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

## National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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

# 1. Name

historic John Denham Palmer House

and or common Oxley-Heard Funeral Home

## 2. Location

street & number 1305 Atlantic Ave.

\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Florida

code 012

# 3. Classification

city, town Fernandina Beach

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
district	public	<u> </u>	agriculture	museum
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	unoccupied	<u> </u>	park
structure	both	work in progress	educational	private residence
site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	Accessible	entertainment	religious
object	in process	<u>_X</u> yes: restricted	government	scientlfic
	being considered	yes: unrestricted	industrial	transportation
	N/A	no	military	other

county

Nassau

# 4. Owner of Property

name	Jack	Heard	· (	·					
street	& number	. P. O.	Box 693						
city, t	own <sup>Fe:</sup>	rnandina	Beach		vicinity of		state	Florida	
5.	Loc	ation	of Le	gal De	scriptio	n			
court	house, reg	istry of dee	ds, etc.	Nassau Co	unty Courthe	ouse			
street	& number			416 Centr	e St.				
city, t	own			Fernandin	a Beach		state	Florida	
6.	Rep	resei	ntatio	n in Ex	isting S	Surveys	<b>;</b>		
title	Florid	a Master	Site File	e (8NA120)	has this prop	erty been deter	mined eli	igible? y	esXno
date		1973				federal	_X_ stat	e county	iocal
depos	itory for s	urvey recor	ds Bureau	a of Archae	ological Res	earch			
city, t	own	Talla	ahassee				state	Florida	

# 7. Description

Condition		Check one
_x_ excellent		unaltered
	ML ruins	_X altered
fair	unexposed	

Check one \_\_\_\_\_ original site \_\_\_\_ moved date

#### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The John Denham Palmer House is a massive, two-and-a-half story frame building, located prominently along Atlantic Avenue, the main east-west transportation artery in Fernandina Beach. Constructed C. 1891, it is the best designed and built private residence in Fernandina Beach outside the current historic district. While it is basically a part of the vernacular building tradition of Fernandina, it does contain certain features associated with the Colonial Revival style. It was altered somewhat when converted to a funeral home during the 1940's, but generally retains its original design, materials and significant individual features. Given its prominent location, its isolation from the historic district and its massiveness, it is one of the landmark buildings in Fernandina Beach.

The Palmer House is a two-and-a-half story, hip-roofed, frame building with a gabled, two-story ell to the rear. It rests on brick foundation piers that are three to six feet in height. The contour of the land, sloping to the rear of the lot, is the reason for the difference in height of the piers. The structural system of the building consists of eight by eight-inch sill beams, six by six-inch floor joists, braced corner studs, and nailed joints, all of heart pine, and probably balloon-frame wall supports. The exterior walls of the house are clad with drop siding and the roof with composition shingles. The facade has five ranks with a central entrance composed of a two-leaf door with glazed, arched panels, and a transom.

The most prominent feature of the building is a two-story, galleried porch, extending the full width of the facade and the east elevation. The porch is nicely proportioned and presents a handsome appearance. Its supports are chamfered and adorned with brackets. A simple balustrade runs its length on the first and second stories. Above the main entrance a door provides access to its second story. Beyond its attractiveness, the porch also served an important function during the period prior to the development of central heating and air conditioning. Oriented toward the south and east, it provided a covered outdoor space receptive to direct sunlight during winter and cool, ocean breezes during summer. A portion of its east side has been infilled as a result of remodeling.

On the first story of the entrance facade, 1/1 casement windows extend to the floor. The second story displays single, 2/2, double-hung, sash windows. A pair of 1/1, double-hung, sash windows are in a centered gable extending out from the main roof over the facade. The gable is centered in relation to the pitch of the hipped roof and the general massing of the building, but is off center in relation to the symmetrical facade fenestration. The porch infill on the east side of the east side of the building has wooden casement windows with ten lights per case. The other windows in the building are paired or single, 2/2, double-hung, sash windows. All the windows in the structure are shuttered and are crowned with a modest cornice and frieze board.

A simple cornice moulding and wide frieze board run under the eaves of the roof and form a slight gable return at the end of the gabled ell. At the base of the exterior walls a drip moulding deflects water away from the underlying sill beam. Continuation sheet

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Four brick chimneys adorn the house, two on the hipped roof of the main block and two on the gabled ell. On the hipped roof the chimneys are located side by side to the interior just behind the short ridge of the roof. One chimney is on the western lateral slope and the other is on the rear slope. The two chimneys appear to be balanced with the fenestration of the facade, but are unbalanced when compared to the position of the roof. The other two chimneys are located toward each end of the gabled roof just off the ridge on the west lateral scope.

Item number

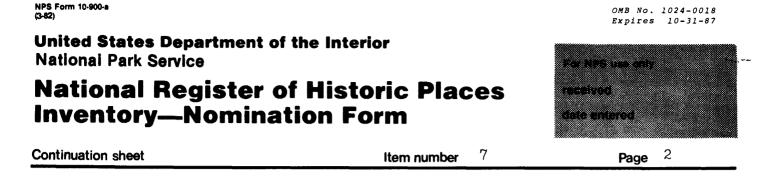
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On the west elevation of the house is a small, gabled, entrance porch located toward the rear of the main block. The porch has slightly tapered supports and a simple rail with balusters and two newel posts. It altered somewhat during the early twentieth century. Two single-story additions flanking the original ell and a second story porch were added to the rear of the house during the mid-twentieth century. A large, wooden stairway was constructed at the rear of the house to provide private access to the apartment in the second story when the building was converted to a funeral home. At the front of the house the original wooden porch steps were replaced with brick steps.

The interior of the house follows a massed plan with a central hallway and flanking parlors. The ell at one time contained the kitchen. The main staircase is located in the central hallway and a secondary staircase is located at the rear of the house. Each of the staircases has an ornamented newel, and the main stair has chamfered balusters. The flooring on the first floor is oak and that of the second floor is pine. A fireplace is located in each of the rooms off the central hall on the first and second stories—a total of eight fireplaces. All the mantles are made of wood and are located in the corner of the room that is nearest to the center of the main block. The mantles in the dining room (now the chapel), the southeast bedroom, the west parlor, and the sitting room have cornice moulding underlying the mantle shelf and beveled pilasters.

The southwest and northwest bedrooms and the east parlor have mantles with bracketed pilasters supporting the mantle shelf. Unique to the other mantles is the elaborately ornamented mantle in the northwest bedroom (now used as a living room for the upstairs apartment). A niche is located in the western wall of the firststory hallway that at one time contained a stove used to heat the passageway. The wall finish is plaster-on-lath. Beaded wainscotting can be found through the downstairs hall, the stairwells, and the dining room. Picture rails and cornice moulding are throughout the house. A chair rail is located in the upstairs hall and in the sitting room. Paneled pocket doors provide access to the east and west parlors from the central hall and to the dining room from the east parlor. The other doors in the house are paneled, hinged doors.

Some alterations have been made to the interior of the house. When the porch was infilled, access was provided by removing the windows in the dining room and enlarging the opening. As mentioned earlier, additions were added in the twentieth century when the building was converted into a funeral home. The additions were generally sympathetic to the original design of the building both inside and out. Some changes were also made to the interior when the upstairs was converted into an



apartment. The floors were carpeted, some minor wall changes made, central heat and air installed, and all the original lighting fixtures removed. But the original floor plan and the significant interior features of the building remain basically unchanged.

The John Denham Palmer House provides a fine example of the vernacular building tradition of Fernandina. Constructed by local builder John R. Mann, it exhibits influences of the Colonial Revival style popular in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The symmetrical fenestration of the facade, the hipped roof, and the central gable are elements of the style. The extensive galleries are an architectural feature typical of residential buildings in the South. The bracketed porch supports and arched, glazed panels in the entrance doors are features commonly associated with residential buildings in the United States during the late nineteenth century.

Outbuildings on the property include a concrete block, three-bay garage and a small duplex. The duplex is a one-story, side gabled building with weatherboard siding. It has a brick chimney on the center of the gable and is roofed with V-crimp mental sheeting. The facade has two ranks with a 2/2, double-hung, sash window and a paneled door to each rank. The building stands on brick piers and has a small shed addition to the western end. It is presently used as an apartment and storage. A paved, semi-circular drive is located to the west of the main house and a garden is located to the east.

The concrete block garage is of relatively recent construction, and does not contribute to the architectural or historic significance of the property.

Contributing resources: 2 buildings. Noncontributing resources: 1 building.

# 8. Significance

1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture architecture art commerce communications	community planning	Iandscape architectur Iaw Ilterature Ilterature Ilitary Illitary I	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify) Medicine
Specific dates	C. 1891	Builder/Architect Joh	n R. Mann/Builder	

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The John Denham Palmer House fulfills criteria B. and C. for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It has local significance in the areas of architecture, social/humanitarian and medicine. It is architecturally significant for its assocration with prominent local builders and for its embodiment of an important period in the architectural history of Fernandina. It has further significance in the area of social/humanitarian for its association with the philanthropic efforts of Lucy Carnegie. Moreover, it has significance to the practice of medicine for its association with John Denham Palmer, its original owner and one of the pioneer doctors in Fernandina. While it has lost some of its architectural integrity as a result of its conversion to a funeral home, it retains to a large extent its original physical appearance.

The John Denham Palmer House is architecturally significant for its association with two of Fernandina's master builders. It was constructed C. 1891 by local carpenters and contractors, Henry and John R. Mann. John R. Mann, in particular, was responsible for the construction of many of the city's landmark buildings. He was a local contractor who also owned a company dealing in marine hardware and groceries. He built many of Fernandina's finer residences, including Villa Las Palmas, and the Hoyt, the Humphrey, the Horsey, and the Hinton Baker Houses. He also constructed at least two commercial buildings, the Keystone Hotel and the A. S. Allan Building, both located on Centre Street and the Memorial Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

Sited on a prominent location, along Atlantic Avenue, the main east-west traffic artery in Fernandina, the Palmer House is also significant for its architecture. Given its massiveness, its method of construction and its individual features, particularly its galleried porch, it is a fine example of the vernacular building tradition of Fernandina Beach. Set apart from the main concentration of historic buildings in the city, it is a landmark residence.

The Palmer House is further significant for its association with John Denham Palmer, a prominent local physician and pioneer practicioner in the treatment of yellow fever. Palmer and his wife Sarah purchased the property on which the building is located in 1890. The following year they assumed a mortgage from Mrs. Lucy Carnegie and apparently constructed their home shortly thereafter. Dr. Palmer and his brother, Thomas Waller Palmer, a lawyer residing in Jacksonville, were the owners of the profitable Palmer Brothers Drugs, located at the corner of North Second and Centre Streets in downtown Fernandina.<sup>2</sup>

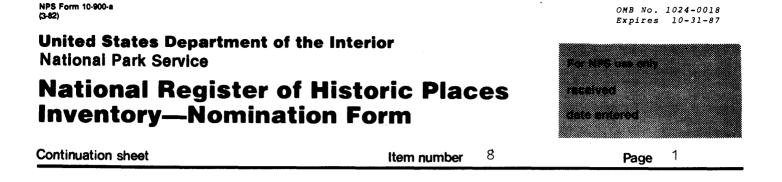
Dr. Palmer was a member of one of Florida's pioneer medical families. He was born in Monticello, Florida, on July 12, 1850, the son of Dr. Thomas Martin and Jane Denham Palmer. In 1872 the younger Palmer, like his father before him, graduated from the University of Maryland School of Medicine.<sup>3</sup>

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

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treet & number P. 0.	Box 1002		telephone (	904) 824-5178
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Keeper of the National	<b>Register</b>	· · · · ·	· · · · ·	
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Chief of Registration				

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Following his graduation Dr. Palmer moved to Fernandina during the period when it was becoming one of Florida's most important cities. He was practicing medicine there in 1877 when a yellow fever epidemic spread throughout the community. Fearing that the epidemic would spread throughout north, the Jacksonville Board of Health sent Dr. Albion W. Knight, a city health officer, to Fernandina in August of 1877 to make an inspection of the city with Fernandina's Health Officer, Dr. B. B. Pope. Accompanying Drs. Knight and Pope was Dr. Palmer, and the three examined those suffering from the disease and every portion of the city. They found that the yellow-fever epidemic was attributed to a large, swampy area. Dr. Knight discovered about twentyfive persons inflicted with yellow fever, all of whom lived in the vicinity of the swampy area.<sup>4</sup>

By mid-September, the epidemic had reached such proportions that the local health officers could no longer care for the ill. Upon learning of the severity of the fever, Jacksonville officials rendered aid in the form of supplies and physicians. Dr. Palmer, working diligently throughout the epidemic, found himself stricken by the disease, but fortunately his case was mild and he quickly recovered.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Palmer's humanitarian spirit and his interest in the treatment of yellow fever prompted him to offer his services to the city of Memphis, Tennessee in 1878 when a devastating epidemic occurred there. Dr. Palmer soon endeared himself to the citizens of Memphis. He frequently arrived on his rounds, toting two baskets under each arm, one containing medicine, the other filled with food for his patients. After the epidemic ended, the City of Memphis presented Dr. Palmer with a medal, in recognition of his contributions to the health care of its citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Palmer and his wife lived in the house until 1905, when they moved to Jacksonville. Although many of his accomplishments occurred prior to its construction, the Palmer House, nevertheless, is the extant building most closely associated with the life of John Denham Palmer. It served as not only his residence but apparently his offices during much of the time he lived there. He is still remembered by the descendents of many of his patients for the treatment of yellow fever and for his humanitarian spirit. On November 3, 1912, Dr. Palmer, "one of the most efficient and highly respected physicians of the city of Jacksonville," died at St. Luke's Hospital after having been accidently shot earlier in the day. He was buried at the Palmer family cemetery in Monticello. His tombstone bears the following inscription: "Unto his friends he was as St. Luke to St. Paul, 'THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN.' Colossians IV, 14."<sup>7</sup>

The Palmer House is further significant for its association with Mrs. Lucy Carnegie. In 1907, Mrs. Carnegie, widow of Thomas Carnegie and sister-in-law of Industrialist Andrew Carnegie, deeded the house to the city of Fernandina with the stipulation that the city use it as a hospital.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs. Carnegie was a winter resident of Cumberland Island, Georgia. She and her husband purchased much of the island in 1881 and built Dungeness, named for the former home of Revolutionary War hero, General Nabhaniel Greene. Mrs. Carnegie came to Fernandina every Sunday, attended services at St. Peter's Episcopal Church,

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and then ate an early dinner at the Florida House before returning to her home. She was involved in a number of charitable activities in the community, including support for her church and the establishment of the city's first hospital at the Palmer House.<sup>9</sup>

The city was to utilize the building, named Fernandina General Hospital, for "wounded, invalid, or indigent persons, requiring medical or surgical treatment and assistance" under conditions set forth by Mrs. Carnegie. Among the conditions were that no liens or incumbrances whatsoever were to be placed against the building. Upon default or failure of the city to comply with Mrs. Carnegie's wishes, the building was to be returned to her or her heirs. Unfortunately, the city failed to carry out Mrs. Carnegie's wishes, and she recovered the deed on February 15, 1914.<sup>10</sup>

From 1919 to 1940, the Palmer House was owned by numerous land speculators and area paper mills to house corporate management. For the most part, the house was rented out to boarders. Boarders, however, were far and few between, and the house stood vacant for many years, perhaps contributing to the neighborhood children's claim that it was haunted.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Stier purchased the house in April of 1940 from the Union Bag and Paper Corporation of Georgia. Stier sold the house to Mr. Joseph M. Oxley and his wife, Margaret, in 1945. The house was subsequently incorporated into the Oxley Mortuary, Inc., with family living quarters located upstairs on the second floor. Upon Oxley's death in 1957, Mrs. Oxley, owner of a local florist shop, turned the business over to her cousin, Mr. Buddy Burgess. An ambulance service also operated out of the funeral home under the supervision of Burgess and Mr. Harold Beckett. The present owner, Mr. Jack Heard, a native of Moultrie, Georgia, purchased the business from Mrs. Oxley on July 1, 1974, and renamed it the Oxley-Heard Funeral Home.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of the Palmer House is based on its architecture and its associations with prominent individuals. Constructed by skilled local craftsmen, it is a fine example of the vernacular architectural tradition of Fernandina. Its massiveness and prominent location make it one of Fernandina's landmark private residences. Furthermore, its original owner, Dr. John Denham Palmer, was a prominent local physician and businessmen who saved countless lives in Fernandina, Memphis, and Jacksonville. Finally, carrying on her family's philanthropic traditions, Mrs. Lucy Carnegie deeded the property to the city for use as a hospital providing indigent care, although a lack of funds and inadequate management prevented Fernandina General Hospital from achieving but limited success.

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#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Susan Tripp: Interview with George T. Davis, June 17, 1985; R. L. Polk & Co., <u>Florida Gazetteer and Business Directory</u>, 1907-1908, p. 151; R. L. Polk & Co., <u>Florida Gazetteer and Business Directory</u>, 1918, p. 158; R. L. Polk & Co., <u>Florida Gazetteer and Business Directory</u>, 1925, p. 229; Florida Master Site File, Site no. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Wanton S. Webb, <u>Webb's Jacksonville and Consolidated Directory of Representative</u> <u>Cities in East and South Florida</u> (Jacksonville and New York, 1887), pp. 541, 551.

<sup>3</sup>Theresa Yeager Palmer, <u>The Palmer Physicians</u>, 1966, pp. vii, 1-6.

<sup>4</sup>Webster Merritt, M. D., <u>A Century of Medicine in Jacksonville and Duval County</u> (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949), pp. 99-101.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. pp. 104-106; Federal Writers Project, Florida, <u>A Guide to the Southernmost State</u>, (Oxford University Press, 1939). p. 375; Federal Writers Project, <u>Guide to Fernandina Florida</u> (Fernandina News Publishing Company, 1940), p. 29; Palmer, <u>Physicians</u>, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Palmer, <u>Physicians</u>, pp. 6-9.

<sup>7</sup>Florida <u>Times-Union</u>, November 4, 1912 and March 6, 1905; Palmer, <u>Physicians</u>, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup><u>Abstracts of Titles</u>, Lot 1, Block 244, Fernandina, Florida, compiled by the Nassau Abstract Company, items 21-31.

<sup>10</sup><u>Abstracts</u>, items 34, 35.

<sup>11</sup><u>Abstracts</u>, items 50-60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Interview with Helen Litrico, June 28, 1985.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>Book of Deeds, Nassau County Florida, Book 106, p. 579; Interview with George T. Davis, June 17, 1985; Interview with Buddy Burgess, June 14, 1985; Interview with Jack Heard, June 19, 1985; Interview with Mr. C. C. Colbertson, June 28, 1985; Interview with Joan Stier Lasserre, June 19, 1985.

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Merritt, Webster, M. D. <u>A Century of Medicine in Jacksonville and Duval County</u>. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949.

Palmer, Theresa Yeager. The Palmer Physicians. 1966.

Webb, Wanton S. <u>Webb's Jacksonville and Consolidated Directory of Representative</u> <u>Cities in East and South Florida</u>. Jacksonville and New York, 1887.

### Newspapers

Florida Times-Union

#### Documents

Abstract of Titles to Lot 1, Block 244, Fernandina, Florida, compiled by the Nassau Abstract Company, items nu-bered 107, 1-16.

Nassau County Courthouse. Nassau County, Florida. Book of Deeds. Book 106.

#### Interviews

Interview with George T. Davis, June 17, 1985.

Interview with Joan Stier Lasserre, June 19, 1985.

Interview with Harold Brackett, June 17, 1985.

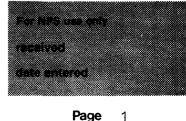
Interview with Helen Litrico, June 28, 1985.

Interview with John H. Heard, June 19, 1985.

Interview with C. C. Colbertson, June 28, 1985.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The John Denham Palmer House occupies the following described lands in the city of Fernandina, Nassau County, Florida, as lithographed and issued by the Florida Railroad Company in 1857 and enlarged, revised, and reissued by the Florida Town Improvement Company in 1887 and 1901 as Lot 1, Block 244. The said lot, less than one acre, measures and fronts 230 feet on Centre Street, which bounds it on the south from where it extends north at right angles to a depth of 172 feet and is bounded on the west by Thirteenth Street.

