

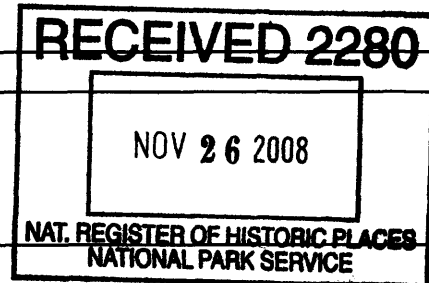
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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

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      Lawton Place  
 other names/site number      N/A



## 2. Location

street & number      136 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
 city, town      Mount Airy      ( ) vicinity of  
 county      Habersham      code 137  
 state      Georgia      code GA      zip code      30563

( ) not for publication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	3	2
sites	0	0
structures	0	1
objects	2	0
<b>total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>

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 Luce*

*11-19-08*

Signature of certifying official

Date

W. Ray Luce  
Historic Preservation Division Director  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

*ex*

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

*Patrick Andrews*

*1/8/2009*

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

Keeper of the National Register

Date

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## 6. Function or Use

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### Historic Functions:

Domestic: single dwelling

### Current Functions:

Domestic: single dwelling

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification:

Other: Georgian-plan house

### Materials:

<b>foundation</b>	Concrete
<b>walls</b>	Brick
<b>roof</b>	Terra Cotta
<b>other</b>	Wood

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

#### Summary Description:

The Lawton Place is a large, two-story, Georgian-plan house facing Railroad Avenue and U.S. Highway 123 in the small north Georgia resort town of Mount Airy. Built in 1884-1885 by Alexander Robert Lawton of Savannah, the wood-frame house is clad in weatherboard (covered with vinyl siding) and covered with a side-gable roof. The two-story portico spans the width of the main façade and is supported by four colossal Doric columns. The rear porch, which is original to the house, has been partially enclosed as a sunroom. The eclectic architectural style of the house reflects its late-19<sup>th</sup>-century of date construction with elements of the Greek Revival style in the portico and door surrounds, Gothic Revival-style louvered attic vents, and Stick Style bargeboard trim in the gable ends.

The interior plan is typical of a Georgian-plan house with four principal rooms divided by a center stair hall. The stairs were rebuilt from the steeper original configuration. Unusual features of the design, although original to the house, are the fenestration of the façade with five openings across the second floor and three across the first floor; asymmetrical placement of the interior chimneys; the large sitting room at the top of the stairs, and 12-foot ceilings on the second floor, six-feet higher than those on the first floor. In the 1950s, a two-story addition with bathrooms and dressing rooms was added to the northeast side. The three historic outbuildings associated with the main house are the Craftsman-style tenant house, main house garage, and a wood privy.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

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**The following description was written by Mark Reinberger in "Lawton House," *Historic Property Information Form*, February 8, 2006. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.**

The Lawton Place, built 1884-1885, is a two-story, Georgian-plan house with a symmetrical five-bay facade and side-gable roof (photos 1-2). On the front (south) facade is a two-story, four-column portico; on the rear (north) is a two-story (now enclosed) porch; and on the east side is a one-story addition built in the 1950s, the only significant addition made to the building. The structure is entirely wood-framed. The exterior is covered with weatherboards, which are hidden by vinyl siding on the sides but not the front or rear. The exterior retains almost all of its original doors, windows, and trim. The wood structure stands on original brick piers, the gaps between which have been filled in with brick. The roof is covered with metal, but the original cedar shingles survive underneath and can be seen in the attic. The cornice on the main roof consists of a plain bed molding, deep soffit and fascia, and a small crown (hidden by gutters), and short returns at the gable ends. This cornice is typical of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century domestic architecture in Georgia. The two interior chimneys, which are covered with stucco, are located asymmetrically and reflect the asymmetrical interior plan.

The front facade is the only formal, symmetrical façade (photos 1-3, 12, 23). The first floor is very close to grade level, so that the portico is not set on a high base. The current concrete-slab porch is higher than the original wood-floor structure. Evidence in the crawl space and foundation suggests that the porch was always low. On the first floor, nine-over-nine, double-hung windows fill bays one and five, flanking a plain six-panel door and sidelights (but no transom because of the low height of the ceiling). Most unusual is that bays two and four do not have windows, which may reflect the desire for uninterrupted wall space inside and the willingness to abandon symmetry for convenience in a vacation home. The actual number of window openings in the first- and second-floor front rooms is the same, but the first-floor rooms have two windows on the side and one on the front. The second-floor fenestration is reversed. The second floor on the main façade has its full complement of windows, two six-over-six double-hung windows on each side of a doorway, which includes a transom and sidelights. The second-floor porch entrance provides access to a large balcony with finely turned balusters and rail. Surviving pairs of eight-light wood casement storm windows on the second floor may be original or at least early. The inoperable shutters are not original to the house.

The Doric portico on the main façade is the house's most conservative feature (photos 1-3, 12, 23). The slender, finely tapered columns are fitting for a much older antebellum house. The slenderness and the wide spacing of the columns suggest that the house does not belong to the antebellum Greek Revival era. Another stylistic anomaly is the near absence of an entablature and the Victorian-era beaded-board ceiling of the porch. Instead of the canonical Doric architrave, tenia, frieze (with triglyphs and metopes), and cornice, the entablature here consists of a plain paneled frieze with Victorian-era moldings and open rafters. Elements of the porch more common in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century include the exposed rafters and the faceted slopes of the beaded-board ceiling (as opposed to the flat ceiling more common in antebellum houses). The faceted slopes reflect a shallow-hipped roof porch, which is tucked under the main cornice.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

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The side elevations of the main block include stylistic inconsistencies that indicate a late-19<sup>th</sup>-century date of construction (photos 4-5, 16-18). On the west side are four windows on the first floor and one window and a door on the second. The windows are six-over-six double-hung sashes. The door gives access to a small balcony, apparently original although its floor structure has been rebuilt. High in the gable ends of both side elevations appear the most Victorian-era features of the house, an attic louver with a concave-arched head in the Gothic Revival style and a filigreed Stick Style cross brace. In 1950s, a two-story, gable-roofed addition was added to the east end of the main block to provide bathrooms to the principal rooms in the house (photos 1, 4-5).

The rear elevation, facing away from town, may have been considered a lesser or service side of the house (photos 18, 22). A two-story porch stretches across the rear of the house. Its framing suggests that it is original to the house, though its infill walls, screens, and windows (large banks of windows on the first and second floors and two end windows on the second floor) are more recent. The rear porch is topped with a shallow hipped roof covered in the same metal as the main roof. A small one-story, shed-roofed porch was built on the east side of the rear porch, beyond the wall plane of the main block (photo 5). This addition, which has an older metal roof, was likely the location of the first indoor toilet and/or bath in the house.

The framing system is uniform throughout the house. Lumber is circular sawn and joined with cut nails. The roof is framed without a ridge beam, which was uncommon before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The framing of the first floor and its rear porch appears to be original. A cellar under room 104 was added soon after the house was completed to accommodate a coal furnace. The cellar walls are lined with wood retaining walls and whitewashed boards. The framing system, which is either brace frame or balloon frame, has not been determined.

The interior plan of the Lawton Place is a Georgian plan defined by four rooms divided by a central hall. The four principal rooms are heated by two interior chimneys. The kitchen is located in the northwest room and a porch spans the rear façade. This basic arrangement of spaces is typical for houses built throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Georgia, but the Lawton Place also includes unusual features that result from its use as a summer resort home. Traditional hierarchies of space and floors have given way to eight-foot ceilings on the first floor that are much lower than the twelve-foot ceilings on the second floor. The original trim and finishes are equivalent on both floors and include pine floors, beaded-board ceilings (except where sheetrock has been installed), plaster walls, plain door and window surrounds, plain cornices (except where sheetrock has been installed), six-panel exterior and four-panel interior doors, and plain mantels in rooms 105 and 203.

First-Floor Rooms:

The center hall (room 101) contains the stair, which was recently rebuilt (photo 8). Evidence in the closet under the stair indicates that the original stair was steeper and landed within the front half of the second-floor hall (room 201) and that there was originally a partition that divided room 101 into front and back rooms. This partition was located beneath the partition that divides rooms 201 and 204. The wood columns within the opening to room 102 were added by the present owners. Room 101 has a sheetrock ceiling and no cornice.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

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Room 102, the largest room in the house, was probably the parlor (photos 7, 15). The mantelpiece was added in the 1990s. The steel beam across the ceiling was added to limit deflection of the floor in room 202.

Room 103 is the kitchen. It was altered by the addition of a sheetrock ceiling below the original boards, the removal of the cornice, and the installation of contemporary appliances and cabinets. The double windows in the rear wall probably replaced two single windows. The mantel was added in the 1990s.

Room 104 is the dining room and may have always served as the dining room (photos 8, right, 14). It is mostly unchanged, except for the mantel, which was added in the 1990s. The doorway, which is probably original, would have provided access to a detached kitchen and other outbuildings. The small porch and steps have been rebuilt.

Room 105 is a parlor (photo 14). A sheetrock ceiling was installed and its cornice was removed, but it retains its original mantel. The original exterior openings on the east side were altered by the construction of a bathroom wing (rooms 108/211) in the 1950s.

Room 106 (rear screen porch) and room 107 (sun room) were built in place of a full-length rear porch. The floor framing is original.

Rooms 108 and 211 form an addition built on the east side of the main block in the 1950s. It contains bath and dressing rooms on the first and second floors (photo 14, right).

Second-Floor Rooms:

The second-floor rooms (201-206) in the main block retain their original finishes.

Rooms 201 (center hall) and 204 (sitting room) are now joined by a large opening but were originally separated by a partition with a door. Room 201 served as a stair landing and passage to the front balcony and two front bedrooms (photos 11-12). Cooling breezes swept through the house when the front door, the door between rooms 201 and 204, and the door to the rear porch were opened. Room 204 may have been a sitting room in the original configuration (as now) because, unlike other bedrooms on the second floor, it does not have a fireplace (photo 13).

The four corner rooms 202 (photo 9), 203, 205, and 206 (photo 10) were likely always bedrooms because their finish is identical and all but room 203 have closets with beaded cleats with hooks, suggesting original or at least early construction. Mantels have been replaced in all but room 203, which retains its original mantel.

Rooms 203 and 205 are smaller rooms at each side of the sitting room and may have been rooms for children.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7—Description

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Rooms 207, 209, and 201 are located on the porch across the back of the house. Rooms 207, 209, and 210 are bathrooms and room 208 is a sitting room. The full-length porch was possibly a sleeping porch as was common in houses of the period.

Rooms 108 and 211 form an addition built on the east side of the main block in the 1950s. It contains bath and dressing rooms on the first and second floors (photo 14, right).

Landscape and Outbuildings:

The one-acre Lawton Place property slopes downward from Railroad Avenue in the front to the rear of the lot. In 1950, Keen-Knight divided the property into three parcels; however, the entire property has remained intact so that the grounds retain their historic configuration. Features on the grounds of the Lawton House are mostly nonhistoric, although the gateposts at the entrance to the driveway (counted as two contributing objects), the front walk, fence lines, and several stone retaining walls that bisect the property are historic. In recent years, a swimming pool (counted as a noncontributing structure) was installed on the west side of the house.

Behind the house are two contributing outbuildings (tenant house and privy) and two noncontributing outbuildings (main house garage and tenant house garage):

The main house garage is a one-story, two-part structure covered with shiplap siding (photos 6, 17, 19). When faced from the front, the original single-bay garage to the left retains its intact exposed framing and an overhead garage door opener. Given its small size and the rough-sawn timber frame, it probably dates from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The exterior has been altered by the removal of the garage door and installation of double-glass doors and sidelights, the installation of large casement windows at the rear, and alterations to the siding. The workroom on the right side probably dates from the 1960s or 1970s.

The tenant house, or servants' house, was built in the late-19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century as an adjunct dwelling for the Lawton Place (photos 19-21). The sharp rise in property value between 1898 and 1911 may reflect the construction of this secondary house and the garage. The tenant house is a one-story, square, pyramidal-roofed cottage. The tenant house includes Craftsman-style elements, such as exposed rafter ends, paired six-over-six windows, and a gable-roofed front porch. The house rests on a brick foundation and is clad in weatherboards. The roof is covered in asphalt shingles and includes a brick chimney at the peak. The interior features four small rooms that share a central chimney, which vented a stove that heated the house. The tenant cottage remains mostly intact with only the addition of a bathroom in the left-rear room.

The privy is located behind the tenant house and is also adjacent to the main house garage. It is a typical privy with its simple frame construction, shed roof, vertical-board walls, and half-moon cutout in the door to admit light. The interior includes two toilet holes. The privy retains a high level of historic integrity in view of the fact that Mount Airy received public water early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the privy went unused for decades.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

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The tenant house garage is a one-bay, shed-roofed structure covered with board-and-batten siding (photo 20, left). The tenant house garage was built in the 1960s or 1970s.



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**8. Statement of Significance**

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**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  
Exploration/Settlement  
Entertainment/Recreation

**Period of Significance:**

c.1884-1885 – 1958.

**Significant Dates:**

c.1884-1885 – Alexander Robert Lawton built Lawton Place in Mount Airy.

**Significant Person(s):**

Lawton, Alexander Robert

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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**Statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Lawton Place is significant in the area of architecture because it is a variant of the Georgian-plan house type adapted for use in a north Georgia resort community. Georgian-plan houses were built throughout the state from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The floor plan, four rooms divided by a central hall, is common in resort and vacation houses in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These vacation houses were often built with greater informality because they were located far from urban centers where there was less pressure to conform to prevailing architectural traditions.

The Lawton Place is a variant of the raised cottage house type that was built throughout the South from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These houses often had Georgian plans with the main floor raised on piers to catch breezes in hot and humid climates. Antebellum raised cottages in Georgia include Woods Plantation near Washington in Wilkes County; the Oliver House in Elberton in Elbert County, built c.1840; the Sharp-English House in Penfield in Greene County, built c.1845; and the Habersham House near Clarksville in Habersham County, built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 19<sup>th</sup>- through the early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, the raised cottage was seen as especially appropriate for vacation communities. Raised cottages in Georgia include the Blalock House in Nacoochee in White County, built in c.1910, and the scores of raised Tybee cottages built on Tybee Island in Chatham County from c.1925 to 1950. The Mulherin-Righton Raised Tybee Cottage and the J. Herbert and Julia Johnson Raised Tybee Cottage are excellent examples of coastal resort cottages in Georgia in which the main floor is raised to the second level for better views and to catch ocean breezes. The first floor is used for servant spaces and equipment storage.

The Lawton Place reflects the conservatism of the builder, Alexander Robert Lawton, and the conservatism of the Greek Revival period, which lasted much later in the South than in other parts of the country. So strong is the attachment of the South to white columns that the region continued to its taste for classicism through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century as picturesque eclecticism was widely popular. Significant original features of the house include: exterior woodwork, interior spatial arrangement, interior woodwork, especially doors, trim, and two mantels, the house frame, an early coal cellar, and outbuildings, including an early garage and a rare privy. The plainness of the house's appointments, such as moldings and mantels, is characteristic of resort or vacation architecture, and contrasts strongly with the lavish Victorian detailing and furnishings of the period's city houses. Such spartan accoutrements had always characterized resort architecture, at least in the South. John H. B. Latrobe, son of the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe, depicted the spare furnishings of Botetourt Springs in Virginia in 1832 and complained about their crudeness. In the postbellum period, the sparseness of Southern resort houses was sometimes intentional, because some families had been so financially devastated by the war and its aftermath that they sought relief by "retiring" to the hills. Although there is no evidence that the Lawtons fit into this category, their Mount Airy house is typical of these plain Southern resort houses.

The Lawton Place is also significant in the areas of exploration and settlement and entertainment and recreation because it represents the earliest period of development of Mount Airy as a summer resort. After the Civil War, resorts became highly dependent upon railroad connections, and railroad companies often developed resorts as enterprises that would boost railroad travel. In north Georgia,

**National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

**Section 8--Statement of Significance**

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post-Civil War resort towns were common, especially along new railroad lines. Northern money supported Mount Airy and other Habersham County, Georgia, resort towns as Demorest, founded in 1889 by prohibitionists from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Indiana; Tallulah Falls, founded along with the Tallulah Falls Railroad in 1882; and Cornelia, founded as a resort and rail yard by Atlanta and Richmond Air Line. These resorts, according to Historian Thomas A. Chambers, were vital elements in the creation of an American leisure class in both the North and South. Further, in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, mountain resorts contributed to a melding of this class in both sections of the country, a phenomenon seen in Mount Airy in the importation of Northern money.

The Lawton Place was among the largest houses in Mount Airy. It originally faced the railroad at the highest elevation in town on the highest point along the railroad line between Atlanta and Richmond, Virginia. The Lawton house was built in the 1880s at the moment of greatest economic prosperity after the Civil War. After the dislocations of the war and depression of the 1870s, the Southern economy had finally rebounded and prosperity reigned, at least until the depression beginning in 1893. Although rural areas benefited, this new Southern wealth was primarily urban-based and tied to industry, agriculture, and commerce. Alexander Robert Lawton, Savannah attorney and Atlanta politician, typifies this new wealth, which was dependent on the railroad and Northern investment.

**National Register Criteria**

A – The Lawton Place is significant in the area of exploration and settlement because it represents the earliest period of development of Mount Airy as a summer resort.

B – The Lawton Place is significant because of its association with Alexander Robert Lawton. Lawton, a general in the Confederate army and later worked for the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia and was president of the Augusta and Savannah Railroad. The resort community of Mount Airy was established by the railroads and Lawton's extensive real estate investments in the small resort town shaped its growth and development. Lawton and his wife founded a church and school in Mount Airy and remained associated with the community until his death in 1896.

C – The Lawton Place is significant in the area of architecture because it is a variant of the Georgian-plan house type adapted for use in a north Georgia resort community.

**Criteria Considerations (if applicable)**

N/A

**Period of significance (justification)**

The period of significance begins with the completion of the Lawton Place in c.1884-1885 and ends in 1958, the 50-year end date, because it continued to be used as a resort dwelling.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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**Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)**

The Lawton Place nomination includes four contributing properties: main house, main house garage, tenant house, and privy. The tenant house garage is the only noncontributing resource associated with this nomination.

**Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)**

During Reconstruction in 1870s, railroad companies in Georgia began speculating in real estate as a way to raise revenue for the railroads. Mount Airy was established by a consortium of Northern railroad investors who envisioned "a delightful summer resort." Alexander Robert Lawton of Savannah was another early investor. Lawton fought in some of the most significant engagements of the Civil War and was wounded at Antietam, near Sharpsburg, Maryland. He served as a Quartermaster General of the Confederate forces at the end of the war. After the war he served as counsel and director of the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia. The Railroad Avenue lot where Lawton built his home was one of numerous parcels he purchased in Mount Airy. Following Lawton's death in 1896, the house passed to a succession of owners. By 1925, it served as a rental property. Its most famous tenant was baseball legend Ty Cobb who rented the house in the late 1950s as his own house was under construction. In a letter to a friend in 1957, Cobb wrote, "Have a fine old house here, rented, antiques, etc., to live in until my home completed. Friends and all the people are so fine and helpful to me."

**The following historical development was written by Mark Reinberger in "Lawton House," *Historic Property Information Form*, February 8, 2006. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.**

The history of the Lawton Place is entwined with the history of Mount Airy as a resort community. Mount Airy developed as a speculative real estate enterprise associated with the rise of the railroads during Reconstruction. At the end of the Civil War, Southern railroads were mostly bankrupt and the rail lines were largely destroyed. Alfred Austell (1814-1881) was a banker who, with Edmund W. Holland, established the Atlanta National Bank. Austell, Holland, and the well-known Inman family of Atlanta established a cotton-trading network with New York merchants. In 1870, Austell, Holland, and partner Samuel B. Hoyt founded the Atlanta and Richmond Air Line Railroad.<sup>1</sup>

The Atlanta and Richmond Air Line was one of dozens of new railroads in the postbellum South. Construction was begun in Atlanta in 1871 and was completed in 1873. The railroad collapsed in 1874. Short of its goal of reaching Richmond, the railroad in 1877 was reorganized as the Atlanta and Charlotte Air-Line Railway. By 1881, it was leased to the Richmond and Danville Railroad and in 1894 was consolidated along with other small railroads into the Southern Railway.

Mount Airy began as one of several resort communities in the north Georgia mountains along the Atlanta and Richmond railroad line. Town building had been one of the most profitable sidelines of

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<sup>1</sup> Atlanta City Directory, (1851).

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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railroad construction. Not only did sales of building lots yield profit, but the towns that formed generated increased traffic on the railroad line. Like many New South railroad towns, Mount Airy was laid out along the tracks as a series of concentric blocks following a broad bend in the line. Mount Airy is located on the Eastern Continental Divide at the highest topographic elevation between the two terminus cities on the Atlanta and Richmond railroad. The site included springs that produced clean water and its high elevation ensured that the town enjoyed healthy air.

The creators of the Atlanta and Richmond Air Line were the same speculators that founded Mount Airy as a "delightful summer resort." In late 1872, these speculators bought 175 acres of land in Land Lot 174 in the 10<sup>th</sup> District from Hodge Kimsey for \$675. They also purchased land in Land Lot 148 in the 10<sup>th</sup> District from Starling Yearwood for \$500. The price of the land, which sold for a few dollars an acre, suggests that it was marginal or worn-out land with few or no improvements. In 1874, the Georgia General Assembly incorporated Mount Airy with a boundary of a circle one- and one-quarter miles in diameter. Residents Hodge Kimsey, W. A. McConnell, and Gabriel Sisk served as its first commissioners.<sup>2</sup>

As the fortunes of the railroads waned, the three original speculators brought in another partner to manage the town. In 1876, Milton Curtis Wilcox (1837-1915) became a one-quarter partner in Mount Airy for \$400. Deeds also mention J. Curtis of Washington, D. C. and J. R. Wilcox of New York, who were likely relatives of Milton Wilcox. The deeds also mention the "designed layout" of Mount Airy, which was recorded in the Habersham County deed office in 1877. Wilcox, along with his wife, Isabella Rogers Wilcox (1846-c.1925), moved from New York to Georgia and was active in Mount Airy's community affairs. He built and operated the Mount Airy Hotel and later published a short-lived newspaper in Mount Airy, The Protectionist.<sup>3</sup>

Like almost all railroad towns in the New South, Mount Airy was centered on the railroad tracks, which curved through the center of town along a ridge. U.S. Highway 123 now follows this alignment. A broad thoroughfare was located on each side of the tracks. Railroad Avenue is the only thoroughfare that survives. Other main streets laid parallel to the tracks include McConnell Street to the north and Parker Street (now Grandview) to the south. Numbered streets intersected the major thoroughfares and divided the town into 26 blocks, which were identified by the letters of the alphabet. These blocks were irregular in size and shape. Small lots intended for businesses filled blocks C, D, G, H, and I along the tracks near the center of town. A depot and hotel were built near the center of town. Lots further from town were designated for summer homes. Three springs and a reservoir were also indicated on the town plan.

Alexander Robert Lawton in Mount Airy

Alexander Robert Lawton (1818-1896) was one of the early investors in Mount Airy. Lawton bought several parcels in and around Mount Airy beginning in 1878. Born in coastal South Carolina to an illustrious Low Country family, Alexander graduated from West Point in 1839 and briefly entered the United States Army. He left the army in 1840 to attend law school at Harvard University. Thereafter

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<sup>2</sup> The Heritage of Habersham County, 1817-2000 (2001), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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he practiced law in Savannah, Georgia, where he was a city alderman and served in both houses of the state legislature. In 1845, he married Sarah Alexander of Washington, Georgia. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lawton reentered the military as a colonel and, with a Savannah troop, captured Fort Pulaski. Later, he was promoted to Brigadier General in charge of the military district of Georgia. In 1862, he fought under Stonewall Jackson and was severely wounded at the Battle of Antietam in Sharpsburg, Maryland. In 1863 and 1864, he served as Quartermaster General of the Confederate forces as conditions in the South and for its military forces deteriorated.

After the war, Lawton returned to the practice of law. He served as general counsel and director of the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia and was president of the Augusta and Savannah Railroad. The Central Railroad and Banking Company maintained the first bank in Mount Airy, which began operating a year or two before Lawton purchased property in town. He also served as curator of the Georgia Historical Society, as did his son, Alexander Rudolf Lawton. In 1887, he was appointed United States Minister to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>4</sup>

The first land Lawton bought in Habersham County was five acres he purchased from Thomas A. Capps for \$50 in 1878 in Land Lot 175 in the southeast corner of Mount Airy along the road from Mount Airy to Clarkesville (31 Oct. 1878, BB 440). In 1880, he purchased 5-1/3 acres from Capps for \$53.33 (18 Dec. 1880, EE 363). In 1884, he bought 106 acres along the Atlanta and Richmond Air Line Railroad one mile from Mount Airy. Lawton paid Davis Smith, Jr. \$200 for this farm known as the Smith Place (29 Sept. 1884, EE 666).

Also in 1878, Lawton set his sights on downtown Mount Airy. He bought lots 1 and 2 on Block H between 4th and 5th streets along the railroad near the center of town. Lawton purchased the land for \$1,200 from John C. McConnell, a local general merchant, who had previously purchased the block from Wilcox, Holland et al (21 Dec. 1878, BB 442; 1880 census). In 1879, Lawton and his wife turned this property over to their son, Alexander Rudolf Lawton (1858-1920), for \$5 (BB 446). Also in 1879, Lawton extended the family holdings in Block H by purchasing lots 3, 5, 7, and 9, all on Railroad Avenue from Wilcox, Holland, et al for \$125 (BB 443). That same year, Lawton bought from the Wilcoxes and Holland et al for \$75 more lots in Block H (4, 6, 8, and 10), located along McConnell Avenue. In 1882, Lawton purchased the entire block when he purchased from Wilcox et al Lots 11 through 16 for \$100 (7 Oct. 1882, CC 217). On Christmas Day 1884, Lawton turned over lots 3 through 16 of Block H to his son, Alexander (KK 424). Town plats from the 1880s and 1895 identify the property on McConnell Street behind Block H as "Lawton Place."

Lawton probably also saw the land in Mount Airy not only as a financial investment but also as a refuge from coastal diseases. His letters of the mid-1870s describe the ravages and terror of a devastating yellow fever epidemic in Savannah in 1876. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War,

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<sup>4</sup> William Harden, A History of Savannah and South Georgia, vol. 2 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 570-574; Edward P. Lawton, A Saga of the South (Ft. Myers Beach, FL: Island Press, 1965), 184-188, 243-245, 260. Heritage, 5; Herbert B. Kimzey and Nancy Kimzey Dempsey, Early Genealogical & Historical Records Habersham County, Georgia (1988), 377-378.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Lawton sent his wife and children to Paris for several years to escape the worst of Reconstruction. Besides Mount Airy, the family often visited springs in different parts of the country. A photograph taken in c.1887 shows them at Capon Springs in the mountains of Virginia. Lawton's brother and one-time law partner, William Seabrook Lawton, retired to Dahlonega, Georgia in 1883.<sup>5</sup>

The Lawtons quickly became pillars of the new Mount Airy community. For example, in 1879 the Wilcox and Holland partnership conveyed land in Block A on 2nd and 3rd streets along Grandview Avenue (called Parker Street on the town plat) for a church and school to a group of Mount Airy residents that included the Wilcoxes and the Lawtons. The church was to be non-denominational and was to be called "The Church of the Strangers," a testimony to the seasonal nature of the community. The school was to be "first class," and have a primary department for boys and girls with an upper school for girls only. Sarah Lawton was named president of the school, with Lawton, M. C. Wilcox, and C. H. Sutton as trustees (CC 59). There is no evidence that a church was ever built on this site. The location for a school was shifted slightly thereafter, because a town plat of the 1880s shows it in Block B although not far from its originally intended site. This may be the same school that Wilcox operated as the Sibley Institute, a noted private school.

The Lawtons also made other land purchases in Mount Airy. In 1882, they bought the southwest half of Block W adjoining the spring lot (25 May, DD 104). A few years later they bought for \$250 "a depot station on the Atlanta and Richmond Air Line Railroad," along with a 100-foot deep lot called Lot Number 3 (Block D). This lot contained a wood-frame building occupied by Timothy O. Parker, a young merchant (17 Mar. 1885, FF 1, 1880 census).

The success of Mount Airy as a real estate speculation is unclear. Deed records associated with Lawton and Wilcox indicate that land prices never rose very high in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Besides the Lawton Place, six, large, 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses survive in Mount Airy, although none would have been particularly grand for the period. The town included a tuberculosis sanitarium that was operated by Sidney Lanier, Wilcox's hotel, and the three-story 150-room Monterey Hotel, which was built in 1902 and destroyed in a fire. In 1880, the first time Mount Airy appears in a Georgia census, the town comprised 72 persons in 19 families. Others, including the Lawtons, were not listed because they were seasonal residents. Permanent residents included the Wilcox, McConnell, and Parker families, a schoolteacher, merchants and clerks, and some railroad workers. Later, census figures examined up to 1920 suggest that the town remained a small town. The wood-framed Mount Airy Presbyterian Church, built 1907, stands in what was Block D, facing the railroad tracks. The heyday of Mount Airy was the first decade of the 20th century when the construction of banks, churches, and the Monterey Hotel coincided with a rise in land prices.<sup>6</sup>

### Lawton Place in Mount Airy

Lawton's last purchase in Mount Airy was the land on which he built Lawton Place. This property comprises lots 1 and 2 in Block S of Mount Airy, 29 July 1884 for \$80 (EE 602). The grantor was

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<sup>5</sup> Manuscript guide to Lawton Family Papers, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Lawton, 243-244 and 265.

<sup>6</sup> Heritage, 5.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Isabella Wilcox, wife of Milton Curtis Wilcox. The low price indicates that there were no improvements on the site, and it can be assumed that the Lawton house was built shortly after the sale in c.1884-1885. When it was sold in 1898, the property was known as "the Lawton Place" (QQ 119) but the town plat from the 1880s called the lot "Oaks," perhaps the Lawtons' name for the house. Lawton may have also had an older house in Block H until 1884, when he turned that property over to his son and built his new house on Block S.

When the Lawton Place was built, the railroad line passed directly in front of the house, along the corridor now occupied by US Highway 123. The tracks were relocated north of the built-up portion of Mount Airy in the 1920s as part of a major project by the Southern Railway to smooth-out grades and curves to handle faster, larger trains.

It is difficult to document who resided at the Lawton Place in Mount Airy, but the photo from Capon Springs provides some clues. This picture shows the older grandparents (Alexander Robert and Sarah), daughter (Mrs. H. C. Cunningham) and daughter-in-law (Mrs. Alexander Rudolf Lawton), three grandchildren belonging to the daughter, two grandchildren belonging to the daughter-in-law, and no fewer than one nurse for each pre-adolescent child. In Mount Airy, the daughter-in-law and her family had their own house, but the Cunninghams and one or two nurses may have lived with the older Lawtons, who themselves may have had one or two servants. Perhaps as many as 10 or 11 people representing three generations may have lived at Lawton Place.

Alexander Robert Lawton died in 1896 while visiting another, more famous, summer resort, Clifton Springs, in Upstate New York. After Lawton's death, the Lawton family moved quickly to divest themselves of their holdings in Mount Airy. The depot lot was sold immediately to the Parkers (July 1896, KK 112). The domestic holdings were kept until Sarah's death in 1898, after which the heirs, daughter Nora Lawton Cunningham and son Alexander Rudolf Lawton, sold all the holdings in Mount Airy (all deeds dated 1898 and 1899: LL 40, KK 399, LL 51, LL 137, MM 145, MM 209, MM 262). The Lawton's sold their house on lots 1 and 2 on Block S on 22 March 1898. The Lawton family received \$750 for the property, an increase in the price that reflects the value of the house. The complicated conveyance transferred the property to Caroline H. Thompson, a minor (QQ 117-121).

Caroline Thompson owned the Lawton Place for about a dozen years from 1898 to 1911. The Thompson family used the house as a full-time residence. The 1910 census identifies them as residents of Mount Airy. The census records Caroline as a 39-years-old postmistress in Mount Airy, who lived with her widower father. Her father, John E. Thompson, was a 65-year-old life insurance salesman. The next year, Caroline sold the house to Mrs. Gene Brown Keen, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, for \$2500 (May 29, 1911, WW 261). The increased price for the Lawton Place reflects improvements made to the property, including a central coal-fired heating system. Keen, who later married, retained the property until her death. Keen-Knight took out a mortgage on the property in 1925 (A-13, 578) and, for reasons that are not clear, transferred the back half of the lots to the Mount Airy Baptist Church, which held it from 1925 until 1951 (A-13, 309 and A-59, 310).

During most of this time, the house was a rental property. Keen-Knight was not recorded as a resident of Mount Airy. Its most famous tenant was the baseball player Ty Cobb, who is widely



National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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regarded as the best hitter in the sport. Cobb lived in the Lawton house for several years in the late 1950s while building his house nearby on 70 acres. He wrote of the Lawton Place and Mount Airy, "[I] have a fine old house here, rented, antiques, etc. to live in until my home completed. Friends and all the people are so fine & helpful to me."<sup>7</sup> About the time Cobb lived at the Lawton Place, a two-story addition was built on the east side of the house to accommodate bath and dressing rooms.

In 1970, Keen-Knight's executor, First National Bank & Trust Co. of Macon, sold the property to Lona B. Pittman for \$17,750 (2 October 1970, 117, 323). Lona B. Pittman owned the house and land from 1970 until 1983, when she sold it to Winifred D. Cagle and Jean B. Cagle (188, 718). Jean B. Cagle sold it to Jeanne T. Cahill in 1995 (329, 355). Cahill covered the sides and back of the house with vinyl siding and made some changes to the interior (as described in the description in Section 7). Jeanne Cahill sold the house to the current owner, Daniel and Sue Lippert, in 2002 (573, 586). The Lipperts have also made some minor changes to the interior, but the house appears much as it did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>7</sup> Ty Cobb to Taylor Spink, 2 September 1957, accessed in <http://tsn.sportingnews.com/archives/ty/9257a/html>.

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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Reinberger, Mark. "Lawton House" *Historic Property Information Form*, February 8, 2006. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

**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:**

- ( x ) State historic preservation office
- ( ) Other State Agency
- ( ) Federal agency
- ( ) Local government
- ( ) University
- ( ) Other, Specify Repository:

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

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## **10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property**      0.84 acres

### **UTM References**

A)    Zone 17      Easting 270440      Northing 3822100

### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The National Register boundary is indicated by a heavy black line on the attached map, which is drawn to scale.

### **Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Lawton Place.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**State Historic Preservation Office**

**name/title** Steven Moffson  
**organization** Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**mailing address** 34 Peachtree Street, N.W., Suite 1600  
**city or town** Atlanta      **state** Georgia      **zip code** 30303  
**telephone** (404) 656-2840      **date** November 1, 2008  
**e-mail** steven.moffson@dnr.state.ga.us

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

**name/title** Mark Reinberger  
**organization** University of Georgia  
**mailing address** 609 Caldwell Hall  
**city or town** Athens      **state** Georgia      **zip code** 30602  
**telephone** N/A.  
**e-mail** N/A

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

**Property Owner or Contact Information**

**name (property owner or contact person)** Tim and Harriet Williams  
**organization (if applicable)** N/A  
**mailing address** 136 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
**city or town** Mount Airy      **state** Georgia      **zip code** 30563  
**e-mail (optional)** N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

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**Name of Property:** Lawton Place  
**City or Vicinity:** Mount Airy  
**County:** Habersham  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** May 2007

**Description of Photograph(s):**

Number of photographs: 23

1. Main façade, photographer facing northwest.
2. Main façade, photographer facing northwest.
3. Main façade, detail of porch, photographer facing northwest.
4. Main and east sides, photographer facing west.
5. Rear and east sides, photographer facing west.
6. Entrance gates, photographer facing east.
7. Interior, first floor, parlor (Room 102), photographer facing east.
8. Interior, first floor, central hall (Room 101), photographer facing northwest.
9. Interior, second floor, bedroom (Room 202), photographer facing northeast.
10. Interior, second floor, bedroom (Room 206), photographer facing northeast.
11. Interior, second-floor, central hall (Room 201), photographer facing northwest.
12. Porch, second story, photographer facing southwest.
13. Interior, second floor, sitting room (Room 204), photographer facing northwest.
14. Interior, first floor, bedroom (Room 105), photographer facing northeast.
15. Interior, first floor, central hall (Room 101) with view to parlor (Room 102), photographer facing northwest.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

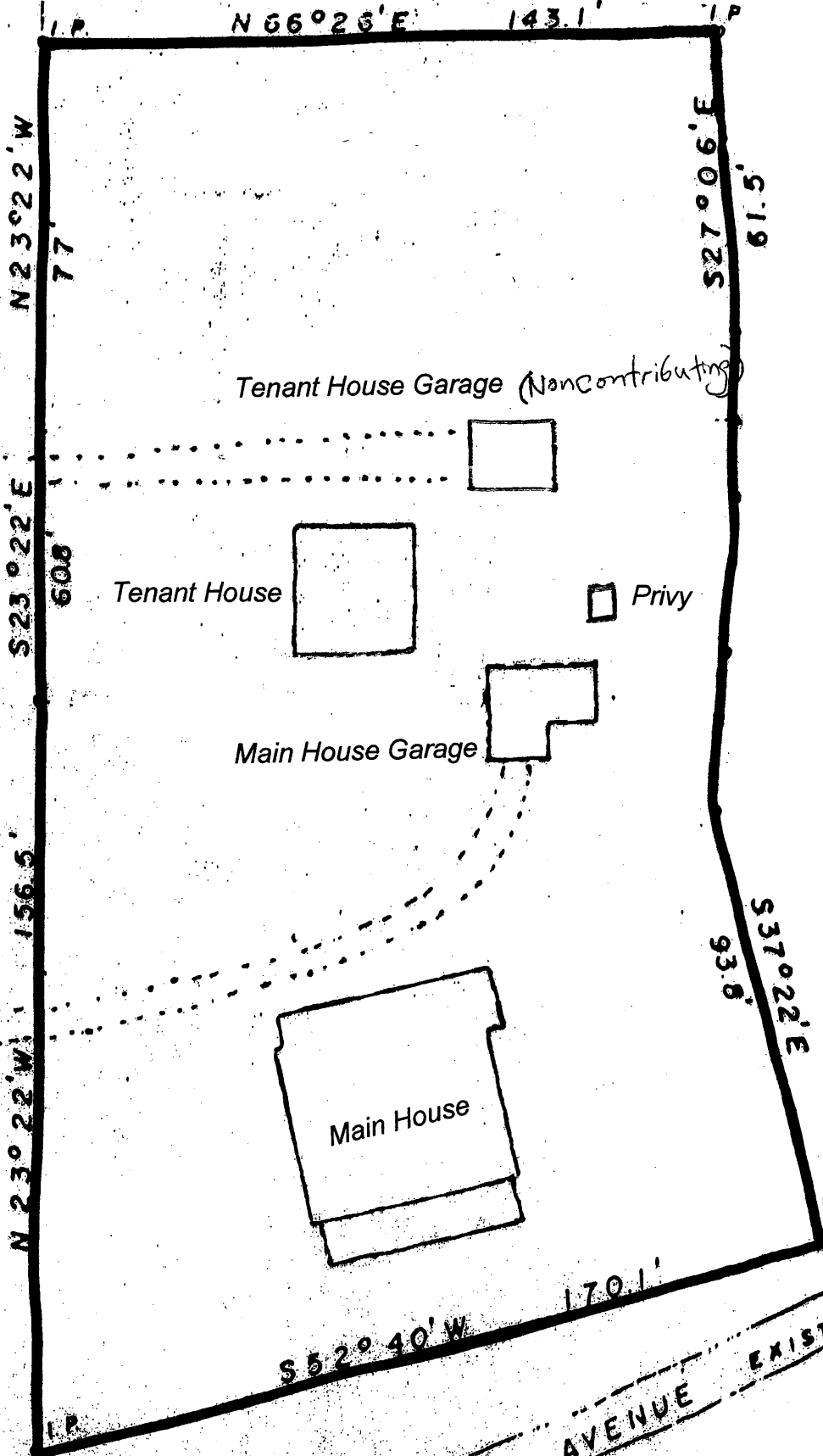
Photographs

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16. Main and west sides, photographer facing northeast.
17. West elevation, photographer facing southeast.
18. West and rear sides with entrance gates, photographer facing southeast.
19. Tenant house (center) and main house garage (right), photographer facing east.
20. Tenant house garage (left), tenant house (center), main house (right), photographer facing east.
21. Tenant house, photographer facing northeast.
22. Rear and west sides, photographer facing southeast.
23. Main façade, detail of porch, photographer facing northeast.

(HPD WORD form version 11-03-01)

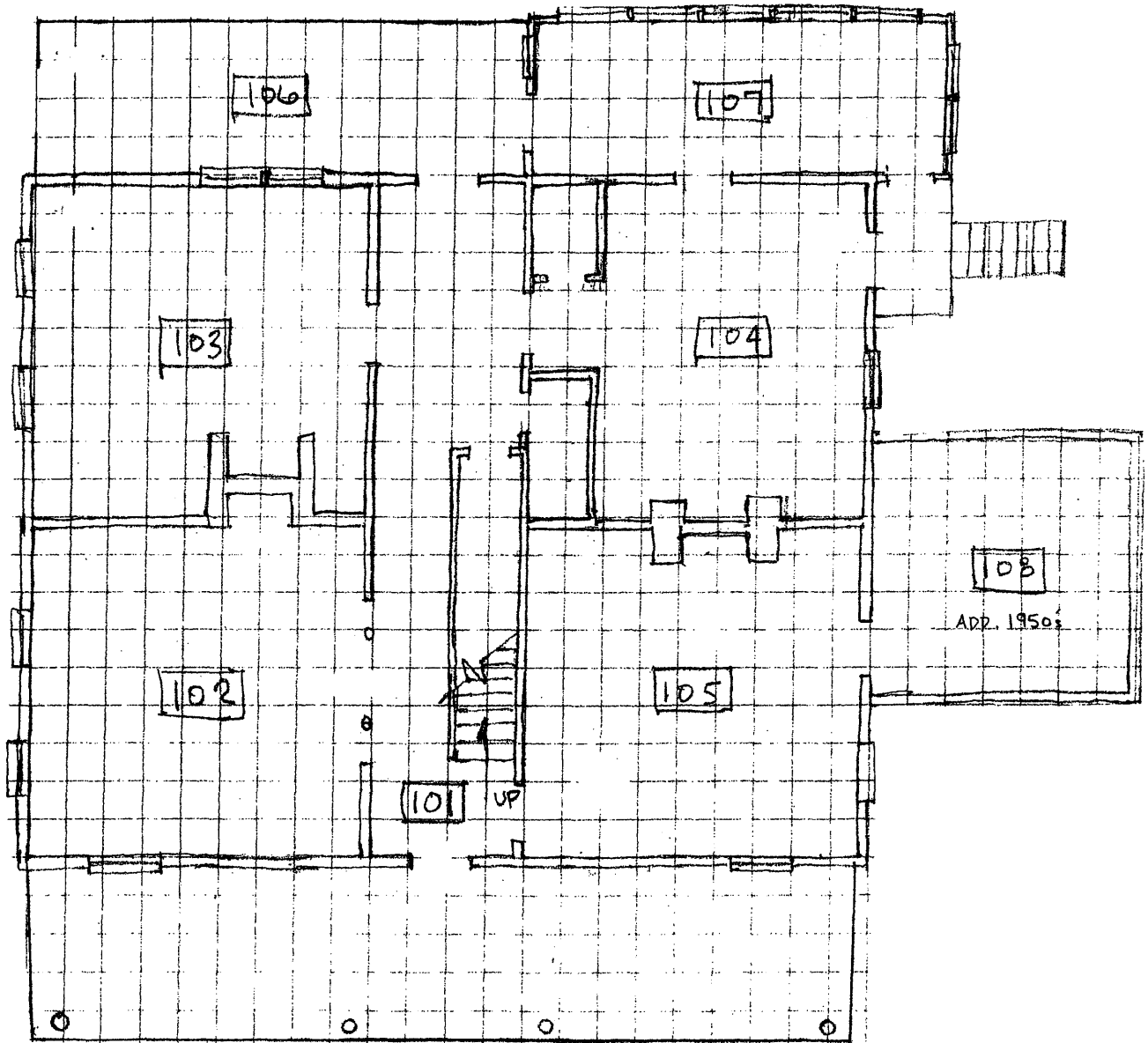
7 TH STREET



Lawton Place  
 Mount Airy, Habersham County, Georgia

National Register Boundary **—————**

Approximate scale: 1 inch = 75 feet



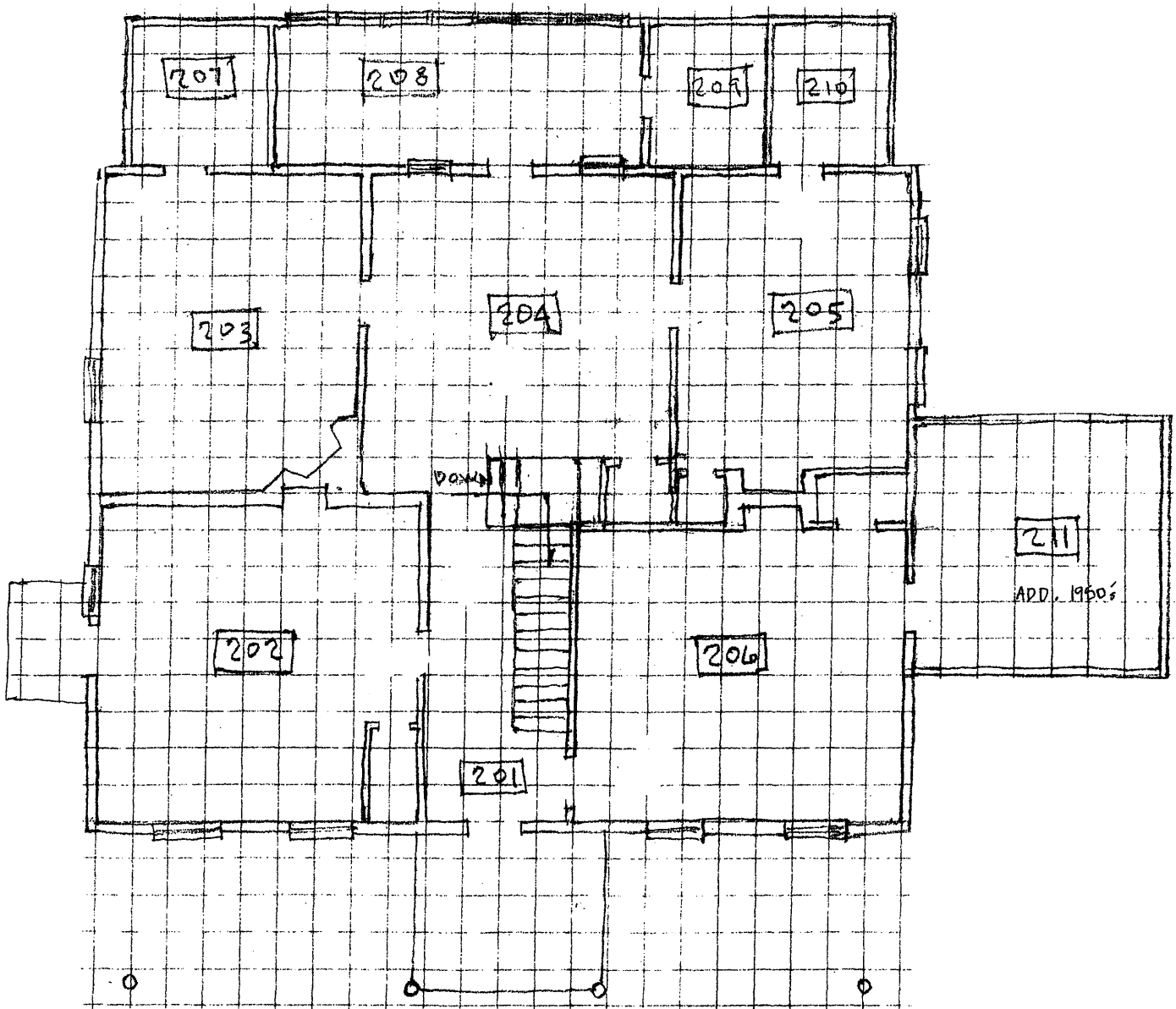
Lawton Place  
Mount Airy, Habersham County, Georgia

First-Floor Plan

No Scale







Lawton Place  
Mount Airy, Habersham County, Georgia

Second-Floor Plan

No Scale

