

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received DEC 13 1982
date entered

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Merrick-Simmons House

and/or common Simmons House

2. Location

street & number 102 South 10th Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Fernandina Beach

N/A vicinity of

state Florida

code 12

county Nassau

code 089

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Elsbeth K. Gordon and Sarah B. Dickinson

street & number 6124 Southwest 30th Avenue

city, town Gainesville

N/A vicinity of

state Florida

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Nassau County Courthouse

street & number Centre Street

city, town Fernandina Beach

state Florida

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A

state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Merrick-Simmons House is a wood-frame 2½ story Greek Revival residential building built near the beginning of the Civil War. It is located in a neighborhood comprised of other residential buildings, dating primarily from the late nineteenth century, which are similar to the Merrick-Simmons House in scale and materials. It is sited on lot 1, block 54 of the City of Fernandina Beach at the corner of 10th and Ash Streets. Behind the house, lot 8 of the same block forms the remainder of the property. It borders Ash Street to the north, extends to Eleventh Street to the east, and serves as parking space for the tenants of the house. The dimensions of the house are 48.5 feet by 32.5 feet and 59.3 feet by 32.5 feet with porches. The Merrick-Simmons House retains most of its original fabric and design. It was in deteriorated condition until 1981 when a comprehensive rehabilitation was undertaken. Originally a single-family residence, it presently serves as a three-unit apartment building.

The Merrick-Simmons House has a balloon frame structural system. It retains large double tier porches on the east and west facades, with the main entrance under the west gable end. The frame is 2½ inch X 10 inch heart-pine joists faced with heart-pine clapboards. It rests on brick piers and 10 inch by 12 inch mortise and tenon sills. The building is ornamented with scroll brackets, a fish-scale faced portico, octagonal porch columns, and turned balustrades.

The unaltered original floor plan consists of a central chimney with parlors to the west, east and north. The west parlor with 12 foot ceiling has a large fireplace surmounted by a period carved oak mantelpiece and an Italian tile hearth. The hearth is flanked on the south by a leaded glass cabinet and two 40" by 80" windows. Two larger 40" by 96" windows extend from the floor and illuminate the west wall. The east parlor, also with a twelve foot ceiling, has a large fireplace surmounted by an ornamented oak mantelpiece with turned finials and three beveled glass mirrors. The hearth is of pale yellow and rose raised Italian tiles with a floral design. The main staircase rises on the east end of the north parlor, curves to the north and has a wood hand rail and turned balustrade. Entry to the north parlor from the porch is through a double door with side and top lights.

The upstairs consists of a foyer and six rooms. The smallest of these rooms on the west served as the borning room for the Simmons family. The upstairs west parlor fireplace mantelpiece is grey marble with Italian tile hearth. The room is surmounted by a gold leaf picture molding. The east parlor fireplace is surmounted by a massive natural heart pine mantelpiece. The exterior east facade has a ten foot by ten foot portico with columns and balustrades, faced with fishscale siding. The original floor boards are retained throughout the house and are 2½ inch thick heart pine varying from six inches to twelve inches in width. The original solid eight foot by three foot doors, containing four panels, remain. The restorers patched extensively in order to preserve the original plaster still showing its coquina sand content. The floor plan of the attic consists of two rooms fourteen by eighteen feet. The present gable roof of tin was insured in 1874 as a cedar shake roof.

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Alterations have been few over the years. The separate kitchen and fifth fireplace were removed soon after the turn of the century. The five by eight foot portico and entrance on the north side were added by Mattie Simmons after 1925 when she rented an upstairs apartment. Structural upgrading was necessary in 1981. It including reinforcement of termite weakened joists under the front porch and raising and leveling the main carrying floor joists and sills on the south side. Two lower sashes were duplicated and replaced because they were so rotted and warped they could not hold glass. All other window sashes and pocket weights have been repaired and many still contain the original glass. One of the glass panes on the south side of the second floor contains the etched name of Mary Dewson, a child of George Dewson who purchased the house in 1873. Access to the attic was improved by an enclosed stairway. The rooms were upgraded to include a bedroom living-room kitchenette combination and bath. Each of the 2½ stories are occupied by tenants. A removable wall was installed to separate the first and second floors, the stairway was preserved intact. The side porch with added stairs provides entry to the second floor. The house has recently been painted with Pittsburgh Historic Colors in soft yellow, with white trim and rose-brown sashes, maintaining the colors found when scraping.

Before 1899, when the separate kitchen was removed from the back of the house, the back porch may have been added. Existing clapboards can be seen under the roof of the porch. At that time, the back door and window configuration was probably changed. The heart-pine front porch columns have rot at the top. They have been temporarily braced until the best procedures can be determined to remedy the problem while at the same time maintaining the original integrity of the porch.

8. 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates c. +1861 **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Merrick-Simmons House is architecturally significant as an unique example of Greek Revival architecture in North Florida. It is historically significant as one of the few remaining buildings constructed in Fernandina Beach prior to the Civil War. Furthermore, it is significant for its association with Chloe Merrick, a prominent figure in the Reconstruction of Florida, and with subsequent owners, particularly John Simmons, who made major contributions to the post-Civil War development of Fernandina Beach.

Although not a "high-styled" building, the Merrick-Simmons House exhibits many of the architectural features associated with the Greek Revival style. The unaltered floor-plan has six large rooms downstairs and six spacious rooms upstairs with twelve foot ceilings and eight foot doors. There are three large porches and two porticos. The central chimney has four fireplaces surmounted by four decorative mantel pieces of turned wood spindels, wood relief, marble, and heart pine. The original windows with 6 over 6 lights, some 96 inches high, are still intact as are the stairway and heart pine floors.

Although the exact date of construction is unknown, deed records, court cases, tax rolls and oral history indicate that the Merrick-Simmons House was built before the Civil War. Mrs. Sidney Simmons, age 86, says that her mother-in-law, Mrs. Mattie Simmons, bought the house in 1899 and told her frequently that the house was built before the Civil War. In June 1863, Tax Sale Certificate No. 32 was issued to Chloe Merrick by the "Direct Tax Commission of the State of Florida" (Deed Record G, p. 498) including lots 1 and 8 and "the premises described therein." It is well known that the Southern sympathizers fled Fernandina in 1862, abandoning their homes. The property of those who fled was appropriated by the Federal Commissary Department (Davis, p. 156) (House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 1st Session). Miss Merrick owned the property as the agent for the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New York from June 1863 until 1865 (Deed Record G, p. 498). On February 14, 1865, A. N. Shearer bought the premises for \$820 through U. S. Tax Sale Certificate #187 (Deed Record L, p. 166). In April 1869, in a quit claim deed, Shearer deeded lots 1 and 8, block 54 "with buildings and appurtanances" to S. N. Freeman, Shearer's partner in the S. N. Shearer Lumber Company, in payment for a debt of \$5,000 (Deed Record L, p. 211, p. 369). In a court case litigated in Nassau County between George Dewson and S. N. Freeman, the property was judged to have earned annual profits of \$500 since May 1, 1865 and to have been deeded fraudently. In said court case, a summons "was nailed to the door of the premises in controversy," on lot 1 block 54. The sheriff "seized the land and tenements" on December 18, 1872 (Deed Record N, p. 242). On February 3, 1873, George Dewson bought the house at public auction for \$400 (Deed Record N, p. 242). Dewson was an attorney, born in the

(See Continuation Sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than 1 (.459)

Quadrangle name Fernindina Beach

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	7	4	5	6	1	9	0	3	3	9	2	8	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Continuation Sheet)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Weaver, Paul L. (Historic Sites Specialist)

organization Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management

date November 19, 1982

street & number The Capitol

telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee

state Florida 32301

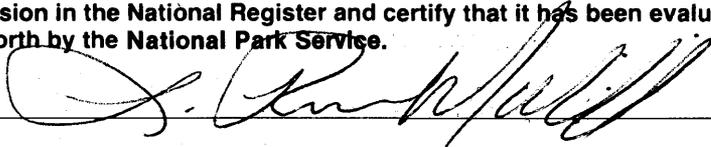
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state 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

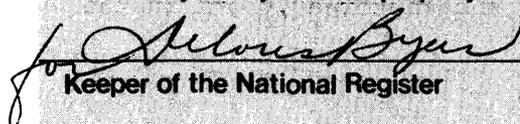


title L. Ross Morrell, State Historic Preservation Officer

date 12/3/82

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register



Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date 1/13/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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West Indies, and listed in the 1860 Fernandina census. He died December 15, 1873. In his papers, filed at the Nassau County Courthouse, is a copy of the insurance policy describing the Merrick-Simmons House. The house was a "two story frame dwelling, belonging to the estate of George Dewson, deceased, situate on lot 1, block 54." Also in the estate papers are receipts to "repair" the chimneys and fireplaces and to "patch, whitewash and kalsomine" the walls. The repairs were made by Dewson's widow, Rosalie, and were approved by the executor of his estate, A. O. MacDonnell.

There is much evidence supporting construction of the Merrick-Simmons House prior to the Civil War. In the inventory of assets of the George Dewson estate, the house is described in an insurance policy. There are also bills for the repair of chimneys and patching walls, indicating a mature building in need of maintenance. There are no bills relating to construction of a new dwelling. Dewson died eleven months after buying the house. Therefore, the conclusion is that he did not build it. The previous owner of the property disposed of the premises in April, 1869 for \$5,000, a very large sum of money for a vacant lot. The quit claim deed specifies "buildings and appurtenances." The summons was "tacked to the door of the premises" in October, 1868. Shearer purchased the premises for \$820 in 1865. He paid twice the sum Dewson paid for the delapidated house in 1873, thus indicating there was a building or buildings. Per the court case cited, the property had earned an annual profit of \$500 since May 1, 1865, indicating there must have been an income generating structure on the 100' by 200' piece of land. Furthermore, Miss Chloe Merrick had possession of the property in June, 1863. This was not only a period of chaos, but the period when supporters of the South fled Fernandina as Federal troops arrived. It was hardly a time for a single school teacher from the North to build a house. In conclusion, the house was probably built after 1856 when the town of Fernandina Beach was platted but before 1863 when Miss Merrick acquired it.

Finally, the Merrick-Simmons House is significant because of its association with individuals important to the history of Florida and Fernandina Beach. Miss Chloe Merrick is the only educator cited by name in the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands monthly education reports from Florida. In House Executive Document No. 70, p. 337 from the 39th Congress, 1st Session, Miss Merrick is described as follows: She was "a lovely specimen of genuine philanthropy and the lady principal (Miss Merrick) deserves great credit for her selfdenying labors" (Report No. 22, Washington, D. C., January 1, 1866, from J. W. Alvord, Inspector of Schools and Finances, to General O. O. Howard). In a letter to Major General O. O. Howard from Colonel Osborne, Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Osborne states: "The Orphan Asylum at Fernandina,

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organized and conducted by Miss C. Merrick, has sixty-five inmates and is a most admirable institution. Miss Merrick has exhibited great energy and fine executive ability in the management of the Asylum from its organization to the present time. It is a perfect success and model institution" (Microfilm 85 O-Q, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, etc., P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida). "It was Miss Merrick whom John Hay noticed while on a mission to Florida in 1863. (She was) 'one of those in charge of the high school in the little Florida town, leading light mulatto and white children together in song about the wings of morning'" (Daniels, Prince of Carpetbaggers, p. 84). "In 1862 the Freedmen's Aid Society of Syracuse, New York organized schools in Fernandina and St. Augustine under the leadership of Chloe Merrick" (Richardson, The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, p. 98). On August 10, 1869 Chloe Merrick married Harrison Reed, the Governor of the State of Florida, thus becoming the First Lady of Florida after having sustained a prominent and efficient part" in the "earlier movements for the improvement and education of the Freedmen" (Johathan Daniels, Prince of Carpetbaggers, pp. 240-241, 83, 84, 87, 143, 236, 238, 252).

John Simmons was another important individual associated with the Merrick-Simmons House. He owned the house from 1899 until 1925. He also owned an ice plant which was located on the lot behind the house. In addition, he was co-owner along with Mr. Hirth and Mr. Bailey, two prominent Fernandina residents, of the Fernandina trolley lines. In order to accommodate Mr. Simmons, the trolley stopped at the Merrick-Simmons House during its daily runs from Centre Street in downtown Fernandina to the beach.

After 1925, the Merrick-Simmons House had a number of owners. It evolved from a single-family residence to a multiple-family apartment building. It was rehabilitated by its present owners who have maintained its function as an apartment building.

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Nassau County Courthouse RECORDS: (Centre Street, Fernandina Beach)

Deed Books: A-3, p. 170
A-5, p. 304
F p. 169
G pp. 107, 498
L pp. 166, 210, 211, 369, 379
M p. 262
N p. 242
P pp. 34-36
Q pp. 97, 118, 278
T pp. 40, 156, 183
U p. 465
X p. 407.

Personal papers of George Dewson in his estate filed in Nassau County Counthouse.

Insurance Binder, The Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia, Samuel Swann agent, (copy enclosed) dated August 12, 1874.

Fourth Circuit Court Cases of Dewson vs. Dutton and Dewson vs. Freeman (March 3, 1873; April 30, 1873, April 4, 1870) in Nassau County Courthouse (owners have xerox copies).

Summons attached to door of the house October 19, 1869 (owner has copy) Nassau County Courthouse.

Davis, William Watson, The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida, 1964, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, pp. 154-155; 235-36; etc.

H. Ex. Docs., 39th Congress, 1st Session No. 70, pp. 280, 281, Report #14 and Report #22, p. 337 from J. W. Alvord, Inspector of Schools and Finances to Gen. O. O. Howard.

U. S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, monthly school reports, Microfilm, 85 O-Q and 96A, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Univeristy of Florida.

Daniels, Johathan, Prince of Carpetbaggers, J. B. Lippincott Co., N. Y. 1958, pp. 83, 84, 87, 143, 236, 238, 240-241, 252, 269.

Oral History:

Mrs. Sidney Simmons, age 85, now a resident of Jacksonville, daughter-in-law of Mattie and John Simmons, owner of the house from 1899 to 1950.

Ben Sorenson, Commissioner of Fernandina Beach and Senior Citizen.

George Davis and Helen Litrico, Local historians.

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The Merrick-Simmons House is located in Block 54 lots 1 and 8 of the original plat of the Town of Fernandina. It is situated on the corner of Ash Street and South 10th Street. Lot 1 has 100 feet frontage on South 10th and 100 feet frontage on Ash Street. Lot 8 is immediately to the west of Lot 1 and has 100 feet frontage on Ash Street and 85 feet frontage on South 11th Street.