

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0689653

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| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| NOV 7 1978 | |
| RECEIVED | |
| DATE ENTERED | NOV 9 1979 |

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME *Mercer House*

HISTORIC
Mercer House

AND/OR COMMON
Mercer House

from letter from owner

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
118 South Wall Street

CITY, TOWN
Natchez

STATE
Mississippi 39120

VICINITY OF
Fourth

COUNTY
Adams

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Fourth

CODE
28

CODE
1

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Charles M. Laird

STREET & NUMBER
P. O. Box 1226

CITY, TOWN
Natchez

STATE
Mississippi 39120

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Office of the Chancery Clerk
Adams County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN
Natchez

STATE
Mississippi 39120

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Adams County Landmarks Inventory

DATE
1974-1978

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Natchez Metropolitan Planning Commission

CITY, TOWN
Natchez

STATE
Mississippi 39120

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT

GOOD

FAIR

DETERIORATED

RUINS

UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED

ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mercer House is a two-story brick structure raised over a full basement which is somewhat below grade. The front sits back from the property line somewhat; one side is at the property line, and there are an ample sideyard and a very deep backyard. The site pitches down from the front of the property. Assumed to have been exposed brick on the exterior, the house is now stuccoed. A portico was added to the front and a later three-story building butts the older house at the back. A low-pitched roof with later dormers drains to a boxed gutter faced with a cornice detailed in Greek Revival moldings.

The main entrance has a large elliptical arch with side lights and a transom and Eastlake doors; it is flanked by typical twelve-over-twelve sash. Upstairs in the center is a twelve-over-twelve sash, flanked by sash extended down to allow access to the portico, but originally the flanking sash was also twelve-over-twelve. This central area projects from the main mass of the house, and on each side of it there is a twelve-over-twelve sash upstairs and downstairs. All openings line up truly, and the windows once had fixed two-panel slat blinds. On one side of the front, concrete steps go up to the portico; on the other (corner) side, concrete steps go down to an opening in the basement. Along the front property line are two fine square fence posts of wrought and cast iron, as well as vestiges of a woven wire fence, the remainder of which the owner has stored for re-erection.

The side street elevation continues the typical lining of twelve-over-twelve sash, with three small sash with later millwork opening into the cellar. All chimneys have been removed. Two smaller windows have been cut into the house toward the back.

The opposite (garden) side elevation also features the twelve-over-twelve windows, and two smaller windows toward the back have been added. Access to the cellar occurs at the front corner and toward the back; neither opening has original sash. An entry door to the stairhall comes out onto a concrete landing with steps; the frame is original except for the exterior trim, but the doors are Eastlake. Above this door a twelve-over-twelve sash formerly lit the stairs, but the sash were replaced by French doors when an Eastlake conservatory (non-extant) was built adjoining the building. All chimneys have been removed.

The back elevation shows twelve-over-twelve sash in the projecting pavilions on each side; these exist toward the sides but were altered where the back addition falls. Inside the back addition, a large elliptical-headed opening is centered in the rear wall upstairs; presumably it was repeated downstairs where the back wall of the building has been opened up to join the old construction with the later.

The plan is almost repetitive on all three floors and is a combination of Federal geometric volumes and the needs, apparently, of the family who built it. There are eight rooms and a stairhall on the first floor and seven rooms and a stairhall on the second floor, including bath and bath-hall. One enters a hall terminated by an

6 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | |

SPECIFIC DATES Ca. 1819

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mercer House is important both for its characteristics which are typical of Natchez ca. 1820 and for those which are unique for Natchez of that period. Quite common to the first wave of fine local residences in the Federal style is the elegant detailing of the woodwork and the use of elliptical arches on interior doors and cased openings. Without any existing parallel today, however, is the plan and the resulting massing of the garden end of the building. Although reminiscent of contemporary Georgia coastal houses with projecting bays and round or octagonal-ended rooms, the Mercer House plan is rendered much more sophisticated and livable by the location of a square room at the back center of the building overlooking the garden, rather than the usual hall running straight through the building. This sophisticated comfort is a mark of Natchez houses of the early decades of the nineteenth century. The architect and the builder are unknown.

The American State Papers record on November 15, 1806, Certificate No. D-50, a claim granted September 5, 1806, by John Wilkings, Jr., for Lot 3, Square 3, Natchez, the lot being 150 feet by 200 feet and containing a house 36 feet square, all valued at \$4,000. On January 11, 1819, John Wilkins' brother, James C. Wilkins, sold Jane Rapalje part of Lot 3, Square 3 (110 feet on State Street, 106 feet on Wall Street) for \$20,000 (Deed Book P:12). This sum clearly suggests a building existed on the property, assumed to be the present house. Dr. William N. Mercer, husband of Mrs. Rapalje's niece, Ann Elizabeth Farar, outlived both his wife and their daughter and sold the property on October 18, 1848, to Hezekiah Claggett for \$4,350, the lot then measuring 108-plus feet on State Street (Deed Book GG:342). Subsequent sales in 1853, 1856 and 1860 occurred. On March 1, 1893, Audley C. Britton purchased the property for \$6,500, the lot being 89-plus feet on Wall Street and 162 feet on State Street (Deed Book 31:420). The portico and side conservatory additions may date from this period. Sales were recorded in 1904, 1914, and 1922, and on March 10, 1924, when Addison J. Foster purchased the property for \$6,500 (Deed Book I:433). At this date the building was used as a funeral parlor. Wright and Ferguson Funeral Home purchased the property in 1961, and on February 10, 1965, Charles M. Laird and his wife, Shirley Luttrell Laird, purchased it for \$30,000 (Deed Book 10C:99). The property consisted of a lot 89-plus feet on Wall Street and 162 feet more or less on State Street and, in back, a lot 40 feet deep on State Street and 87 feet parallel to Wall Street.

The historic name of the Mercer House derives from its association with Dr. William Newton Mercer, a distinguished citizen of Natchez and New Orleans, where his house designed by James Gallier, Sr., in 1844 is today the Boston Club. Tradition has it that the Mercer House was used as an auxiliary to Mrs. Mercer's plantation, Laurel Hill, outside Natchez, providing a place for people arriving and departing by steamboat and for normal town visits.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Jewell, Edwin L. "Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated." New Orleans, 1874.

Moore, Edith Wyatt. "The Mercer House." Unpublished manuscript in possession of Charles M. Laird, P. O. Box 1226, Natchez, Mississippi.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY ca. 2.5 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Natchez, Mississippi-Louisiana

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 651370 3492600

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

First.-That certain lot of land situated at the northwestern intersection of South Wall and State Streets in the City of Natchez, County of Adams, State of Mississippi, having a front

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Samuel Wilson, Jr., F.A.I.A. and Henry W. Krotzer, Jr., A.I.A.

ORGANIZATION

Koch and Wilson Architects

DATE

August 22, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Jackson Avenue

TELEPHONE

504-581-7023

CITY OR TOWN

New Orleans

STATE

Louisiana 70130

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elmer B. Hilliard

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE November 1, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Carol Shull
 ATTEND: *Robert G. ...*
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 8-9-79

DATE AUG 9 '79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 1, 7, 3 & PAGE 10

1

1. NAME

The name the present owner prefers is the name RAPALJE HOUSE feeling that the builder should be credited rather than Dr. Mercer. Mercer was such an important citizen of Natchez and New Orleans that his name was immediately arrived at. We would suggest the name RAPALJE-MERCER HOUSE.

7. DESCRIPTION

A late 19th or early 20th century photograph in the Gandy Collection at Natchez shows the house with its present portico, dormer, stucco and a now disappeared two-story porch in the Eastlake style overlooking the "garden side". An Eastlake front door was set in the original transomed frame. According to the present owner, the Fosters added the three-story mortuary building in the 1920s, tying it into the old building. He also says that in 1959 the first floor back center room was further remodeled, the most significant change being removing the walls with original single acting doors between this room and the two round-ended rooms flanking it.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The front portico represents a late 19th century version of a typical Natchez pedimented portico motif introduced at Auburn in 1812 and popular through the 19th century (see Magnolia Hall). Although undistinguished, the portico thus has a certain historical interest. The architectural importance of the house, however, is in the fine quality of its plan and proportions and in its uniqueness of type, closely suggesting certain Federal houses found along the coast of Georgia. The present portico entirely distorts the historic character of the building, one of the most sophisticated of the early buildings of Natchez. The dormers are late 19th century work, grossly done, and add unwarranted shapes to the low pitched roof. The mid-1920s three-story mortuary addition at the back and the remodeling of original work where it butts into the old buildings are all clearly objectionable intrusions. The portland cement stucco, probably of the late 19th century, again changes the building's character. Tightly bonded to the brick, it probably cannot be removed. A brick red color on the stucco might suggest the original character of the house.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

In 1819 Jane Rapalje purchased a lot 106 feet on Wall and 110 feet on State. In 1848, Dr. Mercer, widower of her heir, sold the property which then measured 108 feet plus on State. In 1893, Audley Britton purchased the property which then measured 89 feet on Wall and 162 feet on State; the Laird purchase in 1961 shows the same lot size, but adds an adjacent lot on the State street end measuring 40 feet on State and 187 feet parallel to Wall. Compared to the present lot, the 1819 lot was wider

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

7 - DESCRIPTION

elliptical door with fanlight. On each side is a square room the depth of the hall. In back, another square room occurs on center with elliptical-headed openings on each side toward the front, the one to the right going to the stairhall, the one to the left to a modern hall and bath. On the back portions of the side walls of the center room, the walls have been opened up, but presumably there was a single-leaf door on each side, leading to long narrow rooms ending in a semicircle. The back wall of the center room is opened up into the later back addition, but presumably it had an elliptical-headed opening the frame of which repeated that above it on the second floor. On the exterior of the semicircular rooms, the masonry is laid up in five flat planes, two of which have openings, forming pavilions and extending past the center back wall of the building. A porch probably crossed the building at both floor levels.

Doors give access on the street side from front parlor to hall to long room, and on the other side from front parlor to stairhall. The left front room and the two semicircular rooms have original wood mantels; the right front room features a marble mantel of ca. 1860. A ca. 1860 marble lavatory top and basin exist (perhaps re-set) in the bath, and there are handmade lead plumbing lines in the house.

The stairhall extends to the attic in a simple Federal design with the exterior end formed to make a semicircular well. At the second floor an open elliptical arch leads into the back center room.

The second-floor plan repeats closely that of the first except there are two rooms on the front: one over the left parlor and hall, the other over the right parlor. The partition between these rooms is old but not in its original location, as opening up the wall showed. Access to a bath and hall over the first-floor bath is through a later door to the back center room. The second-floor bath and hall may have been made out of one end of a room extending the length of the side of the house and ending not in a semicircle, as directly below, but in five flat planes with two openings. Above the other first-floor semicircular room is a room with an identical flat-planed end. The center room contains an original elliptical-headed frame. Access to the addition to the back is from the two side back rooms.

The attic shows clearly the original framing of the roof, which was remodeled with later dormers on the sides and back and the added portico on the front. The attic is sheathed in narrow beaded tongue-and-groove woodwork.

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ITEM NUMBER 7&10 PAGE 2

7 - DESCRIPTION

The basement, with twentieth-century furnace, piping, and wire, still contains extensive evidence of stuccoed walls and a fireplace under the back right room. Further work may clearly show kitchens and storerooms once existing here and ante-dating a frame kitchen later built to the back of the house.

Apart from certain obvious missing doors, the house is remarkably intact and appears to be in good condition. Its repetitive, symmetrical character is encouraging for the restoration of missing doors and windows. The Portland stucco on the outside seems hard and probably must stay.

10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

of eighty-nine (89) feet nine (9) inches, more or less, on Wall Street, and of one hundred sixty-two (162) feet more or less on State Street, and particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the northwest corner of State and South Wall Streets, and running thence along the northerly line of State Street in a westerly direction one hundred sixty-two (162) feet, more or less, to the line of a lot formerly of Mrs. Beatrice Finnell (described Second below) then northwardly nearly at right angles from State Street and along the line of said formerly Finnell lot, eighty-nine (89) feet and nine (9) inches, more or less to a point; thence eastwardly and nearly parallel with State Street one hundred sixty (160) feet be it more or less, to the westerly line of South Wall Street at a point eighty-nine (89) feet and nine (9) inches from the northwest corner of State and Wall Streets. Thence along the westerly line of South Wall Street southwardly eighty-nine (89) feet nine (9) inches to the place of beginning; being all of the same property known as "Mercer House Property" which was conveyed by Mrs. Lena Stewart Merrill and husband to the late Audley C. Britton by deed dated March 1, 1893, recorded in Book 3-I, page 420 of the Records of said Adams County here referred to.

Second.-All that certain lot and parcel of land in the City of Natchez, County of Adams, State of Mississippi (contiguous to and immediately in the rear of the above "First" described land), further described as beginning at a point on the Northerly line of State Street a distance one hundred sixty-two (162) feet measured along the northerly line of State Street from the corner formed by said northerly line of State Street and the westerly line of South Wall Street; run thence in a westerly direction along said

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ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 3

10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

northerly line of State Street forty (40) feet to a point; turn thence to the right through a right angle and run northerly a distance of eighty-nine (89) feet to a point; turn thence to the right and run easterly a distance of forty (40) feet to a point on the western line of the tract first above described; turn thence to the right and run in a southerly direction to the point of beginning.

Both of the above described parcels of land were conveyed to Addison J. Foster by deed from Mrs. Ruth A. S. Wheeler, dated March 10, 1924, and recorded in Book 4-I, page 433 of the Records of Deeds of Adams County, Mississippi, in the office of the Clerk of the Chancery Court of said County. Said Addison J. Foster died on November 19, 1930, leaving a Last Will and Testament duly admitted to probate and recorded in Will Book 7, page 374 of the Records of Wills of Adams County, Mississippi, in the office of the Clerk of the Chancery Court of said County, in which he devised the above described land to his wife named therein as Ada Mitchell Foster and being one and the same person as Mrs. Ada M. Foster.

Both of the above described parcels of land being the same property conveyed by Mrs. Ada M. Foster to Wright & Ferguson Funeral Home by deed dated September 30, 1961 and recorded in Deed Book 9-G at Page 264 of the Adams County deed records.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 & 12 PAGE

2

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

- Continued

on the front (State Street) side and shallower in its depth (along Wall). A cottage facing State on the adjacent property must occupy part of the original lot.

12. OTHER

The term, "garden side", comes from a garden recently projected to be planted there. At this time it is a concrete paved parking area.

The mortuary building occupies the original backyard area.

There is no visible evidence of any historic garden except for some walkways under the back of the house going outwards but interrupted by the mortuary construction. There are two fine wrought iron gate posts on the Wall street property line by the parking lot and a woven wire fence and gate from this property line have been saved.