at Georgetown Law School. On October 23, 1886, he committed suicide by shooting himself in his office at the Treasury Building. His remains were brought back to Decatur and buried in the family plot in the city cemetery in an unmarked grave. [*Atlanta Journal*, October 27, 1886, p. 4.]

Daniel Denny Alston was born in 1867 in Georgia and named for a benefactor who helped Alston and his family out of a difficult financial bind. He is said to have moved to Florida. Mary Charlotte, known as "Minnie," was born in 1869 in Georgia. She married in DeKalb County, Georgia, on October 25, 1888, Maj. Robert Grosvenor Batten, then associated with the Southern Railway and Steamship association, who later worked in Washington D.C., where he died in 1911. [Washington D.C. 1891 City Directory; Index to Wills for the District of Columbia; *Atlanta Constitution*, October 28, 1888, p. 18.]

Mrs. Alston continued to live on the 300-plus acre property until her death on September 5, 1884. The *Atlanta Constitution* of September 6 indicated she "died at her home in Decatur," although it must be presumed she died at "Meadow Nook." Her funeral took place at the Decatur Methodist Church. Senator (General) John B. Gordon was one of the pallbearers, as were other notable men of the era. Her casket "was followed to the grave by a large procession of both races." She was buried at the Decatur City Cemetery on the Alston family lot in an unmarked grave. [*Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1884, p. 5.]

After this her estate was advertised for sale and the house, outbuildings, and land were described in the legal notice.

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The 303-acre property's boundary on today's map would include land surrounding the East Lake Golf Club and golf course, with lot 181 being south of Memorial Drive (the northern boundary line of it and lot 204) and running south, including the East Lake Golf Club and golf course, and ending just south of Glenwood Avenue. The western boundary would be just west of today's Second Avenue. On the east it bordered lot 182 and the half the Alston estate included of lot 182 would have run to approximately the eastern end of the East Lake club property or Allendale Drive.

As the larger parcel was extensively subdivided, the lot surrounding the house, "Meadow Nook," got increasingly smaller. A long list of owners, some for short periods, some for longer, follows, to emphasize that despite all these various owners, the house remained relatively intact and was restorable in the 1990s.

The Division of the Alston Estate, 1885-1892, and the formation of "East Lake"

Mary Magill Alston, Alston's widow, and the children lived in the house and ran the farm until she died in 1884. The inventory of her estate lists the furnishings room by room, and is a remarkable record in its details. From it one learns not only the names and uses of the rooms, but also all of their contents and their value. Included is a list of paintings and silverware. There was also listed a two-story dwelling and two tenant houses, among the real estate, as well as outhouses and barns. It was signed on November 27, 1884. Robert W. Alston, their older son, and Elizabeth Alston Trotter, their older daughter, bought the farm at the estate sale/auction in early 1885 from their mother's estate. They paid approximately \$20 an acre for the land, the 300 or so acre estate.

On March 10, 1886, they sold the land to James H. Helmer for \$9,000. Helmer had come to Georgia from California, from where he had migrated during the gold rush of 1849. He began mining operations in North Georgia, and for years supervised the work of a gold dredge on the Chestatee River. He also opened several valuable mica mines. In the 1880s he moved to Atlanta, and purchased the Alston estate and developed the suburb of East Lake. He also was involved in the Silver Lake project. He died in Atlanta on November 11, 1922, and is buried in Westview Cemetery. [Obituary from *the Atlanta Constitution*.]

Helmer divided the Alston estate/farm consisting of 300 or so acres into house lots and sold them piece by piece to the East Lake Land Co. This company was formed by Alexander C. Bruce and Thomas H. Morgan, two well-known Atlanta architects, partners in the firm of Bruce and Morgan, among others, and chartered in 1891. The Land Company had streets laid out which were named after Bruce, Morgan, and the other officers of the company. Between 1892 and 1898 the Land Company sold the house-lots along these streets to people who came from Atlanta and other parts of Georgia to build some of the houses that surround the Alston House today.

They also laid out a park surrounding a lake which was bordered by a serpentine drive called Crystal Avenue. This lake was formed by damming up the tributary that flowed past the house in Colonel Alston's time. Since the new lake was in the east part of Atlanta, the subdivision was called "East Lake." This lake had a pavilion on its banks where an eighteen-foot steam boat, which the firm purchased in 1895, probably stopped. This information, which is available in the DeKalb County deed

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

books of the 1890's, suggests that the lake was a recreation area for the people who lived in the subdivision. By 1896 the streetcar lines had reached East Lake and the railroad was running commuter trains giving the people who lived in the community easy access to Atlanta. The availability of rail and streetcar lines made suburbs like this one possible so that people who worked in the city could live outside it. By 1896 James H. Helmer had sold all of his share of the Alston Plantation to the East Lake Land Company and Bruce had resigned as its director. The Company went out of business sometime between 1898, when a writ was served against it by the Southern Banking and Trust Company, and 1908 when the town of East Lake was chartered.

The town stayed as it was when it was laid out by the East Lake Land Company until the 1920s when Asa G. Candler, the founder of the Coca-Cola Company and later a mayor of Atlanta, bought all the land south of Morgan Avenue, or half the town, to create the East Lake Golf Club (originally the Atlanta Athletic Club). Finally the remaining sections of the town north of the club grounds became part of the City of Atlanta but retained the name East Lake after it was absorbed into the city in 1927.

Although other streets have been cut through this area since it became part of Atlanta, many sections of the original streets remain today. A comparison of the streets in the plat map, dated 15 April 1893, with the streets shown in this area on a modern street map will show that as many as five of the streets on the plat map are still there with their original names. Other streets such as Bruce Street and Morgan Avenue, have been renamed. Bruce Street, named after Alexander C. Bruce, has become part of Memorial Drive. Morgan Avenue, named after Thomas H. Morgan, has become Alston Drive .

During all of the activity of the creation of the subdivision, the formation of the town and the development the club and golf course, the Alston House was nearly forgotten.

The Alston House and its later owners/occupants.

Since descendants of the Alstons stopped living in the house, it has had many owners and even became rental property before its restoration. This pattern is typical of many houses in East Lake which were built in the 1890s, later neglected, and are now being restored. The survival of the house under these circumstances is a tribute to the building practices of the mid-nineteenth century. Owners and renters of the Alston house are identified through deeds and city directories, where available.

Owners that have been identified include, F. G. Byrd of Hamilton County, Ohio, who bought the house and some land from Asa G. Candler before 1915. He sold the house and lot in 1920 to E. H. Spickerman of DeKalb County for \$6500. The size of the house and lot was 100 feet by 300 feet, which size the house lot remained until the present day. Afterwards, the property was acquired by the Stuart P. Murray Company. It was this company that sold it in 1926 for \$6800 to Robert Pritchett McLarty, who was a young attorney at the time, having served in World War One. He was born at Villa Rica, Georgia, August 8, 1888. He graduated from the Webb School, and from Vanderbilt University. He served as head of the English Department at Tech High School from 1911 to 1917. After the war, he attended the University of Chicago and received his law degree in 1920. In 1923 he

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

married Dodo White of Atlanta. In 1929, McLarty sold the property to Sue Jones Eastman and her husband, Frank C. Eastman, who occupied it from 1930 to 1935.

The city directories indicate that from the period 1935 to 1970, the occupants of the house tended to be people with a variety of occupations. In 1940, James W. Bryce, an engineer with the Otis Elevator Company. From 1941 to 1944, Wilkie O. Moody, a high school teacher, lived in the house. W. Harry Vaughan, a consulting engineer, lived there from 1945 to 1953 approximately. Later residents were salesmen, students, administrators, and field representatives.

The neighborhood continued to be very desirable until the 1950's, when many smaller house were built and occupied by young families. Mrs. Julia Garcia, a native of Mexico, purchased the house by 1970 , and although she never lived there, she appreciated its age and beauty and attempted to stabilize it. During her ownership, she continued to rent the house to people with a variety of occupations, as the move to the suburbs of the 1960's had changed the character of the neighborhood, and most of the residents were renters.

The Restoration

In 1994 Mrs. Garcia and her co-owner, Juventino Ballesteros, sold the property to East Lake Investments, who in turn sold it on September 30, 1994, to the present owner, Sylvia H. Harrison and her husband, Charles Harrison. During and since this time, the East Lake neighborhood in which the house sits has undergone a revival, spearheaded by the restoration of the East Lake Golf Club. After the present owners purchased "Meadow Nook" in 1994 and restored it, Mrs. Garcia stayed there as a house guest and was able to enjoy the restored house which she had owned for almost 30 years.

The current owners, Charles and Sylvia Harrison, have restored the house, added a bedroom addition, and generally made the grounds accommodating to events. They have been hosts to a variety of events at the house as well as being active participants in the revival of the neighborhood and the East Lake Golf Club.

The owners, the Harrisons, received an Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation in 1998 from the Atlanta Urban Design Commission. On October 21, 2001 a ceremony was held that was co-sponsored by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the owners to place a grave marker on the grave of George Morgan Rikard, private in the Alabama Cavalry, C.S.A, who was buried on the grounds during the Civil War. Many of his descendants attended. In July 2004 the owners plan to commemorate the 140th anniversary of the Battle of Atlanta, which involved this property, in an appropriate ceremony at the house, one of handful in the metro-Atlanta area to have survived from that momentous time.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Alston, James Lewis. "Alston, Robert A. " *Dictionary of Georgia Biography*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983. Edited by Kenneth Coleman and C. Stephen Gurr.

Atlanta City Directories, 1897-1991.

DeKalb County, Georgia, *Deed Book 8354*, p. 715: East Lake land Company to Sylvia Harrison, 30 Sep 1994.

DeKalb County, Georgia, *Deed Book 8307*, p. 765 and 769: Ballesteros and Garcia to East Lake Investments, 31 Aug 1994.

DeKalb Historical Society Bulletin: Vol. I (No. 1) 1976.

Grady, Henry W., "Colonel R. A. Alston: Incidents in His Life and Family". *The Daily Constitution [Atlanta]*, March 13, 1879, p. 1.

Perkerson, Medora Field. *White Columns in Georgia*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1956.

Seawright, John Ryan. "The Sorrows of the Alstons, " a lengthy essay with a great deal of well-researched (but without footnotes) information found on the Internet, part of www.flagpole.com , 1997.

U. S. Population Census, DeKalb County, Georgia, 1870 p. 227, dwelling 256, family 256; and also for 1880, DeKalb County, Georgia, found via www.familysearch.org .

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested**
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued**
date issued:
- previously listed in the National Register**
- previously determined eligible by the National Register**
- designated a National Historic Landmark**
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #**
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #**

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office**
- Other State Agency**
- Federal agency**
- Local government**
- University**
- Other, Specify Repository: DeKalb Historical Society, Decatur, Georgia.**

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre.

UTM References

A) Zone 16 Easting 749373 Northing 3737213

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated parcel is marked on the enclosed plat.

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel is the core of the original property still associated with the house and owned by the current owner. It is surrounded by 20th-century suburban development.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
mailing address 47 Trinity Avenue, S. W., Suite 414-H
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30334
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** May 24, 2004
e-mail ken_thomas@dnr.state.ga.us

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title Joye Quinn, professional genealogist
organization n/a
mailing address 5554 Beechwood Dr.
city or town Stone Mountain **state** GA **zip code** 30087
telephone 770-925-0752
e-mail n/a

- () **property owner**
- (X) **consultant**
- () **regional development center preservation planner**
- () **other:**

Property Owner or Contact Information

name (property owner or contact person) Sylvia Harrison
organization (if applicable) n/a
mailing address 2420 Alston Dr.
city or town Atlanta **state** GA **zip code** 30317
e-mail (optional) n/a

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

Name of Property: Alston, Robert A., House
City or Vicinity: Atlanta
County: DeKalb
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: August 2001

Description of Photograph(s):

Number of photographs: 17

1 of 17: South and west facades; photographer facing north.

2 of 17: West facade with front door and new wing to the left; photographer facing northeast.

3 of 17: New wing on left, main house north facade in rear, taken from under the new gazebo; photographer facing south.

4 of 17: Northwest corner of main house front porch with new wing in background and gazebo to the left, and cottage in the background; photographer facing northeast.

5 of 17: East facade with dormers and kitchen extension; photographer facing northwest.

6 of 17: Cottage in back yard with bird bath and lawn furniture, taken from near the gazebo; photographer facing northeast.

7 of 17: The modern gazebo; photographer facing northwest.

8 of 17: Front porch on the west facade of the main house with gazebo in background; photographer facing north.

9 of 17: Main house interior living room or front right room with portrait of Robert Alston over the mantel and view into the dining room; photographer facing northeast.

10 of 17: Main house interior dining room with view back into living room and French doors leading to the porch; photographer facing southeast.

11 of 17: Main house, central hall looking into the office/library, or left front room; photographer facing north/northwest.

12 of 17: Main house, front left room used as office/library with view into bedroom; photographer facing northeast.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

13 of 17: Main house, back left room, used as bedroom with view back into office/library; photographer facing northwest.

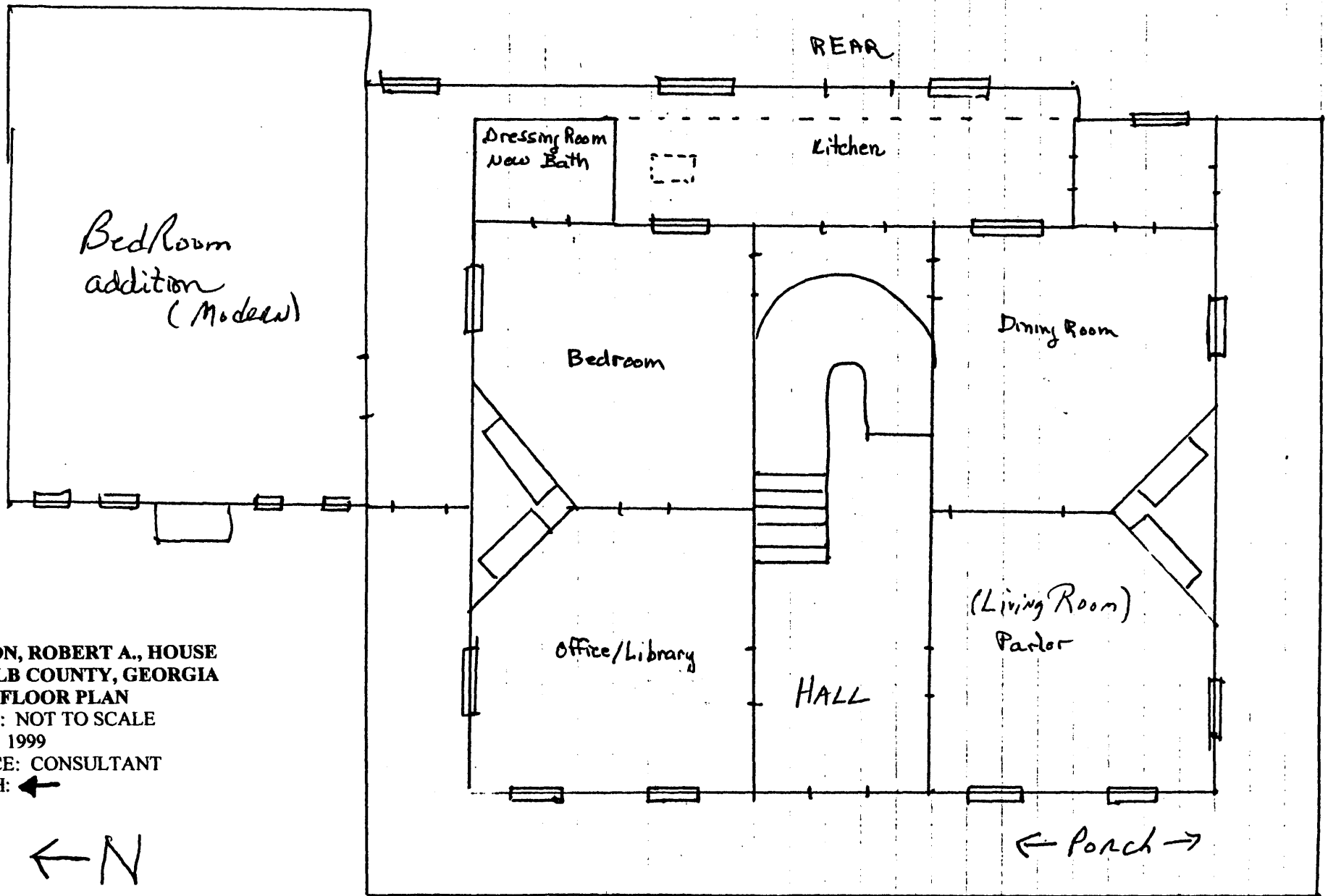
14 of 17: Main house, view of rear of central hall (doorway) and kitchen area formerly the back porch; photographer facing northwest.

15 of 17: Main house, central hall on the first floor, showing original wall mural left uncovered and staircase, door at rear leads to kitchen; photographer facing northeast.

16 of 17: Main house, view of staircase from the second level; photographer facing northeast.

17 of 17: Main house, room on second level; photographer facing northeast.

(HPD WORD form version 11-03-01)

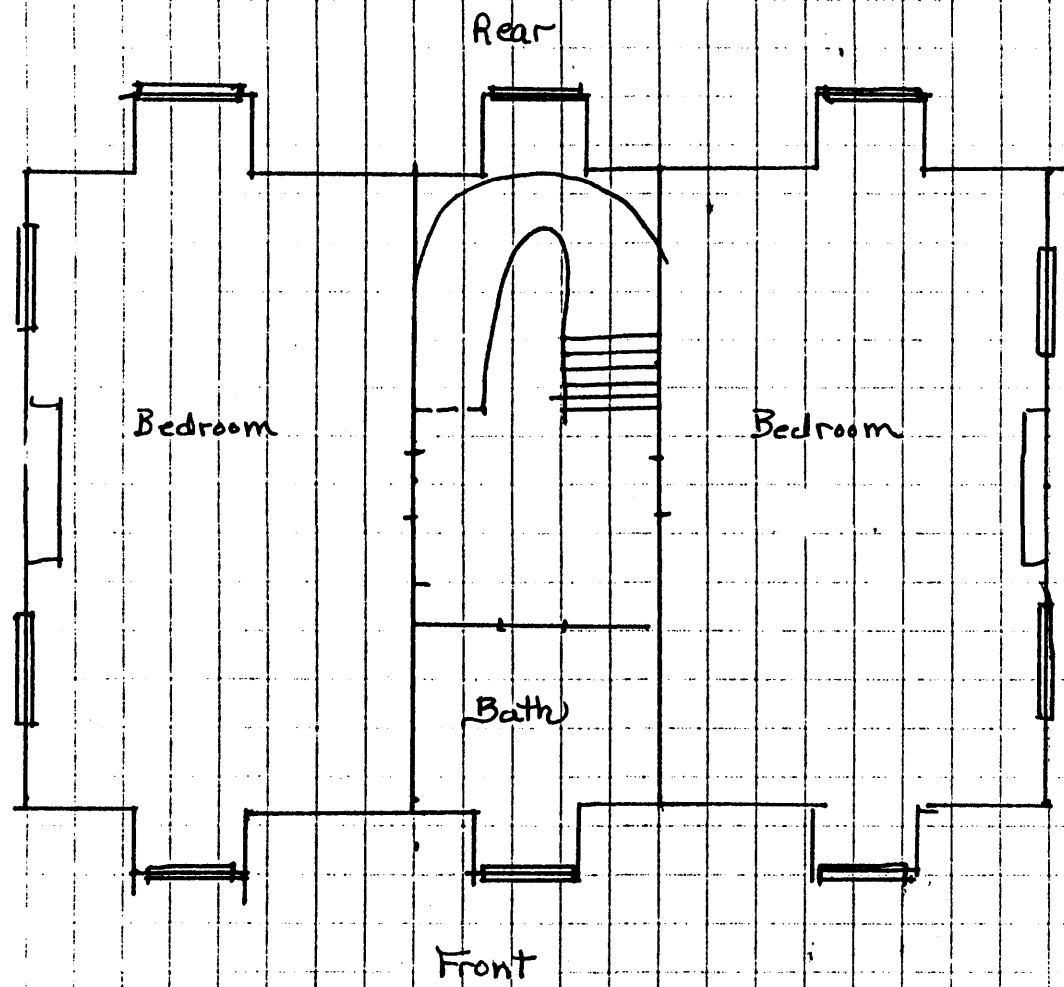


ALSTON, ROBERT A., HOUSE
 DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA
 FIRST FLOOR PLAN
 SCALE: NOT TO SCALE
 DATE: 1999
 SOURCE: CONSULTANT
 NORTH: ←

← N

Front

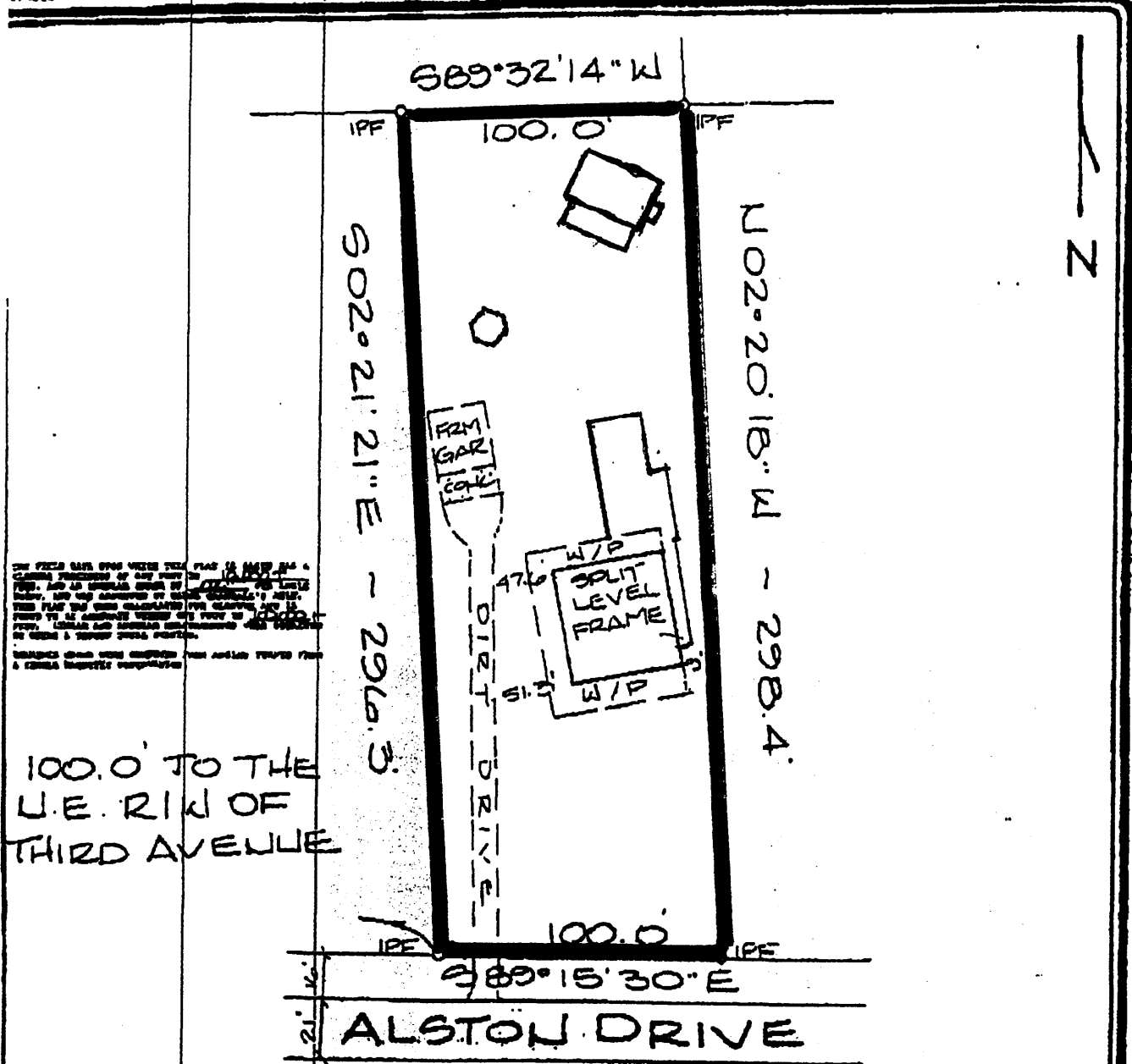
← Porch →



ALSTON, ROBERT A., HOUSE
DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE
DATE: 1999
SOURCE: CONSULTANT
NORTH: ←

← North

574584



THIS PLAN WAS PREPARED BY THE SURVEYOR AND IS SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING NOTES:
 1. THIS PLAN IS BASED ON THE SURVEY OF THE LAND AND IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN.
 2. THE SURVEYOR HAS NOT CONDUCTED A VISUAL INSPECTION OF THE PROPERTY OR THE EXISTING RECORDS.
 3. THE SURVEYOR HAS NOT CONDUCTED A VISUAL INSPECTION OF THE EXISTING RECORDS.
 4. THE SURVEYOR HAS NOT CONDUCTED A VISUAL INSPECTION OF THE EXISTING RECORDS.

100.0' TO THE
 U.E. R/L OF
 THIRD AVENUE

ALSTON DRIVE

2420 ALSTON DRIVE
 ATLANTA, GA

McLUNG SURVEYING INC.

PROPERTY OF
 EAST LAKE INVESTMENTS, INC



This property (is not) located in a Federal Flood Area as indicated by F.I.R.M. Official Flood Hazard Maps.
 In my opinion this plan is a correct representation of the land plotted.
 Perry E. McClung, Surveyor

LAND LOT 181
 DISTRICT 15TH SECTION
 COUNTY DEKALB
 GEORGIA
 DATE 8-13-94 SCALE 1" = 50'

Fences should not be placed using side dimensions from house.

ALSTON, ROBERT A., HOUSE
 DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA
 NATIONAL REGISTER MAP/SITE PLAN
 NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY:
 SCALE: 1" = 60'
 NORTH: ↑
 DATE: 1994
 SOURCE: PLAT MAP