

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received AUG 2 1984
date entered AUG 30 1984

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

1. Name

historic John S. Rhea House/Rhea-McEntire House

and/or common McEntire House, Riverview

2. Location

street & number 1105 Sycamore Street NA not for publication

city, town Decatur NA vicinity of congressional district 5

state Alabama code 01 county Morgan code 103

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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<u>NA</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name W. H. ("Boots") Tankersley & Ann McEntire Tankersley

street & number 1105 Sycamore Street

city, town Decatur NA vicinity of state Alabama 35601

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Office

street & number Morgan County Courthouse

city, town Decatur state Alabama 35601

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Historic American Buildings Survey
title Carnegie Survey, Architecture of the has this property been determined eligible? yes no
South

date 1936-1938 federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state D.C. 20540

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

GENERAL SETTING:

The John S. Rhea or McEntire House is a two-story brick structure occupying the greater part of a city block which is bounded on the east by Sycamore Street, on the north by Water Street (the Southern Railroad right-of-way), and on the south and west by Market and Grove Streets respectively. The house itself faces east toward Sycamore Street, and is set well back on a large, tree-shaded lawn enclosed at the front and south side by a mid-19th century cast iron fence. At least as old as the fence is the weathered herringbone-pattern brick walkway leading from the gate to the house. The Tennessee River lies approximately a hundred yards due north of the house. While all current dependency structures are of recent origin, an old iron pump still remains intact on the front lawn immediately northeast of the main house. The blocks immediately surrounding the property are presently, and have been for many years, given over to mixed commercial and modest residential use.

EXTERIOR:

The original portion of the house measures 53½ feet across the front and is 22½ feet deep excluding a full-width portico. The ell extension at the southwest rear of the main block measures approximately 20 by 22 feet. The tetrastyle front portico adds another twelve feet of depth to the house and is composed of four slightly tapering, paneled piers, 2½ feet square and once linked by a wooden balustrade. Early photos reveal that until some time after 1900, the top most member or cornice of the surmounting entablature once apparently encircled the house. Today, only that portion of the cornice extending the width of the portico remains. Roof leakage or progressive rotting may explain the removal of the cornice at the sides and rear. The frieze and architrave of the light wooden entablature is unadorned except for a simple band of astragal molding.

The brickwork of the facade is laid in Flemish bond, although the pattern is now obscured by numerous layers of dull gray paint, the first of which was applied to the exterior of the house during the late 1800s. Brickwork at the sides and rear is laid in common bond. A pair of flush chimneys--one at either end of the main block--projects above the cornice line. A third chimney once at the west end of the ell has been removed.

The symmetrical, five-bay facade centers upon a wide double-leaf doorway, framed by sidelights and a rectangular transom, with a cantilevered balcony and nearly identical doorway above. These two doorways, with their channeled architraves and cornerblocks, once matched closely the still-unaltered doors of the 1829 Dancy-Polk house two blocks away. During the late 19th century, however, the muntins of both the sidelights and transoms were removed and the small rectangular panes replaced by single sheets of frosted glass. Only the two oblong apertures created by the intersection of horizontal and vertical mullions in the extreme upper corners of the sidelight-transom arrangement retain their original proportions. Happily, the tall, paneled doors themselves were left undisturbed when the frosted glass was introduced. An unusual feature of each portal is the narrow, inset paneled overdoor surmounting the topmost horizontal member of the architrave.

The bulls-eye cornerblocks distinguishing the architraves of the main and balcony doors are repeated to either side, above and below, in the finely-cut granite lintels that cap each window opening. Into each opening itself is inserted a fluted wooden architrave,

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defined by a second pair of bulls-eye cornerblocks. This rather novel fenestrational treatment gives remarkable definition to the windows and was characteristic of a number of other Tennessee Valley houses of the same period, including the William Winston house (NR) at Tusculumbia. Originally, twelve-over-twelve sashing filled these window openings. About 1890, however, the early sashing gave way to the present bipartite arrangement, consisting of two pairs of one-over-one sashes, separated by a wooden mullion bar which repeats the channelling of the surround.

Windows at the sides and rear of the house are slightly narrower than those of the facade, and are spanned by unadorned lintels. Here too, however, the original nine-over-nine sashing has been replaced, first by two-over-two sashes before the turn-of-the century, then by the present four-over-four sashing. The facings, too, are probably of fairly recent origin.

A truncated hipped roof caps the rectangular main block of the house and is intersected at the southwest rear by the half-hip roof which covers the ell extension. Civil War-era views of the house fail to reveal clearly the original roof covering, but a standing seam metal roof has existed at least since the late 19th century. The balustrade which once surrounded the deck atop the main roof long ago disappeared. But its form--a simple wooden railing anchored by intervening posts--can be made out in the earliest photographs of the house (1865).

INTERIOR:

The main block adheres to a conventional center-passage arrangement, with a single room to each side of the twelve-foot wide hallway, upstairs and down. Each room measures about twenty by twenty. The ell at the rear contains two additional rooms, one above and one below, making altogether for six large rooms and two halls in the original structure. The now-removed double gallery at the rear of the house was reached from the back of the main hall, beneath the stair, and provided access to the ell rooms.

The exceptionally fine woodwork which distinguishes the house is concentrated in the lower hall and flanking rooms. While motifs here are obviously derived from conventional builders' handbooks of the 1820s and 1830s, they are combined in an altogether novel way. Deeply paneled window and door reveals are complemented by door surrounds of unusual variety--each surround differing slightly in design from the others. The main door in the lower hall is topped by a modillioned entablature resting upon two pairs of attenuated, engaged Tuscan colonnettes. The projecting impostes immediately above are embellished with paterae. Doors leading to the rooms at either side are similarly framed, but only a single pair of colonnettes carries each entablature. The entablature over the door connecting with the south room is relatively unadorned except for a vigorously molded cornice. The entablature above the opposite or north door, however, is enriched by Roman Doric-order triglyphs and mutules.

The paneled wainscot, which follows the stairway ascending from the left side of the hall, is topped by a molded wooden chairrail also found elsewhere throughout the house. The ramped balustrade of the stair presently terminates in a heavy and incongruous

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Eastlake-style newel, added some time between 1880 and 1900, and obviously replacing a more esthetically proportionate newel or perhaps a scrolled volute. In three flights, the stair gains the upper hall, where it continues on to the attic.

The rooms to either side of the main hall have lost important elements of their original decor, although each retains the ornamental architrave which frames the inner facings of the hall doors. The architrave or door facing in the north room is the most notable, and may be unique in Alabama. Slender, Ionic-order pilasters are here garnished with bas-relief strapwork in an Adamesque manner. Overhead, there is a three-part entablature with denticulated cornice. Until the 1930s, a bas-relief plaster chairrail which apparently repeated the design of the strapwork on the pilasters likewise enhanced the room.

Original mantelpieces in both this and the corresponding room across the hall were lost as early as the turn of the century, if not before. In 1938, however, the late Kathleen Almon McEntire (Mrs. Leroy McEntire) had the present matelpee in the southeast room copied from still-extant original mantelpieces upstairs.

From this same room, which now serves as the living room, a large doorway opens into the ell dining room directly behind. A pair of paneled folding doors--the hinge marks for which are still apparent--once separated the two chambers. These doors were removed in the early 1900s.

While most of the original woodwork survives on the second floor, it is of a simpler and more conventional design than that to be seen on the first.

MAJOR CHANGES:

It is possible that both the present portico and roof configuration of the McEntire house date from the 1850s, when the structure may have been remodeled by Dr. Aaron Burleson and his wife. This would explain a front balcony, the heavy balustrade and cast-iron support brackets for which seem too late for 1836, and yet occur in the 1865-80 photos of the house. Such a massive alteration would likewise explain a persistent oral tradition in the Burleson family that the house was actually built by them. Moreover, irregularities in the brickwork near the porch ceiling, to either side of the upper or balcony door, could suggest an earlier and narrower two-tiered pedimented portico. Certainly such a porch treatment would have been more characteristic of Tennessee Valley domestic architecture at the time the McEntire house was erected. Yet arguing against such a change is the absence in the attic of any evidence of massive alteration to the roof structure such as would have been necessary to extend it over a full-length, full-height portico. Yet it should be noticed that at least one other house in the area--the now-destroyed Walnut Grove--did indeed have such a portico added during the 1850s, perhaps dictating a complete change of the roof structure as well.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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The next change of consequence seems to have been the addition, between 1880 and 1895, of a two-bay, two-story extension to the ell. This undoubtedly took place during the Hinds ownership when, for a time, the McEntire house seems to have served as a hotel or boarding residence. Construction of the wing linked the original ell with a small, two-story brick kitchen dependency at the rear. Ann McEntire Tankersley, who grew up in the house and presently lives there, recalls that this dependency contained one large room (the kitchen) below, and a single large room above--the floor level being several steps below that of the main house. The kitchen was entered through double doors at the west end of the ell extension, as well as through a small anteroom which abutted the rear gallery and contained the stairs to the room over the cooking area.

In 1938 both the ell extension and the adjoining dependency were razed. A double garage was then erected on the site of the ell extension. The site of the kitchen is still marked, slightly below ground level, by brick remains that may be either from the flooring or the chimney.

A 1934 HABS photo of the northwest rear of the McEntire house shows the outline of the original two-tiered back gallery. The date of its demolition is unknown, but in its place was erected, soon afterward, the present two-story kitchen/bath/breakfast room wing in the reentrant angle between main block and ell. Minor internal modifications on the second floor of this addition were carried out in 1983 and mark the only significant change to the McEntire house in recent years.

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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input 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 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 type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

Specific dates 1836 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion C - Architecture

Despite later modifications which have somewhat compromised its original character, the John S. Rhea or McEntire house preserves one of the more significant Federal-period interiors in northern Alabama. This includes a series of door surrounds unusual for their richness and variety. One of these--an Adamesque-style, Ionic-order architrave--may well represent a unique instance in the state of the use of strapwork embellishment about a portal. Moreover, as one of three extant buildings which survived the Civil War destruction of Decatur, the house is a major architectural link with the town's earliest development. Built by a prominent merchant and entrepreneur, the dwelling also expresses, by the quality of its construction, the upper echelon of architectural achievement in an area which, during the mid-1830s, was still very close to the frontier.

Criterion A - Military

Known in Civil War-era records as "the Burleson house," this dwelling served on more than one occasion as a command post for the Federal and Confederate forces which, between 1862 and 1865, intermittently occupied Decatur. Strategically situated where two major southern railroads--the Memphis and Charleston and the Alabama and Tennessee--crossed the Tennessee River, the town of Decatur early became an object of Union and Confederate raids and counter raids on the periphery of the great Middle Tennessee military arena not far to the north. Legends that Sherman, Grant, Confederate General A. S. Johnston, and other martial giants of the "war in the west" briefly occupied the house cannot be substantiated. But wartime sketches and at least one photograph reveal the Burleson or McEntire house, with its riverside location and rooftop observatory, as a key element in the local defense works.

* * * * *

Tradition has long placed the construction date of the so-called McEntire house in the 1820s. This is contradicted, however, in the 1895 memoirs of Mrs. W. W. Littlejohn (nee Caroline Leadingham), an early Decatur resident. Mrs. Littlejohn maintained that the house had been erected in 1836 by John Sevier Rhea, an early Decatur merchant.¹ Recent deed search seems to confirm Mrs. Littlejohn's statement.

In 1824, the two-acre parcel--lots 90, 91, 104, and 105 in the newly founded town of Decatur--was acquired by Jesse Wharton of Davidson County, Tennessee. The acreage apparently remained unimproved for the next decade. Wharton meanwhile died, and on 21 January 1835 Sydney Smith, executor for Wharton's estate, paid \$970 to the "Corporation of Decatur"--evidently the balance on lots 90, 91, and 104. Almost

¹"Recollections of Caroline Leadingham," Alabama Historical Quarterly, vol. XVIII, no. 3 (1956), p. 399.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2 acres

Quadrangle name Decatur, Ala.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	5	0	1	4	0	0	3	8	3	0	4	1	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 attached plat map.

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert Gamble, Architectural Historian

organization Alabama Historical Commission date June 11, 1984

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 205 261-3184

city or town Montgomery state Alabama

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

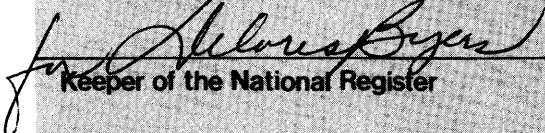
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer date July 26, 1984

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 8/30/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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immediately, Smith then seems to have sold the entire parcel to Rhea, though this transaction has not been located in county records.

A native of East Tennessee and a grandson of John Sevier, Tennessee's legendary governor, Rhea was but one of several members of his family who had emigrated to northern Alabama and the promising cotton region along the lower Tennessee River. He and his wife, Sarah, evidently commissioned the construction of the present house immediately after acquiring the land. Today Rhea's name, written in script or chalkstone, may still be seen scrawled into the face of a joist in the basement. While his new residence was under construction, Rhea also erected a large brick warehouse nearby, on the Tennessee River at the foot of Bank Street.

As first completed, the house was a two-story, L-shaped structure, one room deep across its symmetrical front, with an ell to the rear. There may also have been a central, two-tiered portico at the front (see Section 7) similar to that still to be seen at the nearby Dancy-Polk house (NR). A second porch at the rear paralleled the inside or northern wall of the ell and commanded a prospect of the Tennessee River.

Hardly was Rhea's new house completed, however, when its owner fell victim to the Panic of 1837, which struck the expanding agricultural economy of the cotton states with particular severity. On May 18, 1839, Rhea and his wife were forced to convey to the State Bank of Alabama his Decatur holdings, including lots 90, 91, 104, and 105, upon which was situated "a Brick dwelling house and other improvements" (Morgan County Deedbook A, page 207). Bank president James Fennell signed the conveyance.

Soon thereafter--again the transaction has not been located--the house and lot were acquired from the bank by another merchant, the Scottish-born Alexander Patterson. On July 30, 1850, Patterson and his wife, Elizabeth, deeded the property to their daughter, Margaret Janet Burleson, and her husband, Dr. Aaron Adair Burleson, for one dollar and "love and affection."

Dr. Burleson was one of the fourteen children of Jonathan Burleson, a prominent Morgan County planter living nine miles south of Decatur. Two of Dr. Burleson's brothers, Rufus and Richard Byrd Burleson, would be among the founders of Baylor University at Waco, Texas.

It was the Burlesons who occupied the house during the Civil War, when from time to time the structure was commandeered as military headquarters. Situated near the vital Memphis and Charleston railroad bridge across the Tennessee River, the spacious rooftop observatory of the house seems to have served repeatedly as a military lookout post. Local lore asserts that at various times such preeminent figures as Generals Sherman, Grant, and Albert Sidney Johnston briefly occupied the house, as Decatur changed hands again and again during the course of the war. No factual evidence, however, has been located to support these claims. Still, its value to occupying Federal forces probably accounts for the fact that the Burleson house

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became one of the handful of Decatur buildings spared when, in the spring of 1864, the Union command ordered the civilian evacuation of the town and began construction of the fortifications which would virtually wipe out the community. On May 26, 1864, one hapless resident wrote to a friend that "there is scarcely a house standing, all having been torn down by orders. Those within the fortifications remaining, Mrs. Burleson's, Mrs. Bradley's, and your aunt's. . . . Decatur is among the things that were. . . ."

Although Dr. Burleson was away serving as a surgeon with the Confederate army, his house itself sustained no major damage--this, notwithstanding that his family was forced to temporarily leave Decatur. Dr. Burleson's library, however, was pilfered and destroyed. In 1900, a volume of Byron's poetry taken from the library was returned to the family by a former Union officer, Lieutenant L. N. Weeks, commander of an Ohio contingent that had been in the town in 1864 .

When the end of the war came, in the spring of 1865, the Burleson house was serving as regimental headquarters for the 102nd Ohio. A rare photograph of the house, taken on April 18, 1865, shows the regimental band on the large rooftop widow's walk, performing a requiem concert in memory of their fallen commander-in-chief, President Abraham Lincoln. The photo also reveals the house to have been at that time substantially as it remains today. In the foreground can be seen the iron fence which still encloses the front lawn.

On October 6, 1869, four years after the war, Dr. and Mrs. Burleson sold their Decatur residence to Jerome J. Hinds who, on January 6 of the following year, conveyed half interest in the property to his brother, Joseph Munro Hinds. Natives of the Midwest, the Hinds brothers had served in the Eighth Illinois Infantry during the Civil War. Mustered out at Huntsville, they then entered the mercantile business at Decatur. In 1872, Joseph Hinds received an appointment as U.S. Consul General in Rio de Janeiro and left Alabama for six years. Returning in 1878, he and his family took up residency at the Burleson house, where the third of his children, a daughter whom he and his wife named Grace, was born.

Grace Hinds grew up to become a Gilded Age socialite and eventually the second wife of Lord Curzon, Marquess of Kedleston. In her Reminiscences, published in 1955, Lady Curzon describes her childhood as the daughter of a wealthy Carpetbagger growing up in Alabama.

A certain sense of strangness and discomfort surrounded us there, Republicans in an area of Democrats, Epsicopalians in the midst of Methodists. I was conscious of this feeling even as a child attending the local school. . . .

Decatur . . . as I remember it, was a quiet, sleepy town, although my older friends used to tell me, with great pride,

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of the wealth and dignity, of the vast entertaining and hospitality, before the Civil War. . . .

Some of the old Southern houses still remained, mostly built in the Colonial style. The lovely 'Hinds House' where I was born, was one of the best examples. . . . Visitors from the Northern States used often to ask to be allowed to look over the house, to see the fine carving, which had been done by the slaves. The garden was enchanting, and typical of the South. There were huge mulberry trees, and masses of roses--real big bushes of them There were lilacs, and catalpas, and both pink and white acacias near the big iron gate. The garden was surrounded by a solid iron-spiked fence topped with iron balls. . . .²

After remaining in Hinds ownership for twenty-five years, the house was sold in the fall of 1894 to H. I. Freeman, who in April of the following year sold it to R. P. McEntire. Since that time the house has remained in the McEntire family, passing from R. P. McEntire to his son, Decatur attorney Leroy McEntire, at the elder McEntire's death in 1936. Since 1981 Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Tankersley have occupied the house--Mrs. Tankersley being a daughter of Leroy McEntire. The Tankersley's now call the house Riverview.

²Curzon, Grace Hinds (The Marchioness of Kedleston), Reminiscences (New York: Coward-McCann, 1955), pp. 10-11.

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Brown, Calvin, Papers. Civil War-era family letters in possession (1984) of Mrs. Lewis C. Brown, Decatur.

Bryant, Prof. Russell (Univ. of Alabama). Miscellaneous notes on the Hinds-Curzon family.

Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South, c. 1938. Library of Congress (Francis B. Johnston photographs).

Curzon, Grace Hinds (The Marchioness of Kedleston). Reminiscences. New York: Coward-McCann, 1955.

Gamble, Robert S. Manuscript architectural fieldnotes, drawings, and photographs, 1965-84.

Historic American Buildings Survey, 1936-37. Library of Congress (photographs only).

Leadingham, Caroline (Mrs. W. W. Littlejohn). "Recollections of Caroline Leadingham," Alabama Historical Quarterly, vol. 18, no. 3 (1956), pp. 397-400.

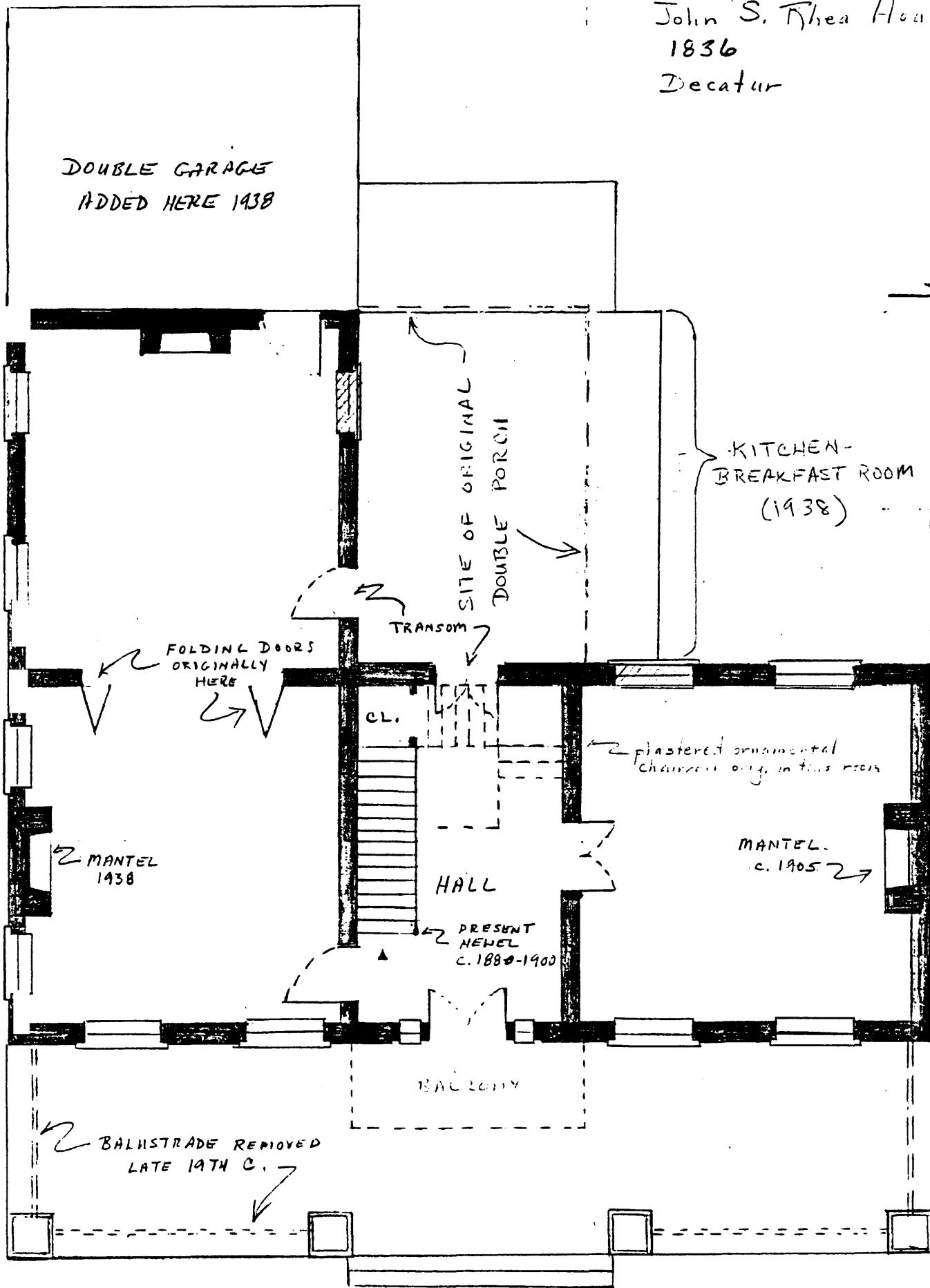
Tankersley, W. H. and Ann McEntire, Decatur, Ala. Personal interviews, February 1984.

Vardaman, James K., Jr., Pass Christian, Miss. Private memorandum on Burleson family and Civil War period, May 6, 1961 (copy in possession of Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Tankersley).

Knox, John, "Old McEntire House Has History To Spare," The Decatur Daily, Dec. 9, 1964, p. 11.

Jenkins, William H. and Knox, John. The Story of Decatur, Alabama. Decatur: Decatur Printing Co., Inc., 1970.

John S. Thea House
1836
Decatur



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