

SG-1679



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office

Other Names/Site Number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 670 Division Street

City or town: Biloxi

State: MS

County: Harrison

Not for Publication:

Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national  state  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

*Kelley Blunt 8-10-17*

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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**4. National Park Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

9-28-2017

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	District
<input type="checkbox"/>	Site
<input type="checkbox"/>	Structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Non-contributing	
1	0	Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.): HEALTH CARE/ medical business/office

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.): VACANT/NOT IN USE

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## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.): MODERN MOVEMENT/  
International Style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

roof: OTHER: built-up

other:

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office is located on the north side of Division Street in Biloxi, Mississippi. It is a one-story, brick-veneer, mid-century modern office constructed in 1966 with strong International style influence evident in its clean horizontal lines and ribbon window. Division Street is a wide thoroughfare bordered by sidewalks and lined with a mix of commercial, religious, and residential architecture. The spacing of buildings from each other and the street is irregular. The medical office is set back from the street approximately 30 feet and on either side of it are vacant lots. Its narrow lot is bordered by a chain link fence. A driveway leading to a small parking area in the rear runs along the left side of the lot. The rest of the lot is covered in grass and a few bushes are planted along the front facade. Across the street is John Henry Beck Park. Although the setting of Division Street has changed somewhat since the construction of the Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office because of the removal of some buildings, the property otherwise retains good integrity of location, feeling, association, design, materials, and craftsmanship.

#### Narrative Description

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#### Exterior - Front (South) Elevation (Photos 3 and 4)

The front facade is divided into two bays framed by three brise-soleil inspired walls and a deep overhang. On the left is the entrance: a solid flush door with a single sidelight on its right. The door and sidelight are covered by security bars. The right bay is defined by an aluminum frame ribbon window divided into four lights. It too is covered by security bars. The red brick veneer wall beneath is decoratively punctuated by stacked joints and projecting headers. Across it is affixed stainless sans serif lettering spelling "GILBERT R. MASON, M.D." with the caduceus beneath.

#### Exterior - Side Elevations (Photos 1 and 5)

The side elevations are both mostly composed of running bond brick veneer. The left (west) elevation has two high sliding aluminum frame windows set in its rear half. The right (east) elevation is cut in at the rear corner where the rear entrance is tucked under the roof line. The solid rear entrance door faces east. Like the west elevation, the east also has two high sliding aluminum frame windows set in its rear half.

#### Exterior - Rear Elevation

The rear elevation is unbroken by any fenestration and is composed simply of the two planes of solid running bond red brick veneer that accommodate the cut in entrance.

#### Interior - Plan (See floor plans, attached.)

The original plan was composed of a reception area in the front, lit by the ribbon window. A reception desk was built into the center of this area. On the left of this space was a mechanical room and bathroom. A hallway led down the center of the building from the reception area to the rear. Off of it were the lab, exam rooms, and office. On the left side was the lab off of which was another small bathroom, then two exam rooms. On the right was another exam room and then the office. The plan today remains nearly exactly the same with two minor changes for ADA compliance and flexibility. The wall between the lab and bathroom has been mostly removed to create an ADA bathroom. The wall between the exam room on the right and the office has also been mostly removed to create a single larger meeting space. These changes were made after the building was damaged in Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

#### Interior - Finishes and Details

Most of the interior was originally finished with vinyl asbestos tiles on the floor, prefinished plywood paneling on the walls, and acoustic ceiling tiles. During the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, the office was inundated with water to nearly the ceiling, which damaged or destroyed much of this material. Since then, the interior has been fully restored to match the original interior finishes and fixtures as closely as possible. For example, a former employee of Dr. Mason's was consulted to aid in matching the original color of the Formica reception desk, and a water fountain from the period was located to replace the original.<sup>1</sup>

The entrance opens into the reception area, which is dominated by a chest height counter wrapping the reception desk. All vertical surfaces are covered in plywood wood paneling. On the left side of the reception area is the mechanical room with a louvered wood door and a bathroom with a flush hollow-core door. The bathroom retains its original white toilet and a wall-mounted sink. Square ceramic tiles cover the floor and up to shoulder height of the walls. A hallway leads from the middle of the reception area to the back door. Off of it are doors to a lab, exam rooms, and the doctor's

<sup>1</sup> Chuck Collins, restoration contractor, whose family firm were the original architects. Interview by author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

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office. Each of these rooms features restored finishes and retains original configurations with two minor changes (see floor plans, attached). A wall between the lab and bathroom was partially removed to make the toilet handicap accessible. Between the office and east exam room another wall was mostly removed to make the space more flexible. Aside from these small changes, anyone visiting the office today who knew it during its period of significance would immediately recognize all of its familiar features and finishes. Thus it has very good integrity of feeling, association, design, materials, and craftsmanship.

**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.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

**Criteria Considerations:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Removed from its original location
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	A birthplace or grave
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	A cemetery
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>E</b>	A reconstructed building, object, or structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>F</b>	A commemorative property
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>G</b>	Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions.): Health/Medicine; Social History; Ethnic Heritage: Black

**Period of Significance:** 1966-1980

**Significant Dates:** 1966, 1968, 1976, 1980

**Significant Person** (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above): Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion D is marked above):

**Architect/Builder (last name, first name):** Collins, John T. and Leonard A.

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**Period of Significance (justification):** The period of significance begins with the construction of the office in 1966 and terminates in 1980, with the nomination and senate confirmation of Dr. Gilbert R. Mason to the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure, an exceptionally significant event representing Dr. Mason's role and impact on both civil rights and the medical profession in Mississippi.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary):** Criteria G: Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.'s medical office was constructed in 1966 and is significant for its association with Dr. Mason from that date to the fifty-year cut-off in 1967, however its association with Dr. Mason and events that made a significant contribution to civil rights and the medical profession in Biloxi and Mississippi does not cease in 1967. Dr. Mason remained a significant person and vocal advocate for civil rights until his death in 2006 and only retired from his medical practice in 2002. 1980 has been selected as the terminating date for the period of significance because it marks the pivotal and exceptional recognition and acceptance of Dr. Mason on a statewide governing body of the medical profession in Mississippi.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office is eligible for the National Register at the statewide level under Criteria B for its association with physician and civil rights leader, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. and under Criteria A for its association with medicine and with civil rights history in Mississippi. The period of significance extends from the construction of the office in 1966 until 1980 when Dr. Mason was nominated and confirmed to the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure, a defining mark of his achievement as both a medical doctor and a civil rights leader.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Note: The full story of Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.'s life and work as told by Dr. Mason with historian, James Patterson Smith is presented in *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle*, which is the major source for the following narrative.

Gilbert R. Mason, M.D.: Entering the Medical Profession as an African American in 1950s Mississippi

Gilbert Rutledge Mason, Sr. was born on October 28, 1928, in Jackson, Mississippi and was a proud and devoted Mississippian who changed the course of his state's history while working as a medical doctor in Biloxi, Mississippi during the second half of the twentieth century. He set his sights on being a doctor at a very early age. He knew and knew of some African-American physicians who worked with the Sally Harris Clinic on Jackson's Farish Street or at the Afro-American Sons and Daughters Hospital, forty-five miles away in Yazoo City, but there were few of these role models. To train to be a medical doctor, he would have to attend a college out of state because the only in-state medical school was at the whites-only University of Mississippi.<sup>2</sup> Gilbert R. Mason's, Sr.'s ultimate goal was attaining a medical degree from Howard University and to work toward that, Mason first went to stay with family in Chicago to earn and save money for school. Then he attended Tennessee State in Nashville and graduated in 1949 with a double major in chemistry and biology. In 1950, he gained admittance to Howard University College of Medicine.

Because there were no medical schools in Mississippi that black students could attend, the state offered a \$5,000 stipend dispersed over the four years of school on the condition that the recipient would return to

<sup>2</sup> Mason and Smith, *Beaches Blood and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2000), 16-17.

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Mississippi to practice medicine for at least five years.<sup>3</sup> When Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. received his medical degree from Howard Medical School in Washington, D.C. and completed the requisite internship in St. Louis in 1955, he returned to Mississippi. He felt drawn to his home state and deeply wanted to serve his fellow Mississippians as a medical doctor. He was also filled with an idealism inspired by the intellectual environment of Howard University in the early fifties and its focus on freedom and public service. He had seen other parts of the country where segregation was slowly giving way to integration and could foresee such a future for the South.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in 1955 when Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. came to Biloxi to establish his medical practice, he came to be a member of the community and an "influence for social uplift."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Mason took over the practice of Dr. Velma Wesley, who was leaving Biloxi to join her husband at a hospital in Detroit. The office of Dr. Wesley was located on a parcel then assigned the address of 439 1/2 E. Division Street at the northwest corner of Nixon Street. Sanborn maps show that this building was an L-front dwelling with a partial-width porch built between 1925 and 1948. According to Dr. Mason's description and a 1960 photograph, it was wood-frame clad in faux brick rolled asphalt siding. This modest building accommodated one examining room, a consultation room, a waiting room, a lab, and a rest room and was cooled with a window air-conditioning unit.<sup>6</sup> Although adequate and efficient, the details of this older, adapted house stand in significant contrast to the modern medical office Dr. Mason would later build. This office, like the later one on the same block, was located in the predominately African-American "back-of-town" neighborhood of east Biloxi. This block was home to St. James AME Church and a "colored trade school" and was just around the corner from the neighborhood's busy business district on Main Street.<sup>7</sup>

In 1955, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason became only the 48th black doctor in Mississippi. That number is barely more than half of the number of the state's 82 counties and quite obviously not proportionate to the state's African American population. The medical licensing exam was proctored in a "white-only" hotel in Jackson where Mason had to remain in the testing room for the duration of the day since all other parts of the hotel, including rest rooms and lobby were off-limits to him.<sup>8</sup> In Biloxi, Dr. Mason was quickly granted hospital privileges and permission to execute any procedure of which he was capable, but those privileges were limited to "courtesy" rather than "active" status which disallowed him from voting in staff meetings. Even with limited privileges, Mason noted that being able to practice in a hospital was a rarity for black doctors and not even something occurring in Jackson at that time.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the black patients that Dr. Mason treated in the hospital were relegated to a deteriorating annex that posed health risks to newborns and their mothers.<sup>10</sup> Another form of discrimination within the health system was the refusal to address African American patients as Miss, Mrs. or Mr., a courtesy uniformly provided to white patients. As Dr. Mason summarized, "With Jim Crow medicine or Jim Crow anything, you made your way daily through a maze of indignities, small and large."<sup>11</sup>

Membership in medical organizations provided another racially biased challenge. The Mississippi State Medical Association and Coast Communities Medical Association were both all white. Without membership in them, one was precluded from joining the American Medical Association. The National Medical Association was founded in 1895 as an organization open to members of all races and operated parallel to the AMA. Likewise at the state and local levels, black medical professionals could join the Mississippi Medical and Surgical Association and the Gulf Coast Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association, which typically met

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>7</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Biloxi, Mississippi, 1925, revised 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 37 and 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 42.

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at member's homes since so few public venues were available to African Americans.<sup>12</sup> Not one to be limited in his learning opportunities, Dr. Mason joined the three latter organizations, but also pursued membership in the local white organizations as did another Dr. Milas Love from Gulfport. In response, the organizations created a "scientific" category of membership which would allow the black doctors to attend scientific meetings, but exclude them from all social and business gatherings of the organizations. Despite, the demeaning nature of this membership, Dr. Mason accepted so he would at least have some presence, though the other doctor refused. In 1959, this limited status was threatened by a speaker who refused to address an integrated audience; Dr. Mason was evicted from the meeting, but not without the support of four white colleagues who left with him. Finally, in 1966 after years of patience and perseverance, Dr. Mason was invited to become a full-voting member of the Coast Counties Medical Society, along with Gulfport doctor Milas Love.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. and Mrs. Mason were also entrepreneurs and extended their impact on the health of their East Biloxi community by opening the Modern Drugstore, which they operated from 1960 until 1963.<sup>14</sup> Located in a prominent commercial building at 714 Main Street (the left unit in what is now 260 Main Street), this business was an important asset for the community.<sup>15</sup>

#### Wading In: Civil Rights in Mississippi

Dr. Mason did not limit his pursuit of civil rights to the medical profession. In keeping with his intent to be a part of his community and serve it in a holistic way, he and wife, Natalie, were active members of the First Missionary Baptist Church and joined many organizations such as the PTA (even before their son entered school) and the Gulfport branch of the NAACP.<sup>16</sup> Mason also became a member of the local Masonic Lodge and the Elks Lodge and held leadership roles in local affiliates of the Boy Scouts and Alpha Phi Alpha, two of the most important organizations through much of his life. As Dr. Mason observed his community and became an integral part of it, one particular feature of the landscape that Jim Crow set apart was especially troubling to him.

Along the southern shore of Biloxi's peninsula, about six blocks south of Dr. Mason's office, the beautiful beach and Gulf Coast waters were completely restricted for white use only. As Dr. Mason put it,

Local practice reserved God's sunrises and sunsets over the glistening waters and white sands of Biloxi beach for the exclusive enjoyment of white folks. For a man who loved swimming and who had gloried in the free use of the parks in Chicago and Washington, D.C., the idea that a marvelous oak-lined public beach was forbidden territory was just too much to abide.<sup>17</sup>

In 1959, Dr. Mason took his first step onto that Biloxi beach and into its waters, beginning a movement to desegregate the beach with which he would be forever identified. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, he and eight African American men, women, and boys ventured onto the beach in the first organized "wade-in." Though the group was eventually ushered off the beach by police, no arrests were made. As Dr. Mason suspected, Biloxi authorities were unable to produce any document outlining a legal restriction on black use of this public beach. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, he met with Gulfport colleague Dr. Felix Dunn and Gulfport attorney, Knox Walker, and a ten-year battle to desegregate all 26 miles of Harrison County's public beach got under way.<sup>18</sup> Their new group, the Harrison County Civic Action Committee, adopted a petition for presentation to the Harrison County Board of Supervisors that outlined the legal research showing the beach to be public and requesting unrestrained access to the beach. It was brought to the board on October 5, 1959 and that day, *The Daily Herald* made the story the most prominent on the front page with a large title reading "Negroes Seek Use of Harrison Beach."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>15</sup> Clemon Jimerson, interview by author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 54.



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Board President, Dewey Lawrence, was quoted in the article with a rather contradictory statement, noting relations "between colored folks and white folks on the Mississippi Coast have always been very good... If we integrate that sand beach entirely we're going to have some riots there and someone is going to get hurt or killed." Apparently, to Lawrence, the so-called good relations of which he spoke were entirely dependent on segregation. The article went on to say that, "Informed observers have long agreed that the first significant test of Mississippi segregation laws will come on the sand beach . . ." <sup>19</sup>

In the 1950s dissatisfaction with status quo Jim Crow restrictions had been coalescing into organized protests in locations around the South. In 1953, the first civil rights bus boycott occurred in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, followed in a couple years by the more famous Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama. In Mississippi, however, notable dates of this era marked the brutal killings of African Americans: Emmet Till in 1955, Reverend George Lee in 1956, and Mack Charles Parker in 1959. Dr. Mason and others involved in the wade-in were not immune to threats of such violence. Every kind of intimidation including death threats was brought to bear against all known to be involved in the petition. That fall, a secret KKK assassination list was obtained and on it were Dr. Mason and Dr. Dunn along with Mississippi NAACP field secretary, Medgar Evers; Mississippi NAACP president, Aaron Henry; and other prominent activists from around the state. This clear danger prompted Dr. Mason to accept the offer of friends to provide security and protection for him. They kept watch night and day and foiled at least one assassination attempt. <sup>20</sup>

With no action being taken on the petition, the group concluded that arrests would be necessary in order to move the case into courts where the protesters would presumably lose locally, but could appeal up to the Supreme Court. To produce those arrests, a mass wade-in was planned for the Spring of 1960. After months of preparation, Dr. Mason drove to the beach on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1960, but found himself the lone protestor. Alone, he proceeded to the water anyway and in time was approached by a police officer and arrested. The same day, Dr. Dunn and his family were removed from the beach in Gulfport by the Mayor, but without charges. After the arrest of Dr. Mason, the African-American community became galvanized behind him and the cause of beach desegregation. He recalled that, "by Monday evening at 6:00 pm, when my trial came up in municipal court, it felt as if practically the entire black population of Biloxi had enlisted in my cause." <sup>21</sup> Subsequently, a plan for a new wade-in the following Sunday was made and this time it would have broad participation. Approximately 125 people met at Dr. Mason's office on April 24th before proceeding to the beach in three groups. The local sheriff's office had been forewarned with the assumption that they might make arrests, but would help ensure peace and curtail any violence against protestors. This was not to be the case. Instead, the protestors were assaulted by groups of racist whites bearing bricks, baseball bats, pipes, sticks and chains who met no interference from authorities. <sup>22</sup> The event became known as "Bloody Sunday". Violence from the beach spread out into the streets later that night and many residents and business in the African American neighborhood on Main and Division were attacked. <sup>23</sup> Black-owned businesses were blasted by shotgun fire and by early Monday morning, two fire bombs had been thrown at Dr. Mason's office, but were extinguished before extensive damage was caused. <sup>24</sup> Reporting in papers around the country characterized the rioting as the worst and bloodiest in Mississippi history. <sup>25</sup> The *Biloxi Daily Herald* reported that one white and six black residents had been shot and many others wounded and noted that the violence came one day

<sup>19</sup> "Negroes Seek Use of Beach: Petition is Presented to the Board," *The Daily Herald*, October 5, 1959: 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Mason and Smith, 58-59.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-74.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 70; *Joplin Globe*, Joplin, Missouri, April 26, 1960; "NAACP Denies Blame in Rioting," *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston, WV, April 26, 1960; "Racial Trouble at Biloxi Laid at NAACP Door," *Florence Morning News*, Florence, SC, April 26, 1960; *The Abilene Reporter-News*, Abilene, TX, April 26, 1960.

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before the anniversary of the lynching of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville.<sup>26</sup> Later that week, two young black men were killed in apparent hate crimes in Biloxi.<sup>27</sup>

After the violence subsided, threats and economic pressures were employed against many African Americans in Biloxi, whether they had been personally involved in the wade-in or not. Dr. Mason himself was threatened with withdrawal of his hospital privileges and received "unfriendly pressure" from the white landlord of his drugstore.<sup>28</sup> In response to this, a new level of resolve and organization emerged from the African American community. The day after the riot, field secretary of the Mississippi Conference of the NAACP, Medgar Evers came to Biloxi and began surveying interest in creating a Biloxi NAACP branch. Evers and Mason had first met in 1955 in Jackson, while Evers was investigating the Till murder. Though Mason had long been aware of the advantages of NAACP organization, it took the attacks of "Bloody Sunday" and its aftermath to convince the broader African-American community in Biloxi that affiliation could do more good than harm.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the week, ninety-two people had become charter members, Dr. Mason was elected its first president, a position he would continue in for thirty-four years. NAACP legal assistance was also accepted to pursue the beach case.<sup>30</sup> On May 17th, 1960, the US Justice Department filed suit against the Biloxi and Harrison country authorities for not allowing use of the beach to the African-American complainants and thus began the crawl through the justice system of the first federal court challenge to Mississippi's segregationist practices.<sup>31</sup> The civil rights activities spread from here with a targeted boycott against certain white business, an expansive voter registration drive, and a push for school desegregation. In November of 1960, Dr. Mason was elected first vice president of the Mississippi NAACP with Aaron Henry as president and Dr. Felix Dunn as second vice president. Organizing required places to meet, so rallies and voter registration schools occurred at the United Benevolence Hall on Division Street, while big meetings were held at McDaniel's Funeral Home and New Bethel Baptist Church. Like Aaron Henry's Drug Store in Clarksdale, Dr. Mason noted that his office was a "one-stop NAACP information and voter registration service center."<sup>32</sup> The newly completed Mason family home at 873 Fayard Street also became headquarters.<sup>33</sup> During these years, friends and associates who called themselves BAM, for Black Angry Men, would watch the Mason home from the roof of the Bousqueto residence across Fayard. When passengers in speeding cars shot at Mason's house, they returned fire.<sup>34</sup>

Among the many civil rights leaders who came to meet and stay at the Mason home was Medgar Evers. Evers and Mason worked closely from 1960 to 1963 on the push to desegregate schools in Biloxi. Evers first wrote a request for national NAACP assistance with desegregation of Biloxi schools in October of 1960. In the same letter, he expressed his desire to file a desegregation suit on behalf of his own children in Jackson. A week later, Evers sent a copy of the letter to Mason and stated that he was "willing to risk life itself." "My feeling is," he continued, "if we are to receive a beating, lets receive it because we have done something, not because we have done nothing."<sup>35</sup> While working on desegregation of schools, Mason and Evers were simultaneously involved with planning another wade-in.

Meanwhile, flagrant violence against civil rights activists in Mississippi was escalating, including incidents that gained national attention. On June 9, 1963, Mississippi voting rights activist and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizer, Fannie Lou Hamer was held and nearly fatally beaten at the

<sup>26</sup> "Racial Violence Erupts at Biloxi: Score or More Hurt, Wounded," *The Daily Herald*, April 25, 1960, 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Mason and Smith, 77.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Vinson Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 183-185.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. The Mason home was damaged in Hurricane Katrina and demolished afterward.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>35</sup> Evers to Mason, October 18, 1960, image printed in Mason and Smith.

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Harrison County, MS  
County and State

direction of police in Winona, Mississippi. Evers spent that Sunday night with the Masons and stayed at their Fayard Street home. On June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was shot dead in his driveway in Jackson. On Sunday, June 16th, Mason served as a pall-bearer at Evers' funeral. The wade-in Mason and Evers had been planning for that day was postponed to the following Sunday.

The next several years were full of steps forward and back as Dr. Mason and others throughout Mississippi labored to advance the cause of Civil Rights. In 1963, the Biloxi Municipal School System became the first to begin integration in Mississippi.<sup>36</sup> In 1964, the statewide African American voter registration drive known as Freedom Summer brought national attention to the denial of voting rights in Mississippi. Violence again made front pages with the abduction and murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner on June 21, 1964. The Civil Rights Act was signed into law July 2, 1964. Also in 1964, the construction of a new hospital building ended the separate and unequal conditions of "hospital Jim Crow" in Biloxi.<sup>37</sup>

#### A New Office for a New Era

In 1966, the beach access case was still unresolved, but many things had changed for the African-American community in Biloxi. Dr. Mason hired the white architecture firm of Collins & Collins to design a new office for his medical practice. Architect, John T. Collins was born in Biloxi and educated at the Tulane School of Architecture. By 1966, he had many religious, educational, institutional, and governmental buildings in Biloxi to his credit, including the Biloxi Federal Building completed in 1964 (NR, 2015). Therefore, commissioning him to design a new office on Division Street definitely made a statement as did the building he produced. With its strong horizontal lines, ribbon window, and facade articulated by brise-soleil inspired walls and overhang, it boldly announced the modern era had come to Division Street. The office provided a new level of comfort, privacy, and professionalism for Dr. Mason's patients, and its water fountain was a beacon for local kids who would stop in for a cool drink.<sup>38</sup> He had the former office building at 443 E. Division Street taken down that year.<sup>39</sup>

The coming years were full of much more civil rights activity and professional milestones for Dr. Mason, and his office continued to be a headquarters for both. It was in 1966 that Dr. Mason was finally accepted as a full member of the Coast Counties Medical Association. In 1968, he was appointed to sit on the governing board of the Division of Comprehensive Health by Gov. John Bell Williams, becoming "one of the first black appointees to any state board or commission since Reconstruction."<sup>40</sup> That same year, Dr. Mason was selected through county conventions as one of three black delegates - along with Charles Evers and Dr. Matthew Page - to attend the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Following opposition by party regulars to their inclusion and disagreement among various civil rights groups, Evers and Page dropped out, leaving Mason as the sole African-American member of the regular delegation in Chicago that year.<sup>41</sup> On August 16, 1968, a ruling on the beach case finally came in favor of the United States that declared the Harrison County beaches were open to all general public "enjoyment, without unreasonable interference, of access to the water for swimming, bathing, boating, fishing, and other customary aquatic pursuits."<sup>42</sup> Trespassing convictions of the 1963 wade-in participants were finally reversed in 1970.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Jr., interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> "Gilbert R. Mason to tear down old five room house at 443 East Division for \$200," *The Daily Herald*, June 3, 1966.

<sup>40</sup> Mason and Smith, 196.

<sup>41</sup> Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994), 420.

<sup>42</sup> *United States v. Harrison County, MS*, 399 F.2d 485 (5th Cir. 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Mason and Smith, 140.

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office

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Invitations from President Carter brought Dr. Mason to the White House on three occasions in the 1970s. In 1976, he was nominated to fill one of vacancies on the Mississippi State Board of Health and Medical Licensure by Governor Cliff Finch. However, a dispute ensued, with the state senate refusing to confirm Mason because he was not approved by "the" medical association meaning the predominantly white Mississippi Medical Association and ignoring the black Mississippi Medical and Surgical Association. The governor issued him a temporary commission so the work of the state board could proceed, and Mason worked in this capacity for almost four years while the case wound its way to the Mississippi Supreme Court. Finally, in 1980, in conformance with national trends, the Mississippi State Board of Health and Medical Licensure divided into two boards, and Governor William Winter nominated Mason to State Board of Medical Licensure and the senate confirmed him. In Mason's words, "This black doctor from Biloxi, who in 1955 was given only "courtesy" staff privileges without voting rights at the Biloxi Hospital, was now helping determine who was to be admitted and expelled from medical practice in the state."<sup>44</sup>

Although Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. continued to be a significant civil rights activist and medical practitioner for many years to come, this 1980 recognition serves as a fitting closure for this nomination in 2017, as it clearly marks exceptional significance after the standard fifty-year guidance for termination of the period of significance. His medical office is the standing building most closely associated with Dr. Mason and both his medical and civil rights work, since it was used for both purposes. As noted above, Dr. Mason had his former office taken down in 1966. His home at 873 Fayard Street was removed after extensive damage from flooding during Hurricane Katrina. The Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office however, retains its integrity of location, materials, design, craftsmanship, feeling, and association with this significant Mississippian and his contributions to the course of civil rights and the medical profession in Mississippi.

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## Developmental History/Additional historic context information

### 9. Major Bibliographical Resources

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Dittmer, John. *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. Urban: University of Illinois, 1994.

Jimerson, Clemon. Interview by author. Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

Mason, Gilbert R., MD with James Patterson Smith. *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000.

Mason, Gilbert R., MD, Jr. Interview by author. Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

Pitt, Michael. "A Civil Rights Watershed in Biloxi, Mississippi." *Smithsonian.com*.  
[www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-civil-rights-watershed-in-biloxi-mississippi-20888869/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-civil-rights-watershed-in-biloxi-mississippi-20888869/)  
(accessed January 11, 2017).

Williams, Michael Vinson. *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2011.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 174.

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office  
Name of Property

Harrison County, MS  
County and State

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** 047-BLX-0343 \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:** .22

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 30.403333 | Longitude: -88.890833 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

LOT S BY DIVISION ST. E BY SWETMAN ET AL N BY LAMAS W BY WEBB ET AL LESS LOT 48 X 165 FT TO LUNDAY SEC. BLK. 92

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the property line.

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office  
Name of Property

Harrison County, MS  
County and State

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Laura Ewen Blokker  
organization: Southeast Preservation  
street & number: 11627 Hwy 37  
city or town: Greensburg  
e-mail: lblokker@sepreservation.com  
telephone: 985.514.7802  
date: 7 April 2017

state: LA

zip code: 70441

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:**
  - Floor plans (2 pages)

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office  
Name of Property

Harrison County, MS  
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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office

City or Vicinity: Biloxi

County: Harrison

State: Mississippi

Name of Photographer: Laura Ewen Blokker

Date of Photographs: Feb. 4 and April 11, 2017

- 1 of 17: View of side (west) and front elevations. Camera facing northeast.
- 2 of 17: View of side (west) and front elevations. Camera facing northeast.
- 3 of 17: View of front elevation. Camera facing north.
- 4 of 17: Close-up view of front elevation. Camera facing north.
- 5 of 17: View of front and side (east) elevations. Camera facing northwest.
- 6 of 17: View of rear (north) elevation. Camera facing south.
- 7 of 17: View of east exam room. Camera facing southeast.
- 8 of 17: View of lab and bathroom. Camera facing west.
- 9 of 17: View of lab. Camera facing southeast.
- 10 of 17: View of office. Camera facing north.
- 11 of 17: View of reception bathroom. Camera facing northwest.
- 12 of 17: View of reception bathroom and water fountain. Camera facing northwest.
- 13 of 17: View of reception area with mechanical room and bathroom doors on left, reception desk on right, and water fountain straight ahead. Camera facing north.
- 14 of 17: View of reception area. Camera facing northeast.
- 15 of 17: View of reception desk. Camera facing northeast.
- 16 of 17: View of reception and hall to exam rooms and office. Camera facing northeast.
- 17 of 17: View of reception and hall to exam rooms and office. Camera facing north.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



Google Earth



Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office, Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi





Google Earth



Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office, Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi

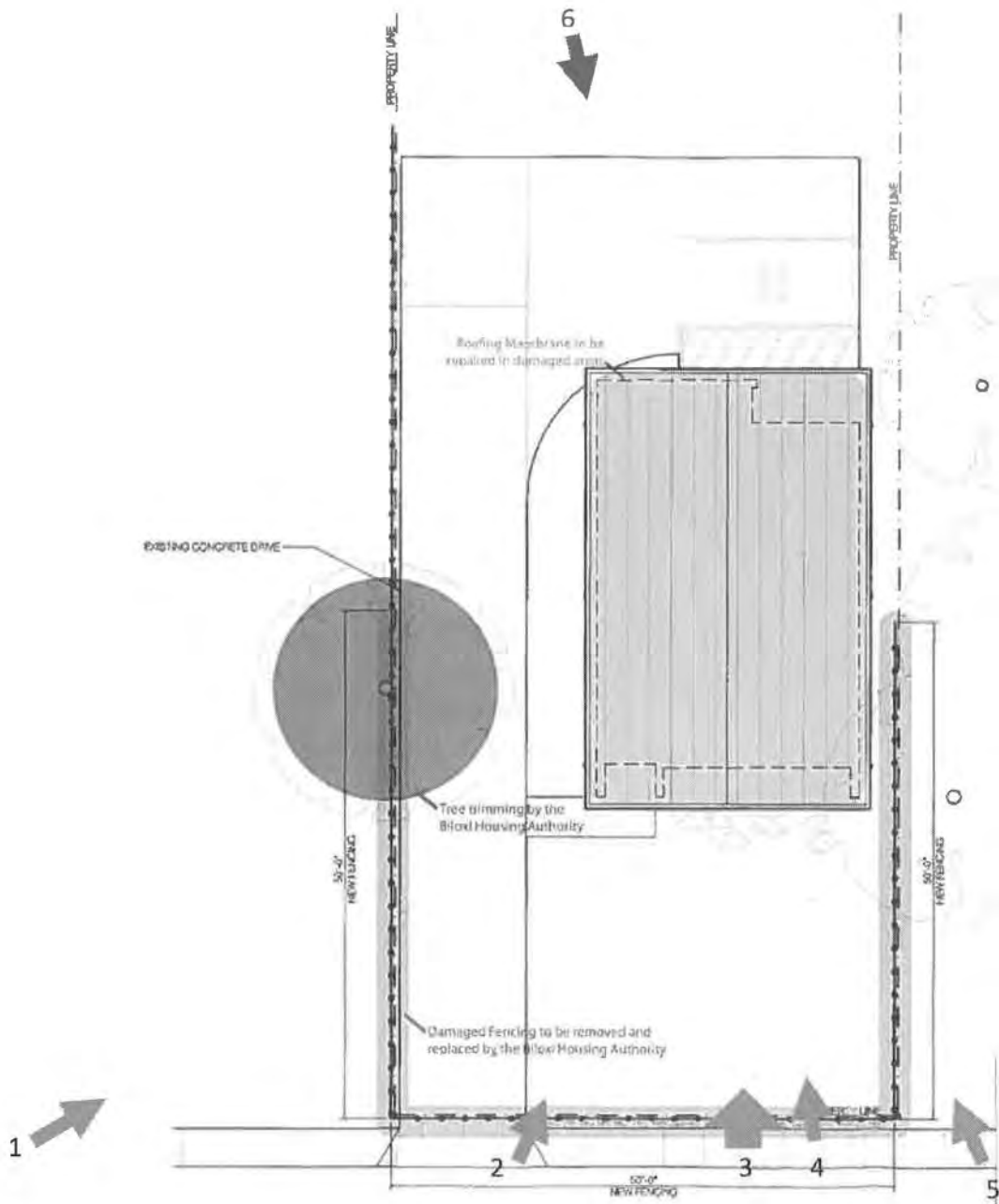
**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

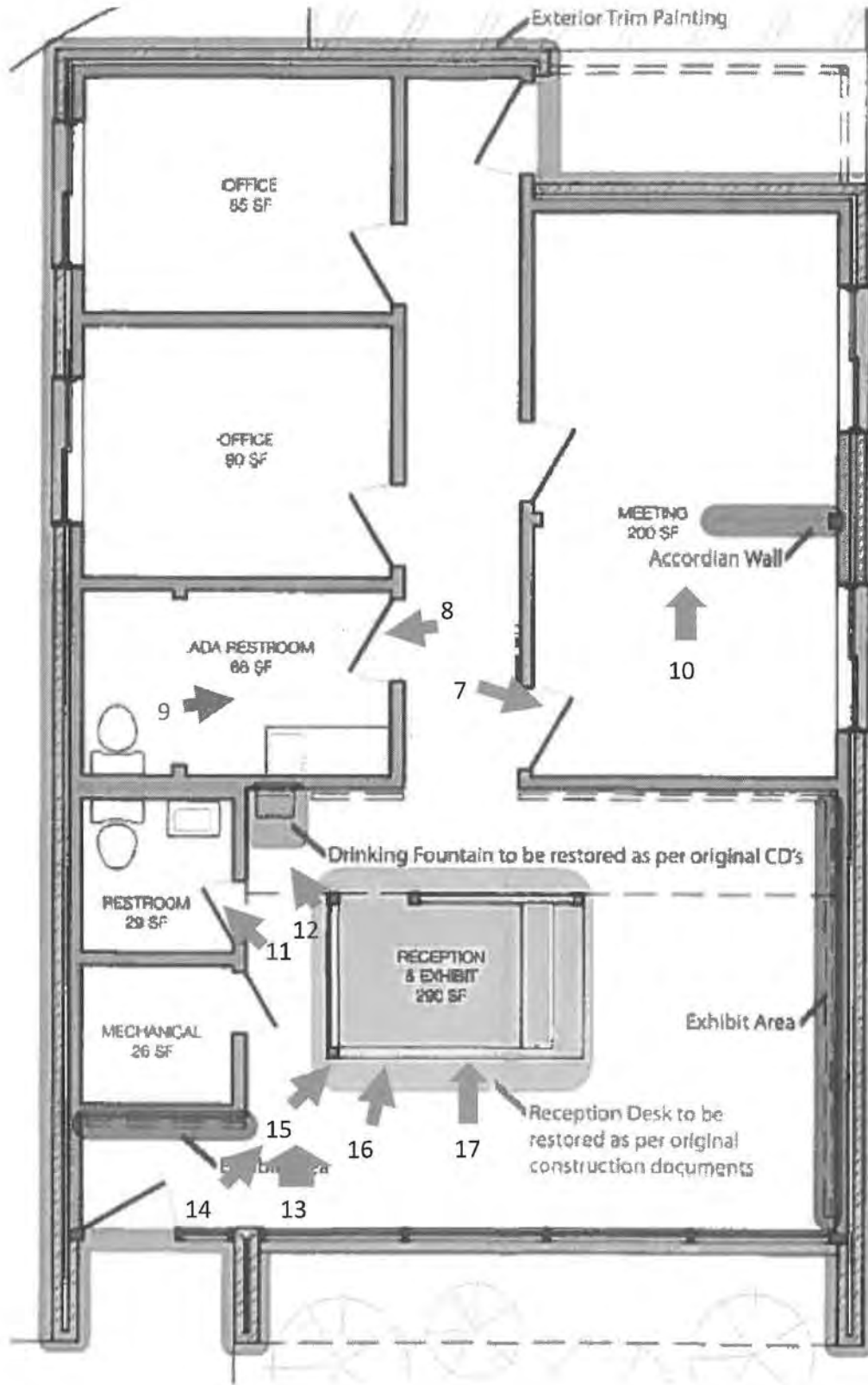
Mason, Dr. Gilbert, Medical Office
Name of Property
Harrison County, Mississippi
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

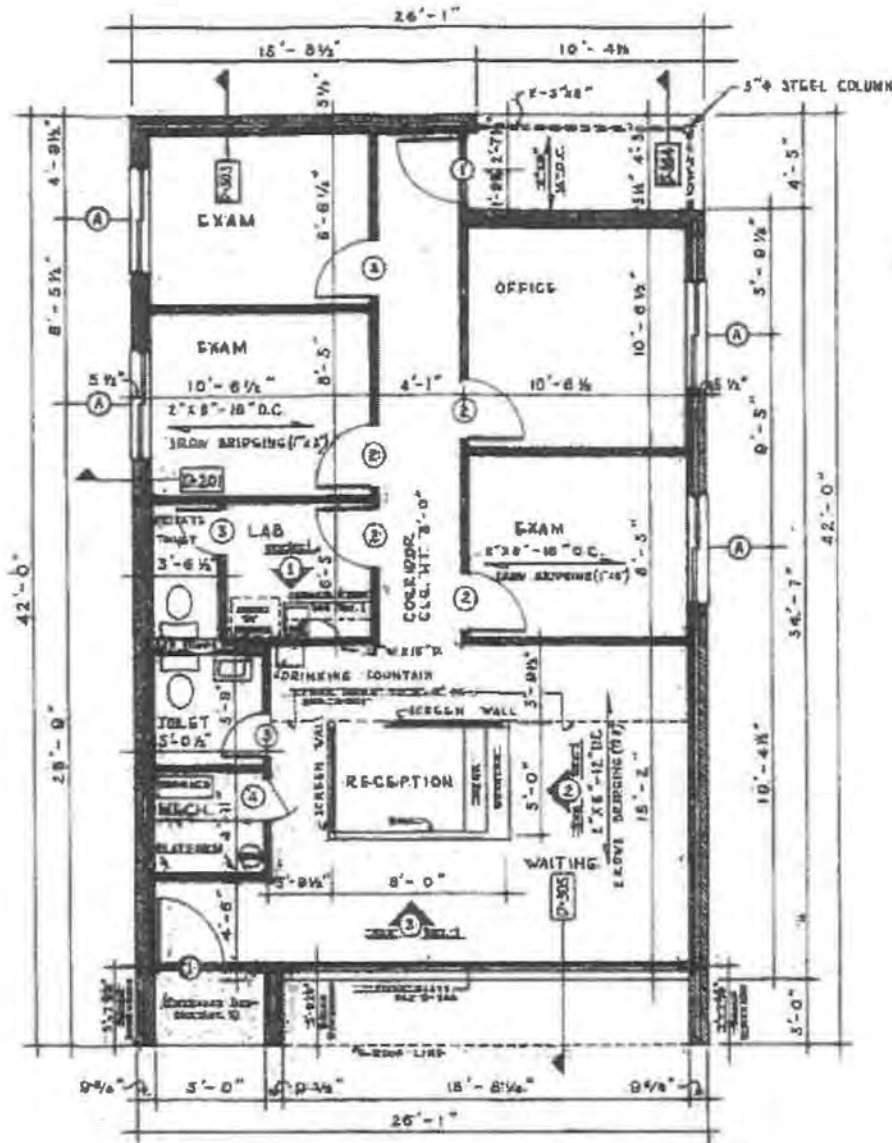
Section number 10 Page 1



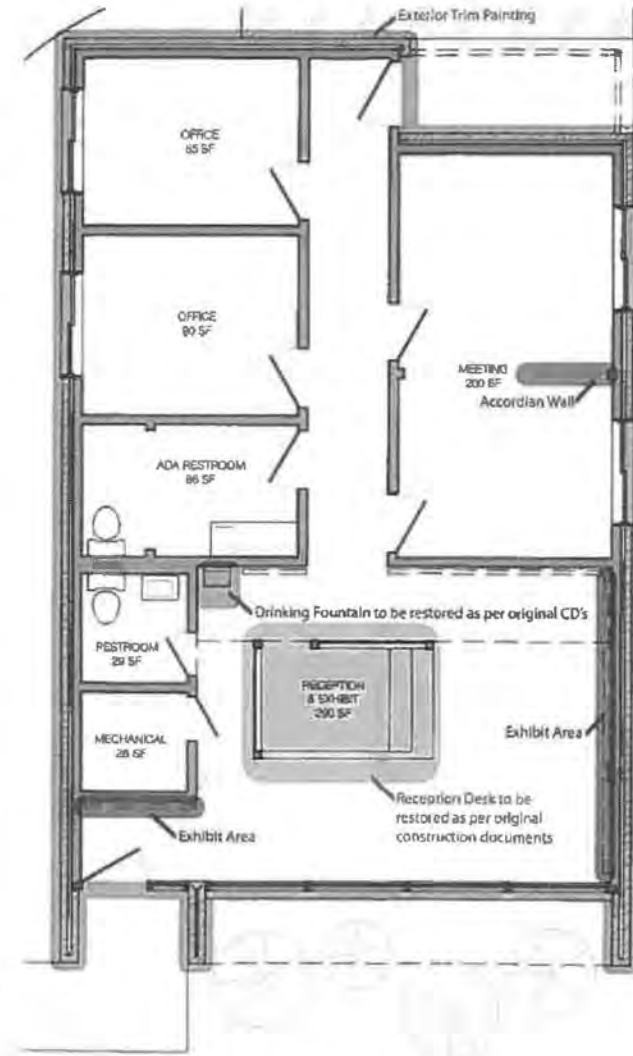


DR. GILBERT R. MASON, SR. MEDICAL OFFICE, BILOXI, HARRISON CO., MS





ORIGINAL FLOOR PLAN



CURRENT FLOOR PLAN



670

R. MASON R.D.

670

ACCESS  
AT REAR

LOT JOB  
WARNING

GILBERT R. MASON M.D.



670

ACCESS  
AT REAR

LOT JOB WARNING

GILBERT R. MASON, M.D.



A photograph of a brick building. The building has a red brick facade and a window with black metal bars. The name 'GILBERT R. MASON M.D.' is mounted on the brick wall in white letters. There are some bare branches and green bushes in the foreground.

GILBERT R. MASON M.D.



870

NO PARKING  
IN FRONT  
OF THIS  
BUS STOP

LOT JOB

GILBERT R. MASON



























UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 8/14/2017      Date of Pending List: 9/19/2017      Date of 16th Day: 10/4/2017      Date of 45th Day: 9/28/2017      Date of Weekly List: 9/28/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- |                                       |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal       | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver       | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other        | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |  |

Accept       Return       Reject      9/28/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Jim Gabbert      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Jim Woodrick, director  
PO Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205-0571  
601-576-6940 • Fax 601-576-6955  
mdah.state.ms.us

August 11, 2017

Mr. Paul Loether  
Program Director, National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
Mail Stop 7228  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240



Dear Mr. Loether:

We are pleased to enclose the nomination form and supporting documents to nominate the following properties to the National Register of Historic Places:

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason Sr. Medical Office, Biloxi, Harrison County

The property was approved for nomination by the Mississippi National Register Review Board at its meeting on July 20, 2017.

We trust you will find the enclosed materials in order and will let us hear from you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Katie Blount  
State Historic Preservation Officer

By: Jennifer V.O. Baughn  
Chief Architectural Historian