

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Foster House

other names/site number Laurel Hill

2. Location

street & number 201 Kennon Street not for publication N/A
city or town Union Springs vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Bullock code 011 zip code 36089

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility 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 does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 7/10/98
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined not eligible for the National Register
 - removed from the National Register
 - other (explain): _____

[Signature] _____
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson H. Beall 8.14.98

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Foster House

County and State Bullock County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check only one box.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

_____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

_____ Total

Number of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Moorish Revival

Greek Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

roof Asphalt

walls Wood

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance c. 1854;c.1896; c.1912

Significant Dates N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Foster, Sterling J. (attributed)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # AL 599
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other state agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository
Alabama Register files

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property 1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	620590	3557010	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title E. Patrick McIntyre, Jr., and Trina Binkley, AHC Reviewer
organization _____ date September 30, 1997
street & number Route 2 Box 638 telephone (334) 288-4340
city or town Ramer state AL zip code 36069

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mrs. Ruth Brown
street & number 201 Kennon Street telephone (334) 738-3334
city or town Union Springs state AL zip code 36089

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 Name of property: Foster House
County and state: Bullock County, Alabama

Physical Description

Pleasantly situated on a one-acre lot, the Foster House is a two-story, frame, hip-roofed building resting on hand-hewn sills upon a low brick pier foundation. It is clad on three sides by weatherboard, while rabbeted shiplap siding similar to novelty board (but original to the home) has been used to clad the east façade. The home has a three-bay front and contains a full-façade portico and a central double-door entrance graced by a raking pediment, a four-light transom, and flanking sidelights. The present front doors are modern reproductions appropriate to the period of the home's construction. On either side of the entrance are jib windows with raking pedimented lintels. The portico with classic entablature is supported by four two-story square columns, and its series of three unusual ogee arches across the façade form the outstanding visual feature of the home. The original wood floor of the portico has been replaced by concrete. The second floor has a double-door entrance with transom and sidelights identical to that found on the first floor; it opens onto a three-quarter length balcony with a balustrade comprised of simple crossed members. The second floor entrance is also flanked by windows with raking pedimented lintels. These windows, as well as all others found in the original portion of the house, have six-over-six sashes.

On the south side of the home a two-story, flat-roofed projecting bay containing a service stairway was added to the home in 1940; it connects the building to a pre-1896 one-story formerly semi-detached brick kitchen with rear shed addition. The shed portion formerly contained an outhouse. On the north side of the home is a two-story, centered, demi-octagonal shaped projecting bay with four-over-four windows built to accommodate two bathrooms; the first floor bath was added circa 1896, while the second story bath was constructed about 1912 (Beckwith, Susan F., from an undated map.) The rear of the house contains a partially enclosed one-story porch; on the north side of this enclosure the Browns added a kitchen in the 1970s. The remainder of the screened porch contains a service stair that connects with a doorway to the intermediate landing of the main staircase to the upper floor of the home. A small shed-roofed projecting bay on the upper floor accommodates both the doorway and flight of stairs as well as a bathroom for the southwest bedroom.

An 11-and-a-half foot wide central hall runs the length of the main block of the home on the first floor, with two rooms found to either side of the hall. The floors throughout the home are of heart pine; they were painted over before the Browns had them re-finished in the 1970s (Brown, Ruth, personal communication, 1977.) According to oral tradition, most of the lumber used in the construction of the home came from land around the immediate house site (Feare, Varian, *Birmingham News-Age Herald*, 1935, p. 10.) The baseboards throughout the interior are of variable width and taper as though hewn and shaped according to the size of the trees from which they were cut. Family sources maintain that the bricks used for the chimneys and in the foundation piers were brought by mule-drawn wagons from Georgia (Beckwith, Susan, 1977.) Doors inside the residence are primarily four-paneled, although there are some two-paneled doors to closets. The ceiling heights are 12 feet on the first floor and 10 feet on the second. The walls and ceilings of the home are plaster.

To the north side of the hall is the dining room, which is entered through a six-foot-wide double doorway with raked pediment (found on all original door surrounds on this level.) This room was formerly used as a parlor by the Foster family and has a late 19th-century Victorian Eastlake mantel added during the period. Other rooms in the home contain their original mantels that are in the same simple Greek Revival style as those found in the Alabama State Capitol. A closet with folding double doors is to the left of the fireplace. The other room on the north side's first level was originally the dining room and is now used as the den; it measures 20 by 18'4". A doorway leads from the den to the kitchen and enclosed porch areas.

Between the entrances to the two main rooms on the north side of the central hall is found the main staircase, which has an unusually low rise and features a turned walnut newel post and delicate turned walnut balusters.

On the south side of the central hall opposite the present dining room is the parlor, which retains its original plaster ceiling medallion, although the present chandelier is a replacement. The other room on the south side of the central hall serves as the bedroom of the present owner. A doorway in this room leads into the demi-octagonal bathroom, which has its own fireplace.

The graceful three-quarter turn staircase leads to the upstairs level, which also has a central hall flanked by two rooms on each

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2 Name of property: Foster House
County and state: Bullock County, Alabama

side. An early lighting fixture original to the home is found in the hallway. Unlike the door surrounds on the first floor, those on the second are rectilinear, and the doorways are only three feet in width. The present owner uses the southeast bedroom as a study, and a doorway in the room leads into a closet space that has been converted into a landing for the 1940-era staircase. A door from the southwest bedroom also opens into the passage. Both of the bedrooms on the north side of the home have doorways connecting the rooms to the upstairs portion of the demi-octagonal bathroom. The northeast bedroom, which has never been restored, serves as a storage room.

For the purposes of this nomination, no outbuildings have been included. Only one original outbuilding survives on the property, the former combination kitchen and laundry. A one-story, gable roof frame building with a two-bay front, it was moved from its original location to the rear of the property in the early 1950s (Brown, personal communication, 1996.) This dependency was photographed along with a wellhouse (no longer extant) by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1935 (Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1994, p.57.)

The home and grounds are well maintained by the present owner and are in excellent condition. A cherry laurel hedge planted by Virginia Foster once formed a large ellipse in front of the home and was the inspiration for the Fosters to name the property "Laurel Hill;" it no longer exists but two mature cedars are found to either side of the old brick walkway that leads from the front of the house to the street (Beckwith.)

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been made of the Foster House property, the potential for subsurface remains is high. Properties of this type were sited within a constellation of dependencies such as kitchens and other outbuildings. Buried portions may contain significant information that may be useful in interpreting the entire property.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3 Name of property: Foster House
County and state: Bullock County, Alabama

Statement of Significance

National Register Criterion C. Architecture. The Foster House is perhaps Alabama's finest surviving example of the Moorish Revival style of architecture, also variously grouped under the designation Gothic Revival or Oriental Revival (Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture*, 1984.) The foursquare, columned, two-story frame home with striking ogee arches contained within the composition of the portico offers a rare representation of the imposition of the Moorish Revival style upon the sober, symmetrical Greek Revival form. Novelty-type flushboard forms the infill between the arches below the line of the entablature, and according to architectural historian Robert Gamble rabbeted shiplap siding was a characteristic feature found on many antebellum homes along Chunnenuggee Ridge (Gamble, Robert, personal communication, 1997.) The Foster House is therefore considered unique for its accommodation of two distinct architectural styles coupled with the incorporation of a localized vernacular feature. The affiliation of simplified ogee arches upon Greek Revival houses is found at several extant residences in the eastern Black Belt of Alabama, including the Menefee and Dowdell residences in Tuskegee, but only the Foster Home offers such a pronounced representation (South Central Alabama Development Commission, *Historic Assets: Macon County, Alabama*, 1975, p.55, 81.) The origins of the Moorish Revival style in the United States evolved from the Picturesque Movement promoted by mid-19th century architect A.J. Downing, as part of the then-current Western cultural fascination with the Orient. According to family tradition the residence is thought to have been designed by and constructed under the direction of Dr. Sterling J. Foster (1822-1899,) a physician, merchant, and planter who was one of the early settlers of the town of Union Springs. As Foster was well-traveled and educated he may have been exposed to popular cultural influences from any number of sources, and his reinterpretation of the Moorish Revival style within a localized context makes the Foster House unique.

Historical Summary

Dr. Sterling J. Foster was born in Greene County, Georgia in 1822, the 15th child of Arthur and Hannah Johnson Foster. After attending Oglethorpe University, Transylvania University, and Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Dr. Foster entered into the practice of medicine at Ellerslie, Georgia in the late 1840s. He stayed in that area for several years before relocating to Putnam County, Georgia (Anonymous, "In Memoriam: Dr. Sterling J. Foster", *Union Springs Herald*, March 15, 1899.) In 1850 he married Virginia Heard of Madison, and by 1854 the couple moved to the small community of Union Springs, Alabama (at that time located in Macon County.) The first recorded property transaction involving Dr. Foster in Macon County is dated November 31, 1854. Dr. Foster was already a man of substantial wealth when he and his wife came to Union Springs, and sources suggest he set about building his magnificent home soon after he arrived. He chose as the site of his homestead the crest of Chunnenuggee Ridge, a line of low hills on the south side of town that originates in Lowndes County and runs through Bullock County. According to his descendants the home took Foster five years to complete. During this period he continued to practice medicine, while at the same time developing a large planting operation and entering into the mercantile business. He was also influential in helping bring the railroad through the community. By 1860 he owned 46 slaves and held several thousand acres of land around Union Springs (U.S. Census, Macon County, Alabama, 1860.)

Comparing records from the 1860 and 1870 U.S. censuses, it is apparent that Dr. Foster suffered from a substantial decline in his net worth after emancipation. In 1860 the value of Foster's personal property was listed as \$60,000; in 1870 it was just \$20,000 (U.S. Census, Bullock County, Alabama, 1870.) According to his granddaughter Virginia Durr, Foster was a Whig who opposed secession and refused to invest in Confederate bonds. As a result he was able to retain more of his wealth after the Civil War than many of his neighbors who had invested in the Confederacy (Durr, Virginia, *Outside the Magic Circle*, 1992, p.4) This allowed Foster to continue the expansion of his business interests, including the operation of the dry goods store in town he had started before the war. In 1888 Foster built the Union Springs Oil Mill (Union Springs Herald, March 15, 1899.) Foster died on March 12, 1899. His widow Virginia continued to live in the house until her death in 1912. On December 16, 1895, she sold the house and 760 acres surrounding it to her son Hugh for the sum of "love and affection and \$1.00" (Probate Records, Bullock County, Deedbook K.) Hugh Foster did not occupy the home until after the death of his mother, and even then only intermittently during his long career as a banker (Anonymous, "Outstanding Citizen Lost in Passing of Hugh Foster" *Union*

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4 Name of property: Foster House
County and state: Bullock County, Alabama

Springs Herald, November 15, 1934.)

Virginia Durr, a prominent Civil Rights activist during the 1950s and 60s, recalled childhood visits to her grandmother Foster's home in her autobiography, *Outside the Magic Circle*. Among Durr's recollections were memories of how during the first decade of the 20th century the back yard of the home was "full of slave cabins filled with old men and women who had been slaves and still lived on the plantation" (Durr, p.5.) She recalled her grandmother as a generous woman, noting there was still that old abundance. Everybody was welcome for dinner...no matter how many people you had, you could have more" (ibid., p.8.) Durr's sister Josephine grew up to marry future U.S. Supreme Court justice Hugo Black.

Hugh Foster died in 1934, and members of the Foster family retained ownership of the Foster House until 1947, when Nettie Foster sold the property and 15 acres to Mr. Carey Bryan, a local businessman who lived there with his family for the following 29 years. Mr. and Mrs. Grady Brown acquired the home from Carey and Thelma Bryan in July, 1976. The present acreage associated with the home totals approximately one acre. Upon purchasing the house the Browns began a lengthy and sensitive restoration so that it is once again one of the most striking and unique residences in central Alabama.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 5 Name of property: Foster House
County and state: Bullock County, Alabama

Bibliography

Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. Nomination for Foster-Bryan-Brown House, 1977.

Beckwith, Susan Foster. Letter to Mrs. Grady Brown, July 23, 1977; various undated sketch maps and letters. On File with Mrs. Ruth Brown.

Brown, Ruth. Personal Communication, 1997.

Bullock County Probate Office. Deed Records (Books "K," "JJ," "LLL.")

Census of the United States: 1860, 1870.

Durr, Virginia Foster. *Outside the Magic Circle*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985.

Feare, Varian. "Antebellum Home of S.J. Foster Charms Writer," *Birmingham News-Age Herald*, September 15, 1935.

Gamble, Robert. *The Alabama Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987.

Gamble, Robert. Personal Communication, 1997.

Gowans, Alan. *Styles and Types of North American Architecture. Social Function and Cultural Expression*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

Macon County Probate Office. Deed Records (Book "H.")

South Central Alabama Development Commission. *Historic Assets: Macon County, Alabama*. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, 1975.

Union Springs Herald. "In Memoriam: Dr. Sterling J. Foster," March 15, 1899; "Good Woman Gone," April 19, 1912; "Outstanding Citizen Lost in Passing of Hugh Foster," November 15, 1934.

Vlach, John. *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 & photos Page 6

Name of Property: Foster House
County and State: Bullock County, Alabama

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Verbal Boundary Description

The property nominated is an irregular shaped parcel of roughly 220' by 393' located on Kennon Street in Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama. The legal description is the following: A portion of the Foster homestead in the city of Union Springs, Alabama, located in the NE corner of Section 3 and the NW corner of Section 2, Township 13, Range 23 described as follows: Beginning at the SE corner of the homestead lot where the same joins the NE corner of a lot now occupied by Mrs. G. C. Shanks, and running thence West 393 feet, thence North 220 feet, thence East 393 feet to a street, thence South along the street 220 feet to a point of beginning. Being the residence house and lot of the grantors herein.

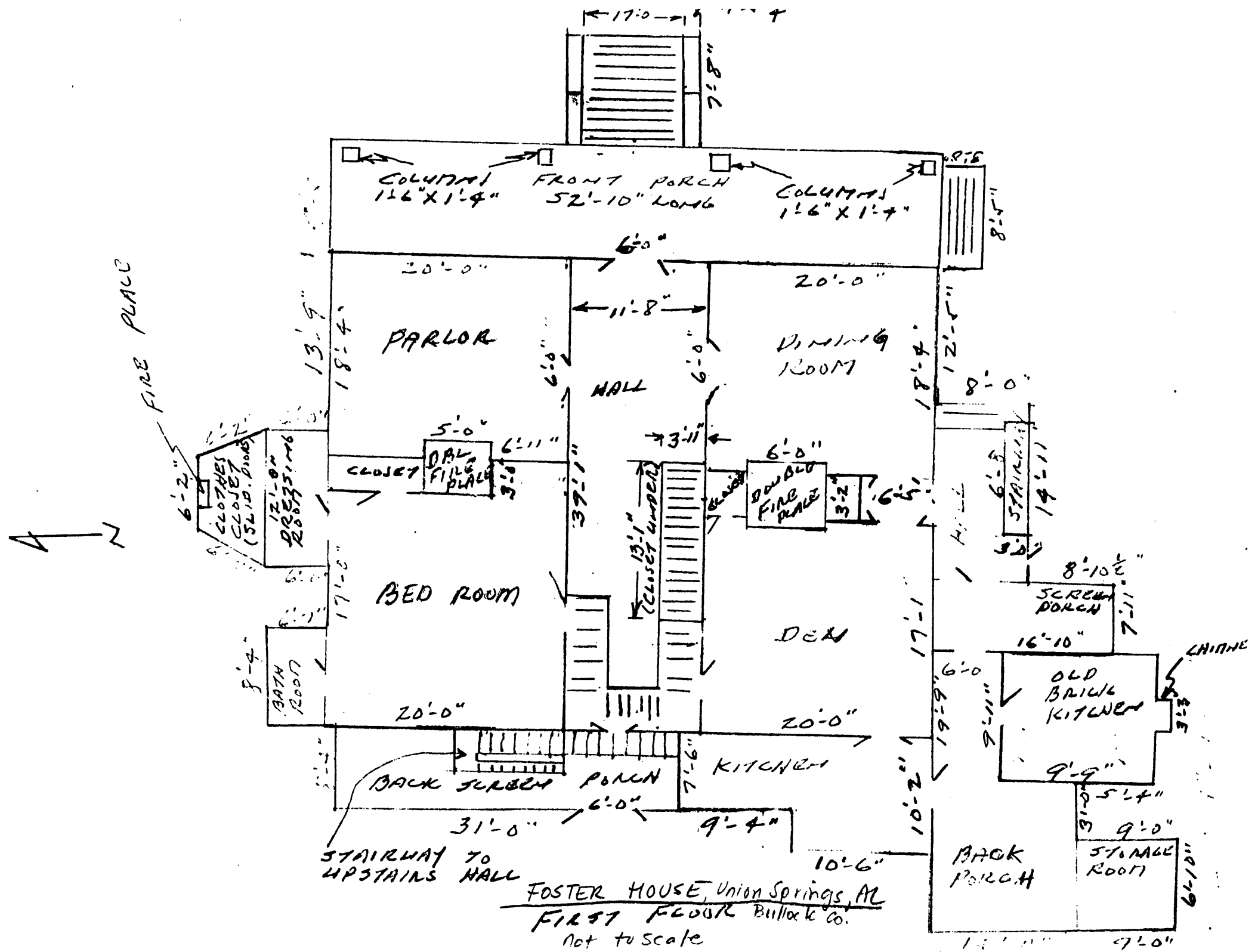
Boundary Justification

The nomination boundaries were drawn to include the extant historic resource and its associated land still remaining in a parcel of land under single ownership. These are the boundaries currently associated with the property.

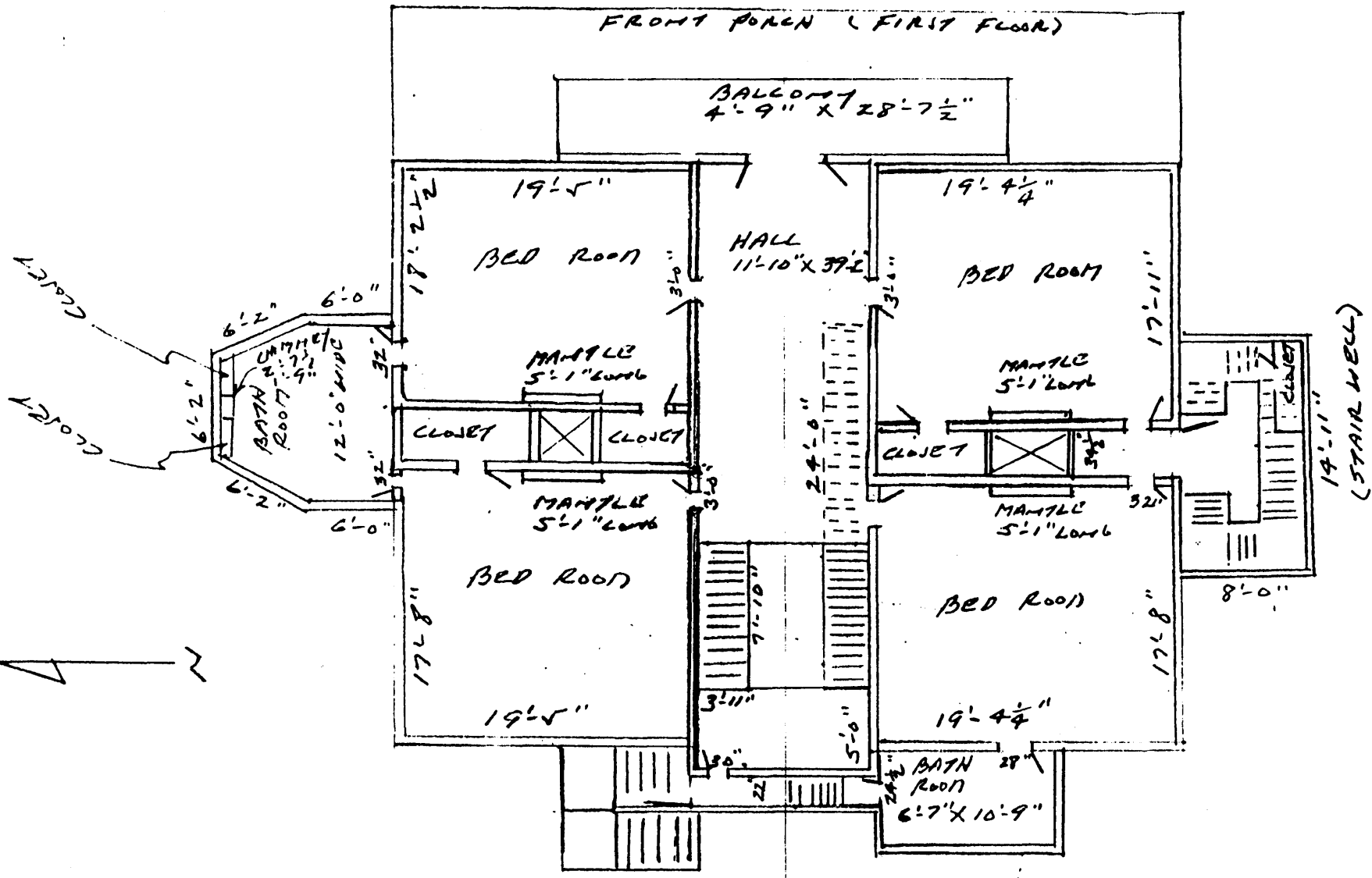
Photos

The following information in items 1 through 5 is the same for all the photographs:

1. Foster House
2. Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama
3. Patrick McIntyre
4. March 2, 1996
5. Alabama Historical Commission
6. and 7. as follows:
 1. facing northwest
 2. front facade facing west
 3. main entrance facing west
 4. front facade, side elevation portico ogee arch facing north
 5. front facade balcony looking north
 6. front facade windows facing west
 7. north elevation facing south
 8. rear elevation (west) facing east
 9. south elevation facing north
 10. first floor staircase facing southwest
 11. southeast parlor door surround from main hall facing south
 12. southeast parlor facing southwest
 13. second floor landing facing east
 14. second floor northeast bedroom mantle facing west
 15. second floor northwest bedroom facing east
 16. second floor landing early light fixture facing south
 17. first floor northeast parlor facing northwest



FOSTER HOUSE, Union Springs, AL
 FIRST FLOOR Bullock Co.
 Not to scale



FOSTER HOUSE, UNION SPRINGS, AL (Bullock Co.)
 SECOND FLOOR
 not to scale