

150

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Bell House

other names/site number Biggs House

2. Location

street & number 550 Upper Kingston Road not for publication N/A
city or town Prattville vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Autauga code 001 zip code 36067

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

1-8-99
Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper
[Signature]
Date of Action
2/12/99

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check only one box.)

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

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

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

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

Contributing

2

1

3

Noncontributing

1 buildings

 sites

 structures

 objects

1 Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling

secondary structure

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling

secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

roof Asphalt

walls Wood

other _____

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

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

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

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance 1893;c. 1900

Significant Dates 1893

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Lockwood, Frank; architect (attributed)

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

- Previous documentation on file (NPS)** N/A
- 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 # _____

- Primary location of additional data:**
- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other state agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1 acre

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

	Zone Easting	Zone Easting	Northing	Northing			
1	16	549080	359261	03			
2			4				

See continuation sheet.

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title E. Patrick McIntyre, Jr., and Trina Binkley, AHC Reviewer
organization Consultant date July 15, 1998
street & number Route 2 Box 638 telephone (334) 288-4340
city or town Ramer state AL zip code 36069

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

Photographs

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

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

Property Owner

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

name Col. and Mrs. Ernest Biggs
street & number 550 Upper Kingston Road telephone (334) 365-7517
city or town Prattville state AL zip code 36067

United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 Name of property: Bell House
County and state: Autauga County, Alabama

Physical Description

Sited amidst a gracious lot with mature, well-maintained landscaping on a one acre property, the Bell House is a 2 and ½ story frame dwelling with 1:1 sashes and featuring weatherboard and shingle siding and a hipped roof with lower cross gabled projecting bays. A circular, shingle-sided tower with conical roof topped by its original copper finial is found on the southwest corner of the west facade of the home and rises above the main roofline. Simplified scroll brackets run the length of the cornice of the home. A (partially screened) wraparound porch with Doric order column supports and turned balustrade runs the length of the facade. Projecting above the sloping roofline of the porch and centered with the main entrance to the home is a gabled entranceway supported by paired Ionic order columns. Within the pediment of the entranceway is a wooden applied representation of a classical style face, possibly a representation of the head of the Roman god Janus. Other gables on the front and side facades are decorated by applied festoons of flower garland and ribbon motifs upon the central portion of the pediments, while those in the rear are sheathed with wooden shingles. The lintels on the tower windows contain applied scallop shells flanked by swags. From the southwest corner of the porch a gabled porte cochere extends over the driveway.

Stepping through the front oak double door entrance to the home and proceeding through a small tile-floored vestibule, the visitor opens glassed double doors and enters a wide entrance hall. The entrance hall has a beamed ceiling and features a handsome Ionic order columnar screen separating it from the stair hall. In addition the hall retains its original brass light fixture. From the entrance the visitor can see to the handsome inglenook at the end of the stair hall and the imposing full-return staircase above it. In all the main rooms on this level are found beautiful oak floors with parquet borders, and interior walls are finished in plaster. Ceiling heights for the home are 14 feet on the first floor and 12 feet on the second. To the left one enters the formal parlor, a generously proportioned room with a cove ceiling molding and handsome pedimented lintels over the windows featuring applied representations of flower garlands. The mantelpiece in this room is painted and includes a generous overmantel composed of a rectangular architrave balanced by paired Ionic order pilasters flanking an arch-shaped mirror. The mantelpiece itself exhibits the same garland festoons across the front as decorates the lintels and the exterior gable pediments. The jambs of the mantel are composed of exquisite Rococo-inspired voluted pilasters, while white Italian marble facing is found on the slip. A door to the right of the fireplace opens into a small tile-floored bathroom added for Mary Bell when she became an invalid in the 1930s (Martha Biggs, personal communication, 1997.) To the right side of the central hall is found the informal parlor, which was paneled in the early 1970s and is used as an office by Col. Biggs. The room contains a semi-circular window formed by the corner tower and a simple Victorian mantel in the southeast corner.

Proceeding from the formal parlor through sliding oak double doors surrounded by a festooned rectilinear overdoor crowned by denticulated pediment, one enters the dining room. The dining room is resplendent with a Renaissance-Revival coffered ceiling of rich dark wood, which according to the daughter of the builder, is mahogany (Katharine Bell, personal communication, 1998.) The room also retains its original brass chandelier. On the north side of the dining room a demioctagonal bay window is graced by leaded colored glass and features a chevron in its center flanked to either side by scrolls. The stained mantelpiece on the east wall of the room consists of a broken pediment overmantel and two Ionic capital columns flanking a rectangular mirror. A door to the left (north) side of the mantel leads into the modernized kitchen wing, which is floored in linoleum. From the kitchen a door opens onto the rear porch where the former well for the house is located and where the landing for an exterior set of servants' stairs is found.

Proceeding from the kitchen into the dining room, one turns left through sliding double doors and proceeds into the stair hall. Here a classic inglenook located behind an archway under the handsome full-return staircase offers the most stunning interior feature of the residence. The archway is supported by paired Ionic capital columns. The outside columns are squared and fluted, while the interior columns are round and unfluted. The fireplace is composed of triangular overmantel balanced by round Ionic capiteled pilasters. The fireplace facings are of original brown encaustic tile. To either side of the fireplace are rectangular leaded colored glass windows featuring cruciform motifs. Built-in seats surmounted by handsome wood rectangular paneling are found across from the fireplace on either side of the inglenook. The staircase is composed of an Art Nouveau newel post and graceful turned balusters.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2 Name of property: Bell House
County and state: Autauga County, Alabama

Across the stair hall from the dining room is found the former bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Bell, which is now used as a den by the Biggs family. The Northeast corner of the room contains closet space, and a door on the east wall leads into the office of Col. Biggs. A stock Victorian mantel is also located on the west wall of the room, and also a door that opens onto the wraparound front porch. On the east side of the room a door leads into a small hall. To the right is the Biggs' bedroom, while walking straight ahead one enters a bathroom that was added by partially enclosing the rear porch. A left turn leads into the laundry room, where a door opens onto the rear porch.

Proceeding up the stairs, the visitor finds a landing before the final turn of the staircase has a door that leads to the exterior and opens onto the landing from the rear outside stairwell. Turning left on the landing one opens a door and enters a long, narrow room with beaded board walls and ceilings. Originally the room for "Good Mary," the longtime maid of the Bell family, it is now used as storage by the Biggs (Biggs, 1997.)

Re-entering the main house and proceeding up the last flight of stairs one enters the central hall, which features unusual curved walls on each side at their west terminuses to accommodate the space created by the staircase rise and allow for access to the two east side bedrooms. As is typical with many large homes, the second floor lacks the extravagant details of the downstairs. Door surrounds on this level are rectilinear, with bulls eye corner blocks, and those that open onto the central hall have transoms. The walls are plastered, with simple moldings and picture rails. The doors feature alternating rectangular and paired square panels, and mantels are of the stock variety. In addition, the mantels in the two bedrooms on the east side of the house were replaced by the Biggs in the early 1970s, although they are period examples. The upstairs has wall-to-wall carpeting throughout, except in the two bathrooms.

Stepping up from the stairway and turning left one passes a small bathroom on the left and the entrance to a large cedar closet on the right (contained within the curved wall of the hallway) and enters the southeast bedroom, which belonged to one of the Bell sons. A fireplace is located on the west wall of the room and a closet is found on the south part of the west wall of the room that contains a small staircase to give access to the attic. To the right of the fireplace a door accesses the southwest bedroom which contains the tower bay; when the Bells owned the house this was the guest room. Leaving the room and walking across the central hall one enters the northwest bedroom, which contains a bay window with a central oval windowpane and fireplace with a rectangular mirror inset into the overmantel. A door on the east wall of the room leads into the adjacent bedroom, which has a fireplace and adjacent bathroom. During the period of the Bell family's occupation of the home the bedrooms on the north side of the house were reserved for the family's daughters (Bell, 1998.)

The grounds surrounding the house are well maintained by the present owners. Several mature trees and ornamental shrubs remain from the early period of the house. An outstanding feature of the property is the handsome cast iron fence (contributing structure) with grapevine motif that runs the west length of the lot on the Old Kingston Road side. The fence, as well as the fireplace grates in the house, were made locally at the Pratt Foundry (Bell, 1998.) A historic photograph of the Bell House from circa 1900 shows a front gabled dependency and a side gabled building to its rear just north of the house, while a water tower and several barns were located slightly north of those buildings. According to Katharine Bell, who was born in the house in 1911, the first barn was for horses, while the second was for cattle. During her childhood a large garden faced the road where there was a scuppernong arbor. A pecan orchard was also located on the property, as was a servants house. A privy for the servants was located over a branch that runs behind the home. Only two original outbuildings, the smokehouse (contributing building) and the former carriage house/garage survive. The smokehouse, circa 1900, is a one-story front gabled weatherboard-sided building with corrugated metal roof located directly behind the house, is now used for storage. The carriage house/garage (noncontributing,) a circa 1910 gable front frame building with corrugated metal roof, has been sided with vertically applied corrugated metal.

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been made of the Bell House property, the potential for subsurface remains may

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Section 7/8 Page 3 Name of property: Bell House
County and state: Autauga County, Alabama

be high. Properties of this type were sited within a constellation of dependencies such as kitchens or other outbuildings. Buried portions may contain significant information that may be useful in interpreting the entire property

Statement of Significance

The Bell House is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C, Architecture. The Bell House is significant as an outstanding example of the Queen Anne style of architecture, a Victorian house form that reached its zenith in Alabama at the turn of the 20th century but persisted locally as late as 1920. With its classical order columnar porch supports and detailing, the Bell House is an example of the "Free Classic" variant of the Queen Anne style, identified by architectural historians as a close relative of the first generation of Colonial Revival homes (McAlester, Virginia, **A Field Guide to American Houses:1984**, p.264.) Most often constructed in urban areas, Queen Anne houses were usually large in scale and most often built of wood. Demonstrative of a high level of craftsmanship, and resplendent in the eclecticism and sophistication of its interior, the Bell House is an important representation of the aesthetics of the urban upper class during the late 19th century. The eclectic stylistic details of the interior reflect a wide range of historicist design, giving evidence to the broad education of the house's architect and to the voluminous breadth of Victorian tastes. The home, which is the most elaborate and high-styled example of Queen Anne architecture remaining in Prattville, was constructed in 1893 for Joseph Bennett Bell, a merchant who was a son-in-law of prominent local industrialist Merrill Pratt. The Bell House is also significant as its design has been attributed to prominent architect Frank Lockwood (1869-1936,) a native of New Jersey who had established a practice in Columbus, Georgia by the time of the home's construction (Brown, Elizabeth V., *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 28, 1994, p. 2E.)

Historical Summary

Joseph Bennett Bell, the son of Jonathan Ezekiel and Georgiana (Bennett) Bell, was born in Greenville, Butler County, Alabama on November 18, 1859. He was raised in Greenville and following the completion of his education, moved to Montgomery where he obtained a job as a clerk in a hardware store. (DuBose, Joel C., **Notable Men of Alabama**, 1904, p.425.) On November 17, 1889 Bell married Mary Pratt, a daughter of Julia (Smith) and Merrill Pratt. Merrill Pratt was the nephew of town founder Daniel Pratt and was heir to half of the Pratt fortune upon his death in 1873. Bell moved to Prattville in early 1890 and became manager of the order department for the Daniel Pratt Gin Company. He was also a stockholder and director for the Pratt company (ibid.) In 1893 the Bells constructed their magnificent home on the outskirts of Prattville, and according to multiple sources, it was Frank Lockwood provided the plans (Bell, 1998; Brown, 1994; Autauga County Heritage Association, **A Driving Tour of Historic Prattville**. Prattville, 1985, p. 5.)

With a prolific career that included designs in the style of Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Italian Renaissance and Tudor, Frank Lockwood is considered by architectural historians to be one of the most accomplished Alabama architects of the late 19th and early 20th Century. Lockwood was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1866, and although no record exists of any formal architectural training, he was an apprentice for several years in the New York office of George B. Post. In the late 1880s or early 1890s Lockwood moved to Columbus, Georgia, where he set up a firm and was joined in partnership by his brother Thomas in 1892 (Brown, 1994.) Lockwood left Columbus by the mid-1890s and came to Montgomery, where he resided until his death in 1936. Several fine residences in the Silk Stocking National Register Historic District in Talladega, Alabama contemporary with the Bell House have been attributed to Lockwood, including the circa 1890 Dr. Wren house and the 1890 Boswell-Thackerson House (National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Silk Stocking District, 1978, Section 8 Page 1.) His most notable project was his design with Charles McKim for an addition to the Alabama State Capitol in 1905 (Gamble, Robert, "Frank Lockwood: Montgomery's 'Edwardian' Architect," p. 5.)

By 1905 Joseph Bell was listed as secretary for the Prattville Mercantile Company (the Pratt Company store) where he remained employed for many years (Gray, Daniel S. **Autauga County: The First Hundred Years**, 1972.) From 1911 until 1915 Mr. Bell was a member of the State Legislature as a representative from Autauga County, and in April of 1919 Bell was appointed probate judge for the county; he served through October of that year (ibid.) Joseph and Mary Bell were the parents

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Section 8/9/10 Page 4 Name of property: **Bell House**
County and state: **Autauga County, Alabama**

of eight children. Mr. Bell died in 1937, and Mary Bell continued to live in the house until her death in 1945. That year the Bell's daughter Katherine returned from service in the Second World War and lived in the home with her sister Adelaide until the home was sold to Thomas H. Walker on October 22, 1949 (Probate Records, Autauga County, Deed Book 82, Page 329.) On June 30, 1970 Ernest and Martha Biggs purchased the home from Nancy and Hyman Hamner (Probate Records, Autauga County, Deed Book 182, page 39.) The Biggs immediately set upon a careful and detailed restoration of the residence, which at the time was in need of substantial repair. According to Colonel Biggs the house had not been painted since 1929 (*Prattville Progress*, undated, on file with Biggs family.) The Biggs continue to enjoy the residence and it has been well-maintained during the period of their ownership. In 1994 the house was used as the main setting for the major motion picture **The Grass Harp**.

Bibliography

- Autauga County Probate Office. Deed Records (Books 82,182.)
- Autauga County Heritage Association. "A Driving Tour of Historic Prattville, Alabama," 1985.
- Bell, Katharine. Personal Communication, 1997, 1998.
- Biggs, Martha. Personal Communication, 1997, 1998.
- Brown, Elizabeth Via. "Lockwood's Legacy," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 28, 1994.
- Dubose, Joel C. (Ed.) **Notable Men of Alabama**. Atlanta: Southern Historical Association, 1904.
- Edwards, Celeste. "Biggs Family Readies for Goblin Invasion," *Prattville Progress*, date unknown. Article on file with Biggs family.
- Gamble, Robert. "Frank Lockwood: Montgomery's Edwardian Architect." Unpublished Manuscript.
- Gray, Daniel S. **Autauga County: The First Hundred Years, 1818-1918**. Prattville: Autauga County-Prattville Public Library, 1972.
- McAlester, Virginia and Lee. **A Field Guide to American Houses**. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.
- National Register of Historic Places nomination for Silk Stocking District, Talladega County, Alabama.

Verbal Boundary Description

The property nominated is an irregular parcel located on the Upper Kingston Road in Prattville, Autauga County, Alabama. The legal description is as follows:

Beginning at a point on the Easterly right-of-way of Upper Kingston Street said point being North 33 degrees 15 minutes West a distance of 430.0 feet from the North right-of-way line of Easy Street, thence North 33 degrees 15 minutes West a distance of 169.0 feet to a point, thence North 57 degrees 15 minutes East a distance of 477.5 feet to a point, thence South 33 degrees 15 minutes East a distance of 169.0 feet to a point, thence South 57 degrees 15 minutes West a distance of 477.5 to the point of beginning. According to the survey dated January 30, 1969 by W.E. Wood, Registered Surveyor.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is based on the legal description of the parcel on which the house is located. These are the current boundaries

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10/ Photos Page 5 Name of property: Bell House
County and state: Autauga County, Alabama

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associated with the property and under single ownership.

Photographs

All photographs are of Bell House property, Autauga County, Alabama, and were taken by Patrick McIntyre on January 30, 1998. All negatives are on file with the Alabama Historical Commission.

1. View of facade, facing NE.
2. View of facade, facing NE showing cast iron fence.
3. View of facade, facing NE.
4. View looking East of gable pediment over main entrance and gabled bay above, showing applied designs.
5. View of north facade, looking SE.
6. View of south facade, facing North.
7. View of cast iron fence fronting Upper Kingston Road, facing NE.
8. View of smokehouse, facing East.
9. View of rear of house, facing West.
10. View of tower, facing East.
11. Close up of gable decoration in bay over main entrance, looking East.
12. View of entrance hall looking toward inglenook, facing east.
13. View of formal parlor from entrance hall, facing North.
14. View of dining room ceiling with original light fixture, facing NE.
15. View of inglenook and staircase, looking South.
16. View of door surround leading into dining room from formal parlor, facing East.
17. View across stair hall into dining room from staircase, looking North.
18. Wide View of upstairs central hall from staircase landing, facing West.
19. Typical door and surround, upstairs SW bedroom looking East.
20. View of upstairs servant's room, looking East.
21. View of NW upstairs bedroom, looking North.
22. View of upstairs central hall looking east.
23. View of newel post looking toward entrance hall, facing West.
24. View of dining room bay window, looking North.



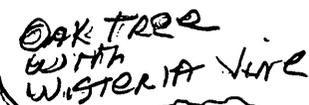
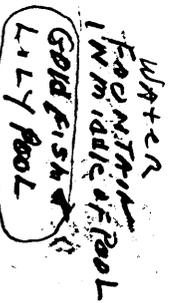
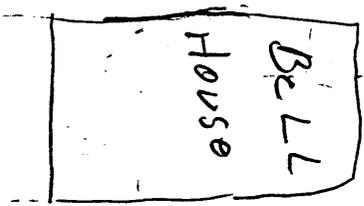
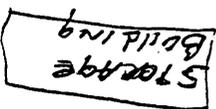
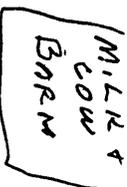
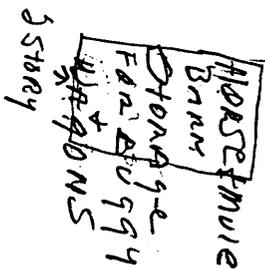
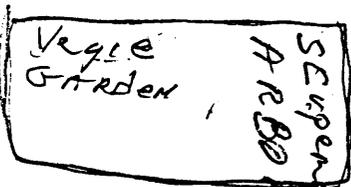
Historic Photograph: Bell House, Prattville, Autauga County, Ala., date unknown



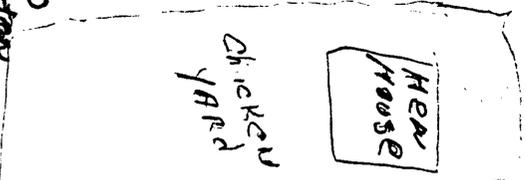
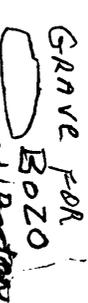
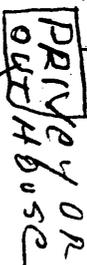
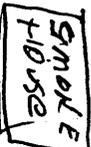
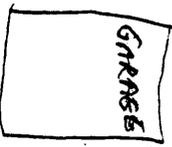
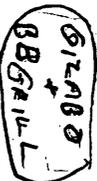
Historic photograph
Bell House, Prattville, Autauga Co., AL
date unknown

West

UPPER KINGSTON ROAD



was in NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC Late 1930's



Memorij Map of Bell House

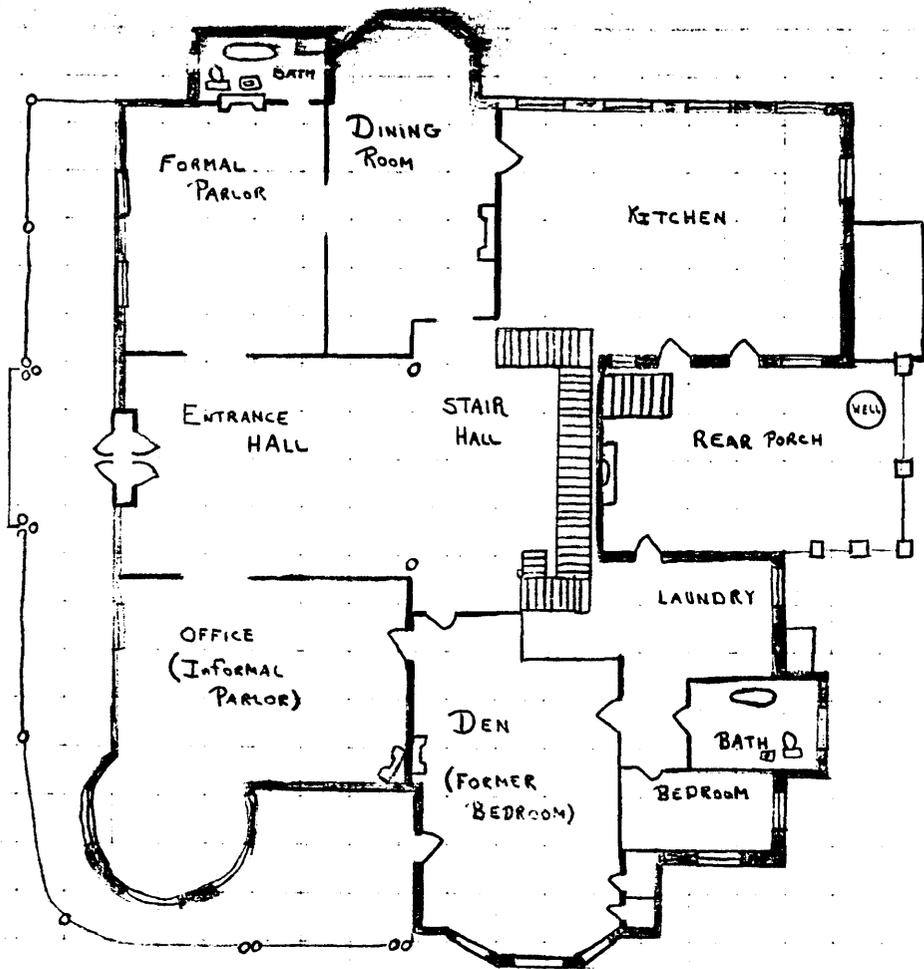
(from early to mid twentieth century)

Prallville, Antauga Co., AL

by Katherine Bell, August 1998

South

West

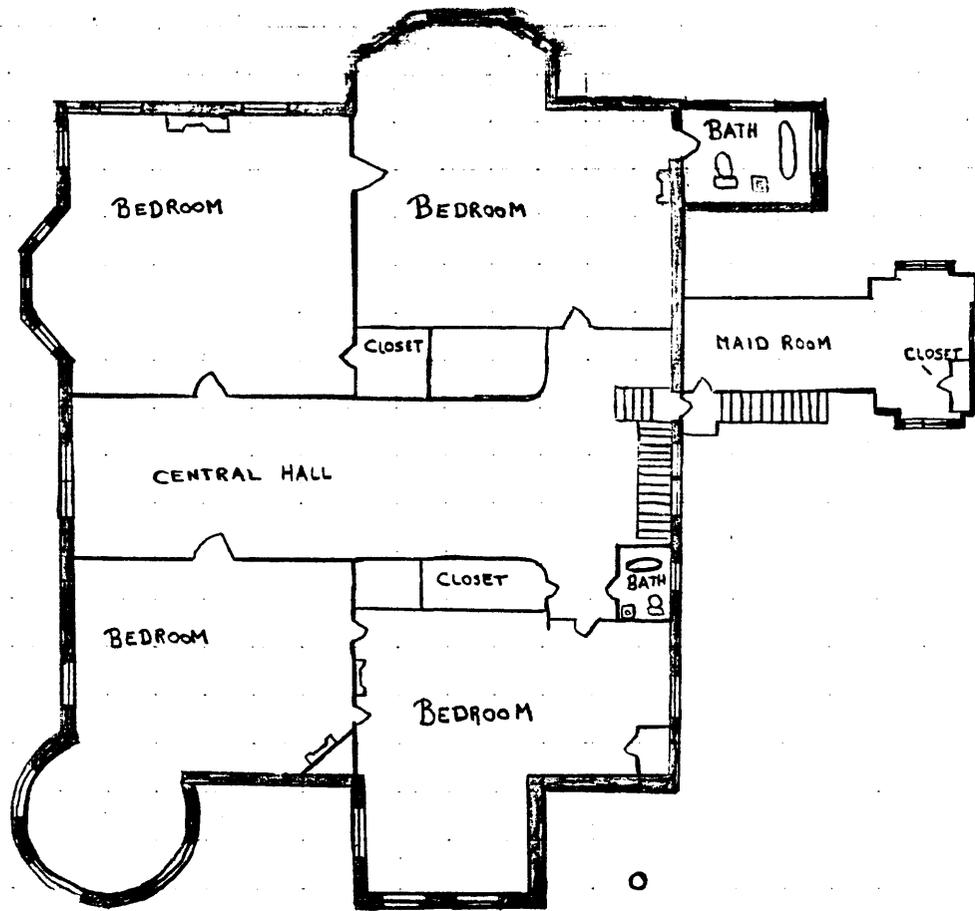


Port
Cochere



BELL HOUSE
PRATTVILLE, AUTAUGA COUNTY, ALABAMA
FIRST FLOOR.

(NOT TO SCALE) E.P.M.



BELL HOUSE
PRATTVILLE, AUTAUGA COUNTY, ALABAMA
SECOND FLOOR
(NOT TO SCALE). E072